

NEWS IN brief

Britain says won't stay in EU via 'back door'

After weeks of feuding, two key figures in Britain's cabinet came together yesterday to say any post-Brexit transition would not be a "back door" to continued European Union membership. Finance minister Philip Hammond and International Trade Secretary Liam Fox have clashed over the UK's future outside the bloc.

Sr Afghan IS members killed in US air strike

Several senior Islamic State group members in Afghanistan have been killed in a United States air strike. Thursday's strike killed Abdul Rahman, who is claimed as a provincial leader in IS's Afghanistan branch. Rahman's death comes a month after US forces killed Abu Sayed, the head of IS-K, US official said.

Five killed in latest violence in Kashmir

Two soldiers and three rebels were killed in an overnight gunbattle in Kashmir, officials said yesterday, in the latest bloodshed in the disputed Himalayan territory. Hundreds of Indian soldiers surrounded Awnera on Saturday evening following a tip-off about armed militants in the area.

Kenya's defiant Odinga vows not to back down

Kenya's opposition leader Raila Odinga yesterday vowed not to back down over an election he claims was stolen from him and urged his supporters to boycott work until he announces this strategy next week. He also defiantly vowed to "remove" the government of President Uhuru Kenyatta.



People receive first-aid after a car ran into a crowd of protesters in Charlottesville, VA on Saturday. A picturesque Virginia city braced for a flood of white nationalist demonstrators as well as counter-protesters, declaring a local emergency as law enforcement attempted to quell early violent clashes. Inset, a man places flowers at a makeshift memorial for the victims of Saturday's attack.



AFTERMATH OF US SANCTIONS

Iran eyes more funds for missiles, Guards

Iran's parliament yesterday gave initial approval to a bill to boost spending on Tehran's missile programme and the elite Revolutionary Guards in retaliation for new sanctions imposed by the United States.

Lawmakers overwhelmingly approved the outlines of the bill to "counter America's terrorist and adventurist actions" as some chanted "Death to America", the state broadcaster IRIB reported.

The measure came in retaliation to legislation passed by US Congress and signed by US President Donald Trump in early August to impose new sanctions on Iran over its missile programme.

Iran denies its missile programme violates a UN resolution which endorsed Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers and calls upon the Islamic Republic not to conduct activities related to ballistic missiles designed to deliver nuclear weapons. Tehran says it does not design such missiles.

The Iranian plan would require Iran's government and armed forces to draw up a strategy to counter US violations of human rights around the world, and to support Iranian bodies and individuals affected by US sanctions.

The measure would also allocate over \$260 million each to Iran's ballistic missile programme and the Quds Force - the external arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which has been deployed to battlefields in Iraq and Syria.

MONSOON DISASTERS ACROSS NEPAL, INDIA

66 dead, dozens missing

Army called out for rescue ops in Assam, IAF put on standby

Monsoon floods and landslides have killed at least 66 people across Nepal and India but officials fear that figure could almost double as rescuers search for dozens believed lost under mud and in submerged villages.

Authorities yesterday upgraded the death toll from flash flooding across landlocked Nepal to 49 as the water kept rising, forcing thousands to flee for higher ground.

"Another 17 are missing. Search and rescue works are underway but the water levels have not declined yet," said Shankar Hari Acharya, the chief of Nepal's national emergency centre.

The Red Cross estimated a higher death toll of 53, with dozens more missing and injured and thousands of homes destroyed.

In neighbouring India, rescuers were desperately trying to reach two packed buses swept into a gorge by a landslide so powerful it destroyed an entire stretch of highway.

The coaches had stopped for a tea break around midnight Saturday in Himachal Pradesh when tonnes of rock and mud cascaded down a mountainside.

Seventeen bodies have been recovered from the accident site in the Himalayan state, said Sandeep Kadam, a senior

official at the scene. But dozens were still missing somewhere at the bottom of the ravine, with soldiers and rescuers clawing through the mud and rock to reach them.

"Around 200 metres of national highway washed away with two buses and more than 50 feared buried," said Indian army spokesman Colonel Aman Anand, who was helping coordinate rescue efforts.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended his condolences and prayers for those affected by the accident.

Meanwhile, army has been called out to rescue marooned people and IAF has been put on standby as Assam reels under one of the worst flood fury, reported TNN.

In Nepal the toll from this year's monsoon -- which typically lasts from late June until the end of August -- has already eclipsed last year, with more than 100 people confirmed dead.

Last weekend in the central lowlands, four girls from the same family drowned when they fell into a flooded roadside ditch.

Nepal's weather department warned that heavy rain was expected to continue for another day, following days of torrential downpours.



Enough evidence found to convict Syria's Assad

Says top member of UN Commission of Inquiry

REUTERS, Vienna

The UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria has gathered enough evidence for President Bashar al-Assad to be convicted of war crimes, a prominent member of the commission, Carla del Ponte, said in remarks published yesterday.

Del Ponte, 70, who prosecuted war crimes in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia, announced last week that she was stepping down from her role in frustration at the UN Security Council's failure to continue the commission's work by setting up a special tribunal for Syria that could try alleged war criminals.

She has not said when she will leave her post.

Asked in an interview with Swiss newspaper SonntagsZeitung whether there was enough evidence for Assad to be convicted of war crimes, she said: "Yes, I am convinced that is the case. That is why the situation is so frustrating. The preparatory work has been done. Despite that, there is no prosecutor and no court."

The Syrian government led by Assad denies reports by the commission documenting widespread war crimes committed

by government-backed forces and Syria's security services.

Del Ponte, a former Swiss attorney general, joined the three-member Syria inquiry in September 2012, chronicling incidents such as chemical weapons attacks, a genocide against Iraq's Yazidi population, siege tactics, and the bombing of aid convoys.

The commission was set up in August 2011 and has regularly reported on human rights violations, but its pleas to observe international law have largely fallen on deaf ears.

Although the United Nations is setting up a new body to prepare prosecutions, there is no sign of any court being established to try war crimes committed in the six-and-a-half year-old war. Nor is there any intention by the UN Security Council to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court in the Hague.

"For six years, the commission has investigated. Now a prosecutor should continue our work and bring the war criminals before a special court. But that is exactly what Russia is blocking with its veto in the UN Security Council," del Ponte was quoted as saying.



Tension flares in Rakhine

Hundreds of Buddhists protest against aid agencies for their alleged support to Muslim Rohingya militants

REUTERS, Yangon

Hundreds of Buddhists took to the streets in western Myanmar yesterday to protest against aid organisations they accuse of giving support to Muslim Rohingya militants, police and a protest leader said.

Buddhist monks and members of the Rakhine ethnic group held demonstrations in 15 towns, including the Rakhine state capital of Sittwe, demanding that aid agencies leave the western state immediately.

Htay Aung, a self-described leader of the protests, told Reuters by phone. "We will protest again and again until we get our demands. If the government fails to act, that is their responsibility," he said.

Tensions have risen once again in Rakhine since seven Buddhists were found hacked to death in the mountains in the north of the state in July. The government said it had discovered forest encampments that proved Muslim "extremists" were responsible for the killings, and the military sent additional forces to the area this week. At one suspected militant camp last month, biscuits originating from the United Nations' World Food Programme were discovered. Ethnic Rakhine Buddhists have long accused UN and other aid organisations of favouring the Rohingya with aid. The state was plunged into violence in October, when Rohingya insurgents killed nine border police, sparking a crackdown in which government security forces were accused of raping, killing and torturing Rohingya civilians. About 1.1 million Rohingya Muslims live in Rakhine, but are denied citizenship and face restrictions on their movements.



Opposition activists hold a protest in Caracas on Saturday, within tensions that have been flaring up for the past four months and which have left nearly 130 people killed in clashes between protesters and security forces. US President Donald Trump's "reckless threat" of possible military force against Venezuela has the goal of bringing conflict to Latin America, the South American country's foreign minister said.

White house plotters seek Trump exit

Says Scaramucci

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Donald Trump's former communications director has said there are people in Washington trying to topple the President.

Anthony Scaramucci, who was sacked last month after just 10 days on the job, said there are "elements" within the White House trying to "eject" Trump.

"What happens in Washington... is the President is not a representative of the political establishment class, so for whatever reason the people have made a decision that they want to eject him," Scaramucci told ABC.

"I think there are elements inside of Washington, also inclusive in the White House, that are not necessarily abetting the President's interests

No Arab winner in Gulf crisis

NOOR MOHAMMED

A Saudi-led coalition, including Egypt, the UAE and Bahrain, and several more countries, cut all ties to Qatar in June over allegations that the country funds "terrorism" - an accusation that Qatar denies.

Qatar has been accused of supporting IS, al-Qaeda, and the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as Shia rebels in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain triggering Riyadh and its allies closing its borders with Doha and imposing land, sea, and air embargo with its tiny but rich neighbor.

Political experts believe the rupturing of diplomatic relations between the conflicting parties is an outcome of the long-simmering dispute about their country's distinctive approach to regional affairs.

In a similar move in 2014 Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE cut ties with Qatar, withdrawing their ambassadors from the country over a period of nine months. But this latest standoff has gone evidently further; this time it also includes trade sanctions. Given that Qatar's has only land border with Saudi Arabia, the block-

ade would be strenuous even for a country that has the highest per capita income in the world. Analysts estimate that at least 40 percent of all of Qatar's food supplies are transported across its sole land border with Saudi Arabia. The emirate is the world's largest producer and exporter of liquefied natural gas, but the wealthy emirate



also relies heavily on imports for food staples and raw materials. But analysts say sooner Qatar is expected to find an alternative supplier from the regions or elsewhere but it will be hard for Saudi to find a substitute importer of huge volume goods in years. Moreover, neither of the Qatar's top export nor import products ferry through any of its neighboring

territory. Similarly Qatar's top import or export partners are also none from the Gulf region. Therefore land, air and seaport closure for Qatar is not expected to have a lasting impact on Qatar or its economy. On the contrary, Qatar, which hosts the largest US military base in the region, plays a significant role in regional and international politics. Its mediation succeeded bringing the peace and stability in Sudan, forcing the Darfur government and rebel groups return to the peace process. Since 2013, Hamas and Fatah, the two disputed Palestine groups, are negotiating peace talks in Doha. Moreover, Qatar's contribution to the Afghanistan peace process is undeniable.

Threatened by a resurgent Iran and as custodians of the two holy shrines of Islam, Saudi Arabia expects to be the major power in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) and expects others to fall in line behind the Saudi position. The decision of Saudi Arabia and other nations to cut ties with Qatar was probably motivated largely by the desire to reaffirm Saudi's hegemony in

the region and keep Qatar, which is accused of perusing an independent foreign policy agenda, in line. Some have pointed to President Donald Trump's recent trip to Saudi Arabia as the cause of this most recent break in relations among the Arab and Muslim neighbours.

During the trip, Trump urged leaders of more than 50 Muslim countries to stand up against what he calls "Islamic extremism" and signed a nearly \$110 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia, the biggest in history. Trump apparent move to take credit for the decision of Gulf nations to cut diplomatic ties with Qatar should be an eye-opener to GCC countries to understand who the real player of the game. It would be wise for the conflicting parties to sit around the table and resolve their outstanding issues before it is too late. As far as common wisdom says, the Gulf crisis has no Arab winners. And only time can tell us who will be the real victims.

The writer is General Secretary at Bangladesh Writer Journalist Association, Qatar.

N KOREA TENSION

Guam residents pray for peace

AFP, Hagatna

The Catholic faithful in Guam led prayers for peace yesterday in the shadow of North Korean missile threat, with the western Pacific island's archbishop appealing for "prudence" amid an escalating war of words between the US and Pyongyang.

The largely Catholic territory should pray for a "just resolution of differences, and prudence in both speech and action", said Archbishop Michael Byrnes, echoing a flurry of international calls for US President Donald Trump to show greater rhetorical restraint.

A "prayers for peace" lunchtime rally in the capital Hagatna drew around 100 people. But despite Guam having become the centre of a threatened showdown between the United States and nuclear-armed North Korea, many said they were unfazed. "I am really not scared because if it's our time to die it is our time to die," added Sita Manjaras, 62, a retired teacher from Tamuning.

Father Mike Crisostomo said their response to the threat was to have faith and pray. "This goes to show to the other worlds, to the other nations and the countries, that Guam maybe small, our faith and our trust is big," he said.

Dora Salazar, 82, who made the 14 kilometre (nine mile) journey from the village of Mangilao for the peace rally, said she was praying for the North's leader Kim Jong-Un.



or his agenda." When asked to identify the individuals, he said he had already "named some names".

He added that Trump needed to bring in "more loyalists" to carry out his agenda. During his brief time working for the President, Scaramucci turned the White House upside down. His hiring led to the departures of both Sean Spicer and Reince Priebus, Trump's former press secretary and chief of staff, respectively.

Scaramucci told a New Yorker reporter that Scibus was a "paranoid schizophrenic, a paranoid" and accused him of leaking information to journalists.