

NEWS IN
brief

**US pressure on RT
an 'attack': Putin**

AFP, Danang

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday slammed Washington's demands for state channel RT to register as a foreign agent in the US as "an attack" on its media, while vowing a "tit-for-tat" response. The Kremlin-backed broadcaster said earlier this week the US Department of Justice had given it until Monday to register its US operations as a foreign agent or see its head arrested and its accounts frozen.

**Islamic State thriving
in Somalia: UN report**

AFP, United Nations

An Islamic State faction in Somalia has grown significantly over the past year, carrying out attacks in Puntland and receiving some funding from Syria and Iraq, a report by UN sanctions monitors said Friday. The faction loyal to Sheikh Abdulqader Mumin was targeted by US drone strikes last week in the first US operation targeting IS in the Horn of Africa. In February, IS gunmen stormed a hotel in Bosaso, the economic capital of Puntland, and in May the faction carried out its first suicide attack at a police checkpoint near Bosaso, killing five people.

**Israel downs Syrian
spy drone over Golan**

AFP, Jerusalem

The Israeli army said it had shot down a Russian-made Syrian drone carrying out a reconnaissance mission over the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights yesterday. The drone was intercepted by a Patriot missile in the demilitarised zone between the Israeli- and Syrian-controlled parts of the Golan. Israel and Syria are still technically at war, though the armistice line on the Golan Heights had remained largely quiet for decades until civil war erupted in Syria in 2011.



People look at the damage in the aftermath of an air strike in the Yemeni capital of Sanaa yesterday. The Saudi-led military coalition carried out two air strikes on the defence ministry in Yemen's rebel-held capital Sanaa, witnesses said. PHOTO: AFP

**Iraq begins battle
for last IS pocket**

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqi forces yesterday launched an offensive to retake the last pocket of territory in the country still held by the Islamic State group, the operation's commander said.

The Euphrates valley town of Rawa and nearby villages were bypassed by government troops and allied militia when they retook the Syrian border town of Al-Qaim last week.

Troops backed by militia recruited among the region's Sunni Arab tribes "launched a major offensive to liberate Rumana and the Rawa area," General Abdelamir Yarallah said.

Rumana is on the north side of the Euphrates just across from Al-Qaim while the small town of Rawa lies downstream.

Rawa is the last town still held by IS apart from Albu Kamal, Al-Qaim's twin town just across the Syrian border where the jihadists were still battling Damascus troops and allied forces yesterday after mounting a surprise counterattack late Thursday.

The Syrian army had declared victory in the battle for Albu Kamal but IS fighters pushed back in from the desert to the north where they still control a strip of territory between areas held by government troops and by US-backed Kurdish-led forces.

The recapture of the Rawa pocket would mark the final battleground defeat of IS in Iraq and sound the death knell of the sprawling "caliphate" the group declared in 2014 over a swathe of Iraq and Syria the size of Britain.

Iraq has been carrying out its final campaign to crush the Islamic State caliphate while also mounting a military offensive in the north against the Kurds who held an independence referendum in September.

**Putin 'insulted' by US
election meddling claim**

Says Trump after meeting him briefly at APEC summit

CNN ONLINE

President Donald Trump suggested yesterday he's done confronting Russian President Vladimir Putin over his country's election meddling since it's insulting to the Russian leader.

Trump said he took Putin at his word that Russia did not seek to interfere in the US presidential election last year, despite a finding from US intelligence agencies that it did. The fraught relations between the two leaders was underscored anew when Putin's spokesman said election meddling did not come up when they spoke, even though Trump said it did.

And he stressed that bigger issues persist between the United States and Russia that require the two leaders to move on.

"He said he didn't meddle. He said he didn't meddle. I asked him again. You can

only ask so many times," Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One as he flew from Da Nang to Hanoi in Vietnam. Trump spoke to Putin three times on the sidelines of summit here, where the Russia meddling issue arose.

"Every time he sees me, he says, 'I didn't do that,'" Trump said. "And I believe, I really believe, that when he tells me that, he means it."



"I think he is very insulted by it," Trump added.

His remarks, which came near the end of Trump's marathon swing through Asia, amounted to the clearest statement yet of Trump's views about last year's election meddling issue.

Jetting from Tokyo to Seoul to Beijing, Trump has largely remained quiet about the Russia investigation back home. But on his flight, which departed Da Nang in the early evening yesterday, Trump's simmering anger over the Russia matter burst forth.

**US to fall short
of Paris climate
targets: report**

AFP, Paris

The United States will fail to meet its commitments for reducing greenhouse gas emissions under the Paris climate treaty, according to a report released yesterday at UN negotiations in Bonn.

A crescendo of efforts at the sub-national level to shrink the country's carbon footprint will not fully compensate for US President Donald Trump's decision to scrap his predecessor's climate policies and promote the use of fossil fuels, it found.

"Given the stated policies of the present US administration, currently committed non-federal efforts are not sufficient to meet the US commitments under the Paris Agreement," concluded the 120-page analysis, entitled "America's Pledge."

**Trump, Putin agree no
military solution in Syria**

AFP, Danang

The United States and Russia issued a presidential joint statement saying there was "no military solution" to the war in Syria, the Kremlin said yesterday, after their leaders met briefly on the sidelines of a regional summit in Vietnam.

There had been mixed messages for days from both Moscow and the White House on whether president Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin would hold face-to-face discussions during the APEC summit in Danang. The pair were seen sharing cordial handshakes and brief conversations three times during the summit but there were no sit-down talks between the two.

In a statement published on its website, the Kremlin said the two presidents had made progress on Syria, which has been battered by six years of civil war.

The US and Russia have backed competing factions in the bloody conflict and agreement between them on the next steps

towards peace is rare.

"The presidents agreed that there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria," the statement said, adding that the two sides "confirmed their determination to defeat ISIS" -- an alternative name for the Islamic State jihadist group.

The statement also added that the two sides had agreed to keep military channels open to avoid potential clashes over Syria and urged the warring sides to participate in UN-led peace talks in Geneva.

The publication of the statement on the Kremlin's website took reporters travelling with Trump by surprise and there was no immediate response from the White House.

Russia has run a major bombing campaign in Syria since 2015 when it stepped in to support President Bashar al-Assad's fight against rebels -- some of them US-backed -- tipping the conflict in his favour.

The Russian military has recently accused the United States of merely "pretending" to fight IS in Iraq and of hindering the Russian-backed offensive in eastern Syria.

Both leaders confirm their determination to defeat IS

Urge warring sides to participate in UN-led peace talks

**Ex-Trump aide probed over
secret Turkey dealings**

AFP, Washington

Investigators are probing whether former White House national security advisor Michael Flynn discussed expelling a Turkish dissident back to his country in exchange for millions of dollars, US media reported Friday.

Special prosecutor Robert Mueller is examining a meeting Flynn had with senior Turkish officials weeks after Donald Trump won the presidential race last year, NBC News and the Wall Street Journal reported.

The meeting allegedly discussed a secret payout of up to \$15 million dollars if, once in office, Flynn would engineer the deportation to Turkey of Fethullah Gulen, a political rival to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, as well as help free Erdogan-linked Iranian-Turkish businessman Reza Zarrab from prison.

NBC and the Journal both cited multiple people familiar with the probe by Mueller, who is leading the investigation into whether members of Trump's campaign colluded with Russian meddling in the election.

According to the sources, Mueller recently interviewed witnesses over the December 2016 meeting between the Turkish officials and Flynn at the swanky 21 Club in New York City.

"Under the alleged proposal, Mr. Flynn and his son, Michael Flynn Jr, were to be paid as much as \$15 million for delivering Fethullah Gulen to the Turkish government, according to people with knowledge of discussions Mr. Flynn had with Turkish representatives," the Journal said.

The Journal said it is not clear how far the proposal went and that there was no sign that any payments were made.

Lawyers for Flynn labeled the allegations "outrageous" and "false".

According to the two reports, the discussions included details of how Gulen could be flown secretly by private jet to the isolated Turkish prison island of Imrali.

NBC reported that the Turkish officials also wanted Flynn to engineer the release of Zarrab, who was arrested in Miami in March 2016 on charges of helping Iran skirt US sanctions.



Michael Flynn



Rahul Gandhi, Vice-President of India's main opposition Congress Party, greets his supporters during a rally ahead of Gujarat state assembly elections, scheduled to be held on December 9, at a village on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, India yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

PARADISE PAPERS LEAK

**Labour calls on
Queen to reveal
full records**

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The Queen must open up her full financial records to the public in the wake of revelations about her investments in the Paradise Papers scandal, Labour has said.

In an exclusive interview with The Independent, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell said information that showed the Queen had invested millions in an offshore tax haven proved "the culture of tax-avoidance" has "permeated everywhere".

He said the monarch's advisors had badly embarrassed her, and in particular demanded an apology of the Tory cabinet minister ultimately responsible for overseeing her finances, Sir Patrick McLoughlin.

As the Government



**'Selfie' Hitler removed
following int'l outrage**

AFP, Jakarta

An Indonesian museum that allowed visitors to take selfies with a life-size wax sculpture of Hitler against a backdrop of Auschwitz concentration camp has removed the exhibit following international outrage, the manager said yesterday.

De ARCA Statue Art Museum in the Javanese city of Jogjakarta drew swift condemnation from rights groups after details of the controversial display were published in foreign media.

The exhibit features a sure-footed Hitler standing in front of a huge photo of the gates of Auschwitz -- the largest Nazi concentration camp where more than 1.1 million people were killed.

The museum's operations manager, Jamie Misbah, said the wax sculpture had been removed after the building was alerted to criticism from prominent Jewish human rights organisation the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

"We don't want to attract outrage," Misbah told AFP. "Our purpose to display the Hitler figure in the museum is to educate."

The Hitler sculpture is one of about 80 figures, including world leaders and celebrities, at the wax and visual effects centre.

The Nazi-themed exhibit was a popular attraction for visitors to take selfies, and photos circulating on social media show customers -- including children -- posing with Hitler and in some cases using the Nazi salute.

**New blow for Aussie govt
PM loses majority as MP resigns over citizenship row**

AFP, Sydney

Embattled Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull lost his grip on parliament when another of his coalition's MPs resigned yesterday, the latest victim of a constitutional crisis over politicians who hold dual citizenship.

Former tennis star John Alexander, who represents a Sydney district for Turnbull's Liberal Party, announced he was resigning after being unable to determine if he had inherited UK citizenship from his immigrant father.

His resignation followed an October 27 ruling by Australia's High Court that forced five other politicians to quit parliament because they had fallen afoul of a previously obscure constitutional rule that bars dual citizens from sitting in the Senate or lower house.

The five included deputy prime minister Barnaby Joyce, leader of the rural-based

National Party, which rules in a coalition with the Liberals.

When parliament convenes on Monday without Alexander, Turnbull will control only 74 of the 150 seats in the House of Representatives, with the opposition Labor Party holding 69. Minor parties and independents fill the remaining seats.

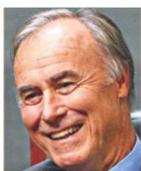
Labor front bencher Tony Burke yesterday vowed to heap pressure on the government by pushing legislation opposed by Turnbull's coalition but supported by independents.

"As of today, no matter which way you look at it on the floor of parliament, this is now government without a majority. It's a prime minister without authority," he said.

Turnbull brushed aside the likelihood of a no-confidence vote or setback on key legislation. "There is no question of that happening," he said in Danang, Vietnam.



Turnbull



John Alexander

**Trump begged for a
war during Asia trip
Says North Korea spokesman**

AGENCIES

North Korea said yesterday that US President Donald Trump's first trip to Asia showed he was a "destroyer" and he had begged for war on the Korean peninsula.

"Trump, during his visit, laid bare his true nature as destroyer of world peace and stability and begged for a nuclear war on the Korean peninsula," the foreign ministry spokesman said in a statement carried by the state news agency.

Trump had warned North Korea on Wednesday not to underestimate the United States as he wrapped up his visit to South Korea.

The North Korean spokesman said nothing would deter Pyongyang from pursuing its nuclear weapons programme.

Tensions over North Korea's weapons programme have surged in recent months, as Pyongyang carried out a sixth nuclear test -- by far its largest to date -- and test fired dozens of missiles, some capable of reaching the US mainland.

In a speech to the South Korean parliament on Wednesday, Trump warned Pyongyang not to underestimate the United States, while offering leader Kim Jong-Un a better future if he gives up his nuclear ambitions.

Trump has also prodded Chinese President Xi Jinping to pile pressure on North Korea.