

# NEWSIN brief

## Suicide blast at Afghan wedding kills five

At least five people were killed and many more wounded yesterday when a suicide bomber attacked a wedding ceremony in eastern Afghanistan, an official told AFP. The Taliban, who have pledged to try to reduce civilian casualties, denied responsibility for the blast in Nangarhar province. The area close to the Pakistan border is home to other insurgent organisations including the Islamic State group, who have carried out previous attacks. More than 40 people were also wounded in the attack. Officials said death toll may rise.

## Sudan general says coup attempt foiled

Sudan's ruling military council foiled a coup attempt, a top general announced on state television Thursday, saying that 12 officers and four soldiers had been arrested. The announcement came as the ruling military and civilian protesters agreed last week to end a political impasse after the army in April ousted longtime ruler Omar al-Bashir on the back of a popular uprising.

## Death toll in Pak train collision rises to 23

The death toll from a train collision in central Pakistan rose to 23 yesterday after several people succumbed to their injuries overnight, officials said. The incident took place Thursday in Rahim Yar Khan district in Punjab province when a passenger train coming from the eastern city of Lahore rammed into a goods train that had stopped at a crossing. A total of 73 people were still being treated for injuries in various hospitals, officials said.



Nepali residents look at floodwaters after the Balkhu River overflowed following monsoon rains at the Kalanki area of Kathmandu, yesterday. At least 17 people have been killed across Nepal after torrential monsoon rains induced floods and landslides, officials said. In neighbouring north-eastern India, the death toll from floods rose to 11, with 870,000 people affected, officials said.

PHOTO: AFP

## India, US resume trade talks amid tariff dispute

US and Indian trade teams started negotiations yesterday as tensions mount over protectionist measures taken by both sides. Assistant US Trade Representative Christopher Wilson met Indian commerce industry officials in Delhi on Friday, ahead of a meeting with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, ministry sources said. While India and the United States have become increasingly close in recent years, US President Donald Trump took a swipe at the giant South Asian nation on Twitter this week, saying that India's tariffs were "no longer acceptable". Washington removed India from a list of countries that got duty-free access for more than \$6 billion of imports to the US earlier this year. The move came on the back of higher US tariffs on Indian steel and aluminium. In response, New Delhi imposed higher duties on 28 US products including almonds, apples and walnuts last month.

## Turkey risks US sanctions

Russia delivers first batch of equipment; Nato 'concerned'

Russia began delivery of an advanced missile defence system to Turkey yesterday, a move expected to trigger US sanctions against a Nato ally and drive a wedge into the heart of the Western military alliance. The delivery to an air base in the Turkish capital Ankara comes after Washington warned this week that there would be "real and negative" consequences if Turkey bought the defence system. Nato, which counts Turkey as one of its members, is "concerned about the potential consequences" of the purchase, an official told AFP. The alliance has repeatedly warned Turkey that the Russian system is incompatible with other Nato weapons systems, not least the F-35, a new generation multi-role stealth fighter jet. The US fears that if Ankara integrates the S-400 into its defences there is a risk that sensitive data about its F-35 could leak back to the Russians and it has threatened to expel Turkey from its fighter jet programme. But Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has refused to back down and said he is confident Turkey will not face US sanctions. Turkey's Presidency of Defence Industries said in a statement that the delivery of the system's other parts would continue "in the coming days". The US State Department has said Turkish officials are fully aware of legislation -- the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act -- which mandates sanctions for any "significant" purchases of weapons from Russia. Washington has given Ankara until July 31 to cancel the S-400 purchase or have its pilots kicked off its F-35 training course and expelled from the US. Nicholas Danforth, of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, told AFP the delivery reflected Ankara's desire to forge "a more independent foreign policy and reset the terms of its relationship with the US". Nick Heras, of the Center for a New American Security, said the S-400 system would be a "game changer" for Turkey's air defence strategy in a region surrounded by actors with well-developed air forces.

### RUSSIAN S-400 MISSILE DEFENCE SYSTEM



## UK music industry group declares climate emergency

A range of British music artists, labels and studios banded together Friday to declare a climate and ecological emergency and pledged to rethink their environmental impact. The Music Declares Emergency collective said the industry lacked a cohesive response to climate change. Some of the artists signed up include Radiohead, the Pretenders, Mick Hucknall, Tom Odell and Siobhan Fahey. UK record labels including Sony, Decca, Polydor, Universal, Virgin EMI, Warner and Domino are supporting the campaign. Signatories called on governments to reverse biodiversity loss and reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by no later than 2030.

## Pakistan won't open airspace until India de-escalates

Pakistan has declined a request to open its airspace until India de-escalates, Aviation Secretary Shahrukh Nusrat told a parliamentary committee. "The Indian government approached asking us to open the airspace. We conveyed our concerns that first India must withdraw its fighter planes placed forward," Nusrat told the Senate Standing Committee on Aviation.

## Karnataka CM says he will seek trust vote

Indian state Karnataka's Chief Minister HD Kumaraswamy, battling a political crisis following the resignations of 16 MLAs from the Congress-Janata Dal (Secular) coalition, yesterday announced on the floor of the House that he would seek a trust vote. With the coalition's strength dwindling owing to the resignations (which are yet to be accepted by the Speaker), the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the state has been demanding that the CM should resign since the government does not enjoy a majority any more. The Congress and the JDS have been accusing the BJP of indulging in horse-trading and luring away legislators. The coalition's tally stands at 116 (Congress 78, JD(S) 37 and BSP 1) in the 224-member House.



## Nepal airport closed after plane skids off runway

Nepal's only international airport was closed yesterday after a plane skidded off the recently repaired runway, injuring two people, officials said. The Yeti Airlines ATR 72-500, arriving into Kathmandu from southern Nepal with 66 passengers, skidded about 15 metres (yards) into the grass. Airport's general manager Raj Kumar Chettri said that removing the Franco-Italian-made turboprop plane was taking a long time because heavy rain has made the area muddy. The Himalayan nation has some of the world's most remote and tricky runways, flanked by snow-capped peaks with approaches that pose a challenge for even accomplished pilots.

## BJP to revive plan for Hindu settlements in J&K

Kashmiri Pandits reject move as unrealistic

India's ruling party will revive a plan to build secured camps to resettle scores of Hindus in the Muslim-dominated Kashmir Valley, a senior leader said, a proposal that would almost certainly heighten tensions in the restive region. Ram Madhav, who is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) national general secretary responsible for Kashmir, said his Hindu nationalist party was committed to helping bring back some of the estimated 200,000-300,000 Hindus who fled the Kashmir Valley in the aftermath of an armed revolt that began in 1989. "Their fundamental rights of returning to the valley have to be respected. At the same time, we have to provide them proper security," Madhav said in an interview, referring to the Kashmiri Hindus, also known as Pandits. Madhav said that a previous BJP-backed government in Jammu and Kashmir state had considered building either separate or mixed resettlement townships, but had been unable to make headway. "No consensus could be built around any one view," he said. The construction of segregated enclaves has little or no support from the region's local political parties, Muslim leadership and groups representing the Hindus who fled. After living side-by-side with Kashmiri Muslims for centuries, Pandits fled for safety after a sharp rise in killings and attacks by Muslim militants when the insurgency flared in 1989. There is widespread opposition to any push for separate townships for returning Hindus in the Kashmir Valley, ranging from separatists to Kashmiri Pandit leaders. Sanjay Tickoo, a Pandit community leader who has continued to live in Kashmir, said the idea of building exclusive settlements with enhanced security was an unrealistic solution that would invite a backlash.



Members of the Syrian Civil Defence (White Helmets) search for bodies or survivors in a collapsed building following a reported regime air strike on the town of Ariha, in the south of Syria's Idlib province, yesterday. At least 10 civilians were killed in the air strike, including three children, a war monitor said. Russian and regime aircraft have ramped up strikes on Idlib since the end of April, killing more than 580 civilians. Rebel and jihadist fire has killed 45 civilians over the same period.

## IRAN TENSIONS

### US plans Gulf naval escorts

The Pentagon yesterday said it was discussing military escorts for vessels in the Gulf one day after armed Iranian boats threatened a British oil tanker. The White House's nominee to become chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, said Washington was attempting to put together a coalition "in terms of providing military escort, naval escort to commercial shipping." "I think that that will be developing over the next couple weeks," Milley told the Senate Armed Services Committee. Tensions in the Gulf have increased in the past few weeks, with Iran's economy in free fall following the re-imposition of US sanctions after President Donald Trump pulled out from a 2015 international agreement to curb Iran's nuclear program. The rapid chain of events further complicates Britain and other European allies' efforts to salvage the 2015 JCPOA nuclear agreement despite the US withdrawal. Milley's statement came after London accused Tehran on Thursday of deploying three military vessels to "impede the passage" of a 274-meter (899-foot) BP tanker, the British Heritage. Iran's menacing of the BP supertanker on Wednesday appeared to be in retaliation for Britain's seizure of the Iranian Grace 1 tanker off Gibraltar on July 4. Britain yesterday said it will send a second warship to the Gulf, temporarily deploying two vessels near Tehran's waters to ensure a continued British naval presence in one of the most important but volatile oil shipping routes in the world.

## Declare Nawaz verdict void

Says ex-Pak PM's daughter after judge's removal; her interview "forcefully" taken off air within minutes

presented a video apparently showing Malik saying he had been pressured into ruling in favour of conviction by individuals with compromising footage against him. In a subsequent post, Maryam said: "The clear meaning of the removal of the judge is that the judiciary has accepted the truth." "If this is the case, how can a verdict by this judge be maintained?" She asked why her father was not being released if the judge, who had given the verdict in the case against him, was removed, reported Dawn Online.



## China to impose sanctions on US firms in Taiwan arms sale

China yesterday said it would impose sanctions on US companies involved in a potential arms sale worth \$2.2 billion to self-ruled Taiwan -- a move that has infuriated Beijing. "The US arms sale to Taiwan has severely violated the basic norms of international law and international relations," said Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang in an online statement. "In order to safeguard national interests, China will impose sanctions on US enterprises participating in this sale of weapons to Taiwan," he said. The planned weapons sale, the first transfer of big-ticket United States military gear to democratically-governed Taiwan in decades, comes as ties between Washington and Beijing are already strained by their trade war. China views Taiwan as part of its territory and has vowed to one day seize it, by force if necessary. It bristles at any countries that might lend Taiwan diplomatic support or legitimacy. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi

yesterday warned Washington "not to play with fire with the Taiwan question" during a visit to Hungary. Earlier this week, the Chinese foreign ministry said Beijing had lodged formal complaints through diplomatic channels expressing "strong dissatisfaction and resolute opposition" at the potential weapons sale, which includes battle tanks and anti-aircraft missiles. China on Tuesday had also demanded that the US "immediately cancel" the \$2.2 billion potential arms sale. The US later shrugged off China's complaints, responding that the equipment would contribute to "peace and stability" in Asia. With the US currently engaged in a trade war with China, relations between Taipei and Washington have warmed considerably. Unlike the last three American presidents, who were wary of angering Beijing, Donald Trump has ramped up relations with Taiwan. And although Washington switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979, it has remained Taiwan's most powerful unofficial ally and biggest arms supplier.