

TOP OF THE WORLD



SAUDI ARABIA

Tunisia's former president Ben Ali dies in exile

Tunis: Former Tunisian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the first leader to be toppled by the Arab Spring revolts, died on Thursday in Saudi Arabia, Tunisia's foreign ministry said. He was 83. "We had confirmation of his death 30 minutes ago," the ministry said, without giving further details. His lawyer, Mounir Ben Salha, confirmed the news, citing family members and Ben Ali's doctor. Ben Ali, who ruled his North African country from 1987 until 2011, was viewed by some as a bulwark against Islamist extremism, but faced criticism for muzzling the opposition and his reluctance to embrace democracy.

NEPAL

Beijing officials to discuss China model of politics with Oli's party

Kathmandu: Nearly two weeks after the Chinese Foreign Affairs Minister Wang Yi told Nepal Prime Minister K P Oli that both Communist-ruled countries should work together for the common good, the Nepal Communist Party has invited top Chinese officials to present tutorials on Chinese model of politics and development. The two-day exercise beginning Monday will see Chinese leaders make presentation on China's development model and diplomacy with emphasis on how it could help the neighbourhood.

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

INDONESIA

Hundreds of waste containers returned to West

Jakarta: Indonesia is sending back hundreds of containers of contaminated waste to the West after shipments supposedly containing plastic meant for recycling were found to hide hazardous substances, customs officials said. Among more than 2,000 containers checked by authorities at four ports from July to mid-September, nearly 550 contained hazardous material or non-plastic waste. More than 300 containers have already been repatriated, officials said.

US building coalition after Saudi oil attack, Iran warns against war

Pompeo meets rulers of Saudi Arabia and UAE, says aiming for peaceful resolution of tensions

TUQA KHALID & AZIZ EL YAAKOUBI DUBAI, SEPTEMBER 19

THE UNITED States said on Thursday it was building a coalition to deter Iranian threats following a weekend attack on Saudi Arabian oil facilities.

Iran has warned US President Donald Trump against being dragged into a war in the Middle East and said it would meet any offensive action with a crushing response.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that Trump, who has ordered more sanctions on Iran, wants a peaceful solution to the crisis.

He was speaking after talks with Saudi and Emirati leaders over the strike that Washington and Riyadh have blamed on Tehran.

Iran denies involvement in the September 14 attack that initially halved Saudi oil output and which Pompeo earlier called an



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo meets Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Jeddah. Iran said Pompeo and the Crown Prince are trying to dupe Trump into opting for war. AP

act of war against the world's largest oil exporter.

Pompeo appeared to soften his tone on Thursday after talks with Abu Dhabi's crown prince, the de facto ruler of the United Arab Emirates, which is Riyadh's main Arab ally.

"We are here to build out a coalition aimed at achieving peace and a peaceful resolution. That's

my mission, that's what President Trump certainly wants me to work to achieve and I hope that the Islamic Republic of Iran sees it that way," Pompeo told reporters.

He did not provide details about the coalition. The United States has however been trying to create a global maritime security alliance since attacks on oil tankers in Gulf waters, which



"We don't want war, we don't want to engage in a military confrontation... but we won't blink to defend our territory."

— MOHAMMAD JAVAD ZARIF IRAN FOREIGN MINISTER

Washington also blamed on Iran.

Pompeo described his proposed coalition as "an act of diplomacy while the foreign minister of Iran is threatening all out war".

Iran's foreign minister, Mohammed Javad Zarif, told CNN that the Islamic Republic "won't blink" if it has to defend itself against any US or Saudi mil-

itary strike, which he said would lead to "all-out war".

Zarif mocked Pompeo, saying he was part of a so-called "B-team", along with Saudi Arabia's crown prince, which is trying to dupe Trump into opting for war.

Pompeo on Wednesday met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who has called the assault on oil plants a "test of global will". Riyadh has displayed what it described as remnants of 25 Iranian drones and missiles used in the strike, saying it was undeniable evidence of Iranian aggression.

Pompeo earlier welcomed an announcement by the UAE that it was joining the maritime coalition, a day after Riyadh said it would too.

Britain and Bahrain previously said they are participating but most European countries have been reluctant to sign up for fear of stoking regional tensions. Iraq said it would not join the mission, and also rejected any Israeli role in it. **REUTERS**

US strike kills 30 farm workers in Afghanistan

Taliban kill 20 in southern province

REUTERS JALALABAD, KABUL, SEPTEMBER 19

A US drone strike intended to hit an Islamic State (IS) hideout in Afghanistan killed at least 30 civilians resting after a day's labour in the fields, officials said Thursday.

The attack on Wednesday night also injured another 40 people after accidentally targeting farmers and labourers who had just finished collecting pine nuts at Wazir Tangi in eastern Nangarhar province, three Afghan officials told Reuters.

"The workers had lit a bonfire and were sitting together when a drone targeted them," tribal elder Malik Rahat Gul told Reuters by telephone from Wazir Tangi.

Afghanistan's Defence Ministry and a senior US official in Kabul confirmed the drone strike, but did not share details of civilian casualties.

Separately, a Taliban truck bomb killed at least 20 people and wounded 95 when it exploded near a hospital in southern Afghanistan on Thursday, a

US cuts aid to Afghanistan

Washington: The United States on Thursday accused Afghanistan's government of failing to fight corruption and cut more than \$160 million in direct funding, little over a week before the country's elections. "We stand against those who exploit their positions of power and influence to deprive the Afghan people of the benefits of foreign assistance and a more prosperous future," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement.

provincial official said.

The Taliban, who have been carrying out nearly daily attacks since the collapse of peace talks with the US this month, said the target was a nearby building of the government's intelligence department in Qalat, the capital of Zabul province.

Trump 'promise' to foreign leader prompts complaint; House denied details

MATTHEW ROSENBERG, NICHOLAS FANDOS, EILEEN SULLIVAN & JULIAN E BARNES WASHINGTON, SEPTEMBER 19

THE INTERNAL watchdog for US spy agencies declined in a briefing on Thursday to disclose to lawmakers the content of a potentially explosive whistleblower complaint that is said to involve a discussion between President Donald Trump and a foreign leader, according to two people familiar with the briefing.

Michael Atkinson, the inspector general of the intelligence community, told lawmakers he was unable to confirm or deny anything about the substance of the complaint, the sources said.

The complaint, which prompted a standoff between Congress and Trump's top intelligence official, involves a promise that Trump made in a communication with another world leader, according to a person familiar with the complaint. The *Washington Post* first reported the nature of the discussion. The acting director of national intelligence, Joseph Maguire, has refused to give the complaint to Congress, as is generally required by law, the latest in a series of fights over information between the Democratic-led House and the White House.

Few details of the whistleblower complaint are known, including the identity of the world leader. And it is not obvious how a communication between Trump and a foreign leader could meet the legal standards for a whistleblower complaint that the inspector general would deem an "urgent concern". **NYT**



US President sues to block release of his tax returns

REUTERS WASHINGTON, SEPTEMBER 19

DONALD TRUMP sued Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance on Thursday, questioning the constitutionality of subpoenas issued by the state prosecutor, and which a source said sought the President's tax returns.

Trump filed his lawsuit three days after the *New York Times* said Vance's office had subpoenaed his longtime accounting firm Mazars for eight years of personal and corporate tax returns.

The President sued over Vance's subpoenas for tax returns and tax-related information, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Trump has refused to disclose his tax returns, after promising during his 2016 White House run that he would. Danny Frost, a spokesperson for Vance, said the district attorney has received and would respond to the complaint. "We will have no further comment as this process unfolds in court," Frost said.



HAZE SPREADS ACROSS SOUTHEAST ASIA

Smog covers a forest during fires in Pungur Pisau regency near Palangka Raya, Indonesia, on Thursday. Forestfires have produced a choking haze that spread across Southeast Asia. **Reuters**

■ Indonesian police arrested 230 people suspected of starting some of the fires that are spreading health-damaging haze across a large part of Southeast Asia.

■ Poor visibility caused by smoke caused delays of flights at airports in Indonesia and Malaysia, and prompted authorities to shut thousands of schools in both countries.

■ Malaysia said it would raise pressure on its neighbours to find a solution to recurring outbreaks of smog-belching forestfires in Indonesia, as air quality plummeted.

Canada's Trudeau apologises after brownface photo sparks furore

ROB GILLIES TORONTO, SEPTEMBER 19

PRIME MINISTER Justin Trudeau's campaign moved to contain a growing furore Thursday after a yearbook photo surfaced of him in brownface at a 2001 "Arabian Nights" costume party and two other similar incidents came to light.

With his bid for re-election just a month away, the 47-year-old Trudeau begged Canadians to forgive him.

"I should have known better then, but I didn't, and I am deeply sorry for it," he said, adding: "It was a dumb thing to do."



Time magazine published the photo on Wednesday, saying it was taken from the yearbook from the West Point Grey Academy, a private school in British Columbia where Trudeau worked as a teacher before going into politics. It shows the then-29-year-old Trudeau in a turban and robe with dark makeup on his

hands, face and neck.

The morning after the story broke, Trudeau gave no sign at all that he might resign, and no figures in his Liberal Party had called on him to step down.

Canadian Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan, a Liberal who is Sikh, said what Trudeau did was wrong but the PM has a record of standing up for minorities.

New video

Global News also reported another instance, broadcasting a brief video of Trudeau in blackface while raising his hands in the air and sticking out his tongue. A Liberal Party spokeswoman said the footage was from the 1990s. **AP**

Netanyahu seeks unity govt with rival Gantz, but rebuffed

JEFFREY HELLER JERUSALEM, SEPTEMBER 19

ISRAEL'S WEAKENED Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu saw his offer on Thursday for a coalition with his strongest political rival, Benny Gantz, swiftly rebuffed after failing to secure a governing majority in a tight election.

Netanyahu's surprise move was an abrupt change of strategy for the right-wing leader. Its rejection could spell weeks of wrangling after Tuesday's election, which followed an inconclusive national ballot in April.

Gantz's centrist Blue and White party emerged from the second round of voting this year slightly ahead of Netanyahu's Likud, but also short of enough supporters in the 120-member Parliament for a ruling bloc.

Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving leader, said in a video clip in which he urged Gantz, the country's former military chief, to meet him "as soon as today", that he had pledged during the election campaign to form a right-wing, Likud-led government.

"But to my regret, the election results show that this is impossible," Netanyahu said. "Benny, we must set up a broad unity government, as soon as today. The nation expects us, both of us, to demonstrate responsibility and that we pursue cooperation."

Responding to Netanyahu's call, Gantz made no mention of the PM and said he himself would head a "liberal" coalition, political shorthand for one that excludes the Israeli leader's long-time ultra-Orthodox allies.

He then left it to Moshe Yaalon,

Netanyahu and Gantz with President Rivlin. **Reuters**

EXPLAINED Graft charges hurt Netanyahu's case

WITH NO party winning a majority in Tuesday's election, Netanyahu made a case for a unity government, asking his main rival to team up with him to avoid another election. But Benny Gantz's Blue and White party, which finished slightly above Netanyahu's Likud in the polls, does not want to appear to be aligning with the PM who faces multiple corruption charges. Netanyahu has tried to push a Bill giving him immunity as long as he is in office, but has so far not succeeded. The corruption charges, while hindering his bid to form a unity government, could also cause further legal trouble if he has to vacate the post of PM.

a fellow Blue and White leader, to deliver a stinging rejection of a partnership with Netanyahu, citing looming corruption charges against the PM. **REUTERS**

FOUR YEARS AFTER GERMANY TOOK IN 1 MILLION MIGRANTS, INTEGRATION IS QUIETLY WORKING, ONE VILLAGE AT A TIME

Syrian children saved a German village, and a village saved itself

KATRIN BENNHOLD & LAETITIA VANCON GOLZOW, SEPTEMBER 19

THE INVITATION was risky, and Mayor Frank Schütz knew it.

Bringing Syrian immigrants to his remote German village, where the anti-immigrant far right is popular and many locals already feel like second-class citizens?

"Madness," the hairdresser opined. "Impossible," a farmer concluded.

But it was the only way to save the village school — the soul and centre of Golzow, which like many rural areas of the former communist East Germany lost a third of its population in the disruptive years after the Berlin Wall fell.

In the summer of 2015, as hundreds of thousands of migrants made their way to Germany, the number of school-age children in Golzow had fallen to a new low. There was not going to be a first grade. It was the beginning of the end for a school that was once the backdrop for 'The Children of Golzow', an epic Communist-era documentary that followed a cohort of first graders through decades of life behind the Iron Curtain.

But then Kamala, Bourhan, Hamza, Nour, Tasnim, Ritaj, Rafef, Roaa, big Mohammad and little Mohammad arrived with their parents. The new children of Golzow, the mayor called them.

"The Syrians saved our school," Schütz said in a recent interview.

And Golzow, in a way, saved itself. When it comes to welcoming migrants, Golzow is a microcosm of Germany, at least arithmetically. The 16 Syrians that settled in this village of 820 inhabitants represent the same share of the population as the roughly 1.5 million who arrived nationwide after 2015.

Their story is a tale about befriending the other even as one in four people in the town voted for the far-right Alternative for Germany in recent elections.

It is also evidence that beneath the fears fanning the populist flame in Europe's biggest democracy, the integration of hundreds of thousands of migrants is quietly working, one village at a time. Across the coun-

The war in Syria resulted in a surge of migrants to Germany. **NYT**

try, more than one in three are now in employment, government statistics show.

Four years after the Syrians ar-

rived, Golzow has changed — for the better, most seem to agree.

Empty apartments have new life in them. At the annual sun-

flower fair, Arabic pastries sit next to German apple tarts. When the school caretaker needs help sweeping up leaves, Fadi, Ahmed and Mahmoud, the Syrian fathers, are among the first to volunteer.

One villager, whose own grandchildren live hundreds of miles away, has taken three Syrian children under his wing, teaching them how to fish and swim. The children call him "Opa," German for grandfather. It wasn't always like this.

When Schütz first gathered villagers to explain his idea to bring in Syrians, there was a lot of scepticism.

"I thought, 'This can't work, they have a different religion, our children won't speak proper

German anymore," said Marco Seidelt, whose 11-year-old son, Davey, suddenly had three Syrians in his class.

Others worried that the newcomers would be noisy or steal, Schütz recalled.

Halima Taha was sceptical, too. "East Germany? Are you crazy?" her Syrian friends told her over the phone after her family was bused from Berlin to an asylum centre in the east and eventually to Golzow, Taha recalled. They don't like foreigners over there, her friends said. It's dangerous.

But then both sides made an effort — and were surprised by how much they liked each other.

Taha, a bubbly 32-year-old mother of three who speaks German with a soft regional lilt,

recalled the flowers and toys the mayor brought when he first welcomed her family to their new home. Villagers donated things to help the family furnish their apartment, including dishes and a set of antlers.

On the first day of school, the German parents greeted the Syrian families with a cake — unaware that they were fasting because it was Ramadan. There was a moment of awkwardness. Then everyone laughed, and Taha cut the cake.

By now, all six Syrian adults have found work.

"They have become important parts of our community," Gaby Thomas, the local head teacher, said of the Syrian families. **NYT**