

# RUSSIA HACKING OF EMAILS Wikileaks offers to help Obama

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Wikileaks has offered to help US President Barack Obama authenticate spy agencies' assessment that Russia was behind the leak of hacked Democratic emails during the presidential election.

The whistle-blowing group, led by fugitive Julian Assange and which this summer published online the private medical files of mental health patients and teen rape victims, claimed on Twitter that only its authentication processes could render the conclusions credible.

Wikileaks published the leaked emails over the summer, the messages having been hacked from the Democratic National Convention and the account of Hillary Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta.

The group tweeted on Friday: "Obama should submit any Putin documents to WikiLeaks to be authenticated to our standards if he wants them to be seen as credible."

On Saturday it was revealed that the FBI and James Clapper, the US director of national intelligence, had come to agree with the CIA's assessment that Russia interfered in the election, in part to help Donald Trump win the White House.

Assange had previously claimed in an interview on the Russian state-funded RT channel that Moscow was not the source of the emails. RT says on its website that it seeks to acquaint international audiences "with a Russian viewpoint on major global events".

Assange has been living in the Ecuadorian embassy in London since he was granted political asylum in 2012. His self-imposed exile began to avoid extradition to Sweden, where he is wanted for questioning over allegations of sexual assault.



Syrian children, who were evacuated from the last rebel-held pockets of Syria's northern city of Aleppo, flash the sign of victory upon their arrival in the opposition-controlled Khan al-Assal region, west of the embattled city, yesterday. *Inset*, a bus drives as a convoy of four buses with on board evacuees arrives at the Syrian government-controlled crossing of Ramoussa.

PHOTO: AFP

# Aleppo evacuations resume

## Thousands of Syrians leave rebel enclave as UNSC unanimously backs sending observers to besieged city

AGENCIES

Thousands of traumatised Syrians left the rebel enclave of Aleppo yesterday under a complex evacuation agreement that will see regime forces exert full control over the battered city.

Families had spent hours waiting in below-freezing temperatures, sheltering from the rain in bombed-out apartment blocks and waiting desperately for news on a new wave of departures.

The operations resumed yesterday, with around 5,000 people travelling in 75 buses out of Aleppo, said Ingy Sedky, spokeswoman for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

They crossed the front line headed for rebel-held territory elsewhere in northern Syria, after around 350 other people got out during the night.

"We will continue throughout the day -- and however long it takes -- to evacuate the thousands more who are still waiting," Sedky told AFP.

They were the first departures since Friday when the government suspended evacuations, insisting that people also be allowed to leave two northwestern villages under rebel siege.

According to the Syrian Observatory

for Human Rights, around 500 people left in a dawn convoy out of Fuaa and Kafraya.

UN Security Council yesterday asked UN chief to urgently make security arrangements to allow UN officials, others to monitor civilians who remain in eastern Aleppo.

The council unanimously adopted a French-drafted resolution that marks

### SYRIA WAR

50 children leave orphanage, some in critical shape: UN

Russia, Iran and Turkey to hold Aleppo talks today

the first show of unity in months among world powers grappling with the crisis in Syria.

The United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) said nearly 50 children who were trapped in an orphanage in the rebel-held Syrian enclave of east Aleppo were evacuated, reports Reuters.

"This morning, all 47 children trapped in an orphanage in east Aleppo were evacuated to safety, with some in

critical condition from injuries and dehydration," Geert Cappelaere, Unicef regional director, said in a statement.

Unicef and other agencies were also assisting in reunifying other children evacuated in the past few days with their families and giving them medical care and winter clothes, he said.

Iran's official news agency IRNA said the foreign ministers of Russia, Turkey and Iran would meet in Moscow today to discuss the situation.

Russia said yesterday that the defence ministers from the three countries would also be meeting in Moscow today.

An AFP reporter visited a hospital where patients lay on floors with no food or water and with almost no heating.

A physiotherapist, Mahmud Zaazaa, said only "three doctors, a pharmacist and three nurses" remained in the rebel enclave.

An official said more than half of Aleppo's buildings had been destroyed or seriously damaged since the rebels overran the east in summer 2012.

UN envoy Staffan de Mistura estimated that as of Thursday around 40,000 civilians and perhaps as many as 5,000 opposition fighters remained in Aleppo's rebel enclave.

# Top N Korean defector fled slavery

AFP, Seoul

Top-ranking North Korean diplomat Thae Yong-Ho, whose recent defection gifted a major propaganda coup to the South, vowed yesterday to devote himself to exposing the cruelties of the Pyongyang regime and encouraging others to escape.

South Korean lawmakers who met with Thae in Seoul told the Yonhap news agency that he had fleshed out his reasons for defecting and testified to the precarious lives of senior officials in the North and the "capitalist" survival techniques of ordinary North Koreans.

Thae was living in London as the deputy ambassador to Britain when he escaped to the South with his wife and two sons in August -- becoming one of the highest-ranking diplomats ever to defect.

The North's state media denounced him as "human scum", and accused him of embezzling state funds and spying for South Korea.

# FBI director 'cost' Hillary the election

## Bill Clinton tells a newspaper editor

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

For all his reputation as a skilled political mover, Bill Clinton has never been very good at hiding his emotions. Especially when they are bubbling over.

In the aftermath of his wife's defeat to Donald Trump, the former president reportedly bumped into the editor of a local newspaper in upstate New York and made clear his opinion as to what had led to the surprise victory for the Republicans.

According to an editorial published in the Bedford-Pound Ridge Record Review, Clinton laid the responsibility at the feet of FBI Director James Comey, and his revelation that the agency had reopened its probe into Clinton's use of a private email server.

The revelation provided fresh ammunition to Clinton's opponents to attack her in the final weeks of the campaign, even though Comey subsequently made clear that the Democratic presidential candidate was not guilty of a prosecutable offence.

That controversial intervention was sufficient to cost Clinton the chance of becoming the US's first female president, according to her husband.

"James Comey cost her the election," he said, according to Ed Baum, editor of the newspaper, who encountered Clinton at a bookstore in Katonah, a town in Westchester.

Clinton said his wife's campaign was leading in national polls and on a path win key battleground states prior to Comey's letter, according to an account in The Hill.



# NEWSIN brief

## Philippines' Duterte wants daily executions

AFP, Manila

Philippine Catholic leaders and rights groups yesterday condemned as "barbaric" President Rodrigo Duterte's plan to restore the death penalty and execute "five or six" criminals daily.

Duterte, 71, has made reviving the death penalty in the mainly Catholic nation his top legislative priority as part of a brutal war on crime that has killed 5,300 people.

## Iran's Rouhani unveils landmark bill of rights

AFP, Tehran

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani unveiled a landmark bill of rights yesterday, guaranteeing freedom of speech, protest, fair trials and privacy, saying the achievement was "one of my oldest dreams". "I'm very pleased that today one of my most important promises is being delivered and I am achieving one of my oldest dreams," Rouhani told officials in a televised ceremony.

## UK post office workers begin Christmas strikes

AFP, London

British postal workers began what could become the longest strike in the Post Office's 300-year history yesterday as part of a wave of industrial action that is also threatening Christmas travel chaos. Thousands of members of the Communication Workers Union are planning to strike for five days in protest at job losses and pension changes.

# Russia bath lotion kills 41 drinkers

AFP, Moscow

A Siberian city declared a state of emergency yesterday after 41 people seeking cheap alcohol died from drinking bath essence containing methanol, a toxic substance used in anti-freeze.

The Russian Investigative Committee has launched a probe into the deaths caused by drinking a liquid labelled as hawthorn-scented bath essence, and has detained several people.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the deaths a "tragedy" that required "very close attention."

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev ordered his cabinet to "sort out" the problem of selling such alcoholic products not intended for drinking -- often labelled as cosmetics -- to impoverished alcoholics.

Medvedev called the widespread sale of such liquids through vending machines, which takes place in cities including Moscow, "an absolute disgrace".

Fifty-four people were taken to hospital in the Siberian city of Irkutsk about 4,200 kilometres (2,600 miles) from Moscow after consuming the toxic substance, investigators said.

Local prosecutor Stanislav Zubovsky told Russian agencies that 57 people were known to have consumed the liquid, 41 of whom have died, while the others are in a serious condition.

The official death toll grew by 20 people over the course of a few hours yesterday.



People march towards Trump Tower during a protest organised by the New York Immigration Coalition against President-elect Donald Trump in the Manhattan borough of New York, US, on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Hundreds die in India police custody: HRW

AFP, New Delhi

Police in India are torturing suspects to death in custody with impunity and blaming suicide or natural causes, Human Rights Watch said yesterday.

The rights group said a failure to follow proper arrest procedures, such as presenting a suspect before a magistrate within 24 hours, was allowing police to get away with murder.

At least 675 people died in police custody in India between 2009 and 2015, government figures show. An investigation by the rights group found that victims were beaten with belts or boots, or suspended by their wrists.

"Since these deaths are not happening in an open domain, it is very hard to prove how they died if the other police officials who are witnesses shield their colleagues," said Jayshree Bajoria, author of the report published yesterday.

"The lack of accountability of police is the reason why there is continued impunity for custodial deaths in India," she told AFP.

HRW investigated 17 deaths in police custody and found that in each case the police failed to follow proper arrest procedures.

These require suspects to have a medical examination after arrest so a doctor can list any pre-existing injuries.

In the case of one death, a police officer in Mumbai said a suspect was beaten because he was "a hardcore criminal" who refused to give any information away.

"He was so weak after the beating that when he got up to drink water, he was dizzy with pain and collapsed against the window, breaking his lower jaw," the report quotes Atmaram Gurav as saying.

While police typically blame deaths in custody on suicide, illness or natural causes, autopsy reports examined by HRW showed injuries consistent with blunt force trauma.

Between 2010 and 2015, there was a conviction in just one case of death in custody, that of 20-year-old Agnelo Valdaris, who was arrested on suspicion of robbery.

# China rejects Trump claim it stole drone

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday rejected US President-elect Donald Trump's claim that it had "stolen" an American research drone, as state media said his diplomatic inexperience could spark a confrontation between the two nations.

Beijing's seizure of the marine probe in international waters in the South China Sea raised already heightened tensions between the world's two largest military powers.

On Sunday, after Beijing and Washington announced the drone would be returned, Trump tweeted: "We should tell China that we don't want the drone they stole back - let them keep it!"

Trump's accusation that China had stolen the drone was "not accurate", said foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying.

"Imagine that you found something on the street -- you would need to first check and verify it before handing it back to someone else," she told a regular press conference.

Hua said the two sides "are in smooth communication through military channels, and we believe the incident will be properly handled". She gave no further details.

The Pentagon said Friday that a Chinese naval vessel "unlawfully" grabbed the unmanned underwater vehicle around 50 nautical miles northwest of Subic Bay in the Philippines.

China said the drone had been snatched since it might pose a safety hazard to other vessels.

It also said it "strongly opposed" US reconnaissance activities and had asked Washington to stop them.

In an earlier misspelled tweet Saturday, Trump also accused Beijing of theft.

# Miss Puerto Rico lands Miss World 2016 crown

AFP, Oxon Hill

Stephanie del Valle of Puerto Rico was crowned Miss World 2016 on Sunday, edging out runners-up from the Dominican Republic and Indonesia, and beauties from around the globe.

Del Valle, 19, is a brown-eyed brunette student who speaks Spanish, English and French, and hopes to get into the entertainment industry.

Crowned by Miss World 2015 Mireia Laguna of Spain, del Valle called it an "honor and a great responsibility" to represent her Caribbean homeland.

The winner, who looked fresh out of Miss Congeniality in a marshmallow pink fluffy ball gown, was always going to stand out against the beautiful girl in

an understated (by Miss World standards) emerald green long sleeve gown.

First runner-up was Yaritza Miguelina Reyes Ramirez of the Dominican Republic, followed by Miss World Indonesia Natasha Mannuela.

Contestants from Kenya and Catriona Gray of the Philippines also were in the final five.

Canada's Miss World representative, Chinese-born Anastasia Lin was embroiled in a controversy when pageant officials reportedly warned her against speaking to the press for three weeks about human rights abuses in China. She was given the green light again on Wednesday.

Last year, China blocked Lin from attending the same contest when it was held in the city of Sanya.

