

# NEWSIN brief

## Pak army to get training in Russia

AP, Islamabad

Pakistani military officers will receive training in Russian Federation military institutes under a recent agreement signed between the two countries. The agreement comes as local media reported the US has stopped financing military training in the US for Pakistani soldiers.

## US courts UK to ditch support for Iran deal

REUTERS, London

The United States yesterday urged Britain to ditch its support for a 2015 nuclear deal with Iran and instead join forces with Washington to counter the global threat it says Tehran poses. Despite opposition from European allies, US President Trump in May pulled the United States out of a deal.

## 12 'terrorists' killed in Sinai: Egypt

AFP, Cairo

Egyptian security forces have killed "terrorists" in a shootout in the north of the Sinai Peninsula, where the Islamic State group is active, an interior ministry source said Sunday. The military says that over 250 suspected jihadists and at least 35 soldiers have been killed in its "Sinai 2018" operation which started in February.

## 4 troops, 3 'terrorists' killed in Jordan raid

AFP, Amman

Four members of the Jordanian security forces and three "terrorists" have been killed during a raid on a militant hideout after an officer died in a bomb blast near the capital, the government said yesterday. Five suspects were also arrested during Saturday's raid in connection with the home-made bomb that exploded under a patrol car at a music festival.



Residents wash chairs next to a submerged vehicle after flashfloods brought by continuous monsoon rains in Marikina, Metro Manila, in Philippines, yesterday. The Philippines endures an average of 20 typhoons and storms each year. PHOTO: REUTERS

# Caspian Sea nations sign landmark deal

Bars foreign military presence in the sea

The leaders of the five states bordering the resource-rich Caspian Sea signed a landmark deal yesterday on the legal status of the inland sea which boasts a wealth of oil and gas reserves and sturgeon.

The leaders of Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan signed the agreement on the status of the inland sea, which has been disputed since the collapse of the Soviet Union rendered obsolete agreements between Tehran and Moscow.

The host, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, said before the signing that the leaders were "participants in a historic event."

Russian leader Vladimir Putin, whose country was seen as driving the deal, said the convention had "epoch-making significance" and called for more military cooperation between the countries on the Caspian.

Nazarbayev said the convention allows for the construction of underwater oil and gas pipelines as well as setting national quotas for fishing and forbids any foreign military presence.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani was quick to hail the clause that prevents non-Caspian countries from deploying military forces.

"The Caspian Sea only belongs to the Caspian states," he said.

Putin also praised this clause, saying it would help "ensure the peaceful status of the Caspian Sea."

The deal provides a means of delimiting national boundaries in the sea whose underground energy resources are estimated at 50 billion barrels of oil and just under 300 trillion cubic feet (8.4 trillion cubic metres) of natural gas.

# PTI 14 short of majority

PPP, PML-N finalise rival strategy; newly-elected House to meet today

PTI, Dawn Online

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has been allotted 28 reserved seats for women and five for non-Muslims by the election commission, taking the party's tally to 158 in the National Assembly — just 14 short of the number required for simple majority.

The PPP reportedly remained non-committal about its support for the PML-N in the election of chief minister, speaker and deputy speaker in Punjab.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's newly-elected parliament is meeting today for

previous assembly, Ayaz Sadiq, will administer the oath to the new lawmakers, followed by election of the speaker and the deputy speaker.

After the election of the new speaker, the outgoing speaker will give him the oath and hand over charge of the new house.

## GOVT FORMATION IN PAKISTAN

With 33 reserved seats, Imran Khan's party's tally stands at 158

PPP, PML-N fail to agree on Punjab assembly

The Election Commission of Pakistan on Saturday distributed the reserved seats among the parties on the basis of their final tally of elected members. There are 60 seats reserved for women and 10 for minorities in the NA.

Khan's party, which is just 14 short of the number required for simple majority, will depend on smaller parties to prove its majority in the House.

In another development, the top leadership of the PPP and PML-N on Saturday finalised a joint strategy to be followed during the election of the prime minister as well as the National Assembly's speaker and deputy speaker.

President Mamnoon Hussain has already summoned the maiden session of National Assembly, the lower house, at 10:00 am in parliament house.

According to law, the speaker of the

PTI spokesman Fawad Chaudhry said the party has already nominated Khan as prime minister and Asad Qaisar as speaker. It has not announced the candidate for deputy speaker so far.

Party sources said the Cabinet list has not been finalised but there is general consensus that Shah Mahmood Qureshi will be the new foreign minister and Pervez Khattak as interior minister.

Asad Umar is expected to get the key post of finance minister and Khan is also expected to appoint prominent businessman Abdul Razzak Dawood as advisor on finance. Dawood served in the cabinet of former military dictator Pervez Musharraf.

# Restore democracy, independent judiciary in Maldives: Indian PM

AFP, New Delhi

Indian leader Narendra Modi yesterday called for greater democracy and the restoration of an independent judiciary in the Maldives ahead of a presidential election in September.

The Indian Ocean archipelago nation has been in turmoil in recent months, with strongman President Abdulla Yameen jailing or forcing into exile all of his main opponents.

Modi told the Times of India newspaper in an email interview that political developments in the Maldives "have been a matter of considerable international concern".

"We hope that (the) Maldives government will ensure early resumption of the political process and allow democratic institutions, including the judiciary to function independently in a fair and transparent manner," the Indian prime minister said.

"This will create (a) conducive environment for the presidential elections."

The election is scheduled for September 23

but the opposition has expressed fears that it could be delayed.

Yameen declared a state of emergency in February after the nation's top court ordered that MPs sacked by the president be restored and dissidents freed from jail.

The Maldives' chief justice and Supreme Court judges were subsequently arrested, along with Yameen's half-brother Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who ruled the country for 30 years until 2008.

The European Union and the United States have expressed concern over the crackdown.

New Delhi's relations with the Maldives — better known as an upmarket tourist destination — have also become rocky and the tiny state's president has become closer to China in the past year.

India will hold its own national election in 2019, and Modi told the Times of India that he was confident of winning an even bigger majority despite a major opposition campaign.

Modi's right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) could face a united opposition alliance in the elections to the parliament's lower house.



## 'SINICIZATION' OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN CHINA

# Protests delay China mosque demolition

AFP, Weizhou

Authorities in northern China delayed the demolition of a massive mosque on Saturday after thousands of people demonstrated to stop its destruction, local residents said, amid a nationwide government drive to tighten restrictions on religious activities.

Across China, officials have sought to limit religious freedoms for Muslims as part of a widespread attempt to bring believers in line with the dictates of the ruling Communist Party.

Protesters began gathering Thursday ahead of a deadline to demolish the grand mosque in the town of Weizhou in the northern Ningxia region, local residents said.

Videos posted on social media in recent days showed protesters gathering in front of the building as police with riot shields stood by. Holding Chinese flags, they sat quietly on the building's steps and milled around a large plaza, before heading to Friday night prayers, according to the videos, which could not be verified by AFP.

"The government said it's an illegal building, but it's not. The mosque has several hundred years of history," a restaurant owner surnamed Ma told AFP.

People had come hundreds of kilometres from other Muslim regions to show support and bring food to those in Weizhou, locals said.

The mosque was rebuilt over the past two years, according

# Nasa launches probe to 'touch Sun'

AFP, Tampa

Nasa yesterday launched a \$1.5 billion spacecraft toward the Sun on a historic mission to protect the Earth by unveiling the mysteries of dangerous solar storms.

"Three, two, one, zero, and liftoff! Of the mighty Delta IV Heavy rocket with Nasa's Parker Solar Probe, a daring mission to shed light on the mysteries of our closest star, the Sun," said the narrator on NASA TV. The launch lit the night sky at Cape Canaveral, Florida at 3:31 am (0731 GMT).

Less than an hour later, mission managers confirmed that the spacecraft separated from the rocket as planned and was safely on its journey.

"At this point, spacecraft is up and happy," said a spokesman with United Launch Alliance, the company that operates the rocket.

The unmanned spacecraft's mission is to get closer than any human-made object ever to the center of our solar system, plung-



ing into the Sun's atmosphere, known as the corona, during a seven-year mission.

The probe is guarded by an ultra-powerful heat shield that can endure unprecedented levels of heat, and radiation 500 times that experienced on Earth.

Nasa has billed the mission as the first spacecraft to "touch the Sun."

In reality, it should come within 3.83 million miles (6.16 million

kilometers) of the Sun's surface, close enough to study the curious phenomenon of the solar wind and the Sun's atmosphere, known as the corona, which is 300 times hotter than Sun's surface.

The car-sized probe will give scientists a better understanding of solar wind and geomagnetic storms that risk wreaking chaos on Earth by knocking out the power grid. These poorly understood solar outbursts

could potentially wipe out power to millions of people.

Knowing more about the solar wind and space storms will also help protect future deep space explorers as they journey toward the Moon or Mars.

The spacecraft is protected from melting during its close shave with the Sun by a heat shield just 4.5 inches thick.

Even in a region where temperatures can reach more than a million degrees Fahrenheit, the sunlight is expected to heat the shield to just around 1,371 degrees Celsius. Yet the inside of the spacecraft should stay at just 85 degrees Fahrenheit.

Scientists have wanted to build a spacecraft like this for more than 60 years, but only recently did the heat shield technology capable of protecting sensitive instruments become available.

When it nears the Sun, the probe will travel at some 430,000 miles per hour — the fastest ever human-made object.



## CHARLOTTESVILLE ANNIV

# No room in US for 'neo-nazism'

AFP, Washington

Ivanka Trump, President Donald Trump's daughter and a White House adviser, explicitly condemned "white supremacy, racism and neo-nazism" late Saturday in a manner her father seems reluctant to do.

"The tweets come on the anniversary of deadly unrest triggered by a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. A similar far-right rally was scheduled for yesterday outside the White House."

"One year ago in Charlottesville, we witnessed an ugly display of hatred, racism, bigotry & violence," Ivanka Trump tweeted.

"While Americans are blessed to live in a nation that protects liberty, freedom of speech and diversity of opinion, there is no place for white supremacy, racism and neo-nazism in our great country," she said.

"Rather than tearing each other down with hatred, racism & violence, we can lift one another up, strengthen our communities and strive to help every American achieve his or her full potential!"

The tweets are notable because her father drew scorn after the Charlottesville bloodshed for initially avoiding any condemnation of the torch-bearing white supremacists who took part in that rally.

President Trump was roundly condemned for saying that there were "very fine people, on both sides" among the racists and the counter-protesters.

Two days later, after a firestorm of criticism, the president said: "Racism is evil and those who cause violence in its name are criminals and thugs, including the KKK, neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and other hate groups."

On Saturday the president issued a generic condemnation of racism in one of seven tweets of the day.

"The riots in Charlottesville a year ago resulted in senseless death and division," he wrote.

"We must come together as a nation. I condemn all types of racism and acts of violence. Peace to ALL Americans!"

# Assad faces new obstacle

Syria rebels build 'National Army' with Turkish help; blast at weapon depot in Idlib kills 39

AGENCIES

A "National Army" being set up by Syrian rebels with Turkey's help could become a long-term obstacle to President Bashar al-Assad's recovery of the northwest - if they can end factional rivalries that have long blighted the opposition.

The effort is at the heart of plans by the Turkish-backed opposition to secure and govern a strip of territory that forms part of the last big rebel stronghold in Syria.

The presence of Turkish forces on the ground has helped to shield it from government attack.

Assad, backed by Russia and Iran, has vowed to recover "every inch" of Syria, and though he has now won back most of the country, the Turkish presence will complicate any government offensive in the northwest.

Turkey's role has gone beyond supporting allied Syrian forces to rebuilding schools and hospitals. At least five branches of the Turkish post office have opened in the area.

Colonel Haitham Afisi, head of the National Army, says setting up the force has been no easy task over the last year.

"We are at the beginning. We face many difficulties but we are working to overcome them," Afisi told Reuters in an interview in the town of Azaz near the Turkish border.

Recently, he had to issue an order instructing fighters to stop "randomly opening fire", wear uniforms and cooperate with a newly established military police that represents "the force of law and justice and not a rival to any other faction".

Meanwhile, an explosion at a weapons depot killed 39 civilians including 12 children in the north-western Syrian province of Idlib yesterday, reported AFP.

The toll rose after more bodies were retrieved from the rubble caused by the blast of unknown origin at the depot in a residential building in the town of Sarmada, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.



to government documents, but the licensing process was not carefully managed. In the process, the facade was changed from its previous Chinese style -- featuring sweeping tiled roofs similar to a Buddhist temple -- to what is often described in China as an "Arab" design, with domes and crescents.

Islam is one of five officially recognised religions in China, home to some 23 million Muslims.

China's top leaders recently called for the "Sinicization" of religious practice -- bringing it in line with "traditional" Chinese values and culture -- and new regulations on religious affairs came into effect in February, sparking concern among rights groups.

The measures increased state supervision of religion in a bid to "block extremism", and in areas with significant Muslim populations, authorities have removed Islamic symbols, such as crescents, from public spaces.

In the far western region of Xinjiang, things have gone much farther, with Muslims being harshly punished for violating regulations banning beards and burqas, and even for the possession of unauthorised Qurans.



# Boy, 12, survives plane crash

AFP, Jakarta

A 12-year-old boy is the sole survivor of a plane crash that killed eight people in mountainous eastern Indonesia, authorities said yesterday.

The Swiss-made Pilatus aircraft lost contact with air traffic control Saturday during what was supposed to be a flight of around 40 minutes in remote Papua province.

The wreckage of the plane was found in a heavily forested area on a mountain side in the Oksibil subdistrict yesterday morning. The plane, which was owned by private charter company Dimonim Air, was carrying 7 passengers and 2 crew.

Before the accident, villagers in nearby Okatem reported hearing a loud roar followed by an explosion. Search and rescue teams walked two hours to reach the crash site. An investigation has been launched, said Papua military spokesman Lieutenant colonel Dax Sianturi.