

# NEWSIN brief

## 'State actor' behind tanker attacks: UAE

AFP, United Nations

Initial findings of an investigation led by the United Arab Emirates of May 12 attacks on oil tankers point to the likelihood that a state was behind the bombings, but there is no evidence yet that Iran was involved, the UAE said Thursday. The United States has accused Iran of being behind the attacks on the four oil tankers off the Emirati coast, which came at a time of escalating tensions between Tehran and Washington.

## Spanish king tasks Sanchez to form govt

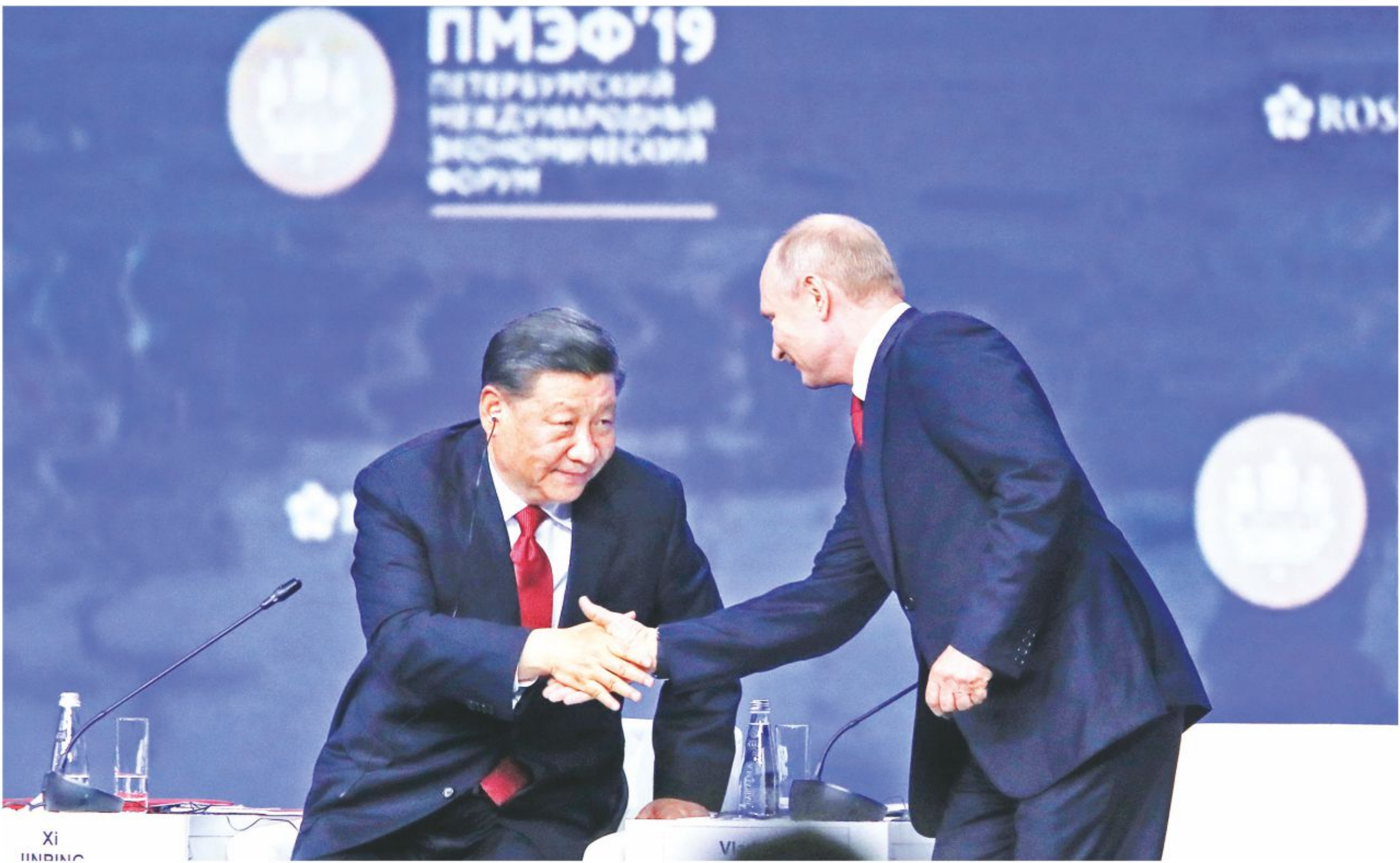
AFP, Madrid

Spain's King Felipe VI on Thursday tasked acting Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez with forming a new government, a complex undertaking that involves negotiating with many diverging parties. While they won a general poll in April and gained lawmakers compared to the previous term, Sanchez's socialists failed to secure a majority in parliament and will need the support of other groupings.

## Iran snubs French idea of fresh nuke talks

AFP, Tehran

Iran on Friday rejected an idea mooted by France of re-opening nuclear talks, warning that seeking to broaden an existing landmark treaty could lead to its collapse. President Emmanuel Macron said Thursday that his goal of "regional peace" would require new negotiations, adding that Paris aimed to rein in Iran's nuclear and ballistic activities and its regional influence. He made the comments at a press conference with US President Donald Trump, who last year withdrew from the multi-lateral agreement known as the JCPOA.



Russian President Vladimir Putin (R) shakes hands with Chinese President Xi Jinping during a session of the St Petersburg International Economic Forum in Russia, yesterday. Story on page 12.

PHOTO: REUTERS

### UNREST IN INDIAN KASHMIR

## Police deserters among 4 killed

AFP, Srinagar

Two low-ranking police deserters were among four rebels killed overnight in a firefight with government forces in Indian-administered Kashmir, the police and army said yesterday.

The former Himalayan kingdom is divided between Pakistan and India. For decades, rebel groups have been fighting for independence from Indian rule or a merger of Kashmir with Pakistan.

The fighting has left tens of thousands dead, mostly civilians.

Soldiers laid siege to a residential area in southern Pulwama district, triggering an exchange of fire with armed militants hiding in a house late Thursday evening.

"Two were local militants from Jaish-e-Mohammad group and the other two were identified as SPOs who had gone missing," the police officer said, referring to the two Special Police Officers.

The officers had deserted, taking their automatic rifles, a day earlier to join the rebel ranks. SPOs are the lowest-ranked officers in the state police.

# Sudan in 'state of terror'

AFP, Khartoum

Ethiopia's prime minister arrived in Khartoum yesterday seeking to revive talks between Sudan's ruling generals and protest leaders as heavily armed paramilitaries remained deployed after a deadly crackdown, leaving residents in 'terror'.

The talks mission by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came after the African Union suspended Sudan on Thursday until the military makes way for a civilian-led transitional authority.

The move by the African bloc was backed by the European Union amid a chorus of condemnation of Sudan's military rulers over Monday's deadly crackdown on a week-long sit-in outside army headquarters demanding civilian rule.

Since the deadly assault, fearful Khartoum residents have remained largely indoors, leaving the streets virtually deserted at a time when Muslims are normally out celebrating the Eid al-Fitr holiday.

Paramilitaries of the feared Rapid Support Forces, who have their origins in the notorious Janjaweed militia unleashed in the conflict in the

western region of Darfur in 2003 and 2004, have remained stationed in a number of the capital's main squares.

Others have been seen out on patrol in their trademark pickup trucks mounted with heavy machine guns or rocket launchers.

"We're living in a state of terror because of sporadic gunfire," a

### CRACKDOWN ON PROTESTERS

Ethiopia PM in Khartoum to revive civilian-military talks

AU suspends Sudan, demanding end to military rule

Govt puts death toll at 61, doctors say at least 113 killed

resident of south Khartoum told AFP.

The protesters and the military authorities have given sharply divergent death tolls for the crackdown.

Doctors close to the demonstrators say 113 people have been killed in Khartoum, including 40 whose bodies were pulled out of the Nile.

The health ministry says 61 people have been killed nationwide, 52 of them by "live ammunition" in Khartoum.

The crackdown was launched after the breakdown of talks between protest leaders and the generals on a new transitional ruling body to replace the military council.

Despite several initial breakthroughs, the talks hit deadlock over the demonstrators' demand -- backed by Western and most African governments -- for it to have a civilian majority and a civilian leader.

There has been pressure on the generals to resume negotiations, even from Gulf Arab states that are among their key supporters.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which have pledged \$3 billion in emergency deposits and credit to shore up the plummeting Sudanese pound and fund imports of basic goods, issued calls on Wednesday and Thursday for renewed talks.

The generals have so far been shielded from condemnation at the United Nations by China, which has made significant investments in Sudan.

## UN finds 115m 'child grooms'

About 115 million boys were married off as children with one in five wed before they turned 15, according to the first United Nations' study to track the prevalence of child grooms. The UN children's agency Unicef analysed marriage and population data across 82 countries and found the Central African Republic had the highest prevalence of child grooms at 28%, followed by Nicaragua at 19% and Madagascar with 13%. Unicef said children married young tended to leave school, have limited economic opportunities, and be more vulnerable to abuse and mental health problems than those who married later. Unicef said these figures meant that there were now 765 million married boys and girls among the 2.2 billion children globally, but girls were still more likely to wed young which put them at risk of health issues related to teen pregnancies. Globally about one in every five women aged 20 to 24 were married before their 18th birthday compared to one in 30 men, UNICEF said. If all girls finished secondary school, more than 50 million child marriages could be prevented by 2030, children's charity Save the Children said in an October report. The United Nations has said all countries should end child marriage by 2030 as agreed in the global development goals in 2015.

## Greta Thunberg gets top Amnesty prize

Swedish teenage activist Greta Thunberg and the millions of school students she inspired to skip school to protest for climate action yesterday won a global human rights award. A growing movement of young protesters demanding action on climate change - inspired by 16-year-old Thunberg who started a weekly vigil outside Sweden's parliament last year - has spread to countries like Brazil, Uganda and Australia. Thunberg and her "Fridays for Future" global movement won Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience Award, joining the likes of South African leader Nelson Mandela and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai. "You have to fight for what you think is right. I think all those who are part of this movement are doing that," said Thunberg in a statement. The viral school strike phenomenon has flipped traditional patterns of authority, handing leadership roles to teenagers who feel aghast at the mismatch between calls for transformative action from climate scientists and rising carbon emissions.



## Russia ready to drop START nuclear arms treaty: Putin

President Vladimir Putin on Thursday said Russia was prepared to drop a nuclear weapons treaty with the US and warned of "global catastrophe" if Washington keeps dismantling an international arms control regime. Speaking to heads of international news agencies at an economic forum in the city of Saint Petersburg, Putin said Washington showed no genuine interest in conducting talks on extending the New START treaty which caps the number of nuclear warheads well below Cold War limits. "If no-one feels like extending the agreement -- New START -- well, we won't do it then," Putin said. "We have said a hundred times that we are ready (to extend it)," Putin said. The treaty was signed by US President Barack Obama and Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev in Prague in 2010. It expires in 2021. SOURCE: AFP

# Syria flare-up leaves 83 fighters dead: monitor

AFP, Beirut

Fierce clashes between Russia-backed government forces and jihadists have left 83 combatants dead in northwestern Syria in the past 24 hours, a Britain-based war monitor said yesterday.

The clashes on the edge of the jihadist-controlled Idlib region have killed 44 government loyalists and 39 jihadists and Islamist fighters since Thursday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The region of some three million people -- almost half of them displaced from other parts of the country -- is dominated by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham alliance led by al-Qaeda's former Syrian affiliate.

The alliance administers a region that spans most of Idlib province as well as adjacent slivers of the neighbouring Latakia, Aleppo, and Hama provinces.

The region has seen a spike in bombardment since late April, with regime forces seizing several towns on the region's southwestern flank.

Late Thursday, the jihadists and allied

rebels launched a counterattack against regime forces in the northwest of Hama province.

They have since seized the villages of Tal Maleh and Jibeen there, the Observatory said.

"Violent clashes are ongoing, accompanied by regime and Russian air strikes," Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said.

The fighting is raging near Christian and Alawite areas under regime control, he said.

Idlib is supposed to be protected from a massive regime offensive by a September buffer zone deal signed between regime ally Russia and rebel backer Turkey. But it was never fully implemented as jihadists refused to withdraw from the planned demilitarised zone.

The government and Russia have upped their bombardment of the region since late April, killing more than 300 civilians, according to the Observatory. The United Nations say more than 270,000 people have fled their homes.



A personnel of the National Migration Institute (INM) checks passenger's ID as a member of the Military Police keeps watch at a checkpoint on the outskirts of Tapachula, in Chiapas state, Mexico, on Thursday. Mexico scrambled to slow the flow of Central American migrants to the United States as talks continued in Washington to head off President Donald Trump's threat of potentially catastrophic tariffs on Mexican goods. PHOTO: REUTERS

# May quits as party leader

## Johnson wins court challenge over misconduct summons

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Theresa May steps down as leader of her Conservative Party yesterday, formally triggering the race for a successor who will try where she failed to deliver Brexit.

May will remain prime minister until a new leader is chosen, likely in late July, but will make no further moves on Britain's tortuous departure from the European Union.

Brexit is still scheduled for October 31 but while the contenders thrash it out over the leadership, the project remains stalled, with the only divorce plan agreed with Brussels rejected in parliament.

May took office after the shock 2016 referendum vote to leave the EU and has spent the past three years working on a departure plan, delaying Brexit twice to try to get the deal through.

But she finally acknowledged defeat in a tearful resignation speech last month, the culmination of months of political turmoil that had slowly

sapped her authority.

Eleven Conservative MPs have declared their intention to stand to replace her, including former foreign minister Boris Johnson, but some are expected to drop out before Monday's deadline for nominations.

The winner will have only a few

### BREXIT CHAOS IN UK



months to decide whether to try to salvage May's plan, delay Brexit again -- or sever ties with Britain's closest trading partner with no agreement at all.

Leadership contest frontrunner Johnson warned that the centre-right Conservatives "must deliver Brexit by

October 31 or we risk Brexit Party votes delivering Corbyn to No 10", referring to leftist Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn getting into Downing Street.

Johnson cleared one hurdle yesterday by fending off a legal action brought by a citizen who accuses him of misconduct in public office for making misleading statements during the 2016 campaign about how much money Britain sends to the EU.

Nominations for the Conservative leadership contest open and close on Monday, and the 313 Conservative MPs -- including May -- will hold the first of a series of secret ballots on Thursday.

With the worst performers eliminated each time, the goal is to have two candidates left by June 20. They will then be put to a ballot of an estimated 100,000 party members.

The contest should be completed in the week commencing July 22.

# 'Growing Muslim populations' one of the greatest challenges

## Says Suu Kyi, Viktor Orban in joint statement

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of Myanmar, and Hungary's far-right nationalist prime minister, Viktor Orban, both see immigration and "continuously growing Muslim populations" as one of the greatest challenges facing their countries.

As part of a rare trip to Europe, Suu Kyi, who has been condemned for her handling of the Rohingya refugee crisis, met the Hungarian leader in Budapest on Wednesday.

"The two leaders highlighted that one of the greatest challenges at present for both countries and their respective regions -- southeast Asia and Europe -- is migration," the Hungarian government said in a statement after the meeting.

"They noted that both regions have seen the emergence of the issue of coexistence with continuously growing Muslim populations."

Orban said Hungary was in favour of trade cooperation between Myanmar and

the EU, but rejected "attempts at the export of democracy".

After his meeting with Myanmar's leader, Orban said the Hungarian people have "great respect for Aung San Suu Kyi and all she has done for her country's freedom and democratic transformation".

Suu Kyi was once lauded as a champion of democracy after being elected as civilian leader in 2015 following 15 years of house arrest for opposing Myanmar's military dictatorship. But she has since fallen from grace on the world stage after failing to condemn the military's violent crackdown on the Muslim Rohingya minority in 2017.

The massacre, which saw thousands of Rohingya raped and killed, was described by the UN as an act of genocide. Ms Suu Kyi's government has since failed to take the steps necessary to guarantee the safe return of the million Rohingya now living in refugee camps in Bangladesh.

