

NEWSIN brief

More Gaza violence inevitable: Israel

Another round of fighting between Israel and Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip is inevitable, Israeli Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman said yesterday. Lieberman said in a video statement distributed by his office that "the question is not to know if the next confrontation (with Hamas) will take place, but when".

Indonesia quake toll tops 400

The death toll from an earthquake on the Indonesian island of Lombok has topped 400, authorities said yesterday, as bodies were still being recovered from the ruins of destroyed buildings. The 6.9-magnitude quake on August 5 levelled tens of thousands of homes just a week after another tremor surged through the island and killed 17.

Duterte sacks 20 for graft in military buys

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has fired 20 people, including colonels and a general, over accusations of fraud and graft in purchases of military medical supplies, his spokesman said yesterday. Civilians and military officials were among those sacked. The servicemen faced a court martial, he added.

Spain festival collapse injures hundreds

Panic erupted at a packed music festival in Spain when a section of a wooden promenade suddenly collapsed, injuring more than 300 people including nine seriously, officials said yesterday. The seafont platform was jammed with people watching a rap artist in the north-western city of Vigo when it suddenly caved in just before midnight on Sunday.

No war, no talks with US

Says Iran's supreme leader after Washington's withdrawal from 2015 nuclear deal, reimposition of sanctions

land and sea. Despite renewed sanctions, many Iranians -- including many at the highest levels of the establishment -- see US hostility as only a contributing factor to long-standing problems inside the country. "Today's livelihood problems do not emerge from outside, they are internal," Khamenei said in another tweet. "Not that sanctions don't have an impact, but the main factor is how we handle them," he added.

Khamenei mirrored recent criticism of Rouhani's economic management from senior members of the clergy and the Revolutionary Guards -- particularly over the collapse of the rial, which has lost around half its value since April. A fortnight ago, Guards commander Mohammad Ali Jafari told Rouhani to take "revolutionary actions to control prices and prevent the enormous increase in the price of foreign currency and gold," in an open letter published by the conservative Tasnim news agency.

But Khamenei criticised conservatives who called for Rouhani's resignation, saying they were inadvertently "playing into the hands of the enemy". "The government must stay in office and powerfully carry out its duties to resolve the problems," he said.

Khamenei rejects Trump offer of talks on tougher nuclear deal

Supreme leader also slams economic mismanagement by Iranian government



Rogue White House aide releases Trump tape

Former White House staffer and TV celebrity Omarosa Manigault Newman has released a recording of a private conversation with President Donald Trump after she was fired. NBC's "Today" program yesterday played the brief recording, in which Trump claims to have had no knowledge that she was sacked and expresses regret at the news.

The recording is the latest volley from the disgruntled 44-year-old, once an ardent Trump ally, and represents another stunning breach of presidential trust. But it also appears to show a president who has little knowledge of what is happening inside his own White House -- or who is willing to lie to avoid confrontation. "Omarosa? Omarosa what's going on? I just saw on the news that you're thinking about leaving? What happened?" he said, apparently unaware she had already been fired. "Nobody even told me about it," Trump is heard saying, after chief of staff John Kelly terminated her employment. "You know they run a big operation, but I didn't know it."



Police officers use pepper spray towards counter-demonstrators during a white nationalist-led rally marking the one year anniversary of the 2017 Charlottesville 'Unite the Right' protests, in Washington, US, on Sunday. The rally outside the White House has fallen flat after about 20 white nationalists were dwarfed by thousands of counter-protesters.

ONGOING TALIBAN BATTLE IN GHAZNI

100 Afghan troops killed in four days

At least 100 Afghan security forces have been killed as troops backed by US airpower struggled to push the Taliban from embattled Ghazni city, officials said yesterday, while residents reported food and medicine shortages four days after fighting began. The Afghan government said it had sent reinforcements to the strategic city, which lies barely two hour's drive from Kabul on the main highway connecting the capital with the country's south. US forces in Afghanistan said they had been conducting airstrikes daily since the fighting began. The assault, which the Taliban launched late Thursday, comes as the insurgents are under increasing pressure to join peace talks and highlights the difficulty of repelling their repeated attacks on urban centres crowded with civilians, with residents among the dead. "About 100 security forces have lost their lives and between 20 and 30 civilians have been killed," defence minister Tariq Shah Bahrami told a press conference in Kabul, offering the first high-level official casualty figure since the insurgents entered the city. He also said that 194 insurgents had been killed and 147 wounded. The Taliban swiftly responded, saying the government's claims were "baseless" and that talks were "under way for their surrender". Doctors were struggling to treat dozens of wounded at hospitals in the eastern provincial capital, where residents said insurgents roamed the streets.

'Grossly unjust' Malaysian PM blasts Myanmar's treatment of Rohingya Muslims

Malaysia is looking to cancel multibillion-dollar Chinese-backed infrastructure projects signed by the previous scandal-tainted government as it digs itself out of debt, Malaysia's prime minister said yesterday during an extensive interview in which he also blasted Myanmar's treatment of Rohingya Muslims as "grossly unjust." Mahathir Mohamad, at 93 the world's oldest prime minister, spoke with The Associated Press days before he heads to Beijing for his first visit since returning to power in a stunning electoral upset three months ago. Mahathir blasted Myanmar's treatment of Rohingya Muslims and said he was "very disappointed" with leader Aung San Suu Kyi's failure to halt oppression of the group. He said Myanmar must accept that Rohingya, who have lived in the country for generations, are citizens. "It is grossly unjust to do what they have done, killing people, mass murder, that's not the way civilized nations behave," he said. Mahathir also said he wants to maintain good relations with China and welcomes its investment, so long as the projects benefit Malaysia. But he took his toughest stance yet on Chinese-backed energy pipelines and a rail project along peninsula Malaysia's eastern coast that were struck by his predecessor, Najib Razak.

Koreas agree on summit Sept meeting will be third between Kim and Moon; doubts remain over North's denuclearisation pledge

North and South Korea yesterday agreed to hold a summit in the North in September, another step towards boosting cooperation between the old rivals, even as doubts grow over efforts to end the North's nuclear weapons programme. Officials from both sides meeting in the truce village of Panmunjom, in the demilitarised zone (DMZ) that separates the two Koreas, reached an agreement on a September summit between the countries' leaders in the North's capital of Pyongyang. No date was announced for what will be the third meeting this year between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in. They first met in April in Panmunjom, a remarkable thaw in ties after more than a year of rising tension and fears of war over the North's development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. There they agreed that Moon would visit the North's capital in the autumn, though the pair met again in May in an unannounced meeting at Panmunjom. No details on an agenda for next month's talks were announced, but the two Koreas have been discussing a range of issues, from a possible peace declaration to joint economic and infrastructure projects. US officials have told Reuters that North Korea had yet to agree to a timeline for eliminating its nuclear arsenal or to disclose its size. After yesterday's talks, Ri Son Gwon, the chairman of a North Korean committee aiming for the "peaceful reunification" of the peninsula, told his South Korean counterpart, Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon, it was important to clear "obstacles" preventing inter-Korean relations from moving forward.



Hero dog saves family in flood-hit Kerala

A family in the flood-ravaged Indian state of Kerala narrowly escaped death after their pet dog woke them up moments before a landslide destroyed their home, local media reported yesterday. Mohanan P. and his family were sleeping at home in the mountainous Idukki district when their pet dog started barking raucously at around 3:00 am, waking the household. "That's when we realised something was wrong. I went out to see and we had to just rush out of the house," Mohanan told Indian news network NDTV. No sooner had the family rushed out when the landslide ploughed down a nearby hill and demolished their home. The family, dog in tow, have since moved to a government-run relief camp nearby. Flash floods triggered by the annual monsoon rains have pounded the southern tourist hotspot in the past few days, killing 39 people and leaving 100,000 more homeless so far. The US embassy Thursday advised its citizens to avoid the areas affected and monitor local media for weather updates. More than a million foreign tourists visited Kerala last year, according to official data.

Amnesty begins probes after 2nd staff suicide

Rights group Amnesty International said yesterday it would conduct "full and independent external inquiries" into the suicides of two of its staff in the last three months. Roz McGregor, 28, from London, took her own life earlier this summer, following the May 26 death of Gaetan Mootoo, a well-known researcher for West Africa. "We are treating these tragedies with the gravity and priority they deserve, and will be holding full and independent external inquiries," Colm O Cuanachain, Amnesty's acting-secretary general, said in a statement. "We can never compare the impact the two tragedies have on the families to our reactions within Amnesty." "But we too are shocked and devastated at the loss of our beloved colleague Gaetan Mootoo, and a brilliant and inspiring young woman, Roz McGregor, who made a great impact in her short time with us," he added. McGregor was a paid intern working for a team that lobbied at the United Nations in Geneva. She had developed insomnia and become troubled by anxiety in the final weeks of her life. Mootoo -- a well-respected researcher who had been with Amnesty for more than 30 years and was known across Africa for his tireless dedication to his work -- worked for its international secretariat. It is responsible for the majority of research and leading campaign work. He was found dead in the organisation's Paris offices, where he worked. Following the death, friends and colleagues called on the NGO's board in London to look into the circumstances around it "in order to prevent other tragedies".



Boys demonstrate outside the offices of the United Nations in Sanaa, Yemen to denounce last week's air strike that killed dozens including children in the northwestern province of Saada yesterday.

UIGHUR CRACKDOWN IN XINJIANG

China prevented 'great tragedy': state-run paper

Massively stepped-up security in China's restive far western region of Xinjiang has helped prevent "great tragedy", a state-run newspaper said yesterday, in the country's first response to a critical United Nations report on the situation there. A UN human rights panel said on Friday that it had received many credible reports that 1 million ethnic Uighurs in China are held in what resembles a "massive internment camp that is shrouded in secrecy". China has said that Xinjiang faces a serious threat from Islamist militants and separatists who plot attacks and stir up tensions between the mostly Muslim Uighur minority who call the region home and the ethnic Han Chinese majority. Hundreds have died in unrest there in recent years. In joint editorials in its Chinese and English versions, the widely-read Global Times tabloid said criticism of the rights report in Xinjiang was aimed at stirring trouble there and destroying hard-earned stability. China's security presence there has prevented Xinjiang from becoming another Syria or Libya, it added. "There is no doubt that the current peace and stability in Xinjiang is partly due to the high intensity of regulations. Police and security posts can be seen everywhere in Xinjiang," the paper wrote. China yesterday rejected allegations raised by the UN panel that 1 million Uighurs may be held in internment camps in the restive Xinjiang region.

