

# NEWS IN brief

### Saudi, Iraq to re-open border after 27 years

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia and Iraq plan to open the Arar border crossing for trade for the first time since 1990, when it was closed after the countries cut ties following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. Saudi local media reported yesterday. The announcement follows a decision by the Saudi cabinet on Monday to establish a joint trade commission with Iraq.

### Uber forced to halt services in Philippines

AFP, Manila

Uber was forced to suspend operations in the Philippines yesterday, after the ride-sharing giant's efforts to appeal a one-month ban were quashed. Transport authorities announced the firm of failing to have the proper permits to license its drivers.

### Thai student leader jailed for lese majeste

AFP, Bangkok

A prominent student leader was jailed yesterday after he pleaded guilty to defaming Thailand's royal family by posting a news story about the kingdom's new monarch on Facebook. Jatupat "Jai Dao Din" Boonpatararaksa, 25, had been held in custody since his arrest in December for slating a profile of King Maha Vajiralongkorn written by the BBC's Thai-language service in London.

### Lanka names new foreign minister

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka named a veteran government lawyer as foreign minister yesterday after the island's top diplomat stood down amid a corruption scandal. Tilak Marapana was assigned the ministry that day. Marapana had previously served as foreign minister under Ravi Karunanayake resigned under a cloud of controversy.



Bystanders look on as floodwaters rage past a damaged building in an area of Freetown, capital Sierra Leone on Monday. Inset, Rescue officials inspect a landslide site yesterday. Sierra Leone's president yesterday appealed for urgent help for the photo-hit village where more than 300 people have died in landslides, as rescue workers resumed the grim search for bodies. PHOTO: AFP



FLOODING ACROSS SOUTH ASIA

## 221 dead, 1.5m displaced

At least 221 people have died and more than 1.5 million have been displaced by monsoon flooding across India, Nepal and Bangladesh, officials said yesterday, as rescuers scoured submerged villages for the missing.

In Nepal, severe flooding has left tens of thousands of homes totally underwater in the populous southern lowlands, with nearly 20 percent of the population affected.

"As per the data we have received so far, 111 have been killed, 35 are still missing and a search operation is underway," Home Minister Janardan Sharma told parliament yesterday.

A third of neighbouring Bangladesh is flooded, with at least 29 dead as relentless monsoon rains pelted the densely-populated riverine country.

Another 1.5 million people have been marooned," Reaz Ahmed, head of Bangladesh's disaster management department told AFP.

Almost 1,200 shelters have been erected across Bangladesh, while the army has been deployed to reinforce weakened river embankments and to assist with search and rescue operations.

India has also suffered from torrential downpours and flash flooding, worsening a monsoon that has already claimed lives.

At least 81 people have died in the eastern states of Bihar and West Bengal, and northeastern Assam state, over the last few days, a government official told AFP yesterday.

Train services have been cut entirely to the northeast, and at least 200,000 people are living in emergency camps in Assam, a remote state that suffers frequent flooding during the annual rains.

In Nepal, residents in hard-hit Saptari district blamed the government for failing to solve the seasonal floods and quickly send aid to those in need.

"Many have lost their homes. Families don't have food or shelter. We are just helping each other," said local resident Pankaj Mishra.

Kathmandu will be criticised for enacting a "one-door" policy requiring all aid for flood victims to flow through a government-run central disaster agency.

## India can defend itself

### Says Modi in 1-Day speech, urges people to reject religious violence

India is strong enough to defend its borders against any threat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in an Independence Day speech as the nation faces a frontier showdown with China and aggravated tensions with Pakistan.

"Security is our top priority," Modi told thousands packed into the landmark Red Fort in New Delhi yesterday as India marked the 70th anniversary of the end of British colonial rule.

"Be it the sea or the borders, cyber or space -- in all spheres, India is capable and we are strong enough to overcome those who try to act against our country," the Hindu nationalist leader declared.

Modi, who wore a Rajasthani turban with a long flowing orange train, toned down his comments from three previous Independence Day speeches and did not mention the targets of his warning, reported AFP.

Modi, who said he spoke with US President Donald Trump on the eve of the speech, said: "The concern for national security is a natural one in an independent India."

"Our security forces have always shown their capabilities whenever you do. Whether it is terrorism or infiltrators, our security personnel have always been ready for sacrifice."

India carried out what it called "surgical strikes" in Pakistan in September last year after insurgents attacked an army base on the Indian side of the Kashmir border, killing 18 soldiers.

"When the surgical strike was carried out, the world came to know about the power that India possesses," Modi said in his speech.

He added that "bullets and abuses" cannot bring peace in Kashmir -- where there are an estimated 500,000 Indian troops -- but also accused Kashmir separatists of "scheming."

"What was needed, he said, were 'hugs' for Kashmiris.

Modi urged India to reject religious violence, after a series of attacks against minorities sparked debate about whether a surge of Hindu nationalism is undermining the country's secular ideals.

"We will not tolerate violence in the name of faith," he said.

At the Red Fort, he also spoke at length about delivering a "new India by 2022, listing his government's achievements, including a fight against corruption, reported Reuters.

Strong growth and economic reforms have bolstered Modi's popularity and helped his party sweep state elections in recent years, leaving the opposition severely weakened.



PM says troubled Kashmir needs hugs as 'bullets and abuses' cannot bring peace. Speaks about delivering a new India by 2022, listing his gov't's achievements

## Iran can scrap nuke deal with powers in 'hours'

### Rouhani to quit deal if US imposes new sanctions

The development of a ballistic missile programme after Tehran launched a rocket capable of putting a satellite into orbit.

In early August, US President Donald Trump signed into law new sanctions on Iran, Russia and North Korea passed by the US Congress. The sanctions in that bill also target Iran's missile programmes as well as human rights abuses.

Iran denies its missile development breaches the resolution, saying its missiles are not designed to carry nuclear weapons.

"The world has clearly seen that under Trump, America has ignored international agreements and, in addition to undermining the (nuclear deal), has broken its word on the Paris agreement and the Cuba accord...and that the United States is not a good partner or a reliable negotiator," Rouhani said.

Trump said last week he did not believe that Iran was living up to the spirit of the nuclear deal.



Iran could abandon its nuclear agreement with world powers "within hours" if the United States imposes any more new sanctions, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday.

"If America wants to go back to the experience (of imposing sanctions), we will certainly return in a short time -- not a week or a month but within hours -- to conditions more advanced than before the start of negotiations," Rouhani told a session of parliament broadcast live on state television.

Iran says new sanctions that the United States has imposed on it breach the agreement it reached in 2015 with the United States, Russia, China and three European powers in which it agreed to curb its nuclear work in return for the lifting of most sanctions.

The US Treasury imposed sanctions on six Iranian firms in late July for their role in



A woman is arrested by police near Trump Tower on Monday during a protest against US President Donald Trump August in New York. Trump visited Trump Tower for the first time since his inauguration. Protesters protested against surge of white supremacy and hatred across US and against Trump's handling of North Korea crisis. PHOTO: AFP

## 'He's a fascist'

### Trump retweets wrong tweet

President Donald Trump likes to tweet early in the morning -- often while watching television. But on Tuesday, he may have hit the button a bit too quickly.

From Trump Tower in New York, where he is spending a few days, the Republican leader retweeted a message from a man who called him a "fascist." It took him about 20 minutes to delete it.

The man was replying to a Fox News tweet about the possibility that Trump could issue a pardon to Joe Arpaio, the former Arizona sheriff who has courted controversy -- and earned a conviction -- over his tough stance on immigrants.

"He's a fascist, so not unusual," tweeted Mike Holden, referring to the 43rd president.

Not long after, Trump retweeted the message to his more than 35 million followers.

"I'm announcing my retirement from Twitter. I'll never top this RT," Holden wrote later on.

He then added this ironic description to his Twitter post: "Officially Endorsed by the President of the United States. I wish that were a good thing."

The mistep came at a delicate moment for the American president, who has been criticised for his initial failure to explicitly condemn a weekend rally by white supremacists in Virginia that ended in bloodshed.

## Ousted Pak PM seeks review of court ruling

### Review of court ruling

Ousted Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif yesterday sought a review of a Supreme Court decision that disqualified him from office over undeclared assets, an official from his ruling party said.

Sharif, 67, resigned during his third stint as prime minister shortly after the Supreme Court ruled on July 28 that he should be disqualified and ordered a criminal probe into his family's wealth.

Jan Achakzai, a PML-N official, told Reuters Sharif had filed three separate appeals in the Supreme Court.

"It is our right to seek a review," he said. "People of Pakistan haven't accepted the decision."

Achakzai said the same five-judge panel that decided on the disqualification would likely hear the review petitions.

Sharif's disqualification stems from the Panama Papers leaks in 2016 which appeared to show that Sharif's daughter and two sons owned offshore holding companies registered in the British Virgin Islands and used them to buy properties in London.

In April, the SC ruled that there was insufficient evidence to remove Sharif from office -- by a split 2-3 verdict -- over the Panama revelations but it ordered further investigations into his family's wealth.

The judges in July alleged Sharif did not declare a small source of income that the veteran leader disputes receiving.

Achakzai said the appeals sought a review of the disqualification on the basis that two of the five judges, who had already given a dissenting note in April's verdict, were not supposed to sit on the panel that gave the final ruling.

Sharif has kept a grip on the ruling PML-N party, which has a solid majority in parliament and elected one of his loyalists, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, as his replacement within days of the court decision.



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## TRUMP'S THREAT TO VENEZUELA

### Maduro calls for military exercises

Venezuela leader Nicolas Maduro ordered the army to conduct a round of military drills later this month in response to US President Donald Trump's threat of military action in the crisis-stricken nation.

Maduro's embattled government -- facing a deepening economic emergency and swelling street protests -- has seized on Trump's apparent threat, which has been roundly condemned even by Latin American states opposed to the socialist president.

Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino called Trump's comments "crazy," saying it showed America had "dropped its mask." In terms of wanting to attack his country.

Maduro told a crowd of supporters in Caracas on Monday that he had organised a round of military drills for August 26-27 in response. "I have given the order to the armed forces' joint chiefs of staff to start preparations for a national civil-military exercise for the integrated armed defense of the Venezuelan nation," he said.

Trump said on Friday that the US was mulling a range of options against Venezuela, "including a possible military option if necessary." His words have bolstered Caracas's oft-repeated claim that Washington has designs to grab control of its proven oil reserves, the largest in the world.

## Grace Mugabe turns self in to S Africa police

### ASSAULT OF MODEL

Zimbabwe's first lady Grace Mugabe handed herself over to South African police and was due in court yesterday, officials said, after allegedly assaulting a model who was at a Johannesburg hotel with her two sons.

During the incident, which occurred on Sunday, Mugabe, 52, allegedly attacked Gabriella Engels, 20, with an extension cord, leaving her with wounds on her forehead and the back of her head.

"She's not under arrest because she cooperated and handed herself over to the police," a South African Police Minister Fikile Mkhutshwa told reporters.

"From the police side, we have had to act in the interests of the victim, we have opened a case."

Pictures on social media appeared to show Engels with a bleeding head injury after the alleged incident in Capetown. She was seen in the market area of Johannesburg's Sandton district.

Mugabe allegedly arrived with bodyguards and accused Engels of parrying with her sons Robert and Chatsungu, both in their 20s, who are based in the South African city.

Mugabe, who is 41 years younger than her husband Robert, has two African one daughter with the Zimbabwean president.

Grace Mugabe regularly speaks at rallies in Zimbabwe and is seen as one potential successor to take over from her increasingly frail husband.



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