

# NEWSIN brief

## Czech Republic to become 'Czechia'

BBC ONLINE

The Czech Republic is poised to change its name to "Czechia" to make it easier for companies and sports teams to use it on products and clothing. The country will retain its full name but Czechia will become the official short geographic name, as "France" is to "The French Republic". If approved by parliament, the name will be lodged with the United Nations. Along with Slovakia, the Czech Republic was established when Czechoslovakia broke in two in 1993.

## Turkey 'blocks' Russian news site Sputnik

BBC ONLINE

Russia's Sputnik news site says its website has been blocked in Turkey as the ties between the two countries worsened. Users trying to access the site are reportedly receiving a message saying it is inaccessible pending "technical checks and legal assessments". The agency's Turkish staff said no warning had been received from telecoms authorities.

## New Delhi rolls in 'odd-even' plan

AFP, New Delhi

New Delhi yesterday imposed driving restrictions that will take around a million cars off its roads for the second time this year, seeking to improve air quality in the world's most polluted capital. The Delhi government first introduced the experiment for two weeks in January as dangerous levels of haze choked the city and authorities said they were bringing it back for another 15 days by popular demand.

## Taliban launch push to retake Kunduz

REUTERS, Kunduz

Hundreds of Taliban insurgents have launched an offensive to seize the northern Afghan city of Kunduz, which they captured and held for several days last year, provincial officials said yesterday. The offensive around Kunduz began only days after the Islamist group announced their annual spring offensive, vowing to launch large-scale attacks using suicide bombers and guerilla fighters to drive the Western-backed government from power.

## One more killed in Kashmir clashes

AFP, Srinagar

A young man was killed yesterday in Indian-administered Kashmir when soldiers fired on protesters, taking the death toll to five in clashes that have continued for the fourth consecutive day, officials said. A police officer speaking on condition of anonymity confirmed the death, saying three other protesters with bullet wounds were sent to a hospital in the main city of Srinagar.



(From left, clockwise) A man walks near a damaged house and car caused by an earthquake in Mashiki town, Kumamoto prefecture, southern Japan; An eight-month-old baby is carried away by rescue workers after being rescued from her collapsed home in the same town; and an aerial view shows damaged Kyushu highway yesterday, after a strong 6.4-magnitude earthquake hit Japan's southwestern island of Kyushu the day before. Story on page 16.



PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

## BRUSSELS ATTACKS Belgian minister quits over security failings

Belgium's transport minister resigned yesterday after being accused of ignoring EU reports of security failings at the country's airports ahead of last month's suicide bombings in Europe's symbolic capital.

The resignation of Jacqueline Galant is the first political fallout from the attacks on March 22 that killed 32 people in Brussels, including 16 at the national airport. Belgium, a notoriously complex country divided along linguistic and political lines, has been accused of a lax security apparatus that was also exposed by a foiled attack on the high-speed train connection to Paris last August. The little-experienced Galant was under fire after the damning EU reports were leaked to media. Two Islamic State attackers blew themselves up in the departure hall at Brussels airport in a first



wave of coordinated attacks that also hit a metro station near European Union headquarters buildings. The EU reports only covered areas of the airport beyond security checks, but they pointed to "serious deficiencies" in security including an inadequate tracing of explosive devices. The latest report from April 2015 said Belgium was still "non-compliant" with serious deficiencies in five areas based on spot checks at Antwerp airport. Galant denied she was ever made aware of the reports that date back to 2008 and that also warn of an alarming lack of staff and funding at the airport authority. But a top official said he had clearly notified Galant and her office.

## Saudis back embattled Najib on 1MDB row

BBC ONLINE

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister has said funds found in Malaysian PM Najib Razak's personal account were a donation, say Malaysian state media.

Last year, the Wall Street Journal accused Najib of corruption, claiming that the \$681m (£478m) had come from troubled state fund 1MDB. Najib has faced repeated calls to step down as prime minister but has been cleared of wrongdoing. He said the Saudi statement confirmed what he had always maintained.

The 1MDB fund was set up by Najib in 2009 to pay for major new economic and social developments in Malaysia.

Last July, Malaysia's then-Attorney General Abdul Gani Patail linked the \$681m in Najib's account to companies and bodies which had ties to 1MDB.

Patail was replaced, and, after an investigation, his successor cleared Najib of corruption, saying that the money was a personal donation by the Saudi royal family to the prime minister's private bank account.

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir, speaking to reporters at a summit in Istanbul, confirmed this, according to Malaysian state news agency Bernama.

"We are aware of the donation and it is a genuine donation with nothing expected in return. We are also fully aware that the attorney general of Malaysia has thoroughly investigated the matter and found no wrongdoing," he said.

"So, as far as we are concerned, the matter is closed," Jubeir said, after a meeting with Najib on the sidelines of the summit.

## Carter visits warship in S China Sea

AGENCIES

US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter visited a warship close to flashpoint waters of the South China Sea yesterday, as Beijing reacted defiantly to an American military build-up in the area.

Carter's trip to the USS John C Stennis was the latest effort by the United States to show its commitment to maintaining security in the hotly contested waters.

The roughly two-hour visit to the Stennis came after Carter announced on Thursday that US had launched joint naval patrols with the Philippines in the sea. He also said the US would deploy hundreds of troops, as well as warplanes, to the Philippines.

China claims nearly all of the strategically vital sea, which is home to some of the world's most important shipping lanes and is believed to sit atop vast oil reserves.

## Thousands flee as battle for Aleppo rages on

200 killed in a week; UN peace talks future in doubt

AFP, Beirut

Fierce fighting raged around Syria's Aleppo yesterday as a surge in violence forced tens of thousands more to flee their homes, overshadowing the latest round of peace talks in Geneva.

The clashes on several fronts have put a strain on a fragile ceasefire in place since February 27, and left more than 200 fighters on all sides of the civil war dead in recent days.

The delegation representing President Bashar al-Assad's regime arrived in Geneva yesterday where UN-brokered indirect talks between representatives of the government and opposition were due to be held.

However, the fighting around Syria's second city Aleppo cast a shadow over international efforts to end the five-year war, which has left more than 270,000 people dead and forced millions to flee their homes.

Troops and militants loyal to Assad's regime have fought Islamic State group fighters to the southeast of Aleppo city this week, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

They also battled jihadists from the al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Nusra Front and allied rebels in the flashpoint area of Handarat

north of Aleppo city, it said.

On one Aleppo front alone -- pitting rebels against IS -- fighting has forced about 30,000 civilians to flee, according to Human Rights Watch.

The watchdog accused Turkish border guards of shooting at some of those displaced as they approached the frontier.

The latest violence came a day after a senior official in Washington told AFP that the United States was "very concerned" about reports of a Russian-backed Syrian government offensive near Aleppo.

European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini also expressed concern about the Aleppo offensive and called for the "respect, consolidation, and expansion" of the truce.

Even though IS and Al-Nusra are excluded from the truce, violence around Aleppo has sparked concerns that the ceasefire may collapse, partly because rebels are involved in the battles there too.

The fighting around Aleppo is the fiercest in Syria since the truce began nearly seven weeks ago, and it is especially significant because all sides in the war are present in the province.

## Hope fades for Rousseff

Brazil court rejects to halt impeachment bid

AFP, Brasilia

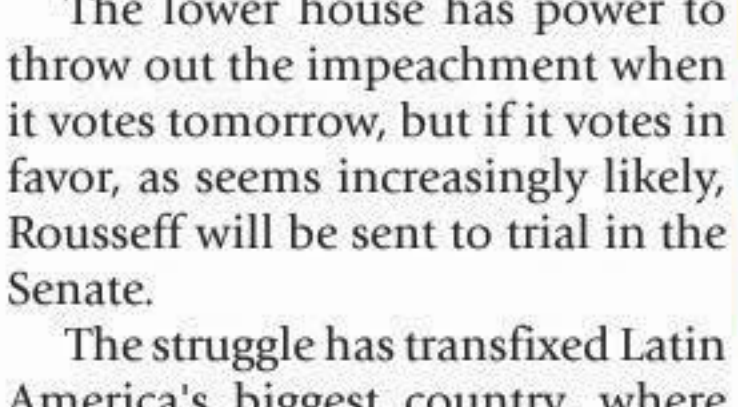
Brazil's lower house of Congress yesterday opened debate on impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff ahead of a vote this weekend that could seal her fate. Hours earlier, the Supreme Court rejected an 11th hour bid by the increasingly isolated leftist president to have impeachment proceedings suspended.

The lower house has power to throw out the impeachment when it votes tomorrow, but if it votes in favor, as seems increasingly likely, Rousseff will be sent to trial in the Senate.

The struggle has transfixed Latin America's biggest country, where the crisis, deep recession and a giant corruption scandal, have overshadowed preparations for the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro this August.

Rousseff, accused of illegal government accounting tricks, is unpopular across the country and reviled by the opposition.

A former Marxist guerrilla, Rousseff was imprisoned and tortured under the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil for two decades until 1985.



Latest counts of voting intentions in the lower house by major Brazilian newspapers show the pro-impeachment camp either at, or on the verge of, the necessary two-thirds majority.

Folha de Sao Paulo daily put the pro-impeachment count at 338, just under the required 342 votes out of a total 513.

Rousseff says she will not go quietly. "The government will fight until the last minute of the second half... to foil this coup attempt," she said Thursday.

She hoped the Supreme Court would be sympathetic to her lawyer's claims that the impeachment proceedings had been turned into an open-ended attack that disregarded legal norms. But in an emergency session that went through the night into yesterday morning, justices voted overwhelmingly to turn down the petition for injunction, several pointing out that the Senate trial was the moment where the substance of the case could be argued.

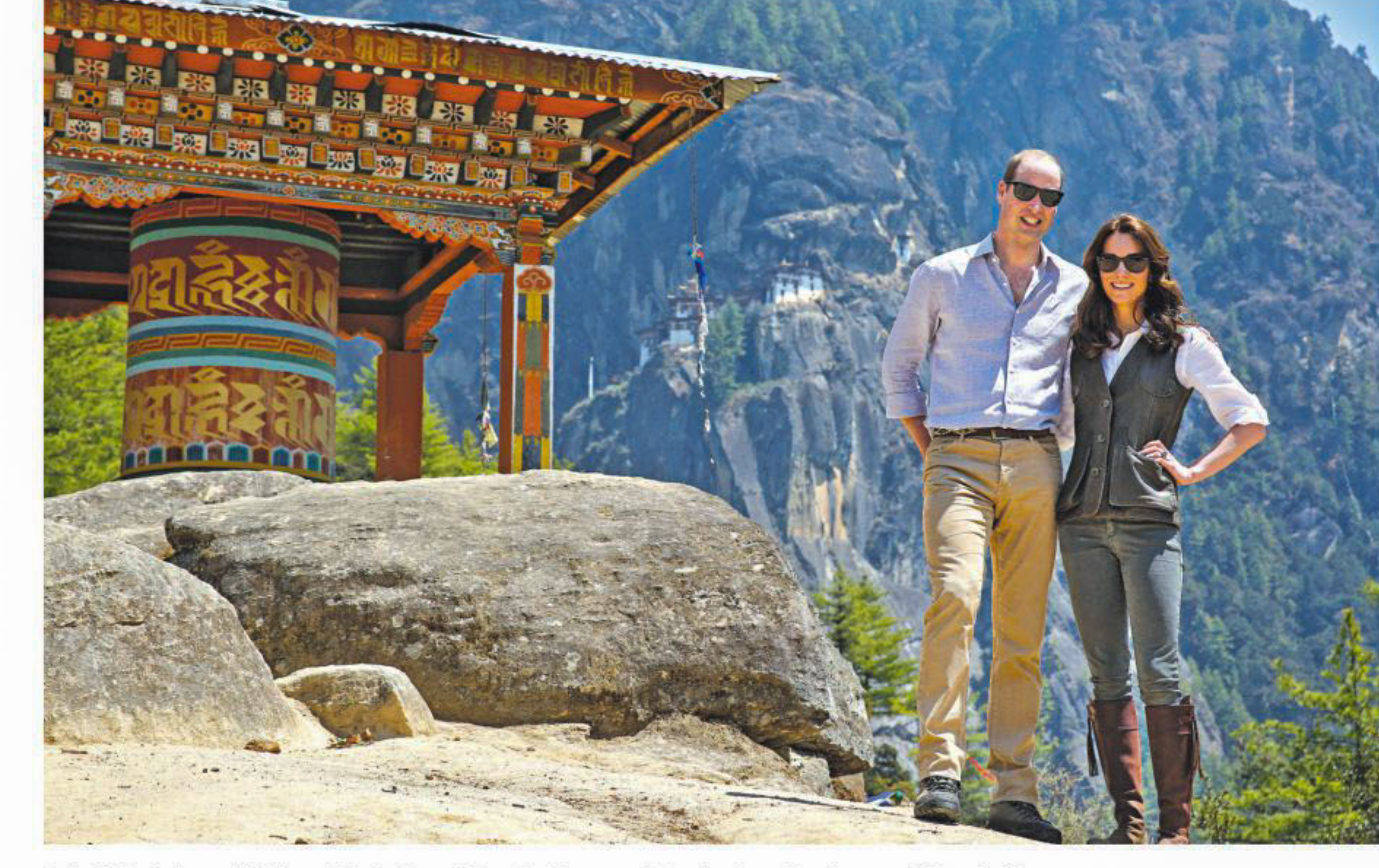


PHOTO: REUTERS

## Clinton, Sanders clash in New York

AFP, New York

Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders came to blows in a heated US presidential debate in Brooklyn on Thursday, raising the stakes in their increasingly acrimonious race to clinch the Democratic nomination.

They attacked each other on the economy, climate change, gun control, race issues, Libya and Israel, in the ninth Democratic presidential debate just days before the key New York primary, when 247 party delegates will be up for grabs.

The former secretary of state holds a 13.8-point lead over the Vermont senator in the New York polls and needs a commanding win in Tuesday's primary after losing seven of the last eight contests to her leftist rival.

It was the most combative performance yet between the ex-New York senator, who advocates incremental but realistic reforms, and her challenger, who calls himself a democratic socialist and advocates a political



revolution. Their exchanges became so acrimonious that at one point the CNN moderator interjected to say: "If you're both screaming at each other, the viewers won't be able to hear either of you."

Each accused the other of failing to answer questions and clashed over the

behavior of banks as New York senator from 2001-09.

Clinton accused Sanders of waging a "phony attack."

New York is a vital battleground for Sanders, who must beat Clinton to keep alive his dream of wresting the nomination from the Democratic frontrunner.

She holds 1,790 delegates compared to 1,113 for Sanders, putting her on course to scoop the 2,383 needed to secure the party's ticket for the White House, where she last lived as first lady from 1993-2001.

A significant haul of 247 Democratic delegates are up for grabs in the New York primary, where minorities and wealthy Democrats are likely to favor Clinton, although polls suggest that Sanders has narrowed her lead.

## N Korea missile launch fails

AFP, Seoul

North Korea tried and failed to test-fire what appeared to be a medium-range Musudan missile on the birthday of founding leader Kim Il-Sung yesterday.

The missile disappeared from surveillance radar a few seconds after launch and is believed to have exploded midair, said a Seoul intelligence official.

There had been widespread intelligence reports in recent days that the North was preparing for the first-ever flight test of its Musudan missile, which is believed to be capable of striking US bases in the Pacific island of Guam.

The April 15 birthday of Kim Il-Sung is a major public holiday in North Korea.

## Germany allows probe into comic's Erdogan insult

BBC ONLINE

The German government has approved a criminal inquiry into a comic who mocked the Turkish president, Chancellor Angel Merkel announced.

By law, the government must approve any use of an article of the criminal code on insulting foreign leaders.

Merkel stressed that the courts would have the final word. And she added that her government would move to repeal the article. Turkey sought the prosecution after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was mocked.

Prosecutors will have to decide whether to proceed against comedian Jan Boehmermann, who crudely mocked Erdogan in a poem. If convicted he could face a fine or a prison sentence.

Some experts say he has a strong defence because his poem could be seen as part of a wider piece of satire about free speech, rather than a deliberate insult, the BBC's Damien McGuinness reports from Berlin.

An earlier remark by Merkel that the poem was "deliberately offensive" laid her open to accusations that she was not standing up for free speech because Europe needed Turkey to help solve the migrant crisis.

Merkel said the government would seek to repeal Paragraph 103 in the penal code, concerning insults against foreign heads of state.

She said her government was divided over whether Boehmermann should face prosecution. The comedian was given police protection this week.

