

# NEWS IN brief

## IS threatens to attack S Arabia

REUTERS, Dubai  
Islamic State (IS) threatened attacks in Saudi Arabia after the militant group claimed responsibility for assaults in Tehran that killed at least 17 people. Site Intelligence monitoring group reported on Friday. In a video that appeared to have been recorded before the attack on Tehran, five masked fighters were shown threatening Shias in Iran as well as the Saudi Arabian government saying their turn "will come".

## Turkey Amnesty head charged in Turkey

AFP, Ankara  
The head of Amnesty International in Turkey was charged late Friday over suspected links to the movement of a Muslim cleric blamed by authorities for last year's failed coup, the human rights group said. Taner Kilic was remanded in custody after being detained Tuesday.

## Iran opposes Kurdish independence vote

AFP, Tehran  
Iran yesterday voiced its opposition to an announcement by Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region that it will organise a vote on independence later this year. Iraqi Kurdish leaders announced on Wednesday that they will organise an independence vote on September 25. Iran worries about separatism among its own Kurds.

## Relief for Polanski

AFP, Los Angeles  
An American woman raped by Oscar-winning filmmaker Roman Polanski as a teenager four decades ago pleaded with a California judge on Friday to end the case so she could move on with her life. Samantha Geimer, who was 13 at the time of the assault in 1977, said she has been serving a 40-year sentence that has kept a cloud over her and her family.



Anti-Conservative Party and anti-Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) demonstrators gather with placards in Parliament Square in front of the Houses of Parliament in central London, yesterday. The DUP opposes gay marriage and abortion.

## IS SIEGE IN PHILIPPINES

# US joins fight; 13 marines killed

AFP, Marawi  
United States special forces are providing support to the Philippine military battling to dislodge Islamic militants in a southern city, the US embassy said yesterday, as 13 Filipino marines were killed in fresh fighting. Philippine troops are struggling to defeat hundreds of fighters, who rampaged through Marawi on May 23 flying black flags of the Islamic State (IS) group, and have used civilians as human shields, bomb-proof tunnels and anti-tank weapons to fortify their positions. Friday's ferocious, street-to-street gunbattles with the militants saw 13 troops killed, in a dramatic surge in the toll from the conflict, Philippine military spokesmen said. A 15-year-old boy was also killed by a stray bullet as he took part in Friday prayers at a mosque in Marawi as the skirmishes raged outside, an AFP video journalist said. It was among the heaviest fighting seen in mainly Muslim Marawi as the air force battered parts of the city with strikes to support ground troops. Some 40 marines were wounded in the gunbattles that lasted 14 hours, according to military spokesman Colonel Edgardo Arevalo. As the conflict intensified, the US embassy in Manila said American forces were providing assistance to the Filipino troops, although it declined to give details for security reasons. Marawi-based military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Jo-ar Herrera confirmed the US help, adding that the special forces were not fighting, but "providing technical support".

# Trump berates isolated Qatar

## Saudi Arabia, allies hail move hours after US secretary of state calls for ending blockade against Doha

AFP, Washington  
US President Donald Trump has accused Qatar's leadership of bank-rolling extremists and demanded a halt to that funding, drawing praise from Saudi Arabia and its allies. Their approval came as Washington joined intensifying international efforts to heal the rift between the key Western Gulf allies, which has escalated into the region's worst diplomatic crisis in years. Russia yesterday urged dialogue between the parties, as Qatar's foreign minister arrived in Moscow seeking support from abroad in the dispute. Trump's warning overshadowed an earlier declaration from US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson -- who encouraged Saudi Arabia and its allies to ease their land and sea "blockade" of Qatar. Tillerson said the blockade was hindering the US-led campaign against the Islamic State group and having humanitarian consequences for ordinary people. But US officials insisted both men were sending the same message that

the countries of the region should not allow their differences to hinder the fight against extremism. Qatar is home to the largest US airbase in the Middle East, making it a key ally in the US-led coalition against the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria. But it has fallen out with its Arab

**GULF CRISIS**

UN says not bound by Saudi Arabia's 'terror list'

Amnesty bemoans cost of Gulf crisis on human rights

Russia, Turkey call for dialogue

figures a platform. Qatar has denounced the allegations of terror funding as baseless and has received the support of its close ally Turkey, which has approved the deployment of troops to defend the emirate. Saudi Arabia and its allies are demanding an immediate change of policy by Qatar was essential. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain released a joint statement listing 59 entities and individuals, including members of Qatar's royal family, as involved in "terrorist" activities. The United Nations yesterday said it is not bound by Saudi Arabia's "terror list" after the kingdom named several high-profile Qatari charities that carry out life-saving work in war-torn and impoverished countries on it. Amnesty International also yesterday warned of the "heartbreak and fear" being suffered by potentially thousands of ordinary individuals because of the political dispute in the Gulf that has isolated Qatar.

## UK GENERAL ELECTION

# Corbyn was just 2,227 votes away from becoming PM

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK  
Jeremy Corbyn was just 2,227 votes away from having the chance to become Prime Minister in the UK general election, an analysis of marginal seats has revealed. If the Labour leader had won seven seats narrowly taken by the Conservatives, he would have had the opportunity to form a "progressive alliance" with all other smaller parties, barring the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).



The Labour Party has said it was prepared to form a coalition government, with Corbyn announcing: "We are ready to serve." With seven more seats going to Corbyn, a coalition of Labour, the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National Party (SNP), Plaid Cymru, the Green Party and one independent MP in the House of Commons would have held 322 seats -- enough to block Theresa May and for Corbyn to enter No 10. The Green Party, SNP and Plaid Cymru had all spoken in favour of alliances, although the Liberal Democrats had ruled out joining with other parties during the election campaign.

The seven constituencies won by the Conservatives over Labour with the slimmest majorities were Southampton Itchen (majority 31); Preseli Pembrokeshire (majority 314); Hastings and Rye (majority 346); Chipping Barnet (majority 353); Thurrock (345 majority); Norwich North (majority 507); and Pudsey (majority 331). Although Corbyn was only 2,227 votes from having the opportunity to form a coalition government, May's Conservatives were only 287 votes from being able to form a working majority. Had the Conservatives seized four seats from Labour -- Dudley North (22 majority); Newcastle-under-Lyme (30 majority); Crew and Nantwich (48 majority); and Canterbury (187 majority) -- May would have been able to form a government without support from the Democratic Unionist Party, which won 10 seats. The calculation comes as the Tories were reeling from the loss of their majority, which it had looked as though they would substantially increase when Ms May called the election in April.

# '100 percent' ready to testify under oath

## Says Trump, accuses ex-FBI chief Comey of lying

AFP, Washington  
US President Donald Trump punched back Friday against James Comey, accusing the ousted FBI director of lying about their private conversations -- and saying he is "100 percent" willing to testify under oath. Comey delivered scathing testimony a day earlier in a highly anticipated Senate hearing, saying Trump sought to derail a probe into onetime national security advisor Michael Flynn -- at best, a political miscalculation, and at worst a criminal obstruction of justice. Trump was addressing reporters at the White House for the first time since Comey's explosive appearance, in which he branded the president a liar and said he believed he was fired over his handling of the FBI probe into Russian election meddling. "Yesterday showed no collusion, no obstruction," Trump said in reference to the twin controversies dogging his administra-

tion -- accusations his aides colluded with the Russian effort to tilt the vote, and that he sought to block the related Flynn probe. Trump lashed out at Comey, dubbing him a "leaker" for indirectly providing reporters with the contents of his memos summarizing their private conversations in the weeks before he was sacked. "Some of the things that he said just weren't true," added the president, who -- when asked if he would be willing to speak under oath to special prosecutor Robert Mueller about the encounters -- responded: "100 percent." The White House has seized on Comey's confirmation that Trump personally was not under investigation over his ties to Russia to declare a victory of sorts. The Trump administration has also highlighted the fact Comey stopped short of accusing the president of obstructing justice -- a potentially impeachable offense. The former FBI chief has said the decision was now in the hands of special counsel Mueller.



An Iraqi man carries an elderly woman on his back as civilians displaced by fighting between the Iraqi forces and Islamic State flee the al-Zanjili district in Mosul, Iraq, yesterday.

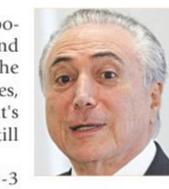
# Hundreds of migrants rescued off Libya

AFP, Rome  
More than 900 migrants have been rescued off the coast of Libya during the past 48 hours while trying to reach Italy, the Italian coastguard said Friday. Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said that it saved 716 of the migrants, and had found one body. "Around 800 people were rescued today (Friday) during eight separate operations" in the Mediterranean, said a spokesman for the coastguard, which is coordinating the operations. The migrants were on eight boats, including two inflatables, he said. Some 130 others were rescued on Thursday. MSF tweeted that it had "completed the 5th rescue (operation) and now have 716 people onboard. Unfortunately, for one person we arrived too late." The UN refugee agency has said around 61,250 migrants have reached Italy since the start of the year after crossing the Mediterranean, while 1,778 more are dead or missing. Conflict-ravaged Libya has long been a stepping stone for migrants seeking a better life in Europe. It has urged Europe, and particularly Italy, to supply it with the equipment it needs to monitor its southern borders, through which migrants, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, enter the country.

# Brazil court votes not to oust President Temer

AFP, Brasilia  
Brazilian President Michel Temer defied predictions of his imminent political demise when a court acquitted him on charges of having won election thanks to dirty money. And after Friday's vote in the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) he promptly went on the offensive in his battle to survive additional corruption accusations. Despite being branded by opponents a political "zombie" and likened to characters from "The Walking Dead" television series, the scandal-plagued president's acquittal in the TSE showed he still has plenty of political life. The TSE judges voted 4-3 against stripping Temer of his mandate on the grounds that the 2014 presidential election was contaminated by undeclared campaign donations and bribes. That clears him to serve out the rest of his term to the end of 2018. Dissenting judges painted a grim picture of the way Brazilian corporations seek to

buy politicians in Latin America's biggest country. But with the panel drawn at 3-3, the TSE's president Gilmar Mendes cast the deciding vote, urging cool heads at a time of national turmoil. "You don't switch the president of the republic every hour," he said. "There are serious proven facts but not enough to annul the mandate." That spared recession-ravaged Brazil being plunged into its second leadership crisis in 14 months, following the impeachment of leftist president Dilma Rousseff last year and her replacement by her then-vice president Temer. It also backed up Temer's strategy of arguing that corruption accusations against him are a dangerous distraction when he is needed to put Brazil back on the economic rails. Eurasia Group consultants said Temer's chances of being toppled before the end of his term have now dropped from 60 to 30 percent.



# 'IS bomber' kills 31 in Iraq market

REUTERS, Hilla  
A woman suicide bomber killed at least 31 people and wounded 35 in a crowded market in the town of Musayab, 80 km (50 miles) south of Baghdad, on Friday, security sources said. Islamic State claimed the attack, as well as one at the main bus station in the Shi'ite holy city of Kerbala, just west of Musayab, which killed three people and wounded 15. A security officer said the bomber in Musayab was a woman and had hidden the bomb under her full-body veil. Islamic State's statements identified both bombers as men. Meanwhile, a US-backed alliance broke into the western part of the Islamic State group's stronghold Raqa yesterday, the force and a monitor said, opening up a second front inside the Syrian city. Yesterday, they pierced into Raqa from the west, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group. The SDF captured the western half of the Al-Sabahiya neighbourhood and are reinforcing their positions there, Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman said.



# US committed to Nato's Article Five

AFP, Washington  
US President Donald Trump said Friday that the United States remained committed to Nato's mutual defense pledge, after he failed to endorse it in a speech in Brussels last month. Amid worries by Washington's European partners that the US leader had not fully bought into the Atlantic alliance, Trump told reporters: "I'm committing the United States to Article Five. Certainly we are there to protect." "That's one of the reasons that I want people to make sure we have a very, very strong force, by paying the kinds of money necessary to have that force," Trump told a press conference. The US president stunned Europe's leaders at a summit in Brussels on May 25 when he failed to publicly back the now 29-member bloc's founding mutual defense guarantee. According to Politico, Trump's defense and security advisors included in his prepared speech a clear endorsement of the mutual defense pledge, but Trump himself struck it out just before speaking. Just days before his January 20 inauguration, Trump rocked the post-World War II western alliance by calling Nato "obsolete." Article Five has been the core of the Nato treaty's strength since it was formed amid a budding Cold War with communist states -- particularly the Soviet Union -- in 1949.