



### IS IN PHILIPPINES

# 89 gunmen killed in urban battle

APP, Marawi

Philippine troops have killed 89 Islamist militants during more than a week of urban battles but a final showdown is expected to be fierce as the gunmen protest their leaders and hold hostages, authorities said yesterday.

Attack helicopters fired rockets yesterday morning into parts of Marawi, a Muslim city in the south of the mainly Catholic Philippines, that were still controlled by the militants fighting under the black flag of the Islamic State (IS) group.

President Rodrigo Duterte declared martial law across the entire southern region of Mindanao in response to the crisis, which he described as the start of a major campaign by IS to establish a foothold in the Philippines.

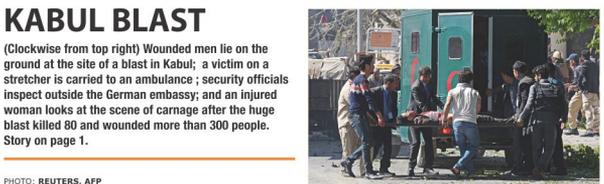
Eighty-nine militants had been killed in the fighting on the amount of territory in the city that the remaining gunmen controlled had been cut to less than 10 percent, military spokesman Brigadier-General Restituto Padilla said yesterday.

However Padilla warned of more intense battles ahead, with the military believing three of the militants' main leaders were likely still in the city.

"That 10 percent is most likely the area that is heavily guarded and defended by any armed men if they are protecting any individual of high value," Padilla said.

The militants are also holding an unknown number of civilians hostage, according to Padilla and other authorities. They initially took a priest and up to 14 other people hostage at the start of the crisis.

A video of the priest appeared on social media on Tuesday, in which he repeated the militants' demands to withdraw and said his captors were holding 240 people hostage.



## KABUL BLAST

(Clockwise from top right) Wounded men lie on the ground at the site of a blast in Kabul; a victim on a stretcher is carried to an ambulance; security officials inspect outside the German embassy; and an injured woman looks at the scene of carnage after the huge blast killed 80 and wounded more than 300 people. Story on page 1.

PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

### SRI LANKA FLOOD

## Foreign aid arrives as toll exceeds 200

AFP, Colombo

International aid arrived as Sri Lanka yesterday as the island's worst floods and landslides in well over a decade climbed to 202.

Foreign Minister Ravi Karunanayake said 16 countries had rushed relief supplies and medicine to assist more than 600,000 people driven from their homes following Friday's monsoon deluge.

"We also have a lot of enquiries from other countries and organisations wanting to know our immediate needs. We are moved by the spontaneous response," Karunanayake told reporters in Colombo. India and Pakistan also deployed medical teams on the ground in some of the worst-affected areas, he said.

The Disaster Management Centre confirmed the death toll rose to 202 after the discovery of more landslide victims yesterday, amid a deluge of mud in Sri Lanka's hard-hit southwest.

Another 96 people were listed as still missing.

As the floods receded in most areas, hundreds of volunteers have fanned out to begin cleaning drinking wells to bring fresh water to survivors, officials said.

Sri Lanka pledged yesterday to tighten construction laws, saying many landslide victims would have survived had their homes not been built on slopes.

The government will also prosecute anyone violating existing rules by building on landslide-prone slopes, said Disaster Management Minister Anura Kumara.

## N Korea prepares for new test

### Reports state media as US successfully tests ICBM defense system

AFP, Seoul

North Korea warned yesterday it was prepared to launch intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) at any time, as the US successfully tested a system designed to intercept them.

The fresh sabre-rattling from Pyongyang appeared to up the stakes as the Pentagon announced Tuesday it had intercepted a mock-up of an ICBM in a first-of-its-kind test.

"The success of the test is a watershed moment for the US military's effort to establish an effective - though limited - ground-based defence against ICBMs as the North ramps up its threats."

"We're prepared to test-fire ICBMs anywhere and anytime on orders from the supreme commander (Kim Jong-Un)," the Rodong Simnun paper said in the article entitled "No one can stop the nuclear power state, rockety master in the East".

The paper added: "The United States must know our declaration that we can turn the devils' den into ashes with

nuclear weapons is not an empty threat."

Concern among the international community over the North's weapons programme was further raised after North Korea test-fired yet another ballistic missile, the latest in a series of launches that have ratcheted up tensions over Pyongyang's quest to develop

### TENSIONS IN KOREAN PENINSULA



appeared to be its longest-range ballistic missile yet tested in a bid to bring the US mainland within reach.

The North has carried out two atomic tests and dozens of missile launches since the beginning of last year in its quest to develop a nuclear capable of delivering a missile warhead to the continental United States - something President Donald Trump has vowed 'won't happen'.

Pentagon spokesman Navy Captain Jeff Davis said Tuesday's trial was not timed specifically in response to tensions with Pyongyang but that "in a broad sense, North Korea is one of the reasons why we have this capability".

"They continue to conduct test launches, as we saw this weekend, while also using dangerous rhetoric that suggests they would strike the United States homeland," Davis said.

Riki Ellison, founder of the Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance, described the test as "vital" prior to launch.

"We are replicating our ability to defend the United States of America

### PALESTINIAN HARDSHIP

## UN blames Israeli rule in WB, Gaza

AFP, Jerusalem

Five years after Israel occupied the Palestinian territories, its policies in the West Bank and Gaza are at the root of Palestinian hardship, the United Nations said yesterday.

"Occupation policies and practices remain the key cause of humanitarian needs in the occupied Palestinian territories," the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in a report.

West Bank and Gaza residents suffer from a lack of basic security, it said, adding that the split between president Mahmoud Abbas's West Bank-based administration and the rival Islamist movement Hamas in Gaza also restricts humanitarian work.

"At its heart, the crisis is one of a lack of protection for Palestinian civilians - from violence, from displacement, from restrictions on access to services and livelihoods, and from other rights violations."

Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip during the 1967 Six-Day War.

OCHA's 15-page Humanitarian Overview for 2016 notes a sharp fall in foodshed over the year compared to 2015.

"Palestinian fatalities from conflict-related violence in the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel declined by 37 percent compared with 2015," it said.



GENERAL ELECTION

## Poll dive hits UK PM's Brexit hopes

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Theresa May was fighting to shore up her general election campaign yesterday after a shock projection forecast a hung parliament and left the pound wobbling.

The landslide Conservative victory may have hoped to seal by calling a snap election for June 8 seemed much less likely with eight days to go, with the polls narrowing and the premier putting in a lacklustre performance in a major television interview.

The opposition Labour party led by veteran socialist Jeremy Corbyn, has gradually nibbled away at the Conservative lead in the polls, with the campaign backfall swing after the Manchester terror attack.

May called the election three years early in a bid to strengthen her slender majority in parliament going into the Brexit talks.

The decision was made on the back of polls that at times put the Conservatives 20 points ahead and on course for an overwhelming victory.

But opinion polls have showed the gap between the Conservatives and Labour closing.

A shock new projection on the front page of The Times newspaper forecast a hung parliament in which the Conservatives would fall short of the 326 seats needed for a majority.

## 'Twiplomacy'

### Saudi king beats Trump in retweets

AFP, Geneva

Donald Trump may be lighting up Twitter with strange news and attacks on allies but in the battle for most attention per tweet the US president is losing.

The world leader whose original tweets generate the most retweets is Saudi Arabia's King Salman, according to the latest "Twiplomacy" study by communications firm Burson-Mattster.

In terms of output, there is no contest: the Saudi king only tweeted 10 times during the period covered by the study - April 2016 to May 20 of this year.

But those 10 tweets were each retweeted more than 147,000 times on average, dwarfing Trump's 13,100 average retweets per tweet, said the study, the sixth of its kind by Burson-Mattster.

Pope Francis is currently in the lead with a combined 33,716,301 followers, over his nine language accounts. Trump lags by about 3.5 million followers but his account has grown by 5.7 percent per month during the US election and start of his presidency, putting him on track to overtake the pontiff, the report said.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi stood in third place with 30,058,659 followers.



Scotland's first Minister Nicola Sturgeon and SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon shares her chips with school children outside a fish bar in Anstruther, Scotland, Britain, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Trump blasts Russia probe

### Urges testimony from former adviser Carter Page

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump sought to insert himself into congressional probe on Russia Tuesday, urging lawmakers to hear from one of his former advisers, Carter Page, to counter testimony by directors of the FBI and CIA.

Trump has been dismissive of probes by the FBI and several congressional panels into alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election and potential collusion by the Trump campaign.

In a series of morning tweets, the Republican president quoted a Monday letter from Page in which he asked to tamp down the scandal if the messages appear to address the investigations.

Page's letter was reported by the Washington Examiner. Reuters has not verified the contents of the letter. A House Intelligence Committee staffer said on Wednesday the panel does not make public its communications.



## Russia fires cruise missiles in Syria

AFP, Moscow

A Russian warship and submarine have fired cruise missiles at Islamic State group targets around Palmyra in Syria from the Mediterranean, Moscow said yesterday, the first such strikes announced in months.

The frigate Admiral Essen and submarine Krasnodar carried out four strikes against military hardware and fighters from the jihadist group who had left its de-facto capital Raqqa, the Russian military said in a statement.

"All the targets were hit," the statement said, without specifying when the strikes happened.

Moscow has, however, not announced any strikes from the sea in recent months as it focuses on pushing a fragile truce between the government and rebels. Islamic State is not included in the ceasefire.

Meanwhile, Turkey on Tuesday said the US arming of a Kurdish militia force deemed a terror group by Ankara was "extremely dangerous", and urged Washington to reverse its "mistake".

"The Pentagon on Tuesday said it had begun to transfer small arms and vehicles to the Kurdish elements of the Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish-Syrian Arab alliance fighting the Islamic State group and containing Kurdish Peoples' Protection Units (YPG) fighters. The weapons include AK-47s and small-caliber machine guns, Pentagon said.

## 'Did you slam your father?'

### Duterte slams Chelsea Clinton over rape criticism

AFP, Manila

Philippine leader Rodrigo Duterte yesterday angrily hit back at Chelsea Clinton for criticising remarks he made about rape, using vulgar language while referring to her father's infidelities as American president.

Duterte on Friday told soldiers they could rape up to three women, in a speech aimed at reassuring them of his full support as they enforced his newly imposed martial law on the south of the Philippines.

"Not funny, ever," wrote the daughter of ex-US president Bill Clinton and former secretary of state Hillary Clinton on her Twitter account.

In a second post with no regard for human rights, it's important to keep pointing that out & that rape is never a joke."

At the end of a long speech to naval officers and their families on Wednesday, Duterte said he was just being sarcastic as he took aim at people who criticised his rape remarks but particularly Clinton.

"These whores, they hear 'rape'. Like, like Chelsea, she slammed me. I was not joking. I was being sarcastic. Listen to the speech, I do not laugh at my own jokes," said Duterte, 72.

"I will tell her, when your father, the president of the United States, says '\*\*\*\*', I repeat, when president Clinton was in the White House, how did you white? Did you slam your father?"

Duterte was referring to Bill Clinton's acknowledged affair with a White House intern, Monica Lewinsky.

American soldiers of raping women in the Philippines and Japan, without giving details, before returning to Clinton.

"You Americans, like Chelsea, be careful because you live in a glass house," he said.

"I repeat, when president Clinton was \*\*\*\*\*, Lewinsky, what was your statement or your reaction?"

