

## NEWS IN 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 blazes. 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 Namal 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 armed group. Washington and the Lebanese movement have been foes since 1983, when the group was blamed by for deadly suicide bombings against its embassy and a US 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 Cadereyta in northeastern Nuevo Leon state broke out in the morning and was put down. But it flared again later as inmates started fires that sent up 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, it can do so. 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

## 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 unflattering story about his nuclear policy which he decried as "fake."

Trump made the implied threat after taking to Twitter to angrily deny reports that he had asked to dramatically increase in America's nuclear stockpile, calling it "made-up."

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 stockpile."

"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 country?" Trump said.

The US constitution is understood to guarantee press freedom, but television networks rely on access to broadcast frequencies granted by government agencies.

After the briefing, the secretary of state is alleged to have called Trump a "moron," although Rex Tillerson's spokesman has denied that allegation.

Trump on Tuesday joked that he and Tillerson should compare IQ scores.



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 vicinity 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 fire 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 a firing exercise over the Yellow Sea before the two B-1Bs returned home, the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said.

Tensions over North Korea's weapons programme have soared in recent months with Pyongyang launching a flurry of missiles and conducting its



B-1B Lancers supersonic bombers

sixth and most powerful nuclear test last month.

The exercises came as a US nuclear-powered fast-attack submarine, the USS Tucson, made a call in South Korea's southern port of Jinhae, 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 defense secretary James Mattis and top military officer General Joseph Dunford "focused on a range of options to respond to any form of North Korean 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 Korean 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 antispyware software that is also used by 400 million people globally, including US government agencies, according to new reports on Tuesday.

The Israeli officials who had hacked into

Kaspersky's network over two years ago then warned 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 last month, the US National

## KURDISH INDEPENDENCE DRIVE

## Court orders arrest of vote organizers

AFP, Bagdad

An Iraqi court yesterday ordered the arrest of senior Kurdish officials responsible for organising an independence referendum, in the latest salvo by the central authorities over the referendum.

The decision ratchets up pressure on Iraqi Kurdistan just over two weeks after voters in the autonomous region overwhelmingly backed independence in the non-binding ballot slammed as illegal by Baghdad.

Acting on a request from the National Security Council headed by Iraq's prime minister, a court in east Baghdad issued warrants against the chairman of the vote's organising commission Hisham Saleh and two other members, Supreme Judicial Council spokesman Abdel Sattar Bayraqdar told AFP.

It ruled that the three "organised the referendum in contravention of a ruling by the Iraqi supreme court," which had found the vote unconstitutional and ordered it called off.

In retaliation the central authorities have already severed ties with the region and the outside world by cutting international air links, while neighbouring Turkey and Iran have threatened to close their borders to oil exports.

Iraq is pushing Turkey and Iran -- which both opposed the ballot over fears of fuelling demands from their own sizeable Kurdish communities -- to close their border posts with Kurdistan and stop all trade with the region.

Washington warned the referendum could "increase instability" in the region and have an impact on the battle against IS, in which Kurdish fighters have been a key force.

Intelligence Council completed a classified report that it shared with Nato allies concluding that Russia's FSB intelligence service had "probable access" to Kaspersky customer 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, involved 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 help, any government in the world with its cyberspies efforts," the company said in a statement on Tuesday.

## FINAL RAQA PUSH

## Talks held on civilian exit

AFP, Kobane



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 poll officials null their next move after his withdrawal from a presidential election plunged the country into uncharted waters.

PHOTO: AFP

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## Child obesity grows tenfold worldwide since 1975: study

AFP, Paris

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 decline in underweight.

"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 mil-

lion 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.

Obesity ballooned in every region in the world, while the number of underweight children slowly decreased everywhere except south and south-east Asia, and central and east Africa.

In Nairobi, the Cook Islands and Palau, more than 30 percent of children aged five to 19 were obese in 2016.

In some countries in Polynesia and Micronesia, the Middle East, North Africa, 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.

With 15 of the 196 countries reporting, the study found that 41 percent of children and adolescents were either obese or underweight.

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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 younger, particularly in rural poor 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 the contradiction India's strict laws on the age of consent.

The court ruled that if a girl marries under 18 and is raped, she can be prosecuted for rape," said Vikram Sivaram, a lawyer who petitioned the court on the issue, in comments broadcast on the NDTV news network.

The government has said it opposes criminalising marital rape as this would damage the institution of marriage.

Those departing Raqa who are found to have fought for Daesh will be turned over to local authorities to turn them over to the city from IS.

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

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.

"Those departing Raqa who are found to have fought for Daesh will be turned over to local authorities to turn them over to the city from IS."

The RCC declined comment on the discussions.

The Syrian Democratic Forces, which includes the US-backed fighters, the main force 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 the Al Ezzor province," said Observatory director Rami Abdal