

NEWS IN brief

Montenegro to join Nato next month

AFP, Brussels
Montenegro will formally become Nato's 29th member in early June, alliance chief Jens Stoltenberg said yesterday, amid bitter Russian opposition to the move. "It shows that Nato's door is open," Stoltenberg said. Nato officials confirmed that Stoltenberg will be in Washington on June 5 when Montenegro formally lodges its accession documents with the US Senate.

Indian district blocks Net after caste clashes

AFP, New Delhi
Authorities in north India have blocked mobile internet services, arrested 24 people and suspended senior officials after clashes between castes that have left two dead and at least 20 injured, police said yesterday. Police said they had blocked access to mobile messaging services to stop "outsiders" from instigating the violence.

Sri Lanka's firebrand monk goes into hiding

AFP, Colombo
A controversial Sri Lankan Buddhist monk linked to a wave of hate attacks targeting the country's Muslim minority has gone into hiding, his party and police said yesterday. Galagodaatte Gnanasara's Buddhist Force party said the monk had feared he could be assassinated.

S Korea rape victim navy officer commits suicide

AFP, Seoul
A South Korean female naval officer apparently killed herself after being allegedly raped by a senior colleague, a defence ministry spokesman said yesterday. The victim, a lieutenant, was found dead in her single-room apartment on Wednesday, where a message was found reading: "Tomorrow, I won't be in this world any longer."



Demonstrators clash with police during the protest "Occupy Brasilia" against the labor and social security reforms and the government of President Michel Temer in Brasilia, Brazil on Wednesday.

BRAZIL POLITICAL CRISIS

Army deployed after ministries set on fire

AFP, Brasilia
Brazilian soldiers deployed Wednesday to defend government buildings in the capital Brasilia after protesters demanding the exit of President Michel Temer set fire to two ministries and fought with riot police.
"At this moment, federal troops are already here in (the foreign ministry)," Defense Minister Raul Jungmann said in a brief televised statement. "And next there are troops arriving to secure all the ministerial buildings."
Jungmann said the army was ordered in by Temer, who is fighting for his political life after being placed under a corruption investigation.
The deployment of soldiers sent a psychological shock-wave through a capital already shaking from the day's violence and frantic debate over the corruption scandal threatening to bring down the president.
In the lower house of Congress, the session was temporarily suspended after leftist deputies took over the speaker's podium, brandishing signs saying "Temer out".
Although most of the protesters were peaceful, small groups wearing masks threw stones at officers ringing the area and smashed their way into the agriculture ministry and reportedly also the culture and planning ministries. Riot police crouching behind black shields lobbed tear gas and stun grenades into the crowd, triggering running battles.
When protesters set a fire in the agriculture ministry, employees were forced to flee. "There was an invasion of the ministry's private entrance. They lit a fire in a room, broke photos in a gallery of ex-ministers and confronted police," a spokesman for the ministry told AFP. "The building was evacuated."

US challenges Beijing claims

In first under Trump, US Navy warship sailed within 12 nautical miles of an artificial island built up by China

AFP, Beijing
China yesterday accused the US of trespassing after an American warship sailed near a reef claimed by Beijing in the South China Sea, the first such operation under Trump. The UN says nations can establish the breadth of their territorial sea up to a limit of 12 nautical miles.
The row comes during a period of warming relations between the countries with Trump saying that Washington has dialed down pressure on Beijing over other issues in hopes of securing their cooperation on North Korea.
The guided-missile destroyer USS Dewey entered the area "without permission from the Chinese government", Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang told reporters at a regular press briefing, adding that the ship had "trespassed in the waters near the relevant islands and reefs".
"The relevant action taken by the US vessel undermines China's sovereignty and security interests, and is very likely to cause unexpected sea and air accidents," he said, urging Washington to stop "provocative actions".

The USS Dewey sailed less than 12 nautical miles from Mischief Reef -- part of the Spratly Islands -- yesterday morning local time, a US official said earlier, the first freedom of navigation operation under Trump. The UN says nations can establish the breadth of their territorial sea up to a limit of 12 nautical miles.
China claims nearly all of the South

SOUTH CHINA SEA ROW
China accuses US of trespassing
Washington insists it can conduct ops in any int'l waters

China Sea, despite partial counter-claims from Taiwan and several southeast Asian nations including the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam.
It has rapidly built reefs into artificial islands capable of hosting military planes.
The US has challenged annexations of these islets and advocated for a diplomatic settlement to the disputes.

Speaking earlier in the day, Pentagon spokesman, Major Jamie Davis, said US forces operate in the South China Sea on a daily basis and will fly and sail "wherever international law" allows.
"We have a comprehensive Freedom of Navigation Operations program that seeks to challenge excessive maritime claims in order to preserve the rights, freedoms, and uses of the sea and airspace guaranteed to all nations under international law," Davis said in a statement to AFP.
The exercises are "not about any one country, nor are they about making political statements," he added.
The US operation came a week after the Pentagon said that Chinese jets conducted an "unprofessional" intercept of a US radiation sniffing plane.
China denied the accusation, with the Ministry of Defense saying yesterday that "the close reconnaissance activities conducted by US military ships and planes towards China are the root cause of the security issues between China and the US over the sea and in the air."

Use of US warplanes in Afghanistan up sharply

REUTERS, Kabul
US warplanes dropped more weapons on Afghanistan in April than in any other single month since 2012, according to new statistics, as military officials press US President Donald Trump to send thousands more troops to the country.
The escalation in the use of American air power was partly due to an effort by US commanders to wipe out a nascent Islamic State presence before the group can establish more of a foothold in the county, a military spokesman said.
The US Air Force unleashed 460 bombs, missiles, or other ordnance last month in Afghanistan, more than double the 203 weapons dropped in March and more than seven times the quantity deployed in April last year.
Trump has yet to announce a decision on proposals from his top military advisers calling for the United States and its coalition allies to send 3,000 to 5,000 more troops to Afghanistan. Currently around 8,400 US and 6,500 coalition troops are deployed,

mostly to train and support Afghan forces.
The additional troops could also be used to ramp-up air support, which has often been seen as decisive in preventing the total collapse of some Afghan defensive positions and relies on trained air controllers on the ground.
The last time more weapons were dropped in a single month was August 2012, when nearly 80,000 US troops were battling the Taliban and two years before former President Barack Obama declared an end to the combat mission in Afghanistan.
Since then, however, Afghan forces have struggled to hold back a resurgent Taliban insurgency.
Islamic State's small local affiliate, sometimes known as Islamic State Khorasan (ISIS-K), has been active since 2015.
Last month the US military dropped one of its largest conventional weapons ever used in combat, a 21,600-lb (9,797 kg) GBU-43 Massive Ordnance Air Blast bomb, on suspected Islamic State militants in eastern Afghanistan.

TALIBAN INSURGENCY
Trump considering request for 3,000-5,000 more troops
April sees most strikes in one month since 2012

Indonesia police probe 'IS-linked' suicide attack

AFP, Jakarta
Indonesia's elite anti-terror squad was yesterday investigating a suicide bombing near a Jakarta bus station that killed three policemen in an assault authorities believe is linked to the Islamic State group.
Authorities raided the houses on Java island of two men suspected of being the bombers who unleashed carnage outside the busy terminal late Wednesday, sending huge clouds of black smoke into the sky and people fleeing in panic.
Three policemen were killed, while six other officers and five civilians were injured in an assault that left body parts and shattered glass strewn across the road.
Police said they believed there was a link between the attackers and the Islamic State (IS) group, without giving further details. Hundreds of Indonesians have flocked abroad

to fight with the jihadists and IS-supporting militants have been behind a series of recent plots and attacks in the archipelago.
The bus station bombing was the deadliest attack in Indonesia since January 2016, when a suicide blast and gun assault claimed by IS in downtown Jakarta left four attackers and four civilians dead.
In a televised address, President Joko Widodo said he had ordered a thorough probe and was "urging all citizens across the nation to stay calm and remain united".
"I convey my deepest condolences to the victims and their families," he added.
Police believe they were specifically targeted in the bombing. The attack came as they were preparing to provide security for a traditional torch parade near the Kampung Melayu terminal, which is an area frequented by locals but not foreigners.



Police guard looks on at the scene of an explosion in Jakarta.



Supporters of India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) try to break a police barricade during a protest against what they call a breakdown of law and order in the state of West Bengal, in Kolkata, India, yesterday. Modi's BJP is seeking to make political gains in the state, where the Trinamool Congress of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee won re-election in 2016.

DISPUTE ALONG LOC UN denies Pak's claim India fired at its vehicle

TNN, New Delhi
The United Nations (UN) has denied the Pakistani army's claim that Indian forces fired at a UN vehicle on the Line of Control (LoC) Wednesday.
Press reports in Pakistan last night quoted the Pakistani army's media wing as saying that India targeted a UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) vehicle in the Khanjar Sector. The Pakistani army termed it a "ceasefire violation" by India and said it "effectively responded to silence Indian firing".
Not true, said the UN secretary general's spokesman at a press briefing late Wednesday night India time.
"I can say to you that this afternoon in Bhimber District ... UNMOGIP military observers accompanied by Pakistani army escorts heard gunshots in their vicinity. There is no evidence that the UNMOGIP military observers were targeted by the gunfire. No UN military observer was injured," said Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for the UN Secretary-General.
Pakistan has been on the back foot since the Indian Army said on Tuesday it destroyed Pakistani posts on the LoC in "punitive strikes", in retaliation for infiltration attempts at the border.
Pakistan denied such assaults then released what the Indian Army called a "fake video" purportedly showing its army "destroying" an Indian post in Nowshera.
"Video from Pakistan claiming to destroy Indian post is fake as Indian posts have walls thick enough to withstand fire of recoilless gun," said the sources.
"The blast is from below the structure which usually happens in case of IED blasts and not explosion from artillery fire," they said.

'Welcome home, India's daughter'

AFP, New Delhi
An Indian woman who said she was forced to marry a Pakistani at gunpoint returned to India yesterday after a court ordered her release.
Uzma Ahmad was reunited with her family at the Wagah border crossing near Amritsar.
The case became a new national cause against arch-rival Pakistan with Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj calling Ahmad "India's daughter" in a Twitter statement to greet news of the release.
"Welcome home India's daughter. I am sorry for all that you have gone through," Swaraj tweeted.
Ahmad, who is in her early 20s, met Pakistani Tahir Ali in Malaysia, according to Indian media.
She told the Islamabad high court that Ali forced her to marry him at gunpoint on May 3 when she was visiting Pakistan.
Ahmad has made headlines in India since making her plea to the court on May 12 to be allowed to return.
The case came amid renewed tensions between India and Pakistan over the disputed Kashmir region and an Indian national Kulbhushan Jadhav, who Pakistan has sentenced to death on spying charges.

Successful launch puts New Zealand in space race

AFP, Wellington
A private New Zealand-based company joined the exclusive space-race club yesterday with the successful launch of a Rocket Lab test craft named Electron.
The rocket blasted off from the company's facility at Mahia, on the east coast of the North Island, to end three days of launch attempts aborted because of the weather.
"Made it to space. Team delighted. More to follow!" aerospace company Rocket Lab tweeted as New Zealand became the 11th country to launch into space.
It was the world's first successful launch from a private site, and was seen as a further advancement in the move towards private enterprise carrying small satellites and other cargo towards the stars.
"In the past, it's been countries that go to space, not companies," said Rocket Lab

founder and chief executive Peter Beck.
"We're one of a few companies to ever develop a rocket from scratch and we did it in under four years."
"We've worked tirelessly to get to this point. We've developed everything in house, built the world's first private orbital launch range, and we've done it with a small team."
However, while the rocket reached space, it did not reach orbit.
"We'll be investigating why, however reaching space in our first test puts us in an incredibly strong position to accelerate the commercial phase of our programme, deliver our customers to orbit and make space open for business," Beck added.
New Zealand Economic Development Minister Simon Bridges hailed the launch as the government set aside NZ\$15 million (US\$10.5 million) for the country's space programme.



ANGRY MPS MISS FLIGHT

Afghan plane forced to fly back home

AFP, Kabul
Supporters of two Afghan MPs who missed a domestic flight from Kabul blocked an airport runway with rocks, forcing the plane to return for the lawmakers, officials said.
The Kam Air flight was abruptly forced to fly back from central Bamiyan province earlier this week, triggering uproar and ridicule on social media with many accusing the lawmakers of abusing their powers.
Five people, including airport security officials, have been arrested over the "illegal diversion", the interior ministry said yesterday.
"When the two MPs arrived at Kabul airport, the plane was on the runway and ready to take off," Humayun Stanakzai, a director of civil aviation, told AFP.
"The MPs got angry and called their men in Bamiyan. When the plane approached Bamiyan airport, their men were at the airport blocking the runway with rocks. The plane could not land and had to be diverted back to Kabul."
The plane carrying 30 passengers had to be refueled and took off again for Bamiyan with the two MPs on board.
The lawmakers, Abdul Rahman Shaheedani and Hussain Naseri, were not immediately reachable for comment.
Kam Air, a private carrier, on Wednesday said they were indefinitely suspending all flights to Bamiyan.