

# NEWSIN brief

## 3,000 migrants rescued off Libya

AFP, Rome  
Around 3,000 migrants were rescued off the coast of Libya on Sunday as they tried to cross the Mediterranean to Europe, the Italian coastguard told AFP. The rescue was undertaken in 22 separate operations coordinated by the Italian coastguard. According to the Italian government, 16,206 people have been rescued in the sea by Friday—compared to 11,911 by the same time last year.

## 20 die in freak tree accident in Ghana

AFP, Accra  
Twenty students died after trees fell on them while swimming in a river during a storm in Ghana, emergency officials said Sunday. Ghana National Fire Service spokesman Prince Billy Anaglate said the "unusual incident" happened on Sunday afternoon, when a group of high school students were swimming at the Kintampo waterfalls.

## Nepal to strap Everest climbers with GPS

AP, Kathmandu  
Some climbers attempting to scale Mount Everest during the upcoming spring climbing season will be strapped with a GPS device to locate them in case they are in trouble and to prevent false claims of reaching the summit, officials said yesterday. Hundreds of climbers are expected to attempt to climb the world's highest peak in April and May, but only a few will be fitted with the devices as an experiment.

## Russia takes swipe at US over Thaad

AFP, Tokyo  
Russia yesterday criticised the deployment of a US anti-missile system aimed at North Korea, saying it poses "serious risks" to the region. The US this month began installing the Thaad anti-missile system in South Korea in response to the North's intensifying ballistic missile development.

# Plane crash-lands in South Sudan

### 14 injured among 45 onboard; fate of rest unknown

AFP, Juba  
A passenger jet carrying 45 people crash-landed in South Sudan's northwestern city of Wau yesterday, leaving at least 14 people injured, government and airport officials said. It was unclear however if the rest of those on board were alive or dead.

"There were 40 passengers and five crew (on board) that is all. I don't have any information," said Gabriel Ngang, the manager of South Supreme Airlines, the owner of the plane. He said the jet had taken off from the capital Juba.

"Right now we have the ambulance which has just come out from the airport and we have received 14 patients being rushed to hospital in stable condition," said State Information Minister Bona Gaudensio.

Paul Charles, an engineer at Wau airport said the weather in the region was not good.

"Visibility was not good up to now and (the plane) was landing from the east to west, then it just crashed (off) the runway. The pilot I think was not seeing the runway well," he said. Images circulating on social media showed thick black smoke billowing from the aircraft, which was completely burned out except for the tail, which clearly displayed the insignia of local carrier South Supreme Airlines.

In November 2015, 36 people were killed when a Soviet-era Antonov plane crashed just after take-off from Juba. Two survivors were pulled out of the twisted metal hulk but one later died.

The plane crash is the latest tragedy to befall South Sudan, which has been gripped by civil war since 2013. The country is also in the midst of a "man-made" famine due to the conflict.



An opposition fighter from the Failaq al-Rahman brigade fires a heavy machine gun in Jobar, a rebel-held district on the eastern outskirts of the Syrian capital Damascus, on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

# UK to formally trigger Brexit on March 29

AFP, London  
Britain yesterday said it will begin leaving the European Union on March 29, setting an historic and uncharted course to become the first country to withdraw from the bloc by March 2019.

Nine months after the stunning referendum vote for Brexit, Prime Minister Theresa May's government will finally trigger Article 50 of the EU's Lisbon Treaty next week, starting a two-year exit process.

"We are on the threshold of the most important negotiation for this country for a generation," said Brexit minister David Davis.

The European Commission said immediately that it was ready to begin negotiations, although a source in Brussels said it would take "four to six weeks" to arrange a summit to agree a common EU position.

Britain is one of the oldest and largest members of the 28-nation bloc, and its departure has raised fears for the EU's future as eurosceptic movements gain support across the continent.

London has repeatedly said it wants to maintain good relations with its European

allies, but major battles await, in particular over budget contributions, immigration and future trade ties.

Britain has said it wants to agree its divorce and a new relationship with Europe within the two years.

The deal would have to be agreed by all the EU's national and some regional parliaments.

May's Downing Street office yesterday repeated that a deal is possible, although lawmakers have warned her government to prepare for failure—and for Britain to crash out of the EU with no agreement in place.

The prime minister has long said she would start the Article 50 process by the end of this month.

Britain's ambassador to the EU, Tim Barrow, on Monday morning informed the office of EU President Donald Tusk that it would do so on March 29, her spokesman told reporters.

The British government says the Brexit process is irreversible once Article 50 is triggered, although experts have said there is no legal ban on member states changing their minds before they have actually left the EU.



# Pakistan passes landmark Hindu marriage bill

AFP, Islamabad

The president of mainly Muslim Pakistan has signed into law a bill allowing the Hindu minority to register their marriages for the first time since partition from India in 1947.

The bill, signed by President Mamnoon Hussain on Sunday, will "safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Hindu families", a government statement said.

It will also allow Hindus to file for divorce and remarriage, and will protect the financial security of women and children after divorce.

Following the end of British rule in South Asia in 1947, the sub-continent was partitioned into mainly Hindu India and Pakistan, triggering widespread religious bloodshed in which hundreds of thousands were killed and millions displaced.

# 'Intense' strikes pound rebel-held Damascus

### Regime forces repel rebel assault; Russian embassy hit

AFP, Damascus

Syrian government forces clashed with rebels and hammered opposition-held areas of east Damascus yesterday after pushing back a surprise assault in the capital.

Rebels and allied jihadists, led by former al-Qaeda affiliate Fateh al-Sham Front, launched an attack early Sunday on government positions in east Damascus, initially scoring gains.

But forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad drove them back by nightfall and began a fierce bombing campaign on Monday morning, a monitor said.

"There have been intense air strikes since dawn on opposition-held positions in Jobar from which the offensive was launched," said Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

He could not specify whether the raids were carried out by Syrian or allied Russian warplanes.

Control of the district -- which has been a battleground for more than two years and is the closest rebel position to the heart of Damascus -- is divided between rebels and allied jihadists on one side, and government forces on the other.

On Monday, regime forces were locked in

fighting with rebel groups in an industrial zone between Jobar and Qabun, a besieged, opposition-held district to the north.

The clashes killed at least 26 members of regime forces and 21 rebels and jihadists, Abdel Rahman said. He did not have an immediate toll for Monday morning's air strikes.

State news agency SANA said Syrian government troops were targeting rebel bases around Jobar on Monday.

The agency reported that opposition fighters on Sunday bombarded the Russian embassy compound in the capital's Mazraa neighbourhood but that there were no casualties.

Syria's conflict erupted in March 2011 with protests against Assad's rule but has evolved over the years into a complex civil war.

More than 320,000 people have been killed and millions more have been displaced by the conflict.

Meanwhile, a senior army officer yesterday said that Israel had fired its Arrow missile at a Syrian rocket which posed a "ballistic threat" during clashes over the weekend.

Israeli warplanes struck several targets in Syria on Friday, drawing retaliatory missile fire, in the most serious incident between the two countries since the start of the Syrian war six years ago.

## SYRIA WAR

## WEST MOSUL FIGHTING

# More than 180,000 displaced

AFP, Baghdad

More than 180,000 people have fled west Mosul as Iraqi forces battle to retake it from the Islamic State group, the Iraqi government said yesterday.

Some 111,000 have sought shelter in 17 nearby camps and reception centres while many others have stayed with relatives, the ministry of displacement and migration said.

Iraqi forces backed by an international US-led coalition launched a drive to retake west Mosul on February 19 after seizing the city's eastern side the previous month.

They have since taken control of several districts including parts of the densely-populated Old City. The Iraqi government says it can accommodate a further 100,000 displaced people in camps, but the United Nations says the numbers could rise way beyond that.

"Humanitarian agencies are bracing for the possibility that an additional 300,000-320,000 civilians may flee in coming weeks," the UN's aid coordination agency OCHA said.

The UN's humanitarian coordinator in Iraq, Lise Grande, said aid groups had spent months preparing for the Mosul operation.

"But the truth is that the crisis is pushing all of us to our limits," she said.

The aid operation for western Mosul is "far larger and far more complex" than in the east, she said.

"The main difference is that tens of thousands of families stayed in their homes in the east," she said. "In the west, tens of thousands are fleeing."



An Acehese woman gets whipped for spending time in close proximity with a man who is not her husband, which is against Sharia law, in Aceh, yesterday. Aceh on Sumatra island began implementing Sharia law after being granted special autonomy in 2001.

PHOTO: AFP

# Bill Gates world's richest man again; Trump slips

AFP, New York

Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates once again topped the Forbes magazine list of the world's richest billionaires, while US President Donald Trump slipped more than 200 spots, the magazine said yesterday.

Gates, whose wealth is estimated at \$86 billion, led the list for the fourth straight year.

He was followed by Berkshire Hathaway chief Warren Buffett among the top 10 billionaires, a group heavily dominated by Americans, many of whom work in the technology sector. Buffett's wealth was estimated at \$75.6 billion.

Others in the top 10 included Amazon founder Jeff Bezos at number three, Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg at number five and Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison at number seven.

The global billionaire population jumped 13 percent from last year to 2,043, the biggest annual increase in the 31 years since the magazine began compiling the list, Forbes said.

The US led countries with the most billionaires with 565, a product of the swelling value of the American stock market since Trump's November 2016 election.

China was second with 319 billionaires, and Germany was third with 114.

Trump himself slipped 220 spots on the list to number 544 with an estimated \$3.5 billion. Forbes attributed Trump's drop to sluggishness in the Manhattan real estate market which is responsible for a disproportionate amount of his wealth.

Among others in the Forbes top 10, Amancio Ortega of Spanish apparel chain Zara was fourth, Mexican telecom tycoon Carlos Slim was sixth, the Koch brothers, Charles and David, were eighth and ninth and former New York City mayor and Bloomberg News founder Michael Bloomberg was 10th.

This year it took at least \$3.7 billion in wealth to make it onto the list, but only in a tie for 501th place, a group that included Hollywood director Steven Spielberg.



# FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION Candidates in first TV debate

AFP, Paris

France's tumultuous presidential election battle steps up a gear as the main candidates face off in the first of several TV debates, gunning for every vote with just a month to go.

In France's most unpredictable election in years, far-right National Front leader Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron have been running neck-and-neck for weeks, with the latest opinion poll showing the centrist just half a percentage point ahead for the first round of voting on April 23.

The debate will be an unprecedented chance for French voters to compare candidates before the first round as the frontrunners will share the stage with trailing candidates Francois Fillon of the right and Benoit Hamon of the left, along with the far left Jean-Luc Melenchon.

All 11 contenders, spanning the spectrum from Trotskyist left to the far right, will take

part in another debate on April 4.

Advisors to 48-year-old Le Pen, who polls show would lose to Macron in the May 7 run-off if the election were held today, said she would tear into the "globalist" programme of her pro-EU rival.

The 39-year-old former economy minister will also come under pressure from Fillon, who will attempt to claw back votes lost to Macron since he became embroiled in a damaging fake jobs scandal.

Polls currently show Fillon, the one-time favourite, crashing out in the first round behind Le Pen and Macron, following revelations of payments by parliament to his wife and children as well as loans and lavish gifts from wealthy friends.

Two men representing the ailing left -- the Socialist Party's Hamon and Communist-backed radical Melenchon, currently fourth and fifth in the polls -- are also hoping to use Monday's three-hour television joust to sway millions of undecided voters.

# Vacancy Announcement

United Nations Development Programme and UN Capital Development Fund in Bangladesh announce vacancies for the following positions under Service Contract modality with the Project titled Local Government Initiative on Climate Change (LOGIC) to be implemented by the Ministry of LGRD and Cooperatives of the Government of Bangladesh.

- 1. Project Coordinator
- 2. Operations Manager
- 3. Capacity Building and Policy Advocacy Specialist
- 4. Knowledge Management and Communications Officer
- 5. District Climate Change Coordinator
- 6. Monitoring Specialist
- 7. Project Assistant
- 8. MIS Officer
- 9. Admin and Finance Associate

The duration of the service contract is one year initially, subject to renewal upon satisfactory performance and availability of funds.

For details of the Job Description and instructions to apply, please visit our website: <http://www.bd.undp.org/content/bangladesh/en/home/operations/jobs/>. Applications should be received no later than 3 April 2017.

Only short-listed candidates will be contacted. Female candidates are particularly encouraged to apply.