

NEWS IN brief

Hariri rescinds resignation

Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri yesterday said that he had withdrawn his resignation, a month after his shock announcement that he was quitting sparked a political crisis. Hariri announced he was stepping down on November 4 in a televised address from Saudi Arabia, lambasting Iran and its Lebanese ally Hezbollah for destabilising his country.

Car blast kills 8 in Homs

An explosives-laden bus blew up yesterday in a predominantly pro-government neighbourhood of the central Syrian city of Homs that has been repeatedly targeted, killing eight people, state television said. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility.

Duterte orders cops back to drug war

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday told human rights groups criticising his deadly anti-drug war to "go to hell" after ordering police back to the frontlines of the crackdown. Duterte had removed the police less than two months ago in response to rising opposition to the campaign. But his spokesman said he was now reinstating them because drug crimes had risen in their absence.

Austria SC allows same-sex marriage

Austria's top court has ruled that same-sex couples can marry from 2019 at the latest, bringing the often conservative Alpine country into line with more than a dozen other European nations. In April 2001 the Netherlands became the first country in the world to allow gay and lesbian couples to marry in a civil ceremony.

Trump defies world over Israel

Vows to move US embassy to Jerusalem defying global outcry, threats

President Donald Trump faced down warnings of widespread Middle East unrest and untold damage to the peace process yesterday, telling anxious Arab leaders he still intends to move the US embassy to Jerusalem.

Amid a frantic round of telephone diplomacy, Trump told Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas and Jordan's King Abdullah that the deeply controversial move was coming, but crucially did not give a timeframe.

Trump "informed the president (Abbas) on his intention to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem," the Palestinian leader's office said in a statement that was echoed in Amman.

Trump must this week decide whether to sign a waiver keeping the embassy in Tel Aviv or fulfill a campaign promise and move it to Jerusalem -- de facto recognizing Israel's claim on the disputed city.

US officials said he will hold off on moving the embassy right away, but may issue a statement reiterating his intent and even go as far as recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

That could upend a decades-old western policy -- observed by both Republican and Democratic presidents -- that stated Jerusalem's status can only be decided by



negotiation. The White House argues that such a move would not prejudice final talks and would represent the reality that west Jerusalem is and will continue to be part of Israel under any settlement.

Still, it risks extinguishing Trump's efforts to broker Middle East peace and igniting the flames of conflict in a region already reeling from crises in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Qatar.

"Mr Trump! Jerusalem is a red line for Muslims," Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in a raucous televised speech,

echoing alarm expressed by Palestinian and Arab leaders. In his address, Erdogan warned that any move to back Israel's claim to the city would mobilize "the entire Islamic world" and even prompt Ankara to sever its recently-renewed diplomatic ties with the Jewish state.

The armed Islamist Hamas movement has threatened to launch a new "intifada" or uprising. Following talks in Brussels with US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, top EU diplomat Federica Mogherini warned that any move which risked undermining efforts

to jumpstart moribund peace talks "must absolutely be avoided."

In Cairo, Arab League chief Ahmed Abul Gheit warned it would be viewed as an act of "clear aggression" against the Arab and Muslim world.

Saudi Arabia also expressed "grave and deep concern" about the impact it would have on both the conflict and peace efforts, while the Palestinians said it would shatter any illusion about Trump's ability to fairly mediate in any talks.

The US Congress has already made its aim clear in the so-called Jerusalem Embassy Act, which was passed in 1995 and which stated that the city "should be recognized as the capital of the State of Israel" and that the US embassy should be moved there.

But an inbuilt waiver, which allows the president to temporarily postpone the move on grounds of "national security," has been repeatedly invoked by successive US presidents, meaning the law has never taken effect.

Israel seized the largely-Arab eastern sector of Jerusalem during the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed it, claiming both sides of the city as its "eternal and undivided capital."

But the Palestinians want the eastern sector as capital of their future state and fiercely oppose any Israeli attempt to extend sovereignty there.

Senior UN envoy arrives in N Korea

A senior United Nations official arrived in North Korea yesterday for a rare visit aimed at defusing soaring tensions over Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programme.

Jeffrey Feltman's visit -- the first by a UN diplomat of his rank since 2010 -- comes less than a week after North Korea said it test-fired a new ballistic missile capable of reaching the United States.

Feltman shook hands with a North Korean foreign ministry official after flying into Pyongyang from Beijing on the North's Air Koryo.

His trip comes a day after US and Seoul launched their biggest-ever joint air exercise -- manoeuvres slammed by Pyongyang as an "all-out provocation".

The five-day Vigilant Ace drill involves 230 aircraft, including F-22 Raptor stealth jet fighters, and tens of thousands of troops, Seoul's air force said.

Russia lists US media as foreign agents

Russia's justice ministry yesterday named nine US media outlets including Voice of America as "foreign agents" after President Vladimir Putin signed a law allowing international media to be slapped with the controversial label.

The ministry said that US-funded Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and seven of their media affiliates had been recognised as "carrying out the functions of a foreign agent", in a statement posted on its website.

Putin last month signed into law hastily issued legislation allowing the measure to target media.

Rights groups fear the law could have a chilling effect on the ability of outlets to carry out independent reporting.

Voice of America and Radio Free Europe began broadcasting to the Soviet Union in the 1950s, playing a key role in providing its citizens with uncensored news.

Both broadcasters had already been formally warned by the justice ministry that they risked recognition as "foreign agents."

The justice ministry has now formalised the move, naming them and their affiliates, including Radio Free Europe's news outlets dedicated to Crimea, which Russia annexed from Ukraine, and the Caucasus.

They also include a television channel run jointly by Radio Free Europe and Voice of America called Current Time TV.



Houthi rebel fighters inspect the damage after a reported air strike carried out by the Saudi-led coalition targeting the presidential palace in the Sanaa, yesterday. Inset, Houthi followers rally to celebrate the killing of Yemen's former president Ali Abdullah Saleh in Sanaa.

PROBE INTO RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE IN US ELECTION

Mueller seeks German bank data on Trump

US special prosecutor Robert Mueller has subpoenaed German lender Deutsche Bank for information on Donald Trump's dealings, according to media reports yesterday.

Investigators -- who are probing whether Trump's campaign colluded with Moscow to swing last year's US presidential election -- presented Germany's biggest bank with a demand for information about Trump and members of his family, Bloomberg News and German business daily Handelsblatt reported, citing anonymous sources.

The subpoena arrived "a few weeks ago," according to the German paper, which added that the most important files relevant to the request have already been sent to Mueller's team.

Investigators were looking for "information about specific financial and credit

transactions with the Trump family," Handelsblatt reported.

An internal investigation at Deutsche "found no suspicious connections between Trump and Russia so far," Handelsblatt added.

Trump has a history of dealings with Deutsche Bank during his career as a New York property mogul, and his businesses owed it around \$300 million in July 2016 according to a Bloomberg analysis.

Meanwhile, the president's wife Melania, his daughter Ivanka and her husband Jared Kushner are all customers of Deutsche's wealth management arm, according to Handelsblatt. Executives at the lender, which has weathered a series of scandals and swingeing fines in recent years, were reportedly only too keen to hand over what information they have on Trump and remove a political target from their own backs, the newspaper added.



PHOTO: AP/WIDEWORLD

Yemen rebels tighten grip

Sanaa clashes kill 234; exiled son of slain Saleh calls for revenge

Yemen's Houthi rebels moved to cement their grip on the capital yesterday after killing former president Ali Abdullah Saleh as he fled the city following the collapse of their uneasy alliance.

Residents reported a few minor clashes between the Huthis and Saleh supporters late on Monday in southern districts which had been loyal to the slain strongman.

But there was no repetition of the heavy fighting that had rocked Sanaa for the five previous nights.

A least 234 people were killed and 400 wounded in those clashes, the International Committee of the Red Cross said yesterday.

New checkpoints manned by rebels sprung up across Sanaa as their leaders hailed their control of the capital, reported AFP.

Sammad said he had ordered the security forces to "take steps against the saboteurs and all those who collab-

orated with them". The capital was awash with unconfirmed rumours of widespread arrests of suspected Saleh supporters in the army and the rebel government.

Meanwhile, the son of Yemen's ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh has called for revenge against the armed Houthi

president Ali Abdullah Saleh. "The Saudi Arabian cabinet expresses the hope that the uprising of the Yemeni people against the sectarian terrorist Houthi militias supported by Iran will free Yemen of abuse, death threats and the appropriation of public and private property," it said in a statement published on the official SPA news agency.

And the UN yesterday called for a "humanitarian" truce in air strikes and fighting in Yemen as it seeks to deliver aid to civilians trapped in the capital Sanaa.

Saleh, who ruled Yemen for three decades, had joined forces with the Huthis in 2014 when they took control of large parts of the country. But that alliance unravelled over the past week as the former leader reached out to the Saudi-led coalition that has waged an air campaign against the Huthis since March 2015.

movement that killed the veteran leader after he switched sides in the civil war, reported Reuters.

Saudi Arabia yesterday called for a Yemen free of "militias supported by Iran", in its first official statement since rebels killed their erstwhile ally former

Saudi Arabia calls for Yemen free of 'Iran-backed militias' Aggressors will regret their actions: Rouhani UN urges 'humanitarian' truce



CATALONIA CRISIS Spain drops int warrant for ex-leader

Spain has withdrawn a European arrest warrant for Catalonia's sacked leader Carles Puigdemont and four of his deputies, who fled to Belgium after the regional parliament declared unilateral independence, the Supreme Court said yesterday.

In a ruling, Judge Pablo Llarena decided to withdraw the warrant as the five "appear to have shown their intention to return to Spain" to take part in regional elections on December 21.

But Llarena, who is in charge of the case, has retained the Spanish arrest warrant, which means they will be detained upon arrival in the country, court sources said.

The judge said the European warrant would complicate the overall probe into the region's leaders.

Some of them are still in Spain -- either in jail or out on bail -- and are facing charges of rebellion, sedition and misuse of public funds.

He said Belgium could reject some of the reasons for the warrant, meaning it could agree to the extradition of Puigdemont and the four others -- but with restrictions, and only for certain offences.

The unexpected decision comes after the Catalan election campaign kicked off, with Puigdemont speaking to supporters in Catalonia on Monday night via video link.

Saudis snub Qatar at GCC

Bahrain sent its deputy prime minister and Emirati media said the state minister for foreign affairs would represent Abu Dhabi. Those three Gulf states, together with Egypt, cut all ties with Qatar on June 5, accusing the gas-rich emirate of supporting Islamist extremists and of being too close to Shia Iran, Riyadh's arch-rival.

Qatar denies the allegations and has accused the Saudi-led bloc of aiming to incite a change of regime in Doha. Casting further doubt on the group's future, the UAE said yesterday it was forming a new military and economic committee with Saudi Arabia separate from the GCC.

The committee "will coordinate between the two countries in all military, political, economic, trade and cultural fields," according to a decree issued by UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan.

Founded in 1981, the GCC is a political and economic union grouping Qatar with Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as well as Oman and Kuwait.



Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani gestures as he poses for a family photo during the annual summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), in Kuwait City, Kuwait, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Call grows for soft Brexit

British PM urged under pressure as deal crumbles

Hours after a Brexit deal collapsed, British Prime Minister Theresa May came under pressure yesterday from opposition parties and even some allies to soften the EU divorce by keeping Britain in the single market and customs union after Brexit.

May's ministers said they were confident they would soon secure an exit deal, though opponents scolded the prime minister for a chaotic day in Brussels which saw a choreographed attempt to showcase the progress of Brexit talks collapse at the last minute.

The Northern Irish party that props up May's minority government said it was only shown the draft of a deal promising regulatory alignment for both parts of Ireland late on Monday morning.

In a sign of just how politically precarious May's Brexit balancing act has become, the Democratic Unionist

Party (DUP) also said it had warned May that it would not support her legislation in parliament unless the draft was changed.

The opposition Labour Party said one way for alignment of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland to become acceptable was for the whole of the United Kingdom to stay in the single market and the customs union.

Nicola Sturgeon, the leader of Scotland's devolved government, said May's failure could signal a push to keep Britain in both.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson, who has been tipped as a potential future leader of May's party, also suggested May should consider keeping the United Kingdom in the single market and customs union.

May has repeatedly said Britain will leave both groupings when the United Kingdom ends its membership of the EU at 2300 GMT on March 29, 2019.



PHOTO: AP/WIDEWORLD