

ELSEWHERE



U.S. will raise Uighur issue at UNGA: Pompeo
WASHINGTON
U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Friday that the U.S. would use the UN General Assembly this month to persuade countries to help "call out" China over treatment of its Uighur Muslim minority. "We want freedom for those folks... this is about their fundamental unalienable rights for those particular individuals." REUTERS

U.S. launches anti-trust probe against tech firms
SAN FRANCISCO
The U.S. Department of Justice has asked Google to provide records on past investigations, as part of its extensive probe of tech giants over possible anti-competitive practices, the Internet titan said Friday. The probe appears directed at dominant tech players. AFP

African Union lifts suspension of Sudan
ADDIS ABABA
The African Union (AU) has lifted its suspension of Sudan three months after freezing its membership. The AU's Peace and Security Council said Friday that the decision followed the announcement of Sudan's first Cabinet since the ousting of veteran leader Omar al-Bashir. AFP

Israel strikes Gaza after rocket attack
JERUSALEM
Israeli forces attacked Hamas positions in Gaza after rockets fired from the enclave hit the country, the military said early on Saturday. The exchange came hours after two Palestinian teenagers were killed by Israeli fire during clashes on the Gaza border. AFP

Russia, Ukraine exchange prisoners

This comes after weeks of negotiations between the sides, who have been fighting since 2014

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE KIEV

Russia and Ukraine carried out a long-awaited swap of 70 prisoners on Saturday, in a deal hailed by President Volodymyr Zelensky as a "first step" towards ending their conflict. Planes carrying 35 prisoners from each side landed simultaneously in Moscow and Kiev, where the passengers emerged under sunny skies.

"We have taken the first step," Mr. Zelensky said on the tarmac after greeting and hugging former prisoners. "We have to take all the steps to finish this horrible war."

Emotional scenes

In emotional scenes at Kiev's Boryspil airport, family members embraced and handed flowers to the former prisoners, many weeping with joy. Among those swapped were 24 Ukrainian sailors, Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov and Russian-Ukrainian journalist Kyrylo Vyshynsky.

Russian state television showed the Russian prisoners emerging from the plane



To prison and back: Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov, who was jailed on terrorism charges in Russia, gets off a plane on Saturday upon arrival in Kiev after the prisoner swap. REUTERS

at Moscow's Vnukovo-2 airport used for government flights. Ukraine's SBU security service confirmed that Vladimir Tsemakh — a fighter with Moscow-backed separatists considered a key witness in the downing of flight MH17 — was handed over to Russia despite pleas from the Netherlands.

Anticipation had been building for days for the exchange, which involved weeks of behind-the-scenes negotiations. Relations between Kiev and Moscow solidified in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea and began backing separatists in the eastern industrial regions of Donetsk and Lugansk. Fight-

ing there has claimed more than 13,000 lives over the past five years. Mr. Zelensky's election in April has raised hopes that a stalled peace process could be revived. The comedian-turned-politician vowed during his campaign to have Ukrainian prisoners in Russia returned

and has said ending the conflict with Russia is his top priority.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said this week that the exchange would be "a huge step towards normalising relations" with Kiev.

Important step: Moscow Saturday's exchange was "a very important step", Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said. "It's necessary to maintain this drive to solve problems as much as possible," she said on Twitter.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel called the swap a "sign of hope" and called for the implementation of a 2015 ceasefire deal that Paris and Berlin helped broker.

The release of Mr. Sentsov will be seen as a major victory for Kiev. He was Ukraine's most famous political prisoner and the subject of a star-studded international campaign calling for his release. He was arrested in 2014 and had been serving a 20-year sentence in an Arctic penal colony for planning "terrorist attacks" in Crimea.

Iran breaches deal, fires up advanced centrifuges

Move will help it increase n-stockpile

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE TEHRAN

Iran said on Saturday that it has fired up advanced centrifuges to boost its enriched uranium stockpiles, in the latest scaling back of commitments under a crumbling 2015 nuclear deal.

The Islamic republic was acting on a threat to further abandon its nuclear commitments based on a deadline it set for European powers to do something to shield it from U.S. sanctions.

The country's Atomic Energy Organisation spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi said it had activated 20 IR-4 and 20 IR-6 advanced centrifuges. "The centrifuge machines, as they are engaged in research and development, will help with increasing the stockpile," he said. "The capacity of these machines is many times more than the previous machines. This started as of yesterday (Friday)," he said.

Under the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran was allowed to enrich uranium us-



Behrouz Kamalvandi, spokesman for Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation. AFP

ing only first generation — or IR-1 — centrifuges. Iran also said on Saturday that it was capable of enriching uranium beyond 20% but for now it had no plans to do so. "Our plan is that if the other parties act on their commitments, we too return to our commitments," said Mr. Kamalvandi.

Despite the decision to further step back from the 2015 deal, Mr. Kamalvandi said Iran would allow the International Atomic Energy Agency to continue monitoring its nuclear programme, as it has done under the 2015 accord.

Iran seizes boat in Strait of Hormuz, arrests 12

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE TEHRAN

Iran seized a boat and arrested 12 Filipinos as it busted a "fuel-smuggling ring" in the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday, the semi-official news agency ISNA reported. "A foreign tugboat was confiscated as well as 2,83,900 litres (75,000 gallons) of petrol worth 233.71 billion rials (about \$2 million)," ISNA said, citing the Coast Guard chief in the

southern province of Hormozgan.

"Twelve Philippine nationals were arrested and the relevant judiciary officials are currently taking the required legal measures," Major Hossein Dehaki was quoted as saying.

Earlier, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps detained a "foreign tanker" in Gulf waters on July 14 for allegedly smuggling contraband fuel.

Kabul welcomes U.S. assurances on Taliban deal

Afghanistan has seen a surge in violence after an 'in-principle' agreement was reached with militants

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE KABUL

The Afghan government on Saturday welcomed a pledge by the Pentagon that the U.S. would only accept a "good deal" from the Taliban after a wave of insurgent attacks sparked concerns of a hasty U.S. withdrawal.

During a wide ranging press conference in Paris earlier on Saturday, U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper sought to allay fears that

Washington was looking for a quick exit from Afghanistan as it inches closer to a potential deal with the Taliban.

"My view, the U.S. view is that the best way forward is a political agreement and that's what we're working diligently on right now," Mr. Esper told reporters.

"That doesn't mean we'll take any deal, but we want to make sure we have a good deal, a good enough deal that guarantees at least the

security of our countries going forward and a brighter future for the Afghan people."

Multiple attacks

The remarks were greeted warmly in Afghanistan where the Taliban in the past week has attacked several provincial capitals and targeted Kabul with suicide bombers. "The Afghan Government welcomes the latest remarks made by the

Pentagon Chief on Afg peace process," presidential spokesman Sediq Sediqqi wrote on Twitter. "We echo the need for sustainable peace, end of violence and a meaningful peace that would guarantee the security of Afghanistan and its allies."

Kabul has been gripped by a surge in deadly violence even after the U.S. and the insurgents reached an agreement "in principle" that would see the U.S. pull thou-

sands of troops from Afghanistan in return for various Taliban security promises.

According to parts of the deal made public so far, the Pentagon would pull about 5,000 of its roughly 13,000 or so troops from five bases across Afghanistan by early next year. The insurgents in turn will renounce al-Qaeda, promise to fight the Islamic State (IS) group and stop jihadists using Afghanistan as a safe haven.

British MPs prepare for legal action to enforce Brexit delay

Lawmakers to go to court if Johnson defies Parliament

REUTERS LONDON

British lawmakers are preparing legal action in case Prime Minister Boris Johnson tries to defy legislation compelling him to seek a further delay to Brexit, Opposition Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn said on Saturday.

An Opposition Bill, which would force Mr. Johnson to ask the European Union (EU) for an extension to Britain's departure to avoid an Oct. 31 exit without a transition deal, was approved by Parliament's appointed upper chamber, the House of Lords, on Friday. Queen Elizabeth is expected to sign it into law on Monday.



An anti-government demonstration in London on Saturday. AFP

The BBC said earlier that lawmakers, including moderate Conservatives expelled this week from their party chamber, the House of Lords, on Friday. Queen Elizabeth is expected to sign it into law on Monday.

Hurricane Dorian's toll rises to 43

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MARSH HARBOR

The toll from Hurricane Dorian's devastating rampage across the Bahamas rose to 43 and was likely to climb "significantly," officials said, with hundreds missing even as rescuers brought out desperate survivors from the debris. Confirming the new toll, Prime Minister Hubert Minnis said 35 were killed on Abaco and eight on Grand Bahama island.

With many missing, "this number is expected to grow significantly," his spokeswoman Erica Wells Cox told NBC News. On the eventual death toll, Health Minister Duane Sands earlier said "the number will be staggering."

Hong Kong police foil airport protest

Authorities allow only airline passengers to avoid the chaos of last weekend

REUTERS HONG KONG

Hong Kong police prevented protesters from blocking access to the airport on Saturday, but fired tear gas for a second night running in the city's densely populated district of Mong Kok in the 14th week of unrest.

Police checked for tickets and passports to allow only airline passengers through to the airport to avoid the chaos of last weekend, when activists blocked approach roads, threw debris on to train tracks and trashed the MTR subway station in the nearby new town of Tung Chung. Protesters also occupied the arrivals hall last month, halting and delaying flights, amid a series of clashes with police.

As night fell on Saturday, there were some cat-and-mouse stand-offs between protesters and police in Tung Chung, but no sign of renewed violence.



3 months and running: A protester running during a clash with police in Hong Kong on Saturday. GETTY IMAGES

On Friday night, hundreds of demonstrators, many masked and dressed in black, attacked MTR metro stations in the Mong Kok dis-

trict, targeted because of televised scenes of police beating protesters on a metro train on Aug. 31 as they covered on the floor.

Activists, angry that the MTR closed stations to stop protesters from gathering and demanding CCTV footage of the beatings, tore

down signs, broke turnstiles, set fires on the street and drew graffiti on walls.

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam announced concessions this week aimed at ending the protests, including formally scrapping a hugely unpopular extradition Bill, but many said the concessions were too little, too late. She said Beijing backed her "all the way". But the demonstrations, which began in June, have long since broadened into calls for more democracy and many protesters have pledged to fight on.

Hong Kong returned to China in 1997 under a "one country, two systems" formula that guarantees freedoms not enjoyed on the mainland. Many Hong Kong residents fear Beijing is eroding that autonomy.

Death of 'Comrade Mugabe' attracts mixed reaction

Zimbabwe ruling party mouthpiece offers a glowing tribute but other newspapers are fiercely critical

ASSOCIATED PRESS

No date for the funeral has been set, and it's not clear when Mugabe's body will arrive from Singapore, where he died on Friday. Mugabe, who was 95, will be buried at the National Heroes Acre, which has been set aside for Zimbabweans who have made huge sacrifices during the war against white-minority rule and who dedicated themselves to the nation.

"We don't have the date yet," Deputy Information Minister Energy Mutodi said. "That is still in the hands of the family and the President, but comrade Mugabe will be buried at the Heroes Acre."

A national hero
Located on a hilltop, the plot features a huge bronze statue of three guerrilla fighters and boasts black marble and granite flourishes. Mugabe is viewed by many as a national hero despite decades of rule that left the country strugg-



Liberator, leader, despot: Children milling around a wall with a mural of Robert Mugabe in Harare on Saturday. GETTY IMAGES

ling. Flags flew at half-staff Saturday, but there were no public activities to mark the death of a man who singularly shaped the once-prosperous country in his own image and created a repressive system that some say remains even today.

Reaction to his death was mixed, although praise ironically came mostly from ruling party officials and mili-

tary leaders. The state-run Herald newspaper, which vilified Mugabe when he was forced to resign and when he subsequently voiced support for the Opposition, carried glowing tributes. In a "commemorative edition," the paper, which often acts as a mouthpiece of the government, carried a montage of his pictures with the headline — "Robert Mu-

gabe-1924-2019" on its front page and glowing reports throughout.

"Whatever happened towards the end of his leadership should not be used to rubbish the good things that he did during his life," the commander of the Zimbabwe Defense Forces was quoted as saying in a separate story in the newspaper.

'95 and out'

Others were less charitable. "95 and out," read the privately-owned Newsday newspaper. "Despite his intellectual prowess, Mugabe's failure to let go of power when it was time was his major undoing. In short, he was a liberator who turned villain. Leaders need to know when to draw the line," it said in an editorial.

"End of an era as Mugabe dies, leaves Zim poor, divided," read the front page headline of another newspaper, the Daily News. "Notwithstanding the many mistakes that he made, many Zimbab-

weans will probably agree that had he not held on to power beyond the 1990s, he would today be largely remembered as one of Africa's best leaders in history," the paper said in an editorial.

Both newspapers were major targets of Mugabe's vitriol, with editors and reporters routinely arrested during Mugabe's rule.

On the streets of the capital, Harare, few seemed bothered as people struggled to cope with biting economic problems largely blamed by critics on Mugabe's rule and perpetuated by his successor and an ally who later turned foe, President Emmerson Mnangagwa. Mnangagwa took power in 2017 with the help of the military.

"Who cares?" said Percy Maute, a street vendor pushing a cart full of tomatoes along a busy street named after the former President. "I don't care. I am too busy looking for money to mourn a man who put me in this position."

Indian couple killed in U.S. boat accident

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA LOS ANGELES

A U.S.-based Indian couple and an Indian-origin scientist were among the 34 people who died from smoke inhalation when they were trapped on a boat packed with scuba divers that caught fire and sank off the California coast, according to media reports.

On Monday, a massive fire broke out on the 75-foot charter boat when the passengers were sleeping below the deck.

The couple, Kaustubh Nirmal and Sanjeeri Deopujari, lived in Connecticut and were among the people who died aboard the vessel, during a three-day diving excursion.

Indian-origin scientist Sunil Singh Sandhu was also there on a dive vessel that sank off Santa Barbara in California. The massive fire was reported to be one of California's worst maritime disasters in decades.