

## NEWSIN brief

### 600,000 Yemenis risk cholera in 2017: ICRC

AFP, Aden

More than 600,000 people are expected to contract cholera in Yemen this year, the International Committee of the Red Cross warned yesterday as the war-torn country's healthcare system faces collapse. More than 370,000 people have fallen ill and 1,800 have died since late April in Yemen's second cholera outbreak in less than a year, according to the ICRC and the World Health Organization.

### Popularity tumbles for France's Macron: poll

AFP, Paris

A poll out yesterday shows the popularity rating of France's new President Emmanuel Macron has slumped 10 points to hit 54 percent over the past month. While Macron has made a strong start on the world stage and won a solid majority in parliament, his first three months in power have not been completely trouble-free.

### Venezuelan opposition readies fresh strike

AFP, Caracas

Venezuela's opposition has called a fresh 48-hour general strike against embattled President Nicolas Maduro's plans to have the constitution rewritten giving him broader powers. The walk-out comes as violent and sometimes deadly protests continue amid a political and economic crisis that has led to shortages of basic goods and soaring inflation.

### Flood fear forces mass evacuation in Japan

REUTERS, Tokyo

Tens of thousands of people in northeast Japan were told to evacuate their homes yesterday as heavy rain caused major flooding and cut some rail links, authorities said. The storm follows freak rains in southwestern Japan earlier this month that left at least 25 people dead.



Israeli border guards attempt to disperse Palestinian Muslim worshippers outside Lions' Gate, a main entrance to the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City, late Saturday, as they gather in protest against new Israeli security measures implemented at the holy site.

PHOTO: AFP

# US Congress agrees on Russia sanctions

## Defies Trump to punish Russia for alleged election meddling

REUTERS, Washington

US Republicans and Democrats have reached agreement on legislation that allows new sanctions against Russia, Iran and North Korea, leading congressional Democrats said on Saturday, in a bill that would limit any potential effort by President Donald Trump to try to lift sanctions against Moscow.

The Countering Iran's Destabilizing Activities Act, which was passed by the Senate a month ago, was held up in the House of Representatives after Republicans proposed including North Korea sanctions in the bill.

The House is set to vote on Tuesday on a package of bills on sanctions covering Russia, Iran and North Korea, according to House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy's office. The measure will "hold them accountable for their dangerous actions," McCarthy said in a statement Saturday.

Under the proposed bill, Trump

must submit to Congress a report on proposed actions that would "significantly alter" US foreign policy in connection with Russia, including easing sanctions or returning diplomatic properties in Maryland and New York that former President Barack Obama ordered vacated in December.

Congress would have at least 30 days to hold hearings and then vote to uphold or reject Trump's proposed changes.

Many lawmakers hope the bill will send a message to Trump to keep a strong line against Russia.

Trump, who met Putin at the Group of 20 summit in Hamburg earlier this month and said it was an "honor" to meet him, has been criticized for seeking to reset US-Russian relations. His administration has been bogged down by ongoing investigations of possible ties between his 2016 campaign and Russia.

With the bill, Republicans and Democrats are seeking to punish Russia for

its 2014 annexation of Crimea, a peninsula belong to Ukraine, and for meddling in the 2016 presidential election.

Putin has denied any meddling in the US democratic process last year. Trump has said that his campaign did not collude with Russia.

House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi said Russia's "outrageous and unacceptable" behaviour in the 2016 US election and in Europe "demand that we have strong statutory sanctions enacted as soon as possible."

Even so, she expressed concerns that by including North Korea the legislation could face procedural delays in the Senate.

Senior Republican lawmakers did not immediately comment on the latest bill.

In Brussels, the European Union sounded an alarm about the US moves to step up sanctions on Russia, urging Washington to coordinate with its Group of 7 partners.

# Trump asserts 'complete power to pardon'

Reuters, Norfolk

US President Donald Trump declared on Saturday that he has "complete power to pardon," as his administration confronts ongoing investigations of possible ties between his 2016 campaign and Russia.

In a series of early morning Twitter messages, Trump aired renewed frustration with his attorney general, the special counsel leading the Russia probe, and Republicans in Congress who are struggling to advance his legislative agenda.

But Trump's comment about pardons, tucked into an attack on the media, raised the possibility that he was considering his options if the investigations do not turn out the way he hopes.

Trump did not specify who, if anyone, he might consider pardoning. His tweets appeared to be written in response to a report by The Washington Post this week that Trump and his legal team have examined presidential powers to pardon Trump aides, family members and possibly even himself.

Reuters has not confirmed the newspaper

accounts.

"While all agree the U.S. President has the complete power to pardon, why think of that when only crime so far is LEAKS against us. FAKE NEWS," Trump wrote.

The Washington Post, citing current and former US officials, reported on Friday that Russia's ambassador to the United States was overheard by US spy agencies telling his bosses that he had discussed campaign-related matters with Trump adviser Jeff Sessions last year, when Sessions was a US senator.

Sessions now leads the Justice Department as Trump's attorney general. At the Senate confirmation hearings for his Cabinet position, Sessions initially failed to disclose his 2016 contacts with Russian Ambassador Sergei Kislyak and later said they were not about the campaign.

In March, Sessions recused himself from the Russia probe. During an interview with The New York Times this week, Trump lashed out at Sessions, saying he would not have chosen him for attorney general had he known Sessions would recuse himself.

### RUSSIA COLLUSION



# UAE eases restrictions on some Qatari media

## Erdogan visits Gulf in hope of easing crisis

AGENCIES

The United Arab Emirates is easing restrictions on some Qatari media.

Channels owned by Qatar-based BeIN Media were back on the air in the UAE this weekend after being unblocked by local telecoms service providers.

That's good news for sports fans and cartoon lovers. BeIN holds the regional TV rights to top flight soccer leagues and tournaments, and broadcasts popular kids channels, such as Baraem and Jeem.

The channels were suspended on June 5 after the UAE and other Arab states cut diplomatic ties with Qatar.

Qatar's state TV and Al Jazeera networks remain blocked, reported CNN Online.

Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday began a key visit to the Gulf region aimed at defusing the standoff around Turkey's ally Qatar, saying no one had an interest in prolonging the crisis.



Erdogan arrived in Jeddah to meet the Saudi leadership before heading to Kuwait, and today to Qatar for his first face-to-face talks with Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani since the crisis began, reported AFP.

"No one has any interest in prolonging this crisis any more," said Erdogan at Istanbul airport before leaving on the two-day trip.

He accused "enemies" of seeking to "fire up tensions between brothers" in the region.

Erdogan praised Qatar's behaviour in the crisis, saying it had sought to find a solution through dialogue. "I hope our visit will be beneficial for the region," he said.

On June 5, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt cut ties with Qatar accusing it of backing extremism and fostering ties with their Shia rival Iran. Doha denies the claim and has been strongly backed by Ankara throughout the standoff.



Indian supporters of Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) chant slogans during a protest march in capital New Delhi yesterday. The GJM wants a new, separate state of "Gorkhaland" carved out of eastern West Bengal state, of which Darjeeling is a part.

PHOTO: AFP

# Ghouta truce crumbles

## Regime carry out air raids on rebel strongholds near Damascus

AGENCIES

Syria's regime carried out air raids on one of the last rebel strongholds near Damascus yesterday, a monitor said, a day after it declared a ceasefire in parts of the besieged enclave.

The Syrian army on Saturday announced a halt in fighting for parts of Eastern Ghouta, a rebel-held region on the outskirts of the capital that has been ravaged in the six-year conflict.

"Regime warplanes targeted the area of Ain Terma with at least six strikes since early morning, and two raids were carried out on and around the city of Douma," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said.

The Britain-based monitor, which relies on sources in Syria for its information, did not report any casualties.

Regime shelling also hit the outskirts of the town of Jisreen yesterday, the Observatory said.

President Bashar al-Assad's forces have surrounded the Eastern Ghouta region for more than four years, and regime forces have regularly targeted the area, reported AFP.

Assad's forces have for weeks been fighting rebels on the

outskirts of Ain Terma, which links Eastern Ghouta to opposition-held parts of the Damascus district of Jobar.

Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman said no jihadist forces were present in the areas targeted by regime bombardment.

The army announced a halt in fighting in areas of Eastern Ghouta on Saturday from midday local time, but did not say which areas exactly would be included.

The ceasefire announcement came after regime ally Russia said it had reached a deal with "moderate" rebels on the boundaries and policing of the safe zone.

It said the sides had also agreed "routes to supply humanitarian aid to the population and for free movement of residents".

More than 330,000 people have been killed in Syria since its conflict broke out in March 2011 with anti-government protests.

Meanwhile, Syrian government forces and their allies have recaptured territory from Islamic State in countryside south-east of its stronghold Raqa after air strikes in the area, reported Reuters.

The advances towards the provincial boundary between Raqa and Deir al-Zor took place late on Saturday.

### ARMY, ALLIES ADVANCE AGAINST IS EAST OF RAQA

MORE THAN 330,000 KILLED IN SYRIA SINCE MARCH 2011



SYRIA CRISIS

### MASS KIDNAPPING

## Search on for 30 missing Afghan villagers

AFP, Kandahar

Afghan police yesterday launched a search for some 30 villagers still missing two days after a mass kidnapping blamed on Taliban militants in the southern province of Kandahar.

Seventy people were abducted Friday from their village along the main road in the south and seven of them were found dead the following day alongside the highway, from the city of Kandahar to Tarinkot in Uruzgan province.

Around 30 people have been released while 30 others remain missing, Kandahar police spokesman Zia Durrani told AFP.

# Every third child bride Indian: report

THE HINDU ONLINE

With over 10 crore Indians, including 8.5 crore girls, being married off before they turn 18, every third child bride in the world is an Indian, a report has found.

The report, titled 'Eliminating Child Marriage in India', was released by ActionAid India on Friday and analyses data on child marriages based on the 2011 Census.

The report found that there had been some improvement in the age of marriage, but that India still accounted for about 33% of all child marriages in the world. Of the married female population in India, 30.2% had been child brides.

The report also found that 75% of all child marriages took place in rural areas as on 2011. The number was even higher for the period between 2007 and 2011, at 82%.

Uttar Pradesh accounted for the highest percentage of child marriages in India, at 16.6%, said the report prepared by Dr Srinivas Goli, of Jawaharlal Nehru University's Centre for the Study of Regional Development.

In fact, UP, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Bihar, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh accounted for 70% of all child marriages in India as of 2011.

While releasing the report, chairperson of ActionAid India Shabana Azmi said that there was a need to address the underlying causes of child marriage.

### HUMAN TRAFFICKING

## Eight people found dead in Texas truck

AFP, Washington

Eight people were found dead yesterday inside a truck in a Walmart parking lot in San Antonio, Texas in what police said appeared to be "human trafficking crime."

Another 28 people were injured -- 20 of them severely -- and were being treated at seven local hospitals, San Antonio Police Chief William McManus told reporters.

The police chief said the group included children but later told CNN that the eight dead were adult men.

He said the truck driver had been arrested.

"We got a call from a Walmart employee about a welfare check in a tractor-trailer that was parked on the lot here," McManus told a news conference.

"He was approached by someone from that truck, who was asking for water."

The employee returned with the water and then called the police who "found eight people dead in the back of that trailer," the police chief said, calling it a "horrific tragedy."



Their French chauffeur Henri Paul, who was later found to be over the legal blood alcohol limit, also died.

The two princes were in Balmoral, the queen's residence in the Scottish Highlands, and William had earlier told Diana of the "very good time" they were having.

"Harry and I were in a desperate rush to say goodbye, you know 'see you later'...if I'd known now obviously what was going to happen I wouldn't have been so blasé about it and everything else," William told ITV.

"But that phone call sticks in my mind, quite heavily."