

NEWSIN
brief

Trump, world leaders head into G20 summit
AFP, Berlin

US President Donald Trump meets other world leaders at Germany's G20 summit from Friday, with conflicts looming over climate, trade and other global issues both inside and outside the heavily fortified venue. Fears over nuclear-armed North Korea cast another long shadow over the gathering.

NY cop shot, killed in police vehicle
AFP, New York

A New York officer was shot and killed yesterday while sitting in a marked police vehicle in what authorities called an "unprovoked attack" shortly after US Independence Day festivities. There was no apparent motive for the killing at 12:30 am in an area of the Bronx that has been troubled by shootings.

Rohingya man killed in Buddhist mob attack
AFP, Yangon

A Rohingya Muslim was stoned to death and six others wounded by a mob of Buddhists in the capital of Myanmar's Rakhine state, authorities said yesterday. The western state is a hotbed of sectarian unrest, with frequent bouts of communal violence between ethnic Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims, a persecuted minority.

Abu Sayyaf group kills Vietnam sailors
AFP, Manila

Islamist militants have beheaded two Vietnamese sailors held hostage for eight months in the southern Philippines, the military said yesterday. Philippine troops found the remains of the two hostages early yesterday morning on the island of Basilan, a stronghold of the notorious Abu Sayyaf kidnap-for-ransom group.



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un reacts with scientists and technicians of the DPRK Academy of Defence Science after the test-launch of the intercontinental ballistic missile Hwasong-14 in this undated photo released by North Korea's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) in Pyongyang yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

US, S Korea send North Korea missile warning

AFP, Seoul

South Korea and the United States fired off missiles yesterday simulating a precision strike against North Korea's leadership, in response to a landmark ICBM test described by Kim Jong-Un as a gift to "American bastards".

Tuesday's launch -- acknowledged as an ICBM by Washington -- marked a milestone in Pyongyang's decades-long drive for the capability to threaten the US mainland with a nuclear strike, and poses a stark foreign policy challenge for Donald Trump.

The US president had vowed that "won't happen", but independent experts said it could reach Alaska or even further towards the continental US.

It will require a reassessment of the threat posed by the nuclear-armed North, which has carried out five atomic tests and said the multi-stage rocket's warhead could survive atmospheric re-entry to strike a target.

Yesterday, Trump lashed out at China, pointing to a surge in its trade with North Korea as evidence that US reliance on

Beijing to rein in Pyongyang was misplaced.

"Trade between China and North Korea grew almost 40% in the first quarter. So much for China working with us - but we had to give it a try!" Trump said in an early morning tweet.

Amid international condemnation of the test, South Korean and US military forces launched short-range ballistic missiles of their own less than 24 hours afterwards from the peninsula into the Sea of Japan.

Both weapons homed in on their target, the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said, "displaying the capability of a precision strike against the enemy headquarters in times of emergency".

The South's new President Moon Jae-In, who backs engagement with Pyongyang to bring it to the negotiating table, said the North's "serious provocation required us to react with more than just a statement".

US general Vincent Brooks, the Combined Forces commander in South Korea, said: "Self restraint, which is a choice, is all that separates armistice and war."

TRUMP LASHES OUT AT CHINA OVER ITS TRADE WITH PYONGYANG

KIM JONG-UN DESCRIBES ICBM TEST AS A GIFT TO 'AMERICAN BASTARDS'

Key powers thrash out Syria safe zones plan

AFP, Astana

Powerbrokers Russia, Iran and Turkey struggled yesterday to hammer out details on a plan for safe zones in Syria at a fifth round of peace talks in the Kazakh capital Astana.

Moscow and Tehran, which back Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and rebel supporter Ankara agreed in May to establish four "de-escalation" zones in a potential breakthrough towards calming a war that has claimed an estimated 320,000 lives since March 2011.

While fighting dropped off in the weeks after the deal, it has ratcheted up in some areas since, and the international players have yet to finalise the boundaries of the zones or determine who will police them.

In a bid to thrash out the details of the plan, participants were holding a string of closed-door meetings for a second day in Astana, with a joint session bringing

together all players, including representatives of the Syria regime and rebels, expected later yesterday.

Rebel representatives at the talks were tight-lipped about progress, with one delegation member telling AFP only that "bilateral discussions are ongoing".

But a source close to the Syrian rebel delegation told AFP that Turkey, Russia and Iran had "prepared seven documents to help implement a ceasefire in Syria and deploy ground forces in predetermined zones."

Meanwhile, US-backed fighters inched forwards in Raqqa's Old City against fierce resistance yesterday, after penetrating the heart of the Islamic State group's Syrian bastion, a spokesman and a monitor said.

The Syrian Democratic Forces -- an alliance of Kurdish and Arab fighters -- entered the historical quarter after air strikes by the US-led coalition punched two holes in its ramparts late on Monday.

ASTANA PEACE TALKS

Members prepare documents to help implement ceasefire

US-led forces face fierce IS resistance in Raqqa

300 IS fighters holed up in Iraq's Mosul

AP, Mosul

Some 300 Islamic State fighters remain in the small patch of territory still controlled by the group in Mosul's Old City, a senior Iraqi commander said yesterday.

Lt. Gen. Sami al-Aridi of Iraq's special forces told The Associated Press that the militants' hold on Mosul has shrunk to a 500 square meter (600 sq. yard) area. A large number of civilians are believed to be trapped in the IS-run enclave, with around 1,500 fleeing with every 100-meter (yard) advance by Iraqi forces.

Iraqi forces moved to besiege the Old City before launching their attack in order to prevent IS fighters from fleeing to neighboring Syria, but al-Aridi said hundreds of militants still managed to escape from the Old City alone.

"They just shave their beards and walk out," al-Aridi said. "Just yesterday we captured two among a group of women and children."

Late Tuesday, Iraq's Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi congratulated the armed forces on a "big victory" in Mosul, despite ongoing clashes. The prime minister declared an end to the extremist group's self-styled Islamic caliphate in June.

IS captured Mosul in a matter of days when it swept across northern and central Iraq in the summer of 2014. Iraqi forces backed by a US-led coalition launched a major operation to retake the city in October.

Huge Antarctic ice block poised to snap off

AFP, Paris

A chunk of ice bigger than the US state of Delaware is hanging by a thread from the West Antarctic ice shelf, satellite images revealed yesterday.

When it finally calves from the Larsen C ice shelf, one of the biggest icebergs in recorded history will be set adrift -- some 6,600 square kilometres (2,550 square miles) in total, according to the European Space Agency (ESA).

The iceberg's depth below sea level could be as much as 210 metres (almost 700 feet), or about 60 storeys, it said.

"The crack in the ice is now around 200 kilometres (125 miles) long, leaving just five kilometres between the end of the fissure and the ocean," the ESA said in a statement.

"Icebergs calve from Antarctica all the time, but because this one is particularly large its path across the ocean needs to be monitored as

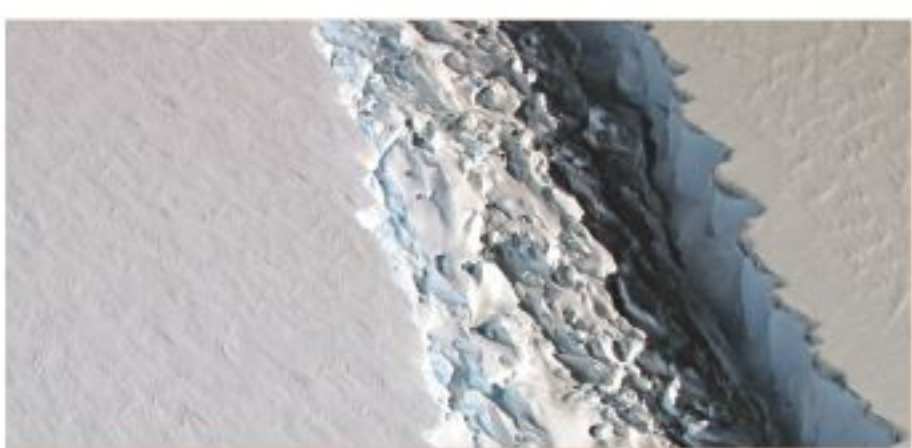
it could pose a hazard to maritime traffic."

Scientists tracking the berg's progression expect it to break off within months.

The Larsen C shelf will lose more than 10 percent of its total surface area.

The massive ice cube will float in water and by itself will not add to sea levels when it melts.

The real danger is from inland glaciers.



Ice shelves float on the sea, extending from the coast, and are fed by slow-flowing glaciers from the land. They act as giant brakes, preventing glaciers from flowing directly into the ocean.

If the glaciers held in check by Larsen C spilt into the Antarctic Ocean, it would lift the global water mark by about 10 centimetres (four inches), researchers have said.

The calving of ice shelves occurs naturally, though global warming is believed to have accelerated the process.

Sri Lanka vows autonomy for Tamil minority

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka yesterday vowed to grant greater autonomy to its Tamil minority in a new constitution after an influential Buddhist monk said the clergy opposed the plan.

President Maithripala Sirisena has said the new constitution will grant extensive autonomy to Tamils concentrated in the island's northern and eastern regions.

He has said he wants to prevent a repeat of a bloody separatist conflict that claimed 100,000 lives between 1972 and 2009.

On Tuesday the senior monk Anamaduwe Dhammadassi said the clergy opposed the plan, which would "create unnecessary problems".

But government spokesman Rajitha Senarathne said the national parliament would not roll back the process which began in April last year to draft a new statute that will be put to a referendum.

'Match made in heaven' Says Netanyahu as India-Israel sign 7 pacts

TOI, New Delhi

After calling India and Israel "sister democracies" on Tuesday, PM Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday described the burgeoning cooperation between the two countries as a match made in heaven.

"This is a marriage made in heaven, but we are implementing it here on earth," Netanyahu said, drawing a hearty laugh from PM Modi and a round of applause from the audience of mediapersons and diplomats.

The two leaders were addressing a joint press conference after holding discussions on an extensive menu of issues earlier in the day. India and Israel inked seven agreements in key sectors like space technology, agriculture and water conservation.

"Our talks focused on not just areas of bilateral opportunities but also how our cooperation can help the cause of global peace and stability," PM Modi said.

Netanyahu and Modi also testified their commitment to combat the forces of terrorism and radicalisation on a regional as well as global scale.

"India has suffered firsthand the violence

and hatred spread by terror, so has Israel. PM Netanyahu and I have agreed to do much more together to protect our strategic interests and also cooperate to fight growing radicalization," the Indian Prime Minister said.

The bonhomie between the two leaders was once again on full display, as they embraced each other and constantly referred to each other as "my friend". When PM Narendra Modi invited Netanyahu to visit India, the Israeli premier readily accepted.

Earlier, Modi has taken his love for word-and-alphabet-play to Israel and he described Indo-Israeli ties with the phrase "I for I".

Clearly, the PM didn't mean it in the traditional way the phrase 'eye for an eye' is used. He meant something quite different.

"I for I. Which means India for Israel and Israel for India," PM Modi said, when he called on Israeli President Reuven Rivlin yesterday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is on a three-day bilateral visit to Israel to celebrate 25 years of diplomatic relations and strengthen India's already close ties with the Jewish nation.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Population in Japan falls at fastest pace

REUTERS, Tokyo

Japan's population, excluding resident foreigners, fell at the beginning of this year at its fastest pace since comparable figures were kept in 1968, highlighting the demographic challenge to economic growth.

As of Jan 1, the number of Japanese people fell by a record 308,084 from a year earlier to 125,583,658, marking the eighth consecutive year of declines, government data showed yesterday.

The number of births fell 2.9 percent from the previous year ago to 981,202, the lowest since comparable data became available in 1974.

People aged 65 or older accounted for 27.2 percent of the total population, the highest ratio on record, while the ratio of those aged 14 or younger fell to a record low of 12.7 percent, the data showed.

The number of registered foreign residents increased to 2,323,428, up 6.9 percent from a year earlier, according to the data.

Japan has long been reluctant to open up to immigration. Many Japanese pride themselves on what they see as their cultural and ethnic homogeneity, even as the population ages and its workforce shrinks.

But recently, the government has been increasing its efforts to attract students and high-skilled workers from overseas.

The overall population, which combines both Japanese and resident foreigners, fell 0.1 percent from a year ago to 127,907,086, the data showed.

However, a latest report predicts that the number of people will fall below 100 million as early as 2053, while also highlighting how the average age of residents is steadily rising.

LONDON TOWER INFERNO

Final human remains recovered: police

AFP, London

British police yesterday said they had recovered the "last of the visible human remains" from the Grenfell Tower high rise building, where an inferno killed at least 80 people last month.

Metropolitan Police commander Stuart Cundy said officers had been "meticulously" sifting through 15.5 tonnes (17 tons) of debris by hand for human remains following the June 14 blaze.

Police have warned that some victims may have been so badly burnt in the tragedy that their remains may never be identified.

Government housing minister Alok Sharma announced that 139 of the 158 families identified by authorities as being left homeless by the tragedy had been offered rent-free temporary accommodation, but revealed that only 14 had so far accepted, with only three moving in.

All the families are currently in emergency accommodation, including hotels.

"I can confirm that every family that is ready to talk to the housing team has been offered a temporary home," Sharma said, explaining that 19 families were not yet "ready to engage" with authorities.

Sharma said that the "over 200 good quality properties" had been put aside in Grenfell's Kensington and Chelsea borough or in a neighbouring borough.