

NEWSIN brief

Stormy 'climate' at G7 summit

BA cancels all flights from London airports

IS claims attack on Egypt Christians

AFP, Cairo The Islamic State group yesterday claimed responsibility for shooting dead 29 Christians on a bus in central Egypt, an attack that prompted retaliatory air strikes on jihadists in neighbouring Libya.

Pakistan reopens Afghan border

AFP, Islamabad Pakistan announced it was reopening its volatile southwestern border with Afghanistan at the start of the holy month of Ramadan yesterday.

Palestinian prisoners end hunger strike

AFP, Ramallah Hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails on hunger strike since April 17 have ended their mass protest after Israel agreed a deal following weeks of refusing to negotiate.

US military to test anti-ICBM system

AFP, Washington The US military will try to intercept an intercontinental ballistic missile in a landmark test of a defense system that comes amid broad tensions over North Korea's weapons program.

Leaders clash on climate issue as Trump says he will decide on Paris deal next week

AFP, Taormina G7 nations yesterday hit deadlock over climate change and strived to finesse divisions over trade, as US President Donald Trump rebuffed pressure to toe the collective line in the club of powerful democracies.

Trump tweeted that he would reveal his hand only next week as to whether he will keep the United States in the Paris accord, a global pact on curbing carbon emissions that he vowed to jettison when campaigning for the White House.

The Group of Seven leading economies, in an extraordinary summit statement, acknowledged that six members were committed to upholding the 2015 accord while the United States stood apart.

"The United States of America is in the

process of reviewing its policies on climate change and on the Paris Agreement and thus is not in a position to join the consensus on these topics," the statement said in highly unusual language.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who also crossed swords with Trump on free trade at the G7, complained that the US president was keeping his colleagues in the dark.

"The whole discussion on the topic of climate was very difficult, not to say very unsatisfactory," she told reporters, labelling the G7 deadlock as "six against one".

On trade, the G7 vowed "to keep our markets open and to fight protectionism", but also to combat "unfair trade practices" and help those left behind by globalisation, after Trump came to power vowing "America First".

After starting his first presidential trip abroad wreathed in smiles, Trump ended it with rebukes, upbraiding America's European partners over military spending, trade and global warming.

An enduring motif of the G7, which represents the lion's share of global economic output, has been to champion free trade.

At last year's summit in Japan, leaders issued a lengthy communique in support of resisting protectionism, as well as helping refugees and fighting climate change.

But that was then, when Barack Obama still occupied the White House. Today, his successor is defiant about defying the G7 line after accusing China, Germany and



US President Donald Trump talks to German Chancellor Angela Merkel at the G7 Summit, yesterday.

others of cheating in international trade.

Trump reportedly described the Germans as "bad, very bad" in their trade practices while visiting Brussels this past week.

"We had very hard deliberations and discussions about trade but we found a reasonable solution," Merkel said, stressing the G7 statement's commitment to open markets.

The G7 statement recognised the human rights of migrants and refugees.

But with Trump promising to build a "beautiful" wall on the US-Mexico border, it also said "we reaffirm the sovereign rights of

states, individually and collectively, to control their own borders".

In a telling sign of the divisions now plaguing the G7, this year's statement came in at a meagre six pages -- down from 32 pages last year.

The summit did find common ground on Friday in endorsing a British call urging internet service providers and social media companies to crack down on jihadist content online after 22 people were killed by a suicide bomber in the north-western English city of Manchester this week.

SUMMARY OF SUMMIT G7 noted that the global economy remains patchy with downside risks, pledging "to use all policy tools" to sustain growth. Threatened stronger sanctions against Russia over its annexation of Crimea if Moscow's actions warrant it. Condemned nuclear-armed North Korea's recent missile tests and said they were ready to take new measures as necessary after various rounds of UN sanctions. Demanded support from Russia and Iran for a peace process in Syria, and similarly called for an inclusive dialogue in Libya.

Dozens killed as Ramadan begins in Afghanistan

REUTERS, Kabul A suspected suicide bomber killed as many as 14 people in Afghanistan yesterday and fighting between militants and security forces left at least 36 people dead on the first day of Islam's holy Month of Ramadan.

In eastern Khost province, a Taliban attacker detonated a car bomb near a football field that is close to a military base, officials said.

At a local hospital, doctors received at least 14 dead bodies and eight wounded people, said Gul Mohammaddin Mangal, head of the public health department in Khost.

"The bodies are not recognizable and it is hard to say if they are civilians or security forces," he said.

Najib Danish, spokesman for the Afghan Interior Ministry, put the death toll at 13 killed and eight wounded, including two children.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed responsibility for the Khost attack, saying it was aimed at members of the Afghan security forces.

In the north-western province of Badghis, militants attacked security forces in Qadis district, sparking fighting that killed 22 insurgents, six security forces, and eight civilians, said Zahir Bahand a spokesman for the provincial governor.

The fighting also left 33 militants and 17 civilians wounded, he said.

In Nangarhar province on Friday, some residents of Achin district rebelled against Islamic State fighters who have occupied much of that district, resulting in fighting that left 15 militants and six civilians dead, provincial governor Gulab Mangar said in a statement.

The Western-backed Afghan government is battling both Taliban and Islamic State militants around the country.

Taliban forces have increased their attacks in the weeks before Ramadan, with a string of strikes in Kandahar, Paktia, and Helmand, among other provinces.

Muslims around the world typically mark Ramadan with fasting, prayers, and other observances, although the holy month can begin on different days in different countries.



Sri Lankan residents look on from a building surrounded by floodwaters in Bulathsinhala in Kalutara district, yesterday. Sri Lanka stepped up its military-led relief operations yesterday as nearly half a million people were displaced after a monsoon deluge killed at least 113 people.

Britain lowers threat level

2 more arrested as 'large part' of terror network held

REUTERS, London Britain lowered its security threat level to "severe" on Saturday following significant activity by police investigating the suicide bomb attack on a pop concert in Manchester, Prime Minister Theresa May said.

Earlier, police hunting a suspected network behind Salman Abedi, the bomber who killed 22 people on Monday night, said they had made two further arrests overnight as they closed in on other possible cell members.

May said this meant the independent body which sets the threat level had decided it should be lowered from its highest rating "critical", which meant an attack could be imminent, to "severe".

A significant amount of police activity has taken place over the last 24 hours and there are now 11 suspects in

custody," May said. "The public should be clear about what this means. A threat level of severe means an attack is highly likely. The country should remain vigilant."

The threat assessment has now been returned to the level it was at prior to the attack in Manchester, northwest England, and means soldiers who have

MANCHESTER TERROR ATTACK

been assisting police, would be withdrawn from Britain's streets from midnight on Monday.

As well as killing 22 people, including seven children, Monday's blast injured 116 with 63 still in hospital and 20 in critical care, health officials said.

Security services had feared an experienced bomb-maker could be large but a source with knowledge of

the investigation told Reuters on Thursday Abedi might have made the bomb himself or with an accomplice, lessening the risk of another attack.

"We are getting a greater understanding of the preparation of the bomb," Britain's most senior counter-terrorism officer Mark Rowley said. Rowley, who said on Friday police were confident they had apprehended a "large part of the network", said there had searched or were still examining 17 addresses, mainly in northwest England, and there would be further raids.

However, extra armed officers will still be on duty across the country with security stepped up at some 1,300 events over the long holiday weekend.

The Times newspaper reported on Saturday that intelligence officers had identified 23,000 jihabist extremists living in Britain.

Clashes, curfew in J&K after rebel leader killed

AFP, Srinagar A civilian was killed after clashes broke out between protesters and government forces following the death of a top rebel commander in Indian-administered Kashmir, police said yesterday.

Authorities imposed a curfew in many parts of the main Srinagar city as violence spread across the restive region after Sabzar Ahmad Bhat's death yesterday.

Bhat, head of the Hizbul Mujahideen militant group, was killed in a gunfight with government forces in Tral area, some 40 kilometres south of Srinagar.

One of Bhat's fighters was also killed in the gun battle, which erupted late Friday after government forces cordoned off a village following an intelligence tip-off.

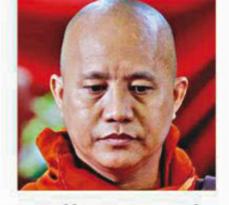
Police said hundreds of villagers tried to break the cordon by throwing rocks at security forces.

A police official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP that the protester was killed after troops opened fire on the villagers. At least three other protesters sustained bullet injuries in the clashes. The nearly 16-hour gunfight ended early yesterday when Bhat and his associate were killed.

Hizbul Mujahideen is the largest indigenous rebel group fighting against Indian rule in the Himalayan territory since an armed rebellion broke-out in 1989.

Bhat succeeded charismatic militant leader Burhan Wani after he was killed in a gunfight in July, which triggered months of anti-India protests in which nearly 100 people died.

Anti-India sentiment runs deep in the predominantly Muslim Kashmir valley where most people favour independence or a merger with Pakistan.



Hardline monks gather in Myanmar despite ban

AFP, Yangon Hundreds of monks and supporters of Myanmar's ultra-nationalist Ma Ba Tha movement gathered in a Yangon monastery yesterday, in a defiant meeting days after Buddhist authorities banned their network, which has been accused of stoking Islamophobia.

The monk-led movement grew in strength under the country's previous military-backed government, peddling a brand of Buddhist nationalism that aggravated religious unrest mainly targeted at minority Muslims.

Myanmar's top Buddhist clergy on Tuesday ordered the Ma Ba Tha to cease all activities by mid-July or face prosecution.

The threat did not deter hundreds of monks, nuns and followers from attending a weekend summit at a Yangon monastery decorated with Ma Ba Tha banners.

Earlier this year the ruling clergy, a body known as Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee, banned Ma Ba Tha's most notorious monk Wirathu from preaching for a year. The fire-brand monk, who attended Saturday's gathering, is known for scathing sermons and Facebook posts that helped foment the idea that Buddhism in Myanmar is threatened by Islam -- despite Muslims making up only around 5 percent of the population.

Philippines steps up bombing of Islamist militants in city

AFP, Marawi But, with security forces unable to end the crisis and the gunmen believed to be holding up to 15 hostages, the military warned yesterday that it would step up the bombing assaults.

The violence erupted on Tuesday when dozens of gunmen went on a rampage throughout Marawi in response to an attempt by security forces to arrest Isnilon Hapilon, a veteran Filipino militant regarded as the local leader of IS.

The gunmen planted black IS flags, took a priest and up to 14 other people hostage from a church, and set fire to buildings.

Thirteen soldiers, two policemen and 31 militants have died in the fighting, according to authorities.

Duterte also said on Friday that he was prepared to talk with the group's leaders. However there appeared to be an extremely small chance of talks, unless they were to negotiate the release of the hostages.

"If you had raped three, I will admit it, that's on me."

Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte tells soldiers fighting militants

Most of the 200,000 residents of Marawi, one of the major Muslim cities in the mainly Catholic Philippines, fled the city because of the fighting as the military used air raids and engaged in street-to-street battles to flush out the militants.



Riot police officers confront opposition activists during a demonstration against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in Caracas on Friday. Inset, Demonstrators use a giant slingshot in clashes with the riot police. Riot police in Venezuela fired tear gas and water cannon to stop anti-government protesters from marching on a key military installation Friday during the latest violence in nearly two months of unrest.

PHOTO: AFP