

NEWSIN brief

109 held in France over May Day chaos

AFP, Paris

France's interior minister yesterday promised to boost security at protests after hooded youths ran amok at a May Day rally in Paris, torching cars and a McDonald's restaurant. Police said 109 people were in custody after the violence.

Russia defence spending shrinks over sanctions

AFP, Stockholm

Russia's military spending fell sharply in 2017 for the first time since 1998 as a slew of Western economic sanctions hit government coffers hard, a closely followed review said yesterday. Despite soaring tensions between Moscow and the West, Russia's military expense last year came in at \$66.3 billion (54.9 billion euros), 20 percent lower than in 2016, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute said.

Modi beats Trump!

AFP, Geneva

US President Donald Trump may rule the roost on Twitter, but he lags far behind Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Facebook, according to a study published yesterday. Modi is by far the most followed world leader on the gargantuan social networking platform, counting 43.2 million followers. That is nearly twice the 23.1 million who follow Trump, according to a study by communications firm Burson-Marsteller.

Morocco cuts Iran ties

AFP, Rabat

Morocco on Tuesday cut diplomatic ties with Iran, accusing the Islamic republic of using its ally Hezbollah to deliver weapons to the separatist Polisario Front in Western Sahara. The Lebanese Hezbollah quickly rejected Rabat's accusations, blaming the decision on foreign "pressure". Iran yesterday also denied the accusation. Polisario Front is fighting for independence of Western Sahara.



Supporters of Armenian opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan dance at the central square of Yerevan, yesterday. Tens of thousands of Armenians converged on the capital, blocking roads and government buildings, as popular anger exploded over the ruling party's rejection of opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan's premiership bid. In an unprecedented show of defiance, protesters paralysed Yerevan, with nearly all streets closed to traffic and many stores shut.

PHOTO: AFP

Mueller raises possibility of Trump subpoena

REUTERS, New York

Special Counsel Robert Mueller, in a meeting with US President Donald Trump's lawyers in March, raised the possibility of issuing a subpoena for Trump if he declines to talk to investigators in the Russia probe, a former lawyer for the president said on Tuesday.

John Dowd told Reuters that Mueller mentioned the possibility of a subpoena in the early March meeting. Mueller's subpoena warning was first reported by the Washington Post, which cited four people familiar with the encounter.

"This isn't some game. You are screwing with the work of the president of the United States," Dowd said he told the investigators, who are probing possible collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia. Dowd left the president's legal team about two weeks after the meeting.

The Post said Mueller had raised the possibility of a subpoena after Trump's lawyers said the president had no obligation to talk with federal investigators involved in

the probe.

After the March meeting, Mueller's team agreed to provide the president's lawyers with more specific information about the subjects they wished to ask Trump, the Post reported.

With that information, Trump's lawyer Jay Sekulow compiled a list of 49 questions the president's legal team believed he would be asked, according to the Post.

That list, first reported by the New York Times on Monday, includes questions on Trump's ties to Russia and others to determine whether the president may have unlawfully tried to obstruct the investigation.

Trump criticized the leak of the questions.

"So disgraceful that the questions concerning the Russian Witch Hunt were 'leaked' to the media. No questions on Collusion," Trump wrote on Twitter on Tuesday. "It would seem very hard to obstruct justice for a crime that never happened!"

A spokesman for Mueller declined to comment.



Iran must pay \$6b to victims of 9/11 attacks

Rules US judge

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

A judge in the US has issued a default judgement requiring Iran to pay more than \$6bn to victims of the September 11, 2001 attacks that killed almost 3,000 people, court filings show.

Monday's ruling in the case - Thomas Burnett, Sr et al v. The Islamic Republic of Iran et al - finds "the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and The Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran" liable for the deaths of more than 1,000 people as a result of the September 11 attacks, Judge George B Daniels of the Southern District Court of New York wrote.

Iran is ordered to pay "\$12,500,000 per spouse, \$8,500,000 per parent, \$8,500,000 per child, and \$4,250,000 per sibling" to the families and estates of the deceased, court filings say.

RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN KOREAS

US troop withdrawal not linked to treaty: South

AFP, Seoul

South Korean President Moon Jae-in yesterday dismissed claims that US troops stationed in the country would have to leave if a peace treaty was signed with the North.

Seoul and Pyongyang have remained technically at war since the 1950s but Moon and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un agreed at a landmark summit last week to work towards a permanent treaty to replace a 65-year-old armistice agreement.

"US Forces Korea (USFK) is a matter of the South Korea-US alliance. It has nothing to do with signing a peace treaty," Moon said, referring to the agreement that sees 28,500 US forces based in the South.

Moon's comments came after a presidential adviser publicly suggested the presence of US soldiers, sailors and airmen would be called into question if a peace treaty were to

be agreed with Pyongyang.

The Blue House has warned the adviser "not to cause any more confusion," with such comments. The rebuttal came as Seoul's defence ministry confirmed that several US fighter jets had arrived in the country to take part in a regular joint exercises.

Moon asked the UN to verify the planned closure of North Korea's nuclear test site, a UN spokesman said Tuesday.

US President Donald Trump seemed pleased Tuesday by a suggestion he should get the Nobel Peace Prize for his upcoming summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, promising that a time and place for the historic meeting will soon be announced.

"Nobel Peace Prize? I think President Moon was very nice when he suggested it," Trump said, referring to South Korean President Moon Jae-in.

Moon asks UN to verify closure of North's test site

Trump pleased by Moon's suggestion he should get the Nobel Peace Prize

Jews persecuted for their role in society: Abbas

US, Israel slam Palestinian leader's 'anti-Semitic' speech

AFP, Jerusalem

US and Israeli officials have condemned Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas over alleged anti-Semitic comments, after he suggested the "social function" of Jews in the banking sector had led to past massacres.

"Apparently the Holocaust denier is still a Holocaust denier," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said yesterday on Twitter, calling on the international community to condemn Abbas's remarks.

David Friedman, US ambassador to Israel, said Abbas had reached a "new low", while President Donald Trump's envoy Jason Greenblatt said "peace cannot be built on this kind of foundation".

The condemnations came after Abbas, who has faced accusations of anti-Semitism before, suggested in an address

to a rare meeting of the Palestinian National Council on Monday night that Jews' relations with banking had led to hostility against them.

"From the 11th century until the Holocaust that took place in Germany, those Jews -- who moved to Western and Eastern Europe -- were subjected to a massacre every 10 to 15 years. But why did this happen? They say 'it is because we are Jews'," the 82-year-old leader told hundreds of delegates.

He then cited "three books" written by Jews as evidence that "hostility against Jews is not because of their religion, but rather their social function," adding he meant "their social function related to banks and interest".

He contrasted this with Jews in Arabic countries, who he argued had not faced similar persecution.



A demonstrator carries a placard reading "don't bomb Syria" during the May Day march in Berlin on Tuesday. Air strikes killed at least 23 civilians including 10 children in a village held by the Islamic State group in northeastern Syria Tuesday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor said.

PHOTO: AFP

Trump 'dictated' his own glowing health report

Says doctor who issued it

AFP, New York

As a presidential candidate Donald Trump quoted a letter from his former personal doctor gushing about his apparently excellent health -- a note the physician now says the president "dictated" himself.

Speaking to CNN on Tuesday, New York doctor Harold Bornstein said Trump "dictated that whole letter. I didn't write that letter."

"I just made it up as I went along."

In December 2015, the Trump campaign released the glowing missive which said that "if elected, Mr Trump, I can state unequivocally, will be the healthiest individual ever elected to the presidency."

The Manhattan doctor months later said he wrote the note hastily as Trump's



car waited.

Bornstein's new comments come as the long-haired, bespectacled physician finds himself back in the spotlight after he told NBC that a bodyguard visited his Park Avenue office last year and confiscated the president's medical records.

"They must have been here for 25 or 30 minutes. It created a lot of chaos," Bornstein told NBC, saying the February 3, 2017 incident made him feel "raped, frightened and sad."

Bornstein said the original and only copy of Trump's medical charts, including lab reports under the president's name and various pseudonyms, were taken.

FB unveils plan for online dating service

AFP, San José

Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg announced Tuesday the world's largest social network will soon include a new dating feature -- while vowing to make privacy protection its top priority in the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal.

Zuckerberg unveiled the plans as he addressed Facebook's annual F8 developers conference in San Jose, California -- emphasizing that the focus would be on helping people find long-term partners.

"This is going to be for building real, long-term relationships, not just hookups," Zuckerberg said in presenting the new feature, noting that one in three marriages in the United States start online -- and that some 200 million Facebook users identify as being single.

Under the new feature, users will be able to create a separate "dating" profile not visible to their network of friends, with potential matches recommended based on dating preferences, points in common and mutual acquaintances.

It will be free of charge, in line with Facebook's core offering. The announcement sent shares in the online dating giant Match.com tumbling, finishing the formal trading day down 22 percent.

FRAMING OF CHARGES AGAINST REUTERS JOURNOS IN MYANMAR

Court accepts testimony of whistleblower cop

REUTERS, Yangon

A judge in Myanmar yesterday declared that a witness who said two Reuters reporters accused of possessing state secrets were framed by police was credible, dealing a blow to the prosecution in what has become a landmark press freedom case.

In what defence lawyers said was a key ruling in favour of the two reporters, the judge accepted the testimony of Police Captain Moe Yan Naing, who said a senior officer had ordered police to "trap" one of the two journalists arrested in December.

Defence lawyer Khin Maung Zaw said the judge ordered police to bring Moe Yan Naing to the next hearing on May 9, after a police officer told the court he was not present because he was sentenced last week to one year in prison for violating the Police Disciplinary Act. "We need to question him more," Judge

Ye Lwin told Police Captain Myo Lwin, one of the officers who had escorted the two journalists to the courthouse, at the end of the proceedings.

Prosecutors had called Moe Yan Naing to testify against Wa Lone, 32, and Kyaw Soe Oo, 28, but last week asked the court to declare him an unreliable witness after the account he gave about the reporters being "set up" appeared to undermine their case.

"Today, the court has proved itself as a court of justice," defence lawyer Khin Maung Zaw told reporters at the end of the hearing, adding that the ruling was "a big step" because Moe Yan Naing's testimony supported the accounts given by the reporters.

Lead prosecutor Kyaw Min Aung did not respond to a request for comment after the hearing.

Myanmar's civilian government spokesman Zaw Htay declined to comment.



CONTROVERSIAL ANTI-FAKE NEWS LAW Mahathir Mohamad under investigation

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian authorities are investigating opposition leader Mahathir Mohamad under an anti-fake news law over claims that his plane was sabotaged in the run up to a general election next week, police said yesterday.

Malaysia is in the middle of intense campaigning for an election that pits Prime Minister Najib Razak against 92-year-old former premier Mahathir.

Najib's government passed a law in April that criminalises "fake news", making it one of the first countries to do so. Critics have said the law is aimed at curbing dissent and free speech ahead of Malaysia's May 9 election.

Mahathir, the opposition's prime ministerial candidate, said last week that he suspected sabotage of a private plane that was to fly him from Kuala Lumpur to Langkawi, where he was to file his candidacy, after the pilot discovered some damage to the aircraft just before take-off.

The government ordered an investigation, following which the Civil Aviation Authority said the inquiry found no indication of sabotage. Its chairman had said it was wrong to make such "wild and false" claims for political gain.

Under the anti-fake news law, offenders could be fined up to 500,000 ringgit (\$127,000) and face a maximum of six years in jail.