

NEWSIN
brief

Turkey to meet Iran,
Russia on Syria

AFP, Ankara

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will host his Russian and Iranian counterparts for a summit on Syria in Ankara on September 16, the presidential spokesman said. Despite being on opposing sides in the Syrian conflict, Syria regime backers Iran and Russia have worked closely with rebel supporter Turkey to find a political solution.

Israel strikes Hamas
base after attacks

AFP, Gaza City

Israeli forces bombed Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip overnight in retaliation for Palestinian rocket attacks, the military said yesterday. Hamas launched two rockets at Israel late Wednesday -- bringing to six the number of strikes from Gaza in less than a week -- the army said, adding that they caused no casualties or damage. No casualties were caused by Israel attacks too.

Internet cut in Papua
over unrest fears

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia has blocked internet access in unrest-hit Papua over fears that a stream of offensive and racist posts online will spark more violent protests in the region, the government said yesterday. Riots and demonstrations brought several Papuan cities to a standstill this week.

2 US soldiers killed
in Afghanistan: Nato

AFP, Kabul

Two US military personnel were killed Wednesday in Afghanistan, Nato announced. The deaths bring to at least 14 the number of members of the US military to be killed in action in Afghanistan this year, just as Washington is seeking a way out of its longest war.



India, Pakistan
doing little to
fight jihadists
Accuses Trump

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump said that other countries, specially India, Pakistan, must assume the battle against Islamic extremists as the US negotiates a withdrawal from Afghanistan. He also warned Europeans to take back nationals captured fighting for the Islamic State, or he will release them back to their countries.

Asked by journalists if he is concerned about the reemergence of the Islamic State group in Iraq, Trump said forces under his lead had wiped out the extremists' caliphate. "At a certain point Russia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, they are going to have to fight their battles too."

"We wiped out the caliphate 100 percent. I did it in record time. But at a certain point, all of these other countries, where ISIS is around ... are going to have to fight them. Because do we want to stay there another 19 years? I don't think so."

He singled out India and Pakistan as frontline countries that are doing little to fight jihadist groups. "Look, India's right there, they are not fighting it, we're fighting it. Pakistan is next door. They're fighting it, very little.... it's not fair. The United States is seven thousand miles away," he told reporters.



A girl waits for customers to sell grains to feed pigeons at Basantapur Durbar Square in Kathmandu, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

‘No point talking to India’

Says Pak PM in interview with NYT, expresses fear of war

DAWN/ANN

Amid rising tension over occupied Kashmir, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has said there is “no point” talking to Indian officials, adding that his overtures for peace and dialogue with New Delhi so far have proven futile.

In an interview with The New York Times journalists Salman Masood and Maria Abi-Habib, published on Wednesday, Imran said: “There is no point in talking to them. I mean, I have done all the talking. Unfortunately, now when I look back, all the overtures that I was making for peace and dialogue, I think they took it for appeasement.”

During the interview at the Prime Minister's Office in Islamabad, which NYT said was Imran's first with an international news organisation aimed at publicising anger over the situation in occupied Kashmir, the premier said: “There is nothing more that we can do.”

The prime minister's remarks come after India stripped Kashmiris of their seven-decade-long special autonomy through a rushed presidential order on

August 5. A communications blackout and heavy restrictions on movement imposed by the Indian authorities from the eve of the intervention entered their 18th day on Thursday. At least 4,000 people have been detained in Indian-occupied Kashmir since then.

The prime minister said that the “most important thing” was that the



lives of eight million people were at risk. “We are all worried that there is ethnic cleansing and genocide about to happen.”

The premier described Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as “a fascist and Hindu supremacist who intends to eradicate Kashmir's mostly Muslim population and populate the region with Hindus”.

Imran, in his messages on Twitter since India's move to annex occupied Kashmir, has repeatedly said that the Indian government's policy in the Himalayan region is in line with the “ideology” of the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) party — said to be a parent organisation of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) — that believes in “Hindu supremacy”.

While speaking to NYT, he expressed concern that India might undertake a deceptive “false-flag operation” in Kashmir to try to justify military action against Pakistan, adding that Pakistan would be forced to respond.

“And then you are looking at two nuclear-armed countries eyeball to eyeball, and anything can happen.

“My worry is that this can escalate and for two nuclear-armed countries, it should be alarming for the world what we are facing now.”

According to the article, the premier demanded that United Nations peacekeepers and observers be allowed in occupied Kashmir.

S Korea scraps intel-sharing
pact with Japan amid row

REUTERS, Seoul

South Korea yesterday said it will scrap an intelligence-sharing pact with Japan, a decision that could further escalate a dispute over history and trade and undercut security cooperation on North Korea.

With the decision not to extend the pact, the political and trade disputes between South Korea and Japan now extend into some of the most sensitive national security issues in the region.

The arrangement was designed to share sensitive information on the threat posed by North Korea's missile and nuclear activities, and the decision to end it comes after North Korea launched a series of short-range ballistic missiles in protest against what it sees as military build-ups in South Korea and Japan.

The General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) was due to be automatically renewed on Saturday, unless either side decided to cancel it.

The decision was announced after an hour-long discussion within the presidential National Security Council

(NSC). South Korean President Moon Jae-in approved it.

Japan cited security concerns without providing specific evidence for its decision on South Korea's trade status.

“Under this situation, we have determined that it would not serve our national interest to maintain an agreement we signed with the aim of exchanging military information which is sensitive to security,” Kim told a news conference.

South Korea would deliver a formal notice to Japan within the due date, Kim said.

There was no immediate response from Tokyo, but Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said before the announcement that the deal bolstered security cooperation between the two countries.

This week the foreign ministers of the two countries met outside Beijing and promised to keep talking, but failed to reach any substantive agreements.

Prior to signing the agreement in 2016, under US pressure, South Korea and Japan shared intelligence through the United States.

Syria to let civilians
flee rebel-held Idlib

AFP, Damascus

Damascus yesterday said it is opening a corridor for civilians to leave the rebel-held northwestern region of Idlib, where government bombardment has killed hundreds since late April, state media said.

The announcement came a day after government forces captured the key Idlib province town of Khan Sheikhun from jihadists and allied rebels.

Damascus has opened such corridors out of other rebel bastions in the past as a prelude to retaking them either by force or through negotiated surrenders.

The Idlib region, which sits on the Turkish border, is now the last major stronghold of opposition to the Russia-backed government of President Bashar al-Assad.

The Idlib region has been ruled since January by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham alliance, which is led by jihadists from Syria's former al-Qaeda affiliate. The government refers to all rebel groups in Idlib as “terrorists”.

The region of some three million people was supposed to be protected by a proposed buffer zone agreed by Moscow and rebel backer Ankara last September.

But the jihadists of HTS failed to pull back from the zone as agreed and in April government and Russian forces resumed intense bombardment of the region. Around 890 civilians have been killed, according to the Britain-based Observatory.

More than 400,000 more have led their homes, the United Nations says.



This photo taken on Wednesday shows the aftermath of a mudslide caused by heavy rainfall in Wenchuan county, in China's southwestern Sichuan province. Nine people have died and 35 are still missing after a series of mudslides in China's southwestern Sichuan province, local authorities said yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

‘We won’t give an inch’

India faces defiance in ‘Kashmir's Gaza’ after scrapping of Article 370

AFP, Srinagar

Young men sit beside a pile of rocks and a bonfire, protecting the only entrance to a besieged neighbourhood they call “Kashmir's Gaza” as a mosque loudspeaker broadcasts slogans of liberation.

In an act of defiance against New Delhi's controversial decision to strip the Muslim-majority region of its autonomy, Soura neighbourhood on the outskirts of Kashmir's main city of Srinagar has sealed itself off from security forces.

Since early August, residents have erected ramshackle barricades of tin sheets, wooden logs, oil tanks and concrete pillars, and dug trenches to keep soldiers at bay amid daily protests against India.

“They can only enter Soura over our bodies. We won't give even an inch of land to India,” Mufeed, a resident who volunteers to guard the neighbourhood at night, told AFP.

“Just like Gaza is resisting Israel, we will fight for our motherland with all our might,” Mufeed added.

Kashmir has waged a three-decade long armed rebellion against Indian rule with tens of thousands of lives, mostly civilians, lost in the conflict.

Ahead of the announcement, India rushed tens of thousands of extra troops to the restive region to join 500,000 already in the valley, and imposed a strict



clampdown fearing further unrest.

But protests have broken out, with the lower-middle class Soura leading the way. At least 15,000 people rallied on August 9 -- the biggest demonstration in Kashmir so far.

They were met by security forces firing live ammunition, tear gas and pellet guns to disperse the crowds, with more than two dozen people reportedly injured.

Soura, a cramped lakeside community of more than 2,000 homes, is surrounded by security forces on three sides.

The renowned mosque Jenab Saeb has become an assembly point for thousands of protesters in the neighbourhood.

Every night, residents march through its narrow lanes,

carrying torches and passing graffiti with the words “Freedom for Kashmir” and “Go India, go back”.

Locals pass along messages if they spot any police movement on the main highway just beyond Soura.

Police forces, who have deployed drones and helicopters, tried to enter Soura at least three times but were pushed back by stone-throwing youth, some also armed with axes and harpoons.

Familiar with police's crowd-dispersing tactics, protesters use saltwater to wash their faces after chilli and tear gas are fired, and wear helmets and glasses to protect themselves against pellets.

Three youths have so far been arrested after venturing out from the area.

“They (India) are testing our resilience and they will definitely fail,” local Nahida told AFP.

“We defeated them last time and even if this situation continues for years, we won't give-in.”

Despite the Soura protests, authorities stress that Kashmir has remained largely peaceful since the lockdown.

Soura has long been part of restive Kashmir's history since the region was divided between India and Pakistan after independence from the British in 1947.

It was the birthplace of Kashmir's former prime minister Sheikh Abdullah, who agreed to join India as a state with autonomy rights.

BID TO SAVE NUCLEAR DEAL

Iran ready to work
on French proposals
Says FM; Tehran shows off
new missile defence system

REUTERS, Oslo

Iran is prepared to work on French proposals to salvage the international nuclear deal that Tehran signed with world powers in 2015 but it will not tolerate US interference in the Gulf, its foreign minister said yesterday.

At a time of heightened friction between Tehran and Washington, Iran also displayed what it described as a domestically built long-range, surface-to-air missile air defence system.

The United State abandoned the international nuclear deal in May last year and stepped up sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

In an effort to prop up the agreement, French President Emmanuel Macron offered on Wednesday to either soften sanctions on Iran or provide a compensation mechanism “to enable the Iranian people to live better” in return for full compliance with the pact.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said he was looking forward to having a serious conversation with Macron in Paris today. “There are proposals on the table, both from the French and the Iranian side, and we are going to work on those proposals tomorrow,” he said.

Zarif also warned against US efforts to create a security mission, which so far Britain, Australia and Bahrain have joined, to guard shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, a vital gateway for global oil supplies.

In his speech in Oslo, Zarif said Iran would not start a war in the Gulf but it would defend itself.

US, N Korea
will restart
talks ‘soon’
Says South Korea

REUTERS, Seoul

The United States and North Korea are expected to reopen denuclearisation talks soon and they will go well, a senior South Korean official said yesterday, boosting hopes for progress in negotiations after a prolonged stalemate.

South Korea's deputy national security adviser, Kim Hyun-chong, gave his upbeat assessment after meeting US envoy for North Korea Stephen Biegun in Seoul.

“My impression was that North Korea and the United States would carry out dialogue soon, and it would go well,” Kim told reporters after the one-hour meeting, without elaborating.

Talks aimed at dismantling North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes have stalled since a failed second summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Vietnam in February.

Trump and Kim met again in June at the inter-Korean border and agreed to reopen working-level negotiations.

But North Korea has fired a series of short-range missiles since then, lambasting US-South Korea joint military exercises and the adoption of new weapons, while chastising South Korean President Moon Jae-in as “impudent”.

A North Korean foreign ministry spokesman yesterday took issue with South Korea's acquisition of American F-35 stealth fighter jets, saying it was not interested in dialogue that was “accompanied by military threats”.

Kim, the South Korean official, said Biegun expressed gratitude over South Korea's restrained response to the North's criticism.