



The Royal Navy's new aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, arrives for the first time at its home port of Portsmouth, Britain, yesterday. HMS Queen Elizabeth is the largest warship ever built for the Royal Navy, according to the Ministry of Defence.

**SIERRA LEONE MUDSLIDE, FLOODS**

## Fears grow for 600 missing

AFP, Freetown

Concerns shifted yesterday to the estimated 600 people still missing and thousands made homeless in Sierra Leone by deadly floods in the capital, as it emerged that at least a third of those killed were children.

The United Nations said Tuesday that it was evaluating humanitarian needs in Sierra Leone, while the first Israeli aid packages were sent and Britain pledged its support.

Officials at Freetown's central morgue said 105 of the more than 300 officially dead were children, and burials began on Tuesday for some of the bodies too mutilated to identify. An independent but unofficial morgue estimate put the toll at 400 dead.

President Ernest Bai Koroma fought back tears on Tuesday as he visited the devastated hilltop community of Regent, saying the scale of the challenge ahead was "overwhelming us".

"Entire communities have been wiped out," Koroma said. "We need urgent support now."

The government of Sierra Leone, one of the poorest countries in the world, has promised relief to what the Red Cross says is more than 3,000 people left homeless, opening an emergency response centre in Regent and registration centres to count those left on the streets.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in New York that the UN country team was "supporting national authorities in rescue operations, helping evacuate residents, providing medical assistance to the injured, registering survivors, and providing food rations, water and dignity kits to those affected."

## 'Blame on both sides'

### Trump under cross-party fire over Charlottesville comment

AFP, New York

US President Donald Trump sparked another political firestorm Tuesday when he doubled down on his initial response to the violent white supremacist rally in Charlottesville that ended in bloodshed, saying there was "blame on both sides."

The Republican president -- who one day ago solemnly denounced racism and singled out the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis as "criminals and thugs" -- also hit out at what he called the "alt-left" over the weekend melee.

Trump has faced days of criticism from across the political spectrum over his reaction to Saturday's unrest in the Virginia college town, where a rally by neo-Nazis and white supremacists over the removal of a Confederate statue erupted in clashes with counter-demonstrators.

The violent fracas ended in bloodshed when a 20-year-old suspected Nazi sympathizer, James Fields, plowed his car into a crowd of anti-racism protesters, leaving one woman dead and 19 others injured.

"I think there is blame on both sides," Trump said in a rowdy exchange with journalists at Trump Tower in New York.

"You had a group on one side that was bad, and you had a group on the other side that was also very violent. And nobody wants to say that, but I'll



say it right now. ... There are two sides to a story," Trump continued.

Trump's fellow Republicans were quick to distance themselves from his remarks.

"We must be clear. White supremacy is repulsive," Republican House Speaker Paul Ryan wrote on Twitter. "This bigotry is counter to all this country stands for. There can be no moral ambiguity."

Former US leaders George HW Bush

and George W Bush also issued a tough joint statement condemning racial bigotry and anti-Semitism, in a veiled rebuke of Trump.

In a statement issued from Kennebunkport, Maine, where they have a family home, the father-son former presidents said "America must always reject racial bigotry, anti-Semitism, and hatred in all forms."

The joint statement did not mention Trump by name.

And the condemnations also spilled beyond the political realm.

NBA superstar LeBron James tweeted: "Hate has always existed in America. Yes we know that but Donald Trump just made it fashionable again!"

Even the US military command, which usually stays out of the political fray, condemned the violence.

General Mark Milley, who is chief of staff of the Army, took to Twitter yesterday to reinforce his service's values.

"The Army doesn't tolerate racism, extremism, or hatred in our ranks. It's against our Values and everything we've stood for since 1775," Milley wrote.

## Trump praises 'wise' Kim

### Says decision to halt Guam strike averted catastrophe

REUTERS, Beijing

US President Donald Trump yesterday praised North Korean leader Kim Jong Un for a "wise" decision not to fire missiles towards the US territory of Guam, which has eased escalating tension between the two countries.

Reclusive North Korea has made no secret of its plan to develop a missile capable of firing a nuclear warhead at the United States to counter what it perceives as constant US threats of invasion.

Trump warned North Korea last week it would face "fire and fury" if it threatened the United States, prompting North Korea to say it was considering plans to fire missiles towards the Pacific island of Guam.

But North Korean media reported on Tuesday Kim had delayed the decision while he awaited to see what the US did next.

"Kim Jong Un of North Korea made a very wise and well reasoned decision," Trump wrote on Twitter.

"The alternative would have been both catastrophic and unacceptable!"

North Korea's threat to fire towards Guam had prompted Trump to say earlier that the US military was "locked and loaded" if North Korea acted unwisely.

The United States has been hoping China can press the North to rein in its weapons programmes. The top US general reiterated that in talks in Beijing this week.

Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Joseph Dunford told Fang Fenghui, chief of

the Joint Staff Department of the People's Liberation Army, in Beijing that North Korea's weapons programmes threatened the entire international community.

Meanwhile, some 300 Japanese and US military personnel yesterday carried out live-fire artillery training in northern Japan, officials said, amid high regional tensions over North Korean missile threats.

China has repeatedly called for all sides to exercise restraint and remain calm. It says the key to a resolution lies in Washington and Pyongyang talking to each other, rather than expecting China to do all the work.



## Duterte urges more as cops kill 32 in raids

AFP, Manila

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday urged police to kill dozens of drug suspects every day, as he praised officers who shot dead 32 people this week in "shock and awe" raids.

Duterte's incendiary comments came as he acknowledged major problems in his drug war, which has claimed thousands of lives, admitting he could not win it as quickly as promised and lamenting a corrupt police force.

In one of the deadliest operations of the war, police reported killing 32 people in raids on Monday on suspected drug traffickers in Bulacan province.

"The ones who died recently in Bulacan, 32, in a massive raid, that was good," Duterte said in a speech to an anti-crime organisation that has backed the drug war. "If we could kill another 32 everyday, then maybe we can reduce what ails this country."

Earlier in the day Bulacan police chief Romeo Caramat held a press conference in Manila to publicise the raids, in which 109 suspects were also arrested.

"We wanted to shock and awe these drug personalities," Caramat said. "Other drug personalities will think twice before continuing with their drug trade."

Police have killed 3,450 people in similar drug raids since Duterte came to office in the middle of last year, according to government data. More than 2,000 other people have been killed in drug-related crimes and thousands more murdered in unexplained circumstances, according to police data.

## NEWS IN brief

### Russia slams US's Venezuela threat

AFP, Moscow

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov yesterday called any threats against crisis-hit Venezuela "unacceptable", following a warning by US President Donald Trump of possible military action. Argentine President Mauricio Macri also said Tuesday that using force was "not the way" as he met with US Vice President Mike Pence, who is on a tour of the region.

### Odinga to knock SC over polls result

REUTERS, Nairobi

Kenya opposition leader Raila Odinga yesterday said he would go to court over last week's presidential election results, ignoring calls by some election observers that he concede defeat to President Uhuru Kenyatta. Around 24 people have died in violence since the Aug 8 election and Odinga's decision will likely ease concerns that he would call for demonstrations that might trigger further violence.

### Palestinian attacker's home demolished

AFP, Kobar

Israeli forces yesterday demolished the home of a Palestinian who fatally stabbed three Israelis in a nearby settlement as tensions soared last month over Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound. Israel regularly demolishes the homes of Palestinian attackers, calling it a deterrent against future violence. However, human rights groups say it amounts to collective punishment, with family members forced to suffer for the acts of relatives.

## Nigeria suicide blasts kill 28

82 injured; Boko Haram suspected

REUTERS, Maiduguri

A woman suicide bomber blew herself up and killed 28 others at a market in northeast Nigeria on Tuesday, two local officials said, in an attack bearing the hallmark of Boko Haram militants.

Two more suicide bombers detonated their devices at the gates to a nearby refugee camp, wounding many people, an emergency services official said.

In all, 82 people were wounded in the three explosions near the city of Maiduguri, epicentre of the long-running conflict between government forces and Boko Haram.

Nigeria's military last year wrested back large swathes of territory from the Islamist insurgents. But they have struck back with renewed zeal since June, killing at least 143 people before Tuesday's bombings and weakening the army's control.

The group has waged an eight-year war to create an Islamic state in northeast Nigeria, and provoked international outrage by kidnapping more than 200 schoolgirls known as the Chibok Girls in April 2014.

Its better-known faction, led by Abubakar Shekau, has mainly based itself in the sprawling Sambisa forest, and been characterised by its use of women and children as suicide bombers targeting mosques and markets.

Last month, an oil prospecting team was captured by al-Barnawi's group. At least 37 people died when rescuers from the military and vigilantes attempted to free them.



A firefighting helicopter drops water on a fire burning east of the Greek capital Athens, on Tuesday. The army was called in to assist firefighters around Kalamos, 45 kilometres east of Athens, where a fire has been burning since August 13. In all, 146 fires have broken out across Greece since then according to authorities.

PHOTO: AFP

## Turkey says Iraqi Kurdish referendum risks 'civil war'

AFP, Ankara

Turkey yesterday warned that plans by the leadership in Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region to hold a referendum on independence could lead to civil war, in Ankara's strongest warning yet against next month's poll.

"In that country (Iraq), which has been through so many problems, a referendum on independence can make the situation even worse," Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told the state TRT Haber broadcaster.

"God forbid, it could even bring it to civil war," he added.

Turkey has a substantial Kurdish minority which is sometimes estimated as making up around a quarter of its total population of just under 80 million.

Ankara has in recent years forged strong ties with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq but is extremely wary of any move towards independence by the region.

Turkish security forces in the southeast of



Mevlut Cavusoglu

## China rejects US criticism

REUTERS, Beijing

China yesterday denied violations of religious freedom after the United States accused Beijing of persecuting Christians, Muslims, Falun Gong members and Tibetan Buddhists in an annual report.

"All Chinese people of all ethnic groups and all regions are fully entitled to religious belief," a foreign ministry spokeswoman said at a regular press briefing. "We see that the United States is not a perfect country either. We urge the US to... manage its own affairs," she added.

US Secretary of State Tillerson pointed to China along with Bahrain, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Turkey as he presented the State Department's annual report on Tuesday.

## SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE

## China agrees on no new expansion: Philippines

REUTERS, Manila

China has assured the Philippines it will not occupy new features or territory in the South China Sea, under a new "status quo" brokered by Manila as both sides try to strengthen their relations, the Philippine defence minister said.

Philippine Foreign Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano also said the Philippines was working on a "commercial deal" with China to explore and exploit oil and gas resources in disputed areas of the South China Sea with an aim to begin drilling within a year.

The defence minister, Delfin Lorenzana, told a congressional hearing the Philippines and China had reached a "modus vivendi", or a way to get along, in the South China Sea that prohibits new occupation of islands.

"The Chinese will not occupy new features in the South China Sea nor they are going to build structures in Scarborough Shoal," Lorenzana told lawmakers late on

Monday, referring to a prime fishing ground close to the Philippines that China blockaded from 2012 to 2016.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea, a waterway through which about \$3 trillion worth of sea-borne trade passes every year. Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also have conflicting claims in the area.

Asked about the Philippine comments, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said China had sovereignty over the Spratly Islands and their nearby waters, and China would continue to dedicate itself to peacefully resolving the dispute through talks with the parties directly involved.

China has built seven islands upon reefs in disputed areas, three of which, experts say, are capable of accommodating fighter jets. They have runways, radars and surface-to-air missiles which China says are for defence.