

NEWSIN brief

Trump to name SC nominee on July 9

US President Donald Trump said on Friday he plans to announce his nominee to replace retiring US Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy on July 9, and that he has narrowed his list of candidates. "I've got it down to about five," Trump said, including two women. He would not identify the candidates by name.

France should quit EU!

When they met in April at the White House, President Donald Trump suggested to his French counterpart that France should quit the European Union and sign a bilateral trade deal with the US. The Washington Post reported Friday. "Why don't you leave the EU?" he reportedly asked visiting President Emmanuel Macron, who was elected last year on a resolutely pro-European platform, the Post said, citing two European officials.

Israeli forces kill two more Gaza protesters

Israeli forces shot and killed two Palestinians, one of them a 14-year-old boy, and wounded 415 others with live fire and tear gas during protests along the Gaza border on Friday, Gaza health officials said. Gaza officials say Israeli troops have killed at least 135 people since the weekly protests began on March 30.

US ambassador resigns over Trump comments

The US ambassador to Estonia is resigning, reportedly in frustration at remarks made by President Donald Trump about America's European allies. James D Melville said Trump's comments on Nato and the EU had brought forward his decision to retire, Foreign Policy magazine reports. The magazine was quoting from a private Facebook post by the envoy.



People line the street as a woman plays "Amazing Grace" on a bagpipe during a candlelight vigil in downtown Annapolis to honor the five people who were killed inside the Capital Gazette newspaper the day before in Annapolis, Maryland, US on Friday. Hundreds of people gathered on Friday evening to remember the five people gunned down at the community newspaper office in Annapolis, one of the deadliest attacks on journalists in US history.

Trump to raise polls meddling issue with Putin

US President Donald Trump said on Friday he would raise the issue of alleged Russian meddling in US elections during his planned meeting with President Vladimir Putin in Helsinki next month.

Speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One on his way to New Jersey, Trump also said he would discuss the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine and other international issues with Putin during the July 16 summit.

Russia has denied US intelligence agencies' assessment that Moscow sought to interfere with the 2016 US election to boost Trump's prospects of becoming president.

Trump also denies wrongdoing and calls an investigation into possible collusion between his presidential campaign and Russia a "witch hunt."

US sanctions aim to turn Iranians against govt

Says Khamenei amid protests over economic woes

US economic pressure on Iran is intended to turn Iranians against their government, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was quoted as saying yesterday by his website.

The country's rial currency has lost up to 40 per cent of its value since last month, when US President Donald Trump pulled out of Iran's 2015 nuclear accord and said he would reimpose sanctions and try to curb Iranian oil exports.

"They bring to bear economic pressure to separate the nation from the system ... but six US presidents before him tried this and had to give up," Khamenei was quoted as saying by Khamenei.ir, referring to Trump.

Speaking to graduating Revolutionary Guards officers, Khamenei accused the United States and Sunni Muslim Gulf Arab states that regard Shia Muslim Iran as their

main regional foe of trying to destabilise the government in Tehran. "If America was able to act against Iran, it would not need to form coalitions with notorious and reactionary states in the region and ask their help in fomenting unrest and instability (in



Iran)," Khamenei said in remarks carried by state TV.

Khamenei was speaking after three days of protests in Tehran and other cities in which hundreds of traders in the bazaar closed their shops to voice anger at the rial's plunge. Such mer-

chants have mostly been loyal to the leadership since the 1979 Islamic Revolution overthrew the monarchy.

State news agency IRNA reported that top government officials including President Hassan Rouhani and the heads of parliament and the judiciary had met to discuss the prospective US sanctions.

"Various scenarios of threats to the Iranian economy by the US government were examined and appropriate measures were taken to prepare for any probable US sanctions, and to prevent their negative impact," IRNA said.

Measures to achieve self-reliance in gasoline production were among issues discussed, IRNA said.

The United States has told allies to cut all imports of Iranian oil from November and is unlikely to offer exemptions, a senior State Department official said on Tuesday as the Trump administration seeks to cut off funding to Iran.

POLITICAL CRISIS IN MALDIVES

Opposition unites, fields joint candidate against Yameen

Opposition parties in the Maldives yesterday agreed to field a joint candidate in September's presidential elections to challenge incumbent Abdulla Yameen, whose crackdown on dissent has alarmed the international community.

Yameen declared a state of emergency in February in the Indian Ocean honeymoon paradise, a move critics say was aimed at averting his impeachment. All his main rivals have meanwhile been jailed.

Yesterday's announcement came after ex-president Mohamed Nasheed, who is in self-imposed exile in London, said on Friday that he would not return to run in the September 23 vote.

Nasheed's Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) said it has agreed to join several other parties, including a breakaway faction of Yameen's ruling party, to form an alliance.

"My heartfelt congratulations to the joint opposition parties who have today agreed to field a common presidential ticket," Nasheed said on Twitter.

Opposition sources in the Maldives said the MDP's parliamentary leader Ibrahim Mohamed Solih is tipped to be named as the common candidate.

Yameen declared the state of emergency - which lasted 45 days - after the top court ordered dissidents to be freed from jail and seats of ruling party MPs sacked by Yameen to be restored.

The chief justice and the supreme court justice were subsequently arrested along with Yameen's half-brother Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, a former strongman who ruled for 30 years until 2008.

The United States and the European Union have expressed deep concern over Yameen's actions. Rights activists have asked the EU to slap sanctions on Yameen and key aides.



Air pollution linked to diabetes

Air pollution caused one in seven new cases of diabetes in 2016, according to a US study, which found even low levels raised the chances of developing the chronic disease.

Diabetes has primarily been associated with lifestyle factors like diet and a sedentary lifestyle, but research by the Washington University School of Medicine in St Louis said pollution also plays a major role.

The study estimated that pollution contributed to 3.2 million new diabetes cases globally in 2016 - or around 14 percent of all new diabetes cases globally that year.

"Our research shows a significant link between air pollution and diabetes globally," said Ziyad Al-Aly, the study's senior author.

Pollution is thought to reduce the body's insulin production, "preventing the body from converting blood glucose into energy that the body needs to maintain health," according to the research.

Al-Aly said the research, published in

the Lancet Planetary Health, found an increased risk even with levels of air pollution currently considered safe by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Researchers working with scientists at the Veterans Affairs' Clinical Epidemiology Center, examined data from 1.7 million US veterans who did not have histories of diabetes and were followed for a median of 8.5 years.

Patient information from the veterans was compared to air quality information to examine the relationship between pollution and diabetes risk.

The scientists found the risk of developing diabetes "exhibited a strong link to air pollution". They then devised a model to gauge diabetes risks over different pollution levels and used data from the annual worldwide Global Burden of Disease study, to estimate the prevalence of diabetes caused by bad air.

Diabetes affects more than 420 million people globally and is one of the world's fastest growing diseases.



A woman of the Rendile tribe smiles as she watches another tribe's performance during the 11th Marsabit Lake Turkana Culture Festival in Loiyangalani near Lake Turkana, northern Kenya. The annual 3-day festival that started on Thursday features the cultural traditions of 14 ethnic tribes in Marsabit county to promote tourism and build better relationship between tribes.

TERROR-FINANCING WATCH LIST

Pakistan vows to improve record

Placed back on a terror financing watch list this week, Pakistan yesterday vowed to tighten regulations and follow an action plan to curb money laundering and terror financing.

Pakistani officials attending a meeting in Paris had tried in vain to persuade the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to keep Pakistan off a list of nations with inadequate controls to prevent terror financing and money laundering.

Western allies have long pushed Islamabad to do more to curb militant groups on its soil, and the United States, United Kingdom, France and Germany all argued back in February for Pakistan to be reinserted on the watchdog's "grey list".

Various anti-Western, anti-Indian Islamist militant groups are based in nuclear-armed Pakistan, while Afghanistan and western military officials have repeatedly complained about covert support in Pakistan for the Afghan Taliban and its cohorts, like the Haqqani group.

Pakistan was included on the watch list for three years until 2015, and FATF has told the government what needs to be done in order to be taken off again.

THAI CAVE TRAGEDY- DAY 7

Rescuers cling to hope

Having failed to find any sign of 12 boys and their soccer coach during a week-long search of flooded cave complex in northern Thailand, rescuers held out hope yesterday that the group could have found safety on a rocky mound in one of the chambers.

Divers from the Thai navy's elite SEAL unit were groping their way through the murky waters filling passages of the 10-kilometre (6-mile) underground maze of the Tham Luang cave, as the rescue effort turned increasingly desperate.

International rescue teams, including 30 US military personnel, have joined the search for the junior soccer team, which went missing last Saturday, but the rescuers have been hampered by heavy rain.

Divers were still some way from the potential safety spot, called "Pattaya Beach" after one of Thailand's best known tourist destinations. "The

distance we've got still got to go is probably two to three kilometres," Narongsak Osottanakorn, governor of Chiang Rai province, told reporters.

Meantime, a police search party has entered the cave from the surface, having drilled a 50-metre long shaft from the mountainside. Survival boxes, filled with food, water and torches, had been dropped down the shaft on Friday, but by Saturday it was wide enough for rescuers to be lowered into the cave.

Deputy Police Chief Wirachai Songmetta said that search party has, as yet, been unable to reach the underground chamber that could be the best hope of survival for the boys.

Aside from bicycles and soccer boots left near the cave's entrance, and some handprints seen on the walls, the searchers have found no trace of the boys, aged between 11 and 16, or their 25-year-old assistant coach.

SYRIAN OFFENSIVE IN SOUTHWEST

Eight towns return to regime control

At least eight battered rebel-held towns in southern Syria yesterday returned to regime control under Russian-brokered deals after nearly two weeks of bombardment, a Britain-based monitor said.

Since June 19, the Damascus regime has pressed a deadly bombardment campaign in southern Syria in a bid to retake the strategic area bordering Jordan and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

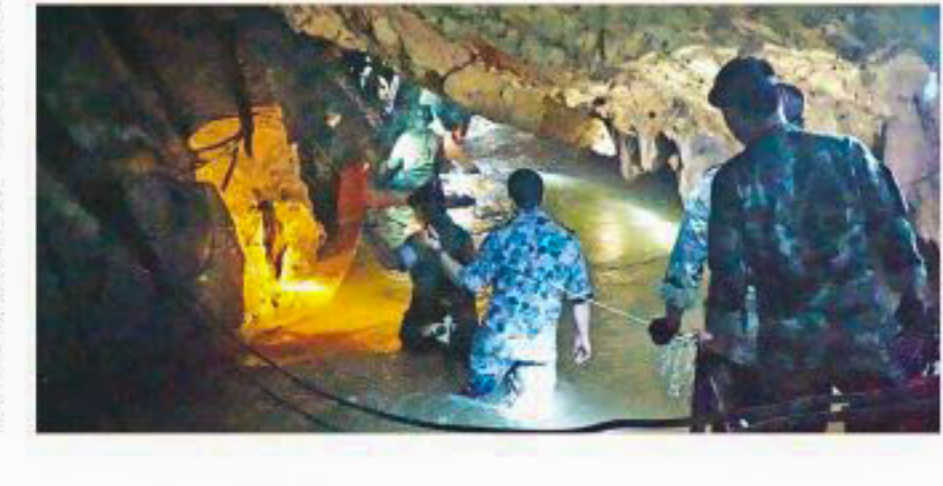
The agreements for the eight towns in the southern province of Daraa were reached even as regime air strikes pounded other opposition holdouts nearby, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor said.

The deals are the latest in a string of such "reconciliation" agreements across the country that have seen the government retake opposition-held areas, often after deadly air and ground offensives.

Regime and Russian strikes on other parts of Daraa yesterday killed at least five civilians, the Observatory said. That brought the total number of civilians killed in regime bombardment on the province to 105 non-combatants including 19 children since June 19.

REUTERS, Islamabad

REUTERS, Chiang Rai



AFP, Beirut