

Libyan coastguard rescues 500 migrants

REUTERS, Tripoli
Libya's coastguard rescued nearly 500 migrants yesterday at sea west of the capital Tripoli, a spokesman said, underlining the challenge of trying to slow an exodus from Africa and the Middle East. The migrants included people from sub-Saharan countries, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia.

Afghan airstrikes 'kill 13 civilians'

AFP, Herat
Afghan authorities said yesterday the country's air force had killed up to 13 civilians including women and children in airstrikes targeting a Taliban base in the western province of Herat. The strikes also hit nearby houses late Monday evening, Herat provincial spokesman Jilani Farhad told AFP.

IS claims stabbing of policeman in Russia

AFP, Moscow
Two men stabbed one policeman to death and wounded another in Dagestan in Russia's North Caucasus on Monday before being shot dead by police in an attack claimed by the Islamic State group. It was the second attack in Russia claimed by IS after a man wounded seven in a Siberian city on August 19.

US beefs up air patrol over Baltic states

AFP, Vilnius
The United States yesterday sent extra jet fighters to patrol the skies over Baltic states to reinforce its NATO allies as Russia gears up for major military drills, Lithuania's defence ministry said. Seven US F-15 fighter jets landed at the country's northern Siauliai military air base.



Rescuers carry the body of a victim at the site of a landslide in Bijie in China's southwestern Guizhou province, yesterday. The death toll after the landslide struck dozens of homes in rural southwestern China has climbed to 15, state television said.

PHOTO: AFP

Two-state solution can't be discarded
Says UN chief in Ramallah

AFP, Ramallah
UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres yesterday said a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remained the only viable option as he made his first visit to the West Bank since taking office.
Guterres spoke after meeting Palestinian prime minister Rami Hamdallah in Ramallah following talks with Israeli leaders the previous day.
"I want to express very strongly the total commitment of the United Nations but my personal total commitment to do everything for a two-state solution to materialise," he said.
"I have said several times there is no Plan B to a two-state solution."
A two-state solution to the conflict has been the basis of international diplomacy since at least the early 1990s, but it has recently come under threat.
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu heads what is seen as the most right-wing government in his country's history, and has signalled he has no intention of evacuating settlements in the occupied West Bank.
Israeli settlements are built on land the Palestinians see as part of their future state.
Prominent members of Netanyahu's government advocate annexing most of the West Bank, which would make an independent Palestinian state impossible.
US President Donald Trump has said he wants to reach the "ultimate deal", but he himself has cast doubt on the two-state solution, saying he could support a single state if this meant peace.

Troops to patrol in Doklam

Says China after ending months-long stand-off with India

AFP, Beijing
China said yesterday that its troops would continue to patrol a disputed Himalayan border area after resolving a months-long military stand-off there with India.
Foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying refused to disclose future plans for the road project that had triggered the confrontation on the remote Doklam plateau.
"I've said that Chinese border troops will continue to be stationed and patrol in Doklam and we will continue to exercise our sovereignty according to historical conventions," Hua told a regular press briefing.
The standoff began in mid-June after Chinese troops started building a road in the area, which is disputed between China and India's ally, Bhutan.
India itself does not claim the territory but has a military presence in Bhutan.
The Indian government announced on Monday that Beijing and New Delhi had agreed to pull back their border forces.
When asked whether China would halt road-building, Hua told reporters: "We'll take into consideration all relevant factors, including weather, to make any infrastructure

plans -- including road-building."
The border tensions eased days before India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to travel to China for a summit of the BRICS group of countries, which also include Brazil, Russia and South Africa.
"At the invitation of the President of People's Republic of China, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Xiamen in China's Fujian province during September 3-5, 2017 to attend the 9th BRICS Summit," India's ministry of external affairs said.
When asked if the border issue was settled in order to avoid conflict at the BRICS meetings, Hua only said that "ensuring the success of the summit serves interests of all relevant parties".
Bhutan separately expressed relief the crisis was apparently over.

Beijing refuses to disclose future plans for road project
Modi expected to travel to China for a summit of BRICS nations
Bhutan welcomes troops disengagement by both sides



The tiny Himalayan country of fewer than a million people had been caught in the middle of what some analysts called the worst crisis in India-China relations in decades.
"Bhutan welcomes the disengagement by the two sides at the face-off site in the Doklam area," its foreign ministry said.
"We hope this contributes to the maintenance of peace and tranquility and status quo along the borders of Bhutan, China and India, in keeping with existing agreements between the respective countries."

Fighting 'Islamist terror' top foreign priority

Macron tells 200 French diplomats gathered in Paris

AFP, Paris
Fighting "Islamist terrorism" is France's top foreign policy priority, President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday, vowing to make his country a leading power in an unstable, increasingly polarised world.
"Providing security for our citizens means that the fight against Islamist terrorism is our first priority," Macron told some 200 French diplomats gathered in Paris.
"There's no place for naivete, nor for fear of Islam that confuses Islamism and Islamic," he said, adding that assuring the security of the French was the "raison d'etre" of the country's diplomacy.
Since early 2015, France has suffered a series of terror attacks that have claimed more than 230 lives, making it the country worst affected in western Europe.
Macron, who took power in May on a promise to boost France's international standing, said he would work with the various powerbrokers in the Middle East -- including arch-rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia -

- to try eradicate the jihadist threat.
"Some have chosen (their camp). It's a mistake. The strength of our diplomacy is to speak to all sides," he said.
France will host a conference on cutting off sources of funding for terror groups like Islamic State in early 2018, he added.
The 39-year-old leader also insisted there was no alternative to the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, which has been fiercely opposed by US President Donald Trump.
"There is no alternative to the non-proliferation agenda. It enables a constructive and demanding relationship with Iran," he said.
Faced with dismal approval ratings less than four months into his term, Macron was looking to burnish his foreign policy credentials with the speech, which is a fixture on France's political calendar.
He won kudos for making a bold start on the international stage, hosting both Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin within his first weeks in office.



TROPICAL STORM HARVEY

Houston water reservoirs overflowing amid floods

AGENCIES
Houston reservoirs that have contained heavy rains from Tropical Storm Harvey are starting to overflow, forcing authorities to release more water into the city's swollen drainage system to alleviate pressure on two dams, Harris County officials said yesterday.
County officials are monitoring six neighborhoods around the reservoirs and encouraged residents in those areas to evacuate before the water levels rise.
The releases will add to flooding in areas close to Buffalo Bayou, which flows through the center of Houston, said Jeff Linder of Harris County's flood control district. The downtown has not flooded yet.
The controlled releases to ease pressure on the dams have so far not added a significant amount of water to already overflowing Houston rivers, Linder said. But continued rain has complicating efforts to distribute flood

waters in a controlled way, reported Reuters.
"This is something we've never seen before," he said. "We have uncertainty in how the water is going to react," when releases from the reservoirs hit overflowing drainage.
Meanwhile, Donald Trump was expected to arrive in Texas yesterday, aiming to show unity in the face of what he called the "terrible tragedy" wrought by monster storm Harvey's devastating rains.
But the US president and his wife Melania are not expected to visit Houston, America's fourth largest city where rescuers are scrambling to reach hundreds of stranded people as Harvey appeared poised to strike again, reported AFP.
They will instead make stops further west, including hard-hit Corpus Christi, for briefings on relief efforts after catastrophic flooding crippled southeastern parts of the vast state.



Indian girls wade through flooded street during heavy rain showers in Mumbai yesterday. Heavy rain brought the India's financial capital to a virtual standstill, flooding streets, causing transport chaos and prompting warnings to stay indoors.

PHOTO: AFP

Ex-PM Yingluck ditched phones before escape

Says Thai army chief
AFP, Bangkok
Fugitive former premier Yingluck Shinawatra discarded her mobile phones and stopped travelling in her usual vehicles in the days before last week's dramatic escape, Thailand's army chief said yesterday, as her party vowed to fight on.
Yingluck, whose government was toppled by the military in 2014, staged a disappearing act before a scheduled court judgement last Friday in a criminal negligence trial.
She faced up to ten years in prison and a lifetime ban from politics if convicted. But instead she was a no-



Indian rapist guru a 'wild beast': judge

TNN, Chandigarh
While sentencing Dera Sacha Sauda head Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh to 20 years in jail, the special CBI court held that he did not spare his own disciples and "acted like a wild beast".
According to the judge, Gurmeet does not deserve any mercy.
"Both the victims put the convict on the pedestal of 'God' and revered him like that only," observed special CBI judge Jagdeep Singh in his judgment released late on Monday evening.
"However, he committed breach of gravest nature by sexually assaulting such gullible and blind followers. Such criminal acts of convict, who is stated to be heading a religious organisation, are bound to shatter images of pious and sacred spiritual, social, cultural and religious institutions existing in the country since time immemorial, which in turn reflects irreparable damages caused by the acts of the convicts to the heritage of this ancient land."
Rejecting the Dera head's plea for sympathy, he said, "Undue sympathy to impose inadequate sentence would do more harm to the justice dispensation system to undermine the public confidence in the efficacy of law."
He said that the courts were obliged to "curtail evil". He observed that though punishment was designed to protect society by "detering potential offenders as also by preventing the guilty party from repeating the offence, it is also designed to reform the offender and reclaim him as a law abiding citizen for the good of the society".

Turkey leaving Europe with 'giant steps'

Says European Commission President Juncker
AFP, Brussels
European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker yesterday said Turkey was fully to blame for the breakdown of its EU accession talks and warned Ankara was fast withdrawing from Europe.
And in Berlin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned there could be no progress even in trade relations with Turkey while the rule of law was not guaranteed there.
Juncker charged that "Turkey is withdrawing from Europe by giant steps," adding that it was up to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to officially call an end Turkey's efforts to join the EU.
Juncker said he suspected that Erdogan was hoping that Europe would be the one to break off the talks "in order to blame the European Union" for their failure.
But the bloc must avoid "falling into the



Gulf tension stunts Qatar hajj numbers

AFP, Doha
Qatar has sent only dozens of its citizens across the border to Saudi Arabia for this week's hajj pilgrimage to Islam's holiest sites because of the increasingly bitter crisis between the Gulf neighbours.
The annual pilgrimage that draws two million Muslim faithful from across the globe and starts this year today has become embroiled in a dispute between Doha and Riyadh now nearing its third month.
Qatar's only land border, which it shares with Saudi Arabia, has been closed and travel, diplomatic and economic sanctions imposed over charges that Doha supports Islamist extremists and has too close ties to Riyadh's regional rival Iran.
Doha has strongly denied the accusations.
Impacting on the hajj, only a few dozen Qatari nationals have been able to travel to Makkah and Medina, western Saudi Arabia, according to a member of Qatar's state-linked National Human Rights Committee (NHRC).
"Through the border, we estimate 60 to 70 people (travelled) last week," he told AFP. "It's not an official figure, we are waiting for an official figure."
Media reports in Saudi Arabia have put the number at up to 1,200 Qataris.
In sharp contrast, 12,000 Qataris took part in last year's hajj, a pillar of Islam that capable Muslims must perform at least once in their lives, according to the state-run Qatar News Agency.