

## Fresh Tunisia arrests over wave of unrest

AFP, Tunis

Tunisian authorities said yesterday the number of people detained in a wave of violent protests had risen to nearly 800, as fresh unrest over austerity measures hit a provincial town overnight.

Activists called for a major protest yesterday in the capital Tunis over the measures introduced at the start of the year that are expected to see prices rise.

An AFP correspondent in the northern town of Siliana reported that police fired tear gas at dozens of youths who pelted them with stones for some three hours overnight.

But the situation appeared calm in other flashpoint towns and neighbourhoods across the country that had seen clashes that left dozens of police officers injured.

Interior ministry spokesman Khalifa Chibani said 151 people were arrested Thursday, taking the number detained for alleged involvement in the violence to 778 after several nights of unrest.

Chibani told local radio that clashes between youths and police were "limited" and "not serious", and insisted no acts of violence, theft or looting were recorded Thursday evening.

Amnesty International yesterday accused the Tunisian authorities of using "increasingly heavy-handed methods to disperse rallies and subsequently arrest protesters" during the unrest.

"Tunisian security forces must refrain from using excessive force and end their use of intimidation tactics against peaceful demonstrators," the rights group said.

One man died in the unrest on Monday night, but the authorities have insisted the police were not responsible.

A number of left-wing activists have been arrested by the authorities in recent days, after officials accused them of fuelling the violence.



Palestinians protestors throw a firebomb towards Israeli security forces during clashes at north of Ramallah in the Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday. US President Donald Trump recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital on December 6, 2017, angering the Palestinians.

## 'BAD' EMBASSY DEAL

# Trump cancels Feb visit to London

REUTERS, London

US President Donald Trump cancelled a trip to London scheduled for next month to open a new embassy, saying he did not want to endorse what he understood was an Obama-era decision to move out of the old one.

The cancellation is a further blow to relations between the allies. More than a year into his presidency, Trump has yet to visit London, with many Britons vowing to protest against a man they see as crude, volatile and opposed to their values on a range of issues.

"(The) reason I canceled my trip to London is that I am not a big fan of the Obama Administration having sold perhaps the best located and finest embassy in London for 'peanuts,' only to build a new one in an off location for 1.2 billion dollars," Trump said in a tweet late on Thursday. "Bad deal. Wanted me to cut ribbon-NO!" Trump said.

The decision to acquire a new London embassy site on the south bank of the Thames was announced in 2008 under George W. Bush along with the plans to put the old Grosvenor Square site in upscale Mayfair up for sale.

A pillar of Britain's foreign policy since World War Two, the so-called "special relationship" with Washington has taken on added importance as Britain prepares to leave the European Union in 2019 and seeks new major trade deals.

Prime Minister Theresa May was the first foreign leader to visit Trump after his inauguration in January last year, and they were filmed emerging from the White House holding hands. She later said Trump took her hand in a gentlemanly gesture as they walked down a ramp.

## Merkel strikes deal with social democrat rivals

### Opens way to new German government

REUTERS, Berlin

Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday struck a deal with Social Democrat (SPD) rivals to open government coalition talks, easing months of uncertainty that has undermined Germany's global role and raised questions about her political future.

But the deal to revive a "grand coalition" that has governed since 2013 must be approved by SPD party members at a congress planned for January 21. Some fear further association with Merkel's chancellorship could erode the influence of the SPD which suffered the worst result in September's election since the modern Federal Republic was founded in 1949.

"We have felt since the elections that the world will not wait for us, and in particular regarding Europe we are convinced we need a new call for Europe," Merkel, who has played a central role in tackling crises over the euro and refugees, told journalists after talks that had run through the night.

A 28-page blueprint pledged close co-operation with France to strengthen the euro zone. It also contained a promise, apparently targeting Saudi Arabia, a major buyer of German arms, not to export arms to countries involved in the war in Yemen.

Weakened by an election setback in September, Merkel turned to the left-leaning SPD to renew their grand coalition after the collapse in November of talks on a three-way coalition with the Greens and Free Democrats (FDP).

Germany is unfamiliar with the long negotiations that mark coalition building in many neighbouring countries. The dominance of the SPD and the conservatives long ensured smooth government transition. But elections last September saw the rise of the right-wing Alternative for Germany which upset the arithmetic.

Merkel was eager to avoid any repeat elections or attempt at a minority government.



had run through the night.

A 28-page blueprint pledged close co-operation with France to strengthen the euro zone. It also contained a promise, apparently targeting Saudi Arabia, a major buyer of German arms, not to export arms to countries involved in the war in Yemen.

Weakened by an election setback in September, Merkel turned to the left-leaning SPD to renew their grand coalition after the collapse in November of talks on a three-way coalition with the Greens and Free Democrats (FDP).

Germany is unfamiliar with the long negotiations that mark coalition building in many neighbouring countries. The dominance of the SPD and the conservatives long ensured smooth government transition. But elections last September saw the rise of the right-wing Alternative for Germany which upset the arithmetic.

Merkel was eager to avoid any repeat elections or attempt at a minority government.

## Turkey issues tit-for-tat travel warning for US

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey yesterday issued a travel warning urging its citizens to reconsider their travel plans to the United States, citing the risk of terror attacks and arbitrary detentions.

The move follows a US State Department advisory on Wednesday which urged Americans to reconsider visiting Turkey due to security concerns.

A statement by the Turkish foreign ministry -- using almost identical language to the original US advisory -- warns of an increase in terrorism and "risk of arbitrary detention" in America.

Relations between the two Nato allies have become increasingly strained over a number of issues, including Turkey's detention of two Turkish employees of US diplomatic missions in the country.

## Nation felt betrayed

### Says Pakistan army chief after US criticism that Islamabad is not doing enough to fight terrorism

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's army chief told a top US general the nation "felt betrayed" at criticism that it was not doing enough to fight terrorism, the military said yesterday, after US President Donald Trump accused Pakistan of "lies and deceit".

US Central Command chief General Joseph Votel told General Qamar Javed Bajwa during a telephone call this week that the United States was not contemplating any unilateral action inside Pakistan, the Pakistani army said in a statement.

Tension between the United States and Pakistan has grown over US complaints that the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network that target American troops in Afghanistan are allowed to take shelter on Pakistani soil.

Trump's administration last week announced the suspension of about \$2 billion in security aid to nuclear-armed Pakistan - officially a US ally - over accusations Islamabad is playing a double game in Afghanistan.

Islamabad denies this and accuses the United States of disrespecting its vast sacri-

fices - casualties have numbered in the tens of thousands - in fighting terrorism.

The US aid suspension was announced days after Trump tweeted on Jan. 1 that the United States had foolishly given Pakistan \$33 billion in aid over 15 years and was rewarded with "nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools".

It is not clear what prompted Trump's tweet, which infuriated Pakistani officials and caught the rest of the US administration off guard.

The Pakistani statement yesterday did not directly refer to Trump's tweet.

"(Bajwa) said that entire Pakistani nation felt betrayed over US recent statements despite decades of cooperation," the army said, referring to the phone call between Bajwa and Votel.

The Pakistani assertion that Votel said no unilateral action inside Pakistan was being considered may have referred to the possibility of cross-border US drone strikes and other military missions targeting Taliban and other militant figures outside the border area.



## India steps up patrols on Chinese border

### Vows to handle Beijing's assertiveness

AFP, New Delhi

India will handle China's growing assertiveness and has stepped up patrols on their disputed border to head off more standoffs, the country's top army officer declared yesterday.

The nuclear-armed neighbours have in the past gone to war over their border and last year were involved in a showdown over a Himalayan plateau claimed by China and Bhutan which is an ally of India.

Indian army chief General Bipin Rawat said a military hotline was being set up between the two sides but insisted his troops are ready for new tensions.

"We understand China is a powerful country but we are not a weak nation," Indian army chief General Bipin Rawat told a press conference when asked about the border dispute.

"We have increased our troop levels... we have increased our patrolling intensity. We are capable of handling China's assertiveness.

"We will not allow our territory to be invaded upon. Whenever intrusions take place we will depend because that's there in our charter."

Hundreds of Chinese and Indian troops faced off last year on the Doklam plateau.

Rawat said Indian soldiers crossed into foreign territory during the standoff but only because Chinese forces had "big equipment and they meant business".

"We knew they will try and claim the whole of Doklam. We felt a change in the status quo... (but) all effort was made by us to ensure it does not lead to a conflict. Even if it would have escalated we were prepared (as) the terrain usually favours us," he said.



An opposition fighter fires a gun from a village near al-Tamanah during ongoing battles with government forces in Syria's Idlib province on Thursday. The regime hopes to seize control of southeast parts of Idlib province to secure a main road between the capital Damascus and the northern city of Aleppo.

AFGHANISTAN UNREST

## US launches air strike after insider attack

AFP, Kabul

US Forces carried out an airstrike on an Afghan government militia after an apparent insider attack in eastern Afghanistan, Afghan sources have told AFP, killing as many as 13 fighters.

The incident occurred Thursday as US soldiers were patrolling in the Islamic State-stronghold of Achin in Nangarhar province, according to Hakim Khan, a commander of the government militia involved in the incident.

He said there had been a "shooting incident" after which US forces conducted an airstrike targeting the militia.

Khan said at least 13 fighters were killed in the airstrike, though other sources gave conflicting figures. An AFP reporter saw at least eight militia fighters buried yesterday morning.

Nato's Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan did not immediately confirm there had been an airstrike, but did say there had been an "active ground engagement".

It denied reports from local sources saying that American soldiers were among the dead.

"One US service member was wounded and is in stable condition at a medical treatment facility," said spokesman Captain Tom Gresback. He did not disclose which branch of the military the troops were from.

Two sources -- Malik Amin, a local neighbourhood representative, and a militia fighter who survived the aerial bombardment -- told AFP that the airstrike came after an "infiltrator" in the militia shot at the American troops.

## Nobody moove!

### Cow causes chaos at Indian airport

AFP, Ahmedabad

First it was monkeys and rabbits. Now a cow has forced flights to be diverted from Ahmedabad airport and Indian authorities said yesterday human negligence may have had a role.

The brave bovine crept past security at a cargo gate at the airport in India's Gujarat state to stray near the runway sparking a rodeo chase with guards.

A flight from Abu Dhabi and a cargo plane had to be diverted to Mumbai after one of the pilots spotted the beast. The arrival of five domestic flights and several departures were also delayed.

Aviation sources said airport security guards and fire officials struggled for more than 90 minutes to move the cow away from the runway.

"The cow had entered from near the cargo gate of the airport. The security personnel with sticks and air guns chased the animal away," one source said.

Sardar Vallabhbhai International Airport and other Indian airports have had previous troubles with disrespectful animals.

In February last year, an IndiGo flight at Ahmedabad was delayed on the takeoff strip because of rabbits on the runway.

## India sends satellites into space to watch borders

REUTERS, New Delhi

India yesterday launched its 100th satellite as Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeks to project the country as a global low-cost provider of services in space.

A total of 31 small satellites were launched into space yesterday. More than half of the micro and nano satellites were for the United States, and the remainder India, Canada, Finland, France, South Korea and the United Kingdom.

"The launch of the 100th satellite by @isro signifies both its glorious achievements and also the bright future of India's space programme," Modi said on Twitter.

India's space programme has a budget of around \$4 billion and Modi's government hopes the latest launches will improve its prospects of winning a larger share of the

more than \$300 billion global space industry.

Modi's government has been promoting a domestic space programme as a demonstration of low-cost technology and last February launched 104 satellites in a single mission, most of them for foreign customers.

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) used its workhorse Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C40), part of an advanced remote sensing satellite Cartosat-2 series or "eye in the sky", for the launch from Sriharikota in southern Andhra Pradesh state at 9:28 am.

The rocket weighs about 1,323 kgs, said a senior official at state-run ISRO, who did not wish to be named.

India will use its latest satellites for better border surveillance and obtaining high resolution images of the earth.



## Boko Haram kills 20 in NE Nigeria

AFP, Kano

Boko Haram fighters have killed at least 20 loggers, militia members and residents told AFP yesterday, in the latest attack against civilians in northeast Nigeria.

The attack happened on Monday when gunmen on motorbikes opened fire on a group of loggers collecting firewood at Kaje village, near the Borno state capital, Maiduguri.

"They (Boko Haram) killed 20 people in the attack. Fifteen others are missing and presumed kidnapped by the attackers," civilian militia leader Ibrahim Liman told AFP.

Details of the attack have been slow to emerge due to limited communications infrastructure after years of fighting in the remote region.

Kaje resident Shuaibu Sidi corroborated Liman's account and said his brother was among the dead.

Nigeria's government and military maintain that the Islamist militants, who have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group, are on the verge of defeat.

The conflict, which began in 2009, has killed more than 20,000 and forced some 2.6 million others from their homes, triggering a dire humanitarian crisis in the region.

But despite clear military gains in major towns and cities, hard-to-reach rural communities remain vulnerable to attack.