

NEWS IN
brief

US to increase military

drone flights

AFP, Washington

The US military will drastically increase drone flights over the next four years, in a bid to boost intelligence and strike capabilities across a growing number of conflict zones, the Wall Street Journal reported Sunday. The Pentagon is planning to expand the number of daily flights from 61 at present to as many as 90 by 2019, a senior defence official told the Journal.

Egypt imposes tough

anti-terrorism law

AFP, Cairo

Under pressure from a jihadist insurgency, Egypt's President

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has boosted police and judicial powers with a new anti-terrorism law that also imposes hefty fines for "false" media reports. Rights groups, which have accused Sisi of imposing a repressive regime since the army ousted president Mohamed Morsi in 2013, fear the new law could be used to further muzzle dissent and target critics.

Appeal against

Pistorius verdict filed

AFP, Pretoria

Prosecutors yesterday filed an appeal calling for Paralympian Oscar Pistorius to be convicted of murder for killing his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp. Pistorius was jailed last year after being convicted on the lesser charge of manslaughter, and is due to be released from prison on Friday.

Trump reports for jury duty in New York

AFP, New York

Flamboyant billionaire White House candidate Donald Trump reported for jury duty in New York yesterday, stepping out of a sleek black limo to be mobbed by media and supporters. The bombastic real estate magnate, who is leading the polls among 17 Republican candidates for president, arrived at New York State Supreme Court at 9:08 am dressed in a blue suit and striped tie.

Philippines can't afford military upgrade

AFP, Manila

The Philippines can only afford a "frugal" military upgrade, defence officials said yesterday, even though maritime tensions with China are growing. Despite a proposed 25 percent rise in next year's defence budget, the government must still divide resources between external defence and internal threats like insurgencies and natural disasters.



Thai soldiers inspect the scene after a bomb exploded outside a religious shrine in central Bangkok yesterday, killing at least 19 people and wounding scores more. *Inset*, Thai rescue workers carry an injured person.

STORY ON PAGE 16

PHOTO: AFP

Bad weather hampers bid to reach debris

Chance of survival for 54 passengers "very slim": rescue official

AFP, Jayapura

Bad weather hampered efforts yesterday to reach debris in remote eastern Indonesian mountains believed to be from a plane that crashed carrying 54 people and cash worth almost half a million dollars.

A plane yesterday spotted debris engulfed in smoke in the mountains near Oksibil and search teams, including soldiers and police, set off in the early hours to reach the site, which is at an altitude of 8,300 feet.

But thick fog, which reduced visibility to one metre, and rain hindered the bid to reach the crash site, the head of Indonesia's search and rescue agency Bambang Soelistyo told AFP.

Efforts to reach the location, about 15 kilometres (nine miles) from Oksibil, were called off for the day at 5:30 pm and would resume today, he said.

He added the chance of any survivors was "very slim". All those on the plane were believed to be Indonesians.

More than 250 rescuers had tried to battle through dense forest to reach what is thought to be the wreckage of the Trigana Air plane, which disappeared Sunday during a short flight in Papua province.

INDONESIA AIRPLANE DISASTER

The ATR 42-300 twin-turboprop plane was carrying 49 passengers and five crew on the journey from Papua's capital Jayapura to Oksibil, a remote settlement in the mountains to the south.

Also on the plane was 6.5 billion rupiah (\$470,000) in cash, which were social assistance funds being transported for distribution to poor families, according to the head of the Jayapura post office.

A photo of the suspected site showed an area that appeared to be fire-blackened and scattered with debris in thick forest, and Soelistyo said he was "98 percent" certain it was the location of the crash.

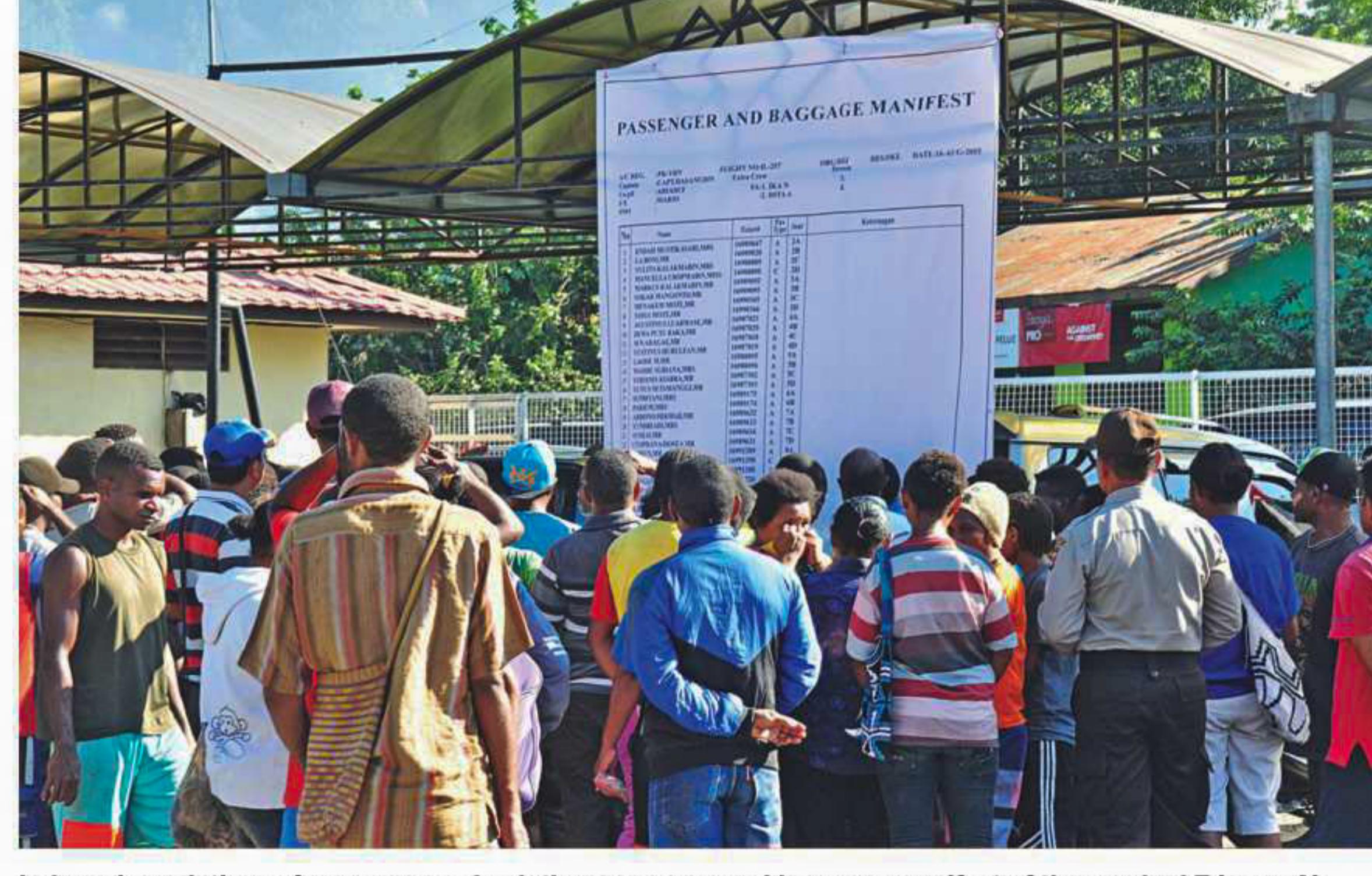
Relatives of passengers were becoming increasingly frustrated at the lack of hard news.

Some shouted "We want confirmation!" and threw a table at a crisis centre set up by Trigana Air at Jayapura airport.

"My family and I have been gathered here for hours. We want to know the fate of my brother, Kepi Deal, who was on board the plane," Rifan Wea, one of about 100 relatives at the airport, told AFP.

"We want to know whether he is dead or alive."

Small aircraft are commonly used for transport in remote and mountainous Papua and bad weather has caused several accidents in recent years.



Indonesian relatives of passengers check the passenger and baggage manifest of the crashed Trigana Air Service flight at the airport in Sentani, near Jayapura, Papua province, Indonesia yesterday.

ISIS' 'MEIN KAMPF'

Secret document blames Israel for the emergence of jihadi group

MAIL ONLINE

Found in one of the tribal areas of Pakistan, a new jihadi document has been billed as the ISIS equivalent of Adolf Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*.

Titled 'A Brief History of the Islamic State Caliphate (ISC): The Caliphate According to the Prophet', the mysterious document includes a graphic depiction of the six stages of the Islamic State.

According to the diagram, the fifth phase 'declaring the caliphate' will be followed by the final phase 'open warfare' in 2017.

"It reads like the caliphate's own *Mein Kampf*," an US intelligence official told Israel National News after reading over the 32-page document.

He said: "While the world is watching videos of beheadings and crucifixions in Iraq and Syria the Islamic State is moving into North Africa the Middle East."

"We see it has a strategy in South Asia. It's a magician's trick, watch this hand and you'll never see what the other is doing," he said.

The authenticity of the document has reportedly been confirmed as genuine by retired US Defence Intelligence Agency Director Gen Michael Flynn.

Yet some of its claims seem out of place, particularly the idea that the jihadi group perceive India as its future battleground rather than Western Europe.

The document contains a lengthy history of Islamic State and militant jihadism before conveniently suggesting that Pakistan and Afghanistan would be the next areas for terror camps.

SRI LANKA ELECTION

Rajapakse hopes for comeback

Results due today

AFP, Colombo

A bullish Mahinda Rajapakse said he was confident of staging a shock return to power as Sri Lanka's prime minister in elections yesterday held just months after he was toppled as president.

Monitors said the vote, called a year ahead of schedule by President Maithripala Sirisena, was largely peaceful despite some reports of candidates trying to bribe voters.

Election officials put turnout at around 65 percent -- higher than the last parliamentary polls in 2010, but well below the 81 percent who turned out in January to hand Sirisena his surprise victory over veteran strongman Rajapakse.

Calls closed at 4:00pm and results are expected today.

"We will win and that is certain," Rajapakse said shortly after voting in his home constituency of Hambantota at the astrologically auspicious time of 10:53 am.

"My message is to remain calm and peacefully enjoy our victory."

Rajapakse's optimism is at odds with analysts' predictions that no single party will win a majority and that the former president's hardline nationalism will undermine his quest for coalition partners.

The 69-year-old remains hugely popular among big sections of the majority Sinhalese community for presiding over the crushing defeat of Tamil guerrillas in 2009 after their 37-year war for a separate homeland.

The president has threatened to invoke his executive powers to prevent his combative predecessor from becoming prime minister, but Rajapakse is hoping a strong showing will force Sirisena to back down.

Since his surprise victory over his former mentor in a January 8 presidential election, Sirisena has struggled to impose his authority over his United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) and was powerless to prevent Rajapakse from standing as one of its candidates.

But while he has drawn big crowds to rallies, he remains a polarising figure on an island still struggling to come to terms with the past.

Sirisena is thought to prefer the United National Party (UNP) of outgoing premier Ranil Wickremesinghe to form the next government, with backing from Tamil and Muslim parties which have little love for Rajapakse.

Speaking after he voted in Colombo, Wickremesinghe said he was confident of forming a new government that could "consolidate the January 8 revolution".



EXPLOSIONS AT CHINA PORT

Homeless residents demand compensation

AFP, Tianjin

Residents who fled their homes near vast and deadly explosions in the Chinese port city of Tianjin gathered in anger yesterday to demand redress from a government they say is ignoring their plight.

About 150 people, some with their faces scarred and many wearing protective breathing masks, descended on a hotel where government and military officials have been holding daily press briefings on the disaster.

"Buy back!" they shouted repeatedly and in unison, demanding compensation for their lost homes and belongings.

Many said they lived just 600 metres from the disaster, which struck Wednesday night and left a wide swathe of the area in ruins.

Liu Liang, a fashion designer who lives in a development called Harbour City, com-

plained that residents were getting no answers from the government and being treated improperly.

He ran and left everything behind when the disaster struck, he told AFP, removing a bandage to show stitches near his left eye.

"The water, the air, the underground water are polluted," he said, voicing the fears of many. "We can't live here," he added.

Despite their fury, the protesters attempted to show humility towards the authorities. "Property owners of Harbour City: We love the Party, trust the government and plead for buyback," read a banner in white Chinese characters on a red background.

Some held small individual signs saying: "We resolutely demand government buy-back."

Four officials who held a press conference in the hotel basement did not meet the protesters and left immediately afterwards.

Fate of nuclear deal still 'not clear'

Says Iran's Khamenei

AFP, Tehran

The fate of Iran's nuclear deal with world powers is still undecided but it will not leave the country vulnerable to US influence, supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said yesterday.

Khamenei, the country's highest authority, said in a statement quoted on his website that Tehran would block any US attempt to influence Iran despite the historic accord.

"They think that through this agreement -- the fate of which is not clear as no one knows if it will be approved here or in America -- they could find a way to intrude into the country," Khamenei said.

"We have closed such a path and will definitely shut it. We'll allow neither economic nor political nor cultural intrusion by the United States."

The deal, reached in Vienna last month, must still be ratified by the US Congress and could face the need for parliamentary approval in Iran.



Syria strikes toll nears 100

UN aid chief 'horrified'

AFP, Damascus

The toll in Syrian government air strikes on a rebel-held town outside Damascus neared 100 yesterday, as the UN's humanitarian chief expressed horror and appealed for civilians to be protected.

Sunday's series of raids on the town of Douma, in the rebel bastion of Eastern Ghouta, was one of the bloodiest regime attacks in Syria's four-year war.

They came almost exactly two years after devastating chemical weapons attacks on the same region that much of the international community blamed on the Syrian government.

The National Coalition, Syria's main opposition body in exile, condemned both the air strikes and the "lukewarm response" by the international community towards the war's

Violent games 'linked to aggressive behaviour'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Psychologists have confirmed that playing violent video games is linked to aggressive and callous behaviour.

A review of almost a decade of studies found that exposure to violent video games was a "risk factor" for increased aggression.

But the same team of experts said there was insufficient evidence to conclude that the influence of games such as Call of Duty and Grand Theft Auto led to criminal acts.

The findings have prompted a call for more parental control over violent scenes in video games from the American Psychological Association (APA).

A report from the APA task force on violent media concludes: "The research demonstrates a consistent relation between violent video game use and increases in aggressive behaviour, aggressive cognitions and aggressive affect, and decreases in pro-social behaviour, empathy and sensitivity to

aggression."

The report said no single influence led a person to act aggressively or violently. Rather, it was an "accumulation of risk factors" that resulted in such behaviour.

It added: "The research reviewed here demonstrates that violent video game use is one such risk factor."

The APA has urged game creators to increase levels of parental control over the amount of violence video games contain.

At a meeting in Toronto, Canada, earlier this month the association's ruling council also called for a video game rating system that took more notice of violence

and for games to be more appropriate to players' age and psychological development.

Dr Mark Appelbaum, who chaired the APA task force, said: "Scientists have investigated the use of violent video games for more than two decades but to date, there is very limited research addressing whether

Fighting flares in Ukraine

10 people killed

AFP, Kiev

Fierce clashes in east Ukraine have killed at least 10 people over the past 24 hours, according to figures collated yesterday from Ukrainian and pro-Russian rebel representatives.

Ukrainian officials reported the death of two soldiers and three civilians, while a rebel commander said five civilians were killed across the conflict zone in the latest surge in violence.

Volodymyr Kolesnyk, a spokesman for the local health department, told AFP that six more civilians were wounded and one man was killed in a Kiev-controlled village close to the rebels' de facto capital Donetsk.

Meanwhile pro-Moscow separatist officials reported the deaths of four civilians in overnight bombardments, three of them in the city of Donetsk.

