

# NEWS IN brief

## Xi backs Marxism for China

Chinese president Xi Jinping yesterday pledged his country will keep following Marxism, as the world's largest communist party prepares to mark the 200th birthday of Karl Marx. China will continue to "hold high the great banner of Marxism" and the party will forever remain "guardians and practitioners" of the philosophy, Xi said during an official tribute at Beijing's Great Hall of the People.

## 17 killed in Myanmar jade mine landslide

A landslide at a jade mine in northern Myanmar has killed 17 people, local authorities said yesterday, the latest disaster to hit the murky multi-billion dollar industry. The accident occurred early yesterday in a mining compound near Wak Khar village in Kachin State's Hpakant township, the epicentre of the perilous work.



## UK PM party fares well in local polls

British Prime Minister Theresa May's Conservative party fared better than expected in local elections in England, results yesterday showed, in her first test since losing her parliamentary majority last year. The party held on to key London councils despite a big push by the main opposition Labour party, which failed to live up to its own hype. The UK Independence Party (UKIP) was all but wiped out, while the pro-European Liberal Democrat party made gains. Full results are not expected until late on Friday.



## Palestinian leader offers apology

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas yesterday apologised for alleged anti-Semitic comments that drew global condemnation. "If people were offended by my statement at the Palestinian National Council, especially people of the Jewish faith, I apologise to them," he said in a statement, days after appearing to suggest Jewish behaviour, including money lending, led to their persecution in Europe. The English-language statement added he wanted "to reiterate our long held condemnation of the Holocaust, as the most heinous crime in history". "We condemn anti-Semitism in all its forms, and confirm our commitment to the two-state solution, and to (living) side by side in peace and security." It did not specifically apologise for his claim about Jewish persecution. Israeli Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman immediately rejected the statement on Twitter. Abbas "is a pathetic Holocaust denier who wrote a doctorate about Holocaust denial and then a book about Holocaust denial," he said. "His apology is not accepted." Monday's comments sparked global anger, with the United States, United Nations, European Union and others criticising them, as well as Israeli leaders.



Palestinian demonstrators react to tear gas fired by Israeli forces during a protest demanding the right to return to their homeland, at the Israel-Gaza border in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday. Hundreds of Palestinians clashed with Israeli forces on the Gaza border yesterday for the sixth week of protests in which dozens have already been killed by Israeli fire. PHOTO: REUTERS

## FIERCE STORMS IN INDIA

# Death toll rises

The death toll from freak storms that hit India climbed above 140 yesterday as people told how they had no time to escape fierce winds which tore down homes, walls and trees. Many families in the worst hit states of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan spent the night fearing new chaos and the interior ministry warned of possible thunderstorms in the region. Victims told how 130 kilometre (80 mile) an hour winds carrying choking sand hit so quickly late Wednesday that they had no time to reach safety from falling walls. The dust storms claimed 121 lives in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and nearby Uttarakhand and Punjab states, according to latest official tolls. Separately 21 people were killed by lightning in two southern states. Authorities in Uttar Pradesh, where 76 died, and Rajasthan, where the storms claimed 39 lives, battled to restore power, clear roads and help people who lost houses. Agra district was one of the worst hit areas with at least 43 people killed, according to the state disaster management authority. The India Meteorological Department has warned there are likely to be more storms over a wider area until Tuesday. Storms and lightning strikes kill many people every year in India but this was one of the most severe series of storms in recent decades. The head of the Telangana state disaster management department, R V Chandravadan, said volatile weather would also continue in the southern region. Seven people were killed Thursday in lightning strikes and strong winds. "We have similar weather warnings for next two days," Chandravadan told AFP. Another 14 people were killed in Andhra Pradesh, which was hit by more than 41,000 lightning strikes late Tuesday.

## FLOODS WREAK HAVOC AFTER DROUGHT

# Hundreds killed in E Africa

Weeks of torrential rain after a long drought have turned from blessing to curse in East Africa, killing hundreds of people and displacing hundreds of thousands of others. In Kenya, which had suffered from three failed rainy seasons, 120 people have died in two months, including eight who were swept off a bridge in a flashflood Thursday night outside the capital, witnesses said. The Red Cross appealed for \$5 million (four million euros) to help those affected. Since early March, "112 people have lost their lives countrywide," Red Cross Secretary General Abbas Gullet told a press conference yesterday, not including Thursday night's incident. Flooding has washed away bridges and homes, with the military airlifting residents from submerged houses in some parts of the country. "About 48,177 households have been displaced so far and this translates to 260,200 people," Gullet said. He said over 21,000 acres (8,500 hectares) of crops had been destroyed and some 20,000 animals washed away. On Monday the government announced that up to 100 schools would not open for the second term due to flooding. Somalia, also struck by a severe drought, has received heavy rains and the south-central town of Beledweyne was engulfed by flood waters after the Shabelle river burst its banks. More than 100,000 people have been displaced. Rwanda has also been seriously affected by the deluge. Its ministry of disaster management said 116 people had died and 207 had been injured in flooding and landslides since January. Torrential rains have also hit Tanzania, where 14 people died in April, as well as Uganda where flash floods have destroyed homes and left at least three dead, according to police in both countries. Authorities have warned that the deluge will continue. A severe drought across East Africa last year left Somalia on the brink of famine, while more than three million required food aid in Kenya and almost eight million needed aid in Ethiopia. Food prices and inflation soared in the region as a result.



# Avoid same protectionist mistakes of the 1930s

More than 1,100 US economists urge Trump to avoid repeating the mistakes that worsened the Depression in the 1930s. The economic advisors to two Republican and two Democratic presidents and 15 Nobel laureates were among those urging the administration to fend off "a host of new protectionist activity, including threats to withdraw from trade agreements, misguided calls for new tariffs in response to trade imbalances, and the imposition of tariffs." The letter, from the National Taxpayers Union, which advocates for tax reform and government spending cuts, was sent on the anniversary of a similar missive sent to Congress on May 3, 1930. That letter also featured more than 1,000 economists urging legislators to reject the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, a trade measure widely blamed for deepening and prolonging the global economic crisis. "Congress did not take economists' advice in 1930 and Americans across the country paid the price," the NTU said. "The undersigned economists and teachers of economics strongly urge you not to repeat that mistake." The NTU letter quotes from the 1930 missive, which warned that tariffs would hurt consumers through price increases, and farmers through loss of markets for their goods. "Such action would inevitably provoke other countries to pay us back in kind by levying retaliatory duties against our goods," the letter said, adding that the policies would sow bitterness. "A tariff war does not furnish good soil for the growth of world peace."

## 2015 NUCLEAR ACCORD

# Russia sees closer Iran ties if US exits

Russia will stand by the Iran nuclear deal and develop closer ties with Iran if US President Donald Trump withdraws from the agreement on May 12, a senior Russian official said yesterday. Vladimir Yermakov, Director General of the Department for Non-Proliferation and Arms Control at Russia's Foreign Ministry, told reporters that a US withdrawal from the 2015 accord known as the JCPOA did not necessarily mean the end of the deal. "It might even be easier for us on the economic front, because we won't have any limits on economic cooperation with Iran. We would develop bilateral relations in all areas - energy, transport, high tech, medicine," he said. Trump, a long-time critic of the deal struck by major world powers, has threatened to pull out unless a follow-on agreement is reached to fix what he calls its "flaws." "If the United States breaks an international agreement backed by UN Security Council resolutions, it will be the United States that should suffer the consequences. Neither Iran nor China nor Russia nor the European states should lose out," Yermakov said. If the United States pulled out, there was no question of discussing new UNSC sanctions on Iran, he added.



An ash plume rises above the Kilauea volcano on Hawaii's Big Island on Thursday. Up to 10,000 people have been asked to leave their homes on Hawaii's Big Island following the eruption of the Kilauea volcano that came after a series of recent earthquakes. PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

## RUSSIA PROBE

# Trump to talk to Mueller if treated 'fairly'

US President Donald Trump yesterday shifted his position over possible talks with US Special Counsel Robert Mueller, saying his lawyers have advised him against any talks but that he would submit to questioning if it was "fair." Trump has repeatedly said he wanted to talk to Mueller, a fellow Republican investigating alleged Russian meddling in the US 2016 election and possible collusion by the Trump campaign. "I would love to speak. I would love to. Nobody wants to speak more than me ... because we've done nothing wrong," Trump told reporters at the White House. "But I have to find a way to be treated fairly."

# It is not 'too late' to call off the royal wedding

## Markle's brother urges Prince Harry in a letter

There is one person who isn't excited for the upcoming royal wedding between Prince Harry and Meghan Markle - her own brother. In a handwritten letter addressed to Prince Harry, Markle's estranged half-brother, Thomas Markle Jr, criticised his sister and warned Prince Harry it is not "too late" to call off the wedding. This isn't the first time Markle's half-brother has spoken out against his sister. Last month, Thomas told the Daily Mirror that Markle has "forgotten her roots" and likes to portray herself as a "people's person." But Thomas insists he is not hurt over not being invited to the upcoming wedding on 19 May 2018. "I'm not bitter, just baffled," he told The Mirror. "It's hurtful given how close we once were." her half-brother, who asked: "Who does that?" In the letter, Thomas blames Hollywood fame for allegedly changing Markle, who starred on Suits until recently. "It's very apparent that her tiny bit of Hollywood fame has gone to her head, changing her into a jaded, shallow, conceited woman that will make a joke of you and the royal family heritage," he wrote. "This isn't the first time Markle's half-brother has spoken out against his sister. Last month, Thomas told the Daily Mirror that Markle has 'forgotten her roots' and likes to portray herself as a 'people's person.' But Thomas insists he is not hurt over not being invited to the upcoming wedding on 19 May 2018. "I'm not bitter, just baffled," he told The Mirror. "It's hurtful given how close we once were."



# US not seeking to reduce forces in South Korea

## Says US NSA, warns China of 'consequences' for military buildup in South China Sea

US President Donald Trump has not asked the Pentagon for options to reduce US forces based in South Korea, US National Security Adviser John Bolton said in a statement yesterday. His comment comes after the New York Times, citing several people briefed on the deliberations, reported on Thursday that the president was seeking options to curb the number of American troops stationed in South Korea. "The New York Times story is utter nonsense. The president has not asked the Pentagon to provide options for reducing American forces stationed in South Korea," Bolton said. Trump's potential moves on the Korean peninsula come as the US president is poised to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un over Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program. The Trump administration is also engaged in efforts to secure the release of three Americans imprisoned in North Korea. In another development, the White House warned Thursday that China would face "consequences" for its military buildup in contested waters in the western Pacific. Sanders did not say what the consequences would be. The South China Sea -- which sits between Vietnam, the Philippines, China and several other countries -- is subject to a myriad of competing territorial claims. Beijing Thursday reasserted its right to build "defense" facilities in the disputed region, but declined to confirm reports it had installed new missiles on artificial islands it had built. Beijing sees the area as key to pushing its defenses beyond China's coast and securing oil supply routes.

