

TOP OF THE WORLD



Cartel gunmen in Culiacán. Reuters

MEXICO El Chapo's son held, released amid violence

Mexico City: Cartel gunmen paralysed a Mexican city Thursday, unleashing hail of automatic gunfire in broad daylight in a staggering show of force after soldiers arrested and then released Ovidio Guzmán López, the son of the infamous drug lord Joaquín Guzmán Loera. The violence began shortly after 3:30 p.m. in the city of Culiacán, when a patrol of 30 soldiers came under attack by individuals in a home in the neighborhood of Tres Rios, according to government officials.

PAKISTAN Press freedom group leader expelled

Islamabad: Pakistan black-listed and expelled the Asia coordinator of global press freedom group the Committee to Protect Journalists, the group's executive director said Friday. Joel Simon called the expulsion of Steven Butler "baffling" and "a slap in the face" to those concerned about press freedom in Pakistan. Butler was refused entry at the Allama Iqbal International Airport in Lahore despite having a valid visa and was returned to the United States. Butler said he was told he was on "a stop list of the Interior Ministry." The Pakistani government had no immediate comment Friday.

CHINA Legislature hits out at US over Hong Kong

Beijing: China's ceremonial legislature is attacking legislation in the US Congress to support pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong. A spokesman for the National People's Congress says the legislation "violates the basic norms of international law and international relations" and "grossly interferes in China's domestic politics." A bill passed by the US House of Representatives would require annual reviews by the US secretary of state of Hong Kong's special economic and trade status, providing a check on Beijing's influence over the territory.

TOLL EXPECTED TO RISE, TALIBAN DENIES ANY ROLE

Blast kills 62, injures over 100 during prayers at Afghan mosque

AGENCIES KABUL, OCTOBER 18

MULTIPLE EXPLOSIONS at a mosque in eastern Afghanistan collapsed the roof on worshippers during Friday prayers, killing at least 62 and wounding more than 100, officials said. Attaullah Khogyani, spokesman for Nangarhar province's governor, said bombs had been placed inside the mosque in the Jawdara area of Haska Mena district. "People using an excavator are still working to bring out the bodies and injured from under the roof," said Sohrab Qaderi, a member of the provincial council in Nangarhar, adding that the death toll was likely to rise. Malik Mohammadi Gul Shinwari, a tribal elder from the area, said that the mosque had been destroyed. "It was a heartbreaking scene I witnessed," Shinwari said. No group immediately claimed responsibility but the government accused Taliban insurgents, who are fighting to reimpose strict Islamic law after their 2001 ouster by U.S.-led forces. Sediqli Sediqli, spokesman for the presidential palace, condemned what he said was a suicide bomb attack. "The Taliban and their part-



A person injured in the blast, at a hospital in Jalalabad on Friday. Reuters

ners' heinous crimes continue to target civilians at the time of worship," Sediqli added. Suhail Shaheen, a spokesman for the Taliban, denied responsibility. "All witnesses say it was a mortar attack by Kabul Adm.(Administration) forces," he said in a tweet. "Such intentional killing of scores of civilians while at prayer is a war crime," Omar Waraich, Amnesty International's deputy South Asia director, said in a statement

Friday. "This is not a war that is winding down, it is escalating and the people who are suffering the most are civilians." Zahir Adil, spokesman for the public health department in Nangarhar Province, said 23 of the wounded were transferred to Jalalabad, the provincial capital, and the rest were being treated in the Haskamena district clinic. The violence comes a day after a UN report said Afghan civilians are dying in record numbers in the country's increasingly brutal

war, noting that more civilians died in July than in any previous one-month period since the UN began keeping statistics. "Civilian casualties at record-high levels clearly show the need for all parties concerned to pay much more attention to protecting the civilian population, including through a review of conduct during combat operations," said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the UN secretary-general's special representative for Afghanistan.

EXPLAINED E. Civilian toll at record high levels

THE LATEST attack comes a day after a UN report suggested that 1,174 civilians were killed and 3,139 wounded from July 1 to September 30. The UN report further indicated that for the first time this year, "anti-government elements" were responsible for more deaths than US or pro-government forces. With reports saying 41 per cent of casualties were women or children, this period is said to be one of the bloodiest in recent years. The incident is expected to renew focus on the need for a peace deal, after talks for one had fallen apart earlier this year.



Smoke billows from Ras al-Ayn, where shelling and gunfire were heard, on Friday. AP

HOURS AFTER CEASEFIRE WAS DECLARED

Kurds accuse Turkey of violating truce as shelling continues in Syria

PATRICK KINGSLEY ISTANBUL, OCTOBER 18

THE LEADERSHIP of the Syrian Kurdish fighters accused the Turkish military and its proxies on Friday of violating the terms of a truce in northern Syria that was brokered a day earlier by Vice President Mike Pence, raising questions about the feasibility of the ceasefire and whether the Americans can enforce it. A spokesman for the Kurdish forces, Mustafa Ali, said on Thursday night by Pence that there would be a five-day pause. Responding to the claims that Turkey had violated the truce, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan denied that any fighting was continuing. "I do not know where you get your information from," he told a reporter after leaving Friday Prayers at a mosque in Istanbul. "Conflict is out of the question."

But shelling continued in the Syrian border town of Ras al-Ain, and gunfire could be heard by journalists just across the border in Turkey. The continuation of the deadly conflict provided further evidence of the US' diminished influence, showing that the American military, having evacuated its troops from northern Syria, had no practical ability to enforce the cease-fire. The truce agreement had already amounted to a near victory for Erdogan, who outmaneuvered President Trump, since it gave the assent of the United States to a Turkish sphere of influence in northern Syria and further diminished the United States' role in the region. On Friday, Kurdish health officials said they were investigating whether six civilians in the town had been hit by chemical weapons during Turkish airstrikes. The Turkish government has denied the claim, along with other accusations of war crimes. Its Defense Ministry said on Friday that the Turkish Army had continued its offensive "on the basis of humanitarian and moral values, and of international law." NYT



TURKEY'S SYRIA OFFENSIVE

Top White House official indicates Trump held back aid to Ukraine

NEW YORK TIMES WASHINGTON, OCTOBER 18

MICK MULVANEY, the acting White House chief of staff, threw the Trump administration's defense against impeachment into disarray on Thursday when he said that the White House withheld nearly \$400 million in military aid to Ukraine to further President Trump's political interests. Mulvaney told journalists in a televised White House briefing that the aid was withheld in part until Ukraine investigated an unsubstantiated theory that Ukraine, not Russia, was responsible for hacking Democratic Party emails in 2016 — a theory that would show that Mr. Trump was elected without Russian help. The declaration by Mulvaney, which he took back later in the day, undercut Trump's repeated denials of a quid pro quo that linked American military aid for Ukraine to an investigation that could help Trump politically.

The comments sent Washington into turmoil as Democrats and some Republicans said they were deeply damaging to Trump. At the White House, Mulvaney said that Trump had demanded that Ukraine investigate the theory, even though a former White House homeland security adviser had told Trump that the theory had been completely debunked.



The look back to what happened in 2016 certainly was part of the thing that he was worried about in corruption with that nation... And that is absolutely appropriate"

— MICK MULVANEY ACTING WHITE HOUSE CHIEF OF STAFF

Democrats called Mulvaney's comments a potential turning point in their impeachment inquiry. "We have a confession," said Representative Eric Swalwell, Democrat of California. By day's end, after Trump told aides to clean up the mess, Mulvaney issued a statement flatly denying what he had earlier said. "Once again, the media has decided to misconstrue my comments to advance a biased and political witch hunt against President Trump," Mulvaney wrote.



Reuters

TURMOIL IN LEBANON

■ A demonstrator holds a Lebanese flag during a protest over the deteriorating economic situation, in Dora on Friday

■ The rallies are the largest Lebanon has seen since 2015 and could destabilise an economy that is already on the verge of collapse

Boris returns to London, looks to drum up support for Brexit deal

ASSOCIATED PRESS LONDON, OCTOBER 18

AFTER WINNING the backing of European Union leaders for his new Brexit deal, Prime Minister Boris Johnson was in London Friday looking to secure enough support to get the deal through the fractious British Parliament. Johnson returned overnight for what is expected to be a busy day attempting to persuade lawmakers to vote for the divorce deal at a rare Saturday sitting of Parliament. It is expected to be a knife-edge vote.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab started drumming up support early. "We've got a real opportunity now to get Brexit delivered faithful to the referendum, move on as a Government, and I think as a country, and lift the clouds of Brexit," he told the BBC. But the chances of that appeared slim. The DUP's Brexit spokesman, Sammy Wilson, said Johnson's Brexit package was bad for Northern Ireland. "I can give you absolute assurance we will not be voting for this deal when it comes before the Commons tomorrow," he told the BBC.

'WRONG NOT TO TAKE BORIS SERIOUSLY'

Brussels: French President Emmanuel Macron said Friday British Prime Minister Boris Johnson had been underestimated. "He may be a colorful character sometimes but we all are at times. He's got a temper, but he's a leader with a real strategic vision. Those who didn't take him seriously were wrong," Macron told a press meet after an EU summit. REUTERS

Trump blasts 'crazy' Pelosi, says Erdogan wants truce to work

STEVE HOLLAND DALLAS, OCTOBER 18

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump defended his Syria pullout at a campaign rally on Thursday and lashed out at "Crazy Nancy" Pelosi and other Democrats who are trying to remove him from office through impeachment. "The more America achieves, the more hateful and enraged these crazy Democrats become. They're crazy. They're crazy," Trump said at American Airlines Center in downtown Dallas. Pelosi and other Democratic leaders had complained about his decision to pull US troops from northeastern Syria. "Crazy Nancy. That crazy Nancy, she is crazy," Trump said of Pelosi.



Donald Trump

He also said that he had spoken with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan who told him there had been some "minor" sniper and mortar fire in Northeastern Syria despite a ceasefire, but that it had been quickly eliminated. "He told me there was minor sniper and mortar fire that was quickly eliminated. He very much wants the ceasefire, or pause, to work," Trump said in a post on Twitter. "Likewise, the Kurds want it, and the ultimate solution, to happen." REUTERS

EARLIER, THE AGENCY DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH SUITS OF THE RIGHT SIZE, SPARKING AN OUTCRY ABOUT SEXISM IN THE PROGRAMME

NASA astronauts make history with world's first all-woman spacewalk

ASSOCIATED PRESS CAPE CANAVERAL, OCTOBER 18

THE WORLD'S first all-female spacewalking team made history high above Earth on Friday, replacing a broken part of the International Space Station's power grid. As NASA astronauts Christina Koch and Jessica Meir completed the job with wrenches, screwdrivers and power-grip tools, it marked the first time in a half-century of spacewalking that men weren't part of the action. President Trump called into

the space station to congratulate the crew on their achievement at about 12:30 p.m. Eastern. "Congratulations, Christina and Jessica on this historic event," the president said. "We are thrilled to be speaking live with two brave American astronauts who are making history." America's first female spacewalker from 35 years ago, Kathy Sullivan, was delighted. She said it's good to finally have enough women in the astronaut corps and trained for spacewalking for this to happen. "We've got qualified women running the control, running space centers, com-



Reuters/NASA

Astronauts Christina Koch and Jessica Meir step out of the International Space Station (ISS)

manding the station, commanding spaceships and doing spacewalks," Sullivan told The Associated Press earlier this week. NASA leaders, Girl Scouts and others cheered Koch and Meir on. Parents also sent in messages of thanks and encouragement via social media. NASA included some in its TV coverage. "Go girls go," two young sisters wrote on a sign in crayon. A group of middle schoolers held a long sign reading "The sky is not the limit!!" At the same time, many expressed hope this will become routine in the future. Tracy Caldwell Dyson, a three-time

spacewalker who looked on from Mission Control in Houston, added: "Hopefully, this will now be considered normal." NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine watched the big event unfold from Washington headquarters. "We have the right people doing the right job at the right time," he said. "They are an inspiration to people all over the world including me." Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi sent congratulations to Koch and Meir "for leaving their mark on history" and tweeted that they're an inspiration to women and girls across America.

A suit problem NASA originally wanted to conduct an all-female spacewalk last spring, but did not have enough medium-size suits ready to go until summer. Koch and Meir were supposed to install more new batteries in a spacewalk next week, but had to venture out three days earlier to deal with an equipment failure that occurred over the weekend. It was the second such failure of a battery charger this year, puzzling engineers and putting a hold on future battery installations for the solar power system. WITH NYT