

**NEWS IN brief**

**2 women charged with Kim murder**

AFP, *Sepang*  
A tightly-guarded Malaysian court yesterday charged two women with murdering the estranged half-brother of North Korea's leader, who was killed with a powerful nerve agent, and warned them they face the death penalty if convicted. Indonesian Siti Aisyah, 25, and Doan Thi Huong, 28, from Vietnam, were held just days after the killing at Kuala Lumpur International Airport on February 13, which Malaysia said was carried out with a nerve agent so deadly that the UN terms it a weapon of mass destruction.

**Australia to reshape foreign policy, trade**

REUTERS, *Sydney*  
Australia will call home all of its overseas ambassadors for a meeting, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said yesterday, as it reshapes its foreign policy to balance ties with long-time ally the United States and China, its largest trading partner. It is the first time Australia has brought together all of its top diplomats from their 113 missions around the world.



**Breivik's rights not violated: Norway SC**

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK  
Norway did not violate mass killer Anders Breivik's human rights, an appeal court has ruled. Breivik charged he had been abused for being placed in near-isolation in a three-room cell since he was jailed for mass murdering 77 people in 2011. The Borgarting appeals court overturned a 2016 verdict by a lower Oslo court that his isolation amounted to "inhuman and degrading treatment" under the European Convention on Human Rights.

**Philippines signs Paris pact on climate change**

AFP, *Manila*  
Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte has signed the Paris Agreement on Climate Change restricting greenhouse gas emissions, putting the deal one step closer to ratification in the country, a senator said yesterday. Manila has committed to reduce its emissions by 70 percent by 2030, but it will need technical and financial support to achieve it.

**South Korea, US begin military drills**

AFP, *Seoul*  
South Korea and the United States kicked off their annual, massive military exercises yesterday as North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un ordered his troops to prepare for a "merciless strike" against the enemy forces. Participation in the joint exercises -- known as Key Resolve and Foal Eagle -- is similar to last year which involved 300,000 South Korean and around 17,000 US troops, as well as strategic US naval vessels and air force assets.

**Fillon faces charges in 'fake job' case**

AFP, *Paris*  
French presidential candidate Francois Fillon announced yesterday that judges had summoned him to press charges over an expenses scandal but vowed to continue his campaign. The 62-year-old conservative former premier was favourite at the start of the year to win the French presidency after clinching the nomination for the Republicans party in November.



Smoke rises after an airstrike, during the battle against Islamic State militants, at the district of al-Mamoun in Mosul, yesterday. Inset, Displaced Iraqis flee their home in the district during the fighting in western Mosul.

**IS cornered in Mosul**

Forces take control of all main roads out of city trapping militants in a shrinking area in the center

REUTERS, *Mosul*  
US-backed Iraqi army units yesterday took control of the last major road out of western Mosul that had been in Islamic State's hands, trapping the militants in a shrinking area within the city, a general and residents said. The army's 9th Armored Division was within a kilometer of Mosul's Syria Gate, the city's northwestern entrance, a general from the unit told Reuters by telephone. Iraqi forces captured the eastern side of Mosul in January after 100 days of fighting and launched their attack on the districts that lie west of the Tigris river on Feb 19. If they defeat Islamic State in Mosul, that would crush the Iraq wing of the caliphate declared by the group's leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2014 from the city's grand old Nuri Mosque. The US-led coalition effort against

Islamic State is killing the group's fighters more quickly than it can replace them, British Major General Rupert Jones, deputy commander of the Combined Joint Task Force said. With more than 45,000 killed by coalition air strikes up to August last year, "their

neighboring Syria, within six months. The closing of the westward highway meant that Islamic State are besieged in the city center, said a military source. Twenty-six thousand Iraqis fled west Mosul in the 10 days since security forces launched a major push to retake it from jihadists, the minister of displacement and migration said yesterday. But the number who have fled is only a small fraction of the 750,000 people who are believed to have stayed on in west Mosul under Islamic State group rule. IS militants are using mortars, sniper fire, booby traps and suicide car bombs to fight the offensive carried out by a 100,000-strong force made up of Iraqi armed forces, regional Kurdish peshmerga fighters and Iranian-trained Shia Muslim paramilitary groups.

**DEVELOPMENTS**  
British general says IS facing high attrition rate, can't survive  
26,000 Iraqis fled west Mosul in 10 days: minister

destruction just becomes really a matter of time," he said on Tuesday in London. The US commander in Iraq, Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend, has said he believes US-backed forces will recapture both Mosul and Raqqa, Islamic State's Syria stronghold in



RCMP officers look on as an extended family of seven people from Turkey illegally cross the US-Canada border just before dawn near Hemmingford, Quebec, on Wednesday.

**ROHINGYA ABUSE**

**Myanmar govt swats away 'biased' claims**

AFP, *Naypyidaw*  
A close aide to Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday dismissed mounting international pressure over alleged abuses of Rohingya Muslims as "biased and unfair", despite UN evidence of murder, rape and torture by security forces. The United Nations has said Myanmar troops and police may have committed crimes against humanity during a four-month crackdown on the stateless minority. Rights envoy Yanghee Lee is expected to turn up the heat next week by calling a formal 'commission of inquiry' into alleged abuses that have seen more than 70,000 Rohingya flee to Bangladesh. "What Yanghee Lee is doing is not fair. It's biased," Win Htein, a close aide of Suu Kyi, told AFP. "We do not care about this kind of unfair report. Because we do not care, we do not worry." Army clearance operations cut through remote villages in northern Rakhine State in retaliation for attacks by militants on police border posts in October. Escapees have given the UN chilling accounts of babies being stabbed to death, people being burnt alive in and widespread gang rape during those operations. If the UN backs a commission and its investigators find evidence that Myanmar's military has committed crimes against humanity, it could once again see Myanmar branded an international pariah.



**INDONESIA TOUR**

**Saudi King brings 460 tonnes of luggage**

AFP, *Bogor*  
Cheering crowds welcomed King Salman yesterday as he began the first visit by a Saudi monarch to Indonesia for almost 50 years, seeking stronger economic ties with the world's most populous Muslim-majority country. The king -- who is accompanied by about 1,000 people travelling on several aircraft, including princes and ministers -- disembarked from his plane using an escalator as he arrived at an airport in Jakarta, his latest stop on an Asian tour. The 81-year-old was greeted by President Joko Widodo and Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, a Christian who is standing trial for blasphemy. Crowds of flag-waving schoolchildren lined the route as a convoy of vehicles carrying the king and his entourage sped through pouring rain to a presidential palace in the nearby city of Bogor, where a marching band played the Indonesian national anthem. Almost 460 tons of equipment have been flown in for the visit, including Mercedes limousines, with most transported to the Hindu resort island of Bali, where Salman will go on holiday after visiting Jakarta. Preparations have been elaborate. Naked statues at the Bogor palace were covered up before Salman's arrival, while local media reported that 150 chefs had been hired to cook for the king's party and a VIP toilet had been specially built at a major mosque he will visit. The monarch and his entourage will reportedly stay in five luxury hotels in Bali for several days following the visit to Jakarta.

**All sides committed war crimes**

Says UN; Russia, China veto UNSC resolution on Syria sanctions

REUTERS, *Geneva*  
Both sides in the battle for Aleppo committed war crimes, including Syrian government aircraft that "deliberately" bombed and strafed a humanitarian convoy, killing 14 aid workers and halting relief operations, UN investigators said yesterday. The report came as Russia and China on Tuesday vetoed a Western-backed UN resolution that would have imposed sanctions on Syria over chemical weapons use, in the first clash at the Security Council since US President Donald Trump took office. Syrian and Russian forces conducted "daily air strikes" on rebel-held eastern Aleppo between July and its fall on December 22, killing hundreds and destroying hospitals, they said in their latest report. Cluster munitions were "pervasively" used and air-dropped into densely-populated areas, it said,

amounting to the war crime of indiscriminate attacks. But investigators could not say whether both Syrian and Russian forces had used them in Aleppo or only one had. They also did not attribute any specific war crime investigated to Russian forces. The UN Commission of Inquiry's report - released as Syrian peace talks continue in Geneva - covers the July-December period and is based on 291 interviews with victims and witnesses, as well as analysis of forensic evidence and satellite imagery. Syrian helicopters unleashed toxic chlorine bombs "throughout 2016" on Aleppo, a banned weapon that caused hundreds of civilian casualties there, the report said. At least 5,000 pro-government forces also encircled eastern Aleppo in a "surrender or starve" tactic, it said. Opposition groups shelled government-controlled western Aleppo, killing and injuring dozens, the report said. They prevented civilians from fleeing eastern Aleppo, using them as "human shields", and attacked the residential Kurdish district of Sheikh Maqsood, both war crimes. The investigators accused the Syrian government of a "meticulously planned and ruthlessly carried out" air strike on a UN and Syrian Red Crescent convoy at Orum al-Kubra, in rural western Aleppo on Sept 19 that killed 14 aid workers.

**UN'S PROBE ON ALEPPO BATTLE**  
Syrian air force deliberately attacked aid convoy  
Cluster bombs used "pervasively" in Aleppo offensive  
Opposition used human shields in eastern Aleppo

**Blasts, gunfire rock Kabul**

3 killed, 38 injured; Taliban claim responsibility

AFP, *Kabul*  
Explosions and gunfire echoed through Kabul after near-simultaneous Taliban assaults on two security compounds yesterday, as the insurgents intensify attacks even before the start of their annual spring offensive. At least three people were killed and 38 wounded in the carnage, which underscores rising insecurity in Afghanistan from the resurgent Taliban. A suicide car bomber struck an Afghan police precinct in western Kabul and a gunbattle ensued, the interior ministry said, in a continuing attack which sent clouds of acrid smoke billowing into the sky. Five minutes later a suicide bomber blew himself up at the gates of an Afghan intelligence agency branch in eastern Kabul as another attacker was gunned down while trying to enter the compound, the ministry added. After the car bomber hit the police station "another attacker who entered the building has taken position inside. Security forces are still engaged in fighting," a ministry official told AFP.

The Taliban claimed both assaults, with spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid calling them "martyrdom attacks" in a Twitter message. The health ministry said the wounded, some of them in critical condition, had been rushed to hospitals. "More casualties are expected as the ambulances are on their way," ministry spokesman Waheed Majroh told AFP. Afghan police and troops are battling a resurgent Taliban as the insurgents escalate nationwide attacks, even in winter months when the fighting usually wanes.

