

NEWSIN brief

Teenager charged over London train attack

British police yesterday said they had charged an 18-year-old man with attempted murder following last week's bombing of a London Underground train, which injured 30 people. Ahmed Hassan, who was arrested the morning after the attack on September 15, was also charged with use of the explosive trinitroperoxide, a statement said.

What's a 'datotad'?

Responding to Donald Trump's bellicose warning to North Korea about it's nuke programme, leader Kim Jong Un yesterday called the US president a "datotad," surprising many. The obscure word is old-late Middle English, or around the 14th century - and means senile old person, someone in their dotage. Although, Shakespeare and Tolkien used it, it is barely heard these days.

UNSC warns against Kurdish referendum

The UN Security Council on Thursday warned that a referendum on independence by Iraq's Kurdistan region was potentially destabilizing, adding its weight to international opposition to the vote. In a unanimous statement, UNSC said the referendum planned for Monday could hinder efforts to help refugees return home and weaken the campaign against the IS group.

Nikki Haley's 'no'

US ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley tried to scotch speculation Thursday that she is gunning to become secretary of state, saying she is not interested in the role. Asked if she wanted to be secretary of state, Haley gave a definitive-sounding "no I do not."



QUOTES FROM UNGA

"Are we having a return of Goliath to our midst, who threatens the extinction of other countries?"



ROBERT MUGABE
Zimbabwe president takes a dig at Trump.



JUSTIN TRUDEAU
Prime Minister admits Canada's failure on protecting indigenous people.



DONALD TRUMP
The US president praises health care of Namibia, a nonsectarian African country.

MEXICO QUAKE

Soldiers and volunteers remove a car crushed by debris of a flattened building in Mexico City yesterday, three days after a strong quake hit central Mexico. Inset, A sniffer dog stands behind a rescue worker taking part in the search operation. Mexican authorities yesterday extended a search for survivors of this week's devastating earthquake that killed nearly 300 people, with foreign rescue teams helping as the window for finding anybody left alive was about to close.



PHOTO: AFP

Iran defies US threat

Rouhani vows to strengthen missiles capabilities amid reports that Trump mulling to scrap Iran nuke deal

President Hassan Rouhani yesterday vowed that Iran would boost its missile capabilities despite warnings from Washington that it is ready to ditch a landmark nuclear deal over the issue.

His comments came as Iran displayed a new missile at a military parade marking the anniversary of the outbreak of its devastating 1980-1988 war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

"Whether you like it or not, we are going to strengthen our military capabilities which are necessary for deterrence," Rouhani said in a speech broadcast live on state television.

"We will strengthen not only our missiles but also our air, land and sea forces... When it comes to defending our country, we will ask nobody for their permission."

Iran has said repeatedly that it has

no choice but to boost its defences as its regional rivals arms and Saudi Arabia sign huge arms contracts with Washington and other Western governments.

Criticism by the Donald Trump administration of a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and major powers, including the United States, has focused heavily on Tehran's continuing missile programme.

Tehran says that the missiles are entirely legitimate under the terms of the deal as they are not designed to carry a nuclear warhead.

But Washington says they breach the spirit of the agreement as they have the potential to carry a nuclear warhead and has imposed new sanctions over Tehran's continuing launches and tests.

Iran says all of its missiles are designed to carry conventional warheads only and has limited their range

to a maximum of 2,000 kilometres, although commanders say they have the technology to go further.

That makes them only medium-range but still sufficient to reach Israel or US bases in the Gulf.

Thus far, the UN nuclear watchdog and the US State Department have reported that Tehran has complied with the terms of the nuclear deal.

But Trump, who this week described the deal as an "embarrassment," is due to report to the US Congress on October 15 on whether or not he believes that Iran is in compliance.

If, as now appears increasingly likely, he decides that it is not, it could open the way for renewed US sanctions and perhaps the collapse of the agreement.

Trump said on Wednesday he had made his decision but was not yet ready to reveal it.

WAR IN ISRAEL

Israeli strikes hit weapons depot by Damascus airport

Iraq forces oust IS from northern town in drive on Hawija

Israeli strikes hit a weapons depot by Damascus airport overnight, targeting a warehouse belonging to Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, which is allied with the Syrian government, a monitor said yesterday.

"Israeli warplanes targeted with rocket fire a weapons depot belonging to Hezbollah near the airport," said Rami Abdel Rahman, director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

There was no immediate official confirmation from either Damascus or Israel, but the Jewish state has been accused of carrying out multiple strikes in Syria, including earlier this month.

On September 7, the Syrian army said Israeli warplanes hit one of its positions near the central town of Masaf.

The site was reportedly used by

Hezbollah forces and those of Iran, another Syrian government ally.

In April, the government accused Israel of firing several missiles at a military position near Damascus airport, triggering a huge explosion.

Israel has remained quiet on the accusations, but has repeatedly warned it stands ready to take military action to prevent Hezbollah from obtaining advanced weaponry.

Meanwhile, Iraqi forces achieved the first goal of a new offensive against the Islamic State group on just its second day of shattering, penetrating the northern town of Shargat.

Some residents celebrated in the streets as government troops and paramilitaries entered the town centre and tore down the black flags of the jihadists who had ruled it with an iron fist for more than three years.



Palestinians run for cover from sound grenades during clashes following a protest against closure of a road south of the West Bank city of Hebron, yesterday.

Land of 'pure terror'

India slams Pakistan at UN, calls it 'Terroristan'

India yesterday went hammer and tongs at Pakistan for its policy of sponsoring terrorism and said the country has now become "Terroristan", or a land of "pure terror".

"Pakistan is now 'Terroristan', with a flourishing industry producing and exporting global terrorism," India said while exercising its "right of reply" at the United Nations General Assembly.

Taking a dig at the prefix "Pak", which means "pure" in Urdu, India said Pakistan has long abandoned its aspirations to be moral and virtuous as a nation and instead, its name has become synonymous with terror.

"The quest for a land of pure has actually produced 'the land of pure terror'. In its short history, Pakistan has become a geographical synonym with terror," India's first secretary to the UN Enam Gambhir said.

Citing the example of Hafiz Saad, a UN-designated terrorist who has floated a political party to contest the next general election in Pakistan, India underscored how the

neighbouring country was providing safe havens to terror leaders in its military town or protecting them with political careers.

India's statement was in response to Pakistan Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi's maiden speech at the UNSGA on Thursday, in which he had defended terrorism and once again sought to highlight the bilateral dispute of Kashmir between the two countries at an international forum.

India pointed out that raising the Kashmir issue is a long-established tactic of Pakistan to deflect attention from the terror outfits it harbours on its soil.

The Indian disputed between Pakistan and the killed six civilians, and wounded an additional 30 people, officials from the two sides said yesterday, in the latest confrontation between the two nuclear-armed countries, the firing took place.

The injured were reported from Indian-administered Kashmir's Jammu region, and most of the casualties were reported on the Pakistani side.



Pak won't be 'scapegoat' in Afghan war

PM Abbasi tells UN

Pakistan refuses to be a "scapegoat" for the global counterterrorism bloodshed or to fight wars for others, Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi told the United Nations on Thursday.

Addressing the UN General Assembly, Abbasi did not explicitly criticise US President Donald Trump's new strategy on Afghanistan but made clear his displeasure with the renewed onus on Pakistan.

"Having suffered and sacrificed so much due to our role in the global counterterrorism campaign, it is especially galling for Pakistan to be blamed for the military or political stalemate in Afghanistan," Abbasi said.

"We are not prepared to be anyone's scapegoat," he said. "What Pakistan is not prepared to do is to fight the Afghan war on Pakistan's soil. Nor can we endorse any failed strategy that will prolong and intensify the suffering of the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan and other regional countries," he said.

He called for a priority on eliminating extremists, including from the Islamic State group and al-Qaeda, in Afghanistan but ultimately a political solution with the Taliban.

US and Afghan officials have long accused Pakistan of playing a double game, with the powerful intelligence services not the civilian government - maintaining ties with extremists

Hurricane Maria toll climbs to 33

Desperate rescue efforts underway

Puerto Rico battled dangerous floods yesterday after Hurricane Maria ravaged the island, as rescuers raced against time to reach residents trapped in their homes and the death toll climbed to 33.

Puerto Rico Governor Ricardo Rossello said the most devastating storm in a century after it destroyed the US territory's electricity and telecommunications infrastructure.

"Part of the island is lacking communications so what we have are some preliminary assessments about 13 deaths at this juncture," Rossello told CNN.

"Right now our efforts are to make sure we have everybody safe, that we can rescue people. Our efforts have already produced almost 700 rescues so we're clearly focused on that."

May proposes two-year Brexit transition deal

Sets out plans for future ties with EU

Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday outlined plans for a transition period of around two years after Brexit during which Britain would continue paying into the EU budget and accessing EU markets.

Delivering a speech in Florence, May said there would also be a continuation of European Union free movement rules during this "implementation period", although EU citizens would be required to register.

Preparations necessary for Britain to adjust to a new relationship with the EU after Brexit "point to an implementation period of around two years," she said.

"On payments, the British leader added: 'I do not want our partners to fear that they will need to pay more or receive less over the remainder of the current budget plan as a result of our decision to leave.'

"The UK will honour commitments we have made during the period of our membership."

Britain voted to leave the European Union in a referendum last year and is expected to leave the bloc in March 2019.

The current EU budget goes until 2020 and Britain pays around 10 billion euros into the budget every year.

May also made an apparent concession on the rights of EU nationals living in Britain after Brexit, which EU officials have said should come under the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union.

"I want to incorporate our agreement fully into UK law and make sure the UK courts can refer directly to it," she said, referring to the Brexit deal.

MIGRANT TRAGEDY IN BLACK SEA

21 killed as boat sinks off Turkey

Twenty-one people drowned and up to 15 more were missing yesterday after a fishing boat carrying migrants sank off Turkey's Black Sea coast, the coast guard said.

Forty migrants were rescued and rescue efforts were still under way to find seven to nine people missing in the incident off the Kefken district, the statement said. The area lies about 130 kilometres (80 miles) east of Istanbul.

Mehmet Ulua, a local official in the nearby town of Kandirli, said the boat was believed to be carrying 70 migrants, most of whom were Iraqis.

Unconfirmed media reports were trying to cross into Romania. The boat reportedly sank due to bad weather and rough waters.

Turkey has emerged as a hub for migrants from trouble zones around the world including Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan who are seeking route west to the European Union.

In 2015, around a million people undertook risky sea journeys to cross the Mediterranean to Europe's coast. Greece from Turkey over the Aegean Sea.

Thousands died in the perilous crossing. The numbers of migrants crossing the Aegean has now dwindled. But increasing numbers, now rising to hundreds within a month, are trying to cross the Black Sea from Turkey to EU member Romania.

