

# NEWS IN brief

## 30 civilians killed in bombings in Syria

AFP, Beirut  
Heavy bombardment killed nearly 30 civilians across northern Syria on Friday, a monitor said, in some of the fiercest shelling of rebel-held areas there in months. The air strikes and barrel bombs targeted the key opposition-held province of Idlib and a rebel town in the adjacent province of Aleppo.

## Indonesia quake toll jumps to 380

AFP, Mataram  
The death toll from a 6.9-scale earthquake on the Indonesian island of Lombok has reached 387 people, authorities said yesterday, adding hundreds of thousands of displaced people were still short of clean water, food and medicine nearly a week on. The quake Sunday levelled tens of thousands of homes across Lombok.

## Gaza protest toll rises to three

AFP, Gaza City  
A 40-year-old Palestinian hit by Israeli fire on the Gaza border died of his wounds yesterday, taking the death toll from protests the previous day to three, the territory's health ministry said. He was among at least 131 Palestinians wounded by Israeli bullets during Friday's protests, even as an informal truce ending a deadly flare-up between Gaza's Islamist rulers Hamas and the Israeli army largely held.

## Taliban, Kabul govt both claim Ghazni

AFP, Kabul  
Both Taliban and government forces claimed they were in control of the eastern Afghan city of Ghazni yesterday, after insurgents stormed the provincial capital, triggering fierce fighting. Ghazni -- less than two hours by road from Kabul -- has been under increasing danger from massing Taliban fighters for months.



**A firefighting aircraft drops fire retardant as the Holy Fire burns near homes on Friday in Lake Elsinore, California. Inset, People watch flames from the wildfire outside Glen Ivy Hot Springs in Corona. Authorities battling massive wildfires in large swathes of California issued mandatory evacuation orders and health warnings Friday over the worsening air quality as the flames grew ever closer to populated areas.**

# Turkey-US ties in jeopardy

Says Erdogan, warns Ankara may look for new allies if sanctions not lifted

AFP, Istanbul  
President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey's partnership with the United States may be in jeopardy as ties strain, warning Ankara could start looking for new allies, in an op-ed published in the New York Times yesterday.

Relations between the two Nato allies have sunk to their lowest point in decades over a number of issues including the detention of US pastor Andrew Brunson on terror-related charges, prompting the Turkish lira to hit record lows against the dollar.

The embattled lira tumbled 16 percent against the dollar on Friday, with US President Donald Trump saying he had doubled steel and aluminium tariffs on Turkey in comments that contributed to the currency's further slide.

In the New York Times, Erdogan warned Washington not to risk relations with Ankara, saying otherwise his country would look for "new friends and allies".

"Unless the United States starts

respecting Turkey's sovereignty and proves that it understands the dangers that our nation faces, our partnership could be in jeopardy," he wrote.

"Before it is too late, Washington must give up the misguided notion that our relationship can be asymmetrical and come to terms with the fact



that Turkey has alternatives," he said. "Failure to reverse this trend of unilateralism and disrespect will require us to start looking for new friends and allies."

In a tweet, Trump announced the doubling of the tariffs -- in new punitive actions against Turkey, saying:

"Our relations with Turkey are not good at this time!"

The White House said the new sanctions would take effect from August 13.

Erdogan downplayed the currency crisis in a speech on Friday, advising Turks not to be worried over exchange rate fluctuations.

He also said Turkey had alternatives "from Iran, to Russia, to China and some European countries".

Erdogan Friday held telephone talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, discussing economic and trade issues as well as the Syria crisis.

The Turkish foreign ministry hit back at Trump's comments, saying that the "only result will be harming our relationship" and vowing unspecified retaliation.

The arrest of US pastor Brunson since October 2016 has soured already deeply delicate relations with Washington. Trump has described Brunson's detention as a "total disgrace" and urged Erdogan to free him "immediately".

## CANCER-CAUSING PESTICIDE Court orders Monsanto to pay victim \$290m

AFP, San Francisco

A California jury ordered chemical giant Monsanto to pay nearly \$290 million Friday for failing to warn a dying groundskeeper that its product might cause cancer.

Jurors unanimously found that Monsanto -- which vowed to appeal -- acted with "malice" and that its weed killers Roundup and the professional grade version RangerPro contributed "substantially" to Dewayne Johnson's terminal illness.

Johnson, a California groundskeeper diagnosed in 2014 with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma -- a cancer that affects white blood cells -- says he repeatedly used a professional form of Roundup while working at a school in Benicia, California.

"I want to thank everybody on the jury from the bottom of my heart," Johnson, 46, said after the verdict. "I am glad to be here; the cause is way bigger than me. Hopefully this thing will get the attention it needs."

The lawsuit built on 2015 findings by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, part of the UN World Health Organization, which classified Roundup's main ingredient glyphosate as a probable carcinogen, causing the state of California to follow suit.

"The Johnson vs Monsanto verdict is a win for all of humanity and all life on earth," said Zen Honeycutt, founding executive director of non-profit group Moms Across America.



## 1m Uighurs held in secret China camps Says UN panel

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

More than one million Uighur Muslims are estimated to be in detention in "counter-extremism centres" in China's far west, the vice chairperson of a United Nations anti-discrimination committee has said, citing credible reports.

Gay McDougall made the comments on Friday as the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination started reviewing China's record over recent years in the Swiss city of Geneva.

Members were "deeply concerned" about reported detentions of ethnic Uighurs and other Muslim minorities, which have "turned the [Xinjiang] Uighur Autonomous Region into something that resembles a massive internment camp that is shrouded in secrecy - a sort of 'no rights zone,'" McDougall said at the start of the two-day hearing.

"Another two million have been forced into so-called re-education camps for political and cultural indoctrination," she added.

China says Xinjiang faces a serious threat from rebels and separatists.

In her remarks, McDougall said that most of these people have never been properly charged with a crime or tried in court.

McDougall said that members of the Uighur community and others Muslims were being treated as "enemies of the state" solely on the basis of their ethno-religious identity.

## Floating icebergs in Mid-East! United Arab Emirates finds stunning solution to water crisis

THE STRAIT TIMES

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) likes to do things big and bold. But a concept from an ambitious Emirati businessman environmentalist could create perhaps one of the most surprising sights yet - icebergs floating just offshore.

He is Abdullah Mohammad Sulaiman Al Shehi, managing director of the National Advisor Bureau company. His concept - which the UAE authorities have approved for future action - is simplistic on paper, but staggering when gauging the magnitude of effort involved.

The theme is harvesting of clean, pure water. Speaking to The Sunday Times, Al Shehi stressed the importance of the precious commodity, saying: "This was the basis of my inspiration - the need for water cannot be emphasised enough, not just for the UAE but for the entire world."

"At least 1.2 billion people have no access to clean water. The United Nations estimates that by 2030, 50 per cent of the citizens of this planet would face severe water shortage." Armed with this knowledge, he wrote a book in 2015. "I took an in-depth look at water harvesting and water-saving mechanisms and I arrived at the theory that icebergs were a solution for the world."



The project is classified as the "UAE Iceberg Project" and the value for realising it has been estimated at about US\$50 million (S\$68.3 million).

In what could be a first project of its kind, Al Shehi wants to tow gigantic icebergs from the Antarctic to the UAE's coastline, in the emirate of Fujairah, by early 2020.

These are to be melted into pure, polar ice water used for humanitarian and commercial consumption and distribution.

A test run will be attempted early next year before ocean-going vessels try the arduous 12,000km journey to tug the icebergs from Heard Island near Antarctica to their intended destination. The initial attempt will aim to float an iceberg to Australia, or the southern coast of South Africa, Al Shehi added.

Despite skepticism, Al Shehi is confident of his project. He has filed in the United Kingdom some patents for the concept behind the towing and others for reducing the melting rate of the ice during the journey.

An average large iceberg reportedly contains some 20 billion gallons of water, enough for one million people to consume over five years.

## US cuts military training prog for Pakistan

REUTERS, Islamabad/Washington

President Donald Trump's administration has quietly started cutting scores of Pakistani officers from coveted training and educational programmes that have been a hallmark of bilateral military relations for more than a decade, US officials say.

The move, which has not been previously reported, is one of the first known impacts from Trump's decision this year to suspend US security assistance to Pakistan to compel it to crack down on Islamic militants.

The Pentagon and the Pakistani military did not comment directly on the decision or the internal deliberations, but officials from both countries privately criticised the move.

US officials, speaking to Reuters on the condition of anonymity, said they were worried the decision could undermine a key trust-building measure. Pakistani officials warned it could push their military to further look to China or Russia for leadership training.

The effective suspension of Pakistan from the U.S. government's International Military Education and Training program (IMET) will close off places that had been set aside for 66 Pakistani officers this year, a State Department spokesperson told Reuters.

The places will either be unfilled or given to officers from other countries.

It is unclear precisely what level of military cooperation still continues outside the IMET programme, beyond the top level contacts between US and Pakistani military leaders.

The US military has traditionally sought to shield such educational programmes from political tensions, arguing that the ties built by bringing foreign military officers to the United States pay long-term dividends.



**Indian army soldiers explain the use of an 84-MM rocket launcher to visitors during an Indian Army exhibition at Panther Stadium in Amritsar on August 11, 2018. School children are given a description of instruments and weapons used by the Army ahead of Independence Day celebrations .**

## Imran Khan tweaks guest list for oath as Pak PM Invites Navjot Sidhu, Kapil Dev, Sunil Gavaskar

NDTV ONLINE

Three of India's greatest cricketers Kapil Dev, Sunil Gavaskar and Navjot Singh Sidhu are finally getting an invite to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf chief Imran Khan's swearing-in ceremony as prime minister.

Khan's party has flip-flopped on the invitations to the event, which was initially planned for August 11, over the last 10 days. On Friday, Khan's party came up with a fresh date, August 18.

Khan's party PTI also revived the plan to invite the three "cricket legends from India and Kaptan's old friends", just a week after it had called off the invitation to foreign dignitaries and international cricket players.

"The ceremony will be completely national in its façade and essence," a statement by his party last week had said, underlining that Khan had decided to go for a simple and austere ceremony.

Cricketer-turned-politician Navjot Singh Sidhu promptly accepted the yet-to-come invitation. The outspoken politician had declared that he would travel to Pakistan for the event, calling Imran Khan "a man of character", a "Greek God" and someone who is "trustworthy".

Kapil Dev had responded more cautiously, underlining that he hadn't received an invite but he will "surely go there" for the ceremony with the government's approval if the invite did come. Sunil Gavaskar hadn't commented.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, the party that Imran Khan founded in the mid-nineties after his career in cricket ended, has been in the fringes of Pakistan's politics for most of the 20 years of its existence. In last month's national election, the PTI, however, emerged as the largest party with 116 seats. It has stitched a coalition that crosses the 137 seats needed for majority.

## Chaos in Seattle 'Suicidal' mechanic steals and crashes empty plane

AFP, San Francisco

A "suicidal" mechanic stole an empty passenger plane from the Seattle-Tacoma airport late Friday, took it for a brief flight that included an aerial loop, then crashed it in an incident officials said was unrelated to terrorism.

Two military F-15s were scrambled to chase the stolen plane, but "were not involved in the crash," local officials said. Video taken by a bystander showed the passenger airplane making an unlikely upside-down loop, then flying low over Puget Sound before crashing into the sparsely populated Keron Island in the northwestern US state of Washington.

The crash sparked a fire in the dense forest. Flames lit up the night as they spread from the burning wreckage to nearby trees. Officials said there were no victims on the ground.

The stolen plane was a twin engine turboprop Q400 airplane belonging to its sister carrier Horizon Air, Alaska Airlines said on Twitter. It normally carries 76 passengers.

"This is not a terrorist incident," Ed Troyer with the Pierce County Sheriff's office wrote on Twitter. The plane thief "is confirmed a suicidal male," Troyer wrote. "We know who he is."

The suspect was identified as a 29-year-old airline mechanic and local resident who "acted alone," Troyer added, confirming that there were "no passengers on the plane" when it crashed.