



Palestinian protesters dressed in Santa Clause outfits wave the national flag during a demonstration at the main entrance of the West Bank city of Bethlehem yesterday. Inset, mourners carry the body of Mohammed Mohaisen, who was killed in clashes on Friday, during his funeral in Gaza City. PHOTO: AFP

CONFLICT WITH PRO-RUSSIAN SEPARATISTS

# US to provide Ukraine with lethal weapons

AGENCIES

The United States will provide Ukraine with "enhanced defensive capabilities," the State Department said on Friday, as Kiev battles Russian-backed separatists in the eastern part of the country.

"US assistance is entirely defensive in nature, and as we have always said, Ukraine is a sovereign country and has a right to defend itself," the department said in a statement.

It said the decision was part of the US effort to help Ukraine defend its territorial integrity and "deter further aggression," but did not specify the capabilities being considered, reported Reuters.

Earlier on Friday, ABC News reported that President Donald Trump was expected to approve the sale of anti-tank missiles to Ukraine, citing State Department sources. Any sale would need congressional approval.

Ukraine and Russia are at loggerheads over a war in eastern Ukraine between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian government forces that has killed more than 10,000 people in three years. Kiev accuses Moscow of sending troops and heavy weapons to the region, which Russia denies.

Moscow warned yesterday that Washington was encouraging "new bloodshed" in eastern Ukraine by its decision to provide the ex-Soviet nation with lethal weapons.

In a strongly-worded statement Russian deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov accused the United States of "crossing the line" and fomenting the conflict in eastern Ukraine, a region known locally as Donbass, reported AFP.

"Kiev revanchists are shooting at Donbass every day, they don't want to conduct peace negotiations and dream of doing away with the disobedient population. And the United States has decided to give them weapons to do that," Ryabkov said.

The leaders of Germany and France yesterday called for all sides in the Ukraine conflict to "face their responsibilities" after a rise in ceasefire violations in the east of the country.

"There is no alternative to an exclusively peaceful settlement of the conflict," German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron said in a statement.

Moscow accuses US of crossing the line

France, Germany call for peaceful settlement

## HEZBOLLAH DRUG TRAFFICKING

# AG Sessions orders review of Obama govt's actions

AFP, Washington

US Attorney General Jeff Sessions on Friday ordered an investigation into allegations that the Obama administration undermined efforts to target Hezbollah drug trafficking.

The announcement comes after Politico reported that Project Cassandra, a program targeting trafficking by Iran-backed Hezbollah that could have undermined the push for a nuclear deal with Tehran, was "derailed" by the administration of former president Barack Obama.

The review will "evaluate allegations that certain matters were not properly prosecuted and to ensure all matters are appropriately handled," Sessions said in a statement.

"While I am hopeful that there were no barriers constructed by the last administration to allowing DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) agents to fully bring all appropriate cases under Project Cassandra, this is a significant issue for the protection of Americans," he added.

But Edward Price, a former CIA agent who served as spokesman for the National

Security Council for the Obama administration, told AFP: "The narrative presented in this report in no way resembles reality."

"The Obama administration said time and again that the nuclear negotiations with Iran were confined exclusively to that narrow issue. We did not make concessions in other arenas, and we most certainly did not curtail or attempt to influence any active investigations, including by the Drug Enforcement Administration.

"Any allegations to the contrary are false, and those reflected in the story appear to be from former low-level officials who have since gone on to work for organizations ideologically opposed to the Iran deal, something Politico failed to disclose."

Trump has criticized the Iran nuclear agreement as "one of the worst and most one-sided transactions the United States has ever entered into."

He refused to certify Iran's compliance with the deal, but left its ultimate fate up to the US Congress.



# At least 10,000 killed in 1989

Says newly released British diplomatic cable that recounts Chinese army's bloodshed in gruesome detail

AFP, Beijing

At least 10,000 people were killed in the Chinese army's crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in June 1989, according to a newly released British diplomatic cable that recounts the bloodshed in gruesome detail.

The document, made public more than 28 years after the event, describes injured girls being bayoneted, bodies being ground up by armoured vehicles and human remains being flushed into the sewers.

"Minimum estimate of civilian dead 10,000," the then British ambassador Alan Donald said in the secret telegram to London seen by AFP at Britain's National Archives.

The estimate, given on June 5, 1989, the day after the crackdown, is almost 10 times higher than that commonly accepted at the time of several hundred to more than a thousand dead.

But experts questioned by AFP said the 10,000 figure seemed credible.

Donald's account gives horrific details of the violence unleashed on the night of June 3-4, when the army entered Beijing to end seven weeks of protests on Tiananmen

Square, the symbolic heart of Communist power. During their advance, armoured personnel carriers "opened fire on the crowd (both civilians and soldiers) before running over them in their APCs", wrote the ambassador.

He said his source was a person who "was passing on information given him by a close friend who is currently a member of the State Council" -- the Chinese cabinet.

He said the source had previously proved reliable "and was careful to separate fact from speculation and rumour".

Once the soldiers arrived in Tiananmen Square, "students understood they were given one hour to leave square but after five minutes APCs attacked," Donald wrote.

"Students linked arms but were mown down including soldiers. APCs then ran over bodies time and time again to make 'pie' and remains collected by bulldozer. Remains incinerated and then hosed down drains."

"Four wounded girl students begged for their lives but were bayoneted," Donald said, adding: "Army ambulances who attempted to give aid were shot up."

At the end of June 1989, the Chinese government had said suppression of the "counter-revolutionary riots" had killed 200 civilians and several dozen police and military.

### TIANANMEN CRACKDOWN

At the end of June 1989, Chinese government said suppression of the riots had killed 200 civilians



## Ex-Marine held over Christmas attack plot: FBI

AFP, Los Angeles

Federal agents arrested a former US Marine on Friday for allegedly plotting a Christmas attack in San Francisco inspired by the Islamic State jihadist group, according to court documents.

Tow truck driver Everitt Aaron Jameson, 26, was planning to target the city's busy Pier 39 tourist spot, according to an affidavit submitted by FBI Special Agent Christopher McKinney.

The suspect is said to have outlined to undercover agents how he wanted to use explosives to target crowds at the pier between December 18 and 25 because "Christmas was the perfect day to commit the attack."

Jameson professed not to need an escape plan as he was "ready to die," according to the document.

The suspect's home in Modesto, California, was raided by FBI agents on Wednesday, where they allegedly found his last will and testament along with weapons and ammunition.

Jameson attended basic training with the Marine Corps in 2009 and graduated with a "sharpshooter" rifle qualification, according to the FBI, but was discharged after failing to disclose a history of asthma.

According to McKinney, Jameson selected Pier 39 -- which gets around 10 million visitors a year -- because "he had been there before and knew it was a heavily crowded area."

Jameson explained that he also desired to use explosives and described a plan in which explosives could "tunnel" or "funnel" people into a location where Jameson could inflict casualties," McKinney stated.

# India-China border talks positive: Delhi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Grappling with the long-festering boundary dispute issue for the first time since a military face-off at a Himalayan plateau near Bhutan, India and China on Friday agreed that an "early settlement of the border question serves the fundamental interests of both."

As India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and China's State Councillor Yang Jiechi wrapped their 20th round of talks on the boundary issue here, a statement issued by India's External Affairs Ministry Friday evening underlined the significance of maintaining peace and tranquillity along the border pending a final resolution of the boundary question.

"The talks were positive and focussed on bringing out the full potential of the closer developmental partnership between the two countries," the statement said. Doval and Yang, the Special Representatives on the boundary issue, held the 20th round of their talks and the first since the 73-day standoff at Doklam in Bhutanese territory in June-August this year.

The latest confrontation took had started in June when India rushed its troops to stop China's People's Liberation Army from constructing a strategic road in the Doklam. However, both the countries agreed to pull back their troops on Aug 28 after negotiations through diplomatic channels.



People wave national flags to celebrate the 84th birthday of Japanese Emperor Akihito, inset, at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo yesterday. Record crowds flocked to the palace as Akihito prepares to abdicate in April 2019. PHOTO: AFP

# World wants peace not death: Trump on UN vote

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

US President Donald Trump said the "world wants peace not death" following the latest bout of UN Security Council sanctions placed on North Korea.

His comments came as the US secretary of defence told American soldiers to be "ready to go" if war breaks out on the Korean Peninsula.

The sanctions - which order North Koreans working abroad to return home within two years and ban nearly 90 percent of refined petroleum exports to the country - were unanimously approved in a resolution by the 15-member body on Friday.

Following the vote, Trump said on Twitter: "The United Nations Security Council just voted 15-0 in favour of additional Sanctions on North Korea. The World wants Peace, not Death!"

The latest sanctions, proposed by the US to prevent Pyongyang from furthering its nuclear programme, were the third imposed this year. An estimated 93,000 North Koreans work

abroad and send money back home, helping the government to fund its weapons programmes.

The sanctions, which also prohibit the supply of industrial machinery to North Korea and the purchase of food and agricultural products from the country, are a response to North Korea's test-launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile on November 29.

James Mattis, the American defence chief, said on Friday that "storm clouds are gathering" over the Korean Peninsula as he urged US troops to be ready if war breaks out - though he emphasised diplomacy was the best way forward.

"My fine young soldiers, the only way our diplomats can speak with authority and be believed is if you're ready to go," Mattis told dozens of troops at the Fort Bragg military base.

The US has nearly 28,000 soldiers permanently stationed in South Korea, a legacy of the 1950-53 war.

Both Russia and China supported the new sanctions, despite previously raising concerns that not enough was being done diplomatically.

### N KOREA SANCTIONS



## MELBOURNE ATTACK

# Driver charged with attempted murder

AFP, Melbourne

An Afghan refugee accused of ploughing his car into pedestrians in Melbourne was charged with 18 counts of attempted murder yesterday, as police vowed a boosted presence over the Christmas period.

Saeed Noori, who has a history of drug abuse and mental problems, allegedly drove his car through a busy downtown intersection on Thursday, careering into tourists and shoppers.

His motive is not clear, although police allege he made "utterances" to them about voices, dreams and the "poor treatment of Muslims" after his arrest. No link to any terrorist group has been found.

A 32-year-old man has been charged with 18 counts of attempted murder and one count of conduct endangering life, Victoria state police said in a statement, citing Thursday's attack.

Broadcaster ABC said Noori did not apply for bail when he appeared in court yesterday, putting his head in his hands and becoming emotional when he saw his mother weeping during the short hearing. The magistrate ordered a psychiatric assessment and he is due to appear in court again on Wednesday, the broadcaster reported.

## NEWS IN brief

### 32 dead as bus plunges off bridge in India

AFP, New Delhi

At least 32 people were killed yesterday when their bus swerved off a bridge and plunged 30 metres (100 feet) onto a riverbed in the western Indian state of Rajasthan, police said. Local television footage showed rescue workers in waist deep water pulling bodies from the bus, which was half submerged in the river Banas some 160 kilometres (100 miles) from the state capital Jaipur.

### Fire breaks out at London Zoo

AFP, London

A fire broke out at London Zoo early yesterday, engulfing a cafe and shop near an animal petting area, and leaving one aardvark missing. Several staff were treated for smoke inhalation and shock following the blaze, which broke out in the Animal Adventure section shortly after 6:00 am, the zoo said. "Duty staff that live on site at the zoo were on the scene immediately, and started moving animals to safety," it said.

### Turkey to change UAE embassy street name

REUTERS, Istanbul

Turkey plans to change the name of the street where the embassy of the UAE is to Fakhreddin Pasha, the historical figure at the centre of a diplomatic row caused by a retweet, the state-run Anadolu agency said yesterday. The UAE foreign minister retweeted last week accusations that Ottoman forces led by Pasha stole money and manuscripts from Medina in 1916 when the city was under Ottoman rule.

### China punishes 8,123 for misuse of govt funds

REUTERS, Shanghai

China has punished 8,123 people for committing fiscal violations after an audit of how the government's 2016 central budget was spent revealed multiple problems, Xinhua news agency reported. Hu Zejun, head of the National Audit Office, announced the infringements while briefing lawmakers yesterday. A broad anti-graft campaign in China has ensnared more than 1.3 million officials.

### RFI reporter released from jail in Cameroon

AFP, Yaounde

A Cameroonian reporter with Radio France International, Ahmed Abba, was Friday released from jail after 29 months in detention, his lawyer said. "Ahmed Abba left Yaounde prison around 9:15 pm (Friday). He has been with me since his release, he is doing well," Charles Tchoungang told AFP.