



US President Donald Trump is welcomed by Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud upon arrival at King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, yesterday. Inset, Trump receives the Order of Abdulaziz al-Saud medal from Saudi King Salman at the Saudi Royal Court in Riyadh.

Iran backs reform, reelects Rouhani

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani won a resounding re-election victory on Saturday as voters overwhelmingly backed his efforts to reach out to the world and rebuild the struggling economy. Rouhani, a 68-year-old moderate cleric who spearheaded a 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, took 23.5 million votes -- 57 percent -- compared to 15.8 million -- 38.3 percent -- for hardline challenger Ebrahim Raisi. But Iran's efforts to open up to the world face a stark challenge from US President Donald Trump, who has threatened to tear up the nuclear deal and is currently visiting its bitter regional rival Saudi Arabia. Iranians nonetheless flocked to the polls, with turnout hitting 73 percent. Election organisers were forced to extend polling by several hours on Friday, as they struggled to adapt to a population explosion that has added 20 million names to the voting rolls in the past two decades. Raisi, 56, had positioned himself as a defender of the poor and called for a much tougher line with the West. But his revolutionary rhetoric and efforts to win over working class voters with promises of increased handouts gained limited traction. Russian President Vladimir Putin, a staunch ally of Iran in the Syrian conflict on the side of the Damascus regime, was among the first leaders to congratulate Rouhani. EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini also tweeted her congratulations. International affairs researcher Foad Izadi, of Tehran University, said Rouhani may now have the leverage to push for more freedoms, including the release of opposition leaders under house arrest for their part in the 2009 protests. But the economy remains the number one challenge.



'Get your dirty hands off Venezuela!'

Maduro tells Trump REUTERS, Caracas Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro blasted Donald Trump on Friday after a fresh round of US sanctions and strong condemnation of his socialist government from the US leader. "Enough meddling... Go home, Donald Trump. Get out of Venezuela," Maduro thundered in a speech carried on live TV. "Get your dirty hands out of here." The Trump administration imposed sanctions on the chief judge and seven other members of Venezuela's Supreme Court on Thursday as punishment for annulling the opposition-led Congress in a series of rulings this year.

Roll back 'hostile policy'

N Korea lays condition for talks with US; Mattis says military solution to crisis would be 'tragic on an unbelievable scale'

AGENCIES North Korea's deputy UN envoy said on Friday the United States needed to roll back its "hostile policy" toward the country before there could be talks as US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis warned that any military solution to the crisis would be "tragic on an unbelievable scale." "As everybody knows, the Americans have gestured (toward) dialogue," North Korea's deputy UN ambassador, Kim In Ryong, told reporters on Friday. "But what is important is not words, but actions." "The rolling back of the hostile policy towards DPRK is the prerequisite for solving all the problems in the Korean Peninsula," he said. "Therefore, the urgent issue to be settled on Korean Peninsula is to put a definite end to the US hostile policy towards DPRK, the root cause of all problems."

Kim In-Ryong also angrily dismissed reports linking North Korea to the global cyberattack that held thousands of computers to virtual ransom. "It is ridiculous," he told reporters, suggesting Washington and Seoul were behind the allegation. Up to 300,000 computers in 150 countries were hit by the WannaCry worm, which seizes systems and demands payment in Bitcoin to return control to users. North Korea, also known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), has vowed to develop a missile mounted with a nuclear warhead that can strike the mainland United States, saying the program is necessary to counter US aggression.

KOREA CRISIS
North Korea denies role in global cyberattack

US President Donald Trump warned in an interview with Reuters in late April that a "major, major conflict" with North Korea was possible, but said he would prefer a diplomatic outcome to the dispute over its nuclear and missile programs. Trump later said he would be "honored" to meet the North's leader, Kim Jong Un, under the right conditions. A US State Department spokesman said the country would have to "cease all its illegal activities and aggressive behavior in the region." "We are going to continue to work the issue," Mattis told a Pentagon news conference. "If this goes to a military solution, it's going to be tragic on an unbelievable scale. So our effort is to work with the UN, work with China, work with Japan, work with South Korea to try to find a way out of this situation."

IS-claimed blasts kill 35 in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad Suicide bombings at checkpoints in Baghdad and south Iraq claimed by the Islamic State group killed at least 35 people and wounded dozens more, officials said yesterday. The bombings, which hit Iraq the previous night, came as Iraqi forces battle IS in Mosul in a massive operation launched more than seven months ago to retake the country's second city from the jihadists. In Baghdad, suicide car bombers attacked in the area of a checkpoint in the city's southern Abu Dsheer area, killing 24 people and wounding 20, Brigadier General Saad Maan told AFP. Security forces were able to kill one of the attackers, but the second blew up his car bomb, Maan said. IS issued a statement claiming the attack. And in south Iraq, a suicide bomber blew up an explosives-rigged vehicle at a checkpoint on the outskirts of the city of Basra, killing 11 people and wounding 30, according to Riyadh Abdulmir, the head of Basra province health department. Another militant who left a second explosives-rigged vehicle was killed by security forces, the Basra Operations Command said. IS also claimed the Basra attack. The jihadist group overran large areas north and west of Baghdad in 2014, but Iraqi forces backed by US-led air strikes have since recaptured much of the territory they lost to the jihadists.



Trump tried to influence Russia probe

Believes Comey INDEPENDENT.CO.UK Former FBI director James Comey is now convinced Donald Trump was trying to influence his investigation into ties between the president and Russia, a source close to him has said. However, they told CNN it would be difficult to prove the president had committed this crime, because "you have to have intent in order to obstruct justice in the criminal sense" In the US, obstruction of justice is a federal offence in which someone "corruptly attempts to influence, obstruct or impede the due and proper administration of the law", they told the US broadcaster. Comey initially believed that he could instruct the new president in what was appropriate during their communications, but later became convinced the president was intending to try and affect the direction of the investigation, the source told the US broadcaster. The former FBI director has confirmed that he will testify before the Senate Intelligence Committee on the investigation into links between Trump's administration and Russia. The White House did not dispute the account portrayed, and instead said that the FBI investigation had put unnecessary pressure on the president's ability to conduct diplomacy with Russia.



'Rapist holy man' castrated in India

AFP, New Delhi An Indian woman cut off a man's penis after he allegedly tried to rape her at her house in the southern state of Kerala, police said yesterday. The 23-year-old law student was at her residence in the state capital Thiruvananthapuram late Friday when she says she was attacked by the 54-year-old man, who had claimed to her family to be a religious guru. "She used a knife in her defense and cut off his penis," district police chief G Sparjan Kumar told AFP by phone. "The man, Hari Swami, was rushed to the nearby government hospital in a serious state," he added. The woman claimed the man had been assaulting her for several years, according to Kumar, who said police had registered a case against Swami for sexual offences against a minor and rape. Police said the girl's parents, who live at the same house, were unaware of the assaults by Swami. "The woman told us that her parents blindly trusted this Swami, and he used to get frequent invites to perform special ceremonies and stay over at their house, where he assaulted her," Kumar told AFP. She is now under police protection and receiving trauma counselling.



Wikileaks founder Julian Assange speaks on the balcony of the Embassy of Ecuador in London on Friday. Ecuador urged Britain to "grant safe passage" out of the country to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange after Sweden dropped a warrant that drove him to take refuge in Ecuador's London embassy.

'Annihilate' IS fighters

Pentagon chief says Trump ordered to eliminate jihadists to prevent them from returning home

AFP, Washington President Donald Trump has instructed the Pentagon to "annihilate" the Islamic State group in Syria in a bid to prevent escaped foreign fighters from returning home, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Friday. The move to encircle then kill as many jihadists in place as possible -- rather than letting them exit a city and targeting them as they flee -- reflects an increased urgency to stop battle-hardened jihadists bringing their military expertise and ideology back to European capitals and other areas. The president has "directed a tactical shift from showing IS out of safe locations in an attrition fight to surrounding the enemy in their strongholds so we can annihilate ISIS," Mattis said, using an acronym for IS. "The intent is to prevent the return home of escaped foreign fighters." Trump, who campaigned on a pledge to

quickly defeat IS, signed an executive order soon after taking office giving his generals 30 days to come up with a revised plan to wipe the jihadists out. The review resulted in the new "annihilation campaign" and saw commanders gain greater autonomy to make battlefield decisions. Critics of Barack Obama's administration frequently complained of White House micromanagement and a lengthy approval process causing delays on the ground. Mattis called foreign fighters a "strategic threat" should they return home and said the annihilation effort would prevent the problem from being transplanted from one location to another. The US-led coalition has been battling IS since late summer 2014, supporting local fighters on the ground with a combination of considerable air support, training and weaponry.



Colonise other planets for survival: Hawking

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK Professor Stephen Hawking has repeated his warning that human survival depends on finding a new home beyond the Earth. The search for other planets to colonise should start now, he believes. Speaking in London at a press conference previewing the Starmus science and arts festival taking place in Norway next month, the professor said: "I strongly believe we should start seeking alternative planets for possible habitation. "We are running out of space on Earth and we need to break through the technical limitations preventing us living elsewhere in the universe." Professor Hawking was presented with a special gold watch from Omega, new sponsors of the Stephen Hawking medal for science communication. Three of the medals, which recognise achievements in making science more accessible, will be presented at the Starmus festival in Trondheim. Each winner will also receive one of the 18 carat gold watches. Starmus founder astrophysicist Dr Garik Israelian said: "Its fun and it's science and it's music. ... This festival is about artists and scientists. The two most important values we have on this planet are science and art."

Crisis deepens for Temer

Plea-bargain testimony says president took \$4.6m in bribes

REUTERS, Sao Paulo/Brazilia Brazil's top court released plea-bargain testimony on Friday accusing President Michel Temer and his two predecessors of receiving millions of dollars in bribes, the most damaging development yet in a historic political corruption probe. The testimony made public by the Supreme Court is from executives of the world's largest meatpacking company, and raises serious doubts about whether Temer can maintain his grip on the presidency. The scandals that have engulfed Brazil's political class and many business elites reduce the chances that Temer, a conservative who took office after leftist former President Dilma Rousseff was impeached last year, can push through economic reforms crucial for Latin America's biggest country to recover from its worst recession on record. The Supreme Court on Thursday said it approved an investigation of Temer for corruption and obstruction of justice. Calls

for his resignation intensified, including an editorial in the O Globo newspaper, which is normally criticized by leftists for backing conservative politicians. The revelations came from testimony given by executives at JBS SA. Once a small meat producer, JBS grew exponentially during 13 years of government by former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Rousseff's Workers Party, primarily through acquisitions funded by low-cost loans from Brazil's development bank. The JBS executives said they made about 500 million reais (\$154 million) in illegal payments to politicians and bureaucrats in recent years in exchange for winning contracts, getting easy credit from state-run banks and resolving tax and other disputes with the government. Temer's office denied in a statement that he obstructed justice by interfering in the probe and also denied accusations he took bribes. Lawyers for Lula said he was innocent. Rousseff denied any wrongdoing in a statement.

