

**NEWS IN**  
*brief*

**1989 Hillsborough disaster: 6 charged**

Four former senior policemen were among six people charged yesterday over the 1989 Hillsborough stadium disaster in England that killed 96 Liverpool football supporters. The disaster occurred on April 15, 1989 during an FA Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest, in Sheffield, northern England.

**EU extends Russia economic sanctions**

The European Union yesterday formally rolled over damaging economic sanctions against Russia for another six months, saying Moscow had failed to live up to its Ukraine ceasefire commitments. EU leaders endorsed the move last week, charging that Russia had not halted its support for pro-Moscow rebels in eastern Ukraine nor put pressure on them to respect a ceasefire brokered by France and Germany which was meant to help end a deadly conflict dating back to early 2014.

**Facebook hits two billion user mark**

Facebook said Tuesday it now counts two billion active monthly users, as the social giant's founder Mark Zuckerberg highlighted his new mission -- not just connecting people, but helping them find common ground. Founded in 2004, the social media behemoth hit the billion-user mark five years ago.

**M Mattis rebukes Putin for 'mischief'**

Pentagon chief Jim Mattis yesterday accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of making international "mischief" and said America's commitment to Nato remains unwavering.

**25 migrants found dead on Libya coast**

The bodies of at least 25 migrants who drowned trying to reach Europe were found near Tripoli Tuesday, the Libyan Red Crescent said. Some of the corpses were washed ashore on a beach near the Libyan capital, but most were on rocks off the suburb of Tajoura in a state of decomposition, an AFP photographer at the scene said.



Colombia's Marxist Farc rebel leader Rodrigo Londono and Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos shake hands during a ceremony to mark the disarmament of rebels in Mesetas, Colombia, on Tuesday. Inset, Picture of a pair of boots belonging to a Farc rebel in which he planted plants as a symbol of life and peace. Farc rebel force declared its disarmament complete on Tuesday after half a century of war against the state, bringing an end to Latin America's oldest armed guerrilla force.



PHOTO: REUTERS

**Nepal holds landmark polls in crisis-hit south**

Millions of Nepalis yesterday voted in the country's first local elections for two decades, a key step in its post-war transformation from feudal monarchy to federal democracy. The government had deployed troops and sealed the border with India, fearing violence in yesterday's second phase of voting. Police said a small bomb exploded in the west of the country, but there were no casualties and the polls passed off broadly peacefully. The elections began last month in other parts of the nation but were repeatedly delayed in the southern plains, which were shaken two years ago by deadly ethnic protests. Voting took place across around half the country of 26 million people, including large swathes of the south. The local elections are supposed to be the final step in the peace deal that ended a 10-year civil war in 2006. Since then the country has suffered persistent instability, cycling through nine governments in a decade. The government had repeatedly postponed the polls in the south due to objections from the local Madhesi ethnic minority, who say federal boundaries laid out in a new national constitution will leave them under-represented in parliament. The Rastriya Janata Party-Nepal (RJP-N), the main party representing the Madhesi community, has said it will boycott Wednesday's phase, raising doubts about the legitimacy of the vote. The polls will pave the way for provincial elections and then a national election, which must be held by January 2018 when the mandate of the current parliament expires.

**Gulf crisis drags on**

*Qatar slams Saudi Arabia's refusal to negotiate over demands as top diplomats meet in Washington to solve impasse*

Qatar yesterday condemned Saudi Arabia's refusal to negotiate the demands of the kingdom and its allies for ending a crippling embargo on the emirate.

Speaking from Washington, where he held talks with US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on Tuesday, Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said the Saudi position was unacceptable.

"This is contrary to the principles that govern international relations because you can't just present lists of demands and refuse to negotiate," Sheikh Mohammed said in comments published in Doha.

His Saudi counterpart Adel al-Jubeir, who is also in Washington, was unbudging on Tuesday over the three-week-old dispute, which has left Qatar, a US ally, isolated under a trade and diplomatic embargo set by its Gulf Arab neighbours.

"Our demands on Qatar are non-negotiable. It's now up to Qatar to end its support for extremism and terrorism," Jubeir said on Twitter.

With the support of the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain, the Saudis announced on June 5 they were suspending all ties with Qatar, accusing it of support for extremist groups -- a claim Doha denies.

They closed their airspace to Qatari carriers and blocked the emirate's only land border, a vital route for its food imports. They also ordered all Qataris to leave and their own nationals to return home.

Last week, Riyadh laid down a list of 13 demands for Qatar, including ending Doha's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, the closure of Al-Jazeera television, a downgrade of diplomatic ties with Iran and the shutdown of a Turkish military base in the emirate.



The United Arab Emirates warned that Qatar should take the demands seriously or face "divorce" from its Gulf neighbours.

"The hour of truth is near," tweeted UAE state minister for foreign affairs Anwar Gargash. "It's time for our brother (Qatar) to choose... honesty and transparency and to realise that media furore and ideological heroism are illusions."

"We have long suffered (Qatar's) conspiracy against our stability and witnessed its support for ideologies that aim to sow chaos in the Arab world. Enough. Return to reason," Gargash wrote.

Meanwhile, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) ambassador to Russia yesterday said that the bloc is considering fresh sanctions against Qatar that may include asking trading partners to choose between them or Doha.

**SCOTLAND'S INDEPENDENCE DRIVE**

**Nicola Sturgeon rules out new referendum for now**

Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon on Tuesday postponed plans for a second independence referendum, after a British general election in which her secessionist party suffered major losses.

"We will not introduce the legislation for an independence referendum immediately," the Scottish National Party (SNP) leader told Scotland's parliament in Edinburgh.

Sturgeon said she would "reset" the timetable for holding a referendum by spring 2019, when Britain is expected to leave the European Union. She said she would look at the plan again in autumn 2018 when the outlines of the deal that Britain is to strike in the Brexit negotiations become clear.

The June 8 election "has re-opened the possibility, however narrow, of averting a hard Brexit and retaining membership of the single market", she said. Scotland voted by 55 percent against independence in a 2014 referendum. But Sturgeon had argued that the Brexit

referendum last year -- in which Scotland voted to stay in the EU but Britain as a whole opted to leave -- justified her demand for a second independence vote.

Prime Minister Theresa May, whose permission would be required for another independence ballot, had told her that "now is not the time" for a referendum.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson agreed with May that Sturgeon should end any lingering uncertainty by ruling out the prospect of a referendum for the rest of this parliamentary term.

"Most people simply don't want this brought back anytime soon," Davidson told the Scottish parliament.

She said the SNP leader was "in denial" and "lacking credibility and confidence in her leadership by the hour".

In the June 8 general election, the SNP came first in Scotland but lost 21 parliamentary seats, prompting calls for Sturgeon to abandon plans for independence altogether.

Overall, May's Conservatives lost their majority in parliament, and the premier is now under pressure to soften her demands in the Brexit negotiations with Brussels.



**CYBERATTACKS**

**Nato may trigger Article 5: chief**

Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg warned the alliance must step up its defence against cyberattacks, saying they could potentially trigger their Article 5 mutual defence commitment.

Computer users around the world were scrambling Wednesday to reboot systems after a tidal wave of ransomware cyberattacks spread from Ukraine and Russia across Europe to the United States and then on to Asia. It seemed to be very similar to the WannaCry ransomware which hit more than 200,000 users in more than 150 countries last month.

Stoltenberg said the "attack in May and this week just underlines the importance of strengthening our cyber defences and that is what we are doing."

"We exercise more, we share best practices and technology and we also work more and more closely with all allies," he told reporters ahead of a Nato defence ministers meeting in Brussels on Thursday at which cyber-security will be a key talking point.

Stoltenberg recalled that Nato leaders had agreed last year that a cyber attack could be considered a threat sufficiently serious to warrant invoking the alliance's 'all for one, one for all' security guarantee.

They also made cyber a Nato domain -- on a par with the traditional air, sea and land arms to become part of overall alliance planning and resource allocation.



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi hugs US President Donald Trump as he departs the White House after a visit, in Washington, US, on Monday. US Vice President Mike Pence on Tuesday hailed the first meeting between Trump and Modi as "historic and productive" and said Trump recognises US ties with India as "one of the most important strategic relationships in the 21st century."

**US court halts deportations of all Iraqis**

A US judge has halted deportations of all Iraqi nationals -- some set to be removed as early as Tuesday -- on the grounds they could be tortured or killed if returned to the Middle Eastern country.

US District Judge Mark Goldsmith on Monday expanded nationwide an earlier order affecting mostly Chaldean Christians who were arrested in immigration raids in the state of Michigan, alarming local Iraqi communities. The judge said his latest order temporarily halts removal proceedings against as many as 1,444 people, including in Tennessee and New Mexico, of whom 85 faced removal as early as Tuesday.

The order comes as the federal government prepares to block certain citizens from six predominantly Muslim countries from traveling to the US, after the Supreme Court Monday partially reinstated President Donald Trump's controversial travel ban ahead of a hearing on the case.

In a March deal between the US and Iraq, the Trump administration agreed to remove the Middle Eastern country from the initial version of its proposed ban, in exchange for Iraq agreeing to take in deported immigrants.

More than 100 Iraqi immigrants with criminal records were arrested in the Detroit area in an immigration raid earlier this month -- prompting a lawsuit. They were slated for deportation back to the war-torn Middle Eastern country with a history of religious animus.

Judge Goldsmith last week granted a temporary restraining order to pause any impending removals to give immigrants a chance to show that they would be in danger if sent back.

**US, France set Syria redline**

*Vow 'joint response' in case of new chemical attack*

US President Donald Trump and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron agreed Tuesday on a joint response in the event of another chemical attack in Syria, as Washington warned Damascus would pay a "heavy price" for such a move.

The tough language, in a phone call between the two leaders, came a day after the White House accused President Bashar al-Assad's regime of preparing a potential chemical weapons attack.

Washington's warning to Damascus -- which prompted criticism from regime allies Russia and Iran -- coincided with a wave of US-led coalition air strikes that killed nearly 60 people at a Syrian prison run by the Islamic State group.

The coalition has been striking IS in Syria and Iraq since mid-2014 but has also been involved in recent confrontations with Assad's forces, raising fears of the United States being drawn into Syria's civil war.

A Pentagon spokesman said Tuesday that US intelligence had noticed suspect activity at the launch site of an apparent chemical strike by the regime two months ago.

The April attack on the rebel-held town of Khan Sheikhun was reported

attack was launched -- the first direct US action against the regime, which denies any use of chemical weapons.

White House spokesman Sean Spicer warned Monday night that if "Assad conducts another mass murder attack using chemical weapons, he and

**DEVELOPMENTS**

- Dozens dead in US-led raids on jihadist-run jail
- Iran warns US against 'dangerous' escalation
- 30 civilians dead in air strikes on IS-held area



to have killed at least 87 people, including many children, and images of the dead and of suffering victims provoked global outrage.

Washington launched a retaliatory cruise missile strike days later against the Shayrat airbase where it said the

his military will pay a heavy price."

After a meeting last month with Assad's ally, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Macron had drawn a "very clear red line" on the use of chemical weapons in Syria and warned of reprisals.

**Facing revolt within party, GOP delays Senate vote**

*US mayors bypass Trump to back Paris climate goals*

US Republicans eager to repeal "Obamacare" suffered a deeply embarrassing setback Tuesday when shrinking support forced them to postpone votes on their controversial health care overhaul, one of President Donald Trump's top priorities.

With the Senate bill delayed by a few weeks and maybe more, the timeline of the effort -- and the overall viability of a years-long bid to dismantle Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act in favor of a Republican replacement -- was thrown into question.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell acknowledged he simply did not have the votes, after a grim, non-partisan forecast projected the bill would leave 22 million fewer people insured by 2026, as compared to current law.

The ideological differences between conservatives and moderates were so stark that it became clear that leadership did not even have the 50 votes in the 100-member chamber needed to simply begin debate on the bill.

The Senate delay is a huge blow to Trump and Republican lawmakers who have spent the last seven years plotting an end to the Affordable Care Act, commonly known as Obamacare.

It also highlights the deep ideological divides within the party over how to improve the health care system while not cutting millions of Americans out of insurance coverage.

In another blow to Trump, his decision to pull out of the Paris climate accord has triggered a bipartisan push from US mayors to stick to the emissions cuts Washington had pledged to hit, the mayor of Atlanta said Tuesday.

Mayor Kasim Reed said he was sending a signal of "optimism, passion and action" on fighting climate change to mayors worldwide despite the pullout Trump announced this month.

Reed said he had attended a meeting in Miami on Saturday where more than 300 US mayors from both the Democratic and Republican parties pledged to honour the commitments Trump's predecessor Barack Obama agreed to in Paris.