

NEWS IN brief

Romania ruling party sinks own govt

AFP, Bucharest

Romania's government fell yesterday after the ruling party took the unusual step of passing a no-confidence vote in its own prime minister following internal power struggles. The left-wing Social Democrat party filed the motion against PMSorin Grindeanu barely 6 months after winning an election.

Evacuation after cop stabbed at US airport

AGENCIES

Bishop International Airport in Flint, Michigan, was evacuated yesterday morning following an "incident" that left an airport police officer injured, according to a brief statement on the airport's Facebook page. Reports indicate that the officer was stabbed. The statement did not provide further details about the incident and said all passengers were safe.

Hungary migrant death truck trial starts

AFP, Kecskemet

Eleven men went on trial yesterday over the deaths of 71 migrants found in an abandoned truck in Austria nearly two years ago, in one of the most disturbing cases marking Europe's migration crisis. The gruesome discovery of 59 men, eight women and four children crammed inside a refrigerated lorry near the Hungarian border in August 2015 sparked international revulsion.

UK's Prince Philip in hospital

AFP, London

Prince Philip, the 96-year-old husband of Queen Elizabeth II, has been admitted to hospital as a "precautionary measure" for treatment of an infection, Buckingham Palace said yesterday. The Duke of Edinburgh, who is to retire from public duties later this year, was admitted to King Edward VII Hospital in London on Tuesday night.



Residents react after Islamist militants attacked a village in Pigcawayan, North Cotabato, Philippines, yesterday. The Philippine military said Islamist militants fled from a primary school in the south yesterday, leaving behind 31 hostages unharmed, including 12 children, after a day-long gunbattle with troops. There was no word of casualties in the incident.

PHOTO: REUTERS

TERROR ATTACK AT BRUSSELS TRAIN STATION

'Could have been much worse'

AFP, Brussels

Belgium yesterday said a Moroccan man carried out a foiled terrorist attack with a nail bomb at a busy Brussels train station, the latest in a wave of attacks to hit Europe.

The 36-year-old man, identified only as O.Z., shouted "Allahu Akbar" and tried to detonate a suitcase in a group of passengers at Brussels Central station before a soldier shot him dead on Tuesday.

The suspect, from the largely immigrant Brussels neighbourhood of Molenbeek which has been linked to a number of previous attacks, was not known to police for terrorism offences. No one was injured in the attack.

"It could have been much worse," Belgian federal prosecutor's spokesman Eric Van Der Sypt told a news conference. "It is clear that he wanted to cause more damage than he did."

Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel said a "terrorist attack has been prevented" in the city that hosts the EU and Nato headquarters.

But he said that while security would be stepped up, the country's terror alert level would be kept stable.

The blast came a day after a man mowed down Muslims near a mosque in London, and a suspected Islamist on a terror watchlist rammed a car laden with weapons into a police vehicle in Paris.

Brussels has been on high alert since suicide bombers struck Zaventem Airport and the Maalbeek metro station near the EU quarter in March 2016, killing 32 people and injuring hundreds more.

China tried but failed

Says Trump on Beijing's effort to reign in North Korea

AFP, Washington

Senior US officials were to meet their Chinese counterparts to seek a tougher line on North Korea's nuclear ambitions -- despite President Donald Trump implying this is already a lost cause.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis are to meet top Beijing diplomat State Councilor Yang Jiechi and General Fang Fenghui, chief of Chinese army staff, at the State Department.

US officials said the first and main item on the agenda would be persuading China to lean on Kim Jong-Un's North Korea regime, in order to halt its provocative missile and nuclear plans.

But, just hours before the talks began, Trump sent a tweet implying that China's President Xi Jinping had already tried and failed to rein in Pyongyang.

"While I greatly appreciate the efforts of President Xi & China to help with North Korea, it has not worked out. At least I know China tried!" Trump tweeted.

Trump did not elaborate on what might happen next, and US diplomats

insisted the talks would go ahead as planned, and with the same agenda.

In April, Trump hosted Xi at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, glossing over his harsh campaign comments against Beijing and -- after apparently successful talks -- hailing the dawn of "a very, very great relationship."

Last month Beijing and Washington signed a limited deal to open new



markets for each other's exports, and a long-standing friend of the Chinese leadership, Iowa Governor Terry Branstad, was confirmed as ambassador.

But tensions remain -- particularly over China's building of artificial islands in disputed South China Sea waters, and Washington's strong desire to get Beijing to rein in Kim Jong-Un's

isolated North Korean regime.

Despite international condemnation and sanctions, North Korea has a small nuclear arsenal and is developing nuclear-capable ballistic missiles that threaten Japan and South Korea -- and one-day could even hit some US cities.

Washington has some 28,000 troops deployed in South Korea and a naval armada in the region.

Last week, the release of a detained US tourist in what initially seemed a gesture of goodwill by Pyongyang turned sour when it was revealed that 22-year-old Otto Warmbier had been in a coma for some time.

Warmbier died on Monday after returning to his hometown in Ohio, triggering outrage in the United States.

Trump's White House has made halting the nuclear threat its number one foreign policy priority, putting aside concerns over trade and currency manipulation to seek Beijing's help in facing down Kim.

China has tightened controls on trade in North Korean coal, but many doubt that Beijing will truly enforce any sanctions that might threaten the stability of its unpredictable neighbor.

May softens tone on Brexit

Promises to listen harder, Trump's UK visit in question

REUTERS, London

Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday promised to listen more closely to businesses' concerns about Britain leaving the European Union as she set out a Brexit-focused government programme, pared-back to reflect her weakened authority.

Chastened by an election which left her Conservative Party short of a majority in parliament and reopened debate on the nature of Britain's EU exit, May also sidelined reform on social care, education and corporate governance.

The two-year programme for government, known as the Queen's Speech, was prepared by ministers and read out by Queen Elizabeth in parliament at its formal opening ceremony.

The queen told lawmakers from both the upper and lower houses of parliament that the government is committed to building "the widest possible consensus" on Brexit, working with parliament, devolved administrations, business and others. "My government's priority is to secure the best possible deal as the country leaves the European Union," the queen said.

The traditionally ceremonial address, dominated by pageantry, was a crucial testing ground for May's ability to run the coun-

try during its most challenging period for generations.

Her authority has been badly damaged just as Britain begins Brexit negotiations. Four militant attacks have raised questions about her grip on national security, and the death of at least 79 people in a tower block fire has become a flashpoint for public anger at her party's record in government.

Lawmakers will have to approve the speech in a vote, expected next Thursday, that will be a de facto vote of confidence.

Minority governments are a rare occurrence in British parliamentary politics where the electoral system usually produces a governing majority.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump's planned state visit to Britain later this year got no mention in Queen Elizabeth II's speech to parliament yesterday, raising doubts about whether it will go ahead.

The omission follows media reports that Trump no longer wants to come because of British public opposition to the visit, after a petition to cancel it received more than 1.8 million signatures.

It is customary for the monarch to list state visits in the annual speech, and Elizabeth did mention one such visit coming up next month by Spain's King Felipe and Queen Letizia.



Prepare coffins

Cambodia PM tells critics, opponents

AFP, Phnom Penh

Cambodia's strongman premier yesterday told his critics and political opponents they faced elimination and should "prepare coffins", an escalation in rhetoric even for a man known for bellicose speeches.

Prime Minister Hun Sen has ruled the impoverished nation for 32 years, making him one of the world's longest serving leaders.

He portrays himself as a leader who has brought growth and stability while critics say corruption, inequality and right abuses have become entrenched during his years in office.

The 64-year-old delivered a string of increasingly shrill speeches in the run up to local elections earlier this month, which saw the main opposition party make significant gains.

But yesterday he delivered one of his most vitriolic speeches yet, warning of civil war if his party is toppled in next year's general election.

Flanked by top military brass and senior government officials, Hun Sen said troops were ready to "crack down on all movements that would topple (the government) and damage the nation."

"Your tongues are the cause of war," he said of his critics. "If you guys keep insulting, threatening to kill, you guys should prepare coffins. I'm warning you," he added.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi participates in a mass yoga session along with other Indian yoga practitioners to mark the 3rd International Yoga Day at Ramabhai Ambedkar Sabha Shal in Lucknow, yesterday. Yoga has connected the world with India, Modi said as he rolled his mat along with millions of others across the globe to celebrate the traditional practice.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Macron allies quit French govt

AFP, Paris

Two more ministers from the centrist party that helped bring French President Emmanuel Macron to power quit the government yesterday as he prepared to unveil a new cabinet.

Justice Minister Francois Bayrou, leader of the small MoDem party and a key ally of Macron's in the presidential campaign, told AFP: "I have taken a decision not to be part of the next government."

European Affairs Minister Marielle de Sarnes is also set to resign, meaning all three MoDem ministers are leaving the cabinet after just over one month in office.

Defence Minister Sylvie Goulard stood down on Tuesday, saying she could not carry on while MoDem was facing an investigation into claims it broke European Parliament rules by using funds to pay assistants who are actually based in France.

MoDem entered an alliance with Macron's 14-month-old Republic on the Move (REM) movement for the presidential and legislative elections.

In exchange, the president rewarded the party for its support by giving them key jobs in his first cabinet -- a caretaker government between the two elections.

France's youngest ever president has pledged to usher in a new era of cleaner politics after a series of scandals involving ministers under his Socialist predecessor Francois Hollande.

Observers say that pledge makes it difficult for Macron to keep MoDem in his new government while it is facing a probe.

Richard Ferrand, a junior minister from Macron's party, has also left the government, this time at the president's request after he became embroiled in a conflict-of-interest scandal involving his wife.

Risky face off over Baltic

Nato jet approaches Russian defence minister's plane after US spy plane faces unsafe encounter

AFP, Washington

A Russian fighter conducted an "unsafe" intercept of a US reconnaissance plane over the Baltic Sea, the US military said Tuesday.

"On June 19, a US RC-135U flying in international airspace over the Baltic Sea was intercepted by a Russian SU-27 Flanker," Europe Command spokesman

Captain Joseph Alonso said in a statement.

"Due to the high rate of closure speed and poor control of the aircraft during the intercept, this interaction was determined to be unsafe."

Meanwhile, a Nato military plane yesterday approached the plane of Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu above the Baltic Sea, Russian news agencies reported, the third such encounter in three days.

A Nato fighter jet tried to approach Shoigu's plane but a Russian escort plane intervened to defend it, Interfax news agency reported, citing

journalists accompanying the minister.

The escort plane, a Sukhoi SU-27, demonstrated it was armed by rocking its wings, after which the Nato plane flew off, Interfax reported.

Russian state television aired defence ministry footage of the incident, reporting that it took place over neutral waters.

Shoigu was flying to Kaliningrad, a highly militarised Russian exclave on the Baltic Sea, to take part in a meeting with defence officials there.

At the meeting, he warned that "the situation near Russia's western borders is tending to get worse," TASS news agency reported.

"This is tied with the upsurge of military activity of the Nato countries in Europe," Shoigu added.

The meeting came after Nato held military exercises at the weekend in Poland on the Lithuanian border close to Kaliningrad.



Temps soar in Europe, US

Scorching heatwave caused fires, grounds flights, prompted power outages

AGENCIES

Europe, US sizzled in a heatwave yesterday, with London bracing for Britain's hottest June day since 1976 as Portugal battled to stamp out deadly forest fires.

More than 1,000 firefighters were still fighting to control the flames that broke out in central Portugal at the weekend, killing 64 people.

Cooler weather was aiding their efforts, but thermometers were still hovering around 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit) -- a level matched across oven-like swathes of Europe, including Italy, Austria, the Netherlands and even alpine Switzerland.

Two forest fires have also broken out since Sunday on Croatia's southern Adriatic coast, prompting the authorities to evacuate 800 tourists, though the blazes have now been brought under control.

"We were scared, it's true," a Swedish tourist who gave her name only as Karolina told local media. "From the hotel room window it seemed like the fire was at our doors."

As the northern hemisphere marked the summer solstice, firefighters were on alert in Austria, where revellers

were due to celebrate the longest day of the year by lighting bonfires for the festival of Saint John.

In Italy, forecasters say the current heatwave could turn out to be the most intense in 15 years, with temperatures around eight degrees above the seasonal average -- 39 degrees Celsius in Milan and up to 30 in the Alps at an altitude of 1,000 metres (3,300 feet).

Britain was set to see its first five-day stretch of temperatures over 30 degrees in June since 1995. The thermometer was forecast to hit 34 Celsius in west London, a record for the month since 1976.

In Guildford, southwest of the capital, a road surface melted on Tuesday, with motorists likening it to a bar of chocolate left out in the hot sun.

A scorching heatwave in the western United States has grounded flights, caused fires and prompted power outages, with record temperatures expected Tuesday in several states including Arizona and Nevada.

The extreme temperatures prompted American Airlines on Tuesday to ground 43 flights to and from Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport, where temperatures were set to reach a record 120 degrees Fahrenheit (49 degrees Celsius).

