

NEWS IN  
brief

## Japan defence minister to resign over scandal

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's defence minister Tomomi Inada will resign over an alleged coverup involving military documents, local media reported yesterday, potentially dealing a fresh political blow to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Public broadcaster NHK reported that Inada, 58, will submit her resignation to Abe as early as today.

## South France wildfires 'under control'

AFP, Bormes-les-mimosas

Huge fires that forced mass evacuations of residents and holidaymakers in southern France were being brought under control yesterday, firefighters said, although they warned new blazes were still starting. As firefighters in France fought for a fourth day to put out the flames, the situation was improving in central Portugal.

## Russia appoints new ambassador to UN

AFP, Moscow

The Kremlin yesterday announced the appointment of Vasily Nebenya as Russia's ambassador to the United Nations, replacing the previous long-serving envoy Vitaly Churkin who died in February. Nebenya will start in the new post as relations between Russia and the West have hit post-Cold War lows over Moscow's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine and its role in escalating the eastern Ukrainian separatist conflict.

## Dengue fever kills dozens in Kerala

AGENCIES

Doctors in the Indian state of Kerala have warned about a "significant" outbreak of the Dengue virus which led to deaths of 86 people in the last month. At least 14,600 people have been infected in the same period, according to the public health officials in the state, which is popular with British tourists and travellers.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Fire officials and rescuers evacuate people from a flooded neighbourhood after heavy rains in Ahmedabad, India, yesterday. At least 48 people have been killed as large swaths of western India have been lashed by heavy monsoon rains and flooding over the last week, officials said.

## UK eyes bigger role in Asia

Boris Johnson says closer relationship could involve British troops, aircraft carriers being deployed to the region

AFP, Sydney

Britain plans to play a bigger role in Asia after Brexit, including deploying aircraft carriers to the region, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said yesterday.

Johnson backed the campaign to quit the EU and said the decision had given his country the opportunity to "think afresh" about its international role, while maintaining close ties with its European partners.

"One of the purposes of my trip is to get over the message that we are now going to be more committed to the Asia-Pacific region and more committed to Australia," he told The Australian newspaper in a Sydney interview.

"People want the involvement of a country that sticks up for a rules-based international system, that is prepared to deploy its military in the area, as we are."

After attending annual talks in Sydney between the British and Australian foreign and defence ministers, Johnson added that one way his nation would be "stepping up" in the region would be through supporting freedom of navigation.

"You will have seen last year how we sent a squadron of typhoons to Korea and Japan," he told reporters yesterday.

"One of the first things we will do with the two new colossal aircraft carriers that we have just built is send them

POST-BREXIT  
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on a freedom of navigation operation to this area."

The comments came as British Defence Secretary Michael Fallon made a pitch to build Australia's next fleet of warships, with Spain and Italy also in the running for the lucrative deal to construct nine frigates.

Australia earlier this year detailed a massive Aus\$89 billion (US\$70.4 billion) shipbuilding strategy in the nation's largest peacetime naval investment.

The big increase in defence spending follows Beijing's assertion of its regional power status through a military build-up in the contested South China Sea.

China asserts sovereignty over almost all of the resource-rich waters despite rival claims from Southeast Asian neighbours and has rapidly built reefs into artificial islands capable of hosting military planes.

"What people need is certainty and stability. We believe that legal certainty in the South China Sea is hugely important," Johnson added to The Australian.

"We don't want to see the militarisation of that area. We believe that for world trade to prosper there must be a fairness about the way sea lanes are going to operate."

Another key issue discussed during the meeting was a free-trade agreement with Australia post-Brexit, with Johnson stressing that Britain's greater regional military involvement went hand-in-hand with an economic pact.

## Murdered NY cop's baby born 2.5 years after his death

AFP, New York

New York police detective Wenjian Liu was ambushed and killed two and a half years ago in a murder that shocked the city. This week, his widow gave birth to his baby daughter.

Angelina was born Tuesday at Weill Cornell Hospital. Her mother, Sanny Liu, asked doctors to freeze her husband's sperm the night he died so that she could one day fulfil their dream of having children.

Liu, 32, and partner Rafael Ramos, 40, were shot dead as they sat in a patrol car in Brooklyn on December 20, 2014.

The night after his death, Sanny dreamt that he handed her a baby girl, police said. She got pregnant through in-vitro fertilization.

"I told my friend, 'It's going to be a baby girl.' My friend said, 'No, you haven't even



checked the sonograms,' but I was right!" she said in a statement released by the police department.

Thousands of police officers attended Liu's funeral where Sanny, who had married him just months earlier, fought back tears to tell mourners that she had lost her "soul mate" and a "wonderful husband."

Liu, an only child, moved with his parents to New York from China as a 12-year-old in search of the American dream.

His parents, left heartbroken by his death, were photographed at the hospital welcoming their new granddaughter.

Liu's killer Ismaaiyl Brinsley also shot his ex-girlfriend on December 20 and committed suicide after the double murder.

Hours earlier, he claimed he wanted to avenge the deaths of African Americans during confrontations with police -- incidents that have fueled years of nationwide protests and national debate.

## Outrage over 'revenge rape' of Pak teen

AFP, Multan

Pakistan police yesterday arrested four more men involved in the rape of a teenage girl as punishment for a rape committed by her brother.

The latest arrests, which include the man who allegedly committed the 'revenge rape', brings the total number detained to 18, a police source confirmed.

A jirga (village council) in a suburb of the central city of Multan had ordered the rape of the 16-year-old girl as a punishment after her brother sexually assaulted a 12-year-old.

The 12-year-old's brother -- now in custody -- approached the village council to complain about the attack, naming his cousin as the culprit.

In response, the council ordered the brother to rape the sister of the accused in return -- an order which was carried out, according to police.

"Both the parties had filed cases of rape against each other at the local police station after the incident that happened last week," local police official Allah Baksh told AFP Wednesday.

Both the girls are now staying in a woman's shelter and were due to meet the provincial chief minister Shahbaz Sharif, brother of the prime minister, later yesterday.

Pakistan's Supreme Court has also ordered an investigation into the incident.

## Maduro lashes out at 'insolent' US sanctions

AFP, Caracas

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro branded US sanctions leveled at his regime on Wednesday as "insolent," as pressure piled up on him abroad and at home over his controversial plan to elect a new body to rewrite the constitution.

The US measures came as Venezuela's opposition began a two-day nationwide strike aimed at ousting the president through early elections.

The deadliness of four months of violent anti-Maduro protests was further confirmed after a general strike entered its second day in Venezuela yesterday as street protests left two more people dead.

The latest deaths in clashes with security forces raised to 105 the number of people killed since April 1.



In Washington, the US Treasury unveiled a list of 13 current and former officials, including the interior minister, senior military brass, the president of the electoral council, and the finance chief of state oil company PDVSA, whose US assets would be frozen.

The opposition and US moves are to force Maduro to give up his plan to have a 545-member "Constituent Assembly" elected on Sunday.

Critics say the body is a step towards a dictatorship, by bypassing or dissolving the opposition-held

National Assembly.

Maduro called the US punishment "illegal, insolent and unprecedented."

"Who do these imperialists in the United States think they are? The government of the world?" he said in a speech.

## Will nuke China if Trump orders

Reuters, Melbourne

The US Pacific Fleet commander, addressing a security conference in Australia, said in answer to a question yesterday that he would be prepared to launch a nuclear strike on China if President Donald Trump so ordered.

The fleet spokesman later said the question was asked as an "outrageous hypothetical".

Admiral Scott Swift was speaking at the Australian National University in Canberra when he was asked whether he would be prepared to launch a nuclear attack on China if ordered to do so by Trump.

"The answer would be yes," he said.

Swift said that all members of the US military had sworn an oath to obey officers and the US president as commander in chief to defend the constitution.

"This is core to the American democracy," he said, in a recording of the event obtained by Reuters.

"Any time you have a military that is moving away from a focus, and an allegiance, to civilian control, then we really have significant problems."

Swift's answer reaffirmed the principle of civilian control over the military and was based on an "outrageous hypothetical" in the question, Pacific Fleet spokesman Captain Charlie Brown told Reuters.

## ROHINGYA ABUSE PROBE

## UN mission gets new chairman

REUTERS, Yangon

The United Nations' Human Rights Council has replaced the chairwoman of a team investigating allegations of killings and rape by Myanmar's security forces, it said yesterday, amid concerns over her perceived bias.

Indian Supreme Court advocate Indira Jaising was initially named to chair the fact-finding mission, which has a focus on the western state of Rakhine that is home to the stateless Rohingya Muslim minority.

Council president Joaquin Alexander Maza Martelli had decided to replace Jaising with Marzuki Darusman, a former attorney-general of Indonesia who has previously conducted rights investigations on North Korea, the council said in a statement from its headquarters in Geneva.

Jaising was appointed to lead the panel in May, after a resolution passed by the Human Rights Council in March calling for a team to be sent to look into the abuse claims.

The panel's two other members, Harvard-trained Sri Lankan lawyer Radhika Coomaraswamy and Australian consultant Christopher Dominic Sidoti, remain in place.

Myanmar has said it will refuse visas to the commissioners, arguing the mission would aggravate tension in Rakhine.

"As in all such cases, the mission will make it a priority to reach out to and engage constructively with the government and other relevant interlocutors," the council said.

"The Human Rights Council reiterates its hope that the government of Myanmar will grant the mission unfettered access to affected areas."

## check the outflow of migrants.

Since January, more than 100,000 people have made the perilous voyage across the water, according to the International Organization for Migration. Over 2,300 have drowned this year in the attempt.

The vast majority land in Italy -- the EU country closest to north Africa -- which has complained of a lack of solidarity from its



neighbours in dealing with the influx.

Macron said he would send officials from the French asylum bureau to help out in Italy. "I am also ready to send some to Libya," he said, adding he was ready to go it alone, if necessary.

"Other European countries are very reticent. We'll try to do it with Europe but we in France will do it," he insisted.

## YEMEN COAST

## UN slams Saudi coalition for migrant deaths

AFP, United Nations

An attack on a boat carrying refugees off the coast of war-torn Yemen in March was almost certainly carried out by the Saudi-led coalition, according to a confidential UN report seen by AFP on Wednesday.

A helicopter opened fire on the vessel carrying over 140 passengers, killing 42 civilians and wounding 34, in an attack the report said was a violation of international humanitarian law.

"This civilian vessel was almost certainly attacked using a 7.62mm caliber weapon from an armed utility helicopter," said the report by the UN panel of experts presented to the council this week.

"The Saudi Arabia-led coalition forces are the only parties to the conflict that have the capability to operate armed utility helicopters in the area."

The coalition was most likely operating from a naval vessel deployed by the coalition backing Yemen's government.

The coalition has denied that its forces were operating in the area of Hodeida when the vessel carrying Somali refugees in the Red Sea came under attack.

Major General Ahmed Assiri, spokesman for the coalition, dismissed the accusation and then told AFP "there has been no firing in the coalition in this zone."

Despite requests from the UN panel, the coalition, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and the 31-nation Combined Maritime Forces have not shared information on the incident, the report said.

"The panel finds that the attack on this civilian vessel resulted in IHL violations ... and thus constitute a threat to peace, security and stability of Yemen," the report said.