

# NEWSIN brief

## Somali pirates release hijacked oil tanker

AFP, Mogadishu  
Somali pirates on Thursday handed over an oil tanker and eight Sri Lankan hostages captured just days ago, the Oceans Beyond Piracy NGO told AFP, bringing to a close the first such attack since 2012. Earlier on Thursday the Puntland coastguard had threatened to use force if the talks to convince the pirates to release the vessel failed.

## Two Paki troops killed in cross-border fire

AFP, Peshawar  
At least two Pakistani security personnel were killed in cross-border fire from Afghanistan yesterday, the military said, when gunmen attacked a checkpoint near the frontier in the troubled northwest. The attack in Khyber tribal district was claimed by Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), a faction of the umbrella Pakistani Taliban, and came at a time of heightened tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

## Flue fears: Saudi king cancels Maldives visit

AFP, Male  
The Saudi king has cancelled a scheduled visit to Maldives because of an outbreak of swine flu in its capital, the government in Male announced yesterday. The Maldives was to be the final stop in the monarch's ongoing Asian tour that has taken him to Malaysia, Indonesia, China and Japan.

## Japan court: Govt liable for Fukushima disaster

AFP, Tokyo  
A Japanese court yesterday ruled for the first time that the government bears responsibility for the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster and ordered it and the plant operator to pay damages. A massive tsunami triggered by a 9.0-magnitude earthquake smashed into the Fukushima Daiichi power plant on Japan's northeastern coast on March 11, 2011.



Relatives react near the bodies of civilians killed in air strike, during a battle between Iraqi forces and Islamic State militants, in Mosul, Iraq, yesterday.

# Iran pilgrims to join hajj: Saudi

AFP, Riyadh  
Iranian pilgrims will participate in this year's annual hajj, Saudi Arabia said yesterday, despite ruptured ties between the regional rivals.  
For the first time in nearly three decades Iran's pilgrims -- which would have numbered about 60,000 -- did not attend last year's hajj after Riyadh and Tehran failed to agree on security and logistics.  
Tensions remain as Saudi Arabia repeatedly accuses Iran of fuelling conflicts by supporting armed Shia movements in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Bahrain.  
But after talks between the two sides, the Iranians will join this year's ritual which takes place at the beginning of September.  
"The ministry of hajj and the Iranian organisation have completed all the necessary measures to ensure Iranian pilgrims perform hajj 1438 according to the procedures followed by all Muslim countries," the official Saudi Press Agency said, referring to this year in the Islamic calendar.  
Iran rejects accusations of regional aggression and says Riyadh must stop its alleged support for Sunni "terrorists" like the Islamic State jihadist group and al-Qaeda.  
More than 1.8 million faithful took part in last year's hajj. The pilgrimage is one of the five pillars of Islam and all Muslims who can must perform it at least once in their lives.  
Iranian pilgrims have for the past two years not attended the lesser pilgrimage to Makkah and Medina in western Saudi Arabia, known as umrah, which occurs outside hajj.

# Syria-Israel tensions flare

### Damascus launches missiles after Tel Aviv warplanes strike inside Syria

AFP, Jerusalem  
Israeli warplanes struck several targets in Syria early yesterday, prompting retaliatory missile launches, in the most serious incident between the two countries since the Syrian civil war began six years ago.  
Syria's military said it had downed an Israeli plane and hit another as they were carrying out pre-dawn strikes near the famed desert city of Palmyra that it recaptured from jihadists this month.  
The Israeli military denied that any planes had been struck. The Syrian government has made similar unfounded claims in the past.  
Nevertheless, analysts said the incident represented a significant shift in Syria's response to Israeli airstrikes inside its territory.  
The air force said earlier that it had carried out several strikes on Syria overnight, but that none of the ground-to-air missiles fired by Syrian forces in response had hit Israeli aircraft.  
It was an unusual confirmation by the Jewish state of air raids inside

Syria.  
In April 2016, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu admitted for the first time that Israel had attacked dozens of convoys transporting weapons in Syria destined for Lebanon's Hezbollah, which fought a devastating 2006 war with Israel and is now fighting alongside the Damascus

regime.  
The missile fire from Syria prompted air raid sirens to go off in the Jordan Valley during the night, the Israeli army said.  
Israel and Syria are still technically at war, though the border had remained largely quiet for decades

## 'US STRIKE TARGETING MOSQUE KILLS 46'



until 2011 when the Syrian conflict broke out.  
Meanwhile, the US said it carried out an air strike in Syria against an al-Qaeda meeting but denied deliberately targeting a mosque where a monitor said on Friday 46 people were killed.  
The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said most of the dead in the

Thursday evening raid on Al-Jineh, in the northern province of Aleppo, were civilians.  
According to a Centcom statement: "US forces conducted an air strike on an al-Qaeda in Syria meeting location March 16 in Idlib, Syria, killing several terrorists."

# Trump welcomes Merkel in White House after delay

AFP, Washington  
US President Donald Trump yesterday welcomed German Chancellor Angela Merkel to the White House for talks expected to focus on their differences over Nato, Russia, global trade and a host of other issues.  
The two leaders shook hands and smiled for the cameras before entering the West Wing.  
Talks had been scheduled for Tuesday, before a blizzard in the eastern United States forced a postponement.  
For years, Merkel -- a trained physicist -- had been president Barack Obama's closest international partner, with the two sharing a strong rapport and a similar deliberative approach.  
With Trump, Merkel may settle for avoiding an open argument or a 140-character Twitter missive.  
Before coming to office the US president called Merkel's acceptance of refugees a "catastrophic mistake" and said she was "ruining Germany."  
He also demanded countries like Germany step up defense spending, a sensitive issue for a nation that has had a strong



pacifist tradition since World War II and proselytizes fiscal prudence.  
In a similar vein, Merkel has sought to remind the real estate mogul of democratic values.  
Any "close cooperation," she said, must be on the basis of the "values of democracy, freedom, respect for the rule of law and human dignity, regardless of origin, skin color, religion, gender, sexual orientation or political belief."  
Comments like that have prompted some of Trump's fiercest critics to declare Merkel the new "leader of the free world," a moniker normally taken up by the occupant of the White House.  
Between meetings, the pair will hold a joint press conference at 1:20 pm (1720 GMT) that is sure to dredge up past barbed disagreements.  
Before departing for the United States, Merkel also noted she was going to Washington as an envoy not just of Germany, but of Europe too.  
"I will of course point out that for us, our country and our membership in the European Union are two sides of the same coin," Merkel said ahead of the visit.

## TURKEY-EU ROW

# Ankara threatens to send '15,000 refugees a month'

### Turkish daily depicts Merkel as 'Frau Hitler' on front page

AFP, Istanbul  
Turkey's Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu has threatened to "blow the mind" of Europe by sending 15,000 refugees a month to EU territory, in an intensifying dispute with the bloc.  
Ankara and Brussels almost a year ago on March 18 signed a landmark deal that has substantially lessened the flow of migrants from Turkey to Europe.  
But the accord is now hanging in the balance due to the diplomatic crisis over the blocking of Turkish ministers from holding rallies in Europe.  
"If you want, we could open the way for 15,000 refugees that we don't send each month and blow the mind" of Europe, Soylu said in a speech late Thursday, quoted



US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson (R) stands with deputy Commander of the Combined Force Command General Leem Ho-young (2nd R) and Margaret Peterlin (2nd L), Tillerson's Chief of Staff, as two North Korean soldiers (top) look at the south side at the border village of Panmunjom, which has separated the two Koreas since the Korean War, yesterday.

# CO2 stable for 3rd yr despite global growth

AFP, Paris  
Global carbon dioxide emissions from the energy sector held stable for the third straight year in 2016 despite the global economy continuing to expand, the International Energy Agency said yesterday.  
By far the main culprit in global warming, carbon dioxide emissions stood at 32.1 billion tonnes last year, the IEA estimated.  
This was the same level as the same as the previous two years, despite the global economy growing by 3.1 percent in 2016.  
The IEA said the stabilisation of carbon dioxide emissions was the result of growing renewable power generation, switches from coal to natural gas, improvements in energy efficiency, as well as structural changes in the global economy.  
"These three years of flat emissions in a growing global economy signal an emerging trend and that is certainly a cause for optimism, even if it is too soon to say that global emissions have definitely peaked," the IEA's executive director Fatih Birol said in a statement.  
The IEA said carbon dioxide emissions dipped in both the United States and China, the world's two largest energy users and emitters, and were stable in Europe, offsetting increases in most of the rest of the world.

# China, Pakistan to jointly build missiles, aircraft

AGENCIES  
Beijing was furious with India last year for launching Agni V, but now it plans to build ballistic, cruise, anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles with "all-weather friend" Pakistan, China's state-run media reported.  
The two countries will also jointly mass produce FC-1 Xiaolong, a lightweight and multi-role combat aircraft, reported Global Times, the Chinese Communist Party's news outlet.  
In addition, the two agreed to strengthen anti-terrorism cooperation and strike terrorist forces including China's insurgent East Turkestan Islamic Movement.  
These were the outcomes of yesterday's meeting in Beijing between Pakistan's army chief Qamar Bajwa and a top Chinese military official, Fang Fenghui. In exchange for Beijing's largesse, Islamabad agreed to ensure the safety of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).  
"Pakistan and China enjoy a special friendly relationship with each other and

# UK raps White House over Trump spy claims

AFP, London  
The White House will not repeat claims that British spies snoop on Donald Trump, Britain said yesterday after the UK spy agency dismissed them as "utterly ridiculous" in a rare public denial.  
Prime Minister Theresa May's spokesman reiterated the GCHQ agency's denial of a report -- which had been repeated by the US president's spokesman on Thursday -- and said the claims "should be ignored".  
"We have made this clear to the administration and have received assurances that these allegations will not be repeated," the PM's spokesman said.  
Britain's ambassador to Washington Kim Darroch spoke directly to White House press secretary Sean Spicer, although May's spokesman refused to say whether the US administration had apologised.  
"The fact is, within the Five Eyes pact, we cannot use each other's capabilities to circumvent our laws," May's spokesman said.  
"It's a situation that simply wouldn't arise."  
Britain and the United States -- along with Australia, Canada and New Zealand -- are part of the "Five Eyes" intelligence-sharing alliance forged from the embers of World War II.  
"We have a close, special relationship with the White House and that allows us to raise concerns as and when they arise as was true in this case," he added.

## IS THREAT

# India beefs up security at Taj Mahal

AFP, Agra  
India has boosted security at the Taj Mahal after a pro-Islamic State group reportedly warned of attacks in the country and threatened the 17th century monument to love, police said yesterday.  
Images published in local media showed a fighter in combat fatigues and black headgear at the Taj Mahal, India's biggest tourist attraction, and the words "new target" as the backdrop.  
The US-based Site Intelligence Group, which tracks jihadi activity, said the pro-IS Ahwaa Ummat Media Center had originally published the graphic on Telegram on Tuesday.  
"There have been no specific intelligence inputs or any official alerts, but going by media reports we have stepped up security at the Taj," senior police superintendent Preetender Singh told AFP on Friday.  
"Security drills are being carried out on a six-hourly basis instead of the usual daily drill."  
Members of the bomb disposal squad and Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team have been deployed with additional personnel patrolling the Yamuna river which flows next to the Taj, he said.  
India's leaders say the IS group does not have influence in the country of over 1.2 billion people, which has a large but traditionally moderate Muslim population.  
There have been some reports of Indians going to fight for the group in Iraq and Syria, but the numbers are low relative to the size of the population.  
Last week, police said an IS sympathiser accused in a train explosion that injured 10 people had been killed in a stand-off as they tried to arrest him.