

NEWS IN brief

Myanmar army sues students over play

A group of Myanmar students has been charged with defamation over a play containing jokes about military wives having affairs while their husbands are away fighting.

Clark to step down as UNDP chief in April

Helen Clark, the highest ranking woman at the United Nations, is stepping down as director of the UN Development Programme in April, according to an email seen by AFP on Wednesday.

Palestinian attacker shot dead: Israel

Israeli troops in the occupied West Bank shot dead a Palestinian who drove at a bus stop in an attempted car-ramming attack Wednesday, a military spokeswoman told AFP.

Philippines talks end with no ceasefire

A third round of peace talks between the Philippines and communist rebels ended Wednesday with no deal on a permanent ceasefire the government had billed as its primary goal.

Six people killed by Chile wildfires

Six people -- among them four firefighters and two police -- have now been killed battling vast forest fires in central Chile, officials said Wednesday.

Avalanches kill 10 soldiers in Kashmir

Avalanches killed 10 Indian soldiers in Kashmir after cascading onto an army post and a patrol along the de facto border that divides the disputed territory with Pakistan, the military said yesterday.

Trump for Syria 'safe zones'

Says Europe made tremendous mistake by admitting millions of refugees from Middle Eastern trouble spots

US President Donald Trump said on Wednesday he "will absolutely do safe zones in Syria" for refugees fleeing violence in the war-torn country. Saying Europe had made a tremendous mistake by admitting millions of refugees from Syria and other Middle Eastern trouble spots, Trump told ABC News in an interview.

The bloody conflict and the threat of clashes between US and Russian warplanes over Syria. "The Secretary of State, in conjunction with the Secretary of Defense, is directed within 90 days of the date of this order to produce a plan to provide safe areas in Syria and in the surrounding region in which Syrian nationals displaced from their homeland can await firm settlement, such as repatriation or potential third-country resettlement," the draft order said.

Pentagon would be given 90 days to draw up a method Turkey waits to see outcome of US president's call Qatar welcomes the pledge

Huseyin Muftuoglu told reporters that Ankara would make an assessment after seeing what Washington proposed. Qatar, a backer of rebels fighting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, welcomed Trump's pledge to order safe zones in Syria, a foreign ministry official was quoted as saying by state news agency QNA yesterday.



Indian Army's Infantry Combat Vehicles are displayed during 68th Republic Day parade in New Delhi yesterday. After the US and French presidents attended the last two events, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, was this year's chief guest as everyone from bagpipe-playing troops to schoolchildren paraded along the landmark Rajpath boulevard.

ROW OVER 'FAKE JOBS' GIVEN TO WIFE Ex-French PM faces probe

French presidential candidate Francois Fillon yesterday vowed to produce evidence to counter explosive allegations that his wife received half a million euros (\$540,000) for "fake jobs". The rightwing former prime minister Fillon, who polls show is likely to reach the second round of May's election, is facing an investigation into claims he handed his British-born wife Penelope a fictitious paid role as a parliamentary aide.

image, contrasting with the former president's legal woes. The claims first surfaced in the Canard Enchaîne weekly, which mixes satire and investigative reporting. The paper said it had been unable to find anyone who remembered Penelope working in parliament. Fillon has dismissed the allegations, which are dominating coverage of the campaign, as "mudslinging" and "misogynistic".



NZ PM denies passports for sale to rich

New Zealand passports are not for sale, Prime Minister Bill English said yesterday, after it emerged US tech titan Peter Thiel gained citizenship in the South Pacific nation despite not meeting official criteria. The dispute over Thiel's citizenship follows reports that mega-wealthy Americans are eyeing the remote South Pacific nation as a "bolthole".



Thiel did not meet the usual requirements -- living at least 70 percent of the previous five years in New Zealand -- but said he was granted citizenship due to exceptional circumstances. "New Zealand is a better place with Mr Thiel as a citizen," English told reporters.

Pentagon chief to visit Japan, S Korea in Feb

In his first trip abroad, Mattis will discuss security co-op with US allies in the region

US Defense Secretary James Mattis plans to travel to Japan and South Korea next month on his first trip as the Pentagon's new chief, a spokesman said Wednesday. He is set to depart on February 1 for South Korea before traveling to Tokyo on February 3.

He will meet with his counterparts and other senior officials, Davis said. Tensions are also rising with China over its moves to assert sovereignty in disputed areas of the South China Sea, and over North Korea threats to test an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of striking the US mainland.



RUSSIA SECURITY FEARS Nato troops arrive in Lithuania

The first of a 1,200-strong Nato force have arrived in Lithuania for deployment close to a key Russian exclave, amid growing security fears. German officers have landed in the capital of Vilnius to coordinate the deployment. More than 100 Belgian army troops and five dozen military vehicles also arrived in the port of Klaipeda, 37 miles from Russia's Kaliningrad exclave.



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Heavy snowfall kills 27 Afghan children

Heavy snowfall and freezing weather has killed 27 children, all under the age of five, in a remote district in northern Afghanistan, officials said yesterday, with fears the toll could rise. Roads in Darzaab in northern Jawzjan province were blocked by 50 centimetres (20 inches) of snow, cutting off access for villagers in the area to medical care as temperatures plunged to -10 degrees Celsius (14 Fahrenheit).

Test to humanity African refugee drowns in Venice as tourists film on phones while laughing

A migrant from Africa has drowned in Venice's Grand Canal as tourists and locals filmed the apparent suicide on their phones. The young migrant, named as Pateh Sabally, a 22-year-old Gambian, was seen jumping into the water from a pier and swimming to the middle of the large canal.

In the video, onlookers start to laugh and one man can be heard saying, "Let him die at this point." Hundreds witnessed the migrant's death and later saw his dead body being pulled out of the water wrapped in a blue bag and tied to a ladder. A taxi driver told local media: "A young man threw himself into the water and two or three life jackets were thrown from the boat but he refused the help."

Advertisement for Bangladesh MNSA Ummayn Corporation, providing contact information and services.

Advertisement for 'ইন্টারিয়র কাজের পুনঃ দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি' (Interior Work Re-tendering Notice), listing various construction and renovation services.