

# NEWS IN brief

## Mugabe's birthday declared as holiday

AFP, Harare  
Zimbabwe has declared President Robert Mugabe's birthday on February 21 a national holiday, a state daily reported yesterday, honouring the veteran politician in power since 1980. Last week the cash-strapped government announced plans to build a \$1 billion Robert Mugabe university.

## Japan launches satellite for better GPS system

AFP, Tokyo  
Japan yesterday launched the third satellite in its effort to build a homegrown geolocation system aimed at improving the accuracy of car navigation systems and smartphone maps to mere centimetres. An H-IIA rocket blasted off at about 2:30 pm from the Tanegashima space centre in southern Japan.

## US State Dept hit by email outage

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The US State Department is experiencing a worldwide outage of its unclassified email system, officials said. In a press conference on Friday, State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert described the outage as a "technical glitch". To her knowledge, she said, the outage was not caused by external actors.

## Trump: 'Decisions made' on Afghanistan

AFP, Washington  
US President Donald Trump tweeted early yesterday that "many decisions" had been made in a meeting with his top military advisers, including on the 16-year-old war in Afghanistan. The Trump administration, wary of international involvements but eager for progress in the grueling Afghan war, has been weighing a range of options. It had originally promised a new plan by mid-July. It was unclear how far-ranging those decisions might be, or when they would be announced.



A Muslim resident of Barcelona gets a hug as she demonstrates on the Las Ramblas boulevard in Barcelona to protest against terrorism yesterday, two days after a van ploughed into the crowd, killing 13 persons and injuring over 100. Inset, a woman mourns for the victims. The placard reads "We are against any injustice".

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS



# Nearly 600 killed

AFP, New Delhi

Nearly 600 people have died and millions have been affected by monsoon floods in South Asia, officials said yesterday, as relief and rescue operations continued.

The latest floods and landslides in the subcontinent began in the second week of August, as the annual monsoon strengthened its grip over the northern and eastern parts of the region.

Indian authorities sought military help in two districts of northern Uttar Pradesh state after fresh heavy rains left hundreds of villages marooned.

As many as 33 out of 75 districts in the most populated Indian state are reeling from floods that have left 55 people dead.

"We have sought army's help to reach out to the affected people," T P Gupta, a senior official from the state's disaster management authority, told AFP.

Nearly 100,000 people have moved to shelters, with authorities estimating another two million have been hit by the deluge.

In India's worst hit Bihar state the death toll reached 153 following one of the deadliest floods to hit the region since 2008.

Nearly 400,000 people have sought shelter in

relief camps and an estimated 10 million have been affected by the flood.

Anirudh Kumar, a top disaster management agency official in the state, said more than 5,000 emergency workers including 2,000 soldiers were supporting relief and rescue operations.

Both Bihar and Uttar Pradesh border Nepal, which was hit by floods at the weekend and where the death toll is 123. At least 20 percent of the 28 million population is affected in what the United Nations has called the worst flood to hit the country in 15 years.

Further east in India, at least 60 people have died in floods that hit Assam state a second time in less than four months and nearly 425,000 remain in relief camps.

Railway connectivity between the remote region and mainland remained suspended for the sixth consecutive day following large scale damage to the tracks.

Authorities in West Bengal state said the flood waters were receding after a lull in the rains but 52 so far deaths were reported. More than a million people have been affected.

At least a hundred people have died in neighbouring Bangladesh with close to six million affected by the floods.

### SOUTH ASIA FLOODS

# 'Know your limits'

Erdogan warns German foreign minister

AFP, Istanbul

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday told German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel to "know your limits" after he vehemently criticised the Turkish leader for interfering in Germany's upcoming elections.

"He knows no limits! Who are you to talk to the president of Turkey? Know your limits. He is trying to teach us a lesson... How long have you been in politics? How old are you?" Erdogan said in a bitter personal attack on Gabriel.

Erdogan had a day earlier caused consternation in Berlin by urging ethnic Turks in Germany to vote against both parties in Chancellor Angela Merkel's ruling coalition in the September 24 legislative elections.

Gabriel condemned Erdogan's comments as an "unprecedented act of interference" in Germany's sovereignty.

"Of course they got uncomfortable. They all started jumping up and down," remarked Erdogan in a speech to supporters in the southwestern province of Denizli.

Erdogan repeated his controversial call to ethnic Turks eligible to vote in the German elections not to cast their ballots for Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU), their coalition partner the Social Democratic Party (SPD) or the Greens.

"Teach them (the three parties) a lesson in the German elections. They are waging a campaign against Turkey. Vote for those who don't have enmity towards Turkey."

He added: "It's not important for us whether Germany opens its doors to us or not. We have enough doors."

"We will go to countries that have opened their doors and we will open our doors to them," said Erdogan.

# 'Pakistan's Mother Teresa' receives state funeral

REUTERS, Karachi

Pakistani soldiers yesterday carried the flag-draped coffin of German-born Catholic nun Ruth Pfau to a state funeral where she was honoured after devoting her life to eradicating leprosy in the country.

Widely known as Pakistan's Mother Teresa, Pfau died last week in the southern city of Karachi at age 87. She is to be buried in her adopted homeland.

Mourners paid their last respects as Pfau's coffin was carried to the Marie Adelaide Leprosy Centre that she founded before being taken on to St Patrick's Cathedral for the official service.

Pfau had been living in Pakistan since 1960, and her leprosy centre in Karachi was Pakistan's first hospital dedicated to treating the disease. She later opened treatment centres across the country.

In 1996, the World Health Organisation declared that leprosy had been controlled in

Pakistan, which led Pfau to the more challenging task of eliminating the disease.

Last year, the number of patients under treatment for leprosy fell to 531 from over 19,000 in the 1980s.

Born in Leipzig, Germany, in 1929, Pfau had seen firsthand the devastation wrought by World War II. She attributed her desire to become a doctor and a healer to this experience.

Ainee Shehzad, a member of the MALC board of trustees who worked with Pfau for 25 years, told CNN that she was "one of the most inspirational" people she had ever met.

Shehzad said Pfau was underprivileged and that she would go to the "remotest parts of Pakistan to help, a foreign lady heading on donkeyback to places even cars couldn't reach."

In 1989, she was presented the Hilal-i-Pakistan, the country's second-highest civilian award.



A woman plays a traditional Finnish string instrument, kantele, at the Market Square where several people were stabbed, in Turku, Finland, on Friday. The stabbing spree left two people dead and six injured. PHOTO: REUTERS

### BARCELONA ATTACK

## CIA warned Spain two months ago

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The CIA warned Catalan police two months ago that Las Ramblas in Barcelona could be a target for a terrorist attack, reports suggest.

After attacks in Paris, London, Berlin and Brussels, US counter-terrorism officials reportedly believed Islamist terrorists could be planning a massacre in the Spanish city.

At least 13 people were killed and more than 100 injured when a van ploughed into crowds of people on Las Ramblas on Thursday. IS has claimed responsibility for the attack.

US officials had reportedly warned their Spanish counterparts that Las Ramblas could be a prime terrorist target, according to El Periodico.

Concerns were first raised a year ago when, reports suggest, an IS leader distributed an image showing world tourist sites and suggesting they could be subjected to future attacks. The Colosseum in Rome, the Statue of Liberty in New York and Big Ben in London were all included, as was Las Ramblas.

That warning led to improved security outside Gaudi's Sagrada Familia in Barcelona but no major changes were made to Las Ramblas.

In a 2007 report later leaked by Wikileaks, the then US ambassador to Spain, Eduardo Aguirre, wrote: "Spanish and American authorities have identified Catalonia as the largest Mediterranean centre for Islamist radical activity."

Spanish media also reports that, on 30 July, a Twitter account associated with Isis posted a message saying: "We are going to install the caliphate in Spain and we will recover our land. Attack imminent in Al-Andalus [the medieval Muslim name for Spain], God willing."

Spain is considered to be a target for Isis because the group sees its duty as establishing Islam everywhere, particularly in areas, like much of Spain, that were once Muslim.

After the attack, Isis affiliated accounts posted messages celebrating the murders. One wrote: "To all the Spaniards, now is the time to pay for everything that your governments have done to our countries."

### WAR AGAINST IS

## Lebanon army launches ops near Syria

AFP, Beirut

Lebanese troops launched an offensive against the Islamic State group yesterday close to the Syrian border where the jihadists have been active for several years.

The operation follows one by Shia militant group Hezbollah last month against jihadists in another border area further south.

Hezbollah is deeply embroiled in the civil war that has raged in neighbouring Syria since 2011, fighting in support of President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

The Lebanese army has sought to keep out of the conflict but has been forced to take action since jihadists of IS and then al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Nusra Front assaulted the border town of Aarsal in 2014 and abducted 30 soldiers and police.

"In the name of Lebanon, in the name of kidnapped Lebanese soldiers, in the name of martyrs of the army, I announce that operation 'Dawn of Jurud' has started," army chief General Joseph Aoun said Saturday.

He was referring to two mountainous border areas -- Jurud Ras Baalbek and Jurud al-Qaa -- where IS has been active.

Kanso said the army believed there were around 600 IS fighters in the two areas, controlling some 120 square kilometres (46 square miles) of territory.

Hezbollah said it had launched a simultaneous operation against the jihadists from the Syrian side of the border but the army spokesman denied there had been any coordination.

Nine Lebanese soldiers captured during the 2014 raid are believed to remain in the hands of the jihadists.

Last month, Hezbollah carried out a six-day offensive against IS and Al-Qaeda's former affiliate in the Jurud Aarsal district further south.

### BANNON'S DEPARTURE FROM WHITE HOUSE

# Big boost for 'globalists'

REUTERS, Washington

The departure on Friday of Steve Bannon, the White House's top economic nationalist, will likely tip the trade policy scales in favor of the Trump administration's "globalist" faction, which could soften the stance toward two of Trump's favorite targets: China and the North American Free Trade Agreement.

But after news that Trump had fired Bannon from his post as chief strategist, trade experts said it may take some time for National Economic Council Chairman Gary Cohn, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue to start winning more debates on trade policy.

Bannon and White House Trade and Manufacturing Office director Peter Navarro were often allied in taking headline anti-China stances over currency manipulation, steel tariffs and other trade issues, often opposed to Cohn, Mnuchin and Perdue, according to lobbyists who

been involved in the debates. The Cohn-led group proved more influential in the administration's decisions in April not to label China a currency manipulator and to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement instead of terminating it.

More recently, they have pushed for

back on every policy idea coming from the so called "globalists," it's easy to see how they could have a chance to start winning more policy battles," the official said.

In the short term, the trade policy trajectory won't change much, said Derek Scissors, a China trade expert at the American Enterprise Institute, a pro-business conservative think tank in Washington. Many of Trump's views on trade pre-dated Bannon's arrival on his campaign in any case.

But industry lobbyists, who have been whipsawed by economic policy twists over trade and an ill-fated border tax proposal, were skeptical that much would change.

Bonnie Glaser, senior adviser for Asia at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the administration's efforts to develop an effective strategy to retaliate against China's unfair trade practices will survive, largely because there is a widely held view in the administration and the corporate sector that China's trade practices are a problem.



# Trump thanks Steve Bannon

Ousted aide says will 'go to war' for Trump agenda

AFP, BBC ONLINE

Donald Trump yesterday thanked Steve Bannon for his "service" a day after the US president parted ways with his controversial former chief strategist and key campaign ally.

A champion of the nationalist-populist agenda that carried Trump to power last November, the 63-year-old Bannon left a White House reeling from the fallout over the president's response to a violent white supremacist rally.

"I want to thank Steve Bannon for his service. He came to the campaign during my run against Crooked Hillary Clinton - it was great! Thanks," Trump tweeted.

Bannon, a hero of the so-called "alt right" whose presence in the West Wing was controversial from the start, had become the nucleus of one of several competing power centers in a chaotic White House.

He has been accused of voicing anti-Semitic and white supremacist views. With Trump under fire for insisting anti-racism protesters were equally to

blame for violence at a weekend rally of neo-Nazis and white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia, the president faced renewed pressure to let Bannon go.

It remains to be seen what role the serial provocateur will continue to play from outside the White House, but Bannon himself vowed to keep pushing Trump's right-wing agenda, as he returned to his former home at the ultra-conservative website Breitbart News.

In his Weekly Standard interview, Bannon said: "The Trump presidency that we fought for, and won, is over."

"We still have a huge movement, and we will make something of this Trump presidency. But that presidency is over. It'll be something else. And there'll be all kinds of fights, and there'll be good days and bad days, but that presidency is over."

He added: "In many ways I think I can be more effective fighting from the outside for the agenda President Trump ran on. And anyone who stands in our way, we will go to war with."