

# NEWSIN brief

## Japan, China aim to open military hotline

AFP, Beijing

China and Japan plan to open a military hotline to ease tensions over disputed East China Sea islands, Beijing said yesterday, after their top diplomats held rare talks aimed at warming chilly ties. Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono met his counterpart Wang Yi in Beijing yesterday in an attempt to improve relations held back by long-standing disputes over maritime territory and Japan's wartime legacy.

## 14 killed in Brazil nightclub shootout

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

At least 14 people were killed in an early Saturday shootout at a nightclub in Fortaleza, in northeastern Brazil, officials said. The shooting broke out at 1:30am when a group of armed men arrived in three vehicles at the Forro do Gago nightclub in Fortaleza's Cajazeiras neighborhood. Local media reported that the shootout was a clash between members of two rival drug trafficking gangs.

## Fresh attack kills 4 Malian soldiers

AFP, Bamako

Suspected al-Qaeda-linked jihadists killed four Malian soldiers yesterday in the second deadly attack this weekend in the country's troubled north, local and military officials told AFP. Fourteen soldiers were killed and 18 wounded on Saturday when suspected jihadists seized control of their camp in Soumpi, near Timbuktu.

## 2 dead, dozens saved in ME migrant ops

AFP, Rome

Two women died and many others are presumed drowned after a migrant boat carrying dozens of people sank in the Mediterranean, rescue services in Italy said. Italian coast guards on Saturday said a total of 800 people were rescued in five separate operations.



A man holds up a rubber mask depicting Russian President Vladimir Putin with the word "Thief" on it during an opposition rally calling for a boycott of March 18 presidential elections in Moscow yesterday. Moscow police yesterday broke into the headquarters of opposition leader Alexei Navalny (inset) and detained him and his aides as Russians rallied across the country to protest upcoming "pseudo-elections."

PHOTO: AFP

# Yemen warns of coup

## Southern separatists take over govt HQ amid fierce clashes in Aden; 15 killed, dozens wounded

AFP, Aden

Yemen's prime minister yesterday accused southern separatists of an attempted coup after they took over the government headquarters amid fierce clashes in the city of Aden.

Prime Minister Ahmed bin Dagher called on the Saudi-led military coalition, which has been backing the government against Shia Huthi rebels in control of much of the north, to intervene in its defence.

Security sources and residents said fighting appeared to have spread to most of the southern port city of Aden, throwing Yemen into further chaos after years of civil war.

The southern separatists -- who want the return of an independent state that ended with Yemen's unification in 1990 -- had backed President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi's government against the Huthis but tensions between the two sides had been on the rise.

"A coup is ongoing here in Aden against legitimacy and the country's unity," Dagher said in a statement.

Security sources told AFP that pro-separatist units trained and backed by the United Arab Emirates had taken over the government headquarters in Aden after

clashes.

At least 15 people were killed and dozens wounded, hospital sources said. President Hadi yesterday ordered his forces to cease fire immediately in Aden.

The fighting erupted after separatist protesters were prevented from entering the city for a protest to demand the government's ouster from Aden, established as its interim base after the Iran-backed Huthis seized control of the capital Sanaa in 2014.

The coalition, which launched its intervention against the rebels in March 2015, had urged restraint ahead of the planned protest.

Universities, schools and the only international airport in the city had all been closed, according to witnesses.

Dagher said that events in Aden were headed towards "total military confrontation" and urged members of the coalition, in particular the UAE, to take action.

The premier also warned that separating south Yemen from the rest of the country would benefit Iran and the Huthis.

"Iran is trying to consolidate its presence in Yemen through the Huthis and by splitting Yemen, we are giving them one-third of the land and three-quarters of the population," Dagher said.

PM calls on Saudi-led coalition to intervene in its defence

Universities, schools and int'l airport in the city closed

# 'No one did such a climb before'

## French climber saved on Nanga Parbat

AFP, Islamabad

An elite group of climbers saved a French mountaineer in a daring night-time rescue on a Pakistan peak nicknamed "killer mountain", but officials yesterday called off the search for a second missing climber.

The team of Polish climbers with support from the Pakistani military launched the attempt Saturday afternoon to rescue stranded French mountaineer Elisabeth Revol, but were unable to reach Polish national Tomek (Tomasz) Mackiewicz on Nanga Parbat.

The four rescuers were flown by the Pakistani military from the base camp of K2 -- the world's second-highest peak -- to reach the stranded climbers.

They were part of a Polish expedition seeking to become the first mountaineers to summit K2's peak during the winter, when good climbing days are rare.

The team was evacuated by helicopter after a five and a half hour descent down the mountain to Nanga Parbat's Camp One

early yesterday.

The group were then airlifted by helicopter to a hospital in nearby Skardu, where Revol was set to be treated for a number of injuries.

Pakistani climber Karim Shah, who was in contact with the expedition, said the rescue effort was unmatched in the climbing world, with the team ascending 1,200 metres in complete darkness along a treacherous route without a fixed rope.

"No one did such a climb before," Shah told AFP. "Most people, it takes two or three days, and they did it in eight hours in the darkness."

Following the operation the Polish team are set to return to K2 base camp where they will continue their summit attempt.

Nanga Parbat, in northern Pakistan, is the world's ninth-highest mountain at 8,125 metres (26,660 feet). It earned the nickname "killer mountain" after more than 30 climbers died trying to climb it before the first successful summit in 1953.



Tomek (Tomasz) Mackiewicz



An Iranian man walks with a child amid the snow in the capital Tehran, yesterday. Some 20 provinces in the west and north of Iran were affected by the snowfall that began on Thursday and peaked on Saturday night, with some mountainous areas receiving as much 1.3 metres of snow according to official news agency IRNA.

## TRUMP ON BREXIT TALKS

# 'I would have been tougher than May'

AP, London

US President Donald Trump is claiming he would take a "tougher" attitude toward Brexit negotiations with the European Union than the approach now being used by British Prime Minister Theresa May.

Without providing specifics, Trump said in an ITV interview broadcast last night that he would have used different tactics.

"Would it be the way I negotiate? No, I wouldn't negotiate it the way it's (being) negotiated... I would have had a different attitude," he said. "I would have said that the European Union is not cracked up to what it's supposed to be."

Britain is preparing to leave 28-nation bloc in March 2019. The complex negotiations have moved slowly and May's Cabinet seems deeply divided over how best to separate.

In the interview with Piers Morgan, Trump said he looked forward to visiting Britain -- where he has been invited sometime for a state visit to be hosted by Queen Elizabeth II -- and apologises for retweeting videos by a far-right group in Britain, which exacerbated tensions with May and drew complaints in Parliament.

He also said Prince Harry and American actress Meghan Markle look like a "lovely couple" but he doesn't know if he's been invited to their May 19 nuptials at Windsor Castle. Trump was unperturbed when told that Markle backed his rival, Democrat Hillary Clinton, in the 2016 US election and has described him as "divisive."

"Well, I still hope they're happy," he said.

Trump also said his administration might not withdraw from the 2015 Paris climate accord if terms more favourable to the United States are reached, in part because he likes French President Emmanuel Macron, a driving force behind implementing the accord.

# Fighting rages in Syria's Ghouta

## Kurds won't join Sochi peace talks

AGENCIES

Heavy fighting resumed in Syria's eastern Ghouta yesterday after a short period of relative calm following reports that a ceasefire had been agreed there late on Friday, a war monitor and pro-government media sources said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, said there was intense fighting accompanied by large blasts, heavy shelling and air raids after an attack by jihadist rebels. It said the Syrian army of President Bashar al-Assad had fired dozens of rockets and shells into eastern Ghouta since the ceasefire was reported to have begun.

Late on Friday, a rebel official said that Assad's ally Russia had promised the opposition delegation at peace talks in Vienna that it would put pressure on Damascus to enforce a truce in eastern Ghouta. The ceasefire was never publicly confirmed by the Syrian government.

International concern has been rising over the fate of 400,000 people living in besieged, rebel-held eastern Ghouta as acute food and medicine shortages have contributed to what the United Nations has called the worst malnutrition of the war.

Meanwhile, authorities in Syria's Kurdish autonomous region yesterday said they would not attend peace talks in Russia's Sochi next week because of Turkey's offensive against the Kurdish enclave of Afrin.

Rebel backer Turkey is one of the sponsors of the two-day talks in the Black Sea resort, along with Damascus allies Russia and Iran. On Saturday, Syria's main opposition group also said it would not attend the negotiations.



## CATALONIA CRISIS

# Spain court deals blow to Puigdemont

AFP, Madrid

Catalonia's fugitive separatist leader Carles Puigdemont was under pressure yesterday to return to Spain after the country's top court ruled he could not govern the region from abroad.

Puigdemont, who fled to Belgium in October after the Catalan parliament declared independence, would in the "coming hours" ask the Supreme Court for permission to attend a debate and vote in the Catalan parliament Tuesday on his bid to form a new government, a lawmaker with his Together for Catalonia party told Catalan radio.

The newly elected speaker of the Catalan parliament, Roger Torrent, last week named Puigdemont as the candidate to head the Catalan government after separatist parties again won an absolute majority in the Catalan parliament in December election.

However, he faces arrest for rebellion, sedition and misuse of public funds over his attempt to break Catalonia away from Spain as soon as he returns.

Puigdemont had said he could be sworn in to office via videoconference from Brussels, a plan Spain's central government opposes.

Puigdemont's supporters have said that he could rule from abroad by video link but has said he would rather return to Spain as long as he is given guarantees that he will not be arrested.

But Spain's Constitutional Court late Saturday ruled Puigdemont must return to the country and be present in the regional parliament to receive the authority to form a new government.



A Palestinian child holds bread during a protest against aid cuts, outside the United Nations' offices in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip January, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

# Top Republican quits key post

AFP, Washington

Las Vegas casino billionaire Steve Wynn stepped down Saturday as Republican National Committee finance chairman, following allegations of decades of sexual misconduct.

The 76-year-old former business rival turned political ally of President Donald Trump had assumed the RNC position after Trump took office in January 2017.

Wynn has denied the allegations, first published in The Wall Street Journal on Friday, and accused his ex-wife Elaine of instigating the accusations as part of a "terrible and nasty lawsuit" seeking a revised divorce settlement.

"Today I accepted Steve Wynn's resignation as Republican National Committee Finance Chair," RNC chair Ronna Romney McDaniel said in a statement to AFP on Saturday. Politico said McDaniel had discussed Wynn's case with Trump early Saturday. The president returned from the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, late Friday.

A towering figure in the gambling world, Wynn has been a prolific Republican donor whose empire includes casinos in Macau.

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In the above premises, I have instructions from my client to call upon all such unscrupulous businessmen which I hereby do by way of this legal notice to desist and refrain from selling such inferior quality machines by passing them off as HASHIMA & KM products.

In the event of continuing with such illegal activity, I have further instructions from my client to initiate appropriate legal proceedings both civil and criminal against all such persons.

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