

NEWS IN brief

Trump's top homeland security advisor quits

AFP, Washington
Donald Trump's White House was hit with a fresh resignation yesterday as his top homeland security advisor, Tom Bossert -- once a presidential favorite -- announced his departure from the West Wing. "The president is grateful for Tom's commitment to the safety and security of our great country," White House press secretary Sarah Sanders said of the top aide's departure.



Japanese confirmed as world's oldest male

AFP, Tokyo
Masazo Nonaka from Japan was yesterday recognised as the world's oldest man at the ripe old age of 112, as his family revealed his secret: sweets and hot baths. Nonaka, who was born on July 25, 1905 -- just months before Albert Einstein published his theory of special relativity -- received a certificate from Guinness World Records at home on Japan's northern island of Hokkaido.

China, Vanuatu deny military base plan

AFP, Beijing
Vanuatu and China both insisted yesterday there were no plans for Beijing to open a military base in the Pacific nation after a report suggesting the Asian giant was pushing the proposal sparked concern in Australia and New Zealand. The Sydney Morning Herald said China had approached Vanuatu about the possibility, potentially upsetting the delicate strategic balance in the region.



Syrian onlookers gather around rescue teams clearing the rubble yesterday morning at the site of an explosion of unknown origin which wrecked a multi-storey building the previous night in the war-battered country's northwestern city of Idlib. The explosion killed more than ten people and wounded 80. PHOTO: AFP

He 'deserves medal' Israel defence chief praises soldier who shot Palestinian in video

AFP, Jerusalem
Israeli Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman yesterday said a soldier who shot a Palestinian along the Gaza border in a video that has been widely shared "deserves a medal". Earlier two Israeli right-wing ministers defended the soldiers after the video appearing to show them shoot a Palestinian and rejoice in it spread widely on social media and news sites. The video comes at a highly sensitive time for Israel's military, which has faced mounting criticism over its use of live fire on the Gaza Strip border, where 31 Palestinians have been killed since late March as mass protests have led to clashes. The shooting in the video appears to take place along Gaza's border with Israel. Voices can be heard discussing opening fire on what seems to be Palestinians posing no immediate threat near the fence. A shooter then appears to open fire on one, knocking the person to the ground. "Wow. What a video! Yes! That son of a bitch," one of the voices behind the camera says in Hebrew. It was not possible to determine whether the person shot in the video died.

US-N Korea talks in 'May or early June': Trump

AGENCIES
US President Donald Trump has said he planned to meet North Korean leader Kim Jong Un next month or in early June and hoped the discussions would ultimately lead to an end of the North's nuclear weapons program. "We'll be meeting with them sometime in May or early June and I think there'll be great respect paid by both parties and hopefully we'll be able to make a deal on the denuclearization of North Korea," Trump told reporters at the beginning of a Cabinet meeting on Monday. "They've said so. We've said so," Trump said. "Hopefully, it'll be a relationship that's much different than it's been for many, many years." Trump's comments came just a few hours before North Korea mentioned talks with the United States and South Korea for the first time. North's state media said Kim Jong Un chaired a party meeting on Monday in which he assessed future talks with Washington and his upcoming summit with South Korea on April 27. Any meeting between Kim and Trump would come after the two Koreas hold their first summit in more than a decade later this month. North Korea has told the United States it is prepared to discuss the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula when Kim meets Trump, a US official told Reuters on Sunday. The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said US and North Korean officials have held secret contacts recently in which Pyongyang directly confirmed its willingness to hold the unprecedented summit. Meanwhile, North Korea's foreign minister held rare talks with his Russian counterpart in Moscow yesterday. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov welcomed Ri to Moscow in the morning, saying that "Russia is as inclined as ever to develop good neighbourly relations with North Korea".

'CHEMICAL ATTACK' IN SYRIA

WORLD REACTION

Syria was on high alert yesterday after US President Donald Trump vowed to respond quickly and forcefully to an alleged chemical attack that has sparked international outrage. Here is what world powers said about the alleged attack. SOURCE: AFP

"We have a lot of options militarily and we'll be letting you know pretty soon... We're going to make a decision tonight or very shortly thereafter"
US President **Donald Trump**



"We have reached the moment when the world must see justice done.... History will record this as the moment when the Security Council either discharged its duty or demonstrated its utter and complete failure to protect the people of Syria. Either way, the United States will respond."
US Ambassador to UN **Nikki Haley**

"From what we hear now, I am afraid they are looking for a military option, which is very, very dangerous."
Russian ambassador to UN **Vassily Nebenzia**



"The attack shows clearly that Syria continues to possess lethal chemical weapons capabilities and even to manufacture new ones. In so doing Syria is grossly violating its obligations and the decisions of the international community in this matter."
Israel foreign ministry statement

"There are consultations among a number of countries with regards what steps to take in order to deal with this issue. Our position is that those responsible have to be held accountable and brought to justice."
Saudi Foreign Minister **Adel al-Jubeir**

West falsely accusing Syria "in order to pave the way for an attack on Syria like the US and Britain's criminal aggression against Iraq in 2003."
Syria's UN ambassador **Bashar al-Jaafari**

"If the red line has been crossed, there will be a response."
France government spokesman **Benjamin Griveaux**

China "opposed to the wanton use of force or threat of force. Military means will lead us nowhere."
Chinese foreign ministry spokesman **Geng Shuang**

"The seriousness of the recent allegations requires a thorough investigation using impartial, independent and professional expertise."
UN Secretary-General **Antonio Guterres**



"I curse those who carried out this massacre. Whoever has done this, the perpetrators will be brought to account and certainly pay a heavy price."
Turkish President **Recep Tayyip Erdogan**

Anger as Malaysia sets polls date on weekday

Opposition alleges move to aid PM Najib

AFP, Kuala Lumpur
Malaysians will go to the polls next month, officials announced yesterday, with the long-ruling and scandal-tainted ruling coalition facing one of its toughest ever challenges from veteran ex-leader Mahathir Mohamad. The poll date announced by the election commission -- May 9 -- sparked fury among the opposition who claimed a weekday election was deliberately chosen to keep turnout low, favouring Najib. It is the first time in almost 20 years that a Malaysian election has been set for a weekday. "I am very, very angry," opposition candidate Maria Chin Abdullah told AFP. "This move by the election commission is obviously to ensure victory for the ruling party." Prime Minister Najib Razak's Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, which has been in power for six decades, has seen its popularity wane in recent years, a slide further compounded by a multi-billion-dollar scandal surrounding state fund 1MDB. Najib is still tipped to win due to BN's firm grip on Malaysia's weakened institutions, and what critics claim are efforts by the government to rig the election through gerrymandering and other forms of cheating. But he faces a tough challenge from Mahathir, 92, who was Malaysian premier for over two decades but has come out of retirement to take on his former protege Najib at the head of the opposition. Najib is under pressure from allies in his United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the main coalition party, to score an emphatic victory after the government lost the popular vote in the last election in 2013. As the polls approached, the BN-dominated parliament voted to redraw constituency boundaries in a manner analysts say favours the ruling coalition.



Police beat a protester during a strike observed across India against a caste-based reservations system in education and jobs in Gaya in Bihar state, yesterday. The strike was called against India's system for allocating space in jobs and education that reserves space for members of "lower caste" communities, following the violent nationwide protests by tens of thousands of Dalits in early April who were enraged at a Supreme Court ruling they said weakens a law intended to protect their lower caste communities. PHOTO: AFP

'My mistake, I'm sorry'

FB chief to tell Congress

AFP, Washington
Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg says he accepts responsibility for the social network's failure to protect private data and prevent manipulation of the platform, according to testimony released Monday on the eve of his first Congressional appearance. "We didn't take a broad enough view of our responsibility, and that was a big mistake. It was my mistake, and I'm sorry," Zuckerberg said in his written testimony released by a House of Representatives panel. "I started Facebook, I run it, and I'm responsible for what happens here." Zuckerberg was set to testify before senators yesterday and a House panel today amid a firestorm over the hijacking of data on millions



A historic handshake

Kenya's presidential election

AFP, Nairobi
It was a handshake that drew a line under Kenya's bruising election, left many people bewildered and swung open the starting gate for the 2022 presidential race. After months of insults during a deadly and divisive election, the two heirs of Kenya's most powerful political dynasties, President Uhuru Kenyatta and his rival Raila Odinga stood side by side, shook hands and pledged reconciliation. Even in a country used to the political game of thrones, where betrayals are commonplace and bitter rivals forge alliances almost overnight, the gesture on March 9 stunned the nation. Kenya's presidential election in August plunged the country into turmoil, after Kenyatta's victory was annulled by the Supreme Court, citing flaws in the process, which ordered a re-run. Kenyatta, 56, subsequently won an October re-run after Odinga, 73, boycotted the election which he said would not be free and fair. Protests and political violence left at least 92 dead during the election period, mostly at the hands of police, according to rights groups. The handshake, which came after Odinga held a mock swearing-in ceremony in January, has brought an end to the vitriolic attacks between the rivals.

Trump furious as FBI raids lawyer's offices

AFP, Washington
A furious Donald Trump blasted the investigation led by special counsel Robert Mueller as a "disgrace" and a "witch hunt" Monday after FBI agents raided the New York offices of the president's longtime personal lawyer Michael Cohen. Agents seized files relating to Cohen's work, which included making a \$130,000 payment before the 2016 election to an adult film actress who says she had a tryst with the Trump a decade earlier. Cohen's own attorney Stephen Ryan said agents were working in part on the request of Mueller, the independent prosecutor investigating links between Russia and the Trump campaign. At the White House, Trump angrily denounced the raid on "good man" Cohen. "It's a disgraceful situation. It's a total witch-hunt, I have been saying it for a long time," he told reporters. "It's an attack on our country in a true sense. It's an attack on what we all stand for." The raid came as Mueller's probe intensifies its focus on Trump's inner circle. Mueller's team is examining possible collusion between Trump's campaign and Moscow, as well as allegations of corrupt behavior by Trump campaign lieutenants and of White House efforts to obstruct the investigation. So far, 19 people have been indicted, including the chairman of Trump's campaign and his former national security advisor. Trump accused Mueller of overseeing a biased investigation staffed by Democrats, "a pure and simple witch-hunt." But the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, Adam Schiff, said it was a Trump-appointed prosecutor who had sought the search warrant, which was in turn approved by a judge. The special counsel is also probing a \$150,000 payment Ukrainian billionaire steel magnate Victor Pinchuk made during the US presidential campaign to Trump's foundation for the American real estate developer to give a 20-minute speech via video link, according to The New York Times.



NERVE AGENT ATTACK IN UK

Ex-spy's daughter leaves hospital

AFP, London
Yulia Skripal, who was poisoned with a nerve agent in the English city of Salisbury along with her Russian ex-spy father, has been discharged from hospital, an official said yesterday. "This is not the end of her treatment but marks a significant milestone," Salisbury hospital's deputy chief executive Christine Blanshard said. She added that while Sergei Skripal, a former double agent who moved to Britain in 2010, is "recovering more slowly than Yulia, we hope that he too will be able to leave hospital in due course". The pair were found collapsed on a bench in the southwestern city of Salisbury on March 4 in what British authorities have said was attempted murder by the Russian state. Western allies backed Britain but Moscow strongly denied any involvement, prompting a furious international row. Countries around the world expelled more than 150 Russian diplomats in response, prompting Moscow to launch its own expulsions. The Skripals were both in a coma after the attack and there were initially fears they would not recover, but last week officials said they were both improving. She said she had found the incident "disorientating", without providing any further details on the attack. The BBC reported that Yulia had been discharged on Monday and was moved to a secure location.

of Facebook users by the British firm Cambridge Analytica, which worked with Donald Trump's campaign. In his written remarks, Zuckerberg called Facebook "an idealistic and optimistic company" and said: "We focused on all the good that connecting people can bring." But he acknowledged that "it's clear now that we didn't do enough to prevent these tools from being used for harm as well. That goes for fake news, foreign interference in elections, and hate speech, as well as developers and data privacy." Zuckerberg recounted a list of steps announced by Facebook aimed at averting a repeat of the improper use of data by third parties like Cambridge Analytica, and noted that other applications were also being investigated to determine if they did anything wrong.