

# NEWSIN brief

## UN hearing on South China Sea begins

AFP, The Hague

The Philippines has appealed to an international tribunal to declare China's claims to most of the South China Sea illegal, warning the integrity of United Nations' maritime laws is at stake. In opening comments to the tribunal in the Hague on Tuesday, Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario said the Philippines had sought judicial intervention because China's behaviour had become increasingly "aggressive" and negotiations had proved futile.

## US to cut 40,000 soldiers from Army

AFP, Washington

The US Army is to cut 40,000 soldiers from its ranks over the next two years at home and abroad, a defense official said yesterday, in a move that will raise doubts about its ability to fight wars. Under the cost-cutting plan, the Army will be down to 450,000 soldiers at the end of the 2017 budget year, even though in 2013 it argued in budgetary documents that going below 450,000 troops might mean it could not win a war, USA Today said.

## Afghans, Taliban 'to meet again': Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

Afghan and Taliban representatives have agreed to meet again after landmark through-the-night talks aimed at ending the militants' 13-year insurgency, Pakistan said yesterday. A delegation of the Afghan High Peace Council (HPC), the body tasked with opening negotiations, met the Taliban in the town of Murree, a hill station north of Islamabad, the Pakistani foreign ministry said in a statement.

## 3 killed after failed Ukraine talks

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine yesterday reported the death of two soldiers and was blamed by pro-Russian rebels for killing a civilian in fighting. The clashes -- sporadic since the start of the month -- resumed with renewed vigour in the wake of another round of unproductive talks Tuesday between Moscow and Kiev envoys that were also attended by the rebels in the Belarussian capital Minsk.

## Mutiny at Yemen army base kills 30

AFP, Aden

At least 30 Yemeni soldiers were killed in coalition air raids and clashes after troops attempted to defect to Iran-backed rebel ranks near the border with Saudi Arabia, a military source said yesterday.



A combination of pictures shows (left), a destroyed mosque in the southern Gaza Strip town of Rafah on July 22, 2014, and the same place (right), on July 6, 2015, a year after the 50-day war between Israel and Hamas' militants.



PHOTO: AFP

## WAR ANNIVERSARY Israel urged to end Gaza blockade

AFP, Gaza City

Israel and Palestinians marked one year since last summer's war in Gaza yesterday, with a UN official calling for an end to the "inexcusable" blockade of the territory that has helped prevent rebuilding.

The ceasefire that ended the 50-day war has largely held, but few of the issues that led to the conflict have been resolved and tens of thousands of Gazans remain homeless in the besieged strip.

While there appears to be little appetite for conflict on either side for now, analysts say failing to address the misery of Gazans who have faced three wars in six years will only sow the seeds for future violence.

"The blockade remains in place and its crippling effect on Gaza is undeniable, inexcusable," Robert Turner, operations director in Gaza for UN relief agency UNRWA, told reporters.

He however referred to a small amount of Gazan goods being allowed through for sale in Israel and the occupied West Bank in recent months as a reason for hope.

"I see a real willingness on the part of Israel to address some of its worst impact," Turner said of the blockade, which Israel says is necessary to prevent the import of arms and material to make weapons.

"It is not yet enough. It is not what is required, which is a full lifting of the blockade."

The war took a heavy toll on Gaza, killing 2,251 Palestinians, including more than 500 children. Seventy-three people were killed on the Israeli side, including 67 soldiers.

A UN report released last month said both sides may have committed war crimes during the conflict in and around the impoverished enclave of 1.8 million people.

# Putin hosts BRICS leaders amid standoff with West

AFP, Ufa

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday welcomed the leaders of emerging powers for a summit Moscow hopes will show it not isolated despite the standoff with the West over Ukraine.

The Kremlin sees BRICS -- a group of emerging economies that includes Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa -- as a growing economic and political influence to challenge Western hegemony.

Moscow's ties with BRICS have become more vital amid the damage inflicted on Russia's economy by Western sanctions, and Putin's exclusion from the Group of Eight gathering, which met last month as the G7.

BRICS "illustrates a new polycentric system of international relations" demonstrating the increasing influence of "new centres of power," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in a statement published yesterday.

Held this year in the city of Ufa some 1,100 kilometres east of Moscow, the summit itself starts Thursday, following a day of bilateral meetings between Putin and the other leaders.

"I won't hide that we are especially happy to see our friends from China," Putin told Chinese President Xi

Jinping ahead of talks.

"We are well aware of the difficulties we have to face economically and in global politics, but by joining efforts we will without a doubt overcome all problems," he added.

Putin also met with India's Narendra Modi, South Africa's Jacob Zuma and is set to speak with Brazil's Dilma Rousseff after hosting a dinner with BRICS leaders.



Also expected late evening is the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, who will meet Putin today afternoon, right after the BRICS summit.

Taking place at the same time in Ufa is a meeting of the regional security grouping, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), to which Iran has applied.

BRICS "augurs the formation of a new world, in which the West will not

dominate," Fyodor Lukyanov, the chairman of the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy, wrote in Rossiiskaya Gazeta state daily.

Critics however say that while the summit is symbolically important for Russia, BRICS is not a strong political force due to the very different agendas and priorities of its members.

The summit is "compensation for one and a half years of a diplomatic



blockade," wrote Alexander Gabuev of the Carnegie Moscow Center.

But, he added, "Moscow is likely alone in its euphoria about the double summit and emerging new geopolitical constructs."

Among the tangible results of BRICS's emergence has been the establishment of a BRICS bank to finance infrastructure projects in member states and developing countries.

# Myanmar to hold general election on November 8

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar yesterday announced November 8 as the date for a historic general election set to be the first contested by Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition in a quarter of a century.

The announcement from the country's election commission fires the starting gun for the much-anticipated poll in the former junta-run nation, which has launched a series of reforms since the end of outright military rule in 2011.

The vote, seen as a crucial test of the country's democratic progress, will determine the elected contingent in the fledgling parliament with a president selected by the legislature later. But Suu Kyi is barred by the constitution from taking the top job.

The Nobel laureate's National League for Democracy (NLD) party did not immediately confirm it would participate in the polls, although it is widely expected to make huge gains at the ballot box.

"We cannot say whether we will take part

right now. We need to hold a meeting to make a decision," spokesman Nyan Win told AFP.

The NLD has gone house-to-house in recent days urging people to check official voter lists and raising concerns that those displayed across the country are riddled with inaccuracies. Election officials yesterday conceded that the lists contain errors, blaming technical faults and staff shortages but insisting that there is still time to iron out many of the flaws.

The Union Election Commission said on its website that the parliamentary election would take place on November 8, a Sunday, with candidates given between July 20 and August 8 to register.

For Myanmar's roughly 30 million voters the election presents a rare chance to cast their votes in a nationwide poll contested by the country's main opposition.

With Suu Kyi barred from the top job and no obvious second candidate within the NLD, observers predict the party could end up supporting a presidential candidate outside its ranks.



Participants run in front of Del Tajo-La Reina's bulls during the second "encierro" (bull-run) of the San Fermin Festival in Pamplona, northern Spain, yesterday. The festival is a symbol of Spanish culture that attracts thousands of tourists to watch the bull runs despite heavy condemnation from animal rights groups.

PHOTO: AFP



## 'Save us from disappearing' Tuvalu PM begs for help to save his country from rising seas

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The prime minister of the world's fourth smallest nation has appealed for help from European leaders to stop it disappearing from the face of the Earth.

Enele Spoaga arrived in Brussels on Monday to call on EU leaders for support ahead of the next UN climate change summit in Paris in December.

The group of islands, home to just 10,000 people, is under direct threat by rising sea levels due to climate change as it is no more than 4m above sea level at its highest level.

He called on Europe to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to keep global warming down to 1.5C, which scientists say is a

safer limit than the current goal of 2C, the Brussels Times reports.

He said: "We need to save Tuvalu to save the world."

"If this island disappears under water, it is not the end of climate change. And I ask you what future do we hold? We need to collaborate as one human face to save human kind."

"We are told that even 2 degrees global warming is too dangerous as it would mean that Tuvalu would disappear under the water. Yes we can move the Tuvalu inhabitants to other peoples' lands but it will not stop climate change."

Tuvalu is one of several island chains in the Pacific which are vulnerable to rising sea levels.

## SREBRENICA 'GENOCIDE' Russia vetoes UN draft resolution

AFP, United Nations

Russia yesterday vetoed a draft UN resolution recognizing the Srebrenica massacre as genocide, branding the measure "confrontational" and a setback to reconciliation in the Balkans.

Britain had put forward the draft text, hoping the Security Council would formally recognize Europe's worst atrocity since World War II as an act of genocide for the first time and condemning genocide denial.

Angola, China, Nigeria and Venezuela abstained from the vote on the draft resolution, days before Bosnia is due to mark the 20th anniversary of the murder of 8,000 Muslim boys and men by Bosnian Serb forces in July 1995.

Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin called the British-drafted text "not constructive, confrontational and politically-motivated" and argued that it unfairly singled out Bosnian Serbs for war crimes.

"The draft that we have in front of us will not help peace in the Balkans but rather doom this region to tension," Churkin told the council meeting that began with a minute of silence to remember the victims.

British Deputy Ambassador Peter Wilson accused Russia of siding "with those who are unwilling to accept the facts today."

"Genocide occurred at Srebrenica. This is a legal fact, not a political judgment. On this there is no compromise," he said.

Russia, the United States and Britain had been locked in intense negotiations over the past 24 hours to try to avoid a veto and agree on a text.

But Moscow refused to drop its insistence that references to the Srebrenica killings as an act of genocide be scrapped, diplomats said.

## Islamic heritage of India has rejected terror

Says Modi in Kazakhstan

PTI, Astana

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday underlined the common Islamic heritage of India and Central Asia, which had always rejected forces of extremism.

Modi said India and Central Asia could not achieve their full potential without each other; nor would the region be more stable without cooperation between the two.

Speaking at Nazarbayev University, Modi said, "The Islamic heritage of both India and Central Asia is defined by the highest ideals of Islam -- knowledge, piety, compassion and welfare. This is a heritage founded on the principle of love and devotion."

"And, it has always rejected the forces of extremism. Today, this is an important source of strength that brings India and Central Asia together."

## Man raises bear cubs thinking as puppies

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A man who spent two years raising two puppies was left stunned when he realised they were, in fact, endangered Asian black bears -- and not dogs.

Wang Kayui, a banana farmer from the Yunnan Province in China, bought the two 'puppies' in Vietnam in 2013 and enjoyed grooming and bathing them on a daily basis, according to People's Daily Online.

Kayui then described how the animals started behaving 'strangely'; they were killing his pet chickens, had an insatiable appetite for food and grew to around 100lbs each.

His error was finally confirmed when he spotted leaflets which had been issued by the local public security bureau on endangered wild animals -- when he immediately recognised he had been illegally keeping the Category 2 protected endangered animals by accident.

