

# NEWS IN brief

## Tokyo braces for hit from typhoon Faxai

AFP, Tokyo  
A strong typhoon that could bring record winds and rain was poised to make a direct hit on Tokyo later yesterday, as authorities issued evacuation warnings amid a risk of high waves, landslides and flooding. Typhoon Faxai, packing winds of up to 216 kilometres (134 miles) per hour, is forecast to reach coastal areas near Tokyo in the late hours of yesterday into this morning, Japan's meteorological agency said. Air and rail transport movement in the capital suspended due to the storm.

## Russians go to local polls after protests

AFP, Moscow  
Russians yesterday voted in local elections after weeks of opposition protests in Moscow that led to the biggest police crackdown on dissent in nearly a decade. Municipal and regional polls were held across the country, but attention focused on the Moscow parliament vote following the arrest and jailing of independent would-be candidates and their supporters. Opposition leader Alexei Navalny urged voters to punish the Kremlin.

## Storm Dorian makes landfall in Canada

AFP, Ottawa  
Dorian made landfall in Canada on Saturday night south of Halifax with ferocious 100 mph winds and torrential rains, meteorologists said, toppling trees and whipping up debris. The storm churned up 65-foot waves which pounded the coast near the port city that is home to Canada's Atlantic fleet. As it moved north from the US after devastating the Bahamas, the storm was now being called a "very intense post-tropical cyclone."



An Indian policeman clashes with Kashmiri Shias during a strict curfew in Lal Chowk area of Srinagar on the 8th day of Muharram yesterday. The lifting of New Delhi's communications restrictions in Indian Kashmir depends on Pakistan stopping deploying "terrorists" and fomenting unrest there, India's national security advisor said Saturday.

## CONFLICT IN NORTHEAST SYRIA

# US, Turkey conduct safe zone patrols

Damascus condemns

AFP, Alqabala  
The United States and Turkey yesterday began joint patrols in northeastern Syria aimed at easing tensions between Ankara and US-backed Kurdish forces who battled the Islamic State jihadist group. Damascus yesterday said it strongly opposes joint patrols in northeast Syria, calling it a flagrant "aggression" that seeks to prolong the country's eight-year conflict. Six Turkish armoured vehicles crossed the border to join US forces in Syria for their first joint patrol under a deal reached between Washington and Ankara, an AFP journalist reported. Two helicopters flew over the area as the Turkish vehicles drove through an opening in the concrete wall separating the two countries. They then headed west along with the same number of American vehicles, along with an ambulance and a pick-up, for the joint operation, before crossing back into Turkey. The Turkish defence ministry said drones were also deployed. The agreement reached on August 7 aims to establish a "safe zone" between the Turkish border and the Syrian areas east of the Euphrates river controlled by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). Syrian Kurdish forces began withdrawing from along the Turkish border in late August. The YPG forms the backbone of the Syrian Democratic Forces -- a key partner of Washington in the fight against IS jihadists in Syria. But Ankara sees the YPG as an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party.

# Trump calls off peace talks

## Pompeo vows to continue pressure on the insurgent group

REUTERS, Washington  
US President Donald Trump on Saturday said he cancelled peace talks with Afghanistan's Taliban leaders after the insurgent group claimed responsibility last week for an attack in Kabul that killed an American soldier and 11 other people. Trump said he had planned a secret meeting with the Taliban's "major leaders" yesterday at a presidential compound in Camp David, Maryland. Trump said he also planned to meet with Afghanistan's president. But Trump said he immediately called the talks off when the insurgents said they were behind the attack. "If they cannot agree to a ceasefire during these very important peace talks, and would even kill 12 innocent people, then they probably don't have the power to negotiate a meaningful agreement anyway," Trump said on Twitter. The surprise announcement left in doubt the future of the draft accord worked out last week by Zalmay Khalilzad, the special US envoy for peace in Afghanistan, for a drawdown of thousands of US troops over the coming months. Meanwhile, Taliban said yesterday that Trump's decision to cancel peace talks with its leadership would lead to the further loss of American lives and assets.

"The Americans will suffer more than anyone else for cancelling the talks," Zabihullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the hardline insurgent group, said in a statement. The United States will keep on pressuring Taliban militants to live up to commitments made in peace talks and will not reduce military support for Afghan troops in the meantime, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said yesterday. Just hours before Trump's tweet, a senior Taliban leader privy to talks in Doha with US officials including Khalilzad and Taliban chief negotiator Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, said an agreement to sign the deal appeared close. Taliban fighters, who now control more territory than at any time since 2001, launched fresh assaults on the northern cities of Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri over the past week and carried out two major suicide bombings in the capital Kabul. One of the blasts, a suicide attack in Kabul on Thursday, took the life of US Army Sergeant 1st Class Elis A. Barreto Ortiz, 34, from Puerto Rico, bringing the number of American troops killed in Afghanistan this year to 16. A spike in attacks by Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan has been "particularly unhelpful" to peace efforts there, a senior US military commander said on Saturday as he visited neighbouring Pakistan, where many Taliban militants are based.

## US-TALIBAN NEGOTIATIONS

Afghan gov cautiously welcome halt to summit  
Taliban warn more US lives will be lost



# EU won't approve delay

## Says French FM; top British minister quits in new blow to PM Johnson

AFP, Paris  
French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian yesterday rejected any further delay to Britain's exit from the EU, now scheduled for October 31 but clouded by political turmoil in London. "In the current circumstances, it's no! ... We are not going to go through this every three months," Le Drian said on Le Grand Rendez-vous Europe/1/CNEWS/Les Echos programme. "The (British) say that they want to put forward other solutions, alternative arrangements so that they can leave," he said, referring to Prime Minister Boris Johnson's efforts to find a way out of the backstop mechanism for Northern Ireland, the main sticking point. "But we have not seen them and so it is 'no'... let the British authorities tell us the way forward," he said. "Let them take responsibility for their situation... They have to tell us what they want." Britain was originally meant to leave the European Union on March 29 but

with parliament deadlocked the British government ended up negotiating two delays, the latest to October 31. Meanwhile, the British government insisted yesterday that Boris Johnson would fight on as prime minister despite seeing a top cabinet ally quit and his do-or-die Brexit strategy blocked by parliament. Johnson's awful run at home got worse with the resignation on Saturday of Conservative heavyweight Amber Rudd from her work and pensions post. Rudd was a moderate member of former prime minister Theresa May's government whose endorsement Johnson coveted during his successful UK leadership challenge. But Rudd said yesterday that she could no longer be part of the team that oversees what both businesses and the markets fear would be a very messy "no-deal" divorce. "I believe (Johnson) is trying to get a deal with the EU. I am just saying what I have seen in government is that there is this huge machine preparing for no-deal," she told BBC television.

## BREXIT IMPASSE



# Iran slams EU powers as nuclear deal unravels

## Int'l atomic watchdog chief in Tehran for talks

AFP, Tehran  
Iran's atomic agency chief yesterday hit out at European powers, saying their broken promises gave the Islamic republic little choice but to scale back its commitments under a nuclear deal. Ali Akbar Salehi was speaking to reporters alongside Cornel Feruta, the acting head of the International Atomic Energy Agency who was on a one-day visit to Tehran. The IAEA official's visit comes a day after Iran said it was firing up advanced centrifuges that enrich uranium at a faster rate -- the latest blow to the landmark 2015 nuclear deal. It was the third step in a strategy Iran implemented in May, reducing its nuclear commitments in a bid to force the deal's remaining parties to deliver on promises of relief from crippling US sanctions. Britain, France and Germany have been trying to save the nuclear deal, which began unravelling last year when US President

Donald Trump withdrew from it and began reimposing the punitive measures against Iran. "The European Union was supposed to be the replacement of the US but, unfortunately, they failed to act on their promises," Salehi said in comments aired on state television. "We heard the EU spokesperson say they would be committed to the JCPOA as long as Iran is," he said, referring to the deal by its formal name, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. "I am wondering. Are they committed to non-adherence? Are they committed to breaking promises? Unfortunately, the Europeans have done this so far." The head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation said the JCPOA was now just a "one-way street." "The street was supposed to be two-way. If it's going to be one-way, the Islamic Republic of Iran will definitely make the right decisions at the right time like it has done with these three steps," said Salehi.



A demonstrator holding a Palestinian flag argues with Israeli forces during a protest against Jewish settlements near Beit Jala in the Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday.

## Vikram lander located on lunar surface: ISRO

The Chandrayaan-2's Vikram module has been located on the lunar surface and it must have been a hard-landing, ISRO chairman K Sivan said yesterday, in an admission that the planned soft-landing wasn't successful. "Yes, we have located the lander on the lunar surface. It must have been a hard-landing," Sivan told PTI. The image of the lander rover 'Pragyan' is housed inside it was captured by on-board camera of Chandrayaan-2 orbiter, which is healthy, safe and functioning normally in the intended orbit around the moon. India's bold mission to soft-land on the moon suffered a setback with the 'Vikram' module losing communication with ground stations, just 2.1 km from the lunar surface during its final descent in the early hours of Saturday.

## Trump 'in severe mental decline': former top aide

Donald Trump is "in severe mental decline" and "won't make it" to the next election, a former top aide has claimed. Anthony Scaramucci, who was White House communications director for just 11 days before he was sacked in 2017, said the US president's behaviour has "got worse" since he last saw him a year ago. In an interview with CTV News on Friday, he said: "He's in full-blown meltdown; it's like the episodes of Chernobyl where the reactor's melting down and people are trying to figure out whether they're going to cover it up or clean it up." Scaramucci said he believed the president's chances of re-election were "diminishing every day" -- but admitted there was "still a chance there".

# Workers fear detention there

## US: N Korea blocking resumption of talks

REUTERS, Goalpara  
Across a river in a remote part of India's northeast, labourers have cleared dense forest in an area equivalent to about seven soccer fields and are building the first mass detention centre for illegal immigrants. The camp in the lush, tea-growing state of Assam is intended for at least 3,000 detainees. It will also have a school, a hospital, a recreation area and quarters for security forces -- as well as a high boundary wall and watchtowers, according to Reuters interviews with workers and contractors at the site and a review of copies of its layout plans. Some of the workers building the camp said they were not on a citizenship list Assam released last week as part of a drive to detect illegal immigrants. That means the workers could themselves end up in detention. Shefali Hajong, a gaunt tribal woman from a nearby village, said she was not on the list and will join nearly two million people who need to prove they are Indian citizens by producing documents such as birth and land ownership certificates dating back decades. If they fail to do so, they risk being taken to detention camps like the one being built. The government says there

are hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants in Assam from neighbouring Muslim-majority Bangladesh, but Dhaka has refused to accept anyone declared an illegal immigrant in India. Shefali, who belongs to the indigenous Hajong tribe, said she was tense because of the situation. "But I need to fill my stomach," she said in the local Assamese dialect as she used a hoe to feed stones into a concrete mixer. She and other workers make about \$4 a day, which is considered a decent wage in the impoverished area. She said she didn't know her exact age and believed it was about 26, adding that she did not know why she wasn't on the citizenship list. "We don't have birth certificates," said her mother, Malati Hajong, also working at the site. The camp, near the town of Goalpara, is the first of at least ten detention centers Assam has planned, according to local media reports. The mammoth Supreme Court-ordered exercise to document Assam's citizens has been strongly backed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government that came to power in New Delhi five years ago. Critics say the campaign is aimed at Muslims, even those who have lived legally in India for decades.

## ASSAM CAMP FOR ILLEGALS



# US: N Korea blocking resumption of talks

AFP, Washington  
North Korea must stop blocking nuclear talks with the United States before it is too late, the US special envoy to that country said amid a stalemate in the negotiations. "If we are to succeed, North Korea must set aside its search for obstacles to negotiations and instead seek the opportunities for engagement while that opportunity lasts," Stephen Biegun said Friday in a speech at the University of Michigan. The State Department released the text of his remarks on Saturday. The two countries began a historic dialogue after President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un held a summit in Singapore in June 2018. A second summit in Hanoi in February collapsed without an agreement. The pair met again in June in the Demilitarized Zone dividing North and South Korea, and agreed there to restart working-level dialogue, but those talks have yet to begin. In recent weeks North Korea has carried out a series of tests of short-range missiles. US officials have called these launches provocations, although Trump himself has avoided criticizing them. North Korean officials have also criticized the US position that sanctions against North Korea will not be lifted until the country gives up its nuclear weapons. "We have made clear to North Korea that we are prepared to engage as soon as we hear from them. We are ready, but we cannot do this by ourselves," Biegun said in his speech. "We must set in motion an intensive set of negotiations," he added.

## Israel attacks Gaza targets following drone raid

The Israeli army targeted Hamas positions in the Gaza Strip overnight in response to a drone attack from the Palestinian enclave, the military said. The Israeli strikes late Saturday came after two days of cross-border exchanges of fire in which two Palestinian teenagers were killed. An Egyptian delegation meanwhile arrived in the Gaza Strip yesterday as part of efforts to keep alive a fragile truce between Hamas and Israel, a Hamas source said. The truce was negotiated by Egyptian and UN officials with aid from Qatar to end several severe flare-ups of violence in recent months. Following a Saturday drone attack, Israeli fighter jets and a drone "struck a number of Hamas military targets, including offensive naval equipment and two military compounds," the army said. It said it "holds Hamas responsible for all that transpires in the Gaza Strip and emanates from it." A security source in Gaza said Israeli "warplanes raided four positions" of the Al-Qassam Brigades, the Hamas military wing, in central and northern Gaza, causing damage but "no injuries".

SOURCES: INDEPENDENT.CO.UK, PTI, AFP