

NEWSIN brief

Most senior US career diplomat to retire

AFP, Washington
The most senior career diplomat in the US State Department has decided to retire, exactly one year after he oversaw the transition to President Donald Trump's administration, he said Thursday. Thomas Shannon will retire as undersecretary of state for political affairs, after 35 years in service. In a retirement letter to colleagues, the 60-year-old gave no hint of political dissatisfaction, describing his decision as "personal, and driven by a desire to attend to my family".

Five migrants shot in Calais brawl

AFP, Calais
Five migrants were shot during a giant brawl in Calais, leaving four fighting for their lives Friday in what the French government called an "unbearable" escalation of violence in a port that serves as a gateway to Britain. Twenty-two were hospitalised with injuries after three fights across the city. Clashes between migrants are a frequent occurrence in Calais, where newcomers live scattered in the woods, emerging at night to try waylay passing trucks.



Fidel Castro's eldest son commits suicide

AFP, Havana
The popular eldest son of the late Cuban president Fidel Castro, Fidel Castro Diaz-Balart, committed suicide on Thursday, state media reported. He was 68 years old. The younger Castro was very popular in Cuba even though he never held a political position. A scientist who studied physics in the former Soviet Union, Fidel Jr helped usher in the development of a nuclear power program in the Communist-ruled country. In his most recent public appearances Castro gave lectures on nanoscience, in which he specialized.

Brexit transition deal in seven weeks: UK PM

REUTERS, London
British Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday said that a Brexit transition period will be agreed with the European Union in seven weeks as she tries to ease concerns that a deal may take longer to reach. The EU has offered Britain a status quo transition until the end of 2020 after Brexit. Both sides are aiming to reach a transition agreement by the end of March that will form part of the final withdrawal treaty to be agreed later this year. But there is disagreement inside May's Conservative Party over some details such as the status of EU citizens during the transition and the scope of European Court of Justice jurisdiction. Many businesses and banks are concerned a battle over the terms of a transition could delay or even sink an agreement just months before Britain exits the EU on March 29, 2019. "In seven weeks time, we will have an agreement with the European Union, that is the timetable they have said on an implementation period," May told the BBC in an interview in China. "What the British people voted for is for us to take back control of our money, our borders and our laws and that's exactly what we are going to do," May said of Brexit.

The EU and Britain hope to hammer out a deal on Britain's exit and the outline of a trade package by October 2018.



Palestinian protesters clash with Israeli forces yesterday in Ramallah in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Arab foreign ministers on Thursday called for the creation of a UN-backed "multilateral mechanism" to help revive the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. The appeal was issued at the end of a two-day meeting to discuss US President Donald Trump's December 6 recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital which has sparked Arab anger. PHOTO: AFP

ROW OVER RELEASE OF RUSSIA PROBE MEMO

Trump blasts DOJ, FBI

Accuses agencies of pro-Democrat bias

REUTERS, Washington
President Donald Trump yesterday attacked the integrity of the FBI and Justice Department in an extraordinary showdown over the expected White House release of a secret Republican memo alleging FBI bias against him in its Russia probe.

Trump, who has long been angered over the probe, accused the country's top law enforcement officers - some of whom he appointed himself - of politicizing investigations in favor of Democrats and against his fellow Republicans. Trump has repeatedly complained about his treatment by federal investigators probing possible collusion between his campaign and Russia to sway the 2016 presidential election, and any actions to impede the investigation.

"The top Leadership and Investigators of the FBI and the Justice Department have politicized the sacred investigative process in favor of Democrats and against Republicans - something which would have been unthinkable just a short time ago," Trump said on Twitter. The president praised "rank and file" FBI employees.

The timing of his latest salvo - two days after the FBI warned publicly against releasing the classified memo - was sure to worsen the presi-

dent's frayed relations with agencies that are supposed to be politically independent. A White House official said Trump was likely to give Congress approval later yesterday to release the four-page document that has become a flashpoint in a wider battle between Republicans and Democrats over Special Counsel Robert Mueller's Russia probe.

The criminal probe grew out of the FBI's Russia investigation after Trump fired FBI director James Comey and Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself from the investigation. Russia has denied meddling in the election campaign. Trump, who has called Mueller's probe a political witch hunt, has denied any collusion or obstruction of justice.



The FBI expressed "grave concerns about material omissions of fact" in the Republican memo on Wednesday, in a rare public rebuke of the president and Republicans in Congress pushing to release the memo.

Democrats have depicted the memo, which was crafted by Republican members of the House Intelligence Committee, as misleading, based on a selective use of highly classified data and intended to discredit Mueller's work.

There has been speculation that FBI Director Christopher Wray, appointed by Trump after he fired Comey, might resign if Trump allows release of the memo.

All 955 miners rescued in SA

AFP, Theunissen

All 955 gold miners trapped underground for more than a day in South Africa after a power cut were rescued unharmed yesterday, to the relief of waiting relatives.

"Everybody's out," mine spokesman James Wellsted told AFP, adding that there were no deaths or serious injuries reported.

There were "cases of dehydration and high blood pressure but nothing serious", he said.

The miners were stuck in the Beatrix gold mine, in the small town of Theunissen near the city of Welkom, for around 30 hours after a massive power outage caused by a storm prevented lifts from bringing workers on the night shift to the surface. After several hours engineers were able to restore power, allowing the hoist to bring up the miners -- who had been trapped since Wednesday evening -- in batches.

Despite the rescue, the accident at Beatrix mine has reignited safety concerns at South African mines.

INTENSIFYING HEADSCARF PROTESTS IN IRAN

29 women held

AFP, Tehran

Tehran police have arrested 29 women for appearing in public without a headscarf as protests against the dress code in force since the Islamic revolution of 1979 intensified, Iranian media reported yesterday.

Those arrested were accused of public order offences and referred to the state prosecutor's office, the Fars, ILNA and Tasnim news agencies reported without elaborating.

Chief prosecutor Mohammad Jafar Montazeri had played down the escalating protests on Wednesday, saying they were "trivial" and "childish" moves possibly incited by foreigners.

He had been asked about a woman detained earlier this week for standing on a pillar box in a busy street waving her headscarf on the end of a stick.

Unprecedented images of at least 11 women protesting the same way had been widely shared on social media.

Even religiously conservative Iranians have voiced support for the protests, with many saying that religious rules should be a personal choice.

At least two photos shared on Twitter on Wednesday showed women in traditional black chador robes, standing on pillar box with signs supporting freedom of choice for women. One held a sign reading: "I love my hijab but I'm against compulsory hijab."

Women have increasingly flouted the Islamic republic's clothing rules in recent years and often let their headscarves fall around their necks.

The protests appear to mirror that of a woman who stood in Tehran's busy Enghelab (Revolution) Street in December without a headscarf and waving a white scarf on a stick. She was reportedly kept in detention for nearly a month and has since kept a low profile.



This image from a video shows injured people (L) trapped between a van and a fence in Shanghai, China, yesterday. A van packed with pressurised gas tanks and bottles full of petrol caught fire and ploughed into pedestrians in front of a Starbucks in Shanghai yesterday, leaving at least 18 people injured, authorities and witnesses said. Police ruled out any terror motive behind the "traffic accident". PHOTO: AFP

ALLEGED FRESH CHEMICAL ATTACKS IN DOUMA

US warns of Syria air strikes

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump has not ruled out military action to stop chemical weapons attacks in Syria, senior administration officials said Thursday, signalling an intensified effort to press the Assad regime and its Russian patrons.

In the wake of yet more suspected sarin and chlorine attacks blamed on the regime, Washington said it wants to send a message to Bashar al-Assad and Moscow that enough is enough.

The latest unconfirmed attack came on Thursday, in the rebel-held town of Douma. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said three people suffered respiratory problems after a rocket attack.

A senior US official told AFP that military options against Damascus similar to those launched in April 2017 were always on the table and "always feasible."

Trump "hasn't excluded anything" in the bid to halt the program, the official said. "Using military force is something that is still considered."

A second senior US official reported evidence that Assad's regime has a "ongoing production capability" focused on sarin and chlorine and is developing new ways to deploy the chemicals banned for weapons use.

"It looks like they are trying to evolve for either military reasons or to escape accountability. It is incredibly important to stop that before it gets off the ground," the official added.

The Assad regime appears to have altered course only slightly since the United States fired 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles at Syrian airfield in 2017 after a large chemical attack on rebel-held Khan Sheikhun.

On January 22, at least 21 people in Douma, including children, suffered breathing difficulties after a rocket attack on a besieged rebel enclave near Damascus.

An AFP correspondent at a hospital in the city saw people carrying babies wrapped in blankets, breathing through oxygen masks, some of them screaming.

Young girls and men sat on hospital beds, tears in their eyes, unable to stop coughing.

CROSS-BORDER TERRORISM THREAT

China in talks over military base in remote Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Worried about militants sneaking into a restive Chinese region from war-torn Afghanistan, Beijing is in talks with Kabul over the construction of a military base, Afghan officials say, as it seeks to shore up its fragile neighbour.

The army camp will be built in Afghanistan's remote and mountainous Wakhan Corridor, where witnesses have reported seeing Chinese and Afghan troops on joint patrols.

The freezing, barren panhandle of land -- bordering China's tense Xinjiang region -- is so cut off from the rest of Afghanistan that many inhabitants are unaware of the Afghan conflict, scraping out harsh but peaceful lives.

However they retain strong links with neighbours in Xinjiang.

Beijing fears that exiled Uighur members of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) are passing through the Wakhan into Xinjiang to carry out attacks.

It also worries that Islamic State group militants fleeing Iraq and Syria could cross Central Asia and Xinjiang to reach Afghanistan, or use the Wakhan to enter

China, analysts say. Meanwhile, President Ashraf Ghani yesterday vowed to take revenge for the bloodshed caused by a spate of deadly attacks in Afghanistan and accused Pakistan of failing to move against the Taliban.

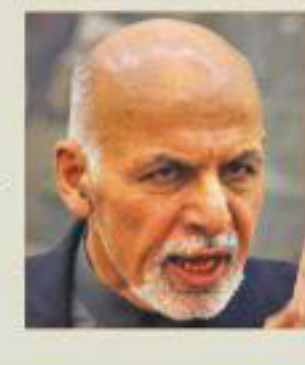
Since January 20, militants have stormed a luxury hotel, bombed a crowded street and raided a military compound in Kabul, killing more than 130 people. A British charity in the eastern city of Jalalabad was also attacked. Officials said five people were killed.

"People will not forget. Even if it takes a hundred years, the Afghans will take their revenge," Ghani said in a televised address to the nation after Friday prayers. "We are waiting for Pakistan to act," Ghani added.

His remarks came a day after Afghan officials said they had handed "undeniable" evidence to Pakistan that they claimed showed the recent attacks were planned on Pakistani soil.

Afghan and Chinese officials discussed the military base plan in December in Beijing, but details are still being clarified, Afghan defence ministry deputy spokesman Mohammad Radmanesh said.

Ghani vows revenge after deadly attacks, urges Pakistan to act



JOB OPPORTUNITY @ Solidaridad

Solidaridad is a frontrunner in the area of sustainable economic development is facilitating the development of socially responsible, ecologically sound and profitable supply chains and value chains development. We are an international market and solution-oriented civil society organization working through nine regional expertise centers in around 53 countries. We aspire to transform production practices in such a way that they provide fair and profitable livelihoods and business opportunities, guarantee decent working conditions and a fair living wage and do not deplete the landscapes where people thrive, now and for generations to come.

We envision a world in which all we produce and all we consume, can sustain us while respecting the planet, each other and the next generations. We bring together supply chain players and engage them with innovative solutions to improve production, ensuring the transition to a sustainable and inclusive economy that maximizes the benefit for all.

Solidaridad is looking for **Programme Manager** for its country programme in Bangladesh. For detailed job profile and required competencies, please see the bdjobs link.

Programme Manager
Detailed job profile at <http://hotjobs.bdjobs.com/jobs/solidaridad/solidaridad38.htm>

Only short-listed candidates will be called for interview. Women are especially encouraged to apply. Application Deadline: February 8, 2018.

CAREER OPPORTUNITY

NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY

Center of Excellence in Higher Education

North South University (NSU), the first private university in Bangladesh, seeks applications for the following position:

Medical Officer (Male): 1 position

Academic Qualification and Job Experience: MBBS degree (Internship completed) from a recognized institution with BMDC (Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council) registration. Minimum 3-5 years of professional work experience in related field is required. Well conversant in MS-Word, MS-Excel and other applications will be preferred. Excellent command in oral and written English is a must.

Age: Ideally 30 - 35 years.

Monthly Salary: An attractive salary package & benefits will be offered to the successful candidate.

Other Benefits: Provident Fund, Gratuity, Festival Bonuses, Group Insurance etc.

Only short-listed candidates will be called for interview

Candidates may apply with a complete CV, two passport sized photographs, experience certificates, copies of transcripts by **February 20, 2018** through e-mail or in hard copy to:

Director, Administration
NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY
Bashundhara, Dhaka - 1229
E-mail: nsuhr@northsouth.edu
www.northsouth.edu