

TOPOF THE WORLD



Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam at the Kowloon Mosque. *Reuters*

HONG KONG  
Carrie Lam  
apologises after  
mosque hit by  
water cannon

*Hong Kong:* Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam apologised to the city's Muslim community on Monday after police fired a water cannon at a major mosque during operations on Sunday to quell violent pro-democracy protests in the Asian financial hub. While the morning after clean up was underway, Lam visited the mosque in Kowloon district, her head covered by a shawl, to express her sorrow over the incident. A statement released later said Lam thanked Islamic leaders for calling for calm during the political turmoil in the city.

LEBANON  
Ministers get pay  
cut in bid to ease  
protesters rage

*Beirut:* Lebanon's cabinet is expected to halve ministers' wages on Monday among other reforms in a bid to ease an economic crisis and defuse the biggest protests against the ruling elite in decades. Across the country, people blocked roads for a fifth day. Schools, banks and businesses closed. Hundreds of thousands of people have flooded the streets, furious at a political class they accuse of pushing the economy to the point of collapse. Under pressure, PM Saad al-Hariri drew up a package of steps over the weekend, some seen as vital to reviving confidence.

CHILE  
Emergency  
extended as  
toll rises to 11

*Santiago:* Chile is "at war", President Sebastian Pinera said Sunday, as the country reels from three days of violent protests and looting that have left 11 dead and almost 1,500 detained in the worst outbreak of social unrest in decades. "We are at war against a powerful, implacable enemy, who does not respect anything or anyone and is willing to use violence and crime without any limits," Pinera said after an emergency meeting with Army General Javier Irujo, who was placed in charge of security in the capital.

ATTEMPTS TO REVIVE AFGHAN PEACE PROCESS

# Agree to unannounced ceasefire, Pakistan urges Taliban: report

'US endorses idea, says ready to resume talks with militant group if it privately agrees to truce'

SAJJAD HUSSAIN  
ISLAMABAD, OCTOBER 21

PAKISTAN HAS suggested to the Taliban that it should agree to an "unannounced ceasefire", days after a high-level delegation of the militant group met the country's foreign minister as part of a push to revive the Afghan peace process, according to a report. The US has endorsed the idea and indicated that it could resume peace talks if the Taliban were ready to give the commitment for a ceasefire in private as it can create a conducive environment to finalise a peace deal, the *Express Tribune* reported. The high-level delegation of the Taliban Political Commission (TPC) called on Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi earlier this month. Taliban have said that the delegation's visit to Pakistan was aimed at putting the peace process back on track. A senior official, on the condition of anonymity, told the newspaper that Pakistan had been pressing the Taliban to agree to a ceasefire or at least give a commitment for reducing the level of violence. The official said that to end



A high-level delegation of the Taliban Political Commission called on Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi earlier this month. *Reuters*

the stalemate, Pakistan suggested to the Taliban to agree to an "unannounced ceasefire" if they had any problem in making their decision public at this stage. The peace talks between the US and the Taliban were stalled by President Donald Trump following the killing of an American soldier in Kabul last month in a suicide attack claimed by the militant group. Trump stunned the world when he suddenly declared that the Afghan peace talks with the Taliban were "dead" after he cancelled a secret meeting with the Taliban and Afghan President

Ashraf Ghani at Camp David near Washington. The Taliban has so far not given any response to the proposal. But the two sides agreed to take some confidence-building measures before making progress on contentious issues, the report said. The exchange of prisoners between the insurgent group and the US soon after the talks in Islamabad was a part of such measures, the official said, referring to the release of 11 members of the Taliban in exchange of three Indian engineers earlier this month from Afghan jails. **PTI**



Residents hurl potatoes at US military vehicles in the town of Qamishli, northern Syria, on Monday. *AP*

## US considers leaving some troops in Syria to guard oil: Pentagon

Residents pelt departing US troops

REUTERS & AP  
DOHUQ, AKCAKALE, OCTOBER 21

THE PENTAGON is considering keeping some US troops near oilfields in northeastern Syria alongside Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to help deny oil to Islamic State militants, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said on Monday. US troops are crossing into Iraq as part of a broader withdrawal from Syria ordered by President Donald Trump, a decision that allowed Turkey to launch an offensive against the SDF which for years was a US ally battling Islamic State. More than 100 vehicles crossed the border into Iraq early on Monday from the northeast tip of Syria, where Turkey agreed to pause its offensive for five days under a deal with Washington. The truce expires late on

Tuesday, just after Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan is set to discuss next steps in the region at a meeting in Russia with President Vladimir Putin. Speaking to reporters during a trip to Afghanistan, Esper said that, while the US withdrawal was under way, some troops were still with partner forces near oilfields and there had been discussions about keeping some of them there. He said that was one option and no decision had been made "with regard to numbers or anything like that". Meanwhile, angry over US withdrawal, residents of the Kurdish-dominated northeastern Syrian city of Qamishli pelted departing American military vehicles with potatoes as they drove through. People in the street hurled potatoes, shouting, "No America," and "America liar," in English.



THAILAND  
KING STRIPS ROYAL CONSORT OF TITLES

Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn has stripped his consort of all titles for "disloyalty" and apparent "ambition" to match the Queen's position, a royal command issued late Monday said, less than three months after she was bestowed with the honour. Former royal bodyguard Sincenat Wongvajirapakdi was the first to be named a consort to a Thai king in centuries.



Flags and banners both for and against Brexit, outside Parliament in London on Monday. *AP*

## Parliament Speaker deals new blow to UK PM's Brexit plan

Refuses to hold vote on EU divorce deal

JILL LAWLESS & DANICA KIRKA  
LONDON, OCTOBER 21



Bercow said the motion proposed by the govt was essentially the same as the one Parliament dealt with on Saturday. *Reuters*

PRIME MINISTER Boris Johnson's plan to lead Britain out of the European Union at the end of this month hit another roadblock Monday when the Speaker of the House of Commons rejected his attempt to hold a new vote of lawmakers on his Brexit divorce deal. The ruling by Speaker John Bercow triggered the government's Plan B — an attempt to pass a Brexit-implementing bill through Britain's fractious Parliament before the country's scheduled October 31 departure date. After months and years of political gridlock, the stage was set for another week of grinding parliamentary warfare. Johnson's government had earlier sought a "straight up-and-down vote" on the agreement he struck last week with the 27 other EU nations laying out the terms of Britain's departure. The request came just two days after lawmakers voted to delay approving the Brexit deal. Bercow refused to allow it because parliamentary rules bar the same measure from being considered a second time during a session of Parliament unless something has changed. Bercow — whose rulings in favour of backbench lawmakers have stymied government plans more than once before — said the motion proposed by the government was "in substance the same" as the one Parliament dealt with on Saturday. He said it would be "repetitive and disorderly" to allow a new vote Monday. On Saturday — Parliament's first weekend sitting since the 1982 Falklands War — lawmakers voted to make support for the Brexit deal conditional on passing the legislation to implement it. Johnson's Conservative government will now try to do that. The government plans to publish the bill later Monday, will hold the first vote on it Tuesday and hopes to have it become law by Oct 31. **AP**



Justin Trudeau and his Conservative opponent Andrew Scheer take part in a debate earlier this month. *Reuters*

EXPLAINED

How Indian-origin Jagmeet Singh may hold key to next govt

OPINION POLLS predict Trudeau's Liberals are likely to retain power in Canada, but it's likely that neither the ruling party nor its main rival, Andrew Scheer's Conservatives, will get a majority. This is where Indian-origin Jagmeet Singh's New Democratic Party (NDP) could come in, since it's expected to be the third biggest party. Singh's left-wing NDP has criticised Trudeau, but is more likely to support the Liberals than the Conservatives. While the latter may seek backing from smaller centrist or centre-right parties, Trudeau's bid for another term as PM could depend on Singh's decision on whether to support the Liberals.



Five parties are contesting Canada's federal election to push through key pieces of legislation. Given the fact that neither of the front-runners could come away with a parliamentary majority, it is the smaller left-leaning New Democratic Party (NDP) or the separatist Bloc Quebecois that could end up holding the balance of power. "I am a lifelong Liberal voter and I am stumped on this one, mostly because I am really concerned about a Conservative win and trying to figure out how to vote strategically," said Kristin Street from British Columbia. **REUTERS**

## 4 shot dead in Bangla violence over Facebook post, security tightened

ANISUR RAHMAN  
DHAKA, OCTOBER 21

BANGLADESH PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina on Monday warned of stern action against those inciting violence, a day after four people were killed in police firing on hundreds of Muslims protesting an alleged blasphemous Facebook post by a Hindu man. On Sunday morning, hundreds of Muslims gathered in southwestern Bhola district, 116 kilometres from Dhaka, for a protest rally under the banner of 'Muslim Tawhid al-Janata', demanding action against the Hindu man for his alleged social media posts. As authorities stepped security across Bangladesh, Hasina warned of stern actions against anyone trying to foment trouble. She said her government had launched an investigation to identify the culprits. According to initial investigation, Hasina said, Hindu youth Biplob Chandra Baidya's Facebook account was hacked by a Muslim man. She said Baidya was being blackmailed to pay 20,000 Bangladeshi Taka (\$235) or blasphemous content would be posted from his Facebook account. The police has taken Baidya into protective custody, after he lodged a complaint with them, alleging that his Facebook account had been hacked. "Punitive measures must be taken against anyone who wanted to disrespect Prophet Muhammad, but at the same time if anyone tries to frame another person, action will be taken against them as well," the prime minister said. Hasina said, "How can a Muslim write something bad about the Prophet and use it to frame someone else?" Meanwhile, security has been tightened across Bangladesh following Sunday's incident. Bhola's district police chief Sarkar Mohammad Kaiser said the protest rally took a violent turn and the police had to open fire in "self defence", killing four of the protesters. "Police in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country are kept on alert after the violence in Bhola," a police headquarters spokesman said. **PTI**

'WE ARE NOT GOING TO STICK WITH THE GUILT AND THE SHAME ANY LONGER'

# Northern Ireland set for momentous abortion, gay marriage changes

AMANDA FERGUSON  
BELFAST, OCTOBER 21

CAMPAIGNERS WHO fought for decades to end Northern Ireland's same-sex marriage ban and restrictions on abortion gathered in Belfast on Monday to prepare for a momentous change to the laws on both at the stroke of midnight. Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom that does not allow same-sex marriage. Also, unlike England, Scotland and Wales, laws in Northern Ireland forbid abortion except where a mother's life is at risk, bans that

have been upheld by the region's conservative politicians. The British province's power-sharing executive collapsed almost three years ago and the assembly remains suspended, with Northern Ireland currently largely administered from London. In July, British lawmakers in London voted overwhelmingly to compel the government to overhaul the laws if Belfast's devolved executive was not restored by midnight on Oct. 21. "We are not going to stick with the guilt and the shame any longer. Tomorrow the law changes in this place, and for the first time in Northern Ireland,



Pro-choice activists on the grounds of Stormont Parliament, Belfast, on Monday. *AP*

women will be free," abortion rights campaigner Dawn Purvis told a public meeting in Belfast

"Free to choose if, when and how many children they will have in the care of health-care

professionals. This is a very emotional day for many here." If a new devolved govern-

ment is not formed by midnight, abortion will be decriminalised, beginning a consultation on what the framework for services should look like, which is due to be finalised and approved by March 2020. Abortion rights were long opposed in Northern Ireland by religious conservatives in both the Protestant community that supports continued British rule and the Catholic community that favours union with the traditionally Catholic Irish Republic. Previous attempts to follow the Irish Republic in legalising abortion have been blocked by the socially conservative Democratic

Unionist Party (DUP), using a special veto intended to prevent discrimination towards one community over another. The mothballed Assembly was recalled briefly by unionists on Monday in a last-ditch attempt to block changes that failed on procedural grounds. "It is a very sad day and I know some people will seek to celebrate and I would say to those people, think of us who are sad today and who believe this is an affront to human dignity," DUP leader Arlene Foster said after leaving the chamber. The changes will bring the province's laws on same-sex

marriage into line with the rest of the UK, and same-sex couples and marriage equality activists gathered in Belfast on Monday to celebrate. "Today means the world to us. Members of our community are that little bit more equal in our society. We have not asked for more rights, but the same rights as everyone else," said activist Shane Sweeney. It will take the British Parliament until mid-January to bring in the new legislation, setting up February 14, 2020 — Valentine's Day — as the first opportunity for same-sex couples to marry once they give the required 28 days' notice. **REUTERS**