

NEWS IN brief

Canada set to allow no-gender passports

Canadian citizens who do not identify as male or female will soon be able to mark "X" on their passports and other identity documents, the government said on Thursday. From August 31, citizens will be able to add an "observation" to their passports stating their sex should be "identified as 'X', indicating it is unspecified," it added.

Japan hits North Korea with fresh sanctions

Japan yesterday said it will impose fresh sanctions on North Korea by freezing the assets of Chinese and Namibian firms doing business with the nuclear-armed state. The move against a half dozen organisations and a couple of individuals comes days after Washington expanded its own punitive measures.

Maduro calls for military loyalty after US threat

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro yesterday warned the armed forces in his crisis-hit country against "fissures" in their ranks, ahead of war games seen as a show of strength after US President Donald Trump's threat of military action. Maduro has faced months of deadly mass protests by opponents who blame him for an economic crisis.

Loveless monkey adopts chicken at Israeli zoo

A lonely monkey at an Israeli zoo has found a way to soothe her maternal urges: by adopting a chicken. Niv, a black macaque, has spent the past week caressing, cleaning and playing with the bird at the Ramat Gan Safari Park near Tel Aviv. The bird could easily escape through the bars but chooses to stay near Niv.



People search under rubble of a house destroyed by a Saudi-led air strike in Sanaa, Yemen yesterday. The air strike killed at least 14 people including six children, rescuers told AFP. The attack was the latest in a wave of deadly raids on residential areas of Yemen blamed on a Saudi-led Arab military coalition, drawing strong international condemnation.

ATTACK ON SOLDIERS Man shot in Brussels

A man was shot in the centre of Brussels yesterday evening after attacking two soldiers with a knife, Brussels prosecutors said. The man was critically wounded but was still alive and in hospital, they said. The soldiers were lightly wounded in the attack, one in the face and the other in the hand. "With the identity that we currently have, it is a 30-year-old man who is not known for terrorist activities," a spokeswoman for the prosecution service said. In addition to regular police, Brussels streets are being patrolled by soldiers due to a heightened security threat level in the wake of militant attacks in Paris and the Belgian capital in 2015 and 2016. In June, troops shot dead a suspected suicide bomber in Brussels' central train station but there were no other casualties, in what authorities treated a terrorist incident.

Ex-Thai PM on the run

Yingluck flees country after skipping court verdict; arrest warrant issued

Thailand's ex-prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra has fled Thailand, a senior party source told AFP, after she skipped a court appearance yesterday that could have seen her jailed, prompting the Supreme Court to issue a warrant for her arrest. Thousands of supporters -- outnumbered by security forces -- waited from dawn for a glimpse of the ousted leader, but she did not show. A senior party source told AFP "she is definitely no longer here, she is likely in Singapore now."

denied knowledge of her whereabouts but ordered border checkpoints "to be stepped up," while his number-two Prawit Wongsuwan said it was "possible" Yingluck had fled through neighbouring Cambodia. Requesting anonymity, the senior source in the Shinawatras' Pheu Thai party told AFP that she left Thailand on Wednesday, adding "it's impossible she left without the military green light."



judge Cheep Chulamon told the court, rescheduling the verdict to September 27. A minister in her government was jailed hours later for 42 years in a separate trial for corruption linked to the policy. Thai junta chief Prayut Chan-O-Cha

Yingluck's brother Thaksin Shinawatra, who is also a former premier, fled Thailand in 2008 before he was convicted of graft and handed a two-year jail term. The telecoms tycoon, who once owned Manchester City football club, has not returned since and his Thai passport has been revoked. He is believed to use a Montenegrin passport to travel between homes in Dubai, London, Hong Kong and Singapore. Analysts say if both siblings are now in exile their time in Thailand's spin dryer political arena is over.

IS makes gains in Syria's Raqa kills 34 regime forces in counterattacks

At least 34 Syrian soldiers and allied fighters have been killed in an Islamic State counterattack in the east of Raqa province, rolling back regime gains, a monitor said yesterday. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor, said the jihadist group had recaptured large swathes of territory from government forces in the fighting on Thursday. Syria's army is seeking to advance through Raqa province to reach neighbouring Deir Ezzor, where jihadists have besieged government forces and civilians in the provincial capital since 2015. Earlier this month, government troops and allied fighters arrived at the outskirts of Madan, the last IS-held town in the eastern Raqa province countryside before Deir Ezzor.

Comply with rules on transparency

Nato urges Moscow on war games

Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg yesterday urged the Kremlin to comply with rules on transparency as Russia geared up for huge military exercises along the alliance's eastern flank next month. Stoltenberg, speaking at a joint press conference in Warsaw with Poland's right-wing Prime Minister Beata Szydlo, urged Moscow to respect international conventions on keeping other countries informed of the manoeuvres. Zapad 2017 ("West"), has stoked alarm in Nato members Poland and the Baltic states, all former members of the Soviet bloc. It takes place in Belarus, which border three Nato member states, and comes as a more assertive Russia pushes back against what it sees as the alliance's unjustified expansion into eastern Europe. "I call on Russia to ensure compliance with its obligations under the OSCE Vienna Document, because predictability, transparency is especially important when we have increased military activity along our borders," said Stoltenberg. The Vienna Document requires signatory nations to provide advance information of exercises and to allow observer teams to avoid any dangerous misunderstandings. Stoltenberg was even more outspoken on Thursday in Italy when he said that "the aggressive behaviour of Russia has undermined stability and security in Europe".

Suicide attack on Kabul Shia mosque kills 13

30 wounded; IS claims responsibility

A suicide bomber blew himself up at the entrance to a Shia Muslim mosque in Kabul as other attackers stormed the building, killing at least 13 people including worshippers gathering for Friday prayers, officials said. Islamic State, which has launched several attacks against minority Shia targets in Afghanistan, claimed responsibility, the jihadist group's news agency said. The assault sparked chaos as worshippers fled and others frantically searched for missing family members. "The attackers are slaughtering people like sheep but there's no one to go and rescue them," Murtaza, a young boy whose parents were trapped inside, said as the attack unfolded. "A lot of people are on the ground and no one is trying to rescue them."

Witnesses said they had thrown grenades, and police officials said a suicide bomber detonated himself at the gate. At least 10 civilians were killed, including women and children, while another 30 were wounded, Ministry of Interior spokesman Najib Danish said. At least three policemen were also killed and eight wounded, he said. Police said they rescued more than 100 worshippers. At least 15 of the wounded were taken to city hospitals, said Ismail Kawosi, a spokesman for the Ministry of Public Health. One witness, Sayed Pacha, said four attackers had entered the mosque. "At first a suicide bomber opened fire and martyred two security guards at the entrance of the mosque and then they entered inside," he told Reuters. The area around the mosque was later rocked by explosions, whose source was not immediately clear.



Policemen try to rescue a child at the site of a suicide attack on a Shia Muslim mosque in Kabul. Inset, A man carries an injured woman from the site of the attack. PHOTO: REUTERS

Babylonians trigonometry 'superior' to modern day!

The Ancient Babylonians knew about a form of trigonometry more advanced than the modern-day version -- about 1,000 years before its supposed invention by the Ancient Greeks, academics in Australia say. The astonishing claim is based on a 3,700-year-old clay tablet inscribed with a table of numbers. Known as Plimpton 322, it is already known to contain evidence that the Babylonians knew Pythagoras' famous equation for right-angled triangles, long before the Greek philosopher gave his name to it. And researchers at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) have claimed it also shows the Babylonians developed a highly sophisticated form of trigonometry -- the system of maths used to describe angles that has tortured generations of school pupils with sine, cosine and tangent. The city of Babylon in Mesopotamia, an early cradle of human civilisation in what is now Iraq, was famed for its Hanging Gardens, said to be one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. And mathematician Dr Daniel Mansfield suggested its people developed trigonometry to help their architects design the city's major buildings.

16 US staff in Cuba hurt in 'acoustic attack': state dept

No fewer than 16 Americans were hurt in what has previously been dubbed an acoustic attack on the US mission in Cuba, the State Department said Thursday. Officials are probing a series of incidents dating back to September last year in which diplomats are thought to have been hit with a mystery sonic weapon. The "unprecedented" attacks came to light last month when Washington warned Cuba it would be held responsible for the safety of US personnel in Havana. But on Thursday, State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert gave the first indication of the scale of the incident, which has threatened slowly improving ties. "We can confirm that at least 16 US government employees, members of our embassy community, have experienced some kind of symptoms," she said. Late last year US embassy staff and at least one Canadian began to feel the effects of what Secretary of State Rex Tillerson called a

"health attack." US officials have said those hurt appeared to have been targeted by some form of previously unknown acoustic assault, but have not blamed Cuba directly. Cuba has insisted it has no knowledge of any attack and is working to "clarify the facts of the situation." No details of the injuries have been released, but a CBS News report suggested at least one victim suffered what amounted to "brain damage." "We take the situation extremely seriously," Nauert said, after revealing the new casualty toll. Nauert confirmed that the 16 cases she was referring to were all US citizens connected to the mission, but was not sure if any were family members of staff. Some were evacuated to Miami for treatment in US hospitals, others were cared for by American doctors who traveled to Havana to work at the embassy. Separately, Canada has said one of its diplomats posted to Havana is being treated for hearing loss.

Turkey purges 900 public sector workers

Turkey has dismissed over 900 public sector officials in the latest wave of the purge that followed last year's failed coup, according to an emergency decree published yesterday. More than 140,000 people have been sacked or suspended including judges and prosecutors since July 2016 over alleged links to US-based Islamic cleric Fethullah Gulen, who Turkey has accused of ordering the attempted coup. More than 50,000 people including journalists have been arrested under the state of emergency imposed last year in a crackdown that has triggered international concern.

Mother wins \$758.7m in record US jackpot

A 53-year-old Massachusetts mother of two who scooped the largest single jackpot in US history -- \$758.7 million -- said it was a dream come true Thursday and immediately quit her hospital job of 32 years. Mavis Wanczyk said she had played the lottery as a "pipe dream," never believing that it would one day be possible for her to retire early from the Mercy Medical Center, where she worked in patient care. On Thursday that dream came true. "I've called them and told them I will not be coming back," she said to laughter at a news conference hosted by the Massachusetts State Lottery. "I'm going to go hide in my bed!" she added when asked how she planned to celebrate. Wanczyk selected the winning numbers -- which included family birthdays -- and bought the ticket from a convenience store in Chicopee, a small town 100 miles west of Boston, calling it "a chance I had to take." It came nine months after the father of her children, William Wanczyk, a former firefighter, was killed on November 6 by a hit-and-run driver while waiting at a bus shelter in the Massachusetts town of Amherst, US media reported.

