

# NEWSIN brief

## EU court orders Poland to scrap SC retirements

AFP, Luxembourg  
The EU's top court yesterday ordered Poland to "immediately suspend" its decision to lower the retirement age of its Supreme Court judges. "Poland must immediately suspend the application of the provisions of national legislation relating to the lowering of the retirement age for Supreme Court judges," it said.

## Pope invited by Kim to visit North Korea

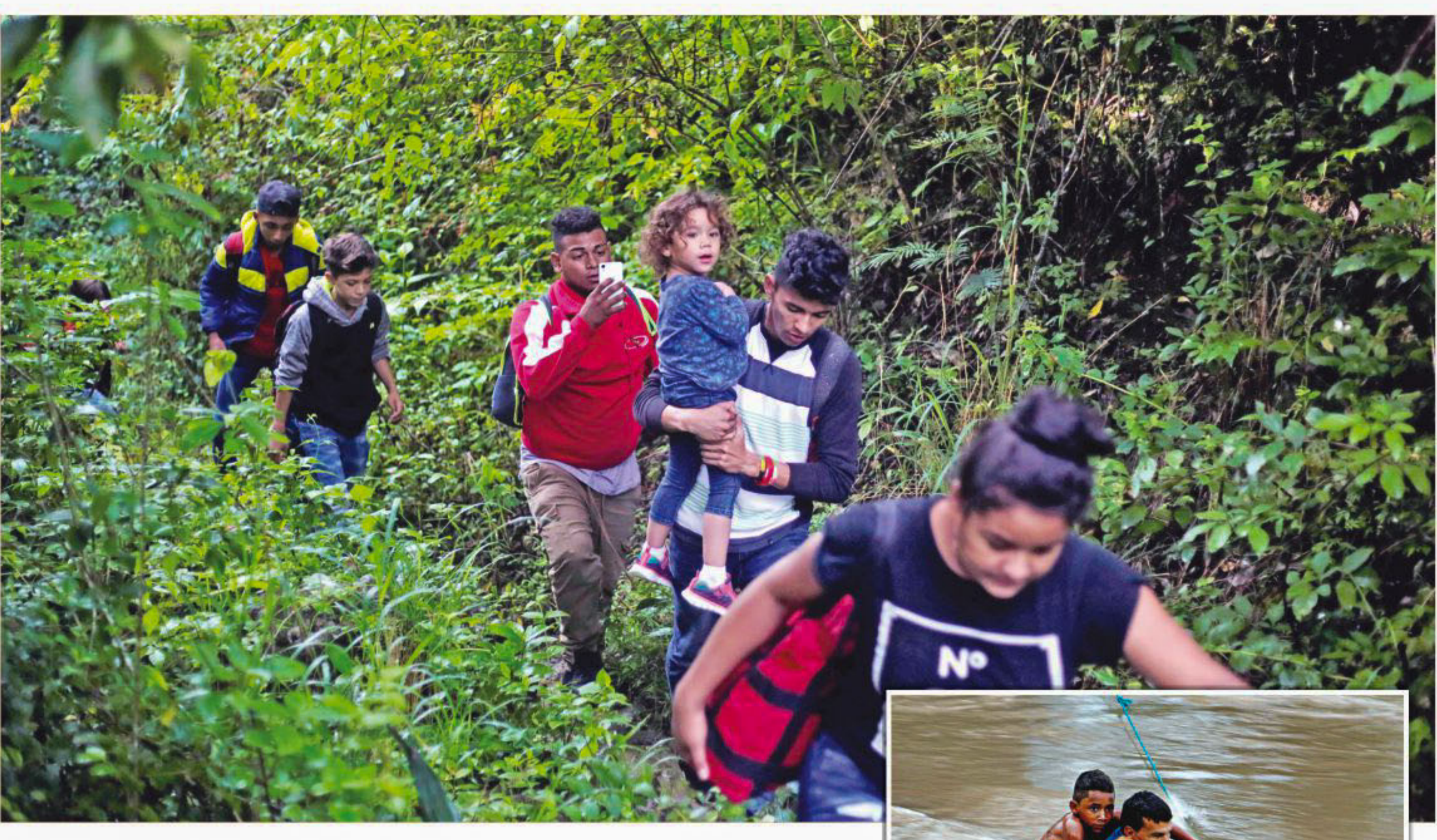
REUTERS, Vatican City  
Pope Francis on Thursday received an invitation to visit North Korea and the pontiff indicated he would consider making what would be a landmark trip to a nation known for severe restrictions on religious practice. South Korean President Moon Jae-in relayed the invitation from Kim Jong Un to the Pope in the Vatican.

## China's ex-internet tsar pleads guilty in trial

AFP, Beijing  
The former head of internet censorship in China, Lu Wei, pleaded guilty to accepting at least 32 million yuan in bribes at a trial yesterday. Lu, who oversaw a tightening of online censorship during his tenure at the Cyberspace Administration of China, was a fierce defender of China's policy of internet control.

## Norway to free Russian spy suspect: agency

AFP, Oslo  
Norway will release a Russian suspected of spying, the country's intelligence agency announced yesterday. Mikhail Bochkarev, 51, was arrested on September 21 at Oslo airport after attending a seminar in Norway's parliament, accused of having collected data on the building and its network.



Honduran migrants hike in the forest after crossing the Lempa river, on the border between Honduras and Guatemala, to join a caravan trying to reach the US on Thursday. Inset, another group of Honduran migrants attempt to cross Goascoran River to enter illegally to El Salvador, in Goascoran, Honduras. US President Donald Trump threatened Thursday to send the military to close its southern border if Mexico fails to stem the "onslaught" of migrants from Central America. PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP



# \$26M CORRUPTION CASE Malaysian ex-deputy PM hit with charges

AFP, Kuala Lumpur  
Malaysia's opposition leader was yesterday hit with 45 charges in a \$26 million corruption case, a new blow to his beleaguered party which lost power in landmark elections this year.  
Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, a former deputy premier and ally of scandal-mired ex-leader Najib Razak, is accused of crimes that include accepting bribes to award government contracts and money-laundering.  
The 65-year-old pleaded not guilty to all charges, and will stand trial.  
"I am ready to face all these charges thrown at me," Ahmad Zahid told reporters. "It is a test from Allah."  
A crowd of supporters turned up outside the court in Kuala Lumpur where he was being charged, waving banners that read "we reject the cruel treatment of our leader". Najib also attended the hearing to offer support.  
The veteran politician is head of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the lynchpin in a coalition of parties that ruled Malaysia from independence in 1957 until their shock defeat in May polls.  
UMNO has been on the ropes since, with many coalition partners abandoning a party that had become synonymous with widespread graft, divisive racial politics in the multi-ethnic country and a rotten ruling elite.  
Najib has also been arrested and charged over allegations he oversaw the plundering of state fund 1MDB, a scandal that played a major part in the election defeat.  
Ahmad Zahid is facing 27 money-laundering charges, eight counts of accepting bribes, and 10 for criminal breach of trust.



# Ireland border issue could sink Brexit deal

Warns EU negotiator as May offers no new proposals

AFP, Paris  
The EU's chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier said yesterday the thorny issue of the border between Ireland and the British province of Northern Ireland could sink the negotiations on Britain's exit from the European Union.  
"The answer is yes," he said when asked on France Inter radio if the Irish border issue could cause the negotiations to collapse. "I believe we need a deal. I'm not yet sure we'll get one. It is difficult, but possible."  
European Union leaders warned Britain on Thursday they would offer no more concessions to break the deadlock in Brexit negotiations, but expressed confidence that a deal can be done before the country leaves the bloc next March.  
A Brussels summit wrapped up without progress after British Prime Minister Theresa May offered no new proposals, beyond suggesting she could accept a longer transition period after Brexit.  
May has been struggling since the 2016 referendum vote to leave the EU to reconcile the demands of her eurosceptic Conservative party with the realities of negotiating with Brussels.  
Her difficulties were laid bare by the fury sparked back home at her suggestion that she could extend a post-Brexit transition period to address the Irish border issue.  
Both sides have agreed there should be a legally-binding "backstop" arrangement to avoid frontier checks between British Northern Ireland and EU member Ireland if and until a new trade deal solves the issue.  
This would come into effect after the transition ends -- but both sides strongly disagree on its terms, and the issue is holding up the rest of the Brexit talks.  
Britain crashing out of the EU without an agreement is viewed as potentially catastrophic as tariffs, customs and regulatory issues could severely disrupt trade.  
Meanwhile, the head of Toyota, who leads a group of Japanese automakers, yesterday urged Britain and the European Union to avoid a no-deal Brexit "at all costs."



## RAFALE COVERAGE

### Reliance sues NDTV for Rs10,000cr

NDTV ONLINE  
NDTV has been sued for Rs 10,000 crores by Anil Ambani's Reliance Group in a court in Ahmedabad for its reportage on the Rafale fighter jet deal.  
The hearing has been listed for October 26th and NDTV will argue that the charges of defamation are nothing more than a heavy-handed attempt by Anil Ambani's group to suppress the facts and prevent the media from doing its job - asking questions about a defence deal and seeking answers that are very much in public interest.  
The lawsuit is filed against NDTV's weekly show, Truth vs Hype, which aired on September 29. Top executives of Reliance ignored repeated, multiple and written requests to appear on the show.

# 'He's my guy'

## Trump praises US congressman from Montana who body-slammed Guardian reporter

AFP, Washington  
US President Donald Trump on Thursday praised a US congressman who assaulted a reporter, making light of the attack.  
Greg Gianforte was sentenced to six months of deferred jail time, 40 hours of community service, 20 hours of anger management sessions and \$385 in fines and court fees for the misdemeanor assault that propelled him and his congressional race into the national spotlight last year.  
Trump's remarks at a rally in Montana come amid an international outcry over the disappearance of Jamal Khashoggi, a journalist who has been missing since entering Saudi Arabia's consulate in Istanbul on October 2, whom the president has said is likely dead.  
At the rally, Trump urged people to vote for Gianforte, describing him as "an incredible Montana leader" and "one of the most respected people in Congress."  
"By the way, never wrestle him," Trump said, referring to Gianforte's assault on The Guardian reporter Ben Jacobs. "Any guy that can do a body slam -- he's my kind of, he's my guy."  
Trump said he originally thought the assault -- which took place on the eve of his election -- might hurt Gianforte's chances.  
"Then I said, 'Well wait a minute, I know Montana pretty well, I think it might help him.' And it did," the president said.  
The Guardian US editor John Mulholland took aim at Trump's remarks.  
"To celebrate an attack on a journalist who was simply doing his job is an attack on the First Amendment by someone who has taken an oath to defend it," he said, referring to the amendment to the US constitution that guarantees freedom of the press.  
"In the aftermath of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, it runs the risk of inviting other assaults on journalists both here and across the world where they often face far greater threats," Mulholland said.  
Riyadh is suspected of murdering Khashoggi, a Washington Post contributor and US permanent resident whose writings have been critical of powerful Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.



# 'I'm not sure he's alive'

Wife of Interpol ex-chief expresses fears for his life and her own safety, lashes out at Chinese govt

AFP, Beijing  
The wife of fallen former Interpol chief Meng Hongwei has expressed fears for his life and her own safety, lashing out at what she called the "cruel" and "dirty" Chinese government that arrested him in mysterious circumstances.  
The comments by Grace Meng in a BBC interview represent a rare and extraordinarily blunt level of criticism of China's government by the victims of Beijing's tough crackdown on corruption, in which cases are typically wrapped up in secrecy and with only the official version of events coming to light.  
"I think it is political persecution. I'm not sure he's alive," Grace Meng said in the interview conducted in France, where Meng was based at Interpol's headquarters.  
Meng Hongwei, also a Chinese vice public security minister, went missing on a trip to China last month. He subsequently resigned as head of the international police organisation on October 7 after Chinese authorities announced he was under investigation.  
China has since said he is suspected of accepting bribes.  
"I tell (my children) daddy is on a long business trip," the sobbing Grace Meng said, appearing in the interview only in silhouette to hide her appearance.  
Complaining that there is "no limit" to China's power to act against opponents, she claimed to have received threatening phone calls suggesting she was being "targeted" in France.  
"They are cruel. They are dirty," she said.  
"I must stand up and I don't want any other wives and children like me."  
The body investigating Meng, the National Supervisory Commission, can hold suspects for as long as six months without providing access to legal counsel.  
Xi's anti-graft campaign has punished more than one million officials, and has wide support from citizens fed up with endemic corruption. But some analysts say it also enables the Chinese president to eliminate rivals.



An Israeli policeman films a Palestinian as others hold him as he is being detained during a demonstration at the Palestinian Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar, east of Jerusalem in the occupied West Bank yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

# WhatsApp dirty tricks alleged in Brazil polls

AFP, Sao Paulo  
Allegations of a dirty tricks campaign on WhatsApp dominated Brazil's presidential election race on Thursday, turning attention to social media manipulation following abuses uncovered in the US election and Britain's Brexit referendum two years ago.  
Trailing leftist candidate Fernando Haddad accused the far-right frontrunner, Jair Bolsonaro, of "illegal" electoral tactics after a report that companies were poised to unleash a flood of WhatsApp messages attacking him and his Workers Party.  
Bolsonaro denied the allegation, tweeting that the Haddad's Workers Party "isn't being hurt by fake news, but by the TRUTH."  
The exchange happened 10 days before a run-off election that polls predict Bolsonaro -- a bluff, internet-savvy, pro-gun polemicist often compared to US President Donald Trump -- will likely win comfortably.  
Ordinary Brazilians told AFP that some in their families or entourage swallowed some misinformation from WhatsApp -- but denied they themselves were being influenced.  
"We get a lot of news, even false news, but some true, about politics but I don't think it changes very much in terms of making decisions," said Ana Clara Valle, a 27-year-old engineer in Rio.  
She said she was voting for Bolsonaro because of his Catholic, pro-family stance, not because of any "extreme right" sensibility.  
Andre de Souza, a 35-year-old lawyer leaning toward voting for Bolsonaro, said he receives around 500 WhatsApp messages a day for and against both candidates.

# Carrots could be key to greener buildings

REUTERS, London  
Crunchy and tasty, yes, but could carrots also strengthen cement and cut carbon dioxide emissions for the building industry?  
A group of researchers at Britain's Lancaster University has been using a household food blender to mix particles from the root vegetable with concrete to see if they can produce a stronger and more environmentally sound product.  
"We found out you could increase the strength of concrete by 80 percent by using a small amount of this new material," lead researcher Mohamed Saafi told Reuters.  
The addition of carrots prevent any cracks in the concrete, the team said. It also means less cement is required, therefore lowering the global carbon dioxide (CO2) output.  
Cement is responsible for seven percent of total global CO2 emissions, according to International Energy Agency estimates.  
"Our preliminary results show that adding about half a kilogram of carrot nanomaterial will reduce about 10 kilograms of cement per one cubic metre of concrete," Saafi said.

# US downgrades main Palestinian mission

Places it under authority of US embassy to Israel

AFP, Washington  
The United States downgraded its main diplomatic mission to the Palestinians on Thursday, placing it under the authority of the US embassy to Israel.  
US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the consulate general, a separate office which handled dealings with the Palestinians, would be replaced by a new Palestinian Affairs Unit inside the controversial new US embassy in Jerusalem.  
The move will make the US ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, who is reviled by Palestinians over his support for Israeli settlements in the West Bank, the main interlocutor with the Palestinian leadership.  
The change, quickly condemned by the Palestinians, follows a series of setbacks for them at the hands of President Donald Trump, who has turned US policy sharply towards Israel.  
Pro-Israel advocates hailed the decision, saying it confirmed the US recognized the whole of Jerusalem as part of Israel.  
"This decision is driven by our global efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our operations. It does not signal a change of US policy," Pompeo said in a statement.  
He said the United States "continues to take no position" on how any peace deal between the Israelis and Palestinians would take shape.  
The Palestinian leadership rejected Pompeo's "efficiency" explanation.  
The decision has "a lot to do with pleasing an ideological US team that is willing to disband the foundations of American foreign policy, and of the international system, in order to reward Israeli violations and crimes," the Palestinians' chief negotiator Saeb Erekat said.

The merger does not signal a change of US policy: Pompeo

# Zika risk low in Pacific: WHO

AFP, Wellington  
As Prince Harry and his expectant wife Meghan prepare to tour Fiji and Tonga next week, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared the risk of contracting Zika virus in the Pacific nations is low.  
The British royals, currently in Australia, arranged their trip before Meghan's pregnancy was known, sparking fears she and her unborn baby could be vulnerable in the island nations, where Zika is officially listed as a risk.  
But WHO said the most recent case of the mosquito-borne virus in Fiji was in 2017 and there had been no recorded cases in Tonga since 2016.  
"At the moment, there is really no evidence of a Zika virus outbreak in Fiji," Dr Angela Merianos, a Suva-based communicable diseases specialist with WHO told AFP.  
She said the situation was similar in Tonga, adding: "Overall, the risk is low and there lots of things that you can do to decrease that risk even further."  
Merianos said all travellers should follow "common sense" precautions to avoid mosquitoes, which can carry dengue fever and chikungunya, as well as Zika.  
These include wearing insect repellent, using mosquito screens and staying indoors where possible.  
"Zika of course is a particular concern for pregnant women and women of reproductive age," she said.