

# NEWSIN brief

## Five people killed in Philippine quake

Five people were killed and dozens were injured after a powerful earthquake hit the southern Philippines, authorities said yesterday. The 6.4-magnitude quake struck the Mindanao region on Wednesday night, reducing dozens of houses to rubble on the southern third of the Philippines. Yesterday afternoon, authorities said five people were killed and 53 injured, mainly in a cluster of small farming towns. The disaster council's spokesman Mark Timbal told local television it had not received any reports of missing people from any of the quake-hit areas.

## Thai king postpones royal barge procession

Thailand's newly crowned king has postponed next week's final event marking his historic coronation -- a royal barge procession down Bangkok's Chao Phraya river -- by almost two months, a deputy premier announced yesterday. The 52-barge procession was scheduled for October 24, and yesterday Thai oarsmen donning hats and gold-flecked attires rowed down the Chao Phraya river for the first full-dress rehearsal.

## Japan to defer imperial parade over typhoon

Japan plans to postpone a major imperial parade celebrating the new emperor's ascension to the throne because of a devastating typhoon, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said yesterday. The parade was scheduled for October 22 as part of a series of events marking the official proclamation of Emperor Naruhito's enthronement. But "given the disaster situation, we are examining a postponement of the parade", Abe told reporters after he visited shelters in Fukushima to meet typhoon survivors.



A lawmaker jumps on furniture as he tries to follow Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam (not pictured), as Lam leaves the Legislative Council in Hong Kong yesterday. Inset, a pro-democracy lawmaker is escorted by security from the Legislative Council, as Lam takes questions from lawmakers regarding her policy address. PHOTO: REUTERS



## WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

# 1,174 civilians die in July-Sept: UN

### Blames Taliban for spike in deaths

An "unprecedented" number of civilians were killed or wounded in Afghanistan from July to September this year, the United Nations said in a new report released yesterday, calling the violence "totally unacceptable". The figures -- 1,174 deaths and 3,139 injured -- represent a 42 percent increase over the same time period last year, the report said, laying most of the blame for the spike at the feet of "anti-government elements" such as the Taliban. July alone saw more casualties than in any other month on record since the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) began documenting the violence in 2009, the report said. The first six months of the year had seen casualties drop somewhat compared to previous years. But the violence has surged so far in the third quarter that it yanked the overall total for the year back on par with the bloodiest since Nato withdrew its combat forces at the end of 2014. The UN recorded 8,239 civilian casualties in total in the first nine months of 2019 -- 2,563 killed and 5,676 injured. Some 41 percent of them were women and children, UNAMA said. "Civilian casualties are totally unacceptable," especially given most parties recognise that there is no military solution in Afghanistan, said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the UN's special representative in the country. The figures show the need for peace talks leading to a ceasefire and a permanent political settlement, he added.

# HK assembly in chaos

## Pro-democracy lawmakers dragged from chamber by security forces as Lam heckled for second day

Hong Kong's parliament descended into chaos yesterday, with lawmakers dragged out by security guards for heckling leader Carrie Lam as they demanded an inquiry into a brutal attack on a prominent human rights activist ahead of a major rally. The knife and hammer attack on Jimmy Sham, which left him bloodied and lying in the street on Wednesday night, was designed to intimidate protesters and incite violence ahead of Sunday's march, pro-democracy lawmaker Claudia Mo told reporters. "This very vicious attack took place practically on the eve of the call for yet another massive protest in Hong Kong on Sunday. We can't help feeling that this entire thing is part of a plan to shed blood on Hong Kong's peaceful protests," she said. The second day of turmoil in the Legislative Council, after Lam was forced to cut short her annual policy speech on Wednesday due to heckling and broadcast it via video instead,

underscores the political rift in the city, with no end in sight to more than four months of anti-government protests. "Regarding the current situation we are facing, we need to be united against violence, say no to violence," Lam said in the chamber and again defended her efforts to end the crisis.

Lawmakers call for inquiry into attack on pro-democracy leader  
Amnesty says attack sends chilling signal

"I have mentioned that we will be humble, listen to different voices and set up an expert commission to find a way out of the current situation we are facing," she said. Lam later staged a Facebook Live event to air her policy address and answer pre-submitted questions. After 30 minutes of the one hour event, 5,700 "angry" emojis had been posted

compared with 1,300 "likes". Hong Kong has been battered by four months of protests, driven by concerns Beijing is eroding freedoms granted when Britain handed the city back to China in 1997. Protesters have five core demands, which include universal suffrage and an independent inquiry into police behaviour. Rights group Amnesty International said the "horrifying attack" on Sham, head of the Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF), would send a "chilling signal" and urged authorities to investigate. Police said they would. Sham was attacked in the gritty Mong Kok district by five men with knives and hammers. Photographs on social media show him lying sprawled on the ground, bleeding from his head. CHRF said he suffered three wounds to the head and has swollen knees and elbows. From hospital Sham urged people not to seek revenge.

# Qatar approves new minimum wage law

## Scraps mandatory exit visas for all workers

Qatar's government said yesterday it adopted a new minimum wage law and will scrap mandatory exit visas for all workers, part of a broad labour reform program ahead of its hosting of the 2022 World Cup. The Gulf state, which relies on about 2 million migrant workers for the bulk of its labour force, is also planning to ease curbs on changing employers, Qatar's administrative development, labour and social affairs ministry said. Qatar, along with other wealthy Gulf Arab states, has come under fire for what rights groups describe as poor labour conditions. Doha is keen to show it is tackling allegations of worker exploitation as it prepares to host the 2022 soccer World Cup, which it hopes will boost its economy and development. The statement said the cabinet had adopted new legislation related to the draft law on a minimum wage, though it did not

disclose what level the wage could be. It added it passed another draft law which will lead to the scrapping of exit permits for all workers, adding work was also underway to enable employees to change employers more easily. Qatar last year eliminated exit visas for some foreign migrant workers, but rights groups considered the reform incomplete as it did not apply to domestic workers and allowed companies to keep the visa requirement for up to 5% of staff. The International Labour Organization described the measures as "a momentous step forward in upholding the rights of migrant workers" and said they were aimed at ending the "kafala" (sponsorship system). This system is common in Gulf states where large portions of the population is foreign. In Qatar it requires workers to obtain their employers' consent before changing jobs, which advocate groups say leaves them open to abuse.

The measure aims at ending 'kafala' labour system: ILO  
Qatar relies on about 2m migrant workers

# 'Simply groundless'

## China slams US restrictions on Chinese diplomats

China yesterday slammed as "groundless" a US decision to order Chinese diplomats to notify the State Department before meeting with local officials, in the latest spat to strain bilateral relations. Washington -- which called the move "reciprocal" -- announced the decision Wednesday in response to the inability of US diplomats to meet with a range of Chinese officials and academics, a senior State Department official said, speaking anonymously. "What the US has said about China restricting the activities of US diplomats is simply groundless," said foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang, adding that China "consistently supported" US diplomats in the country. "We urge the US to correct its mistakes, revoke the relevant decision, and provide support and convenience for Chinese diplomats in the US... rather than artificially setting up barriers," he told reporters at a press briefing in Beijing. The move comes as Washington

and Beijing -- the world's two largest economies -- are locked in a bitter trade dispute. A partial deal is now being put in writing, President Donald Trump said Wednesday, while Beijing said both sides were working towards "an early agreement". "Unfortunately in China, US diplomats do not have unfettered access to a range of folks that are important for us to do our job there," the US official told reporters. "That includes local and provincial level officials, academic institutions, research institutes," the official said. "We have to seek permission and such permission is often denied." Chinese diplomats will henceforth be required to tell the State Department in advance of any official meetings with US diplomats, local or municipal officials, and before any visits to colleges or research institutions. "What we're trying to achieve here is just to get closer to a reciprocal situation," the official said, emphasizing that Chinese diplomats were not being asked to get "permission" for their visits.



Palestinian protesters throw stones at an armoured Israeli security vehicle amidst clashes during a demonstration against construction on an Israeli outpost near the Palestinian village of Turmus Ayya and the Israeli settlement of Shilo, north of Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

# Satellite pics reveal China's aircraft carrier 'factory'

High-resolution satellite images show that the construction of China's first full-sized aircraft carrier is progressing steadily alongside expansive infrastructure work that analysts say suggests the ship will be the first of several large vessels produced at the site. The images of the Jiangnan shipyard outside Shanghai were taken last month and provided to Reuters by the non-partisan Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), building on satellite photos it obtained in April and September last year. Noting a series of pre-fabricated sections, bulkheads and other components stacked nearby, CSIS analysts say the hull should be finished within 12 months, after which it is likely to be moved to a newly created harbour and wharf before being fitted out. The vast harbour on the Yangtze River estuary, including a wharf nearly 1 kilometre long and large buildings for manufacturing ship components, is nearly complete. Much of the harbour area appeared to be abandoned farmland just a year ago, according to earlier images CSIS analysed. It dwarfs an existing harbour nearby, where destroyers and other warships are docked. "We can see slow but steady progress on the hull, but I think the really surprising thing these images show is the extensive infrastructure build-up that has gone on simultaneously," said CSIS analyst Matthew Funaiole. "It is hard to imagine all this is being done for just one ship," he added. "This looks more like a specialised space for carriers and other larger vessels."

# Back Trudeau for another term

## Obama urges Canadians, calls the PM an 'effective leader'

Former US president Barack Obama on Wednesday urged Canadian voters to back Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for another term, calling him an "effective leader." "I was proud to work with Justin Trudeau as President. He's a hard-working, effective leader who takes on big issues like climate change," Obama said in a tweet. "The world needs his progressive leadership now, and I hope our neighbors to the north support him for another term." Trudeau, who is running neck-and-neck with Conservative leader Andrew Scheer ahead of the October 21 ballot, tweeted back: "Thanks my friend, we're working hard to keep our progress going." His Liberal Party also promoted the endorsement on social media. The pair first met as leaders of their respective countries at an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in November 2015, one month after the Canadian won his first general election. Four months later, Trudeau became the first Canadian leader in 20 years to make an official pomp-filled visit to the White House.



online jokes and tongue-in-cheek reports of a budding "bromance" between the two men. Obama saluted Trudeau as his political and generational kin, even though the American is 10 years older. Both champion the importance of issues like health care, gay rights and climate change. "He campaigned on a message of hope and of change," Obama once said. "From my perspective, what's not to like." They last met for a beer reportedly in May when Obama was in Ottawa to deliver a speech. Their relationship stands in stark contrast to Trudeau's troubled ties with current US President Donald Trump. The former president has long been popular with many Canadians. Trudeau's Liberal Party posted Obama's message into a party fundraising pitch that was emailed directly to potential donors. Trudeau's rival, Conservative leader Andrew Scheer, said that he is "not very interested what former foreign leaders are saying". He said he would let Canadians judge whether Obama's endorsement is appropriate. Obama also endorsed Emmanuel Macron for president in France's 2017 election, and he warned British voters against backing leaving the European Union.

# Saudi, Palestinians agree on joint business council

Saudi Arabia and the Palestinians yesterday agreed to establish a joint economic committee and a business council, as the Palestinian Authority faces a financing gap that could top \$1.8 billion. Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas's PA has been in deep financial crisis since February when Israel froze transfers of VAT and customs duties it collects on the Palestinians' behalf. His administration had to impose austerity measures, cutting almost half the salaries of its employees. Abbas, who arrived in Riyadh on Wednesday, met with King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, according to the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA). It added that the leaders reached "an agreement on the establishment of a joint economic committee and on a Saudi-Palestinian business council". The report did not elaborate further. The announcement came days after

Saudi Arabia's football team played Palestine in the occupied West Bank for the first time on Tuesday, with the Saudi side having previously refused to enter the territory as part of its boycott of Israel. Israel's cuts have hit hard on the Palestinian territories, already suffering unemployment of around 26 percent in the second quarter of 2019, the World Bank said last month in a report. Israel collects around \$190 million a month in customs duties levied on goods destined for Palestinian markets that transit through its ports, and it is supposed to transfer the money to the PA. In February, Israel decided to deduct around \$10 million a month from the revenues -- the sum the PA paid inmates in Israeli jails or their families -- prompting the Palestinians to refuse to take any funds at all. US President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner during a conference in Bahrain dangled the prospect of \$50 billion of investment into a stagnant Palestinian economy.