

TOP OF THE WORLD



Roula Khalaf takes over from Lionel Barber

BRITAIN
Financial Times gets 1st woman editor in its 131-year history

London: Roula Khalaf will become the first woman to edit the *Financial Times* in its 131-year history after Lionel Barber, Britain's most senior financial journalist, said he would step down. Barber said on Tuesday he would leave in January after 14 years as editor and 34 years at the Nikkei-owned newspaper. Khalaf has served as deputy editor, foreign editor and Middle East editor during her more than two decades at the salmon-pink FT. "It's a great honour to be appointed editor of the FT, the greatest news organisation in the world. I look forward to building on Lionel Barber's extraordinary achievements," said Khalaf.

BANGLADESH
16 killed after trains collide

Dhaka: At least 16 people were killed and 60 others injured in a head-on collision between two trains in Brahmanbaria district in central Bangladesh on Tuesday, railway officials said. A railway spokesman said the pre-dawn accident appeared to have occurred when Chittagong-bound Udayan Express was changing tracks at Mondobhag railway station in the district and the Dhaka-bound Turna Nishita coming from the opposite direction collided with it. "The salvage campaign is nearly completed as Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan and our senior officials visited the scene to oversee the rescue drives," the spokesman said.

THAILAND
Three killed in court shootout

Bangkok: Three people were killed in a shootout at a Thai courtroom on Tuesday during a hearing into an inheritance dispute, according to police, who said two of the victims were lawyers. The gunman opened fire on the opposing side in the dispute in Chanthaburi provincial court before a guard shot back and fatally wounded him. National police office spokesman Krissana Pattanacharoen said three people including the assailant were confirmed dead, while others were injured in the melee. "Two are lawyers another one is the shooter," he said, adding that they are still investigating why the courtroom feud turned deadly.

IN EXCHANGE FOR KIDNAPPED U.S., AUSTRALIAN PROFESSORS

Afghanistan to free senior Taliban, Haqqani leaders in prisoner swap

Ghani says release of 3 militants, including brother of Haqqani chief, to pave way for negotiations

HAMID SHALIZI
KABUL, NOVEMBER 12

AFGHANISTAN WILL release two senior Taliban commanders and a leader of the Haqqani militant group in exchange for an American and an Australian professor who were kidnapped in 2016, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said on Tuesday.

The government's decision to free Anas Haqqani and two other Taliban commanders in a prisoner swap was taken in the hope of securing direct talks with the Taliban, which has hitherto refused to engage with what it calls an illegitimate "puppet" regime in Kabul.

"In order to pave the way for a face-to-face negotiations with the Taliban, the government has decided to free Taliban prisoners in exchange for two university professors," Ghani said in a televised speech. Ghani said Anas Haqqani and Taliban command-



Afghan President Ashraf Ghani speaks about the prisoner swap in Kabul Tuesday. Reuters

ers Haji Mali Khan and Hafiz Rashid were being released. All three were captured in 2014.

The Haqqani network has in recent years carried large-scale militant attacks on civilians. It is believed to be based in Pakistan and

is part of Afghan Taliban. Anas Haqqani is the younger brother of Sirajuddin Haqqani, who is second-in-command in the Afghan Taliban hierarchy and leads the Haqqani network, considered to be the deadliest faction

EXPLAINED
Ghani likely looking ahead to potential Beijing meeting

DURING THE suspended US-Taliban peace talks, one of the sticking points was the militant group's refusal to directly negotiate with the Afghan government. The Taliban have repeatedly refused to talk to the Ghani government, which it considers a US puppet. After the US-Taliban talks were cancelled earlier this year, both Russia and China have attempted to play a bigger role in the Afghan peace process. China said on Monday that it was trying to organise an intra-Afghan meeting in Beijing involving both the Afghan government and the Taliban. The release of Anas Haqqani, who Taliban had named in their team to negotiate with the US, is likely an attempt by the Afghan government to get the group to the negotiating table ahead of a possible meeting in Beijing.

of the Afghan Taliban. The Taliban had kidnapped US citizen Kevin King and an Australian Timothy Weeks, both professors, in August 2016 from the American University of Afghanistan in Kabul.

Ghani said authorities had been unable to discover where the Taliban were holding the two captives. "Information suggests that their health while being held by the terrorists has deteriorated," he said. **REUTERS**

51 children injured in chemical attack on China kindergarten

KJM VARMA
BEIJING, NOVEMBER 12

AT LEAST 54 persons, including 51 children, sustained burn injuries after a "disgruntled man" broke into a kindergarten and sprayed a corrosive chemical on students in southwest China's Yunnan province, authorities said on Tuesday, in one of the deadliest attacks on schools in the country.

The incident took place on Monday in the city of Kaiyuan, when the 23-year-old man, surnamed Kong, climbed into the kindergarten and sprayed caustic soda (sodium hydroxide), state-run Xinhua news agency quoted authorities of the city.

Fifty-one children and three teachers sustained burn injuries and were sent to the Kaiyuan People's Hospital and the PLA 926 Hospital for treatment. Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post quoted the Kaiyuan Municipal Government as saying,

The condition of two children was stated to be serious, the report said.

At about 3.35 pm (local time) the man climbed into the Dongcheng Kindergarten and

Chinese authorities said a 'disgruntled man' sprayed a chemical on students after breaking into the school

sprayed sodium hydroxide on children, it said. He was detained about 40 minutes after the attack, police said.

Initial inquiries indicated that the man was acting out of "revenge at society", but the investigation was continuing, the report said.

Sodium hydroxide also known as caustic soda has a highly caustic base and alkali that decomposes proteins at ordinary ambient temperatures and may cause severe chemical burns. It is highly soluble in water, readily absorbs moisture and carbon dioxide from the air.

Attacks by, what police generally label as, disgruntled people in China targeting especially kindergartens as well as civilians in public places to vent their anger have become common in recent years. **PTI**



Riot police during a standoff with university students in Hong Kong on Tuesday. Reuters

HK on brink of total breakdown, say police amid more violence

CLARE JIM & JESSIE PANG
HONG KONG, NOVEMBER 12

HONG KONG police fired teargas on Tuesday in the heart of the Central financial district and at two university campuses to break up pro-democracy protests which they said were bringing the Chinese-ruled city to the "brink of total breakdown".

The clashes came a day after police shot a protester at close range and a man was doused with petrol and set on fire in some of the worst violence in the former British colony in decades.

More clashes, teargas and arrests a day after a protester was shot and a man set on fire

A flash mob of more than 1,000 protesters, many wearing office clothes and face masks, rallied in Central for a second day during lunch hour, blocking roads below some of the city's tallest skyscrapers and most expensive real estate.

After they had dispersed, police fired teargas at the remaining protesters on old, narrow

Pedder Street. Police made more than a dozen arrests, many pinned up on the pavement against the wall of luxury jeweller Tiffany & Co.

Police later sealed off Pedder Street which was calm as office workers started leaving for home. "Our society has been pushed to the brink of a total breakdown," a police spokesman told a briefing, referring to the last two days of violence.

He said masked "rioters" had committed "insane" acts, such as throwing trash, bicycles and other debris onto metro tracks and overhead power lines, paralysing the transport system. **REUTERS**

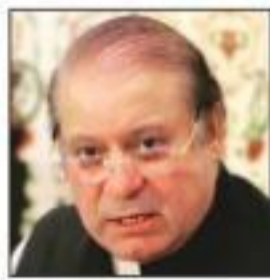
Pak gives conditional nod to Sharif to travel for treatment

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, NOVEMBER 12

PAKISTAN CABINET on Tuesday decided to allow former prime minister Nawaz Sharif to go abroad for medical treatment if he agrees to sign surety bonds making a commitment that he would return after the treatment and face corruption cases against him.

The Cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan, approved the removal of Sharif's name from the no-fly list.

The 69-year-old Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz



Former Pak PM expected to leave for London

supremo agreed on Friday to go to the UK for treatment, heading doctors' advice and accepting his family's request.

He was scheduled to leave for London on a Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) flight on Sunday morning. However, he could not leave as his name figured in the no fly-list. **PTI**

Britain's Labour Party hit by large-scale cyber attack

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON, NOVEMBER 12

BRITAIN'S LABOUR Party says it has experienced a "sophisticated and large-scale cyber attack" on its digital platforms.

The main Opposition party said the attack did not succeed, because of "robust security systems." The party is confident that no data breach occurred. The party has re-

ferred the matter to the National Cyber Security Centre.

Britain will hold a national election on December 12, but is struggling with laws that have not yet been updated to face the digital age. The former chair of the British Parliament digital committee, Damian Collins, has been appealing for a coordinated approach across all parts of government to combat disinformation and protect the electoral system.

The work has heaped pressure on social media companies, who have faced global scrutiny following allegations that London-based political consultant Cambridge Analytica used data from tens of millions of Facebook accounts to profile voters. Former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton says she's "dumbfounded" the UK government has failed to release a report on Russian influence as the country prepares for national elections.



A member of security forces walks past the home of Palestinian Islamic Jihad field commander Baha Abu Al-Atta after it was hit by an Israeli strike. Reuters

Israel says airstrike killed Islamic Jihad commander in Gaza

FARES AKRAM & ARON HELLER
GAZA CITY, NOVEMBER 12

A PAIR of Israeli airstrikes targeted senior Islamic Jihad commanders in Gaza and Syria early Tuesday, escalating Israel's confrontation with Iran across the region and threatening to unleash another devastating round of cross-border violence with Palestinian militants.

In eastern Gaza, the Israeli strike killed Bahaa Abu el-Atta and his wife, setting off a furious barrage of Gaza-fired rockets that reached as far as the Tel Aviv heartland as Islamic Jihad vowed further revenge. The military said Abu el-Atta was the mastermind of recent attacks against Israel and the militant group's top commander in Gaza.

Meanwhile, Syrian officials said an Israeli airstrike in the capital, Damascus, targeted another Islamic Jihad commander, Akram al-Ajouri, who was not harmed.

Syria's state-run news agency said Israeli warplanes fired three missiles at al-Ajouri's home, killing his son and granddaughter. The Israeli military had no comment.

The sudden surge in violence looked to awaken Israel's increasingly open conflict with Iran and its proxies in the region. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has issued a series of warnings recently about alleged Iranian aggression.

Netanyahu also has been criticised by residents along the southern border and political rivals for a tepid response to recent militant attacks. Netanyahu's Security Cabinet held a lengthy emergency meeting to discuss further action.

Afterward, speaking alongside military chief Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi, Netanyahu said Israel had no interest in escalation but would do everything necessary to defend itself against people like Abu el-Atta, whom he described as an "arch-terrorist" and "the main generator of terrorism from the Gaza Strip". **AP**

Crisis in Bolivia: Morales heads to Mexico for asylum

REUTERS
MEXICO CITY, NOVEMBER 12

BOLIVIA'S FORMER president, Evo Morales, was flying to Mexico on Tuesday after fleeing his South American homeland, seeking refuge under a leftist government that has supported the veteran socialist in the wake of a disputed election.

Bolivia's first indigenous president came under Mexico's protection after he departed Bolivia late on Monday on a Mexican Air Force jet, Mexico's Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard said.

"His life and integrity are safe," Ebrard wrote on Twitter, after warning Morales was in danger and saying Mexico would offer asylum as part of its long tradition of sheltering exiles.

Mexico's support has helped cement its emerging role as a bas-



The former Bolivian president departed Bolivia late on Monday on a Mexican Air Force jet. Reuters

tion of diplomatic support for left-wing leaders in Latin America.

Morales, who governed for 14 years, said on Twitter he was thankful to Mexico but saddened to leave Bolivia for political reasons, following weeks of violent protests and unrest.

Kashmir a bilateral matter: Labour

London: Britain's Opposition Labour Party has stepped in to counter its perceived anti-India stance to urge that the Kashmir issue not be allowed to divide communities in the UK in the lead up to the December 12 general election, in the wake of protests from sections of the Indian diaspora.

The Chair of the Labour Party, Ian Lavery, issued a letter to stress

that Kashmir was a "bilateral matter" for India and Pakistan and that his party was opposed to external interference over the issue, as had been implied by some of the wording of a controversial emergency motion passed by the party at its conference in September.

The Labour leader stressed that his party held the Indian diaspora in the "highest regard". **PTI**

LEGACY OF INDONESIA'S MERCURY TRADE

Hidden cost of gold: Birth defects, brain damage and contaminated food

RICHARD C PADDOCK
CIDAHAU, NOVEMBER 12

THOUSANDS OF children with crippling birth defects. Half a million people poisoned. A toxic chemical found in the food supply. Accusations of a government cover-up and police officers on the take.

This is the legacy of Indonesia's mercury trade, a business intertwined with the lucrative and illegal production of gold.

More than a hundred nations have joined a global campaign to reduce the international trade in mercury, an element so toxic there is "no known safe level of exposure", according to health experts.

But that effort has backfired in Indonesia, where illicit backyard manufacturers have sprung up to supply wildcat miners and replace mercury that was previously imported from abroad. Now, Indonesia produces so much black-market mercury that it has become a major global

supplier, surreptitiously shipping thousands of tonnes to other parts of the world.

Much of the mercury is destined for use in gold mining in Africa and Asia — and the trade has deadly consequences.

"It is a public health crisis," said Yuyun Ismawati, a co-founder of an Indonesian environmental group, Nexus3 Foundation, and a recipient of the 2009 Goldman Environmental Prize. She has called for a worldwide ban on



Miners use mercury to extract gold from crushed ore. NY7

using mercury in gold mining. Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous nation, stands out

for its huge number of outlaw gold miners and for concerns that some law enforcement officials

assigned to police the trade are instead profiting from it.

For decades, Indonesia got most of its mercury legally from the United States and Europe. But recognising the harm it was doing, Western countries began reducing mercury exports six years ago.

The mercury trade is lucrative, but the gold business it supports is far more profitable. By some estimates, Indonesia's illicit small-scale gold miners produce as much as \$5 billion a year.

To extract gold, the miners mix liquid mercury with crushed ore. Gold in the ore binds with the mercury to produce an amalgam of the metals. The miners heat the small lump with a blowtorch, sending mercury vapors into the air and leaving the gold behind.

But in mining communities, airborne mercury levels can be dangerously high. Wastewater containing mercury finds its way into fields, streams and bays, contaminating rice, fruit and fish, studies show.

Government officials have known about mercury-related health problems in the gold fields since at least 2012, Yuyun said, but they have not warned residents about the dangers. "It's a crime to deliberately conceal the damning results," said Yuyun, the lead researcher on small-scale mining at the International Pollutants Elimination Network. "People are dying and have little access to any effective treatment. The government has to stop the mercury trade and clean up the mess." **NYT**