

# NEWSIN brief

## Delhi smog: homeless to be given masks

AFP, New Delhi  
New Delhi's homeless will be given cotton masks to help them survive in the world's most polluted major city, officials said yesterday, although experts said the basic coverings would be useless. Each winter the capital chokes through haze so extreme that levels of airborne pollutants eclipse safe limits.

## South Korea-US drills violate deal: N Korea

REUTERS, Seoul  
South Korea's resumption of small-scale military drills with US violated a recent agreement aimed at lowering tensions on the Korean peninsula, North Korean state media said yesterday. About 500 US and South Korean marines began military drills last week that were among joint exercises indefinitely suspended in June.

## Pneumonia to kill 11m children by 2030: study

AFP, Paris  
Pneumonia will kill nearly 11 million children under five by 2030, experts warned yesterday on a global day aimed at raising awareness of the biggest infectious killer of infants worldwide. While in the developed world the severe lung infection mainly affects the elderly, in developing nations it is children who bear the brunt, with hundreds of thousands dying each year from the easily preventable disease.

## Two dead as migrant boat sinks off Turkey

AFP, Istanbul  
Two migrants including a child died after their boat sank off Turkey's western coast yesterday, the Turkish coastguard said, adding that a search was underway to find 10 others. The coastguard said it rescued one migrant after two others swam to shore not far from the coastal town of Dikili in Izmir province.



Central American migrants - mostly Honduran - taking part in a caravan to the US, get on board a truck heading to Irapuato in the state of Guanajuato on Sunday after spending the night in Queretaro in central Mexico. US embarked on a policy of automatically rejecting asylum claims of people who cross the Mexican border illegally in a bid to deter Central American migrants and force Mexico to handle them.

## BATTLE FOR YEMEN'S HOEDEIDA

# Int'l alarm grows as 150 killed in 24-hrs

AFP, Hodeida  
At least 150 people have been killed in 24 hours of clashes in Yemen's Hodeida, medics and military sources said yesterday, as international pressure mounted for a ceasefire in the vital port city.  
Government loyalists supported by a Saudi-led coalition are fighting to oust the Iran-backed Huthi rebels from the Red Sea city, whose docks are a lifeline to 14 million Yemenis at risk of starvation.  
"If the port at Hodeida is destroyed, that could create an absolutely catastrophic situation," UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned.  
"The fighting must stop, a political debate must begin and we must prepare a massive humanitarian response to avoid the worst next year," he said.  
A military source in the pro-government coalition said the insurgents had pushed back a large-scale assault aimed at moving towards the port, under rebel control since 2014.  
In a statement sent via the Telegram messaging app, the Huthis said they had "lured" loyalists up the western coastline of Hodeida, where the rebels then launched an attack on the troops.  
Government forces, led on the ground by Emirati-backed troops, have made their way into Hodeida after 11 days of clashes, reaching residential neighbourhoods in the east on Sunday and sparking fears of street fights that would further endanger civilians trapped in the city.  
Residents and government military sources have reported rebel snipers stationed on rooftops in civilian streets in eastern Hodeida, a few kilometres (miles) from the port on the western edge of the city.

# Uncertainty continues

## Main parties petition in top court against president's decision to dissolve parliament and call for snap polls

AGENCIES  
Supporters of Sri Lanka's fired prime minister and a top election official yesterday challenged in court the president's sacking of parliament, upping the ante in a political crisis that has sparked international alarm.  
President Maithripala Sirisena late Friday called snap elections and dissolved the legislature, two weeks after sacking the prime minister and installing the divisive Mahinda Rajapakse in his place.

Ranil Wickremesinghe, the prime minister.  
Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP), the main opposition Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and the leftist JVP, or People's Liberation Front challenged Sirisena's action in the court.  
TNA spokesman M A Sumanthiran said the Supreme Court agreed to take up the petitions immediately considering the importance of the issue, reported AFP.

Chief Justice Nalin Perera decides to fast-track hearings  
Western diplomats shun govt meeting to register protest  
The United States has led a chorus of international concern over events in the strategically important Indian Ocean island nation of 21 million people.  
Three political parties holding an absolute majority in parliament and Ratnajeewan Hoole, an election commissioner and one of three officials tasked with conducting polls, yesterday asked the Supreme Court to declare the president's actions illegal.  
The court, which heard preliminary submissions, has adjourned until today.  
In the five-page petition, Hoole said Sirisena broke the law in calling the snap elections for January 5 after a string of unconstitutional moves since October 26 when he fired

"We are also asking for an interim order" for an injunction against preparations for the election, which would be two years ahead of schedule, Sumanthiran said.  
Several petitioners also asked that parliament be restored until the court has ruled on their plea.  
Court officials said Chief Justice Nalin Perera and two other judges decided to fast-track the hearings. Legal experts say the dissolved parliament would have to be restored if the Supreme Court holds with the petitioners. If not, the January 5 election will have to go ahead.  
Meanwhile, eight Western countries stayed away from a meeting with Sri Lanka's government yesterday to register their protest against President Maithripala Sirisena's decision to dissolve parliament, reported Reuters.



# IS blast, Taliban attacks rattle Afghanistan

## 75 security forces killed in attacks on Farah checkpoints; six killed in Kabul suicide blast

AGENCIES  
Afghan security forces suffered scores of casualties in heavy fighting, officials said yesterday, as Taliban militants step up battlefield pressure while seeking a political settlement with the United States.  
About 50 security forces were killed in attacks late on Sunday by Taliban fighters on checkpoints around the southwestern city of Farah and nearby districts that triggered hours of fighting, regional officials said.  
At the same time, about 25 Afghan commandos were killed in the central province of Ghazni, where the Taliban have been battling militia from the mainly Shia Hazara community in the districts of Malistan and Jaghori, a conflict coloured by hostility between ethnic Hazaras and Pashtuns.

"Fresh troops have been sent to Malistan and Jaghori but the people are also cooperating and have stood up against the insurgents," Army General Chief of Staff, Mohammad Sharif Yaftali, told reporters.  
Some commandos had been killed or wounded, he added, but gave no details, reported Reuters.

Meanwhile, six people were killed when a suicide bomber blew himself up in Kabul yesterday, close to where scores of Afghans had been protesting against Taliban attacks on the minority Hazara ethnic group, reported AFP.  
The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the blast. "A suicide attacker wearing an explosives belt hits a gathering of Shias near the presidential palace... in Kabul," Amaq said.



# Saudis discussed killing enemies in 2017: NYT

ALJAZEERA ONLINE  
Senior Saudi officials, including aides close to General Ahmed al-Assiri, who was fired last month for allegedly ordering the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, inquired about assassinating prominent Iranian officials and sabotaging Iran's economy, the New York Times has reported.  
The paper said on Sunday that during a meeting with private businessmen in 2017, senior aides close to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, also known as MBS, inquired about killing Qasim Suleimani, the leader of the Quds Force of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps.  
The paper said that al-Assiri attended a meeting in March 2017 in Riyadh where businessmen pitched a \$2b plan to use private intelligence operatives to try to sabotage the Iranian economy.  
George Nader, a convicted paedophile and former political adviser to the United Arab Emirates's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, arranged the meeting, it said.

Nader also met with MBS, and pitched the Iran plan to officials in the White House.  
Another participant in the meetings was Joel Zamel - an Israeli whose now defunct Psy-Group intelligence firm is under investigation by the FBI and is suspected of pitching a media manipulation plan for Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign.  
During the meeting about the plan to sabotage Iran's economy, three people familiar with the discussions told the newspaper that the Saudis asked the private businessmen whether they also "conducted kinetics" - lethal operations - saying they were interested in killing senior Iranian officials.  
The businessmen reportedly hesitated, saying they would need to consult their lawyers.  
The NYT reported that Nader and Zamel's plan dated to the beginning of 2016, when they started discussing an ambitious campaign of economic warfare against Iran similar to one waged by Israel and the United States during the past decade.



A helicopter drops water on a burning ridge in the Feather River Canyon, east of Paradise, California on Sunday. Inset, county officers load a body into a hearse in Concord, California. The number of dead in the wildfire raging in California rose to 31, matching the deadliest in the state's history. PHOTO: AFP

## #METOO ROW IN INDIA

# Woman editor supports MJ Akbar in court

PTI, New Delhi  
A former woman colleague of journalist and politician MJ Akbar told a Delhi court yesterday that his reputation has been "destroyed" and "damaged irreparably" due to the allegations of sexual misconduct levelled by scribe Priya Ramani.  
Joyeeta Basu, the editor of Sunday Guardian, who appeared as a witness to support defamation case filed by Akbar, told Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Samar Vishal that Ramani posted all her tweets "intentionally with a purpose to harm" Akbar's "reputation and goodwill".  
"I have seen tweets by Priya Ramani dated October 10, 2018 and October 13, 2018. I have overcome my doubts but I know from the number of questions raised by people, I know personally that his reputation has been destroyed and damaged irreparably," Basu told the court which is recording the statements of witnesses produced by Akbar.  
Akbar, who resigned as Union minister on October 17, had filed a private criminal defamation complaint in a court here against Ramani after his name cropped up on the social media when he was in Nigeria, as the #MeToo campaign raged on in India.  
Ramani has accused Akbar of sexual misconduct around 20 years ago.  
Basu, in her statement, said: "After reading these tweets by Ramani, I believe that this vilification was conducted and the tweets were published intentionally by Ramani with a purpose to harm Akbar's good reputation and goodwill in the eyes of society."

## GLOBAL CYBERSECURITY RULES

# 51 states pledge support for deal

AFP, Paris  
Fifty-one states, including all EU members, have pledged their support for a new international agreement to set standards on cyberweapons and the use of the internet, the French government said yesterday.  
The states have signed up to a so-called "Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace", an attempt to kickstart stalled global negotiations.  
China, Russia and the United States did not sign the pledge, reflecting their resistance to setting standards for cyberweapons which are at the cutting edge of modern warfare.  
"We need norms to avoid a war in cyberspace which would be catastrophic," French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said yesterday.  
Campaigners have called for a "Digital Geneva Convention", a reference to the Geneva conventions that set standards for the conduct of wars.  
They want states to commit to not attacking infrastructure which is depended upon by civilians during wartime, for example.  
A new international norm would also help define a state-backed cyberattack and when a state could be justified in retaliating.

# Chances of deal in Nov fade

## Another EU meeting ended without breakthrough

AFP, Brussels  
The already slim chance that a Brexit deal would be agreed this month receded still further yesterday as another EU meeting ended without a breakthrough.  
European Union chief negotiator Michel Barnier warned ministers from member states that no deal has been sealed yet on Britain's departure from the bloc.  
In London, Prime Minister Theresa May's spokesman said talks in Brussels went on overnight until the early hours yesterday and would continue, but he warned: "There are still substantial issues to overcome."  
A government source said a deal must happen by Wednesday as there is any chance of an extraordinary EU summit this month to sign the withdrawal agreement.  
If there is no deal in November, the crisis could drag on until a regular EU summit on December 13.  
This would dramatically curtail the time May will have to get any agreement past a

rebellious British parliament before Brexit day on March 29.  
As fears rose that the saga will end with Britain crashing out without a deal, the pound dropped to 1.283 dollars against 1.297 at Friday's close.  
Briefing the 27 other EU member states, "Michel Barnier explained that intense negotiating efforts continue, but an agreement has not been reached yet", the European Council of member states said.  
"Some key issues remain under discussion, in particular a solution to avoid a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland," it added in a statement.  
The talks are stuck on the question of a "backstop" arrangement to prevent the return of border checks between Northern Ireland, part of the UK, and the Republic of Ireland if the sides fail to agree a free trade pact.  
Barnier met Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney yesterday before heading to Strasbourg for meetings with EU parliamentarians.



## STATE ELECTION IN INDIA

# Modi faces test in Chhattisgarh

REUTERS, New Delhi  
India yesterday began the first of five state elections to be held in coming weeks, important tests for Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he plots a course that he hopes will ensure him victory in a general election due by May.  
Voters in the central state of Chhattisgarh went to the polls yesterday to elect representatives for 18 of the state assembly's 90 seats in a staggered poll complicated by logistical problems and left-wing guerrillas.  
The state of about 26 million people has been ruled by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) since 2003, and he will be hoping to hold on to power.  
"Some unholy people have handed guns to children who should have pens in their hands," Modi told a rally in the state on Friday, referring to the rag-tag guerrillas battling government forces from forest hideouts.  
The final phase of voting in Chhattisgarh, which is known for its coal, iron ore and bauxite reserves, will be on November 20.  
Modi's other big tests will be in the neighbouring central state of Madhya Pradesh and in the northwestern state of Rajasthan, where Congress is expected to emerge victorious.