

# NEWSIN brief

## Philippine jihadists behead German

AFP, Manila

Islamic militants in the Philippines have beheaded the German hostage they were holding for ransom, the government in Manila said yesterday. A video posted by the extremist Abu Sayyaf group, which was monitored by intelligence group SITE, showed Jurgen Kantner being killed by a knife-wielding man. Shortly after the video appeared, government

## 11 killed in govt raids on northwest Syria

AFP, Beirut

Government air raids on northwest Syria killed at least 11 people overnight, mostly civilians, a monitoring group said yesterday, while the military said its forces made advances in Aleppo province. "Government warplanes carried out air strikes after midnight on several areas in the town of Ariha" in Idlib province, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights' head Rami Abdel Rahman.

## Air strike kills Afghan Taliban leader

AFP, Kunduz

An air strike has killed an Afghan Taliban commander who twice oversaw the capture of a strategic northern city, officials said yesterday, in a major blow to the insurgent group. Mullah Abdul Salam Akhund, the Taliban shadow governor in Kunduz province, was killed on Sunday when he was holding a meeting in the volatile Dasht-e-Archi district.

## Israeli forces shoot Palestinian woman

AFP, Qalandiya

A Palestinian woman suspected of intending to attack Israeli guards at a West Bank checkpoint into Jerusalem was shot and injured by security forces yesterday. The 30-year-old woman walked towards the guards at the Qalandia checkpoint using the vehicle-only lane "all the time clutching her handbag in a way that made them suspicious", police spokeswoman Luba Samri wrote in a statement.

## EU expands North Korea sanctions

AFP, Brussels

The European Union imposed additional sanctions on North Korea yesterday over nuclear and ballistic missile tests carried out in defiance of the UN Security Council. The decision, implementing a November UN resolution, comes with North Korea in the international spotlight after the assassination in Kuala Lumpur airport of Kim Jong-Nam, the estranged half-brother of leader Kim Jong-Un.



A woman covers her mouth with tape as people take part in a protest outside the New York Times on Sunday in New York. About 250 people demonstrated in support of the news media, amid stepped up attacks on the press by President Donald Trump.

PHOTO: AFP

# Trump lays out hike in military spending

## US claims its seat at UN Human Rights Council

AGENCIES

President Donald Trump yesterday promised a "historic" increase in the US defense budget as he met with state governors at the White House.

"This budget follows through on my promise on keeping Americans safe," he said. "It will include a historic increase in defense spending."

His comments come a day before he addresses a joint session of Congress, an important agenda setting event for new presidents.

Trump will seek to boost Pentagon spending by \$54 billion in his first budget proposal for 2018, which is about a 9% increase, a White House budget official said yesterday.

The New York Times reported that Trump will instruct the government agencies to put together the outlines of a budget that will include deep cuts in domestic spending.

Trump will need to make those cuts to pay for a military buildup and to preserve pensions and health insurance for the elderly

as he promised during the campaign, reported AFP.

Meanwhile, the US claimed its seat yesterday on the Human Rights Council under the new presidency of Donald Trump, whose election has provoked deep concern over the body's future.

Over its 11-year history, the council has come in for criticism, including allegations that it has, at times, been co-opted by rights abusers who push resolutions attacking their geopolitical rivals, with genuine rights issues marginalised.

But the 47-member panel has had successes -- thanks to support from Barack Obama's administration which held a seat on the council for most of his eight-year term. Many of the issues prioritised by Obama's UN envoys -- including violations in North Korea, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and South Sudan -- remain on the agenda.

In a keynote address, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned that the world was facing "a time of urgency" and that the council was needed more than ever.



# Iranian Oscar winner blasts US travel ban

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The Salesman has won Best Foreign Language film at this year's Oscars, winning a second award for Iranian filmmaker Asghar Farhadi who was affected by Donald Trump's Muslim ban.

The film has been in the headlines recently following the news that President Trump's ruling would keep the director Farhadi out of the US. Following its block by US courts, Farhadi decided to boycott the ceremony altogether.

Iranian-American engineer Anousheh Ansari accepted the award on behalf of Farhadi, reading out a statement written by the director.

It read: "I'm sorry I'm not with you tonight. My absence is out of respect for the people of my country and those from other six nations who have been disrespected by the inhumane law that bans entry of immigrants to the US. Dividing the world into the US and our enemies categories creates fear - a deceitful justification for aggression and war."

Iran has had a tense relationship with Washington since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, although there have been no attacks inside the United States attributed to Iranians.

Farhadi's film The Salesman was nominated in the Foreign Language category alongside Land of Mine (Denmark), Toni Erdmann (Germany), A Man Called Ove (Sweden) and Tanna (Australia). The film follows a high school teacher (Shahab Hosseini) who seeks revenge against the perpetrator who attacked his wife (Taraneh Alidoosti) in their apartment.



Police approach a local government office following an explosion in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia, yesterday. A suspected militant linked to the Islamic State (IS) group was shot dead during a firefight with law enforcers at the government office after a small bomb was set off nearby.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## UN REPORT ON SPY AGEN

# N Korea runs arms ops out of Malaysia

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

It is in Kuala Lumpur's "Little India" neighbourhood, behind an unmarked door on the second floor of a run-down building, where a military equipment company called Glocom says it has its office.

Glocom is a front company run by North Korean intelligence agents that sells battlefield radio equipment in violation of United Nations sanctions, according to a United Nations report submitted to the Security Council seen by Reuters.

Reuters found that Glocom advertises over 30 radio systems for "military and paramilitary" organisations on its Malaysian website, glocom.com.my.

Glocom's Malaysian website, which was taken down late last year, listed the Little India address in its contacts section. No one answers the door there and the mailbox outside is stuffed with unopened letters. In fact, no company by that name exists in Malaysia. But two Malaysian companies controlled by North Korean shareholders and directors registered Glocom's website in 2009, according to website and company registration documents.

And it does have a business, the unreleased UN report says. Last July, an air shipment of North Korean military communications equipment, sent from China and bound for Eritrea, was intercepted in an unnamed country. The seized equipment included 45 boxes of battlefield radios and accessories labelled "Glocom", short for Global Communications Co.

Glocom is controlled by the Reconnaissance General Bureau, the North Korean intelligence agency tasked with overseas operations and weapons procurement, the report says, citing undisclosed information it obtained.

## Trump pick for US Navy secy withdraws

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump's pick for secretary of the Navy withdrew from consideration on Sunday, the second time a Trump nominee to lead one of the armed services bowed out because of government conflict-of-interest rules.

Trump last month nominated Philip Bilden, a private equity executive and former military intelligence officer, to lead the Navy, which the president has pledged he will expand.

In a statement on Sunday, Bilden said that "after an extensive review process, I have determined that I will not be able to satisfy the Office of Government Ethics requirements without undue disruption and materially adverse divestment of my family's private financial interests."

The development leaves Trump and Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis without nominees to head both the Navy and Army.

# 'I have belated regret'

## Impeached South Korea president apologizes in her final defence to the court's judges

AFP, Seoul

South Korea's president expressed "belated regret" yesterday over the scandal that triggered her impeachment, as the Constitutional Court wrapped up hearings on her fate and her supporters screamed threats outside.

Park Geun-Hye was elected in 2012 with the highest vote share of any presidential candidate in South Korea's democratic era.

But she was impeached by parliament in December over a massive corruption and influence-peddling scandal that prompted millions to take to the streets to call for her ouster.

She has since been on trial for her political life at the Constitutional Court in Seoul, which is set to decide in March whether to approve her removal from office -- which would trigger new elections -- or return her to the Blue House.

Park has not attended any of the hearings, which began last month.

Her lawyers maintain that she was not aware of any wrongdoing and blamed her secret confidante Choi Soon-Sil, who is

accused of using her presidential ties to force local firms to "donate" nearly \$70 million to non-profit foundations.

In a statement read out by her advocate yesterday, Park reiterated that her only fault was trusting Choi and seeking advice from her longtime friend, who took care of her daily affairs for years, including her wardrobe choices.

"In retrospect, I have belated regret that I should have been more cautious with my trust in her," she said in her final defence to the court's eight sitting judges.

Park bemoaned a "miserable reality" in which her policies and actions had become objects of "misunderstanding and suspicion".

But she has rejected repeated requests from the judges to make herself available for questioning, and has also refused to answer questions from prosecutors probing the scandal.

Outside the court, hundreds of Park's elderly supporters loudly protested against the drive to remove her, with some attempting to break through hundreds of police guarding the court.



# Father of slain SEAL refuses to meet Trump

AFP, Miami

The father of a US Navy SEAL killed in a raid in Yemen criticized President Donald Trump's decision to give the go-ahead and called for an investigation in an interview published Sunday.

Bill Owens, the father of slain SEAL William "Ryan" Owens, told the Miami Herald he refused to speak with Trump when his son's flag-draped casket was brought home to Dover Air Force Base aboard a C-17 transport plane.

"I told them I didn't want to make a scene about it, but my conscience wouldn't let me talk to him," Owens said, speaking out for the first time in the interview with the Herald.

Launched January 29, six days into Trump's presidency, the raid quickly ran into trouble.

The Navy SEALs received fire from all sides as they attacked the objective, an al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula camp.

Air cover was called in and a V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft crash-landed during the fight and had to be destroyed on the ground.

By the time it was over, the 36-year-old Owens was dead along with as many as 16 civilians -- eight women and eight children, a Yemeni provincial official said. Three other SEALs were wounded and three more US troops were injured in the V-22 crash.

Republican Senator John McCain called the operation a failure, but the White House hailed it as a success.

"Don't hide behind my son's death to prevent an investigation," William Owens told the Herald. "I want an investigation.... The government owes my son an investigation."

# Third class passengers' bodies tossed overboard

MAIL ONLINE

The bodies of third class passengers from the Titanic were tossed into the sea by rescuers to make room for first and second class victims, new documents have revealed.

A collection of telegrams between the Mackay-Bennett, the main body-recovery ship, and the White Star line, the company that operated the Titanic, reveal what the grim clean-up operation was really like.

The Mackay-Bennett's crew were overwhelmed by the number of bodies from the disaster, and only had limited space on their small cable repair ship.

It was decided to prioritize first and second class passengers. They were

recovered, embalmed and returned to their loved ones. Meanwhile the bodies of third class passengers were cast into the freezing depths of the North Atlantic.

In keeping with maritime tradition crew members were also buried at sea. In total 116 of the 334 recovered bodies were cast off.

Captain Frederick Larnder made the decision because his ship was struggling to cope with insufficient space and embalming supplies.

Dead passengers were separated by class according to their clothing or personal possessions. Captain Larnder's painful instructions are seen in the 181 telegrams which have been uncovered more than 100 years later.



REVEALED: TITANIC DISASTER

## WAR ON ISLAMIC STATE Iraqi forces seize key Mosul bridge

REUTERS, South of Mosul

Iraqi forces seized a damaged Mosul bridge yesterday which could link up their units on either side of the Tigris river, as thousands of civilians fled the fighting for Islamic State's remaining stronghold in the west of the city.

US-backed army and police units advanced through populated western districts, fighting tough street battles, and announced they had captured Mosul's southernmost bridge.

Once repaired, the bridge could help bring reinforcements and supplies from the eastern side, piling pressure on the militants dug in the western side among 750,000 civilians.

# Migrant rescues off Libya encourage traffickers

AFP, Berlin

The head of EU border agency Frontex yesterday criticised charities that rescue migrants off Libya, arguing that they encourage the traffickers who profit from the dangerous Mediterranean crossings.

Such rescue operations "should be reevaluated", Fabrice Leggeri told Germany's Die Welt daily, also accusing the groups of not effectively cooperating with security agencies against human traffickers.

Leggeri said 40 percent of recent rescue operations at sea off the North African country "were carried out by non-government organisations".

He said that under maritime law everyone at sea has a duty to rescue vessels and people in distress.

"But we must avoid supporting the business of criminal networks and traffickers in Libya through European vessels picking up migrants ever closer to the Libyan coast," said the director of Warsaw-based Frontex.

"This leads traffickers to force even more migrants onto unseaworthy boats with insufficient water and fuel than in previous

years."

Frontex operates on the EU's external borders, off Italy and the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea, but not off the coast of Libya, which has been wracked by chaos since the 2011 overthrow of Moamer Gaddafi.

The Frontex boss also charged that some NGOs cooperate poorly with EU security



agencies, which "makes it more difficult ... to gain information on trafficking networks through interviews with migrants and to open police investigations".

Frontex had criticised NGOs in a report in December, charging they were picking up migrants at sea "like taxis".