

NEWS IN brief

Prince William, Kate expecting third child

Prince William's wife Kate is expecting their third child, Kensington Palace announced yesterday, adding that she would not be attending a planned engagement due to morning sickness. William, 35, is second in line to the throne and the new baby will be fifth in line, bumping Harry down the order of succession.

Japanese princess to wed commoner

Japan's Princess Mako and her fiancé -- a commoner -- announced their engagement Sunday, a match which will cost the princess her royal status according to a law that highlights the male-dominated nature of Japan's monarchy.

Two rebels killed in Kashmir gun battle

Government forces in Indian-administered Kashmir killed two suspected rebels in a gun battle yesterday, police said, and a manhunt was under way for more militants in the disputed Himalayan territory. At least 140 suspected militants have been killed since the beginning of the year.

Macron's popularity slumps: poll

French President Emmanuel Macron has suffered a fresh slump in popularity, with just a 30 percent approval rating among voters, according to a new poll published yesterday. Macron acknowledged this past week that some voters are disappointed with his government's actions so far. The 39-year-old centrist leader, elected in May, saw his rating fall for the second consecutive month, according to the YouGov France poll.



(L to R) Brazil's President Michel Temer, Russia's President Vladimir Putin, China's President Xi Jinping, South Africa's President Jacob Zuma and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi pose for a group photo during the BRICS Summit at the Xiamen International Conference and Exhibition Center in Xiamen in southeastern China's Fujian Province yesterday.

BRICS opposes protectionism

Leaders of the bloc strongly deplore N Korea's latest nuke test

China will give \$80 million in funding for BRICS cooperation plans, Chinese President Xi Jinping said yesterday, while the bloc of five emerging countries pledged to oppose protectionism. Xi offered 500 million yuan (\$76.4 million) for a BRICS economic and technology cooperation plan, and another \$4 million for projects at the group's New Development Bank (NDB) during a three-day leaders summit in the southeastern city of Xiamen. China's new contributions to BRICS pale in comparison to its \$124 billion pledge earlier in May for Xi's own Belt and Road initiative, which aims to expand links between Asia, Africa, Europe and beyond as a new way to boost global development. The announcement came amid questions over the relevance of BRICS and China's commitment to the NDB in light of the Belt and Road initiative and the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, both key efforts by Beijing to bolster its global influence.

Xi said during a plenary session at the BRICS leaders' summit that the five emerging economies - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - should increase cooperation in sectors such as trade and investment, monetary policy and finance, and sustainable development. "We should redouble our efforts to comprehensively deepen BRICS

ANNUAL SUMMIT

China pledges new funding for five emerging countries

Leaders condemn terrorism in all its forms, manifestations

partnerships and open BRICS cooperation," he said. The BRICS leaders condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations wherever committed and by whomsoever. They stressed that there can be no justification whatsoever for any act of terrorism, reported PTI.

"We reaffirm that those responsible for committing, organising, or supporting terrorist acts must be held accountable," the statement said. A draft "Xiamen Declaration" seen by Reuters said BRICS countries will continue to firmly oppose protectionism as they are committed to an "open and inclusive" multilateral trading system. The summit has been overshadowed by North Korea's sixth and most powerful nuclear test, which came on Sunday just hours before Xi opened the meeting with a keynote speech, and prompted a vow of a "massive" military response from the United States if it or its allies were threatened. Though China's Foreign Ministry has condemned the test, Xi did not mention North Korea during that 45-minute address or in his televised remarks during yesterday's plenary session. The BRICS grouping said in its draft communique that it strongly deplored Pyongyang's test, but that the problem over its nuclear programme should only be settled through peaceful means and dialogue.

Trump to end scheme for young migrants

US President Donald Trump has decided to end a popular program that shields hundreds of thousands of young undocumented immigrants from deportation, while deferring enforcement for six months, Politico reported Sunday. The online news outlet said the plan would give Congress, where many in his own party support the so-called "Dreamers" program, time to come up with a replacement before the grace period expires. Trump was scheduled to announce his decision today, but Politico said he had already made up his mind and White House aides had met Sunday to plan the rollout. The New York Times also reported that Trump was strongly considering ending the program after a six month delay, but said officials cautioned that he could still change his mind. Known as DACA for Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals, the program was put into effect in 2012 by president Barack Obama, allowing an estimated 800,000 undocumented immigrants to stay in the country for renewable two-year periods to study or work if they had come to the United States before age 16. Trump, whose anti-immigrant rhetoric helped propel him to the White House, made ending the program a top campaign promise, although once in office he appeared to soften his stance. Politico said Attorney General Jeff Sessions persuaded Trump to kick the program to Congress, arguing that the legislature -- not the executive -- was responsible for writing immigration law. Republican lawmakers, including House Speaker Paul Ryan, have defended the program. "These are kids who know no other country, who were brought here by their parents and don't know another home," Ryan said in a radio interview on Friday.

Modi to discuss Rohingya issue on Myanmar trip

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Myanmar today and discuss the exodus of the Rohingya ethnic minority with Aung San Suu Kyi's government, India's foreign ministry said Friday. The two-day visit comes as renewed violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state forces thousands of Rohingya Muslims to seek refuge in neighbouring Bangladesh, with many drowning as they attempt to cross the border river in makeshift boats. Modi will arrive in the capital Naypyidaw today on his way back from China after attending the BRICS summit, which also includes Russia, Brazil and South Africa. "We will be discussing how India can help them in addressing the situation that is prevailing in the state," Sri Priya Ranganathan, a senior official in India's foreign ministry, told reporters. "Lot of countries are impacted... but ultimately it's for the government of Myanmar to address the situation," she said.

Rights groups including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have called on New Delhi to reconsider its plan to deport the Rohingya, reported AFP. But Ranganathan said, "In so far as illegal immigrants are concerned there is a long standing and established procedure on the basis of Indian law which we will continue to follow, there is absolutely no change." In Yagon, the prime minister will visit the Shwedagon pagoda and will go to martyr's mausoleum to pay tribute to Gen Aung San, the Burmese nationalist leader who was assassinated. Gen. Aung is father of Suu Kyi. Modi will visit a famous Hindu temple and shrine of Bahadur Shah Zafar. Ranganathan said the visit will be an occasion for India to not only review the ongoing development cooperation partnership but also to focus on new areas of engagement. "We regard this visit as an important visit and one in a series of ongoing interaction which we hope will continue in future," she said, reports Times of India.



GERMAN ELECTION DEBATE

Merkel ahead as Schulz fails to halt her advance

Angela Merkel yesterday appeared to be powering ahead to a fourth term as chancellor of Germany, after her rival Martin Schulz failed to halt her advance in a crucial televised debate three weeks before elections. Sunday's prime-time TV clash had been billed as Schulz's last chance to sway a decisive share of voters to his cause and halt a devastating popularity slide. But polls following the 90-minute showdown, which was watched by 16.1 million people, gave Merkel the clear edge over Schulz, a former European Parliament chief. "Merkel came out as sure, Schulz was hardly able to land a punch. The candidate is an honourable man. But being honourable alone won't make one chancellor," wrote Sueddeutsche daily commentator Heribert Prantl. With millions of voters still undecided,

Schulz had been looking to the debate to erode the commanding 17-percentage point lead of Merkel's CDU party and their Bavarian CSU allies ahead of the September 24 polls. Schulz, who had previously complained that Merkel was lulling voters to sleep with her refusal to engage in combative debate, went on the offensive quickly on the hot-button issue of migration. He accused Merkel of failing to coordinate plans with EU neighbours when she decided to open Germany's borders in 2015 to allow in refugees, many from war-torn Syria and Iraq. But Merkel was not rattled, countering that: "In the life of a chancellor, there are moments when you have to make a quick decision." And as Schulz voiced his wish to end EU membership talks with Turkey amid escalating tensions with Ankara, Merkel stole the issue from under his feet as she said she did not "see them ever joining" the bloc.



South Korea's Capital Defense Command soldiers take part in a military drill in Seoul yesterday. Following North Korea's sixth nuclear test, South Korean President Moon Jae-In called for the "strongest punishment" while top military officers in Seoul and Washington vowed a joint "military counteraction" at the earliest date.

IS IN PHILIPPINES

Taking fire from women, kids in Marawi: army

Philippine troops fighting Islamic State-linked rebels in a southern city have encountered armed resistance from women and children, the military said yesterday, as troops make a final push to end a conflict that has raged for more than 100 days. Ground forces were braced for higher casualties amid fierce fighting in Marawi City on the island of Mindanao, where the field of battle has shrunk to a small area in a commercial heart infested with snipers, and littered with booby traps. "We are now in the final phase of our operations and we are expecting more intense and bloody fighting. We may suffer heavier casualties as the enemy becomes more desperate," Lieutenant General Carlito Galvez, who heads the military in Western Mindanao, told reporters. He said the number of fighters was diminishing and a small number of women and children, most likely family members of the rebels, were now engaged in combat. "Our troops in the field are seeing women and children shooting at our troops so that's why it seems they are not running out of fighters." More than 800 people have been killed in the battle, most of them insurgents, since May 23 when the militants occupied large parts of the predominantly Muslim town. The battle is the biggest security challenge in years for the mostly Catholic Philippines, even though it has a long history of Muslim separatist rebellion in Mindanao, an island of 22 million people that has been placed under martial law until the end of the year.

Nasa record breaker back on Earth

A record-shattering Nasa astronaut touched down on Earth on Sunday, finishing a 288-day mission that put her over the top as the American who has spent the most cumulative amount of time in space. Peggy Whitson, 57, is also the oldest female astronaut in the history of space exploration, was the first female International Space Station commander, and holds the record for number of spacewalks (10) by a woman. The biochemist completed a mission at the International Space Station that began in November 2016, covering 122.2 million miles (196.7 million kilometers) and 4,623 orbits of Earth. She and crewmates Jack Fischer of Nasa and Fyodor Yurchikhin of Russian space agency Roscosmos landed in Kazakhstan at 7:31 am local time Sunday (01:21 GMT) in a Soyuz MS-04 spacecraft. Whitson has racked up 665 days in space in her career, more than any other American astronaut. She is eighth on the all-time space endurance list, Nasa said. Her colleague Jack "2Fish" Fischer, 43, went into space as a rookie but has won over space-watchers with his boundless enthusiasm during his four-and-a-half months aboard the ISS.

Syria army nears regime enclave besieged by IS

Syria's army battled the Islamic State group on the edges of Deir Ezzor yesterday, seeking to break the siege of a government enclave and oust the jihadists from a key stronghold. The jihadist group has already lost more than half of its nearby bastion of Raqa to attacking US-backed forces, and the loss of Deir Ezzor city and the surrounding oil-rich province would leave it with only a handful of isolated outposts. Deir Ezzor province borders Iraq, where IS has also been expelled from former strongholds Mosul and Tal Afar. The jihadists hold large parts of Deir Ezzor province, and more than half the provincial capital Deir Ezzor city, the remainder of which is controlled by the government and under IS siege. Syrian troops backed by ally Russia have

been advancing towards Deir Ezzor city on several fronts for weeks. By yesterday afternoon, Syrian state media said troops were swiftly approaching the city. "The Syrian army has advanced towards Deir Ezzor to break the siege on it and is now just three kilometres (nearly two miles) from the city," a breaking news alert on state television said. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said Syrian troops and allied fighters had arrived at the Brigade 137 base on the western outskirts of the city, and were battling to reach troops besieged by IS inside. A military source told AFP: "There have been multiple collapses of the Daesh (IS) line in the west of Deir Ezzor province, allowing the army to move quickly." "The siege on the government troops will be broken within hours," the source added.



CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

UN blames Burundi govt for abuses

UN investigators yesterday accused Burundi's government of crimes against humanity, including executions and torture, and urged the International Criminal Court to open a case "as soon as possible". The United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Burundi said it had "reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity have been committed and continue to be committed in Burundi," pointing a finger at "the highest level of the state". The three investigators, appointed by the Human Rights Council last September, described a "climate of fear" fuelled by violations including executions, torture and sexual violence. Commission chair Fatsah Ouguerouz told reporters in Geneva that the abuses were part of a "general or systematic attack against the civilian population" that could be considered "state policy". "We are struck by the scale and the brutality of the violations," Ouguerouz said in a statement. Given Burundi's record of impunity and the "strong likelihood that the perpetrators of these crimes will remain unpunished," the investigators asked "the International Criminal Court to open an investigation... as soon as possible".