

# NEWS IN brief

## Three charged over NY IS attack plot

REUTERS, New York

Three men have been arrested since May of last year on charges of plotting attacks in New York City for Islamic State in the summer of 2016, US prosecutors said on Friday. The planned attacks, which were thwarted by law enforcement, included detonating explosives in Manhattan's Times Square and in the city's subway.

## US ends Sudan trade embargo

AFP, Washington

The United States announced an end to its 20-year-old trade embargo against Sudan on Friday, citing what it said are improvements in Khartoum's human rights record. Washington, however, did not drop Sudan from its blacklist of state terror sponsors.

## California becomes first 'sanctuary state'

AFP, Los Angeles

California became the first "sanctuary state" for undocumented immigrants Friday, a decision criticized by the Trump administration which believes the move will compromise security. California's governor, Democrat Jerry Brown, signed the landmark legislation -- Senate Bill 54 (SB54) -- which grants better protections to people who are in the US without permission, including those who have committed crimes.

## Still no 'clear motive' in Vegas shooting

AFP, Las Vegas

Five days after the deadliest mass shooting in recent US history, authorities acknowledged Friday that they have not uncovered a "clear motive" for the gunman. Stephen Paddock killed 58 people and left hundreds injured in Las Vegas after raining bullets on a crowd at an open-air country music concert while perched in a 32nd floor hotel room.



Demonstrators attend an unauthorized anti-Kremlin rally in downtown Moscow, yesterday. More than 1,000 supporters of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny rallied in rainy Moscow on President Vladimir Putin's 65th birthday, calling for the Russian strongman to retire. The poster reads " We demand fair election". PHOTO: AFP

## Car drives into pedestrians in London

Several hurt, man arrested

AFP, London

Police arrested a man near London's Natural History Museum on yesterday after a vehicle apparently drove into pedestrians, injuring a number of people.

Crowds in the busy tourist spot in South Kensington, which is also home to the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Science Museum, fled screaming in panic, an AFP reporter said.

Armed police were at the scene, and a video posted on Twitter showed a man being held down on the road next to a black car that appeared to have crashed.

London police said the incident was not being treated as terrorism-related at this stage.

Security is high in Britain after five terror attacks in six months -- four of them in London and one in Manchester -- with the bloodshed claiming 35 lives.

# Rallies call for Spain's unity

### Protesters in Madrid urge dialogue; split emerges among separatists

AFP, Madrid

Thousands of demonstrators rallied across Madrid yesterday calling for Spanish unity and demanding action to resolve a volatile political crisis over plans by Catalan separatists to declare independence.

Madrid's central Colon Square was transformed into a sea of Spanish flags as several thousand people joined a "patriotic" march organised by activists to defend the unity of Spain.

Hundreds of others, all dressed in white, gathered in a nearby plaza outside Madrid city hall in a separate rally calling for dialogue to end the crisis, among them families with young children.

The rallies followed days of soaring tensions after police cracked down on voters during a banned October 1 Catalan independence referendum, prompting regional leaders to warn they would declare unilaterally declare independence in days.

Spain's Prime Minister Rajoy has vowed to block any independence move and has also rejected calls for mediation in a dispute that has drawn cries of concern all over Spain, and even from Barcelona and Real Madrid footballers.

The crisis has raised fears of unrest in the northeastern region, a tourist-friendly area of 7.5 million people that

accounts for a fifth of Spain's economy.

Opponents of secession called for demonstrations around Spain on Saturday and in Barcelona on Sunday.

Another group called "Let's Talk" urged citizens to gather dressed in white in front of town halls, demanding dialogue to end the crisis under the slogan: "Spain is better than its leaders".

Friday saw the first signs the sides may be willing to step back from the brink in a political conflict that risks destabilising Europe.

After days of ill-tempered rhetoric, Madrid said it regretted the injuries caused in the October 1 crackdown and suggested Catalonia should hold a regional election to settle the crisis.

Meanwhile, splits have emerged among Catalan separatist leaders over their plans to unilaterally declare independence following the referendum deemed illegal by Madrid.

Catalonia's leader Carles Puigdemont has threatened to declare independence "within days", but the region's business minister Santi Vila proposed a "ceasefire" in the row with Spain's central government.

In an opinion article published in Catalan daily Ara he urged the pro-secession camp to "reflect on the usefulness and consequences" of a declaration of independence.



CATALONIA CRISIS

# Turkey-backed rebels launch offensive on Idlib jihadists

### Russia air strikes kill 180 jihadists, mercenaries

AFP, Istanbul

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday said that pro-Ankara Syrian rebels were staging a new military operation in Syria's northwestern Idlib province with the aim of pushing out jihadists who control the region.

The move comes as Turkey along with Russia and Iran prepare to set up a so-called "de-escalation" zone in Idlib in line with accords in peace talks in Astana aimed at ending the Syrian civil war.

Erdogan said the operation, which has not yet seen Turkish troops cross the border into Syria, was being conducted in coordination with Russia.

Idlib is largely controlled by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a group led by al-Qaeda's former Syria affiliate, which ousted more moderate rebels in recent months.

HTS is not party to a deal brokered by Russia, Turkey and Iran for the safe zone in the province, one of four such "de-escalation" zones across Syria.

Ousting HTS forces from the area will be

needed to allow the arrival of Iranian, Russian and Turkish forces to implement a de-escalation zone.

He later told reporters the operation was led by Free Syrian Army (FSA) rebels and that the Turkish army was "not yet" operating inside Syria.

The move comes a week after Russian President Vladimir Putin held talks with Erdogan in Ankara, with both sides agreeing to push for the Idlib de-escalation zone.

The Syrian Observatory in the last week has repeatedly accused Syria and Russia of carrying out deadly air strikes in Idlib province with heavy civilian losses.

The Russian defence ministry said Saturday some 120 Islamic State group fighters and 60 foreign mercenaries were killed in a series of Russian air strikes in Syria over the past 24 hours.

Despite being on opposite sides of the conflict, Russia and Turkey have been working together intensely since a 2016 reconciliation deal ended a crisis caused by the shooting down of a Russian war plane over Syria.

## WAR IN SYRIA

# 'Attack foiled' near Saudi king's palace

### One attacker, 2 guards killed

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

The United States Embassy in Saudi Arabia warned US citizens to exercise caution in the area around the king's palace in Jeddah yesterday after reports on social media of an attack there.

According to social media, Saudi security forces foiled an attack near the Al-Salam Palace in the coastal city, leaving one attacker and two royal guards dead.

"Due to the possibility of ongoing police activity, American citizens are advised to exercise caution when travelling through the area," the embassy warned.

The palace is located next to the King Abdulaziz Road and Andalus Road on the waterfront of the city.

The Saudi government has not issued an official statement confirming the incident.

Groups such as al-Qaeda and more recently the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as IS) have carried out a number of attacks in Saudi Arabia.

Attackers have targeted Shia mosques in the country's eastern provinces where much of its Shia minority is based, as well as security forces.

In July this year, Saudi authorities said they foiled an attack on the Grand Mosque in the Muslim holy city of Makkah, which they blamed on IS.



People traveling by bus for two days and were trapped between landslides walks in an area of a highway collapsed by Storm Nate in Casa Mata, Costa Rica. Hurricane Nate gathered strength Saturday as it swept towards the US Gulf Coast after dumping heavy rain that killed at least 28 people in Central America. The picture was taken on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

# Iran slams US 'addiction' to sanctions

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Iranian Foreign Minister Jawad Zarif has condemned US President Donald Trump over his threats to walk away from a landmark nuclear deal between Tehran and Western powers signed in 2015.

The lead negotiator for the Iranian side told Al Jazeera that the US leader's remarks would not "help peace and security in the region" and would harm the long-term interests of the United States.

Trump has repeatedly described the nuclear agreement, which was negotiated by the Obama administration and enshrined under United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231, as "the worst deal ever".

"I think it is an ill-informed statement, because certainly, any deal would not be a perfect deal for all sides; it has to be less than perfect so all sides can live with it," Zarif said, warning that the international community could never trust the US again if it violated the deal.

Zarif said any breaches of the deal by the US would result in Iran's partial or complete withdrawal from the agreement, noting that Tehran would be undeterred by threats of sanctions.

"The nuclear deal is the result of 10 years of posturing and two years of negotiations. Unfortunately, this administration is going back to posturing," he said. "They [US leaders] have immunised us to US sanctions. From a global perspective, it would seem the United States is addicted to sanctions."

Zarif also condemned Iran's regional rivals, Israel and Saudi Arabia, for their role in urging the US to renege on the agreement.

# COMPENSATION FOR UPROOTING INDIGENOUS CHILDREN

## Canada to pay \$640m

AFP, Ottawa

An estimated 20,000 indigenous children taken from their families starting in the 1960s and placed for adoption or fostering will share in a Can\$800 million (US\$640 million) payout, the government announced Friday.

The so-called "Sixties Scoop" saw them placed with primarily white middle-class families in Canada, the United States and overseas.

In recent years, as the children grew into adults and became aware of their past, several lawsuits and class actions were filed over their loss of aboriginal identity, claiming in court documents that it resulted in psychiatric disorders, substance abuse, unemployment, violence and suicides.

"People affected by the '60s Scoop have told us that the loss of their culture and language are among the worst kinds of harm that they suffered," Indigenous Relations Minister Carolyn Bennett told a press conference, flanked by Scoop survivors.

"That is why our government is responding directly to remedy the ill-advised (policies) of the past."

Starting in 1874, 150,000 Indian, Inuit and Metis children in Canada were forcibly enrolled in 139 boarding schools run by Christian churches -- including the Catholic Church -- on behalf of the federal government in an effort to integrate them into society.

Many survivors alleged abuse by headmasters and teachers, who stripped them of their culture and language. At least 3,200 students never returned home. Ottawa formally apologized in 2008 for the "cultural genocide," as part of a Can\$1.9 billion settlement with former students.

# PAKISTAN'S ALLEGED STATE SUPPORT TO TERROR GROUPS

## US signals tougher stance

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump will dispatch his top diplomatic and military advisors to Pakistan in the coming weeks, turning up the heat on a nuclear-armed ally accused of harboring terror groups.

Weeks after Trump angrily accused Islamabad of providing safe haven to "agents of chaos," Secretary of State Rex Tillerson plans to depart for Pakistan late this month.

He will be followed by Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, according to US and Pakistani sources.

The one-two punch is designed to drill home Trump's message that Pakistani state support for jihadist groups has to end, according to officials briefed on the visits.

Washington has long been frustrated by Pakistan's willingness to offer cross-border safe havens to Taliban factions and armed jihadist groups fighting US troops and their Afghan allies.

The relationship reached the breaking point in 2011, when president Barack Obama sent commandos into Pakistan in 2011 to kill al-Qaeda leader

Osama bin Laden, who was living in a military garrison town.

With little change since then, Trump came to office indicating that Washington's frustration had reached the point where something had to give.

"We have been paying Pakistan billions and billions of dollars at the same time they are housing the very terrorists that we are fighting," he said in an August address.

But in the six weeks since Trump signaled that tougher tone, there have been precious few signs that the calculus in South Asia has changed.

Mattis told Congress this week that he will try "one more time" to "see if we can make this work."

Trump has warned that military aid -- which was halved between 2012 and 2016 -- could be cut further, a move that Fair dismisses as insufficient.

Policymakers have considered revoking Pakistan's non-NATO ally status, with deep symbolic but limited practical impact. Punitive economic sanctions -- that could force Pakistan closer to China, Russia or Turkey -- seem a long way off.



## Trump's approval rating slips to all-time low

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Donald Trump's approval ratings have plummeted new depths as less than a third of Americans now back his leadership, a poll has suggested.

Just 32 per cent of voters say they approve of the way the billionaire is handling the pressures of the Oval Office, while 67 per cent disapprove, according to a survey by the Associated Press and the NORC Centre for Public Affairs Research.

Less than a fifth -- 19 per cent -- said they believed the President understood their needs and problems, while only 23 per cent said they thought he was honest.

The findings showed Trump's approval rating had slipped a full 10 points since March.

The analytics website FiveThirtyEight's poll tracker showed the President's average approval rating sitting at about 38 per cent.

More than 60 percent of Americans disapprove of how Trump is handling race relations, foreign policy and immigration.

His stock is falling even among Republicans, AP-NORC's survey said. In March 80 per cent believed he was doing a good job but this has now slipped to just 67 per cent.

The gloomy outlook was encapsulated by the proportion of voters who said they were confident the US was headed in the right direction -- a mere 24 per cent.