

# NEWS IN brief

## Vehicle ramming kills one in Marseille

At least one person was killed and another injured in Marseille yesterday when a van crashed into two bus shelters in different parts of the French city, police said, in an incident not being treated as terrorism at this stage. Police advised the public to avoid the Old Port area where the driver was arrested.

## Lebanon foils bomb plot on UAE flight

Lebanon's interior minister said yesterday the country's police intelligence played a major role in foiling a plot to bring down an Emirati passenger plane that was supposed to take off from Australia. Nohouh Machnouk said four Lebanese-Australian brothers had plotted to blow up the plane with a bomb hidden inside a large Barbie doll.

## 9 killed in Philippines militant attack: police

Islamist gunmen killed nine people and injured ten others as they attacked a town in the Philippines at dawn yesterday, burning houses, police said. About 60 members of Abu Sayyaf group entered a town in their stronghold on Basilan island in the southern Mindanao region and began shooting.

## Death toll in DR Congo landslide hits 140

The death toll from a landslide that swept over a fishing village on the banks of a lake in the Democratic Republic of Congo has reached 140, the government said yesterday. "We estimate that there at least a hundred bodies buried underneath the rumble of large rocks that fell on the 48 destroyed homes," the deputy governor of Ituri Province, Pacifique Keta, told AFP.



People use their phones to film as the 'Big Ben' bell, inset, chimes for the last time in four years ahead of restoration work on the Elizabeth Tower, which houses the Great Clock and the 'Big Ben' bell, at the Houses of Parliament in London, Britain, yesterday.



# China stand-off will end 'soon'

## Says Indian home minister

India's home minister said yesterday he believed a border stand-off with China would end soon, after new footage emerged showing border guards from both countries fighting on a disputed patch of land in the Himalayas. Indian and Chinese soldiers have for more than two months been facing off on a disputed tract of land known as Doklam that India says is Bhutanese territory and China claims for itself. Some analysts have said the dispute amounts to the worst crisis in relations between the two nuclear-armed neighbours in decades. Yesterday, Home Minister Rajnath Singh said India wanted peaceful relations with its neighbours as he addressed a unit of border guards in the capital Delhi. "A deadlock is going on between India and China in Doklam. But I think a solution will come out soon. China will also take a positive step from its side," Singh said as he addressed the paramilitary Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP). "We want to maintain good relations with our neighbours. We don't want conflict, we want peace." The ITBP guards India's 3,488-kilometre (2,167-mile) border with China along the northern Himalayan mountain range. His comments came days after video emerged of soldiers from both sides appearing to kick and punch each other as rocks rained down on them in a disputed part of the Himalayan region of Ladakh last week. Army sources confirmed to AFP yesterday that the video of the fighting on August 15 -- India's Independence Day -- was authentic.

# US-South joint drills begin

## China, Russia urge halt as Pyongyang sees annual military exercises as preparations for invasion

South Korean and US forces began computer-simulated military exercises yesterday amid tension over North Korea's weapons programmes, while a report it has earned millions of dollars in exports is likely to raise doubt about the impact of sanctions.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said North and South Korea and the United States all needed to make more effort to ease tension. "We think that South Korea and the United States holding joint drills is not beneficial to easing current tensions or efforts by all sides to promote talks," she told a daily news briefing.

Japan's Kyodo news agency reported that a confidential UN report found North Korea evaded UN sanctions by "deliberately using indirect channels" and had generated \$270 million in banned exports since February.

**N KOREA TENSION**  
S Korean leader says annual drills are defensive in nature  
North generates \$270m despite sanctions: Kyodo reports

South Korean President Moon Jae-in said the joint drills, called Ulchi Freedom Guardian, were purely defensive and did not aim to increase tension on the peninsula.

North Korea views such exercises as preparations for invasion and has fired missiles and taken other actions to show its anger over military drills in the past.

The UN Security Council unanimously imposed new sanctions on North Korea on Aug 5 that could slash its \$3 billion annual export revenue by a third. The latest sanctions were imposed after North Korea tested two intercontinental ballistic missiles in July.

"There is no intent at all to heighten military tension on the Korean peninsula as these drills are held annually and are of a defensive nature," Moon told cabinet ministers.

China, North Korea's main ally and trading partner, has urged the United States and South Korea to scrap the exercises. Russia has also asked for the drills to stop but the United States has not backed down.

Speaking in Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said North and South Korea and the United States all needed to make more effort to ease tension.

"North Korea should not exaggerate our efforts to keep peace nor should they engage in provocations that would worsen the situation, using (the exercise) as an excuse," he said.

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The joint US-South Korean drills last until Aug 31 and involve computer simulations designed to prepare for war with a nuclear-capable North Korea, reported Reuters.

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# US destroyer, oil tanker collide near Singapore

## Major search launched as ten sailors missing in the second accident involving an American warship in two months

Ten US sailors were missing and five injured after their destroyer collided with a tanker near Singapore yesterday, tearing a large hole in its hull in the second accident involving an American warship in two months.

seeks to combat Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea and North Korea's nuclear ambitions. The US Navy said there was "significant damage to the hull" of the warship in the latest collision, which led to flooding of crew sleeping areas, machinery and communications rooms.

The badly damaged USS John S McCain limped into port in the city-state in the afternoon under escort after the dramatic pre-dawn accident, which sent water flooding into the vessel.

"Damage control efforts by the crew halted further flooding," they said in a statement after the John S McCain arrived at Changi Naval Base in the city-state. A helicopter took four of the injured to a Singapore hospital with injuries that were not life-threatening while the fifth did not need further medical attention, the navy said.



A major search involving ships and aircraft from three countries was launched for the missing sailors after the collision with the Alnic MC in the Singapore Strait, near the Strait of Malacca.

The 505-foot (154-metre) vessel could still sail under its own power after the collision at 5:24 am (2124 GMT Sunday) with the Liberian-flagged tanker, which was slightly bigger at 600 feet. Two other vessels escorted it into port, AFP journalists saw.

# Forces close in on Tal Afar

## Iraqi army battles IS on three fronts as coalition says thousands of civilians trapped in and around the city

Iraqi forces yesterday closed in on Tal Afar on the second day of an offensive against the last major bastion of the Islamic State group in the country's north, after seizing several villages around the city.

ers have told AFP they expect to tighten the noose on the jihadists. The battle for Tal Afar has sparked fears for thousands of civilians trapped inside. The US-led coalition fighting IS in Iraq and Syria says between 10,000 and 50,000 civilians are estimated to be in and around Tal Afar.

### WAR IN IRAQ, SYRIA

US-led strikes kill 27 civilians in Syria's Raqa held by IS

Russian jets kill over 200 militants near Deir al-Zor

Meanwhile, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor said yesterday US-led coalition strikes on Sunday killed 27 civilians in part of Syria's Raqa city held by the Islamic State group.

The offensive launched at dawn Sunday comes only weeks after Iraqi forces seized second city Mosul from IS and as the jihadists also face assaults on their positions in Syria. Tal Afar was once a major supply hub between Mosul and the Syrian border and capturing it would be another major blow to IS's self-declared "caliphate" that once controlled large parts of Syria and Iraq.

Seven children were among the dead in the strikes that "hit the densely-populated Al-Badu area in the centre of the city," Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman said.

The Iraqi army, federal police and counter-terrorism forces backed by 20,000 fighters from the Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary group launched the offensive on Tal Afar.

Russia's air force has destroyed a large column of Islamic State fighters on their way to the Syrian city of Deir al-Zor, killing over 200 militants, Russian news agencies cited Russia's Defence Ministry as saying yesterday.

They are battling IS on three fronts -- the west, south and southeast -- and command-



A boy uses a banana raft to transport his books in Jakhalabandha area in Nagaon district, in the northeastern state of Assam, India, yesterday. Widespread floods have killed more than 800 people and displaced over a million in India, Nepal and Bangladesh, with aid workers warning of severe food shortages and water-borne diseases as rains continue to lash the affected areas.

### GULF DIPLOMATIC ROW

## Qatar denies blocking Saudi hajj flights

AFP, Doha

Qatar yesterday denied it had banned Saudi Arabian flights from landing in the emirate to transport Muslim pilgrims to Makkah, after an accusation by authorities in Riyadh.

Saudi Arabian Airlines on Sunday said Qatari authorities had refused to grant a Saudi Arabian Airlines flight scheduled to transport Qatari hajj pilgrims, permission to land at Hamad International Airport.

The flight is one of a select few that will allow Qataris to land in Saudi Arabia, which last week temporarily opened its borders to pilgrims to the Saudi city of Makkah, the most revered site in Islam, more than two months into a diplomatic crisis that has seen Riyadh cut all ties with Qatar and ban its citizens from entering.

An official source in the Qatar Civil Aviation Authority yesterday "described as baseless the news... that allegedly claimed that the state of Qatar refused to allow Saudi Airlines to transport the Qatari pilgrims," according to a report carried on the state-run QNA news agency.

Qatar's civil aviation authority confirmed that it had received a request from the Saudi carrier for permission to land and had referred the airline to the ministry of Islamic affairs "in accordance with past practices".

The hajj to Makkah, a pillar of Islam that capable Muslims must perform at least once, takes place at the start of September this year. It is expected to draw around two million Muslims from around the world.

The pilgrimage has turned into a point of contention between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which are locked in a diplomatic crisis.

### TRUMP AND FAMILY'S TRAVEL

## US Secret Service faces cash crunch

AFP, Washington

The US Secret Service is facing a cash crunch because of the high cost of protecting President Donald Trump, his many homes and large family, its director said in an interview published yesterday.

Randolph "Tex" Ailes, the service's chief, told USA Today more than 1,000 agents have already hit caps for the year on salary and overtime pay because of the crushing workload.

With 150 foreign heads of state due to converge on New York next month for the UN General Assembly, demands on the service are only intensifying.

Trump has traveled nearly every weekend to his properties in Florida, New Jersey and Virginia.

And the Secret Service also provides protection for his adult children on their business trips and vacations. In all 42 people in his administration have Secret Service protection, including 18 members of his family. "The president has a large family, and our responsibility is required by law," Ailes said. "I can't change that, I have no flexibility."

# Brigitte Macron to work as unofficial 'first lady'

AFP, Paris

Brigitte Macron, the wife of French President Emmanuel Macron, will represent the country and carry out charity work but not have the official status of First Lady, following opposition to giving her this title, the presidency announced yesterday.

official First Lady role -- which would have required a change in the law or constitution -- garnered more than 300,000 signatures in August. An opinion poll in early August showed a majority of French people were also opposed, even though Brigitte Macron is a popular figure.

A proposal by Macron during campaigning earlier this year to create a new First Lady status has been shelved, but the presidency had promised to clarify her position and the resources at her disposal.

Brigitte Macron, who has taken to public life with aplomb, said in an interview with Elle magazine last month that she would be an unofficial First Lady in the mould of previous presidential spouses.

The former school teacher will have two presidential advisors and her own cabinet, paid for from Macron's budget, and will focus on working with charities helping children and handicapped people.

"Like all of those before me, I will take on my public role, but the French people will know the resources at my disposal," said the 64-year-old.

She will also "represent France at her husband's side during international summits and meetings" and work with the partners of other global leaders to highlight work to combat climate change or domestic violence.

Macron's office had promised a "transparency charter" which would make clear how much her role would cost.

An online petition against creating an

The statement yesterday confirmed that she would not be paid but did not reveal the overall bill or the number of staff at her disposal.



# Nepal to hold general elections on Nov 26

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Nepal will hold a general election on Nov 26, the government said yesterday, hoping to conclude a turbulent journey to democracy a decade after a civil war and the abolition of its 239-year-old monarchy.

The election timing is in line with the Himalayan nation's first republican constitution, drawn up in 2015, that requires a new parliament to be in place before Jan. 21 next year.

Law Minister Yagya Bahadur Thapa, confirming the cabinet's decision on the election date, said Nepalis would celebrate their democratic rights.

"This is going to be a big festival. There is no doubt about that," he told Reuters.

Elections to seven state assemblies, set up under the new constitution to establish more of a federal system, would be held at the same time, he said.

The parliamentary election will mark a personal triumph for Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, who was fired by Nepal's last monarch, King Gyanendra, in 2002.

The king had called Deuba "incompetent" for failing to contain a Maoist insurgency and hold elections. Nepal has been in turmoil since a decade-long Maoist conflict ended in 2006 and the monarchy was abolished two years later.

One of Asia's poorest countries, with nearly a quarter of its 28 million people living on less than \$2 a day, Nepal has seen nine different governments since then.