

# NEWS IN brief

## Floods in Thailand's northeast kill 23

Heavy rains have brought some of the worst floods in years to Thailand's rural northeast where 23 people have died over the past month, officials said yesterday. Flash floods have disrupted air travel, inundated rail tracks and swallowed farmland across the rice-farming region of Isaan, affecting more than one million Thais.

## J&K in lockdown after top militant's killing

Thousands of Indian police and troops enforced a lockdown in parts of Kashmir, fearing violent reprisals a day after a top militant commander and two civilians were killed in clashes in the disputed Himalayan territory. Residents in the old quarters of Srinagar, the main city in Indian-administered Kashmir, were ordered to stay indoors.

## Wray gets Senate nod for FBI top post

The US Senate overwhelmingly confirmed Christopher Wray, a criminal lawyer, as the new director of the FBI on Tuesday, three months after President Donald Trump fired his predecessor James Comey. Senators voted 92-5 to confirm him.

## \$10,000 for a drink!

Have you heard the one about the guy who walked into a bar and ordered a \$10,000 shot of whisky? A young Chinese man paid 9,999 Swiss francs (\$10,000, 8,733 euros) last week at a Swiss hotel for a glass of whisky made in 1878 by the revered Scotch maker Macallan, the 20Minuten website said. The report was confirmed by an employee of the luxury Waldhaus Hotel in St. Moritz, north-east Switzerland.



US troops assess the damage to an armoured vehicle of Nato-led military coalition after a suicide bomber's attack in Kandahar province, Afghanistan, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

## AFGHAN MOSQUE ATTACK

### Anger boils as death toll mounts to 33

IS claims responsibility AFP, Herat  
Thousands of Shia protesters chanted slogans against the Islamic State group yesterday as they carried the coffins of victims of a mosque attack that killed 33 people in the western Afghan city of Herat.

Up to 5,000 angry mourners, including relatives of the dead, congregated near the site of Tuesday's suicide bomb attack as IS claimed responsibility for the latest atrocity targeting the minority community. "Death to Daesh (IS)!" and "Down with fundamentalism", the demonstrators chanted, as the coffins were brought one by one and placed in a refrigerated lorry near the Jawadya mosque.

The mourners, who were set to march to the cemetery to bury their dead, also demanded that the government bring the perpetrators to justice and pledged to "take revenge" if it did not.

Jilani Farhad, a spokesman for the governor of Herat province, said the death toll from the attack, in which two suicide bombers throwing grenades stormed the packed mosque, had risen to 33. Another 66 were wounded.

In a statement yesterday, IS's propaganda outlet Amaq claimed it had killed "around 50 Shias" and wounded 80 more in the attack, which also left young children dead.

It came a day after IS claimed a deadly assault on the Iraqi embassy in Kabul as it extends its footprint in the war-torn country.

Underlining the nation's insecurity, a Taliban suicide bomber yesterday rammed a vehicle filled with explosives into a convoy of foreign forces in the restive southern province of Kandahar, causing an unspecified number of casualties.

"At around noon a car bomb targeted a convoy of foreign forces in the Daman area of Kandahar," provincial police spokesman Zia Durrani told AFP.

# We are not your enemy

### Tillerson tells N Korea, says US not seeking to topple regime

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson promised Tuesday that the United States is not trying to topple Kim Jong-Un's North Korean regime, but warned it must halt its nuclear missile program. Briefing reporters on diplomatic efforts to pressure Pyongyang, Tillerson said Washington would be willing to talk to the North if its leaders accept that they must disarm.

"We are not your enemy. We're not your threat, but you are presenting an unacceptable threat to us, and we have to respond."

US President Donald Trump has demanded that China, North Korea's neighbor and biggest trade partner, rein in its nuclear ambitions -- angrily tweeting over the weekend that Beijing

nuclear missile threat. Amid the tensions, the US military yesterday conducted a test of an unarmed intercontinental ballistic missile, officials said, just days after North Korea conducted its own ICBM launch.

The Minuteman III missile went up at 2:01am local California time, the Air Force Global Strike Command said. The ICBM arced into the night sky from Vandenberg Air Force Base in southern California and traveled approximately 4,200 miles to the Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands.

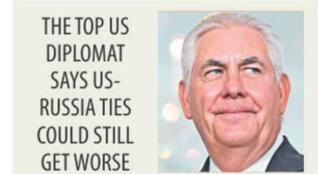
On Ties with Russia, Tillerson said he will meet with his Russian opposite number Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov over the weekend, but warned ties could still get worse.

Some in Moscow and Washington had hoped relations between the former Cold War foes might improve under US President Donald Trump, who has had warm words for President Vladimir Putin. But the great power rivals remain divided over Russia's intervention in Ukraine, US sanctions against Kremlin allies and Moscow's support for Bashar al-Assad's Syrian regime.

"We don't think having a dialogue where the North Koreans come to the table assuming they're going to maintain their nuclear weapons is productive," he warned. But he sought to reassure the isolated authoritarian regime that it does not need a nuclear arsenal to defend itself from a US attack.

"We do not see a regime change. We do not seek the collapse of the regime. We do not seek an accelerated reunification of the peninsula," he promised.

"We do not seek an excuse to send our military north of the 38th parallel. And we're trying to convey that to the North Koreans.



THE TOP US DIPLOMAT SAYS US-RUSSIA TIES COULD STILL GET WORSE

is not doing enough. Last week, Kim boasted that North Korea could now strike any target in the United States after carrying out its latest intercontinental ballistic missile test. Republican foreign policy hawk Senator Lindsey Graham said Trump is ready to launch a devastating military strike if diplomacy fails to stop the

# Pull back troops from Doklam

### China tells India over border stand-off

China yesterday said it has conveyed its firm stand to India that it must take "concrete actions" by immediately pulling back troops from Doklam in the Sikkim section with "no strings attached" to resolve the current standoff.

Providing the details of the July 28 meeting between National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and State Councillor Yang Jiechi for the first time, Chinese Foreign Ministry told PTI that the two officials exchanged views on BRICS cooperation, bilateral relations and relevant major problems.

Doval was in Beijing last month to attend the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) NSAs meeting.

Doval and Yang are also the Special Representatives of the boundary talks between the two nations. Yang held bilateral meeting with Doval "at his request and in accordance with the practice", the ministry said in a written reply to a question about the discussions relating to the standoff at Doklam which began when China started constructing a road in the area.

"Yang Jiechi expressed China's stern positions and explicit requirements on the trespass of Indian border troops into China's territory at the Sikkim section of China-India boundary," it said, indicating that there was no breakthrough during the talks between Doval and Yang.

India's position on the issue was made clear by External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj last month, saying both sides should first pull back their troops for any talks to take place.

# Gone in 8 months

### Earth's 2017 resource 'budget' spent

Humanity used up its allowance of planetary resources such as water, soil, and clean air for all of 2017 by yesterday, a report said.

Earth Overshoot Day will arrive on August 2 this year, according to environmental groups WWF and Global Footprint Network. This is a day earlier than in 2016.

It means humanity will be living on "credit" for the rest of the year. "By August 2, 2017, we will have used more from Nature than our planet can renew in the whole year," the groups said in a statement.

"This means that in seven months, we emitted more carbon than the oceans and forests can absorb in a year, we caught more fish, felled more trees, harvested more, and consumed more water than the Earth was able to produce in the same period."

The equivalent of 1.7 planets would be required to produce enough to meet humanity's needs at current consumption rates.

Calculated since 1986, the grim milestone has arrived earlier each year. In 1993, it fell on October 21, in 2003 on September 22, and in 2015 on August 13.

Greenhouse gas emissions from burning coal, oil and gas make up 60 percent of mankind's ecological "footprint" on the planet, said the groups.

# Netanyahu steps in to stop brawl of Israel, Jordan MPs

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had to step in yesterday to prevent tensions with Jordan spiralling into a brawl between two lawmakers who agreed to meet on the border.

Oren Hazan, from Netanyahu's Likud party, had accepted a challenge from Jordanian MP Yahya al-Saud to meet near the main crossing between the two countries on Wednesday morning, with fears of a fistfight.

Netanyahu's office said in a statement they had called Hazan "to order him not to go to the Allenby Crossing."

Hazan told military radio he approached the border but did not cross on Netanyahu's orders. "The Israeli MP is a coward, he retreated," Saud said according to a video published by Jordanian media. Saud had travelled to the border in anticipation of the meeting and

said he was "doing this for Jordanian people to express our anger."

Jordan is one of only two Arab states to have signed a formal peace treaty with Israel, but the neighbours have been involved in weeks of spats over new security measures installed at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem.

On July 23 Hazan tweeted that Israel protected Jordan's "asses" and the country needed "reeducation," apparently sparking a rebuke on Twitter.

Both MPs have long histories of controversy. Hazan was suspended in 2015 from his position as deputy speaker of Israel's parliament after a televised report accused him of involvement in pimping and drugs.

Saud meanwhile has physically fought with a number of parliamentary colleagues in recent years.



Oren Hazan



Yahya al-Saud



Motorists cover their faces as thick ashes blankets Tiga Pancur village in Karo, North Sumatra yesterday, after the Mount Sinabung volcano erupted. Sinabung roared back to life in 2010 for the first time in 400 years. PHOTO: AFP

# CIA killed first PM of Pakistan

### Reveals US state dept docs

The United States assassinated Pakistan's first PM, Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, more than sixty years ago, according to US State Department documents.

Quoting the declassified State Department documents, Pakistan Today reported on Friday that Khan was murdered because of his refusal to use his office for securing oil contracts in neighboring Iran for US corporations.

According to the report, Khan said he would neither use his friendship with officials in Tehran for dishonest purposes nor interfere in personal affairs of Iran.

In addition, Khan also called on Washington to vacate air bases in Pakistan



which US was using against the Soviet Union, upon which then-US President Harry S Truman threatened the PM with dire consequences.

According to the documents, following these developments, the CIA began to search for an assassin to kill Khan.

The Afghan government of King Mohammed Zahir Shah had finally found a man, named Syed Akbar, to take the task and also made arrangements for him to be killed.

Akbar fired two shots at Khan in Rawalpindi on October 16, 1951.

Khan was shot in the chest and rushed to a local hospital and given a blood transfusion, but the 56-year-old succumbed to his injuries. The assassin was also immediately shot dead.

# Global warming reduces protein in key crops

Rising carbon dioxide levels from global warming will drastically reduce the amount of protein in staple crops like rice and wheat, leaving vulnerable populations at risk of growth stunting and early death, experts warned yesterday.

Researchers say they still don't understand how or why carbon dioxide emissions sap protein and other nutrients from plants, but the mystery is one that could have devastating consequences across the globe.

An additional 150 million people globally may be at risk of protein deficiency by 2050 because of rising levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere said the report in the journal Environmental Research Letters.

# Venezuela 'fixed' vote turnout

The firm that has provided Venezuela's election technology for more than a decade cast doubt yesterday on the outcome of weekend polls for a new assembly, saying turnout figures were "manipulated".

"Based on the robustness of our system, we know, without any doubt, that the turnout of the recent election for a National Constituent Assembly was manipulated," Antonio Mugica, chief executive of Smartmatic, told reporters in London.

He added: "We estimate the difference between the actual participation and the one announced by authorities is at least one million votes."

The British company deplored the lack of participation in Sunday's electoral process by opposition parties, which did not provide auditors or send representatives to the Tabulation Center when the results report was issued.

It noted that political parties usually received printed copies of election returns of all polling stations, to allow them to compare these printed records against the results published later by the electoral commission.

AFP, Jerusalem

AFP, Miami

AFP, London