

NEWS IN brief

Blast at market kills 4 in Afghanistan

Four people were killed and 14 others wounded in an explosion at a mobile phone market in southeastern Afghanistan yesterday, officials said. The deadly blast comes as the Afghan government considers a plan to arm 20,000 civilians to fight the Taliban and other insurgent groups which have gained ground since US-led Nato combat troops left in 2014.

Russia, Iraq restore air travel after years

Russia and Iraq restored scheduled commercial airline services yesterday for the first time since 2004, in what officials hailed as a sign of stability returning to the war-torn country. Russia suspended regular flights to Iraq in 2004 after the US-led invasion in 2003 plunged the Arab country into war.

Saudi-led air raids kill 12 Yemeni civilians

Twelve Yemeni civilians including women and children have been killed in an air raid by the Saudi-led coalition northeast of the capital Sanaa, an official, residents and rebel media said yesterday. A local official told AFP the coalition air raid hit a vehicle carrying the 12 civilians on Saturday in Marib province.

Tributes pour in for Indian war hero

Tributes poured in yesterday for late Indian war hero Marshal Arjan Singh, who rose to prominence during World War II and for his leadership in the country's 1965 war against Pakistan. Singh, the only officer ever to be named Marshal of the Indian Air Force owing to his achievements, died after suffering a cardiac arrest at the age of 98 at an army hospital in Delhi on Saturday.



A woman holds a placard reading 'stop to the massacre of Rohingya' as she takes part in a rally in front of The Eiffel Tower in Paris on Saturday, to protest the situation of Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar's Arakan State.

'Judgment day' for Rohingyas in India

SC to decide on govt's deportation move today; Nepal too ups ante

Detested in Myanmar, Rohingyas desperately seeking sanctuary will get a new reminder today of just how unloved they are in India too. As the number of Rohingya fleeing a military crackdown for Bangladesh refugee camps races past 400,000 in three weeks, the Indian government is to put its case to the country's Supreme Court for expelling up to 40,000 who have arrived over the past 10 years. According to media reports, the government will argue that the Rohingya are a security threat who could aid terrorists. Civil rights campaigners and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Raad al-Husseini have strongly opposed India's move. And many experts question where India could send the Rohingya even if the government gets Supreme Court backing. The plight of the Rohingya in India, and even neighbouring Nepal, highlights the difficulty the international community faces finding them a long-term home. While Bangladesh has been the main destination, some have ended up in neighbouring countries, almost always forced to live in squalor. There are 16,000 Rohingyas registered in India according to the UN, but many more are undocumented. Officials say nearly 7,000 live in shanties in Jammu in the Indian Himalayas, where they started arriving in 2008. Jammu itself is Hindu majority but is part of the same Indian state as neighbouring Kashmir, where India is fighting Muslim separatists -- which is what worries the New

No softening of stance

US says it will remain out of Paris climate accord without more favorable terms as nations meet in Montreal to discuss deal

The White House pushed back Saturday at a European suggestion it was softening its stance on the Paris climate accord, insisting Washington will withdraw from the agreement unless it can re-enter on more favorable terms. The remark came as environment ministers from some 30 countries gathered in Montreal seeking headway on the Paris climate accord, which President Donald Trump had pulled out of in June. At the summit, which was attended by a US observer, the US "stated that they will not renegotiate the Paris Accord, but they (will) try to review the terms on which they could be engaged under this agreement," the European Union's top climate official Miguel Arias Canete said. Canete said there would be a meeting on the sidelines of next week's UN General Assembly with American representatives "to assess what is the real US position," noting "it's a message which is quite different to the one we heard

from President Trump in the past." The US observer was not immediately available for comment and the White House insisted the United States would withdraw from the Paris climate accord without more favorable terms. "There has been no change in the United States' position on the Paris agreement," White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said in an email. "As the president has made abundantly clear, the United States is withdrawing unless we can re-enter on terms that are more favorable to our country," she said. Called by Canada, China and the

European Union, the summit took place 30 years to the day after the signing of the Montreal Protocol on protecting the ozone layer -- which Canada's environment minister hailed as a multi-lateral "success story" by governments, NGOs and ordinary citizens jointly tackling a major global threat. We "committed to full implementation of the Paris Accord. Everyone agreed that the environment and the economy go together, they are linked. You cannot grow the economy without taking care of the environment," Catherine McKenna said at the end of the summit, attended by more than half the G20 members as well as some of the nations most vulnerable to climate change -- from the low-lying Marshall Islands and Maldives to impoverished Mali and Ethiopia. "Changes are real, extreme weather events are more frequent, more powerful and more distressful," she told the gathering, pointing at the devastation wrought by mega-storms such as Harvey and Irma which many climate scientists believe are boosted by global warming.



SUPPORT FOR ROHINGYA

BJP suspends minority leader in Assam

BJP has suspended a leader of its Assam state executive committee belonging to the minority community for voicing support for Rohingya refugees. A few days ago Benazir Arfan had uploaded a post on Facebook requesting people to attend a fast in protest against the treatment meted out to the Rohingyas by the Myanmar government. The post generated controversy in the BJP circles as the saffron party's governments in the Centre and in Assam are against allowing entry of the Rohingyas to India. On Thursday, BJP's state unit sent a letter to Arfan suspending her from the party with immediate effect and giving her three days time to explain why disciplinary action should not be initiated against her.



Delhi government. The Rohingya in Jammu mostly survive by collecting plastic rubbish for recycling or as labourers. They say the hostility there is overt. The ruling right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party in Jammu has sought court orders to evict them from the state. One business group threatened to kill the Rohingyas if they were not moved. Last week a dead cow was found near a Rohingya settlement on the edge of Jammu city. According to Shafi Alam, a Rohingya who arrived in 2008, Hindu activists torched shanties accusing them of killing the cow -- a creature sacred to Hindus. In New Delhi, there are 47 families living in dilapidated rooms at Kanchan Kunj camp. The residents include Mohammad Salimullah, a grocery store owner and one of two Rohingya petitioners challenging the government at the Supreme Court. "I would rather have the government kill us or put us in jail than have us deported back there (Myanmar). If we go back there, they will cut us into pieces and stack us 10-15 people together and set us on fire." In neighbouring Nepal, about 250 Rohingyas live in a slum of shacks in northern Kathmandu, anxiously awaiting news of relatives fleeing Rakhine. Nepal is also attempting to prevent more Rohingya arriving.

Iran will not bow to US 'bullying' on nuke deal

Says Khamenei as Trump ramps rhetoric against it

Iran's Supreme Leader has warned Iran would react strongly to any "wrong move" by the United States on Tehran's nuclear accord with world powers. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's statement comes days after Donald Trump said Iran had violated the agreement's "spirit". "The Iranian nation is standing firm and any wrong move by the domineering regime regarding the [nuclear accord] will face the reaction of the Islamic Republic," state television quoted the Ayatollah as saying. The US President had called the nuclear accord "one of the worst deals I've ever seen" and hinted he may attempt to rescind the deal. Washington extended some sanctions relief for Iran on Thursday under Tehran's 2015 deal with world powers but said it had yet to decide whether to maintain the agreement.

"Today, despite all the commitments and discussions in the negotiations, America's attitude towards these negotiations and their outcome is completely unjust and amounts to bullying," Khamenei said. "The Americans should know that the Iranian people will stand firm on their honourable positions and on important issues related to national interests, there will be no retreat by the Islamic Republic," he added in a speech to Iranian military academy graduates. Iran said last month it could abandon the nuclear agreement "within hours" if the US imposes any new penalties, after Washington ordered sanctions over Tehran's ballistic missile tests. The head of Iran's atomic programme previously warned the country would be able to create highly enriched uranium within five days of the US ending the nuclear agreement.



A protestor confronts police while protesting the acquittal of former police officer Jason Stockley in St Louis, Missouri on Saturday. Rock giants U2 and pop star Ed Sheeran have called off concerts in St Louis, as the US city yesterday braced for more protests over the acquittal of Stockley who shot dead a black man in 2011.

N KOREA TENSIONS

Moon, Trump vow stronger pressure

US President Donald Trump and his South Korean counterpart have pledged "stronger pressure" on Pyongyang, Seoul said yesterday, after North Korea defied tough new sanctions with a missile test and said it wanted to match American nuclear strength. In a phone conversation yesterday, South Korean President Moon Jae-In and Trump "gravely condemned" the latest missile test on Friday, which came just days after United Nations Security Council announced a raft of new sanctions against Pyongyang. "The two leaders agreed on more practical and stronger pressure... to make the North Korean regime realise that further provocation will only bring stronger diplomatic isolation and economic pressure leading to a path of collapse," the South's presidential office said in a statement. Pyongyang says it needs nuclear weapons to protect itself from "hostile" US forces and is determined to build a weapons system capable of delivering a nuclear warhead to hit the US mainland. North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un, who oversaw the latest missile test, has said the launch increased the "combat power of the nuclear force", according to the North's official KCNA news agency. He said the launch was part of the country's plan to achieve "equilibrium of real force" with the US. Experts believe Pyongyang's weapons programme has made rapid progress under leader Kim Jong-Un, with previous sanctions having done little to deter it.

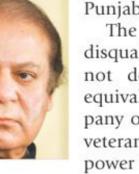
LONDON TRAIN ATTACK

Threat level lowered after second arrest

Britain downgraded its terrorism threat level to severe from critical yesterday, after police made a second arrest in their investigations over the bombing of a London Underground train. "The Joint Terrorist Analysis Centre, which reviews the threat level that the UK is under, have decided to lower that level from critical to severe," Home Secretary Amber Rudd said in a televised statement. Police said earlier yesterday that a 21-year-old man, who has not been identified, was detained late Saturday in Hounslow, on the western rim of the capital. A search was underway yesterday in Stanwell, a few miles (kilometres) west of Hounslow, in connection with the arrest, police said. Officers had arrested earlier Saturday an 18-year-old man over Friday's "bucket bomb" attack at the Parsons Green Underground station, which injured 30 people, and said they were hunting for more suspects. Rudd said the police were trying to find out how the man was "radicalised". The bomb went off in a packed carriage and although the device is thought to have malfunctioned, it still caused a large explosion followed by what witnesses said was a fireball. It was Britain's fifth terror attack in six months, a series that has claimed 35 lives.

Pak by-election tests support for ousted PM

Pakistanis began casting votes yesterday for the parliamentary seat vacated by ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, in a by-election seen as a test of support for the Sharif dynasty ahead of the 2018 general election. Sharif's ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party hopes a resounding victory in the eastern city of Lahore would show that support for the family was undiminished despite the Supreme Court's removal of Sharif in July. Sharif's daughter Maryam has spearheaded the PML-N campaign for her mother Kulsoom - who is the PML-N candidate despite receiving cancer treatment in London with Nawaz at her side. Maryam, who some PML-N leaders see as a future leader, has framed the poll as a chance for voters to give a bloody nose to the judiciary by handing the party a thumping victory.



"Will you take revenge for your disrespected vote?" Maryam asked supporters at a recent rally. Opposition leader Imran Khan - whose threats of street protests pushed the Supreme Court to launch a probe into Nawaz's wealth - is seeking to build on the success of his anti-graft crusade by making inroads into Sharif's power base in Punjab. The Supreme Court in July disqualified Sharif because he did not declare a monthly salary, equivalent to \$2,722, from a company owned by his son when the veteran leader, who had held power twice in the 1990s, became prime minister for the third time. Sharif denies receiving the salary. Khan has turned the by-election into a plebiscite about corruption, and has accused the provincial Punjab government, which is run by Nawaz's brother Shahbaz, of abusing state resources to help the PML-N campaign.

Hamas clears way for unity of Palestinians

Agrees to hold general elections in Gaza

Hamas said yesterday it had agreed to steps toward resolving a decade-long split with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah, announcing it would dissolve a body seen as a rival government and was ready to hold elections. The statement comes after Hamas leaders held talks with Egyptian officials last week, and with the Gaza Strip run by the Palestinian Islamist movement facing a mounting humanitarian crisis. Hamas said it had agreed to key demands made by Fatah: dissolving the so-called "administrative committee" created in March, while saying it was ready for elections and negotiations toward a unity government. It called on the Palestinian Authority government based in the Israeli-occupied West Bank "to come to Gaza to exercise its functions and carry out its duties immediately." Hamas chief Ismail Haniya agreed to take such steps in talks with Egyptian officials in Cairo last week, a Hamas official has told AFP. It was unclear, however, whether the steps would result in further concrete action toward ending the deep division with Fatah. Hamas for now continues to run a de facto separate administration in the Gaza Strip and is in charge of the security forces there.