

# NEWSIN brief

**Putin critic released after 20-day detention**  
REUTERS, Moscow

Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny said on social media yesterday he had been released from detention after spending around three weeks in jail. Navalny was detained by police in late September and sentenced to 20 days in jail on charges of repeatedly violating laws by organising public meeting.

**UN ends month-long Libya talks in Tunisia**  
REUTERS, Tunis

Month-long UN-backed talks aimed at bridging differences between rival Libyan factions ended on Saturday with no discernable progress towards stabilising the country. A month ago UN envoy Ghassan Salame announced an action plan for a transition toward presidential and parliamentary elections.

**'Czech Trump' clinches election victory**  
AFP, Prague

With voters upset over traditional parties and orders from Brussels, billionaire populist Andrej Babis, dubbed the "Czech Trump", clinched victory in the Czech Republic's election on Saturday, while eurosceptics and an anti-Islam group backed by France's National Front made strong gains.

**Fresh attack leaves 13 Niger soldiers dead**  
AFP, Niamey

Thirteen paramilitary police were killed Saturday in a fresh attack in Niger's restive southwest, just weeks after a deadly ambush on a joint US-Niger patrol. The region which borders Mali has faced a series of recent jihadist incursions. Saturday's dawn raid happened in the Tillaberi region.



(From left, clockwise) A girl casts her father's ballot for a national election at a polling station in Tokyo; Japan's Prime Minister and ruling Liberal Democratic Party leader Shinzo Abe puts rosettes by successful general election candidates' names on a board at the party headquarters in Tokyo; and a woman have an umbrella turned inside out with strong wind in Tokyo. A powerful typhoon barrelled towards Japan yesterday, leaving two dead, as millions faced trouble to cast ballots in the national election.



PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

**GOODWILL ENVOY**  
**WHO cancels Mugabe role after outcry**  
AFP, Geneva

The head of the World Health Organization yesterday reversed his decision to name Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe as a goodwill ambassador, following widespread uproar.

"Over the last few days, I have reflected on my appointment of H.E. President Robert Mugabe as WHO Goodwill Ambassador for (Non-communicable diseases) in Africa. As a result I have decided to rescind the appointment" the head of the UN agency, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said in a statement.

Tedros, who took charge of WHO in July, said he had "listened carefully" to those who condemned the decision and spoken to the Harare government.

Tedros had announced the appointment earlier this week during a speech in Uruguay, where he praised Zimbabwe as "a country that places universal health



coverage and health promotion at the centre of its policies to provide health care to all".

But activists, public health experts and key WHO donors like Britain, Canada and the United States swiftly denounced any prospective role for Mugabe, saying Zimbabwe's healthcare system has collapsed under his 37 years of authoritarian rule.

The WHO boss had faced mounting pressure to reverse the decision, including from leading voices in global public health.

"The Mugabe appointment, coming at the end of (Tedros's) first 100 days, was a misstep," director of the Global Health Institute at Harvard University, Ashish K Jha, said.

## SPAIN'S MOVE TO THWART INDEPENDENCE MOVE

# Catalonia weighs options

*Outrage among Catalans as region's leaders decry direct rule plan*

AFP, Barcelona

Catalonia's separatists were planning their response yesterday after Spain took drastic steps to stop the region from breaking away by dissolving its separatist government and forcing new elections.

Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont and his regional executive -- who sparked Spain's worst political crisis in decades by holding a banned independence referendum on October 1 -- will be stripped of their jobs and their ministries taken over under measures announced Saturday by Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. He has ordered fresh elections to be called within six months.

"Yesterday there was a fully-fledged coup against Catalan institutions," said Catalan government spokesman Jordi Turull.

"What happens now, with everyone in agreement and unity, is that we will announce what we will do and how," he told Catalunya Radio.

Rajoy has taken Spain into uncharted legal waters by moving to wrest back powers from the semi-autonomous region, which could see Madrid take control of the Catalan

police force and replace its public media chiefs.

Spain's Senate is set to approve the measures by the end of next week.

The move sparked outrage among separatists, with nearly half a million taking to the streets of regional capital Barcelona and Puigdemont declaring Rajoy guilty of "the worst attack on institutions and Catalan people" since the dictatorship of Francisco Franco.



Among other repressive measures, Franco -- who ruled from 1939 until 1975 -- took Catalonia's powers away and banned official use of the Catalan language.

Though Catalans are deeply split on whether to break away from Spain, autonomy remains a sensitive issue in the north-eastern region of 7.5 million people, which fiercely defends its language and culture and has

previously enjoyed control over its policing, education and healthcare.

Political analysts warn Rajoy faces a serious struggle to impose control over the unruly region. Potential scenarios include Catalan civil servants and police refusing to obey orders from central authorities.

## Italy regions vote on autonomy bid

AFP, Milan

Voters in the northern Italian regions of Lombardy and Veneto were voting yesterday in referendums on autonomy, against the backdrop of Catalonia's push for independence from Spain.

The consultative votes are only the beginning of a process which could over time lead to powers being devolved from Rome.

Secessionist sentiment in the two wealthy regions is restricted to fringe groups with little following. Nonetheless, with both regions expected to vote in favour of the principle of greater autonomy, analysts see the referendums as reflecting the pressures that resulted in Scotland's narrowly-defeated independence vote, Britain's decision to leave the EU and the Catalan crisis.

The participation rate has to pass 50 percent in Veneto for the result to be considered valid. There is no threshold in Lombardy but a low turnout would weaken the region's hand in any subsequent negotiations with the central government.

Lombardy, which includes Milan, and Veneto, which houses Venice, are home to around a quarter of Italy's population and account for 30 percent of its overall economic output.

The referendums could have a domino effect -- a similar autonomy vote is being debated in Liguria, the region that includes the Riviera coastline, and Emilia Romagna, another wealthy industrial part of the country, is already trying to negotiate more devolved powers.

## JOHN F KENNEDY ASSASSINATION

# Trump to allow release of classified documents

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump said Saturday he will allow long blocked secret files on the assassination of John F Kennedy to be opened to the public for the first time.

The November 22, 1963 assassination -- an epochal event in modern US history -- has spawned multiple theories challenging the official version that Kennedy was killed a lone gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald.

So the release of all the secret documents has been eagerly anticipated by historians and conspiracy theorists alike.

Trump's announcement followed reports that not all the files would be released, possibly to protect still relevant intelligence sources and methods.

But Trump appears to have decided otherwise. "Subject to the receipt of further information, I will be allowing, as President, the long blocked and classified JFK FILES to be opened," he said in a tweet.



The files are due to be opened in their entirety Thursday, nearly 54 years after Kennedy's assassination in Dallas -- unless the US president decides otherwise.

Millions of classified Kennedy files have been made public under a 1992 law passed in response to a surge in public demand for disclosure in the wake of Oliver Stone's conspiracy-heavy movie on the assassination.

But the law placed a 25-year hold on a small percentage of the files that expires October 26.

Some reports put the number withheld at 3,100. Tens of thousands of files that had been released with portions blacked out are also set to be fully declassified.

"The president believes that these documents should be made available in the interests of full transparency," a White House official said.

Kennedy was the fourth US president to be cut down by an assassin's bullets.



Former US president Barack Obama speaks as Jimmy Carter, George HW Bush, Barack Obama, George W Bush and Bill Clinton listen during a concert at Texas A&M University, on Saturday. All five of America's living former presidents took the stage Saturday at the benefit concert in Texas to raise money for victims of the hurricane-ravaged southern United States and Caribbean.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## IS caliphate's end 'in sight' after Raqqa fall

Says US president

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump said Saturday a transition can soon begin to set conditions for lasting peace in Syria now that the end of the Islamic State "caliphate is in sight" with the fall of Raqqa.

The United States and its allies will support diplomatic negotiations "that end the violence, allow refugees to return safely home, and yield a political transition that honors the will of the Syrian people," Trump said in a statement.

The declaration came four days after US-backed Kurdish-led forces recaptured Raqqa.

Trump said the entire city has been liberated from IS control, which he said marked a "critical breakthrough" in the global struggle against the militant group.

"With the liberation of ISIS's capital and the vast majority of its territory, the end of the ISIS caliphate is in sight," Trump said, using an alternate acronym for the Islamic State group.

"We will soon transition into a new phase in which we will support local security forces, de-escalate violence across Syria, and advance the conditions for lasting peace, so that the terrorists cannot return to threaten our collective security again."

A US-backed Arab-Kurd alliance announced yesterday it had retaken one of Syria's largest oilfields from the Islamic State group in Deir Ezzor.

Meanwhile, Russia accused the US-led coalition in Syria yesterday of wiping the city of Raqqa "off the face of the earth" with carpet bombing in the same way the United States and Britain had bombed Germany's Dresden in 1945.

# Time for Shia militias over

*Tillerson, in Riyadh, asks Iran-backed forces to leave Iraq as he pushes Gulf allies to undercut Iran role in the region*

REUTERS, Riyadh

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson yesterday demanded that Iranian "militias" leave Iraq at a press conference in Riyadh, where the US diplomat is holding talks with top Gulf officials.

His call came after a rare joint meeting with the leaders of Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

"Certainly Iranian militias that are in Iraq, now that the fighting against (the Islamic State) is coming to a close, those militias need to go home," Tillerson said at a press conference in Riyadh. "All foreign fighters need to go home."

The United States is concerned that Iran, a Shia regional rival, will take advantage of gains against IS there and in Syria to expand the influence it gained after the US invasion in 2003, something Sunni Arab states like Saudi Arabia also oppose.

Tillerson's Gulf visit comes as part of concerted efforts to curb Shia Iran's influence in the region and follows President Donald Trump's announcement of an aggressive strategy

against Tehran and his refusal to certify the Iran nuclear.

Tens of thousands of Iraqis heeded a call to arms in 2014 after IS seized a third of the country's territory, forming the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) which receive funding and training from Tehran and have been declared part of the Iraqi security apparatus. A senior US official said Tillerson had been referring to the PMF and the Quds Force, the foreign paramilitary and espionage arm of the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).

A new joint body between Iraq and Saudi Arabia convened an inaugural meeting earlier yesterday to coordinate their fight against IS and on rebuilding Iraqi territory wrested from the group. The rare senior meeting, signalling a thaw between states that have been at loggerheads for decades, was also attended by Saudi King Salman and Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.

Tillerson's six-day trip will also take him to Qatar, Pakistan, India and Switzerland.



# 1.1b 'invisible people'

*World Bank says huge number of people worldwide going about their daily lives without proof of identity*

AFP, Washington

More than 1.1 billion people worldwide officially don't exist -- going about their daily lives without proof of identity.

The issue leaves a significant fraction of the global population deprived of health and education services.

Among these "invisible people" -- many of whom live primarily in Africa and Asia -- more than one third are children susceptible to violence whose births have not been registered, the World Bank's "Identification for Development" (ID4D) program recently warned.

The problem is particularly acute in geographical areas whose residents face poverty, discrimination, epidemics or armed conflicts.

Vijayanti Desai, who manages the ID4D

program, said the issue arises from a number of factors, but cited the distance between people and government services in developing areas as major.

For populations near the Peruvian Amazon, for example, traveling to an administrative service can take some five days of transit by boat, according to Carolina Trivelli, Peru's former development minister.

Many families are also simply not informed about the importance of birth registration -- and the consequences of non-registration, which can include the denial of basic rights and benefits, or an increased likelihood of marrying or entering into the labor force underage.

And even if parents are aware of the need to declare a birth, costs can be crippling, said Anne-Sophie Lois, representative at the United Nations in Geneva.

