



JAPAN FIRE ENGULFS WORLD HERITAGE CASTLE

A major fire devastated a historic Japanese castle on the southern island of Okinawa on Thursday morning, destroying large parts of the World Heritage site's complex, local authorities said. The Shuri castle is a key part of a complex dating back to the Ryukyu Kingdom, and is believed to have been in use from around the 1400s.

TOP OF THE WORLD



USA Harris campaign lays off dozens of staffers

Sacramento: Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris is laying off several dozen staff members and transferring others in an effort to salvage her prospects in the Iowa caucuses. The move, which comes roughly three months before the caucuses formally usher in the Democratic contest, make the California senator the most prominent candidate so far to announce a major campaign restructuring. Harris's campaign turned to history to make the case that in order to win the leadoff caucuses, candidates sometimes have to overhaul their operations. "Plenty of winning primary campaigns... had to make tough choices on their way to the nomination," her campaign manager, Juan Rodriguez, said.

AFGHANISTAN 'CIA-backed militia killing with impunity'

Kabul: CIA-backed Afghan paramilitary groups operating with impunity are summarily executing civilians during botched nighttime raids and are responsible for the disappearances of suspects, Human Rights Watch said in a report on Thursday. The report documented 14 cases from late 2017 to mid-2019. The secretive militias, whose support from the CIA continues a tradition stemming from the Soviet-Afghan war of the 1980s, have long hunted the Taliban and are seen as an important tool as the war against the insurgents intensifies. But their tactics have long sparked controversy across Afghanistan.

BANGLADESH 400 Rohingya have returned, says Myanmar

Dhaka: Around 400 Rohingya have voluntarily returned to Myanmar from Bangladesh, Myanmar's embassy there said, but with previous repatriation attempts having failed, Dhaka was yet to verify the claim. Bangladesh is home to nearly a million Rohingya refugees. Myanmar's embassy posted photos on Facebook that purported to show "46 more voluntary returnees" being "warmly received" in Myanmar, taking the total number going back to 397 in an unspecified timeframe.

KOREAN PENINSULA North Korea fires two ballistic missiles: Japan

Seoul: North Korea fired two projectiles, which Japanese authorities said appeared to be ballistic missiles, into the sea between the Korean peninsula and Japan on Thursday, according to the Japanese coast guard and South Korea's military. The first of two "unidentified projectiles" was fired on Thursday at 4.35 pm local time from South Phyongan Province, in the centre of the country, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said in a series of statements. A second projectile was detected at 4.38 pm.

Pakistani protesters head to Islamabad, want Imran to quit

Security boosted, schools and some offices shut as thousands of demonstrators close in on capital

SYEDRAZA HASSAN
ISLAMABAD, OCTOBER 31

THOUSANDS OF anti-government demonstrators were due in the Pakistani capital on Thursday to demand that the government step down, piling more pressure on Prime Minister Imran Khan as he strives to get the faltering economy on track.

The protests are organised by Fazl-ur-Rehman, the leader of one of Pakistan's largest religious parties, who says the government of cricketer-turned-politician Khan is incompetent and illegitimate and was installed by the military after a rigged election last year.

Schools and some offices were closed in Islamabad as the



Protesters on their way to Islamabad on Thursday. AP

protesters made their way from the eastern city of Lahore. They were due to arrive later in the day. Police have reinforced checkpoints and brought in extra barriers, including shipping containers to block roads and seal off the administrative and diplomatic heart of the city. Rehman, who heads the

Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl party, has billed his protest as an Azadi march.

"This movement will not stop if we don't get the desired results after reaching Islamabad," Rehman told reporters in Lahore late on Wednesday. "We want the Prime Minister's resignation, the entire assembly is fake, we want to dissolve it."

Khan won last year's election on a promise to end corruption, help middle-class families and get the economy on track.

But the honeymoon has come to an end as the economy runs into headwinds with the fiscal deficit ballooning to about seven per cent of gross domestic product and a balance of payments crisis is looming.

Consumer inflation increased to 11.37 per cent year-

on-year in September from 10.49 per cent in August largely on food price rises, while the rupee has fallen more than 50 per cent against the dollar since the end of 2017.

The government agreed in July to a \$6 billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund. Rehman is a veteran politician who heads an alliance with several seats in the National Assembly and provincial assemblies.

But his real influence comes from his ability to mobilise support, particularly in numerous madrasas across the country.

Pakistan's two main Opposition parties have both said they would back Rehman's campaign against Khan, though have also said they would not support any unconstitutional action. **REUTERS**



A video released by the Pentagon showed parts of US special forces' raid on Baghdadi's compound in Idlib, Syria. Reuters

Islamic State names new chief, confirms Baghdadi's death

US releases video of raid on Baghdadi

AP & REUTERS
BEIRUT, WASHINGTON, OCTOBER 31

THE ISLAMIC State group declared a new leader Thursday after it confirmed the death of its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi days earlier in a US raid in Syria.

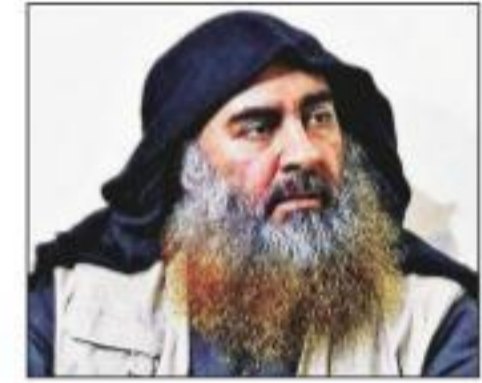
In its audio release by the IS central media arm, al-Furqan Foundation, a new spokesman for IS identifies the successor as Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi — tracing his lineage, like Baghdadi, to the Prophet Muhammad's Quraysh tribe.

It provided no other details about Qurayshi and it was not immediately clear who the name was in reference to. The group typically identifies its leaders using noms de guerre that refer to their tribal affiliation and lineage. Those names often change.

The speaker in the audio also confirmed the death of Abu Hassan al-Muhajir, a close aide of Baghdadi and a spokesman for the group since 2016.

Muhajir was killed in a joint US operation with Kurdish forces in Jarabulus in northern Syria on Sunday, hours after Baghdadi blew himself up during a US raid in Syria's northwestern Idlib province.

The killings were a double blow to the extremist group, nearly seven months after its territorial defeat in Syria.



Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed in a raid by US special forces on his hideout in Syria's Idlib last Sunday.

The new spokesman, named Abu Hamza al-Qurayshi, urged followers to pledge allegiance to the new "caliph" and addressed the Americans, saying: "Don't rejoice."

Meanwhile, the Pentagon on Wednesday released its first images from the raid in Syria that led to the death of Baghdadi.

The declassified, grainy, black-and-white aerial videos from Saturday's raid showed US special operations forces closing in on the compound and US aircraft firing on militants nearby.

The most dramatic video showed a massive, black plume of smoke rising from the ground after US military bombs levelled Baghdadi's compound.

"It looks pretty much like a parking lot, with large potholes," said Marine General Kenneth McKenzie, the commander of US Central Command, which oversees US forces in the Middle East.

74 killed as fire sweeps through moving train in Pak

ROBERT BIRSEL
ISLAMABAD, OCTOBER 31

A FIRE swept through a Pakistani train on Thursday, killing 74 people and injuring nearly 40 after a gas canister that passengers were using to cook breakfast exploded, the minister of railways said.

The fire destroyed three of the train's carriages near the town of Rahim Yar Khan in the south of Punjab province. It was on its way to Rawalpindi, near the capital, from the southern city of Karachi, with many people travelling to a religious gathering.



Near Rahim Yar Khan in Pakistan's Punjab province. Reuters

It was the worst disaster on Pakistan's accident-plagued railway system in nearly 15 years. "Two stoves blew up when

people were cooking breakfast, the presence of kerosene with the passengers in the moving train further spread the fire," Minister

for Railways Sheikh Rashid Ahmed told Geo television.

Many of the dead were killed when they leapt from the moving

train to escape the flames, he said.

People sneaking stoves onto trains to prepare meals on long journeys is a common problem, the minister said. Shortly before the fire broke out, the conductor had ordered some passengers to stop cooking but they had ignored him, Ahmed said.

But several survivors questioned whether the fire was sparked by a cooking accident, telling media they believed the cause was a short-circuit in the train's electrical system.

Television pictures showed fire and black smoke pouring from the train's windows after it came to a stop on a stretch of line flanked by fields. **REUTERS**

Twitter says it will ban all political ads

KATE CONGER
SAN FRANCISCO, OCTOBER 31

TWITTER SAID Wednesday that it would ban all political ads, putting a spotlight on the power and veracity of online advertising and ramping up pressure on Facebook's chief executive, Mark Zuckerberg, to reverse his hands-off stance.

Jack Dorsey, Twitter's chief executive, said political ads, including manipulated videos and the viral spread of misleading information, presented challenges to civic discourse, "all at increasing velocity, sophistication, and overwhelming scale." He said he worried the ads had "significant ramifications that today's democratic infrastructure may not be prepared to handle." He added that he believed that the reach of political messages "should be earned, not bought."

His move sets up a clash of principle with Facebook and Zuckerberg, who this month said that he would allow politicians to run any claims — even false ones — in ads on the social network. Zuckerberg reasoned that Facebook had been founded to give people a voice and said his company stood for free expression. Politicians' ads, he said, were newsworthy.

Twitter's announcement that



This isn't about free expression. This is about paying for reach. And paying to increase the reach of political speech has significant ramifications that today's democratic infrastructure may not be prepared to handle.

— JACK DORSEY
TWITTER CHIEF EXECUTIVE

it would eliminate political ads, starting Nov 22, prompted immediate attacks from the right. Brad Parscale, US President Donald Trump's campaign manager for the 2020 election, said Twitter's decision was a partisan act intended to silence conservatives.

Parscale said the move was "a very dumb decision" for Twitter's shareholders and he wondered if Twitter would also stop running ads "from biased liberal media outlets" that attacked Republicans. **NYT**

HOUSE APPROVES RULES FOR NEXT STAGE OF PROCEEDINGS

Trump impeachment effort passes first test in Congress

PATRICIA ZENGERLE & RICHARD COWAN
WASHINGTON, OCTOBER 31

A DEEPLY divided US House of Representatives took a major step in the effort to impeach President Donald Trump on Thursday when lawmakers approved rules for the next stage, including public hearings, in the Democratic-led inquiry into Trump's attempt to have Ukraine investigate a domestic political rival.

In the first formal test of support for the impeachment investigation, the Democratic-controlled House voted almost entirely along party lines — 232 to 196 — to move the probe forward in Congress.

The vote demonstrated unity among Democrats who accuse Trump of abusing his office and jeopardising national security for personal political gain. But they did not pick up a single Republican vote.

"It's a sad day. No one comes to Congress to impeach a president," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said before the vote.

Televised public hearings featuring US officials testifying in Congress about alleged wrongdoing by Trump could crowd out other issues like the economy and immigration as



Speaker Nancy Pelosi presides over the vote on a resolution that sets up the next steps in the impeachment inquiry. Reuters

EXPLAINED

Show of unity and intent by Democrats

THE RESOLUTION passed by the House of Representatives sets out the rules and procedures to be followed in the impeachment inquiry, which will now enter its public phase. But the vote has greater significance with 231 out of 233 voting Democratic lawmakers backing the resolution. This is a show of unity from a party that was bitterly divided on the impeachment issue before the probe began. This also removes any doubt that the Democratic leadership will carry forward impeachment proceedings, but when they will be able to bring formal charges remains to be seen.

voters turn their minds to the November 2020 presidential election.

Republicans accused Democrats of using impeach-

ment to overturn the results of his 2016 victory.

"The Greatest Witch Hunt In American History!" Trump tweeted after the vote. **REUTERS**

COMPLEX DISEASE SPREADING RAPIDLY

Scientists say quarter of all pigs in the world may die of swine fever

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SYDNEY, OCTOBER 31

AROUND A quarter of the world's pigs are expected to die from African swine fever as authorities grapple with a complex disease spreading rapidly in the globalisation era, the World Organisation for Animal Health's president said Thursday.

A sharp reduction in the world's pig population would lead to possible food shortages and high pork prices, and it might also cause shortfalls in the many products made from pigs,

such as the blood-thinner heparin that's used in people, said Dr Mark Schipp, the organisation's president.

The disease's spread in the past year to countries including China, which has half the world's pigs, had inflamed a worldwide crisis, Schipp told reporters at a briefing in Sydney.

"I don't think the species will be lost, but it's the biggest threat to the commercial raising of pigs we've ever seen," he said. "And it's the biggest threat to any commercial livestock of our generation."

African swine fever, fatal to hogs but no threat to humans,



African swine fever is fatal to pigs, but not a threat to humans

has wiped out pig herds in many Asian countries. Chinese author-

ities have destroyed about 1.2 million pigs in an effort to con-

tain the disease there since August 2018.

The price of pork has nearly doubled from a year ago in China, which produces and consumes two-thirds of the world's pork. And China's efforts to buy pork abroad, as well as smaller outbreaks in other countries, are pushing up global prices.

"There are some shortages in some countries, and there's been some substitutions using other sources of protein, which is driving up the prices of other proteins," said Schipp.

Progress had been made toward a vaccine, but Schipp, who is

also Australia's chief veterinary officer, said the work was challenging because the virus itself is large and has a complex structure. He said a big step forward was the announcement last week that scientists had unravelled the 3D structure of the virus.

African swine fever is spread by contact among pigs, through contaminated fodder and by ticks. It originated in South Africa and appeared in Europe in the 1960s. A recent reappearance in western Europe came from wild pigs transferred into Belgian forests for hunting purposes.

Its capacity to spread rapidly

is shown by its spread from China in the past year, Schipp said. Mongolia, the Korean Peninsula, Southeast Asia and East Timor have had outbreaks as well.

He said the spread reflects the global movement of pork and of people but also the effect of tariffs and trade barriers, which sends those obtaining pork to seek out riskier sources. And Schipp said quality control was difficult for products such as skins for sausages and similar foods.

He praised China's efforts to battle the disease and said the outbreaks would change the way pigs are raised.