

NEWSIN brief

US deploys Patriot missiles in Lithuania

AFP, Vilnius

The United States deployed a battery of Patriot ground-to-air missiles in Lithuania yesterday as part of multinational Nato exercises in the Baltic country, its defence ministry announced. The missiles will return home after the Nato exercises, called Tobruq Legacy 2017 end on July 22, said ministry spokeswoman Austra Vaitkeviciute.

Trump's visit to UK delayed until 2018

AFP, London

US President Donald Trump's state visit to Britain is being planned for next year, a senior British government source said yesterday. Prime Minister Theresa May extended the invitation when she visited Washington just days after Trump's inauguration in January, but a date has yet to be set.

16 dead in military plane crash in US

AFP, Washington

A US military aircraft crashed Monday in the southern state of Mississippi, killing 16 people, US media reported. The US Marine Corps confirmed that a "mishap" involving a KC-130 occurred in the evening, without providing additional details.

Saudi executes six people in a day

AFP, Riyadh

Six people convicted of drug trafficking and homicide were executed in Saudi Arabia on Monday, the government said, the highest number of executions in a single day this year. A Pakistani citizen was executed for drug trafficking and five Saudi nationals for homicide. Monday's executions bring to 44 the number of convicts put to death this year. Saudi Arabia reported 153 people executed last year.



Smoke plumes billowing in the Old City of Mosul during fighting between Iraqi forces and Islamic State (IS) group fighters. IS has captured most of a village south of Mosul despite losing control of its stronghold in the city, an Iraqi army officer and residents said, deploying guerrilla-style tactics as its self-proclaimed caliphate crumbles. The picture was taken on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Iraq must stop IS 2.0

Says US commander as UN says up to 3,000 still trapped in Mosul

AGENCIES

A senior US commander in Iraq has warned that the war against so-called Islamic State (IS) is not over, despite a "historic" victory in Mosul.

Lt Gen Stehen Townsend told the BBC Iraqis needed to unite to ensure IS was defeated across the rest of Iraq. He also urged the government to reach out to the Sunni Arab minority.

"If we're to keep... ISIS 2.0 from emerging, the Iraqi government is going to have to do something pretty significantly different," he said.

"They're going to have to reach out and reconcile with the Sunni population, and make them feel like their government in Baghdad represents them."

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared victory over "brutality and terrorism" in Mosul on Monday, announcing his forces had ended the Islamic State group's rule over the country's second city.

Standing with members of the security forces, Abadi hailed the retaking of Mosul -- where IS dealt

Iraqi troops a devastating defeat three years ago -- as a key moment in the war against the jihadists, reported AFP.

"Our victory today is a victory over darkness, a victory over brutality and terrorism, and I announce here... to the whole world today the end and failure and collapse of the mythical terrorist Daesh state," Abadi said in a

WAR ON IS IN SYRIA, IRAQ

Iraq, allies violated int'l law in Mosul battle: Amnesty

50,000 civilians trapped in Raqqa

televised address from west Mosul, using an Arabic acronym for IS.

US President Donald Trump also praised the victory, saying it was a signal that IS's "days in Iraq and Syria are numbered".

But rebuilding the shattered city of Mosul and helping civilians will be a huge task, and aid groups warn that Iraq's humanitarian crisis is far from

over, reported AFP.

Meanwhile, sporadic clashes continued in the city of Mosul yesterday. The US-led coalition supporting Iraqi forces said they were rooting out a "handful" of militants in the Old City.

The UN's humanitarian co-ordinator told the BBC that up to 3,000 civilians were also still trapped in the area.

Across the border, in Syria up to 50,000 civilians remain trapped in the jihadist stronghold of Raqqa, the UN said yesterday, warning that supplies of water and other essentials were fast running out.

US-backed forces have been closing in on the last redoubt in Syria of the Islamic State group after penetrating its Old City last week, but an estimated 2,500 jihadists are still defending the centre.

Amnesty International said yesterday tactics used by Iraqi forces and their US-led coalition allies in the battle for Mosul violated international humanitarian law and might amount to war crimes, reported Reuters.

Pak PM faces pressure

Opposition demands his resignation after SC probe finds unusual wealth in Sharif family

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was fighting for his political future yesterday after judicial investigators ruled his family had accumulated unusual wealth, with his allies denouncing the findings and vowing he would clear his name.

A Joint Investigation Team (JIT), set up by the Supreme Court to investigate corruption allegations that surfaced following the Panama Papers leak, spent two months looking into the family's wealth and gave its finding to the court on Monday.

In their report, which has been leaked to media, the team alleges Sharif's family accumulated wealth far above its earnings, and says his children, including heir-apparent Maryam Sharif, signed falsified documents designed to mask the truth.

Opposition leader Imran Khan said Sharif had "lost all moral authority" and must resign immediately.

But Sharif's allies dismissed all the

'I love it'

Trump Jr replied to email offering damaging info on Clinton

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump's eldest son yesterday released emails showing he embraced Russia's efforts to support his father's presidential campaign, and admitting he would "love" to get dirt from Moscow on Hillary Clinton.

The email chain, released in its entirety by Donald Jr on his Twitter account shortly before The New York Times published it, effectively confirms that he believed Moscow was behind the compromising information about Clinton that he hoped to receive at a meeting last year with a Kremlin-connected Russian lawyer, Natalia Veselnitskaya.

The disclosure places the president's son at the center of a burgeoning scandal involving multiple US investigations into whether Trump associates colluded with Russia last year in its covert efforts to tip the 2016 elections to the Republican billionaire.

He had been told by a friend that the information Ms Veselnitskaya had to offer would "incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful to your father". It added: "This is obviously very high level and sensitive information but is part of Russia and its government's support for Mr Trump."

Trump Jr replied a few minutes later: "If it's what you say I love it especially later in the summer."



US moves to defuse row

Tillerson in Gulf as Qatar signs counter-terror deal

AFP, Doha

Qatar and the United States yesterday signed a deal on combatting "terrorism" as visiting US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson pursued efforts to resolve the Gulf diplomatic crisis.

In Qatar as part of a series of Gulf meetings, Tillerson also said Doha had been "reasonable" in the dispute, which has seen Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt cut ties with the emirate over accusations it supports extremism.

Tillerson is spending much of this week in the Gulf seeking to mediate in the rift among crucial US allies, and will meet foreign ministers of the four countries isolating Qatar in the Saudi city of Jeddah today.

After talks with senior officials in Doha yesterday, Tillerson and Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani announced the deal targeting extremist financing.

"The memorandum lays out a series of steps the two countries will take over the

coming months and years to interrupt and disable terror financing flows and intensify counter-terrorism activities globally," Tillerson said at a joint press conference.

He said the deal meant Qatar was "the first to respond" to US President Donald Trump's call at a summit in Riyadh earlier this year "to stop the funding of terrorism" -- suggesting that such deals could be signed with the other Arab states as a step towards ending the crisis.

Tillerson flew back to Kuwait -- the main mediator in the crisis and where he is based this week -- after the talks in Qatar.

The four countries on June 5 announced sanctions against Qatar over accusations Doha supported Islamist extremism and was too close to Iran. They severed all diplomatic ties, suspended transport links with Doha and ordered all Qataris to return home within 14 days.

On June 22, the Saudi-led bloc issued a list of 13 demands which, if met, would end the sanctions, including closing Al-Jazeera, downgrading ties to Iran. Qatar refused to comply.

GULF CRISIS



Bosnian Muslim women offers prayers near the caskets of 71 victims of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, at the memorial cemetery in the village of Potocari, near the Eastern-Bosnian town of Srebrenica, yesterday. The remains of some 71 newly identified victims' of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre were buried yesterday on the 22nd anniversary of the massacre in which nearly 8,000 men and boys from the enclave were captured and systematically killed by Bosnian Serb forces.

PHOTO: AFP

Indian SC stays govt ban on cow slaughter

AFP, New Delhi

India's top court yesterday stayed a nationwide ban imposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government on the sale of cattle for slaughter that had provoked outcry in many states.

The Supreme Court upheld a decision by a lower court staying the ban imposed in May, which prohibited the sale and purchase of cows -- an animal considered sacred for Hindus -- for slaughter.

The sudden ruling had sparked protests against what many saw as an overreach by the Hindu-right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and many states where cow slaughter was legal vowed to fight the decree.

Petitioners in the southern state of Tamil Nadu launched the first challenge, claiming the ban infringed their right to eat what they choose, a flashpoint issue in the Hindu-majority nation.

Allegations of cow slaughter and beef consumption against Muslims and other minorities have triggered murders and violent reprisals in India, where many are vegetarian.

"This is a welcome ruling and we expect the court will now look into the constitutional validity of the order," Ajmal Khan, the lawyer who represented petitioners in Tamil Nadu, told AFP.

"Our stand is vindicated."

In its ruling, the Supreme Court said the government had already given it a commitment that it would review the rules on the sale of cattle for slaughter.

Some states organized beef festivals in the days after the ban was announced to protest the measure, while counter rallies by BJP supporters saw cows adorned with flowers.

TERROR ATTACK ON AMARNATH PILGRIMS

Indian leaders, Kashmiri separatists vent outrage

AGENCIES

Indian leaders and Kashmiri separatists united yesterday to condemn an attack on a bus that killed seven Hindu pilgrims and threatened to exacerbate tensions in the country's only Muslim-majority state.

Six women and a man died when unidentified gunmen opened fire late Monday on a bus carrying Hindus on the annual pilgrimage to a Himalayan cave revered as the abode of the god Shiva.

It was the worst such attack in the divided Himalayan region since 2000 when gunmen fired on a group of Hindu pilgrims, killing 32 people including two police officers.

The chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir state said the attack was a "blot on all Muslims and Kashmiris". "Pilgrims come to Kashmir every year

for the yatra (pilgrimage) despite all difficulties. And seven people died today. I have no words to condemn it," Mehbooba Mufti Sayeed told reporters as she visited wounded victims in hospital.



Protests also took place in the country's financial capital of Mumbai and the industrial city of Ahmedabad in the west, reported Reuters.

"Pained beyond words on the dastardly attack on peaceful Amarnath

pilgrims in Jammu and Kashmir," Modi said on social network Twitter.

"The attack deserves strongest condemnation from everyone," he added, saying he had spoken to the state's governor and chief minister to assure them of all possible help.

Tens of thousands of Hindus from all over India travel to Kashmir every year to visit a phallus-shaped ice formation in the Amarnath caves that is worshipped as a symbol of Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction, reported AFP.

Separatist leaders in Kashmir condemned the attack, which they said "goes against the very grain of Kashmiri ethos".

The incident happened amid high tensions in Indian-administered Kashmir, where militant groups have for decades been fighting for independence or a merger with neighbouring Pakistan.

Brexit worries mount as May marks a yr in power

AFP, London

A weakened Theresa May came under fresh pressure yesterday to soften her Brexit position, adding to uncertainty about her negotiating strategy with Brussels one year after she became Britain's leader.

The prime minister marked the anniversary with a speech in which she appealed to the main Labour opposition party to help implement her policies, a month after losing her majority in a general election.

Amid rumours of plans to oust her, May accepted that "the reality I now face as prime minister is rather different" than it was before the June 8 election.

May took over last year after her predecessor David Cameron resigned in the wake of a shock referendum in which Britain voted to leave the European Union.

The austere vicar's daughter was seen as a safe pair of hands who could heal a Conservative Party that emerged bitterly divided from the referendum.

But her government has been forced into a series of embarrassing U-turns and her gamble of holding an early election backfired spectacularly.

Key parts of her Brexit plan are now also under fire from critics within her own party who want a more moderate approach and whose voices are suddenly influential because of the election result.

The latest fronts in the battle between proponents of a "hard" and "soft" Brexit are Britain's membership of the Europe's nuclear regulator Euratom and the authority of the European Court of Justice.

The government has also hinted it may relent on its hardline position of ending the authority of the EU's highest court in Britain from the moment the country leaves the bloc as expected in 2019.

The real showdown is expected after the government tomorrow publishes the Repeal Bill, a hefty draft law aimed at scrapping the cornerstone of Britain's EU membership, the European Communities Act.

