

NEWSIN brief

**Mueller's Russia probe pointless: Kremlin**  
REUTERS, Moscow

The Kremlin said yesterday that US Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election and other related crimes would end one day, describing it as pointless. "There's hope that it will wind up one day," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

**UN voices concern over Saudi arrest of activists**  
REUTERS, Geneva

The United Nations called on Saudi Arabia yesterday to provide information about women's rights activists arrested ahead of the lifting of a ban on women driving that is part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's reform programme. The UN human rights office said the government should ensure the women and other campaigners in custody have due process.

**Afghan special forces kill nine civilians**  
AFP, Jalalabad

Afghan special forces have killed nine civilians in an apparently botched operation in the eastern province of Nangarhar, officials said yesterday. The victims were related to Afghan Senate chairman Fazel Hadi Muslimyaa, provincial spokesman Attaullah Khogyani told AFP.

**France's 'Spiderman' joins fire brigade**  
AFP, Paris

Mamoudou Gassama, the 22-year-old Malian "Spiderman" famed for saving a child hanging from a balcony, took his first step toward French citizenship yesterday and joined the fire brigade as accolades continued to pour in over his daring rescue. Gassama became an overnight sensation after the video of him plucking a four-year-old boy to safety Saturday went viral.

Diplomacy heats up

Trump says Kim's top aide on way to NY as US 'pre-advance team' visits Singapore to meet North Korean officials

AGENCIES

A senior North Korean official is headed to New York to discuss an upcoming summit, US President Donald Trump said yesterday, the latest indication that an on-again-off-again meeting between Trump and North Korea's leader may go ahead next month.

"We have put a great team together for our talks with North Korea," Trump said in a Twitter post. "Meetings are currently taking place concerning Summit, and more. Kim Young (sic) Chol, the Vice Chairman of North Korea, heading now to New York. Solid response to my letter, thank you!"

Kim Yong Chol, vice chairman of the ruling Workers' Party's Central Committee, was scheduled to fly to the United States today after speaking to Chinese officials in Beijing, South Korea's Yonhap news agency said, citing an unidentified source.

The talks indicate that planning for the unprecedented summit on curbing Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program, initially scheduled for June 12, is moving ahead after Trump called it off last week in a letter to the North's leader, Kim Jong Un.

A day later, Trump said he had reconsidered and officials from both countries were meeting to work out details.

Kim Yong Chol, previously chief of the Reconnaissance General Bureau, a top North Korean military intelligence agency, coordinated the North Korean president's two meetings with US site of the meeting, via Beijing late on Monday, Japanese public broadcaster NHK reported.

At the same time, a "pre-advance" US team was in Singapore to meet North Koreans.

Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe discussed North Korea by phone on Monday and confirmed they would meet before an expected US-North Korea summit, the White House said.

A White House statement said that in their call, Trump and Abe "affirmed the shared imperative of achieving the complete and permanent dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and ballistic missile programs."

Meanwhile, Japan has reported a suspected sanctions violation by Pyongyang to the UN after spotting an apparent cargo transfer involving a North Korean tanker, the foreign ministry in Tokyo said yesterday.

The incident is the fifth time this year Tokyo has reported a cargo transfer by a North Korean vessel, in violation of sanctions over Pyongyang's banned nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, reported AFP.

US-N KOREA SUMMIT PREP

Trump, Abe agree to meet before summit  
Japan reports North's sanctions breach



Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in April and May.

Analysts believe the United States is trying to determine whether North Korea is willing to agree to sufficient steps toward denuclearisation to allow a summit to take place.

North Korean leader Kim's de facto chief of staff, Kim Chang Son, meanwhile, flew to Singapore, the scheduled

'It is a travesty'

US stages walkout in protest as Syria takes reins of UN disarmament forum in Geneva

AGENCIES

The United States yesterday led a protest against Syria taking over the Conference on Disarmament, calling it "a travesty" at a time when Damascus is widely accused of using chemical weapons.

The US ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament (CD), Robert Wood, briefly walked out of the room in protest when the Syrian representative took the floor.

"Syria's presence here is a travesty," he told AFP just before the session began.

"This regime has committed countless crimes against its own people through the use of chemical weapons, and it is just unacceptable for them to be leading this body," he insisted.

Syria's ambassador Hussam Edin Aala meanwhile slammed the protest as "sensational propaganda" and "characterised by double-standards."

Syria on Monday took over the rotating presidency of the CD, according to a decades-old practice among the body's 65 members following the alphabetical order of country names in English.

But despite the mechanical nature of Syria's arrival at the helm of the CD, following Switzerland and Sweden, a number of country representatives voiced their outrage that a representative of Damascus was presiding over the body that negotiated the chemical weapons ban.

More than 350,000 people have been killed and millions displaced since Syria's civil war began in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests.

After hundreds of people died in chemical attacks near Damascus in 2013, a deal with Russia was struck to rid Syria of chemical weapons, staving off US airstrikes.

Meanwhile, Syrian army has completed preparations for an imminent offensive against rebel-held areas in southwestern Syria, a non-Syrian commander in a military alliance that backs Damascus said yesterday, raising the prospect of a major new escalation.

However, a rebel commander in the Deraa region of the southwest told Reuters there was no sign of mobilisation for such an assault and accused Damascus of waging psychological warfare. Nevertheless, rebels had prepared defences, he said.

**SYRIA CONFLICT**

Syria's envoy slams protest as propaganda

Regime forces ready for southern battle

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Police officers and forensics experts are seen on the scene of a shooting in Liege, Belgium, yesterday after a gunman shoots dead two female police officers with their own weapons before killing a bystander in a brazen suspected terror attack. Inset, a man is being consoled by a police officer on the scene. Story on page 14. PHOTO: REUTERS

Storms kill 47 in northern India

AFP, New Delhi

Fierce storms which swept across northern India have killed at least 47, taking the death toll from freak weather over the past month to several hundred, officials said yesterday.

The storms and lightning strikes toppled walls and power pylons or electrocuted victims, as temperatures in India rose as high as 48.6 Celsius.

Disaster management officials in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand said 47 people had died in night-time storms that swept across the region.

Bihar was the worst hit, pounded by strong winds and thunderbolts.

"At least 19 people have been confirmed dead. 11 of them due to lightning," Yoginder Singh, a Bihar state disaster management official, told AFP.

The wild weather extended into neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, where winds of up to 70 kilometres an hour buffeted India's most populous state.

"Fifteen people were killed by overnight lightning and high-speed winds," said T.P. Gupta of the Uttar Pradesh disaster management department. Another 10 people were injured, some with burns after being struck by lightning, he added.

Many people in rural India sleep outdoors in summer to escape the searing heat, making them more vulnerable to storms.

Nearly 200 people have died in Uttar Pradesh this month in powerful sandstorms. Scores have died in other states.

The Indian Meteorological Department has warned that more storms and heavy rain could hit Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the next two days.

LIBYA PEACE CONFERENCE

Factions agree to Dec 10 elections

REUTERS, Paris

Rival Libyan factions yesterday agreed on a declaration that would create a political framework to pave the way for UN-backed elections in December to end the country's seven-year-old conflict.

The oil-producing nation splintered following the 2011 Nato-backed revolt that toppled Muammar Gaddafi, and since 2014 has been divided between competing political and military groups based in Tripoli and the east.

The United Nations is leading an effort to reunify Libya and to organise national elections.

The Paris meeting, included eastern-based commander Khalifa Haftar, Tripoli Prime Minister Fayez Seraj, and the leaders of rival parliamentary assemblies, aimed to urge them to agree general principles for ending the conflict and moving towards elections.

"Against the backdrop of a Libyan-owned process and the full engagement of all Libyan parties involved, we committed in Paris on May 29, 2018 ... to work constructively with the UN to realise credible and peaceful elections as soon as possible and to respect the results of these elections when they occur," an eight-point joint statement by the four stakeholders read.

Four-year hunt ends

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's new government has promised to release a long-awaited report into the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 as a privately funded underwater search ended yesterday.

Flight MH370, carrying 239 people, vanished en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing on March 8, 2014, becoming one of the world's greatest aviation mysteries.

The government of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said last week that US seabed exploration firm Ocean Infinity, which had scoured the southern Indian Ocean for the aircraft since January, would end its hunt yesterday.

The previous administration of Najib Razak, who was defeated in a stunning election upset on May 9, had promised up to \$70 million to the Texas-based firm if it found the plane within 90 days.

Malaysia's transport minister, Anthony Loke, said a full report into MH370's disappearance would be published in the near future, but he did not give a date.

"I can assure you the final report will be published with full disclosure. There will not be any edits, or anything hidden," he told reporters late on Monday.

Asked whether the report would refer to controversial elements of the MH370 case, he said: "To me, whatever elements, we will just publish it".

Last year, Australian authorities said the MH370 captain had flown a route on his home simulator six weeks before the disappearance that was "initially similar" to the course actually taken by the aircraft.

Peter Foley, who led the Australian Transport Safety Bureau's search efforts, told an Australian Senate hearing "control inputs" had been made to fly the airliner off course, but he could not say if one of the pilots had done so.

FLIGHT MH370 DISAPPEARANCE



Pair won't survive

Say UK doctors who treated former Russian spy Skripal, his daughter

AFP, London

Doctors in Britain who treated former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter following their March poisoning in Salisbury have said they initially feared the pair would not recover.

Skripal and his daughter Yulia, who was visiting from Moscow, collapsed on March 4 on a bench in the city in southwestern England where the former double agent lived.

London blamed Moscow for using a Soviet-made nerve agent known as novichok on the pair, which Moscow has furiously denied, sparking a diplomatic crisis between Russia and Britain.

Stephen Jukes, the intensive care consultant at Salisbury District Hospital, who treated them a week after their admission, said in a BBC interview that once the nerve agent was detected "all the evidence was there that they would not survive".

Jukes revealed the hospital's medical team first suspected the Skripals were suffering from an opioid overdose, but that the diagnosis soon changed to a nerve agent poisoning.

The doctors interviewed said that all the initial focus was on simply keeping the pair alive.

The pair were heavily sedated and given large doses of drugs designed to protect them from the effects of the poison and help re-start their bodies' natural production of a key enzyme.

India, Pakistan agree to keep border peace

TOI, New Delhi

Director General of Military Operations (DGMOS) of India and Pakistan yesterday agreed to "fully implement" the ceasefire pact of 2003 in "letter and spirit" forthwith to stop cross border firings in Jammu and Kashmir.

The two military commanders reviewed the prevailing situation along the Line of Control (LoC) and International Border (IB) in J and K during a conversation over the hotline at 6:00 PM, the Indian Army said.

The special hotline contact was initiated by the Pakistani DGMOS.

Following the conversation between Indian DGMOS Lt Gen Anil Chauhan and Pakistan's Maj Gen Sahir Shamshad Mirza, the two armies issued identical statements saying both sides agreed to fully implement the 15-year-old ceasefire understanding.

Both the sides agreed to fully implement the ceasefire understanding of 2003 in letter and spirit forthwith and to ensure that henceforth the ceasefire will not be violated by both sides, according to a press release by the media wing of Pakistan Army, Inter Services Relations Pakistan (ISPR).

Both DGMOS also agreed that in case of any issue, restraint will be exercised and the matter will be resolved through utilisation of existing mechanisms of hotline contacts and border flag meetings at local commander's level, the release said.

During the talks, both the sides reviewed the prevailing situation along the Line of Control and Working Boundary and mutually agreed to undertake sincere measures to improve the existing situation ensuring peace and avoidance of hardships to the civilians along the



A picture taken from Gaza City yesterday shows a smoke billowing in the background following an Israeli air strike on the Palestinian enclave. Israel struck bases of militant groups in the Gaza Strip hours after nearly 30 mortar shells were fired at the Jewish state. PHOTO: AFP

THE TIMES NEWSPAPER REPORT

UK MPs probe unpublished UN 'sex-for-food' findings

AFP, London

British MPs probing sexual abuse in the international charitable sector are investigating an unpublished UN report from 2001 naming 15 major aid organisations implicated in a "sex-for-food" scandal, The Times newspaper reported yesterday.

The charities were listed in a probe by UN and Save the Children officials who collected testimony from children in West Africa that aid workers had traded food for sex, according to the newspaper.

The Times obtained a copy of the 84-page report which is now also in the hands of lawmakers.

The UN released a summary of the investigation in 2002 but the full report naming the agencies was never made public. It has now been passed to the British parliament's international development committee, the newspaper said.

MPs are probing the aid sector following revelations earlier this year of a prostitution scandal in Haiti involving staff from British charity Oxfam.

The report had found dozens of workers for more than 40 NGOs -- including 15 international organisations -- were "alleged to be in sexually exploitative relationships with refugee children", according to The Times.

The list of implicated personnel were from UN agencies and other organisations in the sector, such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), it reported.

The IRC "released local workers whose involvement was confirmed" and initiated reforms "addressing and preventing sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse", it said in a statement.

Report finds workers for 40 NGOs were allegedly involved in the scandal