

# NEWS IN brief

## Activists launch leaflets into North Korea

South Korean activists launched tens of thousands of anti-Pyongyang leaflets across the border into North Korea yesterday, denouncing its latest nuclear test and defying threats of retaliation. The leaflets, criticising leader Kim Jong-Un for putting nuclear weapons before the wellbeing of his people, were launched with helium balloons from the border city of Paju.

## Tanzania debris came from MH370: Malaysia

A piece of aircraft wreckage found in June off Tanzania has been confirmed as coming from the doomed airliner MH370, Malaysia said yesterday. The Malaysia Airlines jet was carrying 239 passengers and crew when it disappeared en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing on March 8, 2014.

## Nato, Russia hold 'risk reduction' talks

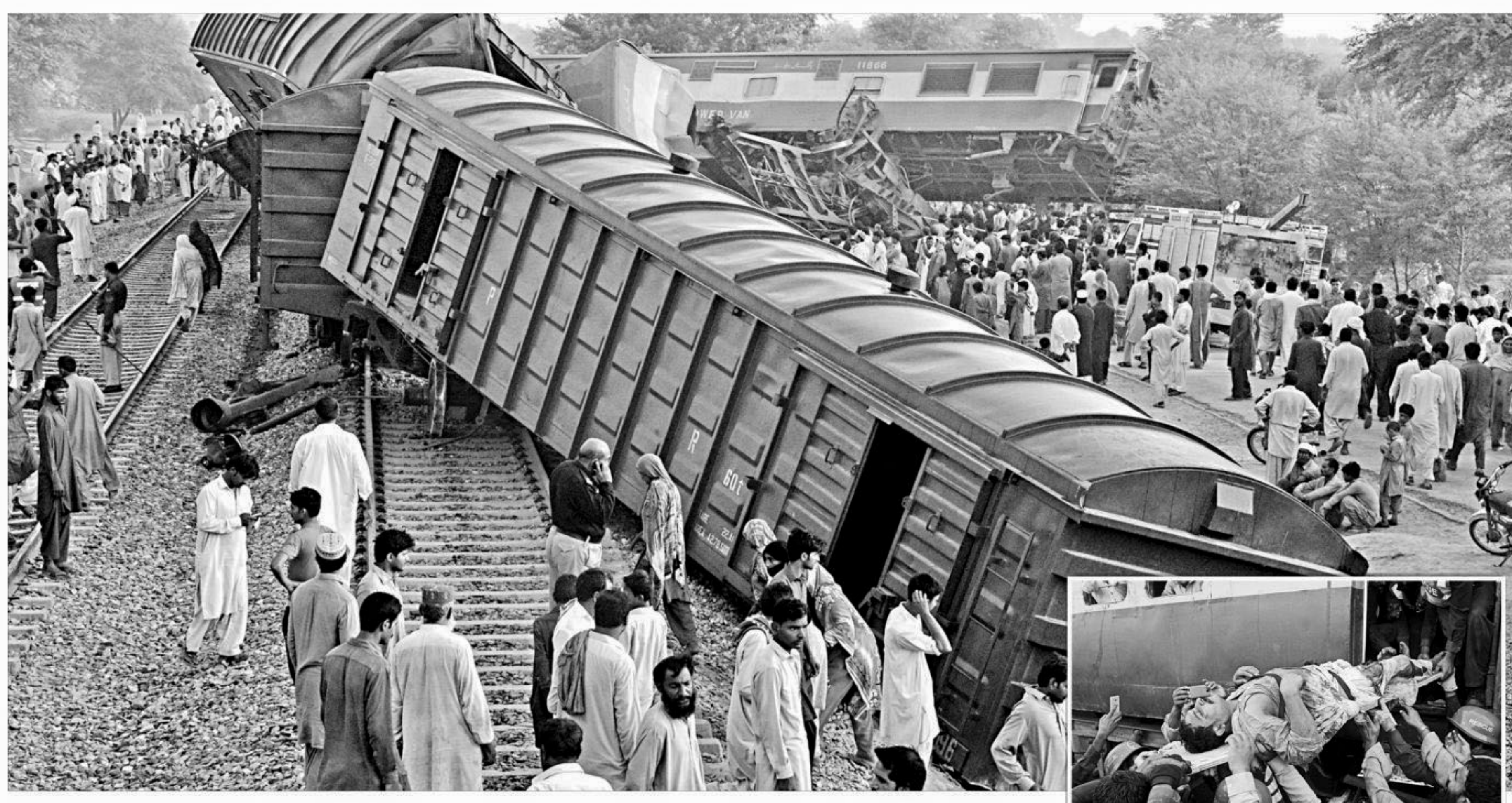
Nato and Russia yesterday held high-level talks on risk reduction and transparency to avoid any misunderstandings, after a series of close shaves, the US-led alliance said in a statement. The statement added that Nato head Jens Stoltenberg "looks forward to discussing these issues and next steps with the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, in the near future."

## Israeli jets hit Gaza after rocket fire

Israel's air force hit the Hamas-run Gaza Strip early yesterday after Palestinians fired a rocket into southern Israel, the military said. No casualties were reported. A rocket from Gaza hit open ground in Israel late Wednesday night, but the military reported no casualties from the attack.

## BBC to get new boss

The BBC is to get a new boss after British Prime Minister Theresa May chose not to make her predecessor David Cameron's nominee, Rona Fairhead, an automatic pick for the role, the latest of several breaks with his legacy. The public broadcaster is about to undergo an overhaul of its governance structure that will involve scrapping the BBC Trust, which currently regulates the broadcaster. The Trust said on Wednesday that May's government had decided to run a competitive process to appoint the Board's first chair, and published a statement from Fairhead saying she would not be applying.



Locals gather at the scene where two trains collided near Multan, Pakistan, yesterday. Inset, Volunteers move an injured man from the wreckage following the collision.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

## Pak train crash kills four, scores hurt

A Pakistani express train crashed into a freight train yesterday killing at least four people and injuring 93, an emergency rescue service said. The Awam Express bound for the southern city of Karachi hit the freight train about 25 km (15 miles) from the city of Multan, in Punjab province, trapping some passengers in overturned carriages. "The last trapped victim has been extricated after four hours by cutting thick metal sheets of train carriage with the help of hydraulic cutters," a provincial emergency service, Rescue 1122, said in report. It said four people had been killed. Earlier, media put the death toll at six with more than 150 injured. Pakistan's colonial-era railway network has fallen into disrepair in recent decades due to chronic under-investment and poor maintenance.

# US to lift Myanmar sanctions

Says Obama after meeting with Suu Kyi in White House

AFP, Washington

Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi called on Wednesday for the lifting of economic sanctions against her country, and President Barack Obama, in their first White House meeting since she became leader, said the United States was ready to do so.

"It is the right thing to do in order to ensure that the people of Burma see rewards from a new way of doing business and a new government," Obama said with Suu Kyi beside him in the Oval Office.

The trip by Suu Kyi, 71, who like Obama is a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, capped a decades-long journey from political prisoner to national leader after her party won a sweeping electoral victory last year.

With Suu Kyi no longer an opposition figure, Washington has been weighing a further easing of sanctions against Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, as Obama looks to normalize relations with a country shunned when it was ruled by a military junta.

As Suu Kyi arrived for the meeting, the White House issued a statement saying it would reinstate Myanmar to the Generalized System of Preferences, or GSP, which provides duty-free treatment for goods from poor and developing countries. Myanmar will be back in the program on Nov 13, US officials said.

After visiting the White House, Suu Kyi met with some members of the House of Representatives at the US

Capitol. She was to return there yesterday for meetings with House and Senate leaders from both parties.

Some members of Congress have expressed concerns about change in Myanmar and its human rights record.

Republican US Representative Ed Royce, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, commented after meeting with Suu Kyi that while the new administration brought hope to Myanmar, he remained committed to efforts to protect its oppressed Rohingya Muslim minority.

For Obama to lift sanctions, he would need to issue an executive order ending the national emergency declaration on Myanmar, first issued in 1997, which underpins sanctions, and revoke previous country-related sanction orders.

A senior administration official said the removal of sanctions would not apply to military-to-military assistance.

In a statement on Myanmar, the State Department said that several restrictions would remain in place, including barring visas for military leaders.

Suu Kyi has been criticized for doing too little to address the plight of the Rohingya, some 125,000 of whom have been housed in temporary camps since violence in 2012.

Myanmar law does not recognize the Rohingya as one of the country's 135 official ethnic groups, making them stateless. Seen as illegal immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh, they are deeply disliked by many in Myanmar.



# 'President Duterte killed justice official with Uzi'

Former Davao hitman tells Philippine parliament

AGENCIES

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte allegedly once shot dead a justice department agent with an Uzi submachine gun while serving as mayor of Davao.

The allegation was made by Edgar Matobato, a self-confessed former death squad member, before a Senate inquiry on extra-judicial killings yesterday.

Duterte, he alleged, ordered him and others to kill about 1,000 criminals or political rivals over a 25-year period.

One government minister called the allegations "lies and fabrications".

Justice Secretary Vitaliano Aguirre said Matobato was "obviously not telling the truth" while presidential spokesman Martin Andanan said investigations into the president's time as mayor had gone nowhere.

Matobato, 57, said he had been a member of the Davao Death Squad, a notorious vigilante group allegedly responsible for hundreds of killings.

"Our job was to kill criminals like drug pushers, rapists, snatchers," he said.

But he also said that Duterte's opponents

had been targeted too, including four bodyguards of a local rival for mayor, Prospero Nograles.

In 1993, he said his group had injured a justice department agent after a confrontation at a road block.

"Mayor Duterte was the one who finished him off," he said.

"Jamisola [the justice department official] was still alive when he [Duterte] arrived. He emptied two Uzi magazines on him."

Victims would be shot or strangled, he said, with some disembowelled and dumped into the sea so fish could eat them, or in one case fed to a crocodile.

He told the Senate panel he had gone from a witness protection programme into hiding when Duterte became president, fearing for his life.

Matobato also alleged Duterte had ordered the bombing of a mosque in retaliation for an attack on Davao Cathedral in 1993.

Prospero Nograles' son Karlo, a Davao city representative, challenged Matobato's account relating to his father's bodyguards.

"I don't know what this guy is talking about," he wrote on Facebook.



Duterte



Matobato

## BALI TOURIST BOAT BLAST

# Two foreigners killed, 18 hurt

AFP, Denpasar

An explosion on a speedboat in Bali left two foreigners dead and 18 other tourists injured yesterday, sparking dramatic scenes as rescuers rushed to haul stunned and bloodied holidaymakers off the vessel.

Dazed passengers, many covered in cuts and bruises, were taken to medical centres on the Indonesian holiday island after the blast, with TV footage showing them being carried on stretchers to ambulances and lying in hospital beds.

An Austrian woman was killed along with a second female foreigner, whose nationality was still being verified. Two German citizens were injured while nationals from Britain, France, Italy, Portugal, Ireland and Spain were also among the passengers.

It appeared to be an accident with the explosion occurring in the fuel tank. The bomb squad was initially deployed to the scene on an island that has suffered bloody Islamist militant attacks in the past, but authorities quickly ruled out an attack.

Indonesia has a poor maritime safety record and regularly suffers fatal boat accidents but serious incidents around Bali -- which attracts millions of foreign visitors each year -- are rare.



Hospital workers assist a foreign tourist who was injured from an explosion on a ferry boat traveling from the island of Bali to Lombok, at Penta Medika Hospital, Karangasem, Bali, Indonesia, yesterday. Inset, Police and investigators examine the ferry boat.

PHOTO: REUTERS



## India offers \$1b in fresh aid to Afghanistan

AFP, New Delhi

India offered Afghanistan a fresh \$1 billion in economic assistance after their leaders met in New Delhi on Wednesday to strengthen already close ties between the neighbours.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated India's commitment to helping the war-torn country strengthen its education, health, agriculture and other sectors during talks with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani.

In a joint statement, India announced the \$1 billion offer, but there was no mention of providing weapons to help Afghanistan fight militants, which it has previously asked for.

Modi and Ghani called in the statement for an end to sponsorship and support of militants.

They did not name Pakistan, but they have previously accused their neighbour of supporting Islamic extremists.

"The two leaders discussed the regional situation and expressed grave concern at continued use of terrorism and violence in the region for achieving political objectives," Indian foreign secretary Subrahmanya m Jaishankar said.

"They called upon the concerned to put an end to all sponsorship, support, safe havens and sanctuaries to terrorists, including for those who target Afghanistan and India," he told reporters.

The Afghan government has accused Pakistan of supporting the Taliban, while Delhi says Pakistan supports rebels crossing the border into Indian-controlled Kashmir -- claims that Islamabad denies.

# PUSH TO 'LEGALLY TOPPLE' GOVERNMENT IN MALDIVES

## Nasheed in talks with Gayoom

AFP, Colombo

Exiled Maldives opposition leader Mohamed Nasheed said he is in talks with the former president, who repeatedly threw him in jail, to "legally topple" the current leader of the troubled honeymoon islands.

Nasheed became the first democratically elected president of the Maldives in 2008, but now lives in exile in London after he was jailed on terrorism charges that he says were politically motivated.

In the past he has accused Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who ruled the Maldives for 30 years and is still regarded as the power behind the throne, of being behind his downfall.

But on Tuesday he indicated he wanted to bury the hatchet with Gayoom, amid reports of a rift between the former strongman leader and his half-brother, current President Abdulla Yameen.

"How can you build a future if you always want to go back to live in the past," Nasheed told reporters in Colombo via a video link from London.

Nasheed said he had forgiven Gayoom and was in talks with his faction of the ruling Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) "for a new political alignment".

He did not disclose details, but said he had visited Colombo late last month to meet fellow dissidents and map out a strategy to "legally topple" Yameen.

An alliance between the 78-year-old Gayoom and Nasheed was unthinkable even a few months ago. Gayoom who ruled the country for 30 straight years till 2008, was accused of engineering Nasheed's downfall in 2012.

There was no immediate comment from Gayoom, however, and diplomats in Colombo were cautious about the prospect of such an alliance.

The former president does not hold any office in the current administration, but is said to command the loyalty of a majority of the 33 PPM legislators in the 85-member majlis, or parliament. In July, Gayoom's daughter Dunya Maumoon quit as foreign minister saying she did not agree with a plan to bring back the death penalty after nearly seven decades.

Nasheed was jailed for 13 years in 2015 but granted prison leave earlier this year for medical treatment in London, where he secured political asylum.



Nasheed



Gayoom

# Campaign launched for Snowden's pardon

AFP, New York

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the American Civil Liberties Union launched a campaign Wednesday to push President Barack Obama to pardon Edward Snowden, the fugitive intelligence whistleblower living in Russia.

High-profile lawyers and celebrities including writer Joyce Carol Oates and actor Martin Sheen have already signed the campaign's main prod, a petition at pardonsnowden.org that urges Obama to grant Snowden clemency before the president leaves office in January.

But the White House quickly said it had no intention of pardoning Snowden, a former contractor for the National Security Agency who released thousands of classified documents in 2013 revealing the vast US surveillance put in place after the September 11, 2001, attacks.

White House press secretary Josh Earnest disputed that Snowden was a whistleblower and said he would enjoy legal due process at

a trial in the United States, where he faces up to 30 years in prison for espionage and theft of state secrets.

"His conduct put American lives at risk and it risked American national security," Earnest told reporters.

In July, the White House rejected an earlier petition to pardon Snowden that had garnered more than 160,000 signatures.

The 33-year-old fled with documents to Hong Kong, where he hid among Sri Lankan refugees in cramped tenements, and later received political asylum in Russia after the United States revoked his passport while he was en route to Ecuador.

Bernie Sanders, who ran a leftist campaign for the Democratic Party nomination to succeed Obama, offered his support, writing on Twitter: "The interests of justice would be best served if our government granted Snowden some form of clemency."

Snowden and his supporters argue that although he stole information, the revelations have benefited the public because they led to improved privacy protection laws.