

NEWS IN brief

IS in first suicide attack in Somalia

AFP, Mogadishu
The Islamic State group has claimed its first suicide attack in Somalia yesterday, which police said killed five people at a checkpoint in the northeastern port city of Bosaso. The militants are led by former Shabaab cleric Abdiqadir Mumin who switched allegiance from al-Qaeda to IS last year and was named a "global terrorist" by the US in August.

Defiant Maduro to overhaul charter

AFP, Caracas
Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro formally launched moves to rewrite the constitution on Tuesday, defying opponents who accuse him of clinging to power in a political crisis that has prompted unrest killing 53 people. Elections to the new assembly will take place at the end of July.

Taiwan court rules in favour of gay nuptials

AFP, Taipei
Taiwan's top court ruled in favour of gay marriage yesterday, a landmark decision that paves the way for the island to become the first place in Asia to legalise same-sex unions. It gave the government two years to implement the ruling.

Four climbers found dead on Everest

AFP, Kathmandu
Rescuers found the bodies of four climbers on Mount Everest, taking the season's death toll to 10 as experts warn cut-price mountaineering outfits are putting clients at risk. The climbers were found inside a tent at camp four -- at 7,950 metres -- on Tuesday. Two of the dead were foreign climbers and two were Nepali guides.



UK TERROR ATTACK

A Jewish woman named Renee Rachel Black and a Muslim man named Sadiq Patel react next to floral tributes in Albert Square in Manchester, Britain, yesterday. Inset, soldiers and a police officer walk in central London.

PHOTO: REUTERS

When happiness turned to horror

AFP, Manchester
The sounds of happy cheering and bouncy pop were still ringing in the ears of excited young fans of US singer Ariana Grande when an altogether more menacing noise erupted. Within minutes, police in Britain's third city of Manchester knew they had a major incident on their hands after a bomber targeted the youngsters leaving the performance in one of Europe's largest indoor venues. The investigation has reportedly recovered CCTV footage showing the suspected bomber, Salman Abedi, striding into the foyer of the Manchester Arena at 10:30 pm on Monday and detonating a home-made explosive device. Panic ensued both in the foyer and inside the 21,000-seat auditorium as fans, and parents waiting to pick up their children, fell over each in a stampede to flee. At least 22 people were killed -- one a girl aged just eight -- and another 59 were wounded, many seriously. Twelve

of them were aged under 16. Abedi, 22, also died in Britain's worst terror attack since the transport network in London was hit by suicide bombers in July 2005. Greater Manchester Police had labelled it a possible act of terror within 17 minutes of the blast going off, mobilising a major operation that



included the closure of a nearby transport hub and roads. They were flooded with 240 phone calls within the first hour of the incident, and went on to mobilise more than 400 officers and staff during the night. The police carried out a controlled explosion near the arena at 1:35 am, on what turned out to be a pile of abandoned clothing.

By 2:15 am, Prime Minister Theresa May was acknowledging an "appalling terrorist attack" and she went on to brief opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn in the kind of contact that only takes place during times of national emergency. Grande, a former child TV star, tweeted at 3:51 am that she felt "broken" by the bloodshed, as the future of her current world tour was plunged into doubt. The coming day would bring heartbreak as parents grieved for young lives horrifically cut short, or issued poignant appeals for those still listed as missing. The day would also bring questions: about security at the venue, about Abedi's background, and about the implications for a country heading to the polls on June 8 for a general election in which national security had been only a fringe issue. But defiance sounded the loudest note, as a vigil Tuesday evening outside Manchester's imposing Town Hall erupted in chants declaring that the city would prevail.

UK 'irritated' by US leaks about attack

AFP, London
A British minister said yesterday it was "irritating" that details about the Manchester concert bombing had been leaked to US media before being released in Britain, saying she had spoken to US authorities. "The British police have been very clear that they want to control the flow of information in order to protect operational integrity... the element of surprise," Interior Minister Amber Rudd told BBC radio. "So it is irritating if it gets released from other sources and I have been very clear with our friends that that should not happen again." Asked if the US authorities had compromised the investigation, she said: "I wouldn't go that far. "But I can say that they are perfectly clear about the situation and that it shouldn't happen again." At least 22 people were killed on Monday night when a bomb went off at a concert by US pop star Ariana Grande in Manchester, northwest England, among them children. British-born Salman Abedi was identified as the suspected suicide bomber responsible. His name first surfaced in US media reports Tuesday, based on briefings given to US officials by their counterparts in London.

Two killed in suicide blasts in Jakarta

JAKARTA, Reuters
A suspected suicide bomber and a police officer were killed yesterday in explosions near a bus station in the eastern part of Jakarta, the Indonesian capital. There were two blasts, five minutes apart late in the evening, in Kampung Melayu, police said in a statement. Some people, including police officers, were wounded and taken to a nearby hospital, it added. A hospital official told Metro TV that two policemen and a civilian were being treated. Another TV report said five people were injured. Authorities in the world's biggest Muslim-majority nation have been increasingly worried about a resurgence in radicalism, driven in part by a new generation of militants inspired by Islamic State. In January last year, four militants mounted a gun and bomb assault in the heart of Jakarta. Eight people, including the militants, were killed in that attack.

US plans deep cuts to foreign aid, diplomacy

AFP, Washington
The US State Department laid out plans Tuesday to put "America first" and to slash Washington's budget for diplomacy and foreign aid by more than 30 percent. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said President Donald Trump's dramatic plan, which will be reviewed by Congress, would make government "leaner and more accountable." If the proposed cuts are approved by US lawmakers, the State Department and USAID budget for 2018 will be \$37.6 billion, down from an estimated final 2017 spend of \$54.9 billion. "This budget request reflects the president's 'America First' agenda," Tillerson said in a statement released in Washington.

'Madman with nukes'

Trump tells about Kim Jong-Un; China sees no reason to refuse talk with North Korea

AFP, Washington
President Donald Trump called North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un a "madman with nuclear weapons" during a telephone call with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, according to a transcript of the conversation released by US media Tuesday. A White House readout of the April 29 call characterized it as a "very friendly conversation." Days after the conversation, Trump said publicly that he would be "honored" to meet with Kim. But in the call, Trump hinted at a possible dramatic escalation on the Korean Peninsula. "We can't let a madman with nuclear weapons let on the loose like that. We have a lot of firepower, more than he has, times 20 -- but we don't want to use it," the US leader said, citing "two nuclear submarines" the Pentagon sent to the area last month. Transcribed by the Philippine government, the conversation was released by The Washington Post and The Intercept. Trump also queried Duterte about

whether he believed Kim was "stable or not stable." The Philippine leader responded that their North Korean counterpart's "mind is not working and he might just go crazy one moment." Kim has a "dangerous toy in his hands that could create so much agony and suffering for all mankind," he added. But Trump appeared reassured that North Korea's recent missile tests had failed, saying that "all his rockets are crashing. That's the good news." Turning to China and its ability to counter the nuclear threat, Trump pressed Duterte to call Chinese President Xi Jinping to exert pressure. Meanwhile, China on Tuesday took a swipe at the US, saying there was "no reason" to refuse dialogue with North Korea despite a string of missile tests strongly condemned by the UN Security Council. The council met behind closed doors to discuss tightening sanctions on North Korea following the launch on Sunday of a medium-range missile that again raised alarm over Pyongyang's military capabilities.



A government troop stands on guard checking vehicles evacuating residents from their hometown of Marawi city in southern Philippines yesterday. Inset, An army armoured personnel carrier drives along a main highway of Pantar town, Lanao Del Norte, as it travels to reinforce Marawi city. Story on page 16 PHOTO: REUTERS



Nepal's Maoist prime minister resigns

AFP, Kathmandu
Nepal's Maoist prime minister resigned yesterday as part of a planned handover to a former political foe who will be the impoverished nation's tenth leader since the end of the civil war in 2006. Pushpa Kamal Dahal, a former guerrilla chief who led the decade-long Maoist insurgency before entering politics, is stepping aside after less than 10 months in office. He is expected to be succeeded by three-time former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, who heads the largest party in the current coalition government. "I announce my resignation from the post of prime minister today, right now, with a pledge to continue being active for the upliftment of the country and the people as a politician, parliamentarian and a citizen," Dahal said in a televised speech in which he catalogued his government's achievements. Dahal, who still goes by his nom de guerre Prachanda, or "fierce one", had promised to step down after holding local elections as part of the agreement that brought him to power last August. Local elections were held in three of the country's seven provinces 10 days ago. Deuba's appointment is expected to be confirmed in a parliamentary vote within the next 10 days. Dahal, 62, came to power after withdrawing support from the then-government and realigning his Maoist party with Deuba's centre-

MIGRANTS TRAGEDY IN MED

30 killed as boat sinks

AFP, Rome
At least 30 migrants including young children drowned yesterday when they fell off an overloaded vessel in the Mediterranean, where tensions are rising between aid ships and the Libyan coast guard. "There's a critical situation today. About 200 people fell into the water," a coastguard spokesman told AFP, while a humanitarian worker at the scene said 31 bodies had been recovered. The migrants were on a wooden boat carrying between 500 and 700 people and were just 20 nautical miles off the Libyan coast. The crew of the Phoenix aid boat had begun the rescue and were distributing lifejackets when many of those on deck fell into the water, perhaps knocked off balance by a wave.

Past month 'deadliest on record'

A total of 225, including 36 women and children, killed by friendly fire

AFP, Beirut
US-led air strikes on Syria killed a total of 225 civilians over the past month, a monitor said on Tuesday, the highest 30-day toll since the campaign began in 2014. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the civilian dead between April 23 and May 23 included 44 children and 36 women. The US-led air campaign against the Islamic State jihadist group in Syria began on September 23, 2014. "The past month of operations is the highest civilian toll since the coalition began bombing Syria," Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP. "There has been a very big escalation." The previous deadliest 30-day period was between February 23 and March 23 this year, when 220 civilians were killed, Abdel Rahman said. The past month's deaths brought the overall civilian toll from the coalition campaign to 1,481, among them 319 children, the Britain-based

US-LED AIR STRIKES IN SYRIA



on a convoy headed toward a remote garrison near the border with Jordan being used by coalition forces. Earlier this month, the US military said that coalition air strikes in Iraq and Syria had "unintentionally" killed 352 civilians since the campaign began. The coalition launched operations

against IS in Iraq in August 2014, then expanded them to Syria the following month. It is now backing twin offensives against IS's last major urban strongholds -- Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq. It has deployed special operations forces on the ground in both countries as advisers. On Friday, US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis said President Donald Trump has instructed the Pentagon to "annihilate" IS in Syria in a bid to prevent foreign fighters from returning home. The president has "directed a tactical shift from shoving ISIS out of safe locations in an attrition fight to surrounding the enemy in their strongholds so we can annihilate ISIS," Mattis said, using an alternate 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.

Trump promises world peace after Pope talks

AFP, Brussels
Donald Trump yesterday vowed to use his US presidency to promote peace around the world after what he depicted as an inspirational meeting with an initially grim-faced Pope Francis. Meeting face-to-face for the first time, the two leaders sidestepped profound differences over a string of issues ranging from the environment to the plight of migrants and the poor. And the US president emerged from a half-hour meeting at the Vatican gushing with enthusiasm about the 80-year-old pontiff, to the point of the former TV star appearing slightly star-struck. "Honor of a lifetime to meet His Holiness Pope Francis," Trump wrote on Twitter before leaving Rome for Brussels and the next leg of his first overseas trip as president. "I leave the Vatican more determined than ever to pursue PEACE in our world." Trump later arrived in Brussels, a city he once dubbed a "hellhole", ahead of his first summits today with wary leaders of Nato and the European Union. Francis also gave Trump copies of the three major texts he has published as pope, including one on the environment which urges the industrialised world to curb carbon emissions or risk catastrophic consequences for the planet. Trump, who has threatened to ignore the Paris accords on emissions and described global warming as a hoax, vowed to read them. Trump's Vatican visit was the third leg of his overseas trip, after stops in Saudi Arabia and Israel and the Palestinian