

# NEWS IN brief

## 'Positive' results from US-Taliban talks: UAE

AFP, Abu Dhabi  
The United Arab Emirates said on Wednesday that reconciliation talks it hosted between the United States and Taliban officials from Afghanistan produced tangible and positive results. The two days of meetings aimed at ending Afghanistan's 17-year conflict were held in Abu Dhabi, with the attendance of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

## US approves Patriot missile sale to Turkey

AFP, Washington  
The United States said Wednesday it approved the sale of \$3.5 billion in missiles to Turkey, offering an ultimatum after US outrage over the Nato ally's plans to buy from Russia. The announcement came as President Donald Trump said that US forces would withdraw from neighboring Syria, a decision likely to please Turkey as it pursues Kurdish fighters.

## Egypt acquits 43 in NGO foreign funding retrial

AFP, Cairo  
A court yesterday acquitted 43 NGO staff accused of receiving illicit foreign funds to stir up unrest during Egypt's 2011 uprising, a judge said. The verdict follows prolonged legal proceedings in the case. In April, Egypt's top appeals court ordered a retrial following appeals filed by 16 defendants.

## Eleven migrants found dead in boat off Spain

AFP, Madrid  
Eleven migrants have been found dead in a boat in the sea off southern Spain along with 33 survivors, a Spanish coastguard spokeswoman said yesterday. Rescuers had taken the migrants, who came from sub-Saharan Africa, to the Spanish port of Almeria early yesterday. "Eleven people were found dead on board and 33 alive" -- four women and 29 men, she said.



A Palestinian man points at graffiti reading in Hebrew, "death to killers (R)" and "we are not sleeping when the name of the God is desecrated (L)" at the wall of a Palestinian house in the neighbourhood of Beit Hanina in Israeli annexed East Jerusalem yesterday. Inset, a Palestinian man displays his vehicle's slashed tire in the area. PHOTO: AFP



# UN ratifies global migrant pact

## Five nations voted against it

AFP, United Nations  
The UN General Assembly on Wednesday formally ratified a UN deal on migration by a large majority -- but without the support of the United States and a string of other countries. A total of 152 countries voted in favour of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which was agreed upon earlier this month by 165 UN members at a meeting in Morocco. Twelve countries abstained while five nations voted against it -- the United States, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and Israel. Billed as the first international document on managing migration, it lays out 23 objectives to open up legal migration and discourage illegal border crossings, as the number of people on the move globally has surged to more than almost 260 million, or 3.4 percent of the world population. More than 80 percent of those moving between countries do so legally, but more 60,000 people have died trying to cross borders illicitly since 2000, according to UN figures. Rows over the accord have erupted in several European Union nations, sparking the collapse of Belgium's coalition government and pushing Slovakia's foreign minister to tender his resignation. From the United States to Europe and beyond, right-wing and populist leaders have taken increasingly draconian measures to shut out migrants in recent years. According to diplomats, the United States had sought up to the last minute to convince other countries not to support the pact.

# Give up the 'delusion'

## North Korea says it won't give up nuke weapons unless Washington removes threat first

AGENCIES  
North Korea said yesterday its commitment to denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula was bound up with a "complete removal of US nuclear threats". Following a rapid diplomatic rapprochement this year, the North's leader Kim Jong Un and President Donald Trump signed a vaguely-worded statement in Singapore in June, agreeing to work towards the "denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula". But the two countries have since disagreed on what it means, causing follow-up negotiations to stall. Now Pyongyang is demanding sanctions relief and has condemned US insistence on its nuclear disarmament as "gangster-like", while Washington is pushing to maintain the measures against the North until its "final, fully verified denuclearisation". Yesterday's commentary released by the North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) asserted that the commitment was a mutual rather than unilateral undertaking. "It must be clearly understood that the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula means the removal of all nuclear threats -- not only those from the North and the South but those aiming at the Korean peninsula from surrounding

areas as well", it said. It urged the US to give up the "delusion" of forcing the North to give up its nuclear arsenal "unilaterally" through "pressure and coercion". It also called for the lifting of sanctions, describing it as a "touchstone" in determining whether the US was committed to implementing the Singapore agreement. A second summit between Trump and Kim -- who exchanged personal insults and threats of war throughout 2017 -- is expected to take place next year, reported AFP. The US leader faces criticism over the planned talks since North Korea has taken few concrete steps to abandon its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes. Meanwhile, the defence ministry said yesterday South Korea wants to hold smaller joint military drills with the United States next year, scaling back larger exercises as part of an effort to boost nuclear diplomacy with North Korea, reported Reuters. The allies have suspended a number of combined military exercises this year as tensions on the Korean peninsula eased and Washington began talks to dismantle Pyongyang's nuclear programme.

### DENUCLEARISATION

Pyongyang calls for lifting of sanctions

S Korea seeks smaller military drills with US

# Indian farmers get \$9b loan relief ahead of polls

AFP, New Delhi  
Three newly elected Indian state governments have waived up to \$8.6 billion in farm loans in a bid by Rahul Gandhi's main opposition Congress party to boost support ahead of 2019 elections. The sorry plight of farmers in India, where thousands commit suicide every year, is set to be a major issue in the polls when Prime Minister Narendra Modi will run for a second term. Last week Congress wrested power from Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in three state elections, partly by promising the help voters working in agriculture. Late Wednesday the new government of one of these states, Rajasthan, announced a write-off on loans of small farmers up to 200,000 rupees (\$2,850), at an estimated cost of \$2.5 billion. The two other states, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, where Congress ended 15 years of BJP rule, announced similar plans this week to forgo loans worth nearly 440 billion rupees. The move signals Congress's intent to

latch on the growing disquiet in rural areas, where 68 percent of India's 1.25 billion people live, against Modi, 68. "It's done!", Gandhi, 48, whose standing was boosted by the state election successes, said on Twitter. "We asked for 10 days. We did it in 2." Modi swept to power in 2014 largely on promises of improving lives of poor, ending corruption, boosting the economy and more jobs. But tens of thousands of farmers have rallied in recent months -- including 80,000 in New Delhi this month -- over his government's failure to mitigate their problems. Modi had pledged to double farm income by 2022 but most say nothing has changed. His opponents accuse him of being pro-rich and ignoring the plight of millions of poor farmers. Political parties often promise farm loan waivers or other agricultural sops to win support in rural India. Roughly 55 percent of the population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture, making the community the largest voting bloc.

### The move signals Congress's intent to latch on disquiet in rural areas

## PROBE INTO ALLEGED ASSASSINATION PLOT

# Sirisena keeps control of Sri Lankan police

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Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena yesterday appointed a 30-member cabinet, retaining control over the police while they investigate an alleged plot to kill him that triggered a row with the premier and led to a lengthy political crisis. The cabinet announcement follows the reinstatement of Ranil Wickremesinghe as prime minister after the Supreme Court threw out Sirisena's order to dissolve parliament and hold elections. Sirisena had earlier fired Wickremesinghe, accusing his government of failing to seriously investigate the assassination plot. Wickremesinghe denies the allegation. The president retained control over the law and order ministry. "President kept the police with him temporarily till the investigations over the plot to

kill him are over and till some reforms are introduced," said Rajitha Senarathne, who was reappointed health minister. Sirisena re-appointed Mangala Samaraweera finance minister, whose first task will be to secure parliament approval for a temporary budget aimed at avoiding a government shutdown from January 1, reported Reuters. The plot to kill the president, links to foreign intelligence, a rogue police officer and a missing sniper: the snippets of news emerging from the island nation in recent weeks seem plucked from the pages of paperback fiction. Sirisena sparked the political crisis on October 26 when he sacked Wickremesinghe in a bid to name nationalist firebrand Mahinda Rajapakse as prime minister. He had to backtrack in the face of opposition from the legislature, where he had no majority, and Sri Lankan courts.



Ground personnel carry International Space Station (ISS) crew member Sergey Prokopyev of Russia after the landing of the Soyuz MS-09 capsule in a remote area near the town of Zhezkazgan, formerly known as Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

# China opposes new US law on Tibet

REUTERS, Beijing  
China yesterday denounced the United States for passing a new law on restive Tibet, saying it was "resolutely opposed" to the US legislation on what China considers an internal affair, and it risked causing "serious harm" to their relations. US President Donald Trump on Wednesday signed into law the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act. The law seeks to promote access to Tibet for US diplomats and other officials, journalists and other citizens by denying US entry for Chinese officials deemed responsible for restricting access to Tibet. Beijing sent troops into remote, mountainous Tibet in 1950 in what it officially terms a peaceful liberation and has ruled there with an iron fist ever since. Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told a daily briefing that the law "sent seriously wrong signals to Tibetan separatist elements", as well as threatening to worsen bilateral ties strained by trade tension and other issues. "If the United States implements this law, it will cause serious harm to China-US relations and to the cooperation in important areas between the two countries," Hua said. The United States should be fully aware of the high sensitivity of the Tibet issue and should stop its interference, otherwise the United States would have to accept responsibility for the consequences, she added, without elaborating. Rights groups say the situation for ethnic Tibetans inside what China calls the Tibet Autonomous Region remains extremely difficult. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said in June conditions were "fast deteriorating" in Tibet.

# Malaysia targets middlemen

THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION, Kuala Lumpur  
Under pressure to crack down on labor abuses, Malaysia is moving to eliminate middlemen who charge millions of foreign workers exorbitant recruitment fees, leaving them saddled with debt and vulnerable to exploitation. From factories to construction sites and plantations, the Southeast Asian nation relies heavily on foreign workers for jobs usually shunned by locals. Many arrive having borrowed huge sums to pay recruitment agents, meaning they have to work for years earning virtually nothing - a form of modern-day slavery known as debt bondage. In a bid to address this, recently Malaysia struck a deal with Nepal to directly recruit workers there, without going through agents. The agreement came after Nepal temporarily suspended sending workers due to concerns about their treatment. "This is aimed at curbing human trafficking and exploitation of workers," Malaysian human resources

### DEBT BURDEN OF MIGRANT WORKERS

Bangladesh, Indonesia and Nepal are top providers of Malaysia's nearly 2m registered migrant workers

workers will be hired on a government-to-government basis. Malaysian employers will have to bear all the recruitment costs, including airfare, and visa and medical check-up fees. Kulasegaran said Malaysia is negotiating similar agreements with Bangladesh, Indonesia and Vietnam. Bangladesh, Indonesia and Nepal are

the top providers of Malaysia's nearly 2 million registered migrant workers, government figures show. There are millions more without work permits. The world's largest glove maker, the Malaysian firm Top Glove, said this month it would cut ties with unethical recruitment agents, after some of its migrant workers were found to have clocked excessive overtime to clear debts. Debt bondage is one of the most prevalent forms of modern slavery, which affects more than 40 million people worldwide, according to the United Nations' International Labour Organization. Kulasegaran, the government minister, has urged major firms operating in Malaysia to take the lead in ensuring there are no labor abuses among migrant workers. Aegile Fernandez, from the Malaysian migrant rights group Tenaganita, welcomed the government's plan to eliminate recruitment agents - but she warned that foreign workers continue to be exploited in other ways.

# Blind amphibian named after Donald Trump

CNN ONLINE  
After winning an auction to name a newly discovered blind amphibian, a British company chose Donald Trump as the creature's namesake, likening its behaviour to the US President's stance on climate change. Demorphis donaldtrumpi was discovered in Panama and has a propensity for burrowing its head in the ground, said Aidan Bell, co-founder of sustainable building materials company EnviroBuild. "Realizing the similarities between the amazing but previously unknown creature and the leader of the free world we couldn't resist buying the rights," Bell told CNN via email.

The animal is a caecilian -- a limbless, burrowing amphibian -- that spends most of its time underground, according to a statement from EnviroBuild. It lost its limbs around 60 million years ago but does have tentacles that it uses to find prey. "As demorphis donaldtrumpi is an amphibian, it is particularly susceptible to the impacts of climate change and is therefore in danger of becoming extinct as a direct result of its namesake's climate policies," said Bell in a statement. Trump has long been known as a climate-change skeptic. "Global warming is a total, and very expensive, hoax," he tweeted in 2013, and his stance does not appear to have changed much since he became President.

