

# NEWSIN brief

## Iraq president visits Iran

AFP, Tehran  
Iraq's new President Barham Saleh made his first official visit to neighbouring Iran yesterday, calling for "a new order in the region". Saleh met his counterpart Hassan Rouhani to discuss trade, transport links and efforts to tackle dust pollution that plagues areas on both sides of the border.

## Brexit deal won't get through House: Davis

REUTERS, London  
British Prime Minister Theresa May's draft European Union divorce deal will not get the approval of the UK parliament, former Brexit Secretary David Davis said on Friday. Davis resigned as Brexit secretary in July in protest at May's plans for a long-term relationship with the bloc.

## Every vote counts!

AFP, Chicago  
Democrat Jim Glenn is poised to win a seat in Kentucky's legislature by one vote after a final tally was announced Thursday, besting incumbent Republican DJ Johnson. The result stands at 6,318 votes for Johnson and 6,319 votes for Glenn. If the final tally stands, the Kentucky district will be one of more than 300 across the country where Democrats gained state legislative seats in often tight races.

## UN to convene Yemen talks in Sweden soon

AFP, United Nations  
The United Nations intends to convene peace talks on Yemen soon after receiving firm assurances from the parties that they will attend negotiations in Sweden, the UN envoy said Friday. The Saudi-backed government and the Huthi rebels have shown a "renewed commitment" to work on a political solution to end a war that has driven millions to the brink of famine, Martin Griffiths told the Security Council.

## 37 killed in CAR clashes

AFP, Bangui  
At least 37 people were found dead in a town in restive Central African Republic, the UN said Friday, after clashes between Christian and Muslim-dominated militias that saw a church torched in the latest surge of sectarian violence. The violence which sparked on Thursday in the central town of Alindao when Christian militiamen, known as anti-balaka, killed Muslims prompting revenge attacks.

## BITS OF HISTORY (NOVEMBER 17)

- 1917: Auguste Rodin, French sculptor of "The Thinker" and "The Kiss", died.
- 1954: General Gamal Abdel Nasser became Egyptian head of state following the fall of President Mohamed Naguib.
- 1972: Argentine ex-president Juan Peron arrived in Buenos Aires after 17 years of exile.
- 1997: Egyptian Islamic militant group al-Gama'a al-Islamiya killed 58 foreign tourists and four Egyptians at Luxor.

# US, China clash at Apec

## Xi says Washington protectionism 'doomed to failure'; Pence slams Beijing's chequebook diplomacy, trade practices

AFP, Port Moresby  
China and the US crossed swords yesterday ahead of an APEC summit, duelling over protectionism, trade tariffs and "chequebook diplomacy" as they laid out sharply contrasting visions for the Pacific Rim region.

In combative back-to-back speeches at a business forum held on a hulking cruise ship moored in Port Moresby, Xi Jinping and US Vice President Mike Pence pulled few punches.

The feisty exchanges laid the ground for what could be a fiery encounter between the Chinese leader and President Donald Trump at next month's G20 in Argentina.

Xi lashed out at "America First" trade protectionism and stressed that global trade rules should not be applied "with double standards or selfish agendas" -- in a thinly veiled swipe at Washington.

The world's top two economies have been embroiled in a spiralling trade war, imposing tit-for-tat tariffs on each other's goods in a confrontation experts warn could torpedo the global economy.

Xi urged the world to "say no to protectionism and unilateralism", warning it was a "short-

sighted approach" that was "doomed to failure".

For his part, Pence vowed US tariffs would remain in place unless Beijing "changes its ways". Amid fears diplomatic and trade friction could spill over into the military sphere, Pence announced the US would join forces



with Australia in the development of a new naval base. And in a move likely to irritate Beijing, he also briefly met Taiwan's APEC representative.

Trump decided to skip the summit in Papua New Guinea, leaving the door open for Xi, who arrived two days earlier for a state visit and has been the undoubted star of the show.

The APEC summit of leaders from 21 countries across the region has developed into a

tussle for influence between an increasingly assertive China and a more withdrawn US.

This appeared to be borne out by the first "family photo" of leaders, which featured Xi front and centre while Pence was absent.

But in his speech, Pence lashed out at Chinese largesse in strong terms, mocking the Belt-and-Road initiative that sees China offering loans to poorer countries in the region to improve infrastructure.

He said the terms of China's loans were "opaque at best" and "too often, they come with strings attached and lead to staggering debt".

"Do not accept foreign debt that could compromise your sovereignty," he said.

As if pre-empting the criticism, Xi defended the plan amid attacks it is akin to "chequebook diplomacy" to further Chinese interests in the region.

He denied there was a "hidden geopolitical agenda... nor is it a trap as some people have labelled it".

And the Chinese leader warned that no one would gain from heightened tensions between the US and his emerging superpower.

"History has shown that confrontation -- whether in the form of a cold war, hot war or trade war -- will produce no winners," he said.



Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Chile's President Sebastian Pinera, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russia's Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister Peter O'Neill, Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, Indonesian President Joko Widodo, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, US vice President Mike Pence, Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and others pose for a family photo during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Summit in Port Moresby, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

## Trump says he has written answers to Mueller's questions

AFP, Washington  
US President Donald Trump said Friday he had personally written -- though not yet submitted -- answers to the questions put to the White House by Robert Mueller's Russia investigation, while once more assailing the probe as a "witch hunt."

Trump ended months of speculation on whether he would respond to questions from the special counsel, who is investigating whether the president's 2016 election campaign colluded with Russians and if Trump illegally obstructed the probe.

"I answered the questions very easily," Trump told reporters at the White House. "I haven't submitted them yet. I just finished them. As you know, I've been a bit busy."

Trump went on to dismiss the investigation, which he has repeatedly called illegal and threatened to shut down, attacking it this week as a national "disgrace."

The confirmation came nine days after Trump installed a new acting attorney general, Matthew Whitaker, who has been strongly critical of Mueller and suggested cutting the probe's purse-strings to make it difficult to continue.

Critics fear Whitaker will interfere with the investigation and provide the White House inside information on its activities to help protect the president, who if accused by Mueller of obstruction could face impeachment.

Trump's lawyers have said Mueller is seeking to trap Trump in a minor lie to be able to accuse him of perjury. In recent weeks speculation has grown that Trump's son Donald Trump Jr. and campaign consultant Roger Stone could face charges.

But the tight-lipped Mueller has not given any sign of whether Trump is regarded more as a witness or a target of the investigation.

Meanwhile, the outgoing chairman of the US House Judiciary Committee is planning to issue subpoenas compelling former FBI Director James Comey and former US Attorney General Loretta Lynch to be deposed about their decision-making ahead of the 2016 US presidential election, a House Democratic aide told Reuters on Friday.

The House of Representatives aide told Reuters that Goodlatte is planning to call Comey in for closed-door questioning on Nov 29 and Lynch on Dec 5.

## 28,529 Afghan troops killed since 2015

AFP, Washington  
The death toll among Afghanistan's security forces is nearing 30,000 since the start of 2015, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has said, a figure far higher than anything previously acknowledged.

Ghani appeared via video link this week at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, part of a university he once taught at as a professor of anthropology.

Since the start of 2015, when local police and army units succeeded Nato as bearing responsibility for Afghanistan's security, "28,529 of our security forces have lost their lives and become martyrs for our freedom," Ghani said.

In the same timeframe, 58 Americans have been killed, he said.

## 'If he misbehaves, we'll throw him out'

### Says Trump after CNN reporter returns to White House

AFP, Washington  
The White House agreed Friday to allow CNN reporter Jim Acosta back in after a judge ruled that the star journalist was improperly banned following a testy exchange at a press conference with President Donald Trump.

Trump spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said "in response to the court, we will temporarily reinstate the reporter's hard pass."

But she left open the possibility of seeking to remove Acosta's access later and said new rules would be imposed "to ensure fair and orderly press conferences."

Trump said that "rules and regulations" were being drafted to govern such gatherings, where the president or his representatives often accuse journalists -- Acosta in particular -- of being overly hostile.

"We have to practice decorum. We want total freedom of the press," Trump told reporters, adding later in an interview with

Fox News: "If he misbehaves, we'll throw him out."

Trump routinely describes journalists he does not approve of, and the media in general, as "enemies of the people."

On November 7, the day he was stripped of his pass, Acosta had riled Trump by refusing to give up the microphone at a news conference when he considered that Trump was evading his question. Trump responded by branding Acosta a "rude, terrible person."

CNN cast the controversy as a question of free speech, which is protected under the constitution's first amendment. In his ruling Friday, Judge Timothy Kelly stressed that he had only found the procedure for expelling Acosta illegal and that free speech did not enter the equation.

However, major media outlets took up Acosta's cause. Tellingly, Trump's most friendly outlet, Fox News, joined the suit calling for Acosta's pass to be returned.



Jim Acosta

## CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES

# Number of missing soars past 1,000

AFP, Chico  
The number of people listed as missing in a northern California wildfire jumped past 1,000 as searchers found the remains of eight more victims on the eve of President Donald Trump's trip to witness the devastation.

Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea told reporters the number of people unaccounted for almost doubled from 631 to 1,011 in 24 hours as authorities receive more reports of people missing and as emergency calls made when the fire broke out are reviewed.

"I want you to understand that this is a dynamic list," he told reporters. He said that on a positive note, 329 people who had been listed as missing since the fire broke out had so far been accounted for.

The eight additional sets of human remains found bring to 71 the total number of dead from the so-called Camp Fire, the deadliest and most destructive in California history.

The inferno erupted November 8, laying waste to the town of Paradise at the northern foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains and sending thousands fleeing.

Trump is set to visit the region on Saturday to survey the damage and meet victims. In an interview with Fox News ahead of his visit, Trump doubled-down on his earlier claim that mismanagement of California's forests was to blame for the fires. And he acknowledged that climate change may have contributed "a little bit" to the wildfires.



A man wears a mask of French president Emmanuel Macron as people take part in the nationwide yellow vests demonstrations, a symbol of a French drivers' protest against higher fuel prices, in Haulchin, France, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

## US ON CAMBODIA GENOCIDE RULING

# Verdict a signal to other perpetrators

AFP, Phnom Penh  
The US has welcomed Cambodia's landmark genocide verdict and said it served as a warning that perpetrators of mass atrocities, "even those at the highest levels", will eventually face justice for their crimes.

A war crimes tribunal in Cambodia found the Khmer Rouge's former head of state Khieu Samphan, 87, and "Brother Number Two" Nuon Chea, 92, guilty of genocide on Friday and sentenced them to life in prison.

The historic verdict comes nearly 40 years after the Khmer Rouge were expelled from Cambodia following a four-year reign of terror that left about a quarter of the population dead from starvation, mass executions, and overwork.

"Their crimes were numerous, calculated, and grave," US State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert said, commending the courage of the victims and witnesses who testified during the trial.

"Let this be a message to other perpetrators of mass atrocities, even those at the highest levels, including former heads of state, that such actions will not be tolerated and they will ultimately be brought to justice," she said in a statement.

Cambodia's neighbour Myanmar has come under fire in recent months for its handling of the Rohingya crisis, which United Nations investigators believe amounts to "genocide" given the atrocities perpetrated on the stateless Muslim minority.