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Trump names new defence chief

WASHINGTON
Donald Trump has nominated Mark Esper to be the U.S. Secretary of Defense, the White House said late Friday, as Washington navigates a spike in tensions with Iran. Mr. Esper, who must be confirmed by the Senate, is the third man to lead the Pentagon in six months. **AFP**

U.S. blacklists five Chinese tech companies

WASHINGTON
The U.S. Commerce Department blacklisted five Chinese technology entities — including prominent supercomputer manufacturer Sugon and its three subsidiaries — on Friday in a new move against Beijing's supercomputing industry. All the five entities will be barred from obtaining U.S. technology. **AFP**

Myanmar order Internet shutdown in Rakhine

YANGON
Myanmar authorities ordered telecom companies to shut down Internet services in eight townships in Rakhine and Chin States, leading operator Telenor said on Saturday, amid heightening tensions in the region, where government troops are fighting ethnic rebels. **REUTERS**

7 killed in Cambodia building collapse

PHNOM PENH
At least seven people died on Saturday when an under-construction building owned by a Chinese company collapsed at a Cambodian beach resort, officials said, as rescuers scoured the giant rubble heap for survivors. The building went down before sunrise in the casino-resort town Sihanoukville in southwestern Cambodia, a rapidly developing tourist hotspot awash with Chinese investments. **AFP**

Palestinians reject U.S.'s West Asia 'peace plan'

Palestine isn't for sale, says Hamas

REUTERS
GAZA CITY

Palestinian officials on Saturday dismissed proposals unveiled by Jared Kushner to form the first economic portion of the Trump administration's long-awaited West Asia peace plan.

Senior Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) official Hanan Ashrawi said Mr. Kushner's plans were "all abstract promises" and said only a political solution would solve the conflict. Hamas was more blunt, saying: "Palestine isn't for sale".

The Trump administration's \$50 billion West Asia economic plan calls for creation of a global investment fund to lift the Palestinian and neighbouring Arab state economies, according to U.S. officials.

Iran vows to 'firmly confront' any aggression by the U.S.

Foreign Ministry says Tehran will not allow the country's borders to be violated

REUTERS
DUBAI

Iran said on Saturday that it would respond firmly to any U.S. threat against it, the semi-official Tasnim news agency reported, amid escalating tension between Tehran and Washington over the shooting down of an unmanned U.S. drone by the Islamic Republic.

On Thursday, an Iranian missile destroyed a U.S. Global Hawk surveillance drone. Tehran said the drone was shot down over its territory and Washington said it had occurred in international airspace.

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Friday that he aborted a military strike to retaliate for Iran's downing of the U.S. drone because it could have killed 150 people, and signalled he was open to talks with Tehran.

More sanctions

Speaking in Washington on Saturday before heading to the U.S. presidential retreat at Camp David, where he said he would deliberate on Iran, Mr. Trump said the U.S. government was imposing new sanctions on Tehran.

7 killed in Cambodia building collapse

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
COLOMBO
A state of emergency was extended by Sri Lanka's President Maithripala Sirisena on Saturday, going back on pledges to relax the tough laws introduced after the Easter Sunday attacks that killed 258 people.

Mr. Sirisena said in a decree that he believed there was a "public emergency" in the country, and was invoking provisions of the public security act extending the state of emergency.



Call for peace: An anti-war protest outside the White House in Washington on Thursday. **AP**

"We are putting additional sanctions on Iran," he said. "In some cases we are going slowly, but in other cases we are moving rapidly."

Military action was "always on the table," he added, but he said he was open to reversing the escalation and could quickly reach a deal with Iran that he said would bolster the country's flagging economy. "We will call it 'Let's make Iran great again'," Mr. Trump said.

Iran has vowed to defend its borders. "Regardless of any decision they (U.S. officials) make... we will not allow any of Iran's borders to

be violated. Iran will firmly confront any aggression or threat by America," Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi told Tasnim.

Worries about a confrontation between Iran and the U.S. have mounted despite Mr. Trump saying that he has no appetite to go to war with Iran. Tehran has also said it is not seeking a war but has warned of a "crushing" response if attacked.

"Any mistake by Iran's enemies, in particular America and its regional allies, would be like firing at a powder keg that will burn America, its interests and its

allies to the ground," said the senior spokesman of Iran's Armed Forces, Abolfazl Shekarchi, on Saturday.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration on Thursday issued an emergency order prohibiting U.S. operators from flying in an overseas area of Tehran-controlled airspace over the Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman. Some other international airlines are taking related precautions.

Airspace safe: Tehran

But Iran said on Saturday its airspace was "safe and secure" for all planes to cross, Tasnim reported.

The U.S. and Saudi Arabia have blamed Iran for attacks on two oil tankers last week in the Gulf of Oman and on four tankers off the United Arab Emirates on May 12, both near the strategic Strait of Hormuz. Iran has denied any involvement.

Britain's Foreign Office said West Asia Minister Andrew Murrison would raise concerns about "Iran's regional conduct and its threat to cease complying with the nuclear deal" during a visit to Tehran on Sunday.

Sri Lanka extends state of emergency

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
COLOMBO

A state of emergency was extended by Sri Lanka's President Maithripala Sirisena on Saturday, going back on pledges to relax the tough laws introduced after the Easter Sunday attacks that killed 258 people.

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Sweeping powers

The tough laws, granting sweeping powers to police and security forces to arrest and detain suspects, were due to expire on Saturday.

Just over 100 people, including 10 women, are in custody in connection with April's Easter Sunday suicide

attacks against three churches and three luxury hotels in Colombo.

The emergency can be declared for a month at a time, and Parliament must ratify it within 10 days. The continuation of the emergency came as police announced criminal investigations against several top officers, including the Inspector-General, for negligence and lapses ahead of the bombings.

Iran executes 'contractor' over spying for CIA

Zavar worked for the Defence Ministry

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TEHRAN

Iran has executed a "Defence Ministry contractor" convicted of spying for the Central Intelligence Agency, semi-official ISNA news agency reported on Saturday.

"The execution sentence was carried out for Jalal Haji Zavar, a contractor for the Defence Ministry's aerospace organisation who spied for the CIA and the American government," ISNA reported, quoting the Iranian military.

ISNA said he was convicted by Iran's military court and that he was executed, at an unspecified time, at the Rajayi Shahr prison in the city of Karaj, west of Tehran.

The agency did not say when Zavar was arrested, noting however that his contract with the Defence Ministry had been terminated during the Iranian year 1389 (March 2010-2011).

He was identified as a spy by the Defence Ministry's intelligence unit, ISNA said, adding that "documents and espionage devices were found at his house".

Zavar's ex-wife was convicted of "involvement in espionage" and is serving a 15-year jail sentence, the agency said.

The report comes days after Iran said it had dismantled a "new" U.S. spy network in the country linked to the CIA, amid escalating tensions between Tehran and Washington.

Police called to Boris Johnson's home after row with girlfriend

Neighbour was concerned for her welfare, says official

REUTERS
LONDON

British police were called to the home of Boris Johnson, the favourite to be the next Prime Minister, after neighbours heard a loud altercation between him and his girlfriend.

The police were called in the early hours of Friday to an address in south London where Mr. Johnson is living with his girlfriend, Carrie Symonds.

"The caller was concerned for the welfare of a female neighbour," the police said in a statement issued on Friday evening. "Police attended and spoke to all occupants of the address, who were all safe and well."

"There were no offences or concerns apparent to the officers and there was no



A poster depicting Boris Johnson near his house in London. **REUTERS**

cause for police action," the statement said.

The *Guardian* newspaper, which first reported the story, said an unidentified neighbour had heard a woman screaming followed by "slamming and banging". At one point, Ms. Symonds

could be heard telling Mr. Johnson to "get off me" and "get out of my flat".

Recording of altercation

A neighbour of Mr. Johnson told *The Guardian* newspaper that they had recorded the altercation from inside their flat out of concern for Ms. Symonds.

The *Guardian* said it had reviewed the recording and that Mr. Johnson could be heard refusing to leave the flat and using a swear word to tell Ms. Symonds to get off his laptop. Crashing sounds can also be heard, the newspaper said. Reuters has not reviewed the audio.

Another neighbour interviewed by the BBC confirmed the argument and said she had heard a woman shouting.

Philippines ex-official hits out at China

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BANGKOK

A former Philippines Foreign Minister who was denied entry into Hong Kong said on Saturday that he was barred over his criticisms of China, calling the move "sheer intimidation" by Beijing.

Hong Kong, which has been rocked by massive anti-Beijing protests in recent weeks, on Friday turned away Albert del Rosario, who has spearheaded legal moves against the Chinese government's bullish behaviour in South China Sea.

Mr. Del Rosario tried to enter on a diplomatic passport before being held for six hours and put on a flight back to the Philippines. His lawyer said authorities gave no reason, but Mr. Del Rosario said he was targeted by Beijing.

U.S. report expresses concern on communal violence in India

Officials often failed to prosecute perpetrators: document

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

The U.S. Secretary of State released the State Department's '2018 Report on International Freedom', an annual submission it makes to the U.S. Congress as mandated by law.

"This mission is not just a Trump administration priority — it's a deeply personal one. For many years, I was a Sunday school teacher and a deacon at my church," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said.

"And that might sound unusual to a lot of folks inside the Beltway [i.e., Washington DC]. But I am one of millions of Americans, and billions of people across the world, who live in the knowledge of a higher power."

"I had a chance to meet with some Uighurs here, but unfortunately, most Chinese Uighurs don't get a chance to tell their stories. That's why, in an effort to document the staggering scope of religious freedom abuses in Xinjiang, we've added a special section to this year's China report," Mr. Pompeo said.

The report consists of country-wise chapters. The chapter on India detailed



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. **AP**

mob-related violence and discusses conversion, the legal status of minorities and government policies.

Renaming of cities

"The report said the Central and State governments as well parties took steps to affect Muslim practices and institutions. "The government continued its challenge in the Supreme Court to the minority status of Muslim educational institutions, which affords them independence in hiring and curriculum decisions. Proposals to rename Indian cities with Muslim provenance continued, most notably the renaming of Allahabad to

Prayagraj. Activists said these proposals were designed to erase Muslim contributions to Indian history and had led to increased communal tensions," the report said.

"There were reports of religiously motivated killings, assaults, riots, discrimination, vandalism, and actions restricting the right of individuals to practice their religious beliefs and proselytize," the report said. Authorities often failed to prosecute perpetrators of "cow vigilante" attacks, it said.

"There were reports by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that the government sometimes failed to act on mob attacks on religious minorities, marginalized communities, and critics of the government. Some senior officials of the Hindu-majority Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) made inflammatory speeches against minority communities... According to some NGOs, authorities often protected perpetrators from prosecution. As of November, there were 18 such attacks, and eight people killed during the year," said the report.

Writer accuses U.S. President of sexual assault

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

An advice columnist for *Elle* fashion magazine said on Friday that Donald Trump sexually assaulted her in the dressing room of a New York department store more than two decades ago, an accusation swiftly denied by the U.S. President.

According to E. Jean Carroll, the rape occurred in either 1995 or 1996, when

Mr. Trump was a prominent real estate developer and she was a well-known magazine writer and host of a television show.

16th person

The account, revealed in an excerpt of Ms. Carroll's latest book and published on Friday by *New York* magazine, makes her at least the 16th woman to have accused Mr. Trump of sexual misconduct

before he became President.

Mr. Trump reacted with a statement saying he'd never met Ms. Carroll, and that the incident "never happened."

Ms. Carroll said she never went to the police because she was afraid of repercussions.

Ms. Carroll wrote that she did not come forward sooner because she was afraid of "receiving death threats, being driven from my home,

being dismissed, being dragged through the mud."

Mr. Trump shot back that Ms. Carroll was an attention seeker.

New York magazine quoted a senior White House official saying that the accusation "was created simply to make the President look bad," while Mr. Trump asked if Ms. Carroll had links to his opponents in the Democratic Party.

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