

MEANWHILE

IRAN ADMITS ROCKET EXPLODED DURING TEST

Iran acknowledged for the first time on Monday that a rocket at its Imam Khomeini Space Centre exploded after satellite photos showed the blast last week, with an official saying a technical malfunction during a test caused the explosion.

TOP OF THE WORLD



SCOTT MORRISON
Australian PM

AUSTRALIA
PM: Won't block deportation of family to Lanka

Melbourne: Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Monday refused to intervene to stop a Tamil family from being deported to Sri Lanka, saying an "exception here or there" would only increase people-smuggling trade. His comments came amidst a mounting public and political pressure on the government to let the Tamil couple, Priya and Nadesalingam, and their two Australian-born toddlers to stay in the country. The family is fighting to remain in Australia because they fear persecution in Sri Lanka. "I know what happens when people think it's okay to make an exception here or there," he said in Sydney.

JAPAN

Nuke plants told to prepare for decommissioning

Tokyo: Japan's nuclear policy-setting body adopted a report Monday saying the country is entering an era of massive nuclear plant decommissioning, urging plant operators to plan ahead to lower safety risks and costs requiring decades and billions of dollars. Twenty-four commercial reactors — or 40 per cent of Japan's total — are designated for or are being decommissioned. Among them are four reactors at the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant that were severely damaged by the massive 2011 earthquake and tsunami that struck north-eastern Japan.

SOUTH KOREA

Lawmaker berates official nominee for not giving birth

Seoul: A South Korean lawmaker provoked outrage Monday when he berated a female economics professor nominated as the country's antitrust chief for not "fulfilling her duty to the nation" by having a child. Despite its economic advances, South Korean society remains highly patriarchal and is facing a demographic crisis with women increasingly reluctant to have babies for reasons ranging from the expense of child-rearing to career setbacks. The government has spent billions of dollars since 2005 to try to boost the birth rate — one of the world's lowest.

BORIS JOHNSON MAY SEEK POLLS IF MPs VOTE TO AVOID NO-DEAL EXIT

Election speculation mounts on eve of 'last chance' Brexit battle

GUY FAULCONBRIDGE, ELIZABETH PIPER & KATE HOLTON
LONDON, SEPTEMBER 2

PRIME MINISTER Boris Johnson was due to make a statement in Downing Street on Monday amid speculation he would call an election if Parliament defeats him over a Brexit plan opponents fear could push the United Kingdom into a ruinous no-deal exit.

Johnson's promise to take the country out of the European Union on October 31 with or without a divorce deal has propelled the United Kingdom towards a constitutional crisis and a battle with the 27 other members of the bloc.

An alliance of opposition lawmakers are plotting with rebels in Johnson's Conservative Party to take control of Parliament and tie the government's hands with legislation that would block a no-deal exit.

Just 24 hours until Parliament returns on Tuesday from its summer break, Johnson's enforcers warned rebels that if they voted against the government they would be kicked out of his Conservative Party.



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With little clarity on whether the deadlocked British Parliament might be able to come up with a resolution to the three-year Brexit crisis, talk turned to a possible election.

"We want a general election," opposition Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn said, to oust

Johnson's "phony, populist cabal".

He added: "We must come together to stop no deal — this week could be our last chance."

However, former Labour leader Tony Blair warned Corbyn, a veteran socialist, to avoid what he cast as an election "elephant trap" Johnson had laid

DOWNING STREET GETS A NEW PUPPY



BRITISH PM Boris Johnson and his girlfriend, Carrie Symonds, revealed Monday that they had adopted a rescued Jack Russell puppy. The 15-week-old puppy, named Dilyn, was later

for Labour.

"Boris Johnson knows that if no-deal Brexit stands on its own as a proposition it might well fail, but if he mixes it up with the

Corbyn question in a general election he could succeed despite a majority being against a no-deal Brexit because some

may fear a Corbyn premiership more," Blair said.

Johnson held an impromptu cabinet meeting on Monday.

The Sun newspaper said Johnson was planning a snap election in five weeks' time — before Brexit — if lawmakers defeat him. REUTERS



Afghan security personnel near a poster of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in Kabul Tuesday. Reuters

US envoy shows draft deal with Taliban to Ghani

REUTERS
KABUL, SEPTEMBER 2

THE US special representative for Afghanistan showed Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on Monday the draft of an agreement between the United States and the Taliban expected to clear the way for a phased US troop withdrawal, officials said.

Zalmay Khalilzad, the Afghan-born US diplomat who has completed nine rounds of talks with Taliban representatives, is meeting Afghan leaders in Kabul this week to reach a consensus before the deal is signed.

The agreement is expected to include a staggered withdrawal of US forces from their longest ever war in exchange for a Taliban commitment that they will not allow Afghanistan to be used by militants to plot attacks on the US and its allies.

Ghani's government has been shut out of the talks as the militants refuse to recognise it, dismissing it as a US puppet.

But as part of the deal, the Taliban are expected to make a commitment to open power-sharing talks with the government. Ghani will consider the draft and share his views on it with Khalilzad within two days, sources with knowledge of the negotiations told Reuters.

EXPLAINED

Deal could still be scuppered by US discord over role

THERE ARE disagreement within the White House about the role the US should play in Afghanistan after troop withdrawal, according to a New York Times report. While some people believe the CIA should keep backing militias in the country and use them as a counterterror force, others say the militias themselves could be a threat, and without some sort of US military presence, the terror threat from Afghanistan can't be contained. There are also those who believe the Islamic State in Afghanistan is not a threat to the West at the moment and the US does not need to spend resources to keep it in check. Although the deal with the Taliban is almost done, there is a fear the discord within the White House might scupper an agreement with the militants who want a full withdrawal.

Would quit if I could, says Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam

REUTERS
HONG KONG, SEPTEMBER 2

EMBATTLED HONG Kong leader Carrie Lam said she has caused "unforgivable havoc" by igniting the political crisis engulfing the city and would quit if she had a choice, according to an audio recording of remarks she made last week to a group of businesspeople.

At the closed-door meeting, Lam told the group that she now has "very limited" room to resolve the crisis because the unrest has become a national security and sovereignty issue for China amid rising tensions with the United States.

"If I have a choice," she said, speaking in English, "the first thing is to quit, having made a deep apology."

Lam's dramatic and at times anguished remarks offer the clearest view yet into the thinking of the Chinese leadership as it navigates the unrest in Hong Kong, the biggest political crisis to grip the country since the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989.



School students at a protest in Hong Kong on Monday. AP

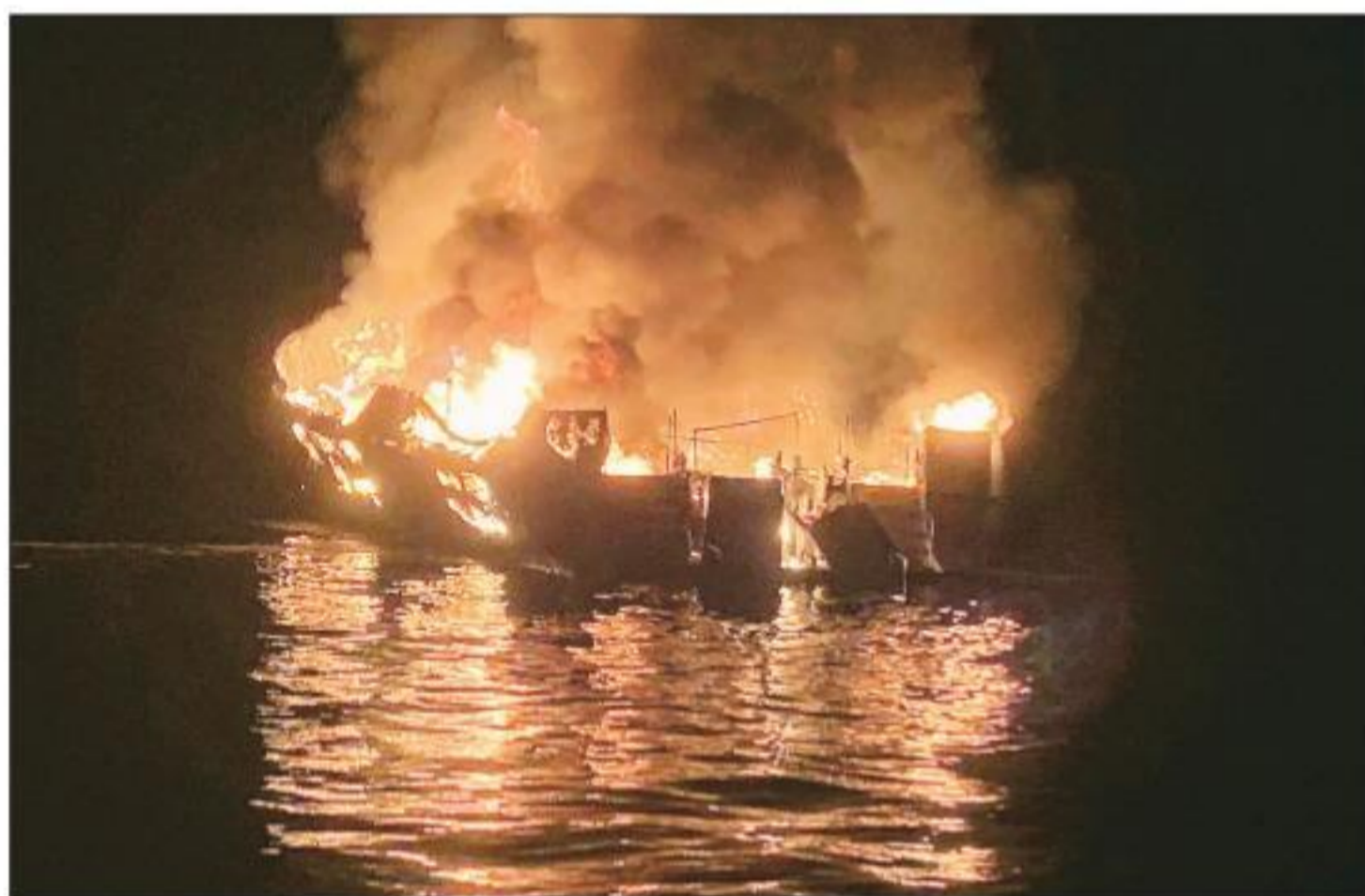
Thousands of students boycott 1st day of school

NADIA LAM & VINCENT YU
HONG KONG, SEPTEMBER 2

CLAD IN gas masks along with their formal white school uniforms, tens of thousands of students in Hong Kong boycotted the first day of classes Monday as part of a citywide strike following a violent weekend of demonstrations.

High school students added gas masks, goggles and hard hats to their traditional uniforms, while university pupils crowded into a square at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Workers also participated in their own rally at a public park, braving strong winds and storm clouds as a typhoon threatened.

The young protesters strove to demonstrate their continued determination with Monday's school boycott, the first of a planned two-day strike. REUTERS



A 75-foot vessel burns off Santa Cruz Island, California, on Monday. Reuters

Boat sinks in flames off California, 34 missing, many feared dead

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LOS ANGELES, SEPTEMBER 2

A COMMERCIAL scuba-diver boat sank amid intense flames early Monday off the coast of Southern California and 34 passengers were unaccounted for, the US Coast Guard said.

Many were feared dead. Fire crews in helicopters, small boats and a Coast Guard cutter spent hours desperately battling the fierce pre-dawn fire on the 75-foot Conception, which had been on a diving excursion around Santa Cruz Island.

But the blaze and intense heat prevented them from breaching the vessel's hull to search for survivors before the craft sank, the Coast Guard said.

Five Conception crew members were awake and jumped into the water when flames burst

Five crew members, who were awake when the boat went up in flames, jumped into the water and were rescued

out around 3.15 am. Coast Guard Captain Monica Rochester told reporters in a televised briefing.

The five were rescued by people on a pleasure craft called the Grape Escape, Rochester said.

She said it was unclear whether the Conception's crew had been able to try to rescue any passengers, all of whom were believed to have been sleeping in a bunk cabin below decks.

She said 34 people — not the 33 reported earlier by the Coast Guard — were unaccounted for when the Conception sank 20

yards offshore, leaving only its bow exposed.

"I'm unaware of any survivors at this time," Coast Guard Petty Officer Aaron Bemis told CNN earlier, adding that it was too soon to confirm casualties.

Rochester said the Coast Guard was still in "response phase" — meaning search and rescue efforts were continuing, primarily through a shoreline search for possible survivors.

She said the Conception, which was launched in 1981 by a Santa Barbara-based company called Truth Aquatics, "has been in full compliance" with safety regulations, and that its owner was cooperating with investigators.

Asked whether there had been an explosion on board or a slow-developing fire, Rochester said that "the only Mayday call we received was the vessel was engulfed in flames".

Record-setting hurricane keeps pounding Bahamas

RAMÓN ESPINOSA
MCLEAN'S TOWN CAY, SEPTEMBER 2

IN A slow, relentless advance, a catastrophic Hurricane Dorian kept pounding at the northern Bahamas early Monday, as one of the strongest Atlantic storms ever recorded left wrecked homes, shredded roofs, tumbled cars and toppled power poles in its wake.

The storm's top sustained winds decreased slightly to 270 kmph as its westward movement slowed, crawling along

Grand Bahama island Monday morning at 2 kmph in what forecasters said would be a daylong assault. Earlier, Dorian churned over Abaco island with battering winds and surf during Sunday.

Information began emerging from the affected islands, with Bahamas Power and Light saying there is a total blackout in New Providence, the archipelago's most populous island, Abaco. "The reports out of Abaco as everyone knows," company spokesman Quincy Parker told ZNS Bahamas radio station, "were not good." AP



In Freeport, Bahamas on Sunday. AP

TO DIVERSIFY AWAY FROM OIL, KAZAKHSTAN IS SUPPORTING AN ANCIENT FORM OF CAMEL HYBRIDISATION

How many humps are there on a camel? In Kazakhstan, it's complicated

ANDREW E KRAMER
AKTAU, SEPTEMBER 2

IN MOST of the world, camels come in two types: two-humped Bactrian and one-humped dromedary.

But nothing is so simple out in the desert of Kazakhstan, where the camels roaming about, munching shrubs, come in a dizzying array of back shapes — most of them some version of 1 1/2-humped. This is no accidental, naturally occurring oddity.

"All the best specialists in hybridisation are in Kazakhstan,"

Yuri V Gabrov, director of the Moscow Ethnographic Society and an authority on camels, said in an interview. "They are way out in front."

Kazakhstan, a vast and sparsely populated nation in Central Asia, is growing its camel herds by mating two-humped and one-humped camels, producing hybrids that are hardy to cold like Bactrian breeds, while producing copious milk like dromedaries.

Demand for the animals is driven by the improbable rise in popularity of a fermented camel milk drink known as shubat. It also stems from a push by the govern-

ment to develop agriculture and diversify the economy away from oil; the Kazakh Ministry of Agriculture provides loans to farmers to expand the hybrid herds.

This kind of camel husbandry was widespread in preindustrial Central Asia, where for centuries the most common form of hybrid, known as a "Nar camel", was the preferred beast of burden for east-west trade with China. But the practice largely faded in the early 20th century, when Soviet authorities confiscated livestock from nomads during collectivisation.

As Kazakhstan pulled out of



At a camel farm in Aktau, in western Kazakhstan. NYT

its post-Soviet economic slump, the camel herds also recovered. The number of camels in

Kazakhstan rose to 191,000 in 2017 from 96,000 in 1999, the last year for which figures are

available, according to the state statistics agency.

At the same time, hybrids became more common, giving rise to the distinctive 1 1/2-humped animals now seen roaming Kazakhstan's arid landscape.

"Up until a decade ago, Bactrian camels were the norm," said a 2017 study on Kazakhstan's camel herds, published in the Journal of Arid Land Studies. "The situation is changing."

The study found that 80% of the country's camels were hybrids. "Now many people are keeping camels," said Gulnara Uteniyazova, a camel milkmaid

out on a recent, sweltering day, maneuvering through her grunting, snorting herd with a pail, at a camel farm on the steppe. She said her family owns about 80 head, mostly hybrids. "It's good business."

Kazakh veterinarians have documented 32 types of hybrid, of which about 20 are raised commercially. The hump arrangement depends on the degree of hybridisation.

The most common hybrid is achieved by mating a Bactrian male, with its two distinct humps and a pronounced dip between them, with a female

dromedary. Most other varieties are created by "back crossing" the resulting hybrids with other two-humped males. Unlike mules, donkey-horse hybrids that are almost always sterile, the offspring of a Bactrian and dromedary pairing are fertile.

The result is a great diversity out in the windswept desert. Kazakhs have taken pride in their expanding, unusual herds. Kazakhstan is "the leader in selective breeding of camels, with nothing comparable elsewhere in the world," a business news site, In Business, wrote last fall. NYT