

19 THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



Mike Pence

IRAQ Pence makes surprise trip to reassure Kurds

Irbil: Vice President Mike Pence made an unannounced visit to Iraq on Saturday in the highest-level American trip since President Donald Trump ordered a pullback of US forces in Syria two months ago. Flying in a C-17 military cargo jet to preserve the secrecy of the visit, Pence landed in Irbil to meet with Iraqi Kurdistan President Nechirvan Barzani. The visit was meant to reassure US allies in the fight against Islamic State after the US pulled troops from northern Syria, leaving Kurdish allies in Syria to face a bloody Turkish assault last month.

KENYA Heavy rain: 34 killed in floods, mudslides

Nairobi: Kenya's interior minister says 29 people have been killed in mudslides, among the 34 people overall who lost their lives Saturday amid flooding. Interior Cabinet Secretary Fred Matiangi said 17 people died in a mudslide in the village of Takmal in Pokot Central, while 12 others lost their lives in mudslides in Parua and Tapach in Pokot South. Five others died when their car was swept away on the road between Kitale and Lodwar after two rivers overflowed their banks, said an official.

EGYPT Editor held amid crackdown, says news outlet

Cairo: Independent news outlet Mada Masr said Egyptian police arrested one of its editors Saturday, amid an ongoing security crackdown. Shady Zalal, 37, has worked since 2014 at the website, which publishes investigations into corruption and security issues. Police raided Zalal's Cairo apartment without showing an arrest warrant, Mada Masr said. Officers told his wife Zalal was being taken to Giza's security directorate but Mada Masr was unable to confirm his whereabouts. The publication called for Zalal's "immediate and unconditional release".

US Indian-origin man convicted of rape in NY

New York: An Indian-origin man has been convicted of raping a woman, after helping her find a place to live in Queens. Ashok Singh, 58, of Pennsylvania, was found guilty of rape and unlawful imprisonment following a two-week-long trial. He will be sentenced next month and faces up to 25 years in prison, Acting Queens District Attorney John Ryan said. According to trial testimony, in December 2015, Singh met the victim, who was looking for a rental apartment, and offered to help her find a place to stay.



A NEW NATION?

■ Voters in the Pacific island chain of Bougainville cheered and sang as they flocked to the polls Saturday at the start of a referendum on independence from Papua New Guinea

■ Some 207,000 Bougainvilleans are registered to vote over the next two weeks, deciding whether the isles will spring from global obscurity to become the world's newest country

■ The vote caps a 2001 peace deal that ended a brutal decade-long war between Bougainville rebels, PNG security forces and foreign mercenaries in which up 20,000 people were killed

■ Results are due to be released around December 15 and supporters of full independence are expected to win handily, although a surprise is always possible

100 protest leaders arrested, says Iran, as US penalises minister for shutdown

NEW YORK TIMES
NOVEMBER 23

IRAN'S JUDICIARY said Friday that about 100 people accused of having led violent antigovernment protests over fuel price increases had been arrested nationwide, and a top cleric said they deserved the "maximum penalty." The declaration by the cleric, Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami, leader of Friday Prayers, suggested the authorities intended to make examples of the suspects to help crush any remnants of the deadly protests, which upended life in dozens of Iranian cities and towns.

While Khatami did not specify if he meant that the suspects should receive the death penalty, the Kayhan newspaper, mouthpiece of the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has said

JUDGE ORDERS IRAN TO PAY \$180M FINE

JAILED, TORTURED
A federal judge ordered Iran to pay a Washington Post reporter and his family nearly \$180 million in damages after the reporter was imprisoned for almost 18 months during which he was psychologically tortured and physically abused

2014 ARREST
Jason Rezaian was an accredited journalist for



working in Iran when he was arrested on July 22, 2014. He was subjected to solitary confinement, sleep deprivation and aggressive interrogations

they should be hanged.

"This is not a system that will be shaken by these stupid evils," Khatami said, according to a translation by Iran's official Islamic Republic News Agency.

In scrambling to respond to the protests, Iranian officials disconnected almost the entire country from the internet, effectively censoring the true extent of casualties and destruction.

The shutdown also blocked Iranians from using social media messaging apps, crippling a popular way to share information.

The Trump administration, which welcomed the protests, said Friday that it had penalized Iran's minister of information and telecommunications technology, Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi, for what it called his responsibility for the internet shutdown.

"While Iranian regime leaders maintain access to the internet and social media accounts for themselves and their cronies, they deprive their people of these basic tools of expression and communication," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement. The United States, he said, "stands with the people of Iran in their struggle against an oppressive regime that silences them while arresting and murdering protesters."

South Korea to meet Japan in bid to thaw ties

Nagoya: Japan and South Korean foreign ministers agreed Saturday to arrange a summit between their leaders next month, seeking to build on a lowering of tensions after Seoul stuck to a key military pact.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and President Moon Jae-in could meet in China next month, their ministers agreed on the sidelines of a G20 meeting in Nagoya, Japan. The summit would take place on the occasion of the Japan-China-South Korea trilateral scheduled for next month, said a Japanese diplomat who declined to give his name. Ties between the two countries, both key US allies in the region, have hit rock bottom in recent months over trade and Japan's historic war-time atrocities.

This led to Seoul threatening to withdraw from a key military intelligence-sharing pact, alarming the US who said that would benefit only North Korea and China in the region. **PTI**

US world's biggest source of instability: China at G20 meet

REUTERS
BEIJING, NOVEMBER 23

THE UNITED STATES is the world's biggest source of instability and its politicians are going around the world baselessly smearing China, the Chinese government's top diplomat said on Saturday in a stinging attack at a G20 meeting in Japan.

Meeting Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok on the sidelines of a G20 foreign ministers meeting in the Japanese city of Nagoya, Chinese State Councillor Wang Yi did not hold back in his criticism of the United States.

"The United States is broadly engaged in unilateralism and protectionism, and is damaging multilateralism and the multilateral trading system. It has already become the world's biggest destabilising factor," China's Foreign Ministry cited Wang as saying. The United States has, for political purposes, used the ma-



China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the summit. AP

chine of state to suppress legitimate Chinese businesses and has groundlessly laid charges against them, which is an act of bullying, he added.

"Certain US politicians have smeared China everywhere in the world, but have not produced any evidence." The US has also used its domestic law to "crudely interfere" in China's internal affairs, trying to damage "one country, two systems" and Hong Kong's stability and prosperity, he added.

RECENT ESCALATION

TIES BETWEEN THE US and China further deteriorated this week after American lawmakers passed two bills to back Hong Kong demonstrators and warn China over human rights issues. The move, which came even as the two countries engaged in talks to end their trade war, had evoked a strong reaction from Beijing. While it is feared that this could sour the talks, neither country has indicated that dialogue had been affected.

THUNBERG TO GUEST-EDIT RADIO PROGRAMME

Teenage Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg will guest-edit BBC radio's main daily current affairs programme in December, the broadcaster announced Saturday. Thunberg will speak to the world's leading climate change figures and hear from frontline activists, said the BBC. She has also commissioned reports from the Antarctic and Zambia and an interview with Bank of England governor Mark Carney

Amid uneasy calm, Hong Kong to vote today in local polls

AGENCIES
HONG KONG, NOVEMBER 23

AN UNEASY calm settled over Hong Kong on Saturday as the city prepared to stage local elections seen as a referendum on months of anti-government protests, after weeks of especially violent clashes between police and demonstrators.

Voters on Sunday will have a chance to cast their opinion on the city's future — albeit through an election for a group of local officials who mainly deal with noise complaints, bus stop locations and neighborhood beautification projects.

A record 4.1 million Hong Kong people, from a population of 7.4 million, have enrolled to vote, spurred in part by registration campaigns during months of protests. For the first time, riot police will guard all polling stations in the city and almost all officers in the 31,000-strong force will be on duty, the *South China Morning Post* reported on Friday.

The district council is one of the lowest rungs of Hong Kong's elected offices. It is usually a quiet affair focused on community issues. But the race has taken on outside significance in the midst of the violent protests that have divided the city. The election will be the first test of whether the protests can transform public anger that has led millions to take to the streets into actual votes.

"Politically speaking, the battle of the district councils as a whole is a crucial battle in taking control," said Eddie Chu, a pro-democracy legislator who is also running for district council. It has been an especially in-



At a rally to support Hong Kong protesters in Seoul. Reuters

tense election season. Several candidates, on both sides, have been attacked. The police fired tear gas at a campaign rally this month and arrested three candidates. Fears have been widespread that the city leadership could postpone the vote over the unrest.

Twelve opposition figures, including prominent politicians and activists as well as first-time candidates, were ambushed and bloodied by gangs of masked men or attacked while canvassing for votes. "We can see Hong Kong isn't as free and as civilised as we'd previously imagined," said Jannelle Leung, a 25-year-old accountant who was struck in the back of her head with a hard object in early October.

Jocelyn Chau, a first-time candidate like Leung who received lurid calls before being punched by a man while canvassing last month in the pro-Beijing neighborhood of North Point, criticised the government for not condemning the attacks on pro-democracy figures. "Not even superficial gestures," said Chau, 23.

DEFECTOR CLAIMS KNOWLEDGE OF CHINA INTERFERENCE

A MAN claiming to be a disillusioned Chinese intelligence operative has told Australian authorities that China's intelligence agencies were directly intervening in politics in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

So far, some Western diplomatic officials believe the claims by an asylum seeker named Wang Liqiang to be reliable at least in part. "I do not want to see Taiwan becoming a second Hong Kong," he wrote. "And I would not become an accomplice in the conspiracy of turning an originally democratic land into autocratic land."

'TO COUNTER TERROR FINANCING'

Important for Pak to implement FATF recommendations: US

LALIT K JHA
WASHINGTON, NOVEMBER 23

IT IS important for Pakistan to fully implement the recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to counter terrorism financing, a top American diplomat has said.

The implementation of the FATF recommendations, besides taking action against terrorist networks, would help the US revise its travel advisory against Pakistan, the diplomat said in response to a question.

"We want to see improvements in Pakistan's security situation so that we can reflect that in a travel advisory," Acting Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Alice Wells said at an event at the Wilson Center think tank on Thursday.

"Some of the steps that, I think, are very important are Pakistan's implementation, full implementation of the Financial Action Task Force requirement to counter terrorism financing, to prosecute and seize the assets of members of terrorist organisations," Wells said.

WE WANT TO SEE IMPROVEMENTS IN PAKISTAN'S SECURITY SITUATION SO THAT WE CAN REFLECT THAT IN A TRAVEL ADVISORY

— ALICE WELLS
ACTING ASST SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA

In its last travel advisory issued on April 9 this year, the US State Department urged American citizens to reconsider their travel to Pakistan. It also advised US citizens against travelling to Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in view of terrorism and kidnapping. The travel advisory is revised every six months. Terrorist groups continue plotting possible attacks in Pakistan, said the advisory.

Terrorists may attack with little or no warning, targeting transportation hubs, markets, shopping malls, military installations, airports, universities, tourist locations, schools, hospitals, places of worship, and government facilities, it said. **PTI**

Two children among nine killed by car bomb in Syria

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BEIRUT, NOVEMBER 23

A CAR bomb killed nine people including four civilians in a Turkish-held border town in northern Syria on Saturday, a Britain-based war monitor said.

Two children were among those killed in Tal Abyad, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the bombing. But Ankara's defence ministry in a statement blamed Kurdish forces who controlled the town before Turkish troops and proxy fighters overran it last month.

An AFP photographer saw smoke billow from the twisted burnt remains of a pick-up truck inside the town, and a bright red blood stain on the road nearby. Pro-Turkey fighters and men in civilian clothes carried away human remains in a waterproof cover, he said.

The area has been shaken by repeated such bombings since Turkish troops carried out a cross-border operation last month.

THE EXPEDITION IS MEANT TO STUDY HOW CLIMATE CHANGE WILL AFFECT CENTRAL ARCTIC

Stuck in Arctic ice, dodging polar bears — all for science

NEW YORK TIMES
NOVEMBER 23

DESPITE DIFFICULT ice conditions and curious polar bears, a German research icebreaker with 100 scientists and crew members is comfortably adrift in the frozen Central Arctic, two months into a yearlong expedition to study the region's changing climate.

"MOSAIC is in full swing," Jessie Creamean, a researcher from Colorado State University, wrote in an email, using the informal name for the expedition, the



Crew maintain cables near the Polarstern. NYT

Multidisciplinary Drifting Observatory for the Study of Arctic Climate. The ship, the Polarstern, has been frozen into the ice since early October; Creamean and other researchers will be on board until next month, when a first relief team of scientists arrives.

Creamean has been setting up portable equipment, nicknamed C-3PO, on the ice to sample particles and droplets in the air as part of her studies of how Arctic clouds form. She is also an "ice boss" on a 12-person crew that goes out every Monday and takes 60 ice cores — each about 20

to 40 inches long — for studies by various scientific teams.

All of this is happening in 24-hour darkness, which set in just a few days after the ship, which left northern Norway in late September, stopped next to an ice floe in the Laptev Sea, far north of the Siberian coast, and froze in place. The ship has been drifting with the ice since then usually covering 5 miles a day or less, and is about 300 miles from the North Pole.

The \$155 million expedition, organized by the Alfred Wegener Institute in Germany with par-

ticipants from 18 other countries, is meant to advance understanding of how climate change will affect the Central Arctic, a region that is warming about twice as fast as other areas but has been studied relatively little because of its remoteness.

Thomas Krumpen, a Wegener Institute senior scientist who was aboard the Akademik Fedorov, a Russian icebreaker that accompanied the expedition for the first month before returning to Norway, said that finding a good ice floe had been difficult. "We were facing

quite thin ice with only a few floes around that were thick enough to work on," he said.

The expedition has also been visited by polar bears, including a mother and cub who sniffed around electrical equipment on the ice. Polar bear encounters are taken very seriously — researchers must be accompanied by armed guards and scramble to safety if a bear is sighted. So far there have been three bear-related ice evacuations. "Luckily, no bad encounters and everyone (including the bears!) has remained safe," Creamean wrote.