

NEWSIN brief

Brazil's Lula to defy surrender order

REUTERS, Brasilia
Brazil's former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will not turn himself in to serve a 12-year prison sentence for corruption, a party source with knowledge of his thinking said yesterday, adding he will wait until a higher court rules on a last-minute appeal. Lula has not spoken publicly since Judge Sergio Moro issued his dramatic arrest warrant on Thursday.

Nepal's new PM makes maiden visit to India

AFP, Kathmandu
Nepal's new Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli yesterday arrived in India on the first foreign visit of his latest term. During the three-day visit Oli will meet his counterpart Narendra Modi, and possible deals on the use of Indian waterways by Nepal as well as an expansion of an India-backed railway to Kathmandu have been mooted.

US to update Saudi artillery for \$1.31b

AFP, Washington
The United States on Thursday approved a contract to sell Saudi Arabia 180 self-propelled artillery systems for \$1.31 billion, in the latest stage of perhaps the world's biggest arms deal. When President Trump visited Riyadh last year he boasted that the kingdom would spend \$110 billion on US equipment and the howitzer contract is one more step towards that goal.

Two UN peacekeepers dead in Mali attack

AFP, Bamako
Two UN peacekeepers were killed and 10 others wounded on Thursday night during an attack on their camp in northeastern Mali, the UN's mission said. "At 6:45pm the peacekeepers came under mortar fire," the mission said in a statement. Mali is one of the most dangerous UN missions, with more than 150 peacekeepers killed since 2013.



(From top left, anticlockwise) An injured Palestinian protester is carried by fellow demonstrators during clashes with Israeli security forces near the border with Israel; demonstrator hurls stones at Israeli troops; Gazans are seen trying to remove part of the Israeli fence at the Israel-Gaza border; tear gas fired by Israeli security forces lands on demonstrators; and Palestinian youths react during the clashes.

Will fight back at any cost

Warns China as Trump threatens to slap further \$100b in tariffs

REUTERS, Beijing
China warned yesterday it would fight back "at any cost" with fresh trade measures if the United States continues on its path of protectionism, hours after President Donald Trump threatened to slap tariffs on an additional \$100 billion in Chinese goods.
Trump said the United States has already lost any trade war, as he defended his proposed tariffs, saying the move might cause "a little pain" but the United States will be better off in the long run.
"We've already lost the trade war. We don't have a trade war, we've lost the trade war," Trump said in a radio interview with New York radio show, 77 WABC's "Bernie & Sid" early yesterday. In a Twitter message on Wednesday, he had said: "That war was lost many years ago by the foolish, or incompetent, people who represented the US."
In light of China's "unfair retaliation" against earlier US trade actions, Trump upped the ante on Thursday by ordering US officials to identify extra tariffs, escalating a high stakes tit-for-tat confrontation with potentially damaging consequences for the world's two biggest economies.
On Wednesday, China unveiled a list of 106 US goods - from

soybeans and whiskey to frozen beef and aircraft - targeted for tariffs, in a swift retaliatory move only hours after the Trump administration proposed duties on some 1,300 Chinese industrial, technology, transport and medical products.
Washington has called for the \$50 billion in extra duties after it said a probe determined Chinese government policies are designed to transfer US intellectual property to Chinese companies and allow them to seize leadership in key high-technology industries of the future.
Responding to Trump's latest comments, the Chinese commerce ministry reiterated that China was not afraid of a trade war even though it did not seek one, and accused the United States of provoking the conflict.
So far, US information technology products from mobile phones to personal computers have largely escaped the ire of Beijing, as well as telecoms equipment and aircraft larger than the equivalent of a Boeing 737.
Among the most affected by a trade war could be the US technology sector, particularly chipmakers. The US semiconductor sector relies on China for about a quarter of its revenue.
Chinese state media had slammed Trump's threat of more trade action as "ridiculous".

Trump repeats 'we've already lost trade war'
US technology sector could face ire of Beijing in new measures

NEW CLASHES ALONG GAZA BORDER

4 killed, hundreds hurt

AFP, Gaza City
Israeli forces killed four Palestinians as thousands protested and clashes erupted along the Gaza border yesterday, a week after a mass demonstration led to violence and the bloodiest day since a 2014 war.
Gaza's health ministry also reported that some 408 Palestinians had been taken to hospitals and medical centres for treatment. The dead included a 16-year-old, it said.
Palestinians burned mounds of tyres and threw stones at Israeli soldiers over the border fence, who responded with teargas and live fire.
Israel said there were also attempts to break through the barrier.
Thousands of protesters -- Israel estimated 20,000 -- gathered in locations near the border east of Khan Yunis, in the south of the blockaded Palestinian enclave, and east of Gaza City, among other spots.
The number of protesters was however lower than last week, when a demonstration by tens of thousands led to clashes in which Israeli forces killed 19 Palestinians.
The tyre fires were meant to be a smokescreen from Israeli snipers, and thick black smoke

covered the border area in some places.
Israeli forces took up positions on the other side of the border and set up large fans in a bid to push away smoke.
They also used water cannon to try to disperse the protesters.
Israel had warned that its open-fire rules would remain unchanged for Friday's protests, pledging to stop damage to the fence and prevent infiltrations or alleged attacks.
It had faced mounting criticism over its use of live fire, and UN chief Antonio Guterres called for restraint ahead of yesterday's protest.
The protests, designed to last six weeks, are in support of refugees. More than 700,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from their lands during the war surrounding Israel's creation in 1948.
Israelis say allowing the so-called "right of return" would mean their country would cease to exist. Protests will run until the expected opening of the new US embassy in Jerusalem in mid-May. The US move has led to deep anger among Palestinians, who see the annexed eastern sector of Jerusalem as the capital of their future state.

BATTLE AGAINST OBESITY

UK rolls out sugar tax on soft drinks

AFP, London
Britain yesterday joined France, Norway and Mexico in rolling out a sugar tax on soft drinks in an attempt to tackle obesity and tooth decay in children.
Drinks containing five grammes of sugar per 100 ml will face a lower rate of 18 pence (\$0.25, 0.21 euros) per litre, whereas those with more than eight grammes per 100 ml will face a rate of 24 pence per litre.
Top-selling brands such as Fanta, Ribena and Lucozade have already cut the sugar content of their products to avoid the tax, but Coca-Cola and Pepsi will both stick with the same recipes, which both contain more than 10 grammes per 100 ml.
"Our teenagers consume nearly a bathtub of sugary drinks each year on average, fuelling a worrying obesity trend," said Public Health Minister Steve Brine.
"The levy is a ground-breaking policy that will help to reduce sugar intake."
The government hopes the tax will raise £240 million (\$335 million, 274 million euros) per year, which it will spend on sports facilities and breakfast clubs.
Former finance minister George Osborne, who unveiled the tax policy when in office, believes milkshakes with large quantities of sugar may be targeted next.
"I suspect the sugar tax will start to be extended to things like milk products, which I was nervous of going into in the first instance because I wanted to establish the case for a sugar tax," he told BBC's Newsnight.



Former South African president Jacob Zuma gestures to his supporters as he appears at the KwaZulu-Natal High Court in Durban yesterday, for a brief preliminary hearing on corruption charges linked to a multi-billion dollar 1990s arms deal.

'You'll be sorry'

Russia warns Britain at UNSC meet over spy poisoning row

REUTERS, United Nations
Russia told Britain at the United Nations Security Council on Thursday that "you're playing with fire and you'll be sorry" over its accusations that Moscow was to blame for poisoning a former Russian spy and his daughter.
It was the second showdown between Russia and Britain at the world body since the March 4 nerve agent attack on Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in an English town. Russia, which requested Thursday's council meeting, denies any involvement.
"We have told our British colleagues that 'you're playing with fire and you'll be sorry,'" Russian UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said during a more than 30-minute speech that attempted to poke holes in Britain's allegations against Moscow.
He suggested that anyone who watched television crime shows like Britain's 'Midsomer Murders' would know "hundreds of clever ways to kill someone" to illustrate the "risky and dangerous" nature of the method Britain says was used to target Skripal.
British police believe a nerve agent was left on the front door of the Salisbury home where Skripal lived after he was freed in a spy swap. He was a military intelligence colonel who betrayed dozens of Russian agents to Britain's MI6 spy service.
"We believe that the UK's actions stand up to any scrutiny," British UN Ambassador Karen Pierce told the Security Council. "We have nothing to hide ... but I do fear that Russia might have something to fear."

Malaysia braces for 'dirty' polls

Warns Mahathir as PM Najib dissolves parliament

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia's Prime Minister Najib Razak announced the dissolution of parliament yesterday, paving the way for a general election showdown with his old mentor and the country's most seasoned campaigner, Mahathir Mohamad.
Najib is under pressure to deliver an emphatic win for the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, as he struggles to appease Malaysians unhappy with rising costs and a multi-billion dollar scandal at a state fund he founded.
The 64-year-old leader is expected to retain power due to a rift in opposition ranks between Mahathir's bloc and the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party.
But analysts predict a tough fight from Mahathir, who transformed Malaysia into an industrial nation from a rural backwater during his iron-fisted 22-year rule until 2003.
The opposition says the election will be unfair. Mahathir, 92, who was himself criticised for his

authoritarian premiership, told a news conference Malaysia's 14th general election would be "dirty".
"Should Najib win this election through his tricks and his cheating, then we can kiss goodbye to democracy in the 15th, 16th, 17th elections," Mahathir said.
In recent days, parliament approved plans to redraw electoral boundaries and passed a contentious anti-fake news bill, changes critics say will favour Najib.
The government rejects the accusations. Polling must be held within 60 days of a dissolution.
With the common goal of taking down Najib, Mahathir has joined hands with his former deputy and jailed opposition leader, Anwar Ibrahim, ending a feud that had shaped the country's political narrative over two decades. If elected, Mahathir would become world's oldest PM.
Najib's United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) party heads the ruling coalition that has held power since Malaysia's independence in 1957.



No jobs, no vote

Indian town warns Modi ahead of 2019 polls

REUTERS, Kasba Bonli
Rakesh Kumar has a post-graduate degree but works as a house painter in the small town of Kasba Bonli in northwestern India.
The 31-year-old, the only one of eight siblings to attend university, said his attempts to get a salaried job had failed, and he blamed the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for not creating employment opportunities as it had promised.
"I voted for Modi last time," said Kumar, wearing a pink shirt and wrinkled, brown trousers that had droplets of paint on it. "He had promised jobs, and I was sure I would get something. I won't vote for him again."
Modi's failure to create tens of millions of jobs for the country's youth - a promise which helped him secure the largest mandate in three decades in 2014 - would be the biggest threat to his bid for another term in a general election due by May, 2019, many political analysts say.
That seems the case in Kasba Bonli, a market town in Rajasthan state on the edge of sprawling wheat fields, which voted overwhelmingly for Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at assembly elections in 2013 and the general election in 2014.
"My two sons are educated but unemployed," said Hanuman Prasad Meena, a farmers' leader in the town. "Many farmers voted in Modi's name earlier, but he has no support here now."
Hanumat Dixit, a local BJP leader in Rajasthan, acknowledged the party could suffer in the coming election because of the lack of jobs, but added Modi needed more time to deliver on his promises.



Finally time for talks has arrived

Puigdemont urges Madrid leaving jail

REUTERS, Berlin
Former Catalan President Carles Puigdemont called on Spain to abandon its attempts to prosecute separatist leaders as he left a German prison yesterday, urging Madrid to enter into dialogue with them.
Puigdemont, granted bail after German judges ruled he could not be extradited on charges of "rebellion" brought by Spain, thanked prison staff as he emerged to cheers and people waving Catalan flags.
He called for "the immediate release of all my colleagues in Spanish prisons".
"It is a shame for Europe to have political prisoners," Puigdemont said. "Finally the time for dialogue has arrived."
Judges yesterday rejected Spain's request to have him extradited to face the rebellion charges for having organised a referendum on Catalan independence that Madrid viewed as illegitimate.
They set bail at 75,000 euros (\$92,000), saying that Puigdemont, who fled Spain five months ago after Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy dismissed his regional administration, did not pose a serious flight risk.