

# NEWSIN brief

## Senior Afghan official abducted in Pakistan

AFP, Peshawar

The deputy governor of Afghanistan's northeastern province of Kunar has been kidnapped in neighbouring Pakistan, officials said yesterday, an incident which could further strain relations between Islamabad and Kabul. Muhammad Nabi Ahmadi arrived in the northwestern Pakistani city of Peshawar on Friday for an appointment with a doctor. No group has claimed responsibility.

## Pakistan frees 68 Indian fishermen

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan yesterday released 68 Indian fishermen held for trespassing into its territorial waters, officials said. Indian and Pakistani fishermen are frequently detained for illegal fishing since the Arabian Sea border is not clearly defined and many boats lack the technology to fix their precise location. A Pakistani official said 380 Indian fishermen still remained behind bars in the country.



## Britain's Prince George on IS hit list: Report

PTI, London

Britain's Prince George is on the hit list of the Islamic State terror group which has threatened to kill the four-year-old son of Prince William and Kate Middleton, according to a UK media report. George, who is the third-in-line to the British throne, had started his term at a primary school near the family's Kensington Palace home in central London last month.



## US pressure delays Israel's annexation bill

REUTERS, Jerusalem

US pressure delayed an Israeli ministerial vote yesterday on a proposed bill that Washington fears entails annexation of Jewish settlements near Jerusalem, an Israeli lawmaker said. The "Greater Jerusalem" legislation would put some settlements in the occupied West Bank, built on land Palestinians seek for a future state and viewed as illegal by most countries, under the jurisdiction of Jerusalem's municipality. The bill, proposed by a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party, was to have been submitted for approval yesterday to a ministerial committee on legislation, a first step before a series of ratification votes in parliament. But Likud lawmaker David Bitan, chairman of Netanyahu's coalition in parliament, said a vote by the cabinet committee would be delayed because Washington told Israel the bill's passage could impede US efforts to revive peace talks that collapsed in 2014. "The prime minister doesn't think this is about annexation. I don't think so either. We have to take the time to clarify matters to the Americans. Therefore, if the bill passes in a week, or in a month, it's less problematic," he said. Proponents of the legislation say it falls short of formal land annexation to Israel but will enable some 150,000 settlers to vote in Jerusalem city elections.



Civilians assist a man, injured from a suicide car bomb explosion, at the gate of Naso Hablod Two Hotel in Hamarweyne district of Mogadishu; inset Somali security officers secure the site after the blast on Saturday. PHOTO: REUTERS

# 'We will build weapons'

### Iran's president vows to continue developing ballistic missiles as IAEA says Tehran respecting nuke deal

AFP, Tehran

Iran's president yesterday said his country would continue building weapons including developing missiles as the United States prepares new sanctions over its ballistic missile programme.

"To defend our nation and territorial integrity, we will build all the weapons we will need," Hassan Rouhani told parliament in statements broadcast on state television.

Recent Iranian missile launches have triggered US sanctions and accusations they violate the spirit of a 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and major powers.

Signed by Iran, Germany, Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States, the landmark accord saw economic sanctions on Iran lifted in exchange for Tehran curbing its nuclear activities.

"We have built missiles, we are building some and will continue to

do so because it does not violate any international regulations -- not even the UN Security Council's Resolution 2231" endorsing the deal, Rouhani said.

Under Resolution 2231, Tehran is "called upon" to refrain from carrying



out launches of missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

Iran says all of its missiles are designed to carry conventional warheads only.

But the United States and France say the missile launches do not comply with the UN resolution.

This month, US President Donald Trump said a "total termination" of the nuclear deal remained possible, after refusing to certify the 2015 accord and leaving its fate to the US Congress.

On Thursday, Congress passed new sanctions in response to Iran's ballistic missiles programme.

Meanwhile, the head of the United Nations atomic agency yesterday said Iran was carrying out its commitments made under a landmark nuclear deal with world powers.

"As of today, I can state that the nuclear-related commitments made by Iran under the JCPOA (nuclear deal) are being implemented," Yukiya Amano said at a press conference in Tehran broadcast by state television.

Under the deal, Iran is allowed to enrich uranium to low levels of 3.5 percent, which can be used to power reactors.

## CONFLICT OVER CONTROL OF KURDISTAN BORDER

# Iraqi forces, Peshmerga start new round of talks

REUTERS, Baghdad

Iraqi forces and Kurdish Peshmerga fighters yesterday started a second round of talks to resolve a conflict over control of the Kurdistan region's border crossings, Iraqi state TV said.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi on Friday ordered a 24-hour suspension of military operations against Kurdish forces in northern Iraq. The two sides held a first round of talks on Friday and Saturday.

Abadi said the talks are meant to prepare for the peaceful deployment of Iraqi troops at the border crossings with Turkey, Iran and Syria in Iraq's Kurdistan region.

Clashes broke out between the two sides after Iraqi forces captured the oil-rich city of Kirkuk from the Peshmerga, in a surprise offensive ordered by Abadi after the Kurds held an independence referendum in northern Iraq on Sept 25.

PM Abadi wants to take control of border crossings

Kurdish leader will hand over power on Nov 1

Kirkuk is part of so-called disputed areas, claimed by both the Iraqi central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq.

Meanwhile, a Kurdish government official said that Iraqi Kurdistan's veteran leader Masoud Barzani would not extend his presidential term beyond Nov 1. His decision came just weeks after a referendum on Kurdish independence backfired and triggered a crisis for Iraq's Kurds who had been enjoying a period of unprecedented autonomy.

Abadi wants to take control of the disputed areas and the border crossings, including one in the Fish-Khabur area through which an oil export pipeline crosses into Turkey. The KRG on Wednesday proposed an immediate ceasefire, a suspension of the referendum result and "starting an open dialogue with the federal government based on the Iraqi constitution" - a call rejected by Baghdad.

# Food a 'weapon of war' in Yemen: WFP

AFP, Riyadh

Beyond air raids, gun battles and port blockades, food is now a "weapon of war" in Yemen, the UN's World Food Programme said yesterday, as millions face impending famine.

"Yemen is on the brink of famine. Cholera is compounding a dramatic food crisis. Food is being used as a weapon of war," WFP assistant executive director Elisabeth Rasmussen said at a conference on aid to Yemen hosted by Saudi Arabia.

The Yemen conflict has claimed more than 8,650 lives since 2015, when a powerful military coalition led by Saudi Arabia joined the government's fight against Iran-backed Huthi rebels and their ally, strongman Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Long the most impoverished country in the Arab world, the conflict in Yemen has left seven million people at risk of famine and an estimated 17 million -- 60 percent of the overall population -- food insecure, according to the United Nations.

Both sides in the conflict stand accused of failing to protect civilians in what the UN has called the "largest humanitarian crisis in the world".

The Saudi-led coalition, which controls Yemen's airspace and some ports, was this month added to a UN blacklist for the "killing and maiming of children".



Mourners pray for the late Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej during the procession transferring the relics and his ashes from the Grand Palace to a local temple in Bangkok, yesterday. A year of official mourning for Thailand's late King ended yesterday after a lavish five-day funeral full of pageantry and religious ritual. PHOTO: AFP

# Myanmar's tourism fades

AFP, Yangon

Only a few years ago Beyonce and Jay-Z were posing for photos among Myanmar's famed temples, heralding the former junta-run country's rise as one of the hottest new tourist destinations on the map.

But that dream is cracking as images of burnt villages and Muslim Rohingya fleeing army-led violence in western Rakhine shock the globe, sparking outrage over a staggering scale of human suffering that has festered along the border.

Ever since the bloodshed broke out in late August, tourism operators have witnessed a cascade of cancellations, rippling fear through a nascent industry that was gearing up for its high season in October.

"Almost all the trips scheduled for October and November have been cancelled due to instability in the country, because of the situation in Rakhine state," said Tun Tun Naing from New Fantastic Asia Travels and Tour, an agency that leads trips to the pristine beaches and mist-shrouded lakes that dot the lush country.

"Most groups in Japan, Australia and other Asian countries cited security reasons and some Europeans have

clearly said they boycotted because of the humanitarian situation," he told AFP.

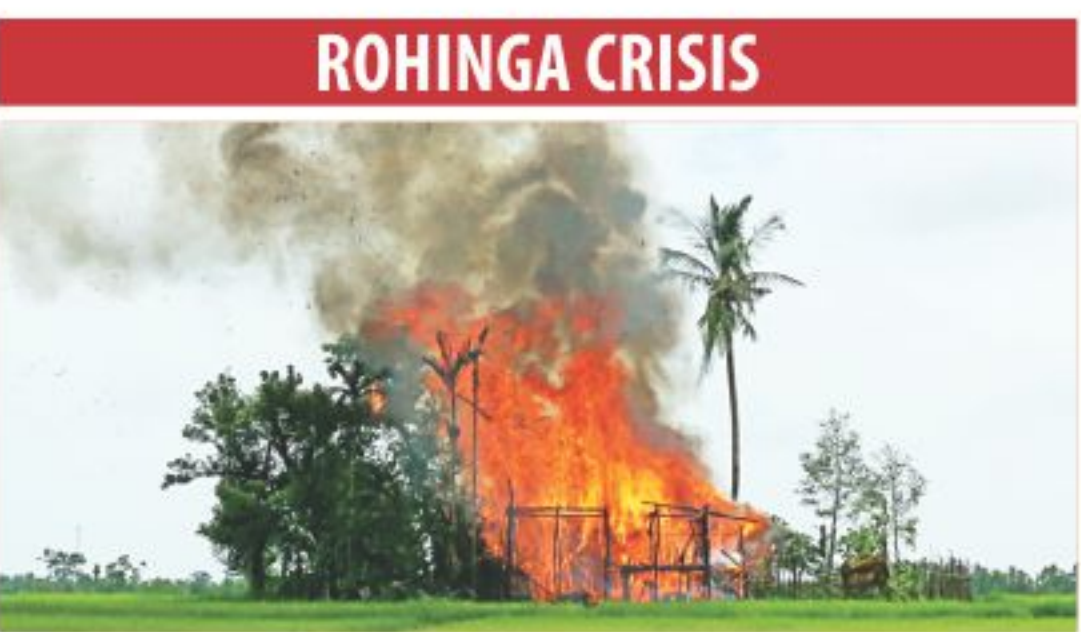
In Yangon, a bustling city known for its crumbling colonial architecture, some foreign tourists could still be seen circling the gilded Shwedagon Pagoda that looms over the former capital.

But they admitted that the ongoing crisis is an awkward backdrop for their holiday.

"It's very sad to see what the country is becoming, our guide told us that Muslims were dangerous and that they were not Burmese," said French tourist Christine, who declined to give her surname, of a crisis that has spiked religious tensions in the Buddhist majority country.

Some distinguished guests are also keeping their distance, with Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, and his wife Camilla deciding to skip a stop in the former colony during an autumn tour of Asia.

There are fears the refugee crisis could throw Myanmar's fledgling tourism sector back to the dark days under military rule, when many travellers passed over the pariah state to avoid lining the pockets of generals who brutally suppressed human rights.



ROHINGA CRISIS

# Taliban attacks on Afghan cops kill 22

AFP, Kabul

Taliban insurgents, some wearing night-vision goggles, killed 22 Afghan policemen yesterday in separate attacks on checkpoints over the weekend in the latest blow to the country's beleaguered security forces.

Militants wearing the goggles launched a pre-dawn assault on a police post in Khan Abad district in the northern province of Kunduz on Sunday and killed 13 officers, said provincial police chief Abdul Hamid Hamidi.

Only one policeman survived the attack, he told reporters. The attackers destroyed the checkpoint and stole a Humvee, according to district governor Hayatullah Amiri.

On Saturday Taliban fighters killed nine policemen and wounded two others stationed at checkpoints in Ghazni, the capital of the southeastern province of the same name, said provincial governor's spokesman Mohammad Arif Noori.

Twelve of the militants were killed and four wounded, Noori said.

The Taliban claimed the attacks in statements to media. The insurgents have stepped up attacks on security installations as they seek to demoralise police and troops and steal equipment to fuel the insurgency.

The militants have acquired "dozens" of armoured Humvees and pickup trucks in recent years, defence ministry deputy spokesman Mohammad Radmanesh told AFP recently.

## SHABAAB SIEGE ON HOTEL IN SOMALIA

# 29 killed; security chiefs sacked

AGENCIES

The death toll from a deadly attack on a hotel in Mogadishu rose to 29 yesterday, prompting the Somali government to sack its police and intelligence chiefs.

The move came after Al-Qaeda aligned Shabaab gunmen staged coordinated bomb attacks Saturday outside the Nasa Hablod Hotel 2 before storming the building.

Two weeks ago, Mogadishu was hit by a massive truck bombing that killed 358 people in the troubled country's worst-ever attack.

Saturday's carnage was unleashed when a car bomb exploded outside the hotel entrance followed by a minibus loaded with explosives going off at a nearby intersection.

The gunmen then rushed into the popular hotel, launching a siege that lasted several hours.

"So far I am sure 29 people died - the death toll may rise, Abdullahi Nur, a police officer, told Reuters.

At least 12 of the dead were police officers, Nur said. A woman was beheaded while her "three children were shot dead", he said.

A Reuters witness saw seven bodies lying inside the hotel. Officials had initially given a toll of 14 dead, saying "most" of the casualties were civilians although a senior police official and a former MP were among them.

"Five gunmen stormed the building, two of them were killed and the rest captured alive," security ministry spokesman Abdiasiz Ali Ibrahim told reporters.

The Shabaab has made attacks on hotels -- commonly beginning with a suicide car bombing followed by an invasion by gunmen -- a regular strategy in its decade-long battle to overthrow successive internationally-backed governments in Mogadishu.

## WAR IN SYRIA

# Regime, IS clashes kill 73 in Deir Ezzor

AFP, Beirut

Heavy clashes between Syria's army and the Islamic State group in Deir Ezzor city have killed at least 73 fighters in the last 24 hours, a monitor said yesterday.

Syria's army controls most of Deir Ezzor city, capital of Deir Ezzor province in the country's east, and made further advances after responding to an IS attack that began Saturday, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor said.

The monitor said the fierce fighting Saturday killed at least 50 IS fighters, as well as 23 Syrian soldiers and pro-regime militiamen.

Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman said government forces had captured two new neighbourhoods and the municipal stadium.

"IS is now encircled in an area between the city and the (Euphrates) river," Abdel Rahman said.

IS once held large sections of Deir Ezzor city, and for nearly three years laid siege to other parts of it that remained under government control.

In early September, advancing government forces broke the siege, and they have been working since to expel the jihadists from the rest of the city.

Abdel Rahman said the fighting that began Saturday was the fiercest in the city since government troops broke the siege, adding that clashes were continuing Sunday, with regime ally Russia carrying out heavy airstrikes in support of the army and allied fighters.

Deir Ezzor, an oil-rich province that borders Iraq, was once a stronghold of IS, but the jihadist group faces twin assaults there, from the regime and the US-backed Kurdish-Arab Syrian Democratic Forces.