

NEWSIN brief

17 killed as wildfires torch California
REUTERS, Santa Rosa

Firefighters battling wildfires in California's wine country face the prospect of new outbreaks when dry, windy conditions return to an area where at least 17 people have been killed and 2,000 homes and businesses destroyed in flames. The weather gave firefighters a reprieve on Tuesday.

Rajapakse son arrested over anti-India protest
AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan police Tuesday arrested the legislator son of former president Mahinda Rajapakse for leading violent anti-India demonstrations over alleged plans to sell an airport built and named after his father. A police spokesman said MP Nimal Rajapakse was arrested for being a member of an unlawful assembly outside the Indian consulate in the southern town of Hambantota on Friday.

US slaps rewards on Hezbollah leaders
AFP, Washington

The United States stepped up its rhetoric against Hezbollah on Tuesday, slapping rewards on two commanders and urging allies to blacklist the Lebanese group. Washington and the Lebanese movement have been foes since 1983, when the group was blamed by for the 1982-83 Beirut barracks in Beirut.

Thirteen killed in Mexico prison riot
AFP, Monterrey

Mexican security forces used lethal force Tuesday to put down a prison riot in clashes that left at least 13 inmates dead, authorities said. Unrest at the prison in Cuadern in northeastern Cadeleya in the southern town of Cuadern broke out in the morning and was put down. But it flared again later as inmates began to loot the prison's huge columns of black smoke visible from far away.

US opposing 'whole world' on Iran nuclear deal

Says Rouhani as Trump gears up for scrapping accord

AFP, Tehran

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani lashed out at US counterpart Donald Trump on Tuesday, saying he was opposing "the whole world" by trying to abandon a landmark nuclear agreement.



"If the US wants to take a hostile position regarding an international agreement which is approved by the UN Security Council... they will oppose not just Iran but the whole world," Rouhani said at a cabinet meeting shown on state television.

"It will be absolutely clear which is the lawless government. It will be clear which country is respected by the nations of the world and global public opinion," he added.

Trump is due to deliver a speech as early as today outlining a tougher line on Iran, and is expected to say he will no longer certify the 2015 nuclear deal as required every three months.

The US Congress would then have 60 days to decide on whether to impose sanctions, effectively pulling out of the nuclear agreement.

Other parties to the deal - Britain, France, Germany, China, Russia and the European Union - have all voiced staunch support for it, saying Iran has stuck to its commitments to curb its nuclear programme.

The nuclear deal "is a test for all governments," Rouhani said. "Whenever we have committed ourselves, we have stood by our commitments to the end. This is an honour for us."

Rouhani also took aim at reports that the US may declare Iran an elite Revolutionary Guards a terrorist organisation.

He said Trump was "clearly upset" over the Guards' military successes against the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq.

The world had 10 times as many obese children and teenagers last year than in 1975, but underweight kids still outnumbered them, a study said yesterday.

Warning of a "double burden" of malnutrition, researchers said the rate of increase in obesity far outstripped the decline in under-nutrition.

"If post-2000 trends continue, child and adolescent obesity is expected to surpass moderate and severe underweight by 2022," researchers wrote in The Lancet medical journal.

The team found that there were 74 million obese boys aged 5-19 in 2016, up from six million four decades earlier.

For girls, the tally swelled from five million to 50 million.

By comparison, there were 117 million underweight boys and 75 million underweight girls last year after the number peaked around the year 2000, the study said.



Almost two thirds of the underweight children lived in South Asia.

In some countries in Polynesia and Micronesia, the Middle East, North Africa and the Caribbean and the United States, more than one in five children were obese.

Obesity comes with the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, while underweight children are more at risk from infectious diseases.

INTERNATIONAL



Women mourn as people carry the remains of a suspected militant who, according to the local media, was killed during a gun battle with Indian security forces in the Hajin area of Bandipora district, Kashmir, yesterday. Two air force commandos and two suspected rebels were killed during a gunbattle in Indian-administered Kashmir, the army said yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

US in Korea provocation

Two supersonic heavy bombers overfly Korean peninsula in show of force as Trump meets advisers to discuss options

AFP, Seoul

The US has flown two supersonic heavy bombers over the Korean peninsula in a show of force against Pyongyang, staging the first night-time joint aviation exercises with Japan and South Korea.

Two B-1B Lancers based in Guam flew a mission in the victory of the Sea of Japan late Tuesday, the US Pacific Air Forces said in a statement.

"Flying and training at night with our allies in a safe, effective manner is an important capability shared between the US, Japan and the Republic of Korea and hones the tactical prowess of each nation's aviators," Major Patrick Applegate said in a statement.

South Korean defence authorities yesterday said the bombers staged a simulated air-to-ground missile firing drill with two South Korean fighters over the Sea of Japan (East Sea).

The four aircraft then flew across the peninsula and staged another round of sixth and most powerful nuclear test last month.



B-1B Lancers supersonic bombers

The exercises came as a US nuclear-powered fast-attack submarine, the USS Tuscon, made a call in South Korea's southern port of Inhae, the US Pacific Command said. It did not say when the Hawaii-based submarine

with a crew of around 150 would depart the peninsula.

The bomber drill came as US President Donald Trump on Tuesday discussed "a range of options" with his national security team to respond to North Korea's recent missile and nuclear tests.

The briefing by his defence secretary James Mattis and top military officer General Joseph Dunford "focused on a range of options to respond to any form of North Korea aggression or, if necessary, to prevent North Korea from threatening the United States and its allies with nuclear weapons," according to a brief statement from the White House.

It came days after he said that diplomatic efforts with North Korea have consistently failed, adding that "only one thing will work".

Trump has engaged in an escalating war of words with North Korea strongman Kim Jong-Un, trading insults amid rising tensions between the two nuclear-armed rivals.

Spy vs spy vs spy

NYT report says Israeli spies found Russians using Kaspersky software for hacks around the globe

REUTERS, Washington

Israeli intelligence officials spying on Russian government hackers found they were using Kaspersky Lab antivirus software that is also used by 400 million people globally, including US government agencies, according to media reports on Tuesday.

The Israeli officials who had hacked into Kaspersky's network over two years ago then turned their US counterparts of the Russian intrusion, said The New York Times, which first reported the story.

That led to a decision in Washington only last month to order Kaspersky software removed from government computers.

The Washington Post also reported on Tuesday that the Israeli spies had also found in Kaspersky's network hacking tools that could only have come from the US National Security Agency.

After an investigation, the NSA found that those tools were in possession of the Russian government, the Post said.

And late last month, the US National

Intelligence Council completed a classified report that it shared with Nato allies concluding that Russia's FSB intelligence service had "probable access" to Kaspersky computer databases and source code. The Post reported.

That access, it concluded, could help enable cyber attacks against US government, commercial and industrial control networks, the Post reported.

The New York Times said the Russian operation, according to multiple people briefed on the matter, is known to have stolen classified documents from a National Security Agency employee who had improperly stored them on his home computer, which had Kaspersky

antivirus software installed on it.

Kaspersky Lab denied to the Times any knowledge of, or involvement in, the Russian hacking. "Kaspersky Lab has never helped, nor will we help, any government in the world with its cyberespionage efforts," the company said in a statement on Tuesday.



Trump threatens NBC over fake nuke report

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump yesterday questioned whether US news broadcasters should have their licenses revoked, after an unfattering story about his nuclear policy which he decried as "fake."

US television network NBC reported that Trump last summer told generals and security aides "he wanted what amounted to a nearly tenfold increase in the US nuclear arsenal."

"With all of the fake News coming out of NBC and the Networks, at what point is it appropriate to challenge their license? Bad for freedom," Trump said.

The US constitution underpins the guarantee press freedom, but television networks rely on advertising to broadcast frequencies granted by government agencies.

After the briefing, the secretary of state is alleged to have called Trump a "minority," although Rex Tillerson's spokes-



Child obesity grows tenfold worldwide since 1975: study

AFP, Paris

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Sex with child bride is rape

Indian SC closes legal loophole

AFP, New Delhi

Sex with a minor amounts to rape even if the couple are married, India's top court ruled yesterday, closing a legal loophole that had allowed some perpetrators to escape punishment.

The age of consent and thus the legal age for girls to marry in India is 18, but millions of children are made to do so when they are much younger, particularly in poor rural areas.

India's rape laws specifically exclude married couples, which historically meant that even non-consensual sex with a minor could not be classed as rape if it took place within marriage.

But the Supreme Court said that contradicted India's strict laws on the age of consent.

FINAL RAQA PUSH

Talks held on civilian exit

AFP, Kobani

Talks for the safe exit of civilians trapped in Syria's Raqa were underway yesterday, as US-backed forces prepare a final push to recapture the city from the Islamic State group.

The Syrian Democratic Forces, an alliance of Kurdish and Arab fighters, have taken around 90 percent of the city from IS since they broke into the city in June.

The US-backed militia has surrounded remaining IS fighters in just a handful of positions, but thousands of civilians are still in the city, some of them being used as human shields by the jihadists.

On Tuesday, the US-led coalition said officials from the Raqa Civil Council - a provisional administration for the city set up by the SDF - were trying to negotiate the safe passage of civilians from remaining IS-held areas.

"The Raqa Civil Council is leading discussions to determine the best way to enable civilians trapped by Daesh to exit the city, where some are being held as human shields by the terrorists," the coalition said, using the Arabic acronym for IS.

Daesh, the Arabic word who are found to have fought for Daesh will be turned over to local authorities to face justice."

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor of the war, said the talks were focused on granting surrendering IS fighters and their families a way out of Raqa.

"The negotiations are for the exit of Daesh fighters and their families to Albu Kamal and eastern Hama Governorate," said Observatory director Rami Abudayeh.



Opposition supporters block streets and burn tyres during a protest in Kisumu, Kenya, yesterday. Supporters of Kenya's opposition leader Raila Odinga took to the streets as police officials mull their next move after his withdrawal from a presidential election plunged the country into uncharted waters.

PHOTO: AFP