

TOPOF THE WORLD



SRI LANKA
Gotabhaya passes court test on eligibility to contest polls

Colombo: In a major relief to presidential election front-runner Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, a Sri Lankan court on Friday dismissed a plea challenging the citizenship of the former defence secretary and his candidacy for the November polls. The Court of Appeal rejected the case filed by two civil activists alleging that Gotabhaya, the younger brother of former strongman Mahinda Rajapaksa, violated the immigration and election laws by engaging in political activities during the 2005 presidential elections while holding US citizenship. The activists appealed to the court to cancel Gotabhaya's citizenship, alleging that he renounced it in 2003 to become a US citizen.

UKRAINE
5 dead in crash of chartered plane low on fuel

Kiev: Ukrainian authorities say a chartered plane has crashed near the western city of Lviv, killing five people and injuring three, after apparently running out of fuel. Ukrainian Infrastructure Minister Vladyslav Kryklyi announced the death toll on his Facebook page, and said an investigation is underway. He said the An-12 plane was carrying seven crew members and one passenger Friday morning when it sought to make an emergency landing for lack of fuel. The emergency service said in a statement that emergency workers rescued three people from the wreckage.

USA
Vaping-related deaths rise to 18, illnesses surpass 1,000

US HEALTH officials on Thursday reported 18 deaths due to a mysterious lung illness linked to e-cigarettes and other vaping products and said the number of confirmed and probable cases of the condition now exceeds 1,000. Public health officials are still at a loss to explain the cause of the severe lung illnesses, which have now reached 1,080 cases across 48 states and one US territory so far, up from 805 cases last week. Many of 275 cases reported this week appear to have occurred after the CDC raised alarms over the illness last month.

BRITAIN
Ex-Tory leader Rory Stewart quits as MP

Manchester: Rory Stewart, a one-time contender to become British prime minister, said on Friday he had resigned from the governing Conservative Party and would not run at the next election. Stewart, a former aid minister, was one of 21 Conservatives to be expelled from the party for backing the first step last month to introduce a new law designed to block Britain from leaving the European Union without a divorce deal.

Violent protests after Hong Kong bans masks, another teen shot

City's govt invokes rarely-used emergency powers; 14-year-old hospitalised in serious condition

CLARE JIM & POPPY MCPHERSON
HONG KONG, OCTOBER 4

HONG KONG police shot and wounded a teenage boy on Friday, as violent protests erupted across the Chinese-ruled city hours after its embattled leader Carrie Lam invoked colonial-era emergency powers last used more than 50 years ago.

Lam, speaking at a press conference, said a ban on face masks would take effect on Saturday under the emergency laws.

Nearly four months of anti-government protests have plunged Hong Kong into its biggest political crisis since its handover from Britain to China in 1997 under a "one country, two systems" formula that granted it autonomy and broad freedoms not enjoyed on the mainland.

The Beijing-backed leader said the banning of face masks was necessary to quell escalating violence and didn't rule out the prospect of further measures if the unrest continued.

But the move only enraged protesters, who took to the streets as darkness fell to vent their anger.

Sirens echoed through the streets as protesters set fires, hurled petrol bombs at police and burned the Chinese national flag, in a direct challenge to authorities in Beijing.

Police said an officer in Yuen Long, a district in the outlying New Territories that saw fierce clashes in July, had fired a shot in self-defence after a protester threw a petrol bomb at him, setting him on fire.

Local media reported a 14-



Masked protesters block a street in Hong Kong in protest against the decision made by the city's Chief Executive Carrie Lam (below) on Friday. Reuters, AP



The decision to invoke the emergency regulations ordinance is a difficult, but also a necessary one for public interest."

—CARRIE LAM
HONG KONG CHIEF EXECUTIVE

year-old boy had been shot and the city's Hospital Authority said a 14-year-old was in a serious condition, without giving further details.

Around a hundred demonstrators besieged a Bank of China (HK) branch in the high-end shopping district of Causeway

Bay, while across the harbour in Kowloon district protesters smashed the glass store front of a China Life branch.

Police fired volleys of tear gas to disperse protesters in flash-point districts across the territory, including Causeway Bay, Sha Tin and Wong Tai Sin, under-

scoring the challenges facing authorities as the protests show no sign of letting up.

China's Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office praised Lam's move in a statement that said the protests were evolving into a "colour revolution", a term coined to refer to popular upris-

MEANWHILE
TURKEY RESTRICTS ACCESS TO CHILDREN'S BOOK

Turkey has ruled that the book *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* should be partially banned and treated like pornography because it could have a "detrimental influence" on young people. The book offers a series of inspiring stories about women from history, including British nurse Florence Nightingale, French designer Coco Chanel and American singer Beyonce.

TRUMP IMPEACHMENT INQUIRY

US envoys pushed Ukraine to probe Bidens, their text messages show

STEVE HOLLAND & PATRICIA ZENGERLE
WASHINGTON, OCTOBER 4

US OFFICIALS pressured their Ukrainian counterparts to launch investigations that could benefit President Donald Trump's personal political agenda in exchange for a meeting between the two countries' leaders, a cache of diplomatic texts released late on Thursday showed.

The exchanges were released by Democrats in the House of Representatives as part of an impeachment investigation to determine whether Trump pressed for Ukraine to probe former vice president Joe Biden and his son, Hunter Biden, in connection with Ukrainian gas company Burisma.

Biden is a leading contender for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination. His son was on the board of Burisma for a number of years.

Kurt Volker, who resigned a week ago as Trump's special representative to Ukraine, provided the messages to members of the House and staff of the House Foreign Affairs, Intelligence and Oversight committees in a closed-door meeting earlier on Thursday.

Democrats are focusing on a July 25 telephone call between Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy in which the Republican President urges Zelenskiy to investigate Burisma and the Bidens.

In the hours before that call, Volker told one adviser to the Ukrainian President that a meeting between the countries' two leaders was tied to Kiev's agreement to probe the 2016 US election, according to the committees.

Later messages between the aide, Andriy Yermak, and Volker showed duelling efforts to lock in a date for a Trump-Zelenskiy meeting and to issue a statement from Kiev announcing a "reboot" of relations along with the probes into Burisma and the 2016 election. **REUTERS**

Ukraine to review cases on founder of firm that employed Biden's son

PAVEL POLITYUK & MARIA TSVETKOVA
KIEV, OCTOBER 4

UKRAINIAN PROSECUTORS said on Friday they would review 15 previous investigations related to the founder of gas company Burisma, where the son of former US vice president Joe Biden was a board member until this year.

It is the first concrete sign of how Ukraine plans to handle investigations that are being closely watched in Washington, where US President Donald Trump is fighting an impeachment battle against the Democrats.

Trump had asked Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy in a July 25 phone call to investigate Biden and his son Hunter, who earned money from Burisma.

Ukraine's new top prosecutor Ruslan Ryaboshapka told



Joe and Hunter Biden. Reuters

Reuters on Friday he was not aware of any evidence of wrongdoing by Hunter Biden.

But his office announced that prosecutors would investigate whether old cases featuring Burisma founder Mykola Zlochevsky, related to the time when Zlochevsky served as a minister in a previous government, were conducted properly.

No decision on how to proceed against Zlochevsky has been taken so far, the office said. **REUTERS**

Iraq's top Shia cleric warns govt as protest death toll reaches 42

QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA
BAGHDAD, OCTOBER 4

IRAQ'S TOP Shia cleric on Friday sharply criticised the government in the wake of deadly violence gripping the country, urging both the political leaders and the protesters to pull back "before it is too late" as the death toll in this week's anti-government demonstrations climbed to 42.

The highly-anticipated comments by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani were his first since the protests erupted earlier this week. Many across Iraq's predominantly Shia south had looked to the influential cleric for guidance.

Al-Sistani's sermon came just hours after Iraq's Prime Minister called on protesters to go home, comparing security measures imposed in the wake of the demonstrations to "bitter medicine" that needs to be swallowed.

Since Tuesday, security forces have fired live rounds and tear gas every day to disperse protesters across multiple provinces demanding job opportunities, improved services and an end to corruption.

The rallies have erupted spontaneously, mostly spurred by youths wanting jobs, improved services such as electricity and water, and an end to endemic cor-



Demonstrators run at a protest during a curfew in Baghdad on Friday. Reuters

ruption in the oil-rich country. Authorities have also cut internet access in much of Iraq since late Wednesday, in a desperate move to curb the rallies.

Al-Sistani blamed the leaders of the two biggest parliament blocs in particular, saying they failed to make good on their promises. "The government and the political sides have not fulfilled the demands of the people to fight corruption," al-Sistani said in his Friday sermon, delivered by his representative Ahmed al-Safi in the Shiite holy city of Karbala.

SUCH INCIDENTS OCCUR EVERY 60 OR 70 YEARS, SCIENTISTS SAY

Awe, concern after massive iceberg splits from Antarctica

KENDRA PIERRE-LOUIS
OCTOBER 4

A MASSIVE iceberg with the robotic sounding name D28 has separated in recent days from an ice sheet in Antarctica, prompting both awe and concern around the world.

Measuring 610 square miles, D28 is slightly larger than Oahu, Hawaii, and some are worried that its fracture from the Amery Ice Shelf is a signal of climate change.

"This is normal behaviour for an ice sheet to lose mass like this," said Helen Amanda Fricker, a glaciologist at the Scripps

Institution of Oceanography at the University of California, San Diego. Fricker is part of the team that helped identify the calving event, the technical term for the split. She said such events happen roughly every 60 or 70 years. "The danger with this event is that it shouldn't be interpreted out of context."

It is true that atmospheric warming as a result of the greenhouse gasses emitted from burning fossil fuels has contributed to the melting of glaciers and ice sheets around the world, including in Antarctica. Between 2012 and 2016 Antarctica lost 219 billion tons of ice, according to the



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recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report. But most of that loss occurred in

West Antarctica. D28, by contrast, is in East Antarctica. Ice shelves are floating exten-

sions of glaciers, some of which can cover more than 20,000 square miles of land. Those glaciers shed ice periodically as a way of balancing the weight they gain when snow falls on their centers. Absent that behaviour, they would "just grow and grow and grow — like not cutting your hair," said Daniela Jansen, a geophysicist with the Alfred Wegener Institute Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research in Germany.

An ice shelf "acts like a cork to hold in the flow of the ice that's inland of the ice sheet," said Robert L Hawley an associate professor of earth sciences at

Dartmouth College. If too much of the ice shelf is removed during a calving event, it can't hold back the rest of the sheet anymore, potentially setting it up for a series of collapses. "It is like you are removing a cork from a champagne bottle," Jansen said.

In the case of D28, which gets its name from a classification system used by the US National Ice Center, there's no indication that the ice shelf left behind is unstable. And as for sea level rise, "The ice has already been afloat for decades so there will be absolutely no impact on sea level," Adrian Luckman, chairman of the geography department at

Swansea University in Wales, said by email.

Geographic events of this scale "are fascinating reminders of big things happening in remote corners of the planet, even though they are a natural part of the growth and calving cycle of ice shelves," said Luckman, who added that we are in "the golden age of satellite earth observation."

Being able to track events like this in real time has transformed what we know about the most remote parts of Antarctica, he said, "as well as the rapidity with which these big calving events can be detected and reported upon." **NYT**