

Schools across Pakistan's second largest city Lahore closed for the second time in a month on Friday, with the city blanketed in a toxic smog that experts say is putting residents at risk. On Friday the Air Quality Index from a monitoring station at the United States' consulate hit a year-high 451 out of a possible 500, a level considered 'hazardous' and where even healthy people are advised to stay indoors

TOP OF THE WORLD



Imran Khan

PAKISTAN

Imran: Appears Sharif's health improved by looking at plane

Lahore: Prime Minister Imran Khan Friday took a dig at Nawaz Sharif, saying the ailing former premier suddenly recovered and looked perfectly fine as he got a glimpse of the London-bound air ambulance. Addressing a gathering in Mianwali, Khan said, "I was stunned when I saw him boarding the air ambulance. The medical report said he could die any moment and had to be taken abroad for treatment. It said he cannot be cured in Pakistan. But I wonder whether it was by looking at the plane that his health suddenly improved," Khan said.

IRAQ

4 dead in capital as top cleric pushes reform

Baghdad: Four anti-government protesters were killed in clashes with security forces in Iraq's capital Friday as the country's top Shiite cleric pushed politicians to enact electoral reforms. More than 340 people have died and thousands have been wounded since rallies against widespread graft and unemployment erupted in Baghdad and the south last month. Demonstrators have demanded that the government step down but leaders have resisted, instead proposing a raft of measures including recruitment drives and a revamp of Iraq's electoral system.

TAIWAN

'US helping to combat China interference'

Taipei: The top US representative in Taiwan says Washington is working with Taipei to combat efforts by Beijing to influence upcoming elections. Brent Christensen told reporters Friday the US was "aware China is attempting to apply pressure through various means on Taiwan... to influence Taiwan's democratic process." He says "malign actors" are using disinformation to undermine faith in the island's democratic institutions but that the US and Taipei were working closely to counter such efforts.

MEXICO

31 bodies found in secret graves, say investigators

Guadalajara: Investigators have found 31 bodies hidden in clandestine graves outside Mexico's Guadalajara, authorities in violence-torn Jalisco state said Thursday. The work of uncovering the clandestine graves began earlier this month after authorities secured a 3,400 square foot (320 square meter) plot of land in Tlajomulco, a suburb of Guadalajara. "At the end of the work on the property... 31 bodies were located in the area, corresponding to six women and 25 women," the Jalisco prosecutor's office said in a statement.

RAJAPAKSA BROTHERS GET TOP PORTFOLIOS

Gotabaya promises snap election soon, appoints interim Cabinet

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
COLOMBO, NOVEMBER 22

SRI LANKA'S new President Gotabaya Rajapaksa vowed to call a snap general election "at the earliest opportunity" as he appointed a 16-member interim Cabinet on Friday and allotted major portfolios of defence, finance and trade to his brothers while inducting two Tamils as a sign of reaching out to the minority community.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said that he would "consult the people" as soon as possible under Sri Lanka's Constitution after appointing the interim Cabinet headed by his elder brother Mahinda Rajapaksa, a former president who will now serve as prime minister, defence and finance minister.

The President's eldest brother Chamal Rajapaksa, 77, will serve as trade and food security ministry. "I will consult the people at the earliest opportunity I get under the Constitution," the president said after swearing in the new Cabinet. Sri Lanka's existing parliamentary term ends next August, and the Constitution allows the president to dissolve the legislature in March and go for an election.

"This is an interim government," said Gotabaya Rajapaksa,



President Gotabaya Rajapaksa (centre) greets elder brother Chamal Rajapaksa (bottom right) as Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa watches in Colombo on Friday. AP

who took over as the country's President on Monday.

He said the ministers of state would be appointed next week. Gotabaya Rajapaksa as the President cannot hold ministries although he is the head of the Cabinet. The Tamil minority members came from the Tamil-dominated North and from the central tea plantations areas dominated by Tamils of Indian origin.

Dinesh Gunawardena, 70, a veteran Marxist politician, has

been named as the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

It is the first time in Sri Lankan history that two siblings have held the two top political positions, although Mahinda Rajapaksa is only in charge of a caretaker government. Mahinda Rajapaksa was appointed as the country's prime minister on Thursday after incumbent Ranil Wickremesinghe formally tendered his resignation to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa will hope to ride a wave of popularity and secure a majority for his Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party in the 225-member Parliament during the poll.

Soon after he was sworn in as the president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa thanked the powerful Buddhist clergy for backing his presidential bid and vowed to protect all communities, while giving foremost priority to Buddhism. He also thanked the Sinhala-majority people for electing him.

EXPLAINED

Infighting may hinder Opp in polls

THE UNITED National Party has been facing infighting over who the main Opposition leader should be: former PM Wickremesinghe or this year's presidential candidate Sajith Premadasa.

While the UNP general secretary has asked the Speaker to recognise the former PM, the Tamil minority, which voted for Premadasa, expects him to take the role. This divide could hurt UNP's prospects if Gotabaya decides to call for a snap election. Gotabaya's party currently only has 96 legislators, which would allow UNP to assert its numbers — but the internal divide could prevent this.

LALIT K JHA

WASHINGTON, NOVEMBER 22

THE TRUMP administration has urged Pakistanis to ask "tough questions" to China on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, as a top American diplomat launched a blistering attack on the multi-billion dollar project which she claimed is going to take a toll on Pakistan's economy.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a planned network of roads, railways and energy projects linking China's resource-rich Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region with Pakistan's strategic Gwadar Port on the Arabian Sea.

The CPEC was launched in 2015 when President Xi Jinping visited Pakistan and it now envisages investment of over \$50 billion in different projects of development in Pakistan.

"We hope Pakistanis will ask Beijing tough questions on debt, accountability, fairness and transparency... Ask the Chinese government why it is pursuing a development model in Pakistan, that significantly deviates from what brought China its own economic success," Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Alice Wells said on Thursday.

"Why doesn't the Pakistani public know the price for CPEC's most expensive project, or how it's being determined on debt?" "What are the long-term ef-

ON OBOR

■ The US extended support to India's opposition to China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, questioning its economic rationale

■ India has been 'crystal clear from the outset they saw the geopolitical elements of OBOR,' Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Alice Wells said

■ The OBOR was designed in part to be able to export excess labour, excess capital and excess production facilities, she said.

fects in Pakistan of Chinese financing practices?" the top American diplomat asked in her remarks on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in South and Central Asia, with emphasis on the CPEC.

In her speech at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Wells said the CPEC is a main initiative of the One Belt One Road project intending to bring Pakistan closer to China by addressing infrastructure needs, but potentially at an unsustainable cost to Pakistan. PTI

'STAND WITH XI... ALSO WITH HONG KONG'

Hong Kong would have been obliterated if not for me: Trump

MICHAEL CROWLEY

WASHINGTON, NOVEMBER 22

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump claimed in a Fox News interview on Friday that China's government would have "obliterated" Hong Kong and killed "thousands" of people there were it not for him.

But Trump would not commit to signing legislation overwhelmingly passed by Congress this week that would impose sanctions on Chinese officials who commit human rights abuses in the semiautonomous island territory and place Hong Kong's special economic status under greater scrutiny.

And he spoke warmly about China's president, Xi Jinping, whom he is trying to coax into striking a trade deal that has become one of the central goals of his presidency.

"We have to stand with Hong Kong, but I'm also standing with President Xi," Trump said during a nearly hour long interview on the morning program "Fox & Friends." "He is a friend of mine. He is an incredible guy.

But he added: "I stand with Hong Kong. I stand with freedom. I stand with all of the things we want to do. But we're also in the process of making the largest trade deal in history."

But he also took credit for

TRUMP: OBAMA GOVT SPIED ON MY CAMPAIGN IN 2016

Washington: US President Donald Trump, who is facing an impeachment inquiry, on Friday accused the previous Obama administration of spying on his 2016 presidential campaign. Trump said what he called the modern-day version of wiretapping may be, but the anti-Trump conspiracy still went "to the highest level" of the Obama administration.

"You're dealing at the highest levels of government. They were spying on my campaign. This is my opinion. I said it a long time ago," Trump told Fox News. He claimed that Democrats "looked like fools" during this week's impeachment proceedings. PTI

the fact that China had not extinguished the protests with a sweeping and violent crackdown. "If it weren't for me, Hong Kong would have been obliterated in 14 minutes," Trump said. NYT

NETANYAHU RESISTS CALLS TO RESIGN



Supporters of Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu protest in Tel Aviv on Friday. Reuters

ISRAELI PRIME Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faced calls to resign over a corruption scandal on Friday, as senior government colleagues publicly declared support after some signs of cracks in party loyalty

NETANYAHU SAID he would not quit after he was indicted on charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust. He denied all wrongdoing and denounced the indictment as an "attempted coup"

UNDER ISRAELI law, he is under no obligation to step down. But with Israel heading towards a likely third election, Netanyahu could soon be trying to win an election while preparing to be prosecuted.

Seoul suspends move to end key pact with Japan

JOYCE LEE & KIYOSHI TAKENAKA
SEOUL/NAGOYA, NOVEMBER 22

SOUTH KOREA suspended a decision to end an intelligence-sharing pact with Japan on Friday, just hours before it was due to go into effect, providing the first signs of compromise after several months of feuding over trade and historical grievances.

The late change of heart announced by the presidential



People protesting the GSOMIA pact on Friday. AP

Blue House should be greeted with relief by South Korea and

Japan's mutual ally, the United States.

US officials have been pressuring the neighbours to set aside their differences over history to maintain the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA).

"This government has decided to suspend our notice of Aug. 23 on the Korea-Japan intelligence agreement on the condition the agreement can be terminated at any time," said Kim You-geun, deputy director of South Korea's national

security office. "Japan has expressed its understanding," Kim said in a briefing.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said South Korea had made a "strategic decision" in sticking with the intelligence-sharing pact.

Japan's trade ministry said it hoped to hold talks with South Korea on export controls but it would not immediately put South Korea back on the trade "white list" that fast-tracks exports to the neighbouring country. REUTERS

ONE WITNESS SAID IMMIGRANT HISTORY IS THE 'ESSENCE OF AMERICA'

At Trump impeachment hearings, immigrant stories shine

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, NOVEMBER 22

One came from northeast England. Another came from the former Soviet Union. A third was born in Canada to parents who'd fled the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

Several witnesses who testified in the House impeachment inquiry this week chose to highlight their immigrant backgrounds, sharing their families' stories in highly personal opening statements. They drew a connection to how those experiences led them to public service and a strong desire to safeguard U.S. national security.

Their stories offered a sharp



Witnesses Fiona Hill (left), Marie Yovanovitch (centre) and Alexander Vindman



counterpoint to President Donald Trump, who has often derided immigrants as a threat to American national security.

"I can say with confidence that this country has offered for

me opportunities I never would have had in England," former National Security Council official Fiona Hill testified Thursday. She spoke in what she called a "very distinctive working-class"

British accent that would have impeded her professional advancement at home, but that "never set me back in America."



On Tuesday, Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, an Army

officer who works with the National Security Council, testified that his family fled to the U.S. from the Soviet Union when he was 3. He said in his opening statement that he and his brothers felt compelled to serve in the military to repay the country that had offered them refuge from authoritarian oppression.

"In Russia, my act of expressing concern to the chain of command in an official and private channel would have severe personal and professional repercussions, and offering public testimony involving the president would surely cost me my life," he told the committee. He expressed gratitude for his "father's brave act of hope 40 years ago and for the privilege of being an American

citizen and public servant, where I can live free, free of fear for mine and my family's safety."

"Dad, I am sitting here today in the U.S. Capitol, talking to our elected professionals. Talking to our elected professionals is proof that you made the right decision 40 years ago," he added, assuring his father: "Do not worry. I will be fine."

It was a similar story for Marie Yovanovitch, the former ambassador to Ukraine, who immigrated to the U.S. at age 3 from Canada. Her father had fled the Soviets, while her mother had grown up in Nazi Germany.

"Their personal histories, my personal history gave me both deep gratitude towards the United States and great empathy

for others like the Ukrainian people who want to be free," she told lawmakers, explaining that she joined the foreign service with "no agenda other than to pursue our stated foreign policy goals."

"My service is an expression of gratitude for all that this country has given to me and to my family," she said.

Hill was also asked about the attacks on Vindman and suggestions of dual loyalty. "I think it's very unfortunate," she said, describing the country's immigrant history as "the essence of America."

With the exception of very few, she added: "Everyone immigrated to the United States at some time in their family history. And this is what, for me, really does make America great."