

**NEWSIN**  
brief

**Trump unsure if Mattis will stay**

US President Donald Trump said in an interview aired yesterday that Defense Secretary Jim Mattis "could be" leaving, referring to him as "sort of a Democrat." Mattis, seen as one of the steady but also more independent members of Trump's cabinet, has served as a low-profile counterweight to the president.

**Migrant truck crash kills 22 in Turkey**

Twenty-two people, including children, died yesterday when a vehicle carrying migrants reportedly heading for Greece plunged off the highway into a waterway in Turkey. The vehicle, described as a lorry, was travelling on a highway in the Izmir region when it flipped over and fell into the channel several metres below.

**'Zombie' storm smashes into Portugal, Spain**

Storms packing nearly 180 kilometres-per-hour winds hit Portugal early yesterday leaving hundreds of thousands of people without power before carrying heavy rain on into Spain. The region around Lisbon and the centre of the country at Leiria and Coimbra were worst hit with trees uprooted, cars and houses damaged.

**Suicide blasts kill 20 in Somalia**

The death toll has risen to 20 people yesterday following two suspected suicide bombers that struck in the southern Somali city of Baidoa on Saturday, a local hospital official said. "We received 20 dead people and about 40 others injured from the twin blasts," a hospital source said.

**Saudi warns against sanctions**

*Vows to respond to any steps taken against it amid sanctions threats; US, UK may boycott key Riyadh conference; Trump pessimistic about Khashoggi's fate, but bats for continuing with arms sales deal*

AGENCIES

Saudi Arabia rejected threats to punish it over the disappearance of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul, saying the kingdom would retaliate against any sanctions with tougher measures, the official state news agency said yesterday.

The comments came after US President Donald Trump threatened "severe punishment" for Riyadh if it turned out Khashoggi was killed in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

"The Kingdom affirms its total rejection of any threats and attempts to undermine it, whether by threatening to impose economic sanctions, using political pressures, or repeating false accusations..." the official Saudi Press Agency quoted an unnamed government source as saying.

"The Kingdom also affirms that if it receives any action, it will respond with greater action, and that the Kingdom's economy has an influential and vital role in the global economy..." the source added without elaborating.

The threat caused the stock market of the world's biggest oil exporter to lose as much as \$33 billion of its value yesterday in one of the first signs of the economic pain that Riyadh could suffer over the affair.

Khashoggi, a Washington Post contribu-

**ESCALATING ROW OVER MISSING SAUDI JOURNALIST**



tor and US permanent resident whose writings have been critical of powerful Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has been missing since entering the country's consulate in Istanbul on October 2.

Turkey believes Khashoggi was deliberately killed in the consulate and his body removed. Saudi Arabia insists Khashoggi left the building safely.

Turkey on Saturday stepped up pressure on Saudi Arabia by accusing the kingdom of failing to cooperate with a probe into the journalist's disappearance.

Foreign capital is key to Saudi Arabia's plans to diversify its economy beyond oil and cut a 12.9 percent jobless rate among its citizens.

was not killed, but maybe that's not looking too good... from what we're hearing," Trump told journalists at the White House.

Trump had not described what punishment Saudi Arabia might face. He has indicated Washington does not want to harm close defence ties, saying the United States would be punishing itself if it halted sales of military equipment to Riyadh.

But US senators have triggered a provision of the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act requiring the president to determine whether a foreign person is responsible for a gross human rights violation. The act has in the past imposed visa bans and asset freezes on Russian officials.

Meanwhile, there is concern Khashoggi's disappearance could add to a sense that Saudi policy has become more unpredictable under the crown prince.

A Gulf banker said the Khashoggi case, combined with other events, had become a significant factor for some potential investors in Saudi Arabia.

"It's cumulative - the Yemen war, the dispute with Qatar, the tensions with Canada and Germany, the arrests of women activists. They add up to an impression of impulsive policy-making, and that worries investors," the banker said.



**US wants Iran regime change**  
*Says Rouhani*

REUTERS, Dubai

The United States is seeking "regime change" in Iran, President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday, adding that the current US administration is the most hostile that the Islamic Republic has faced in its four decades.

Tensions have increased between Iran and America after US President Donald Trump withdrew from a multi-lateral agreement on Iran's nuclear programme in May.

"In the past 40 years there has not been a more spiteful team than the current US government team toward Iran, Iranians and the Islamic Republic," Rouhani said in a speech broadcast on state TV.

"There was a time when there was one person who had enmity. The rest were moderate. Now...the worst have gathered around each other," he added in a speech marking the beginning of the academic year at Tehran University.

Rouhani accused the Americans of using psychological and economic warfare and questioning the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic.

"Reducing the legitimacy of the system is their final goal. When they say getting rid of regime change in their own words, how does regime change happen? Through reducing legitimacy, otherwise a regime doesn't change."

He used the English phrase "regime change" to emphasise his point.

Washington reintroduced steps against Iran's currency trade, metals and auto sectors in August.

With US curbs on Iran's oil exports set to come into force next month, some Iranians fear their country is entering an economic slump that may prove worse than the period from 2012 to 2015, when it last faced major sanctions.

**Israel okays 31 settler homes**

*Netanyahu threatens Hamas with strong blows for Gaza violence*

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's government yesterday approved the construction of 31 settler homes in Hebron, the first such green light for the flashpoint West Bank city since 2002, a cabinet minister said.

Construction permits were agreed in October last year but needed the government's approval, according to the Peace Now NGO which monitors settlement construction in occupied territory.

"For the first time in more than 20 years, Hebron will have a new Jewish neighbourhood where a military camp once stood," Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman said after the weekly cabinet meeting.

He said in a statement that the project will comprise 31 settler homes and two kindergartens.

"It is an important step in the global activity which we are carrying out to reinforce settlements in Judea and Samaria," added Lieberman referring to the occupied West Bank.

Hebron is holy to both Muslims and Jews, with Old Testament figures including Abraham believed

to be buried there.

The city is a flashpoint reflecting the deep tensions that run between Palestinians and Israelis.

Hebron is home to around 200,000 Palestinians, with about 800 settlers living under Israeli army protection in several heavily fortified compounds in the heart of the city.

The street is now largely closed off to Palestinians who have repeatedly demanded that it be reopened to traffic.

Meanwhile, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday threatened to inflict "very strong blows" on Hamas after fresh violence along the border with the Gaza Strip controlled by the Islamist group.

"Hamas has apparently not understood the message -- if these attacks do not stop, they will be stopped in another way, in the form of very, very strong blows", Netanyahu said during the weekly cabinet meeting.

"We are very close to another type of action which would include very strong blows. If Hamas is intelligent, it will cease fire and violence now", he added.



**Maldives risks sanctions as Yameen fights back**

AFP, Colombo

Maldives judges yesterday heard a petition by strongman president Abdulla Yameen to have his recent election defeat annulled, potentially triggering US sanctions and plunging the Indian Ocean archipelago into fresh turmoil.

Yameen lost heavily in the September 23 election to a little-known united opposition candidate, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, despite his main rivals being in jail or in exile and the media in his pocket.

Under pressure from the US, Europe and India, which is seeking to counter growing Chinese influence in the strategically positioned 1,200-island honeymoon paradise, Yameen quickly conceded defeat and said he would leave office on November 17.

But even as Western countries breathed a sigh of relief, prisoners were released and opposition figures began returning from exile, Yameen last week filed a request for the Supreme Court to annul the result and call fresh elections.

A statement on Saturday by his Progressive Party (PPM) said the vote was the "most farcical election in living memory" with the organisation "abysmal", vote-rigging "rampant" and many people unable to cast ballots.

The Supreme Court in the capital Male adjourned yesterday after proceedings that lasted several hours, and will resume today.

The United States -- which like the European Union threatened sanctions if the elections were not free and fair -- on Saturday warned it would react if Yameen, 59, does not go quietly.

"The US is concerned by troubling actions by outgoing president Yameen that threaten to undermine the will of the Maldivian people," State Department spokesman Robert Palladino said on Twitter.



Abdulla Yameen

**BREXIT SHOWDOWN**

**UK PM May faces double trouble**

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Theresa May faces a fight on two fronts this week, battling to convince her own ministers and then Brussels as the Brexit talks come to a crunch.

She must see off the threat of a cabinet mutiny and then try to overcome the divorce negotiations logjam at a summit in Brussels -- though a breakthrough still seems elusive.

Time is running out on Britain's EU exit talks -- meaning this week's gathering of European Union leaders could prove decisive in striking a deal between London and Brussels.

With Britain set to leave the bloc at the end of March, European Commission head Jean-Claude Juncker is demanding "substantial progress" this week, specifically on the vexed issue of the UK's border with the Republic of Ireland.

EU President Donald Tusk has described the summit starting Wednesday as a "moment of truth" in the Brexit talks.

The hard work starts for May on Tuesday when she will rake over the Irish border issue with her cabinet, amid speculation that further ministers could quit if the PM ploughs on with her proposals.

Some diplomats in Brussels have suggested the leaders could talk through the night on Wednesday and approve the outlines of an agreement while they are still in the Belgian capital for broader talks on Thursday.



A demonstrator displays a placard reading "Racism is a crime, not an opinion" during a massive demonstration in Berlin, on Saturday. Tens of thousands of protesters from across Germany marched through Berlin against xenophobia and the far right in one of the country's biggest rallies of recent years.

**BAVARIA POLLS**

**Merkel's allies face threat of debacle**

AFP, Munich

Voters in the southern German state of Bavaria went to the polls yesterday in an election where Chancellor Angela Merkel's arch-conservative CSU allies were bracing for heavy losses.

The Christian Social Union (CSU), who have almost single-handedly ruled the wealthy Alpine beer-and-leather state since the late 1950s, are expected to lose their absolute majority, polls say.

The other partner in Merkel's fragile 'grand coalition', the Social Democrats, were also set to do poorly while the far-right and anti-immigration AfD looked certain to enter the state assembly.

The biggest winners, however, may be the left-leaning Greens who have doubled their poll ratings to 19 percent since the last state elections, which would make them the second strongest party.

Poll booths opened at 0600 GMT for 9.5 million eligible voters. Large numbers had said they were still undecided shortly before the vote, and first projections were expected from 1600 GMT.

If the polls prove correct, the Bavarian election will mark another step in the demise of 'big-tent' mainstream parties and the fragmentation of the political landscape, as seen in other western democracies.

For Merkel, now often labelled a lame duck leader in her fourth and final term, it would further raise political pressure two weeks ahead of another dangerous vote, in the central state of Hesse.

Parliamentary speaker Wolfgang Schauble, a veteran Merkel ally, has conceded that the two state polls will "affect national politics and thus the reputation of the chancellor," who seeks re-election as Christian Democrats (CDU) party chief in December.

**Slain Salvadoran, Pope Paul VI made saints**

AFP, Vatican City

Slain Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero and Pope Paul VI, Catholic giants who sparked controversy during their lifetimes, joined the church's highest rank yesterday with an elevation to sainthood.

Pope Francis wore a blood-stained rope belt which belonged to Romero, who was murdered at the altar, as he led the ceremony in front of tens of thousands of pilgrims from across the world.

The pontiff also used a chalice and pastoral staff belonging to Paul VI, in a canonisation being seen as a reminder of Francis's call for "a poor church for the poor".

Both men have been hailed by Francis for their courage in turbulent times and their dedication to social justice and the down-trodden.

The giant portraits of two hung on Saint Peter's Basilica along with those of five other new saints, including an orphaned youth and a German nun.

"Paul VI spent his life for Christ's Gospel, crossing new boundaries and becoming its witness in proclamation and in dialogue, a prophet of a Church turned outwards, looking to those far away and taking care of the poor," Francis said.

"It is wonderful that together with him and the other new saints today, there is Archbishop Romero, who left the security of the world, even his own safety, in order to give his life according to the Gospel, close to the poor and to his people," he added.

Romero stood up for peasant rights in the face of a right-wing backlash which painted him as a radical supporter of "liberation" theology in his small, impoverished central American nation.



Pope Paul VI



Romero

**HURRICANE MICHAEL**

**Hopes fade for more survivors**

REUTERS, Mexico Beach

The hunt for missing people in the aftermath of Hurricane Michael early yesterday is turning into a search for the dead, as hope of finding more people alive fades in the Florida Panhandle, US officials said.

"We're going into recovery mode, unfortunately," said Fire Chief Alex Baird of Panama City, one of the coastal Florida communities clobbered by the hurricane that made landfall Wednesday as a Category 4 storm, packing more than 140 mph winds and deadly storm surges.

"At sunrise, we'll start again on our search," Baird said. "We hope that we'll find more (survivors), but it's more and more doubtful."

**Rebels fire shells from Syria's Idlib buffer zone**

AFP, Beirut

Opposition fighters have fired mortar shells from a planned buffer zone in northwest Syria, in a deadly attack that threatens a deal to protect the last major rebel bastion from a regime offensive.

The Russian-Turkish accord also provides for jihadists to withdraw by today from the demilitarised zone ringing rebel-held areas in and around Idlib province.

But a monitor and AFP correspondent said yesterday no hardliners had been seen leaving the region yet.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor reported "heavy mortar shells" were fired late Saturday from the planned buffer area into regime territory, killing two soldiers.

The deal agreed last month is only the latest in a string of truces throughout Syria's seven-year war, which has killed more than

360,000 and displaced millions.

It calls for setting up horseshoe-shaped buffer zone around the Idlib region that would be free of heavy arms by October 10 and of "radical fighters" by October 15.

Rebels and jihadists had reportedly met the first deadline, with Turkish officials, armed factions and the British-based Observatory reporting that the area was free of heavy-duty weaponry.

But the shells which Saturday hit an army position in Hama province appear to have violated the accord.

"This is the first clear violation of the deal since the heavy weapons were withdrawn. This area is supposed to be clear of heavy weapons, including mortar shells," said Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman.

He said intermittent regime shelling had been hitting the planned buffer for days, but the deal does not require government forces to withdraw any of their weapons.

**Attack threatens key Russia-Turkey deal to protect assault on Idlib**