

# NEWS IN brief

## World is one step away from nuke war: Pope

REUTERS, Aboard The Papal Plane  
Pope Francis said yesterday he was really afraid about the danger of nuclear war and that the world now stood at "the very limit". His comment, made as he flew off for a visit to Chile and Peru, came after Hawaii issued a false missile alert that provoked panic in the US state and highlighted the risk of possible unintended nuclear war with North Korea.

## Qatari jets intercept passenger plane: UAE

AFP, Abu Dhabi  
The United Arab Emirates accused rival Qatar of "intercepting" a passenger plane en route to Bahrain yesterday, as Doha denied the accusation in a row over alleged airspace violations.



Workers and security officials examine the damage after a mezzanine floor collapsed at the Indonesia Stock Exchange building in Jakarta yesterday. Inset, people help an injured person outside the building. National police spokesman said 75 people were injured after the floor collapsed. PHOTO: REUTERS

## Sunk tanker leaves big oil spill off China

AFP, Beijing  
Chinese ships yesterday scrambled to clean up a massive oil spill after an Iranian tanker sank off China, raising fears of devastating damage to marine life.  
The Sanchi, carrying 136,000 tonnes of light crude oil from Iran, went under on Sunday after a new and massive fire erupted, sending a cloud of black smoke as high as one kilometre (3,280 feet) above the East China Sea.  
The bodies of only three of the 32 crew members have been found since the vessel collided with the CF Crystal, a Hong Kong-registered bulk freighter, on January 6, sparking a fire that Chinese rescue ships struggled to extinguish.  
Iranian officials said there was no hope of finding survivors among the crew of 30 Iranians and two Bangladeshis, prompting grief and anger among families of the sailors in Tehran.  
The search and rescue effort was cancelled and a clean-up began after a fire on the sea surface was finally extinguished yesterday, state broadcaster CCTV reported.  
Two ships sprayed chemical agents aimed at dissolving the oil, CCTV said. The spill was 11.5 miles long and up to 4.6 miles wide and located east of the submerged ship, it added. This would amount to an area of some 50 square miles (129 square kilometres).  
"This (clean-up) work is one of our focuses. It is also a priority area of our efforts. No one wants to see a large-scale secondary disaster," said foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang, adding that the cause of the accident was under investigation.  
Alaska-based oil spill consultant Richard Steiner called the accident "the single largest environmental release of petroleum condensate in history".

## New era in India-Israel ties

Netanyahu, Modi sign several agreements on defence, energy and agricultural sectors amid protests in New Delhi

AFP, New Delhi  
Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday hailed a "new era" in ties with India as he signed a series of deals during the first visit by an Israeli Prime Minister in 15 years.  
Netanyahu made the comment after talks with Narendra Modi, who made history in July when he became the first Indian leader ever to visit Israel.  
He is accompanied by the largest-ever business delegation to travel with an Israeli leader, including technology, agriculture and defence executives.  
The two men embraced warmly, appearing to overcome any tensions over India's refusal to support US moves to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital, before signing agreements on cybersecurity and energy.  
"We are ushering today a new era in our relations," Netanyahu said after their talks.  
"We have had diplomatic relations for 25 years, but something different is happening now because of your leadership and our partnership."  
Earlier, Netanyahu said he was "disappointed" by India's decision to vote for a resolution at the UN General

Assembly opposing the US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.  
Israel is already a major weapons supplier to India, exporting \$1 billion of military equipment annually.  
Earlier this month India announced it would buy 131 surface-to-air missiles



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from Israel for its first domestically made aircraft carrier.  
But New Delhi needs to balance closer ties with Israel with its historic support for the Palestinian cause.  
Dozens gathered near the Israel embassy in New Delhi to protest at

Netanyahu's visit yesterday.  
Modi also wants to end India's status as the world's top defence importer and encourage foreign companies to transfer their technology to local firms to create much-needed jobs.  
India has already cancelled a \$500 million deal to buy Israeli Spike anti-tank missiles after apparently deciding to manufacture the equipment at home.  
Yesterday, Modi said he had invited Israeli defence companies "to take advantage of the liberalised FDI (foreign direct investment) regime to make more in India with our companies".  
Netanyahu is the first Israeli leader to visit India since Ariel Sharon's trip in 2003.  
He will visit the Taj Mahal and travel to Modi's home state of Gujarat today before heading to Mumbai where the majority of India's estimated 4,500 Jews live.  
There, he will make an emotional visit to a Jewish centre targeted in the 2008 Mumbai attacks.  
Netanyahu is accompanied by 11-year-old Moshe Holtzberg, whose parents were among 166 people killed by Pakistani militants in coordinated attacks on the city.

## Turkey denounces US terror army plan in Syria

REUTERS, Istanbul  
Turkey's Tayyip Erdogan yesterday threatened to "strangle" a planned 30,000-strong US-backed force in Syria "before it's even born," as Washington's backing for Kurdish fighters drove a wedge into relations with one of its main Middle East allies.  
The United States announced its support on Sunday for plans for a "border force" to defend territory held by US-backed, Kurdish-led fighters in northern Syria.  
The Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad responded yesterday by vowing to crush the new force and drive US troops from the country. Assad's ally Russia called the plans a plot to dismember Syria and place part of it under US control.  
But the strongest denunciation came from Erdogan, who has presided as relations between the United States and its biggest Muslim ally within Nato have stretched to the breaking point.  
"A country we call an ally is insisting on forming a terror army on our borders," Erdogan said in a speech in Ankara. "What can that terror army target but Turkey?"

"Our mission is to strangle it before it's even born."  
Erdogan said Turkey had completed preparations for an operation in Kurdish-held territory in northern Syria.  
The United States has led an international coalition using air strikes and special forces troops to aid fighters on the ground battling Islamic State militants in Syria since 2014. It has about 2,000 troops on the ground in Syria.  
The US intervention has taken place on the periphery of a near seven-year civil war that has killed hundreds of thousands of people and driven more than 11 million from their homes.  
Islamic State was effectively defeated last year, but Washington says its troops are prepared to stay to make sure the Islamist militant group cannot return, also citing the need for meaningful progress in UN-led peace talks.  
For much of the war, the United States and Turkey worked together, jointly supporting forces fighting against Assad's government. But a US decision to back Kurdish fighters in northern Syria in recent years has enraged Ankara.

Damascus vows to drive US troops from country  
Russia says US does not want to maintain Syrian unity



## Cranberries singer Dolores dies at 46

CNN  
Dolores O'Riordan, the lead singer of the Irish band The Cranberries, died in London yesterday, according to a statement from her publicist.  
O'Riordan, who was 46, died "suddenly" according to the statement, but no details were given on the cause of her death.  
The singer was in London for a short recording session, the statement added.  
The Cranberries rose to global fame in the mid-1990s with a string of hits, including "Linger," "Zombie" and "Dreams." The group, from Limerick, has sold more than 40 million albums worldwide.

## Lanka SC dashes Sirisena's hope of longer term

AFP, Colombo  
Sri Lanka's top court has rejected a controversial attempt to extend President Maithripala Sirisena's term in office by an extra year, further souring the ruling party's relations with its coalition partners.  
Sirisena had asked the Supreme Court whether a limit on presidential terms, which he introduced in 2015 as part of measures to curb the power of the executive, applied to his own mandate.  
His chief attorney general last week told the court that the constitutional provision reducing terms from six to five years would not apply to the incumbent.  
But that position was unanimously rejected by the five-judge bench which ruled that Sirisena was not exempt from the law, official sources said.  
"The Supreme Court has conveyed the opinion that the President's term of office is five years," Sirisena's office said in a statement yesterday.

"The court arrived at this opinion after the President sought its opinion with regard to the term of office of the incumbent President."  
Efforts to extend Sirisena's rule have further strained relations with his main coalition partner, which has indicated it may go it alone in the next general election in 2020.  
The United National Party joined hands with Sirisena to topple Mahinda Rajapakse in January 2015, ending the strongman president's decade in power.  
But since then their alliance has fractured, with Sirisena clashing with his Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe over economic policy.  
Sirisena has publicly accused Wickremesinghe's UNP of being more corrupt than the regime which together they helped oust.  
During his rule, Rajapakse granted himself greater powers over the police, judiciary and civil servants, excesses which Sirisena pledged to curb upon his election.



Palestinian refugees wait to receive aid at a United Nations food distribution center in Al-Shati refugee camp in Gaza City yesterday. The Trump administration is preparing to withhold tens of millions of dollars from the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, according to US officials. PHOTO: REUTERS

## Trump's peace efforts 'slap of the century'

Says Palestinian leader  
AFP, Ramallah  
Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas denounced US President Donald Trump's peace efforts as the "slap of the century", at a key meeting Sunday on the White House's declaration of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.  
In a wide-ranging two-hour speech, Abbas reiterated he would not accept the Trump administration as a mediator in peace talks with Israel and called for an internationally-led process.  
He also accused Israel through its actions of ending the 1994 Oslo peace accords that form the basis of Palestinian ties with the Jewish state, saying the Palestinians would study all strategies for responding to it.  
Beyond that, Abbas

## Turkmenistan bans 'bad habits' from TV

AFP, Ashgabat  
Tightly controlled Turkmenistan has banned broadcasters from showing sex and encouraging "bad habits" in a law designed to create a "positive image" of the Central Asian country on the air.  
The law, signed by strongman President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov over the weekend according to state newspaper Neutral Turkmenistan, cites "protection of minors" as the reason for the ban on erotic content.  
While the legislation does not specify what "bad habits" broadcasters should avoid promoting, Berdimuhamedov's government has waged a war on smoking in the republic of five million.  
The document equally does not explain how content will be judged "pornographic" or "sexual-erotic".  
In practice, television channels have long shown versions of foreign films with sexual and suggestive scenes edited out.  
The new law also says broadcasters must aim "to create TV and radio programmes (showing) a positive image of Turkmenistan."  
Press freedom watchdog Reporters Without Borders says Turkmenistan suffers from an "ever-growing information 'Black Hole'" and placed it 178th out of 180 countries in press freedom index.

## 'I'm not a racist'

Trump defends himself after controversy over his remarks about African countries, keeps door open for DACA deal

REUTERS, West Palm Beach  
US President Donald Trump insisted on Sunday "I'm not a racist" in response to reports that he had described immigrants from Haiti and African countries as coming from "shithole countries."  
Trump also said he was "ready, willing and able" to reach a deal to protect illegal immigrants brought to the United States as children from being deported but that he did not believe Democrats wanted an agreement. He tweeted earlier on Sunday that the existing program would "probably" be discontinued.  
The debate over immigration policy became increasingly acrimonious after it was reported on Thursday that the Republican president used the word "shithole" to describe Haiti and African countries in a private meeting with lawmakers.  
The comments led to harsh recriminations from Democrats and Republicans alike, with some critics accusing Trump of racism,

even as bipartisan talks continued in the US Congress to seek a bipartisan compromise to salvage the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA.  
Asked by a reporter in Florida whether he was a racist, Trump said: "No. I'm not a racist. I'm the least racist person you have ever interviewed."  
Trump has threatened to end DACA, but he seemed to keep the door open for a deal when he told reporters before dinner on Sunday night: "We're ready, willing and able to make a deal on DACA, but I don't think the Democrats want to make a deal.... The Democrats are the ones that aren't going to make a deal."  
Efforts to extend the program are further complicated because it could make a funding bill to avert a government shutdown due Friday more difficult.  
"DACA is probably dead because the Democrats don't really want it, they just want to talk and take desperately needed money away from our military," Trump said.



## Kashmir border violence kills 9

AFP, Srinagar  
At least nine people including four Pakistani soldiers were killed in fighting in disputed Kashmir yesterday, India and Pakistan said.  
The Pakistani army said four of its soldiers and three Indian troops had been killed in an exchange of fire across the heavily militarised de-facto border known as the Line of Control (LoC).  
India denied it suffered any casualties, but said its soldiers had killed five "militants" who attempted to cross the LoC in a separate incident in Uri, 100 kilometers (62 miles) northwest of the main city of Srinagar.  
India frequently accuses Pakistan of sending fighters across the LoC to launch attacks on its soldiers in Kashmir, which has been divided between the two nuclear-armed neighbours since partition in 1947.  
"During the night a group of infiltrating militants were challenged by the army, triggering a fierce exchange of fire in which five militants were killed," superintendent of Indian police Imtiyaz Hussain told AFP.  
Hussain said the militants appeared to be from Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), a Pakistan-based militant group that police say has recently stepped up its activities in the volatile territory.



attacked the US ambassadors to Israel and the United Nations, David Friedman and Nikki Haley, calling them a "disgrace".  
Both Trump appointees have been strong supporters of Israel, with Friedman having backed Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank.  
"We said 'no' to Trump, 'we will not accept your project'," the Palestinian president said.  
"The deal of the century is the slap of the century and we will not accept it," he added, referring to Trump's pledge to reach the "ultimate deal" -- Israeli-Palestinian peace.