

# NEWS IN brief

## Army deploys in Rio after favela shootings

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Brazilian soldiers deployed by armored vehicle, truck and helicopter Friday to reinforce police after heavily armed drug traffickers rampaged through the country's biggest favela, spraying bullets and terrifying locals. Amateur footage broadcast on Globo television showed men with a variety of rifles and pistols firing volley after volley in a densely built-up area.

## Darfur clashes kill 3

AFP, Shattaya

Clashes between Sudanese forces and residents of a Darfur camp for the displaced killed three people Friday, the UN said, as President Omar al-Bashir urged reconciliation in the war-torn region. The Darfur conflict began when ethnic African minority rebels took up arms against Bashir's Arab-dominated government, accusing it of economic and political marginalisation. The United Nations says the conflict has killed about 300,000 people.

## Kurd leader delays vote declaration

AFP, Erbil

Iraqi Kurdish leader Massud Barzani yesterday delayed a scheduled news conference on a controversial independence referendum he has called for next week as international pressure mounts for a postponement. There has been uncertainty about whether the vote will go ahead tomorrow as Iraq's key allies the United States and Iran, as well as powerful neighbour Turkey, have stepped up their opposition. On Friday, the Iraqi Kurdish leader had insisted that the vote would be held as planned, despite a warning from the UN Security Council that it was "potentially destabilising".



Iraqi forces fire a rocket towards Islamic State (IS) group positions as they advance to recapture the insurgent stronghold of Hawija after retaking the nearby northern town of Sharqat from the jihadists on the second day of a new offensive. Inset, An man carries his clothes as he heads towards Iraqi forces after they captured Sharqat.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## 'Victory is now within reach'

Syria says at UN

AFP, United Nations

Syria's foreign minister yesterday told the United Nations that a military victory in the six-year war was "now within reach" following a series of battle-ground gains by government forces.

"The liberation of Aleppo and Palmyra, the lifting of the siege of Deir Ezzor and the eradication of terrorism from many parts of Syria prove that victory is now within reach," Walid al-Muallem told the General Assembly.

More than 330,000 people have died in the war and more than 5 million Syrians have fled across borders to become refugees.

The United Nations is planning to convene a new round of peace talks in the coming weeks between Syria's government and the opposition, even though past negotiations have failed to yield more than incremental progress.

# No Saarc summit again? US travel ban to expire

### Question mark rises as India warns internal cooperation at risk

TNN, New Delhi

For the second year in a row, there may be no Saarc summit. India, Bangladesh and Afghanistan had pulled out of the 2016 Saarc summit citing Pakistan's open support to terror that impacted all three countries. Islamabad was supposed to host the 2016 summit, which had to be cancelled. This year too, there appears to be no move to hold the summit. Saarc summits are generally held in November.

As Sushma Swaraj met Saarc foreign ministers in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session, India's disinterest in the summit was evident, which has resulted in a downgrading of the institution where India plays the lead role. With India-Pakistan bilateral relations in free-fall, it has had an impact on the South Asian body.

Swaraj did not refer to the uncertainties of the Saarc summit, but stressed the primacy given to removal of terrorism.

She cautioned that cooperation among Saarc countries "remains at serious risk due to rising number of threats and incidents" that threaten the region's peace and stability.

She said, "Regional prosperity, connectivity and cooperation can take place only in an atmosphere of peace and security in the region. It, however, remains at serious risk in the region."

"It is necessary for our region's survival that we eliminate the scourge of terrorism in all its forms, without any discrimination, and end the ecosystem of its support," Swaraj said as per a copy of her opening statement.

Swaraj added that Saarc had failed to live up to its objectives, without a free trade system in place, or any agreement on trade in services etc, which actually makes South Asia one of the least connected regions in the world. She listed the projects undertaken by India under the Saarc rubric.



Sources said Nepal, which currently holds the Saarc chair, is working on some initiatives so that a summit can be realised in 2018.

The Indian external affairs minister pointed out that regional cooperation can only be successful if it meets the expectations of the people, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

"With a significant percentage of the region's population still under poverty, SAARC needs to deliver on its commitments. Major SAARC initiatives have, however, not moved forward," she said.

India will continue to emphasise terrorism from Pakistan as a hurdle to Saarc and global peace and security, sources in New Delhi said. At the UNGA this week, India flagged the terrorism issue repeatedly in its interactions and public statements.

### Trump officials say more countries could be added in list

AFP, Washington

More countries could be hit with tough travel restrictions to the United States after the ban on people from six mainly Muslim countries expires from today, Trump administration officials hinted.

White House and Homeland Security officials said that after a 50-day review, they had identified a number of countries that could not or were not willing to meet US standards for identifying potential terror threats.

President Donald Trump, whose initial measures against the six countries were blasted as an effective "Muslim ban," has yet to make a final decision on which nations will make the new list for much-restricted issuance of US visas, they said.

The officials refused to identify the countries or give a number.

But they said the new presidential order will implement a "spectrum" of measures that could range from just tougher vetting of applicants -- like demanding access to their cellphones and social media accounts -- to a full, open-ended travel ban.

"Our enemies and our adversaries are dead set on exploiting our defenses to enter our country and we've got to do everything possible to keep nefarious actors out," said Miles Taylor, counselor to the secretary of homeland security.

"The goal here is not to indefinitely block certain nationals from coming to the United States. The goal is to protect Americans until foreign governments do comply with our standards and no longer pose a risk to the welfare and the security of the United States."

That left the way ahead murky for citizens of Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen, who have been blocked from obtaining US visas since the ban began at the end of June.

According to a Wall Street Journal report, the new list could possibly have eight or nine countries on it, including some if not all of the six currently affected.

The ban -- which initially included Iraq and was accompanied by a 120-day block on all refugees -- sparked a political uproar when Trump announced it on January 27, a week after becoming president.



## Evacuate now 70,000 Puerto Ricans told to flee as rain-swollen dam fails

AFP, San Juan

Some 70,000 people have been ordered to evacuate their homes after a rain-swollen dam in Puerto Rico failed in the latest disaster caused by Hurricane Maria, which was on Saturday expected to head into open waters.

With the storm death toll standing at 33 across the Caribbean, Puerto Rico's National Weather Service issued a flash flood warning for people living along the Guajataca River in the northwest of the island, saying an earthen dam there was in danger of collapsing.

"All Areas surrounding the Guajataca River should evacuate NOW. Their lives are in DANGER!" the NWS tweeted on Friday, saying flooding had already begun downstream.

Governor Ricardo Rossello also issued an order for 70,000 people living in the area to flee.

Puerto Rico was already battling dangerous floods after Hurricane Maria hit early Wednesday, devastating the Caribbean island.

Rossello has called Maria the most devastating storm in a century after it destroyed the US territory's electricity and telecommunications infrastructure.

So far, a preliminary assessment said 13 people had died as a result of the storm, he told CNN.

So far, at least 33 people have been confirmed dead as a result of Hurricane Maria, including 15 in Dominica, three in Haiti and two in Guadeloupe.



People stand together on a street yesterday after a tremor was felt in Mexico City just four days after a 7.1 magnitude quake hit central Mexico. Inset, A woman prays after the tremor. Mexican rescuers were working yesterday in a desperate search for survivors of an earthquake that killed nearly 300 people, hoping to defy experts who say the chances of finding life in the rubble after 72 hours are bleak.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## New quake sows panic in Mexico City

AFP, Mexico City

A strong 6.2 magnitude quake shook Mexico yesterday, causing panic in traumatized Mexico City, where rescuers trying to free people trapped from this week's earlier earthquake had to suspend work.

There were no immediate reports of damage or casualties from the new quake, which was smaller and with its epicenter farther to the south than Tuesday's devastating 7.1-magnitude earthquake that killed nearly 300 people.

However it sparked concern that it could have caused heavy rubble on top of survivors awaiting rescue in Mexico City to shift.

Mexican and foreign rescue crews rapidly evacuated sites they were working at as a seismic alarm went off.

"Oh God, have mercy," exclaimed Teresa Martinez, 74, who had run out in to the street for safety.

"This time we didn't feel the ground move... maybe since the last one we're getting used to them," said Pablo Martinez, who had run out of his central apartment block with his 6-year-old daughter in his arms.

The US Geological Survey registered Saturday's quake at 6.2 magnitude, occurring at 12:53 GMT with an epicenter 19.3 kilometers (12 miles) southeast of the city of Matias Romero, in the southern state of Oaxaca.

The head of Mexico's civil protection service, Luis Felipe Puente, tweeted that "for the moment no effects reported, we are continuing to monitor."

At some Mexico City sites rescue workers were still discussing whether to return to their task of trying to reach survivors of Tuesday's quake believe to be buried under debris in three sites in the city.

## McCain foils GOP move to repeal Obamacare

AFP, Washington

US Senator John McCain announced Friday his opposition to the latest Republican attempt to replace Barack Obama's signature health care law, likely dooming the repeal effort.

It is the second time in two months that he has defied his party and President Donald Trump over efforts to replace the Affordable Care Act, often referred to as "Obamacare," which has long been in Republicans' sights.

"I cannot in good conscience vote for the Graham-Cassidy proposal," McCain said of the bill proposed by fellow Republican senators Lindsey Graham and Bill Cassidy, adding he believed health reform legislation needed to be a bipartisan effort.

President Trump, speaking in Alabama late Friday, acknowledged the setback but

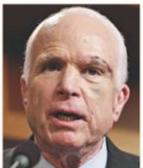
vowed to fight on.

"I have to tell you, maybe -- it's a little tougher without McCain's vote," he said at a rally in Huntsville.

In July, McCain made a dramatic return to Washington from Arizona after a brain cancer diagnosis to become one of three Republican senators who helped sink their party's earlier bid to replace Obamacare.

Now, rebels within the party ranks appear set to torpedo what may be the party's last chance to make good on a longstanding Republican goal, and a signature pledge of the president.

With both McCain and the conservative Rand Paul opposed, it would take just one more Republican defector to prevent the bill's passage before a deadline of September 30, the end of the fiscal year. At least two party moderates -- Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski -- are known to have serious reservations.



## Thai junta says police helped Yingluck escape

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's deputy junta leader has accused three police officers of helping sneak ex-prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra out of the country last month, a vanishing act that stunned the kingdom.

Yingluck, whose government was toppled by the military in 2014, has not been seen since August 25, when she failed to turn up for a court verdict in her criminal negligence trial.

Thailand's junta says it was unaware she was planning to escape -- something many Thais have found difficult to believe given the round-the-clock surveillance Yingluck frequently complained of.

## China to limit fuel, textile exports to North Korea

REUTERS, Shanghai

China yesterday said it will ban exports of some petroleum products to North Korea, as well as imports of textiles from the isolated North, in line with a United Nations Security Council resolution passed after Pyongyang's latest nuclear test.

The announcement from Beijing came at the end of a week that saw tensions ratchet up between the United States and North Korea, with the leaders of both countries trading insults.

The Ministry of Commerce said in a statement on its website that China would limit exports of refined petroleum products from Oct. 1 and ban exports of condensates and liquefied natural gas immediately to comply with the latest U.N. sanctions.

Imports of textiles from North Korea would also be banned immediately, the statement said.

Textile trade contracts signed before Sept 11 would be respected if import formalities

are completed before midnight on Dec. 10, the statement said.

The moves follow the adoption of a unanimous UN Security Council agreement on sanctions after the isolated North conducted its sixth and most powerful nuclear test on Sept. 3.

That resolution imposed a ban on condensates and natural gas liquids, a cap of 2 million barrels a year on refined petroleum products and a cap on crude oil exports to North Korea at current levels.

Russia urged calm on Friday after US President Donald Trump called North Korean leader Kim Jong Un a "madman". Kim had called Trump a "mentally deranged US dotard" a day earlier after Trump said Washington would "totally destroy" North Korea if it threatened the United States or its allies.

China has also urged calm, with Foreign Minister Wang Yi telling his Japanese counterpart that Tokyo should not abandon dialogue over North Korea.