

# NEWSIN brief

## US-led strikes kill 28 jihadists in Syria

At least 28 Islamic State group jihadists were killed Monday in coordinated strikes by the US-led coalition and allied fighters in eastern Syria's Deir Ezzor province, a monitoring group said. IS, which once controlled swathes of Syria and Iraq, has been pounded by multiple offensives and today controls less than three percent of Syria's territory.

## Israeli strike kills 2 militants in Gaza

An Israeli strike yesterday killed two militants of the Gaza Strip's ruling Hamas movement after shots were fired at soldiers, Gaza and Israeli officials said. Palestinian sources said that the Israeli attack was in the north of the strip but they said it was a drone strike, while the Israeli statement said that it was tank fire.

## Largest ever wildfire rages on in California

Two fires mercilessly roaring through northern California have grown so rapidly that they are now the largest ever to ravage the state, authorities said. Collectively dubbed the Mendocino Complex, the wildfires have burned through 283,800 acres and are just 30 percent contained, according to state fire authority CalFire.

## N Korea frees 5 Korean detainee

North Korea yesterday released a South Korean who was arrested after crossing the border last month, Seoul's unification ministry said, welcoming the "humanitarian" gesture. The North told the South Monday of its decision to release the man, who was detained for crossing into the country on July 22, the ministry said in a statement.



Rescue workers extract a woman yesterday, who survived after being trapped in rubble since Sunday's earthquake, in Tanjung, North Lombok, Indonesia.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# Search on for survivors

### Thousands left homeless wait for aid as death toll tops 100

The death toll from a powerful earthquake that hit Indonesia's tourist island of Lombok topped 100 yesterday as rescuers found victims under wrecked buildings, while thousands left homeless in the worst-affected areas waited for aid to arrive.

Lombok had already been hit by a 6.4 magnitude earthquake on July 29 that killed 17 people and briefly stranded several hundred trekkers on the slopes of a volcano.

Indonesia sits on the Pacific Ring of Fire and is regularly hit by earthquakes. In 2004, the Indian Ocean tsunami killed 226,000 people in 13 countries, including more than 120,000 in Indonesia.

**INDONESIA QUAKE**

Experts say aftershocks are expected to continue for next two weeks

Tourists leave Lombok, more than 4,600 rescued from Gili islands

A woman was pulled alive from the rubble of a collapsed grocery store in the north, near the epicentre of Sunday's 6.9 magnitude quake, the second tremor to rock the tropical island in a week.

That was a rare piece of good news as hopes of finding more survivors faded and a humanitarian crisis loomed for thousands left homeless by the disaster in the rural area and in desperate need of clean water, food, medicine and shelter.

Sutopo Purwo Nugroho, the spokesman of Indonesia's disaster mitigation agency (BNPB) put the toll at 105, including two on the neighbouring island of Bali to the west, where the quake was also felt - and the figure was expected to rise.

Some villagers used sledgeshammers and ropes to start clearing the rubble of broken homes, but others, traumatised by continued aftershocks, were too afraid to venture far from tents and tarpaulins set up in open spaces.

Sunday's earthquake triggered at least 230 aftershocks, which were expected to continue for the next two weeks, experts said.

Thousands of tourists have left Lombok since Sunday evening, fearing further earthquakes, some on extra flights added by airlines and some on ferries to Bali. Officials said about 4,600 foreign and domestic tourists had been evacuated from the three Gili islands off the northwest coast of Lombok, where two people died and fears of a tsunami spread soon after the quake.

Saffron Amis, a British student on Gili Trawangan - the largest of the islands fringed by white beaches and surrounded by turquoise sea - said at least 200 people were stranded there with more flowing in from the other two, Gili Air and Gili Meno.

# India foils Kashmir infiltration attempt

### Gunfight kills 4 troops including a major

NDTV ONLINE

An Army Major and three soldiers were killed in a gunfight with a large group of terrorists who were trying to infiltrate from Gurez in north Kashmir yesterday.

The infiltration bid was foiled and two terrorists were also shot dead, the army said in a statement.

According to sources, it was a group of six to eight terrorists that crossed the Line of Control or LoC at Gurez in north Kashmir's Bandipore district, 125 km from Srinagar.

They were intercepted by soldiers, leading to a fierce gunfight. The encounter was still going on and the army had called in reinforcements to go after the remaining terrorists, who fled in the nearby jungles.

The Pakistani forces have been targeting Indian positions at Gurez since Monday night, in a possible attempt to provide covering fire to the group of heavily armed infiltrators.

Earlier this month, the government of India statistics revealed that there have been 406 infiltration attempts across J&K in 2017 during which 59 militants and seven armed forces were killed. This year up to June, 133 infiltration attempts were made during which 14 militants have been killed.

The government also maintained that the Indian Army and Border Security Force have adopted a robust counter infiltration strategy which has an appropriate mix of technology and human resource to check infiltration effectively. "Issues of infiltration and suspicious activity close to border are taken up regularly with Pakistan authorities at appropriate level through the established mechanism of hotlines, flag meetings as well as talks between the Director General of Military Operations of the two countries," the government said in a written reply in parliament last week.

## 'EMERGENCY SITUATIONS' AND 'NATIONAL SECURITY'

# India asks telcos to find ways to block social apps

and such other mobile apps can be blocked on internet," according to the government letter dated July 18 and seen by Reuters.

Facebook Inc, which owns both WhatsApp and photo-sharing platform Instagram, declined to comment. Telegram did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

A source at India's department of telecommunication said the letter was aimed at finding ways to block such apps during "emergency situations".

"There is a need for a reasonable good solution to protect national security," said the official, who declined to be named.

Following calls from the government to stem the platform's misuse, WhatsApp has moved to deter mass message forwards and launched an advertising campaign to educate consumers.

In July, WhatsApp said message forwards will be limited to five chats at a time, whether among individuals or groups, and said it will remove the quick forward button placed next to media messages.

REUTERS, New Delhi

India has asked its telecom operators to find ways of blocking applications such as Facebook and messaging app WhatsApp in the case of misuse, according to a document seen by Reuters.

India has in recent months intensified efforts to crack down on mass message forwards after it found that people were using social media and messaging apps to spread rumours and stoke public anger.

WhatsApp in particular has faced the wrath of Indian regulators after false messages circulated on the messaging platform led to a series of lynchings and mob beatings across the country.

The department of telecommunications in July asked Indian telecom service providers, as well as mobile and internet industry bodies, to "explore various possible options" to block such apps.

"You are ... requested to explore various possible options and confirm how the Instagram/Facebook/Whatsapp/Telegram

## 'HOTHOUSE' EARTH

The planet urgently needs to transition to a green economy because fossil fuel pollution risks pushing the Earth into a lasting and dangerous "hothouse" state, researchers warned on Monday. If polar ice continues to melt, forests are slashed and greenhouse gases rise to new highs -- as they currently do each year -- the Earth will pass a tipping point. Crossing that threshold "guarantees a climate 4-5 Celsius (7-9 Fahrenheit) higher than pre-industrial times, and sea levels that are 10 to 60 meters (30-200 feet) higher than today," cautioned scientists in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

"Hothouse Earth is likely to be uncontrollable and dangerous to many," said the article by scientists at University of Copenhagen, Australian National University and the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany. Rivers would flood, storms would wreak havoc on coastal communities, and coral reefs would be eliminated -- all by century's end or even earlier. Global average temperatures would exceed those of any interglacial period -- meaning warmer eras that come in between Ice Ages -- of the past 1.2 million years. Melting polar ice caps would lead to dramatically higher sea levels, flooding coastal land that is home to hundreds of millions of people.

### WHERE IS THE TIPPING POINT?

Researchers suggest the tipping point could come once the Earth warms to 3.6 Fahrenheit (2 Celsius) over pre-industrial times. The planet has already warmed 1 C over pre-industrial times, and is heating up at a rate of 0.17 C per decade. "A 2 C warming could activate important tipping elements, raising the temperature further to activate other tipping elements in a domino-like cascade that could take the Earth System to even higher temperatures," said the report. This cascade "may tip the entire Earth system into a new mode of operation," said co-author Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research.

### HOW THEY CALCULATED THIS

The "Perspective" article is based on previously published studies on tipping points for the Earth. The scientists also examined conditions the Earth has seen in the distant past, such as the Pliocene period five million years ago, when CO2 was at 400 ppm like today.

During the Cretaceous period, the era of the dinosaurs some 100 million years ago, CO2 levels were even higher at 1,000 ppm, largely due to volcanic activity. To state that 2 C is a no-return threshold "is new," said Martin Siegert, co-director of the Grantham Institute at Imperial College London, who was not involved in the study. The study authors "collated previously published ideas and theories to present a narrative on how the threshold change would work," he said.



SOURCE: AFP

# Veteran Indian leader Karunanidhi dies

Thousands mourned in southern India yesterday after the death of revered 94-year-old political leader Muthuvel Karunanidhi.

Karunanidhi, a charismatic self-styled champion of the poor, had been in intensive care since July 28 in Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu state.

A big crowd had been thronging the streets outside the hospital since his hospitalisation but it swelled to some 6,000 yesterday, an AFP photographer estimated, after doctors said he had suffered a "significant decline".

Prime Minister Narendra Modi immediately tweeted condolences to Karunanidhi's family, saying "India and particularly Tamil Nadu will miss him immensely".

"He was one of the senior most leaders of India. We have lost a deep-rooted mass leader, prolific thinker, accomplished writer and a stalwart whose life was devoted to the welfare of the poor and the marginalised," he added.

Supporters beat their chests and



A Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party supporter holds a portrait of party president M Karunanidhi in front of hospital where he died, in Chennai yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

chanted the leader's name as hundreds of police struggled to contain the surging crowds pressing against barricades.

The Press Trust of India news agency said a security alert had been sounded across the state, bearing in

mind the outbreaks of violence in the past over the deaths of popular figures.

Karunanidhi was chief minister of Tamil Nadu five times and successfully contested 12 state elections, building legions of supporters on the way.

His popularity had not waned even though he handed over the reins of his Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party to his son MK Stalin.

Karunanidhi, a school dropout, became involved in politics at a young age, spearheading the DMK which was allied for many years to the Gandhi dynasty's Congress party.

Affectionately called "Kalaigarn" or scholar, he wrote reams of poems, lyrics and books and was a prolific screenwriter for the Tamil film industry.

His popularity rivalled that of J Jayalalitha, another powerful leader from Tamil Nadu whose death sparked a huge outpouring of grief. An estimated one million people lined the streets for Jayalalitha's burial in 2016.

The deaths of Jayalalitha and Karunanidhi leave a big political vacuum in one of India's most industrialised and prosperous southern states only months before key national election early next year.



## Ex-PM Najib to be charged with money laundering

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's embattled former prime minister Najib Razak will be charged today under a money-laundering act, the anti-graft agency said, in connection with a multi-billion-dollar scandal at state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB).

Najib, 65, and his family have faced intense scrutiny since May, when a shock election result brought his former mentor-turned-foe, 93-year-old Mahathir Mohamad, back to power.

Mahathir swiftly reopened an investigation into 1MDB and barred Najib and his wife, Rosmah Mansor, from leaving the country.

Last month, Najib was arrested and charged with abuse of power and criminal breach of trust related to an alleged transfer of 42 million ringgit (\$10.31 million) into his personal bank account from SRC International, a former unit of 1MDB.

He has pleaded not guilty to the charges and was released after posting bail.

On Tuesday, he was summoned to the office of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), a day before his pre-trial hearing in court.

He was questioned for about 45 minutes. In a statement soon after Najib left its office, the anti-graft agency said he would be charged under the anti-money laundering act.

# Saudi-Canada row ramps up

### Riyadh expels Canadian envoy, recalls its own after Ottawa criticizes crackdown on activists

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia and Canada showed no signs of backing down in an escalating row over human rights, after Riyadh abruptly cut ties over Ottawa's vigorous calls for the release of activists jailed in the kingdom.

The Saudi government expelled Canada's ambassador, giving him 24 hours to leave the country, and recalled its own envoy to Ottawa, while freezing all new trade over what it slammed as "interference" in its internal affairs.

Ottawa did not give any ground over the shock expulsion of the envoy, Dennis Horak, with Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland saying Canada would continue to defend human rights around the world.

The rupture, which underscores a newly aggressive foreign policy led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, comes after Canada denounced a new crackdown on women and human rights campaigners in the kingdom.

to take further action".

Later Monday, the row appeared to escalate as Riyadh said it will relocate thousands of Saudi students studying in Canada to other countries, and state airline Saudia announced it was suspending flights to and from Toronto.

Last week, Canada said it was "gravely concerned" over the new wave of arrests of rights campaigners, including award-winning gender rights activist Samar Badawi, and called on Riyadh to "immediately release them."

Canada doubled down on Monday. "Canada will always stand up for human rights, in Canada and around the world," Freeland told an audience in Vancouver.

"It is now time for other governments to join Canada in increasing the pressure on Saudi Arabia to release all prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally," said Samah Hadid, Amnesty International's Middle East campaigns director. But Riyadh's singling out of Canada is aimed at strongly discouraging other critical Western governments from speaking out, observers say.

## RAPE AT CHILDREN'S HOMES

# Indian top court seeks govt's explanation

AFP, New Delhi

India's top court yesterday ordered the government to explain what it was doing to prevent rape at state-run children's homes as horrific details emerge of sex abuse rings.

Narendra Modi's political opponents also seized on the scandals at two government-run facilities, accusing the prime minister of keeping quiet about India's record of rape.

Police are investigating the sexual assault of dozens of girls at the shelters in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The states are governed in coalition or outright by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The Supreme Court yesterday, hearing a plea into the Bihar case, admonished the Modi government's record in tackling rape.

"Every six hours, a woman is raped in India," declared a three-judge bench in New Delhi.

"What is to be done? Girls and women are getting raped left, right and centre."

The Delhi Commission for Women Monday announced a committee to audit all government shelters across the national capital.

Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi yesterday attacked Modi over the issue, saying the prime minister was vocal on all subjects "but not women".