

## NEWSIN brief

**Erdogan calls Turkey  
snap polls for June 24**  
AFP, Ankara

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday called snap elections in Turkey for June 24, bringing the polls forward by over a year-and-a-half after a call from his main nationalist ally. Both presidential and parliamentary elections will be held on the same day. They had originally been scheduled for November 3, 2019.

**Israeli fire near Gaza  
border injures five**  
AFP, Gaza City

Five Palestinians were injured by Israeli fire along the Gaza border yesterday, the health ministry in the Palestinian enclave said, with tensions high over recent protests and clashes there. The five were injured by Israeli artillery fire east of Khan Yunis.



**Barbara Bush dies**  
REUTERS, Washington

Former US first lady Barbara Bush, the only woman to see her husband and son both sworn in as president, died on Tuesday, the Bush family said. She was 92. Bush was the wife of the 41st president, George HW Bush, and mother of the 43rd, George W Bush.

**Wedding truck crash  
kills 21 in India**  
AFP, New Delhi

At least 21 revellers were killed en route to a wedding when their truck flew off a bridge, police said yesterday. The truck, carrying more than 40 passengers, smashed through a protective railing in central Madhya Pradesh state late Tuesday and plunged nearly 20 metres to a dry riverbed below.



Members of various groups join together in protesting against India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and discrimination against religious minorities in India, in central London yesterday, on the sidelines of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was set to sign £1 billion of investment deals with Britain yesterday.

PHOTO:  
AFP

## Internet invented by ancient Indians!

**Tripura CM ridiculed over claim**  
UNB, Websites

Netizens are mocking an Indian minister who claimed that the Internet and satellite were invented hundreds of thousands of years ago by ancient Indians.

Biplab Deb, 46, who is the chief minister of the north-eastern state of Tripura, had made the comments at a public function on Tuesday.

"Internet and satellite communication had existed in the days of Mahabharata. How could Sanjaya (the charioteer of King Dhritrashtra) give a detailed account and description to the blind king about the battle of Kurukshetra? It means Internet was there, the satellites and that technology was there in this country at that time," he said, according to Times of India.

Deb, who is from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), said, since the era of the Mahabharata, India was top in technology but somehow in the middle, it got lost.

But his claim has not found many takers. According to the BBC, "Tripura CM Biplab Deb" is trending on Twitter with many Indians mocking him.

Kshitij Nagar tweeted: "Well I hope they at least had better bandwidth than what present day ISPs offer."

Deb is not the first Indian minister to have claimed that many modern day science technologies were invented in ancient India. In 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told a gathering of doctors and medical staff at a Mumbai hospital that cosmetic surgery existed in ancient India.



## Pompeo secretly meets Kim

*Trump says CIA chief met the North Korean leader in Pyongyang to lay groundwork for leaders' talks*

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump yesterday confirmed that his CIA chief has held secret talks with North Korea's leader in Pyongyang, as the South said it was exploring paths to a peace deal with the nuclear-armed North.

Seoul's push for discussions on formally declaring an end to inter-Korean hostilities was the latest in a series of diplomatic initiatives involving the divided Korean peninsula that would have been unthinkable just months ago.

The flurry of activity has raised hopes for a major breakthrough from a pair of upcoming and potentially historic summits.

The latest shock move was CIA director Mike Pompeo's face-to-face meeting with North Korea's young leader, reportedly during the first weekend in April.

The surprise visit marks the highest-level contact between the United States and North Korea since 2000.

"Mike Pompeo met with Kim Jong Un in North Korea last week. Meeting went very smoothly and a good relationship was formed. Details of Summit are being worked out now," Trump tweeted.

Trump is expected to hold a summit with Kim by June.

"Denuclearization will be a great thing for World, but also for North Korea!" he added, regarding efforts to persuade North Korea to abandon its



nuclear weapons ambitions.

Kim is expected to meet South Korea's President Moon Jae-In at a landmark meeting next Friday where discussion of a peace declaration is now on the cards.

Trump earlier said that the summit could, with his "blessing", explore a peace treaty to formally end the conflict.

The 1950-53 Korean War ended in an armistice rather than a peace treaty, leaving the two sides technically at war. The Demilitarised Zone between them bristles with minefields and fortifications.

But reaching any final treaty would be fraught with complications.

While the US-led United Nations command, China and North Korea are signatories to the decades-old armistice, South Korea is not.

Both Pyongyang and Seoul claim sovereignty over the whole Korean peninsula, but a treaty could imply mutual recognition of each other.

The North would be likely to demand the withdrawal of US troops, while the South's national security adviser Chung Eui-yong yesterday said that Seoul and Washington wanted to see Pyongyang give up its nuclear ambitions.

Analysts say North Korea would only give up nukes if it secures guarantee that US or its allies won't attack the country. Considering history and previous actions, it will be a tough task

### PROBE INTO ALLEGED CHEMICAL GAS ATTACK IN SYRIA

## Inspectors' visit delayed

*UN team came under fire in Douma ahead OPCW visit*

AFP, United Nations

A UN security team was fired at on Tuesday while on a reconnaissance mission in the Syrian town of Douma to prepare the deployment of experts investigating an alleged chemical attack, officials said yesterday.

"Shots were fired yesterday [Tuesday] at a UN security team doing a reconnaissance in Douma," a UN official told AFP. "They were not injured and returned to Damascus."

The experts from the OPCW chemical watchdog were awaiting the green light from the security team before beginning their on-site investigation in Douma of the alleged attack.

The suspected April 7 gas attack on Douma, near Damascus, reportedly left more than 40 people dead and was blamed by Western powers on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces.

British Ambassador Peter Wilson told reporters in The Hague that the security team on Tuesday travelled to two sites in Douma, escorted by Russian security police.

Regime forces shell IS  
bastion in Damascus  
Saudi renews offer to  
deploy troops to Syria

The officials were greeted by a "large crowd" of protesters at one site, forcing them to withdraw while at the second site "they were subject to small-arms fire and an explosion," Wilson said, citing information from the OPCW director general.

Ahmet Uzumcu, the head of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, told ambassadors in The Hague that it was unclear when the fact-finding mission will be able to deploy to Douma, Wilson added.

Meanwhile, Syrian regime forces shelled the last pockets in Damascus controlled by the Islamic State group, preparing the ground for a possible assault on the jihadist stronghold, a monitor said yesterday.

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubei reaffirmed on Tuesday the kingdom's willingness to deploy troops to Syria.

"We are in discussions with the US and have been since the beginning of the Syrian crisis (in 2011) about sending forces into Syria," Jubei said at a press conference in Riyadh with UN chief Antonio Guterres.

## Cubans wary of future

*Lawmakers start two-day session to name first non-Castro president in more than 40 years*

REUTERS, Havana

Cuban lawmakers started a two-day session yesterday to name the first non-Castro president in more than 40 years, ushering in younger Communist leaders who will be under pressure to bring greater prosperity and revitalize the creaking economy.

The replacement for President Raul Castro is widely expected to be First Vice-President Miguel Diaz-Canel, 57, an engineer who embraces technology and appears socially liberal but is considered a safe pair of hands to follow the elderly leaders who fought the 1959 revolution, as they retire.

The next president is likely to be cautious at first, seeking to consolidate support among conservatives despite a desire for faster development of an economy smaller than it was in 1985, when Cuba had the support of the Soviet Union.

Gathered at a convention center in a leafy Havana suburb, 605 legislators in

the rubber stamp national assembly will select 30 other members of Cuba's state council along with the replacement for Castro, who took over from his brother, Fidel, in 2008.

Castro, 86, brought sweeping change, significantly thawing relations with the United States for the first time since rebels led by his brother overthrew a US-backed dictator, and making cautious market reforms to one of the world's last Soviet-style command economies.

But with the economy suffering from a crisis in allied Venezuela and relations with the United States strained anew under President Donald Trump, some Cubans are pessimistic about their lives improving and feel nervous about what is to come.

"Right now, we don't know what the future holds," said Adriana Valdivia, 45, a teacher in Havana. "Raul is finished and Fidel is history."



US President Donald Trump and first lady Melania Trump dine with Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Abe's wife Akie at Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, US, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## FB rolling out privacy choices under EU rules

AFP, Menlo Park

Facebook announced yesterday it would begin rolling out changes to how it handles private data this week to comply with forthcoming EU rules, with European residents seeing the measures first.

The social network, which has been rocked by disclosures about the hijacking of personal data on tens of millions of its users, said it will start implementing "new privacy experiences" to comply with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which became effective May 25.

"Everyone -- no matter where they live -- will be asked to review important information about how Facebook uses data and make choices about their privacy on Facebook," said a statement from chief privacy officer Erin Egan and deputy general counsel Ashlie Beringer.

"We'll begin by rolling these choices out in Europe this week."

Under the new policy, Facebook users will be asked to review and make choices about ads they receive, including whether they want Facebook to use data from third parties.

Facebook users will also be asked to review and choose what to share about the political, religious, and relationship information on their profiles.

Additionally, users will be allowed to opt in or out of use of facial recognition technology.

The statement said users will be told that facial recognition is optional, but that it could offer some benefit, such as being notified when someone is using an unauthorized picture.

"We not only want to comply with the law, but also go beyond our obligations to build new and improved privacy experiences for everyone on Facebook," Egan and Beringer wrote.



## China fights smog with big air purifier

AFP, Xian

China has found a novel way to tackle its massive air pollution problem: Putting up a giant air purifier the size of an industrial smokestack in the middle of a smog-plagued city.

Instead of pumping out billows of black smoke like the chimneys rising from factories in the northern province of Shaanxi, the 60-meter (197-foot) tall structure on the outskirts of the regional capital Xian blasts clean air.

Standing between high-rises, the device is capable of cleaning between five million and 18 million cubic meters of air each day, depending on the weather, season, and level of pollution, according to a report by the Chinese website Thecover.cn.

The tower can reduce the density of PM 2.5 -- the tiny airborne particles considered most harmful to health -- by between 10 and 19 percent in a 10 square kilometer area, the website said.

PM 2.5 can play a role in heart disease, stroke, and lung ailments such as emphysema and cancer. For now, the facility -- which was built in June 2016 -- is just an experiment.

## Nepal a natural area for co-op with India

*Says China, invites Delhi to join in connectivity projects*

REUTERS, Beijing

Nepal is a natural area for cooperation between China and India, the Chinese government's top diplomat State Councillor Wang Yi said yesterday, as he invited India to participate in connectivity projects between the three nations.

The landlocked Himalayan nation has traditionally looked to India for economic support and trade, but Nepal has increasingly been courted by China with transport deals, to New Delhi's unease.

In 2016 Nepal's then prime minister, K P Sharma Oli, sealed deals with Beijing to use Chinese roads and ports, seeking to reduce Nepal's dependence on India for trade and transit.

While relations between China and India have been strained in recent years, with spats over everything from their disputed border with Tibet, current Indian Prime Minister

Narendra Modi has sought to re-set ties and will visit China in June for a regional summit.

Speaking to reporters after meeting Nepal Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali in Beijing, Wang dismissed the notion that Nepal had to carefully balance its relations with China and India.

"I believe that China, Nepal and India are natural friends and partners. We are neighbours connected by the same mountains and rivers," Wang said. "As we say in China, family members and neighbours wish each other well."

China and Nepal have agreed to a long-term vision for a cross-Himalaya connectivity network, part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, he added.

"We believe that such a network when well developed can also create conditions for an economic corridor connecting China, Nepal and India."

Nepal sealed deals  
with Beijing in 2016  
for trade and transit

## 'A total con job' Trump claims 'fake' media being fooled by porn star

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump lashed out at porn star Stormy Daniels in his first substantive comments over the scandal surrounding the woman who says she slept with him and was paid to keep quiet.

A day after Daniels released an artist's sketch of a man she said threatened her years ago in a Las Vegas parking lot and told her not to talk about the alleged affair, Trump tweeted: "A sketch years later about a nonexistent man."

He added: "A total con job, playing the Fake News Media for Fools (but they know it!)"

Daniels, 39 also offered a \$100,000 reward for any information about the unidentified man.

Daniels, in an interview on ABC's "The View," described the legal threats from Trump's personal lawyer Michael Cohen as bullying. Last week, FBI agents confiscated documents in a raid on Cohen's offices. Some of the documents seized were reportedly relate to a payment of \$130,000 that Cohen admits making to Daniels, who claims she had a one-night stand with Trump in July 2006 in Lake Tahoe. Trump has denied any knowledge of the hush agreement.

