



Japan Emperor makes first public appearance
TOKYO
Emperor Naruhito urged Japan to work together for world peace as he made his first public appearance on Saturday in front of a cheering, flag-waving crowd of tens of thousands. **AFP**

Pakistani-American arrested for links to JeM
WASHINGTON
Pakistani-American Waqar UL-Hassan was arrested earlier this week by the FBI on his arrival from Pakistan for being in contact with two UN-proscribed terror groups — the Islamic State and the Jaish-e-Mohammed. Mr. Hassan was arrested at the Charlotte Douglas International Airport in North Carolina on Tuesday. **PTI**

9 killed in IS attack on Haftar’s forces in Libya
TRIPOLI
At least nine people were killed on Saturday in an attack claimed by the Islamic State (IS) targeting forces loyal to Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar in southern Libya, officials said. IS claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement distributed through social media. **AFP**

200 rockets fired from Gaza

Israel responds with air strike on rocket launchers, hits Hamas military posts

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GAZA CITY
Gaza militants on Saturday fired some 200 rockets at Israel, which responded with strikes that killed a baby, her pregnant mother and another Palestinian, officials said, as a fragile ceasefire faltered and a further escalation was feared. The latest flare-up came with Hamas seeking further concessions from Israel under the ceasefire.

Israel said around 200 rockets were fired from the Palestinian enclave and its air defences intercepted dozens of them.

One woman was seriously injured in a rocket strike on the Israeli city of Kiryat Gat, some 20 km from the Gaza border, police said.

Police said a man was also hospitalised in the city of Ashkelon and spoke of other injuries without providing details. A house near Ashkelon was damaged, while other rockets hit open areas.

120 military targets hit
The Israeli Army said its tanks and planes hit some 120 militant targets in its response. They included an Islamic Jihad attack tunnel that stretched from southern Gaza into Israeli territory, military spokesman Jonathan Conricus said.

The Gaza Health Ministry



Ceasefire falters: A picture taken from the southern Israeli village of Netiv Haasara shows an explosion caused by an air raid across the border in Gaza Strip on Saturday. **AFP**

reported a 22-year-old man as well as a 14-month-old baby and her pregnant mother killed, with 17 others wounded. An Israeli Army spokeswoman said the military did not have any information on the incident involving the baby. The Army said earlier it was targeting only military sites. As the exchange of fire continued, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held consultations with security chiefs.

A statement from Hamas ally Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for at least some of the rocket fire and said it was prepared for more if necessary. Its armed wing distributed a video showing militants handling rockets

and threatening key Israeli sites, including Ben-Gurion International Airport near Tel Aviv. A source in the Islamic Jihad group said Egypt was engaged in discussions to calm the situation, as it has done repeatedly in the past. The European Union called for an immediate halt to rocket fire from Gaza.

Israel said it was closing its people and goods crossings with Gaza, as well as the zone it allows for fishermen off the enclave, until further notice due to the rocket fire. “Over the coming hours we will continue and we will broaden our offensive efforts, air force efforts, inside the Gaza Strip, again focusing only on military targets,”

said Mr. Conricus.

The escalation follows the most violent clashes along the Gaza border in weeks on Friday. Four Palestinians, including two Hamas militants, were killed after two Israeli soldiers were wounded in a shooting during weekly protests on the border. Israel blamed Islamic Jihad for what it called a sniper attack, but stressed it held Hamas responsible for all violence from Gaza.

Efforts at de-escalation
A ceasefire between Israel and Hamas brokered by Egypt and the UN had led to relative calm around Israel’s April 9 general election.

The ceasefire has seen Israel allow Qatar to provide millions of dollars in aid to Gaza to pay salaries and to finance fuel purchases to ease a severe electricity shortage.

Several factors may lead Israel to seek to calm the situation quickly.

Mr. Netanyahu is engaged in tough negotiations to form a new government following last month’s election, while Israel is due to host the Eurovision song contest in Tel Aviv from May 14 to 18. The country also celebrates its Independence Day on Thursday. On the Gazan side, the Muslim holy month of Ramadan begins later in May.

N. Korea fires ‘short-range projectiles’

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SEOUL

U.S. President Donald Trump voiced confidence on Saturday that Kim Jong-un would not “break his promise”, following what if confirmed would be North Korea’s first short-range missile launch for more than a year.

“I believe that Kim Jong-un fully realises the great economic potential of North Korea, & will do nothing to interfere or end it,” he said. “He also knows that I am with him & does not want to break his promise to me. Deal will happen!”

Since their historic summit meeting in Singapore in 2018, Mr. Trump has said Mr. Kim remains committed to the “complete denuclearisation” of the Korean peninsula.

North Korea “fired a number of short-range projectiles” from Hodo peninsula near the east coast town of Wonsan starting at 9.06 a.m., the South’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. The projectiles travelled northeast from 70 to 200 km towards the East Sea, also known as the Sea of Japan, the JCS added.

The last North Korean missile launch was in November 2017.

2 students arrested in Jaffna search operation

LTTE leader’s photo was found in office

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Security forces have arrested two students during a search operation at the University of Jaffna on Friday.

They were arrested under prevailing Emergency regulations that came into effect following the Easter attacks, and select sections of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), after a photograph of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran was found in the students’ union office.

Friday’s search was conducted reportedly at the University’s request, ahead of its scheduled reopening date, a fortnight after institutions were closed in the wake of the Easter Sunday serial blasts that claimed over 250 lives. A few banners bearing images of the final phase of the civil war were also retrieved on the campus, according to university sources.

A canteen staff member of the University was also arrested after photographs of LTTE figures Thileepan and Anton Balasingham were spotted at the canteen. “They were produced at the Jaffna magistrate court and remanded until May 16,” said Kesavan Sajanathan, the lawyer appearing for the

students. In a circular dated April 30, the University Grants Commission asked all national universities to cooperate with authorities to enable enhanced security checks on campuses. During the last week, search operations were held in other universities, including the South Eastern University. Further, security forces are likely to conduct extensive search operations at schools before they reopen on Monday, official sources said.

On high alert

Two weeks after deadly suicide bomb attacks targeting churches and hotels in Colombo, nearby Negombo and the eastern Batticaloa city, Sri Lanka remains on high alert. Most suspects linked to the incidents have been apprehended, according to sources, but amid rumours of continuing threats, educational institutions and business establishments remain apprehensive.

Sri Lanka’s Catholic Church cancelled Sunday mass for the second week over fears of possible attacks, but a service conducted by Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith will be broadcast on national television, news agency AFP reported.

Gaps narrowing in talks: Taliban

New proposals offered for U.S. troop pullout, says spokesman

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ISLAMABAD

The Taliban on Saturday said the gap is narrowing in talks with U.S.’s special peace envoy over a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. The two sides are continuing to meet in Qatar.

In a voice message, the Taliban spokesman in Doha, Sohail Shaheen, said both sides have offered new proposals for drawing down U.S. and NATO forces. This would be a significant initial step toward a deal to end nearly 18 years of war and America’s longest military engagement.

“There are proposals to lower the gap between the



Sohail Shaheen, the spokesperson of Taliban. **AP**

two sides, but (it) still needs negotiation to reach a final agreement,” he said in an English language statement.

Other Taliban officials familiar with the negotiations had earlier said that the U.S. was seeking a year and a half to withdraw its estimated 14,000 troops from Afghanistan, while the Taliban

wanted it done in six months. Talks between the U.S. and Taliban, which began last year with the appointment of Washington’s peace envoy, Zalmay Khalilzad, have focused on a timetable for a U.S. withdrawal as well as Taliban guarantees that Afghanistan will not be used as a staging arena for global terrorist attacks.

Taliban officials said the group has concerns about a ceasefire – Taliban commanders in the field are unlikely to accept a ceasefire while foreign troops are still in Afghanistan, and once a ceasefire is declared, it would be difficult to re-start the fighting if the U.S. reneges on its deal.

Boeing 737 skids into Florida river

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MIAMI

A Boeing 737 skidded off a runway into a river after crash-landing during a lightning storm in Florida on Friday, officials said, with terrified passengers all safely evacuated to shore from the stricken jet’s wings. The plane carrying 143 people, including crew from Guantanamo Bay, slammed into shallow water next to a naval air station in Jacksonville after a hard landing that saw the plane bounce and swerve down the runway, passengers said.

No fatalities or critical injuries were reported.

Hand over sharp weapons, says Sri Lanka police

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
COLOMBO

Sri Lankan police on Saturday directed the public that those who are in possession of any sharp-edged weapons like swords or Kris knives, and uniforms similar to that of the Army and the police, should deposit them at the nearest police station by tomorrow.

The move was taken after police recovered a large haul of weapons, including swords, during searches of mosques following the Easter Sunday’s suicide attacks.

Announcing the amnesty scheme, police spokesperson Ruwan Gunasekera said, “This will be in effect from today until tomorrow... If you are having police or ca-

mouflaged military uniforms, please hand them over to the nearest police station”.

The police said that several people, including politicians, were arrested for their possession of sharp-edged weapons since the crackdown began.

Mr. Gunasekera also requested the relatives of the

blast victims to assist the police in performing DNA tests on them as around 56 bodies, lying in the Colombo judicial medical officer’s mortuary, are yet to be identified. “Relatives of anyone missing since April 21 who might have been in areas of explosions, please inform the nearest police station,” said Mr. Gunasekera.

Huawei 5G leak not a criminal offence: police

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

The top-secret leak that Britain had conditionally allowed China’s Huawei to develop its 5G network does not amount to a criminal offence, police concluded on Saturday.

Prime Minister Theresa May on Wednesday sacked Gavin Williamson as Defence Secretary over the leak last month of the bitterly-disputed decision made at the April 23 meeting of the National Security Coun-

cil. Some senior Opposition figures called for a police investigation. In a statement on Saturday, Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu, the head of Specialist Operations at London’s Metropolitan Police, said a probe would be inappropriate.

“I am satisfied that what was disclosed did not contain information that would breach the Official Secrets Act,” said Mr. Basu, whose section is responsible for investigating alleged criminal breaches of the Act.

12 killed as Fani barrels into Bangladesh

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KHULNA

Cyclone Fani weakened to a depression as it barrelled into Bangladesh on Saturday after leaving a trail of deadly destruction in India. Police in Bangladesh put the death toll there at 12.

More than 1.6 million people were taken to shelters in Bangladesh, said officials, with at least 36 villages flooded by a storm surge and more than 2,000 homes destroyed.

“Six people died after

they were hit by falling trees or collapsed walls, and six have died from lightning,” said disaster official Benazir Ahmed.

In the coastal town of Banishanta, where embankments burst and some 250 families were marooned overnight, most houses were semi-submerged under water while a few straw huts had been washed away.

Ferries on large rivers remained out of action but those on smaller waterways resumed operations.

Coronation of Thailand’s ‘Rama X’ begins

Maha Vajiralongkorn crowned the King in an event that will continue on Sunday

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BANGKOK

To the boom of cannons, pipes and chants, King Maha Vajiralongkorn was crowned on Saturday in a ceremony governed by centuries-old rituals, vowing a righteous reign and calling for “national security” and “happiness” in a remarkable display of royal power.

Starting at the auspicious time of 10.09 a.m. (0309 GMT), the public was granted a rare window into the cloistered halls of Thai royalty as the three-day coronation began.

10th Chakri monarch

King Vajiralongkorn is the 10th monarch of the Chakri dynasty, which has reigned over the kingdom since 1782. He ascended the throne over two years ago following the



Royal and divine: Thailand’s King Maha Vajiralongkorn sitting on the throne after being crowned on Saturday. **AP**

death of his beloved father.

Saturday’s sombre ceremony opened with the white-gowned King receiving sacred water and dabbing it gently across his face at a shrine inside the Grand Palace complex. A cannon

salute marked the moment as pipes played and Buddhist monks chanted. Several grey-haired Hindu Brahmins were also in attendance at a ceremony that symbolises Rama X’s transformation from human to divine figure.

He later took his seat under the umbrella of state and was handed the Great Crown of Victory, a 7.3-kg tiered gold headpiece topped by a diamond from India.

For most Thais, it is the first time they have witnessed a coronation – the last was in 1950 for the King’s beloved father Bhumibol Adulyadej.

The \$31 million coronation continues on Sunday with the King appearing in a hours-long procession along a seven-km route twisting through the old city.

Born on July 28, 1952, the British-schooled King Vajiralongkorn is known for his love of cycling and piloting jets, but he spends much of his time abroad – mainly in Germany – and remains something of a mystery to many Thais.