

# NEWSIN brief

## Brexit bill passes first vote in UK parliament

British MPs yesterday voted in favour of a bill to end Britain's EU membership, a key moment for the government's Brexit strategy. Lawmakers voted by 326 to 290 in favour of backing the legislation, after more than 13 hours of debate, which will now go forward for further scrutiny by MPs.

## Indian priest abducted in Yemen released

Muscat has secured the release of an Indian priest who was abducted last year during a deadly attack by Islamist militants in Yemen, Oman's official news agency said yesterday. Thomas Uzunnalil had been held captive since March 2016, when jihadists attacked a care home operated by missionaries in the southern port city of Aden, killing 16 people including four nuns.



## 28-yr-old named as Trump's media chief

Twenty-eight-year-old Donald Trump aide Hope Hicks has been named White House communications director, formally taking on one of the most powerful roles in Washington. Hicks -- who had been acting director since the spectacular departure of Anthony Scaramucci -- confirmed her appointment via email on Tuesday. The former model and PR operative is known around the West Wing for her close relationship with the Trump family and as a keen defender of Trump's image.



Residents ride on a makeshift raft as they cross a flooded main street in Manila yesterday. At least four people died and six were missing after a major storm caused widespread flooding in and around the Philippine capital yesterday forcing schools, government offices and businesses to shut down.

## DEPARTION OF ROHINGYAS

# India hits back at UN criticism

India yesterday reacted strongly to remarks made by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein on the issue of deportation of Rohingya Muslims. Ambassador Rajiv K Chander, the permanent representative of India to the United Nations, expressed disapproval of the remarks of Al Hussein, who had criticised New Delhi's current measures to deport Rohingyas "at a time of such violence against them". Al Hussein had deplored India's measures to deport the Rohingya refugees, noting that "nearly 40,000 had settled in India and 16,000 of them had received refugee documentation." "We are perplexed at some of the observations made by the High Commissioner in his oral update. There appears to be inadequate appreciation of the freedoms and rights that are guaranteed and practiced daily in a vibrant democracy that has been built under challenging conditions. Tendentious judgments made on the basis of selective and even inaccurate reports do not further the understanding of human rights in any society," Rajiv K Chander said. Chander further said that like many other nations, India is concerned about illegal migrants, in particular, with the possibility that they could pose security challenges and added that enforcing laws should not be mistaken for lack of compassion. Chander then pointed at the issue of Kashmir and said, "We have also noted that the issue of human rights situation in Jammu and Kashmir has been raised. It is a matter of regret that the central role of terrorism is once again being overlooked. Assessments of human rights should not be a matter of political convenience."

PHOTO: AFP

# India runs on dynasty

Says Rahul Gandhi, acknowledges Congress arrogance in polls defeat

NDTV ONLINE, TNN  
India's Congress vice president Rahul Gandhi believes that it's time to stop singling him out for acquiring his job on the basis of his DNA. "Most of the country runs like this. That's how India works," Gandhi told students at the prestigious University of California in Berkeley yesterday. Listing a series of prominent Indians born into famous families, the 47-year-old said, "Dynastic politics is a problem in all political parties. Akhilesh (Yadav son of Mulayam Singh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party), (MK) Stalin (son of M Karunanidhi in DMK), Abhishek Bachchan (son of Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan) -- are all examples of dynastic legacy, also (Mukesh and Anil) Ambani (son of Dhirubhai Ambani), that's how the entire country is running." "Don't go just after me," Gandhi said at the event. He is expected to take over by October as president of the Congress, a post currently held by his

mother Sonia Gandhi. For the last few years, he has served as the party's main face including in the 2014 general election, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi's victory ensued the worst-ever performance for the Congress, which was left with just 44 Lok Sabha seats. While rebutting talk of the Congress



Rahul praises PM Modi's communication skill Harshly criticises Centre for recent spate of lynchings

as a family shop, Gandhi acknowledged that the party was in a state of decay ahead of the last general election. "Around 2012, arrogance crept into the Congress party and we stopped having conversations with people," he told students. Gandhi is often described by critics as a political dilettante, a reputation spurred in part by his abrupt disappearances abroad mid-way through

show-stopping political confrontations between the government and opposition parties like his. "Being a reluctant politician is perspective from 1,000 BJP followers sitting on machines only spreading rumours about me," he said, referring to the BJP's social media network. Having dealt with questions about reluctance and intellect, the Congress vice president then acknowledged that PM Modi is a "better communicator" than he is. But it was a backhanded compliment from him to the PM. "Mr Modi has certain skills, he is a very good communicator, he's much better than me," said Rahul. The Congress leader also alleged Modi took unilateral decisions. Rahul tore into the Modi government saying that "violence, anger and the politics of polarisation have raised their ugly head in India", a development "that is new to the country". He harshly criticised the Centre for the recent spate of lynchings and cow-related vigilante acts of violence.

# US SC keeps Trump's refugee ban in place

4 more states sue govt over DACA

AFP, Washington  
The US Supreme Court kept the Trump administration's strict refugee ban in place Monday, at least temporarily dashing the hopes of some 24,000 already-approved immigrants. Justices of the highest court in the land accepted the administration's emergency petition to stay a ruling by the San Francisco Appeals Court last week that would have allowed thousands of refugees already in the pipeline to come to the United States despite the ban. That put the broader legal challenges to the travel ban -- which halts all refugees and travelers from six mostly Muslim countries -- off until an expected Supreme Court review on October 10. On September 8, the San Francisco court upheld a ruling against the travel ban, saying that refugees who have formal assurances of resettlement in the United States from refugees assistance agencies are not covered by the ban. The ruling would have taken affect yesterday, reopening the door to 24,000 people left in limbo by President Donald Trump's on-again off-again travel ban. Meanwhile, four more US states announced Monday they are suing the Trump administration over its decision to rescind a program that deferred deportations of immigrants who arrived illegally as children.



# Germany drops case against Auschwitz medic Zafke

AFP, Berlin  
A German court yesterday said it had dropped a case against a 96-year-old former medical orderly at the Auschwitz death camp because he suffers from dementia, ending one of the last high-profile Nazi prosecutions. Hubert Zafke had faced 3,681 counts of being an accessory to murder at the concentration camp in Nazi-occupied Poland. The decision to end the proceedings was widely expected after prosecutors last month said the accused was unfit for trial and the case should be dismissed. The move nevertheless sparked a furious reaction from victims' representatives, who said repeated delays in the proceedings had robbed them of a final chance for "late justice". "Because of his dementia he is no longer capable of following a trial," court spokesman Carl Christian Deutsch said in a statement. The charges against Zafke focused on a one-month period in 1944 when 14 trains carrying prisoners -- including the Jewish teenage diarist Anne Frank -- arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Frank, who arrived in Auschwitz with her parents and sister, was later transferred to another camp, Bergen-Belsen, where she died in March 1945. Some 1.1 million people, most of them European Jews, perished between 1940 and 1945 in Auschwitz before it was liberated by Soviet forces.

# US sanctions would be counter-productive

Warns Pak PM after Trump sets out Afghan policy

REUTERS, Islamabad  
Pakistan's Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said it would be counter-productive for the United States to sanction Pakistani officials or further cut military assistance, warning it would hurt both countries' fight against militancy. US-Pakistan relations have frayed since President Donald Trump last month set out a new Afghanistan policy and lashed out at nuclear-armed Pakistan as a fickle ally that gives safe haven to "agents of chaos" by harbouring the Afghan Taliban and other militants. Pakistan denies hosting militant sanctuaries, and Islamabad bristles at claims it has not done enough to tackle militancy, noting it has borne the brunt of violence in the so-called war on terror, suffering more than 60,000 casualties since 2001. Abbasi, 58, told Reuters that any targeted sanctions by Washington against Pakistani

military and intelligence officials would not help US counter-terrorism efforts. Washington's civilian and military assistance to Pakistan was less than \$1 billion in 2016, down from a recent peak of \$3.5 billion in 2011, and Abbasi warned that Washington will not achieve its counter-terrorism aims by starving Pakistan of funds. "If the military aid cuts degrade our effort to fight war on terror, who does it help?" he said. "Whatever needs to be done here, it needs to be a cooperative effort." Abbasi said one practical side-effect of military aid cuts and US Congress blocking the sale of subsidised F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan will be to force Islamabad to buy weapons from China and Russia. Meanwhile, Russia has hailed the Xiamen Brics declaration and its naming of Pakistan-based terror groups as a victory for countries concerned about terrorism in the region.



A man row through storm surge flood waters from Hurricane Irma in Jacksonville, Florida. Photo was taken on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP



AFP, Istanbul

# Turkey to get Russian S-400 missile systems

nical cooperation, saying: "The contract has been signed and is being prepared for implementation." The purchase of the missile systems from a non-Nato supplier is raising concerns in the West over their technical compatibility with the alliance's equipment. But Erdogan said Turkey -- which has the second largest standing army in Nato after the United States -- was free to make military acquisitions based on its defence needs. However, signing the deal does not mean that delivery is imminent, with Russia facing a high demand for the S-400s from its own armed forces and key clients like China and India. Some analysts have suggested the message sent to the West by the military cooperation between Moscow and Ankara is as important as the delivery itself.

# 28 civilians killed in Syria air strikes

AFP, Beirut  
Separate Russian and US-led coalition air strikes yesterday killed 28 civilians in Syria's eastern Deir Ezzor province, where rival offensives against the Islamic State group are under way, a monitor said. The province lies along Syria's border with Iraq and is seen as a strategic prize by both Russian-backed Syrian troops and an alliance of Arab and Kurdish forces supported by the US-led air coalition. The strikes follow three days of deadly suspected Russian raids in Deir Ezzor province that have killed dozens of civilians, according to the Observatory.

# ATTEMPTED HONOUR KILLING IN PAKISTAN Couple electrocuted on elder's order

AFP, Karachi  
Pakistani police were yesterday hunting a tribal elder who ordered a teenage couple to be electrocuted by their families as punishment for eloping, in the country's latest gruesome "honour" killing. The couple, members of the Pashtun ethnic group living in the southern city of Karachi, fell foul of their families after eloping last month. But police said the man's family persuaded them to return home so they could be married. A tribal jirga (council) then ordered the couple's execution after the families had put their case to the influential group of elders. The couple were tied to a wooden bed and electrocuted by family members. Police said the girl was aged 15 or 16 and the man was around 18 years old. "The (jirga) decided that the girl would be electrocuted by her own father and uncle and the boy by his father and uncle," police officer Amanullah Marwat told AFP, adding that the families later buried the bodies in secret. Jirgas commonly adjudicate in communal disputes in rural Pakistan, but are rare in cities. Police have arrested the relatives behind the killings, charging them with murder and tampering with evidence. However the leader of the jirga who ordered the murders remains at large.

# Irma causes no major damage in Florida

Leaves millions without power; toll hits 40  
AFP, Miami  
Millions of Florida residents were without power yesterday as the remnants of Hurricane Irma spun northwest into the southeastern US, trenching the region and causing rivers to overflow. Most of the Sunshine State appeared to have dodged forecasts of catastrophic damage despite dire early warnings. But Irma's overall death toll jumped to at least 40 after Cuba reported that 10 people had been killed there over the weekend. Irma roared ashore as a powerful Category 4 hurricane when it hit the far southern Florida Keys on Sunday, tearing boats from their moorings, uprooting palm trees and downing power lines, after devastating a string of Caribbean islands. By the time it hit the US mainland the storm had been downgraded, and by late Monday it had weakened further to a tropical depression. Across the Caribbean, hard-hit island residents struggled to get back on their feet as Britain, France, the Netherlands and the United States increased relief efforts. About 15 million people in Florida were without power, however, and Governor Rick Scott said the island chain known as the Keys had suffered widespread damage. Irma destroyed a quarter of the houses in the Florida Keys, the US emergency response chief said yesterday. "Some of the initial estimates are -- and this is why we asked people to evacuate, largely from storm surge -- 25 percent of the houses in the Keys initially have been destroyed and 60 percent have been damaged," FEMA director Brock Long said.