

US senators get briefing on UFO sightings

A group of US senators, including the vice chair of the Senate Intelligence committee, received a classified briefing Wednesday about a series of reported encounters by the US Navy with unidentified aircraft, according to a congressional aide. President Donald Trump recently confirmed that he was also briefed on reports of Navy pilots spotting unidentified flying objects. Several pilots told the New York Times in an article published in May about multiple encounters with UFOs with no visible engine or infrared exhaust plumes. In April, the Navy introduced guidelines for its pilots to report unexplainable events so the military can keep track of what may, or may not, be happening. Politico first reported on this matter. A Navy official told CNN at the time that the Navy does not believe aliens have been flying around US airspace. But the Navy said these kinds of "incursions" pose both a security risk and safety hazard.

British minister suspended for manhandling protester

A British minister was suspended on Friday after he was filmed physically removing a climate change protester from a dinner in London. Mark Field, the junior Foreign Office minister, was suspended after he was seen manhandling a climate change protester. Prime Minister Theresa May's office said it had suspended the junior Foreign Office minister. "The prime minister has seen the footage and she found it very concerning," Downing Street said. "He will be suspended as a minister while investigations take place." Field told ITV that he "deeply" regretted his actions, saying that "in the confusion many guests understandably felt threatened and when one protester rushed past me towards the top table... There was no security present and I was for a split-second genuinely worried she might have been armed." The Conservative politician has referred himself to the Cabinet Office for investigation.



Trump loves immigrants!

US President Donald Trump, who officially launched his campaign for re-election this week, pitched himself to Hispanic voters Thursday during an interview with the US Spanish-language network Telemundo. "I love immigrants," Trump said, when presenter Jose Diaz-Balart asked the president about his administration's policies on child separation, on the DACA program protecting people brought to the US illegally as children -- which the president ended -- and on his "zero-tolerance" border plans. "You mean illegal immigrants," Trump said. "This country is based on immigrants," he said, insisting he'd welcome even more to help fill the industrial jobs he says he's brought back to the US during his tenure. During the interview -- his first with a Spanish-language TV network -- Trump boasted of his popularity among Hispanics, claiming a 17-percent polling improvement among the group, and said his presidency has seen the lowest-ever rate of unemployment among Hispanics.



Protesters hold up their mobile phones as they gather outside the police headquarters in Hong Kong, yesterday. Inset, A protester throws an egg at the police headquarters. Thousands of demonstrators converged on Hong Kong's police headquarters yesterday, demanding the resignation of the city's pro-Beijing leader and the release of demonstrators arrested during the violent June 12 protests. PHOTO: AFP

China rescues over 1,100 foreign brides

Chinese police have rescued over 1,100 women from Southeast Asia who were "sold" as wives last year, authorities said yesterday. More than 1,300 suspects, including 260 foreigners, were detained in the joint operations with police from Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand between July and December, the Ministry of Public Security said in a statement. Beijing's decades-long one-child policy and preference for boys has led to a shortfall of nearly 33 million women in China. Largely driven by poverty, young women from the Mekong region have gambled on marriage in China. But some have fallen prey to "marriage scams" leaving them at risk of abuse, detention under Chinese immigration law or being forced into prostitution.

North Korea lauds China ties

Kim Jong Un seeks Xi Jinping's support in face of stalled US talks

North Korea lauded its ties with historically China yesterday as Xi Jinping wrapped up a highly symbolic two-day visit to his nuclear-armed neighbour, with both countries facing deadlock in their negotiations with US President Donald Trump. Kim Jong Un told the Chinese president that his visit was an opportunity to demonstrate "the immutability and invincibility of the DPRK-China friendship before the world", the KCNA news agency reported, using the abbreviation of North Korea's official name. At a time when "serious and complicated changes are happening in international and regional situations", KCNA said, the two leaders agreed to "promote close strategic communication" and develop their "common interests". Pyongyang pulled out all the stops to welcome Xi, the first Chinese president to visit in 14 years -- a period in which Pyongyang has carried out five nuclear tests and launched missiles capable of reaching the entire US mainland. China always prefers stability in its neighbourhood and the North's nuclear provocations strained the relationship between the Cold War allies, with Beijing backing UN sanctions on Pyongyang and Kim not visiting to pay his respects for more than six years after inheriting power. But as he embarked on a flurry of diplomacy

last year, Kim ensured that Xi -- whose country is the North's key diplomatic supporter and main provider of trade and aid -- was the first head of state he met. Kim travelled to China three more times to meet Xi, and Pyongyang has been increasingly keen for the Chinese president to reciprocate. Analysts say Xi, who flew back to China yesterday, intended to use the trip as a way of signalling to Trump his influence with Kim, a North might give up in return. But North Korean media did not carry comments by Kim reported by Chinese state broadcaster CCTV, which quoted him as saying that he was "willing to be patient" in the talks with the US, but wanted "the parties concerned" to meet him halfway. Xi told him that China "positively evaluated" the North's efforts, CCTV said. Jeung Young-tae, director of the Institute of North Korean Studies in Seoul, said the summit amounted to China giving Kim strong backing in the process. "Xi is saying that he will help Kim resist pressure from the US and calling on Kim to stick to his demands," he told AFP. Pyongyang has repeatedly called for Washington to adopt "a new method of calculation" for the negotiations, and Hong Min, a senior researcher at the South's state-run Korea Institute for National Unification said Xi's support gave Kim a "political and diplomatic opening to resume talks with the US again". North Korean authorities deployed tens of thousands of citizens to line the streets to welcome Xi, with KCNA saying they expressed their "friendly affection" for Chinese citizens who have "shared joys and sorrows" with them in the pursuit of socialism. Beijing sent millions of troops known as "Chinese People's Volunteers" to save the North from defeat during the Korean War, and Mao Zedong described their relations as "close as lips and teeth".



US Senate blocks Saudi arms sales

The US Senate on Thursday voted to block the sale of billions of dollars in military sales to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other countries, rejecting President Donald Trump's decision to sidestep Congress' review of such deals by declaring an emergency over Iran. Trump has promised to veto the Senate action in order to proceed with the deals, worth some \$8.1 billion. Senators would need 67 votes to override his veto, which looked unlikely after Thursday's votes. The bi-partisan backers of the resolutions said they sent a bipartisan message to Saudi Arabia that Washington is not happy about human rights abuses, including the murder of Jamal Khashoggi at a Saudi consulate in Turkey and about the war in Yemen. Despite Trump's veto threat, members of Congress said they expect some Saudi-related legislation would come into effect this year. Lawmakers are working on a separate measure "to hold Saudi Arabia accountable" for human rights abuses and Khashoggi's murder. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee is due to consider as soon as next week legislation that would take away the ability of Trump, or any president, to use emergency authority to sell arms to any country besides Nato members and certain other key partners without congressional review.

MATCHSTICK FACTORY FIRE

Children among 30 killed in Indonesia

At least 30 people, including several children, were killed when a fire ripped through a private home that operated as a matchstick factory in Indonesia yesterday, authorities said. Pictures from the scene showed blackened corpses lying on top of each other in the burnt-out house after the blaze, which authorities said broke out early yesterday afternoon. TV footage showed plumes of black smoke billowing from the home in the town of Binjai in North Sumatra, about 70 kilometres (44 miles) west of provincial capital Medan. "We don't know what caused the fire but it has been extinguished," the head of North Sumatra's disaster agency Riadil Lubis told AFP, adding that at least three children were among the dead. "We've sent teams there," he added. Resident Budi Zulkifli was headed to the local mosque in the Muslim-majority nation when the fire broke out. "I was about to go out to Friday prayers when there was a loud explosion," he told AFP. "But I don't know what blew up." Binjai police chief Nugroho Tri Nuryanto said a gas canister explosion may have set off the blaze, but that the cause still needed to be confirmed. At least three people escaped but most victims may have been unable to flee the scene, he added, while local media said four women escaped. "They were trapped in a room -- there was no way out," Nuryanto told Tribun News, referring to the dead. "We're still identifying the victims and scouring the scene." It was not clear why there were children at the scene. But one survivor, identified only as Pipit, said that they were visiting their parents who worked at the site. "The children went there at lunchtime," she told Tribun News.



An Indian Army Dog Unit doing yoga poses as part of an event for International Yoga Day in Jalandhar in north India's Punjab state, yesterday. Inset, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the way for International Yoga Day, performing sun salutations and other flexible feats in a mass session with an estimated 30,000 other devotees of the discipline. PHOTO: AFP

NEWSIN brief

240 injured in Georgia protest crackdown
At least 240 demonstrators and police officers were injured during an overnight anti-government protest in Georgia after riot police fired rubber bullets and tear gas at a largely peaceful rally. Demonstrations broke out in capital Tbilisi on Thursday after a Russian lawmaker addressed parliament from the speaker's seat -- a deeply controversial move in a country at loggerheads with Moscow.

India warships sent to strategic Gulf waters
India has sent warships and stepped up aerial surveillance in strategic Gulf waters, the Press Trust of India reported on Thursday, with global tensions rising in the region. "INS Chennai and INS Sunayna have been deployed in the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf to undertake maritime security operations," the navy said. The aim is "to re-assure the Indian-flagged vessels operating/transiting through the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, following the maritime security incidents in the region," it added.

Suicide blast at Shia mosque in Baghdad kills 2

A suicide explosion at a Shia mosque in eastern Baghdad killed two civilians and wounded nine people yesterday, two Iraqi police officers told AFP. The blast hit the Imam Mahdi al-Muntadhar mosque in Baladiyat, near the massive and densely-populated district of Sadr City. "At least one attacker wearing a belt of explosives tried to enter the building but was stopped by the guards, and detonated himself outside," one officer told AFP. "Two civilians were killed and nine people were wounded," the source said. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

No Brexit renegotiation

Warn EU leaders as Johnson faces Hunt in battle to be British PM

The EU's top leaders yesterday fired a Brexit warning to whoever wins the battle to become the next British prime minister, saying the existing divorce deal could not be changed. Hot favourite Boris Johnson will face foreign minister Jeremy Hunt in a run-off vote to decide who takes on the tricky task of piloting the country's departure from the EU. Both say they want to renegotiate the deal that outgoing PM Theresa May struck with Brussels after two years of painful negotiation, a deal which British MPs have rejected three times. European Council President Donald Tusk said the bloc would remain "very precise and also patient" despite the high political drama unfolding in Westminster. "Maybe the process of Brexit will be even more exciting than before because of some personal decisions

in London but nothing has changed when it comes to our position," Tusk told reporters after a summit of EU leaders in Brussels. The former Polish premier said that all remaining 27 EU leaders were adamant there could be no changes to the near 600-page legal accord struck in November last year. "We look forward to working together with the next UK prime minister," Tusk said. "We are open for talks when it comes to the declaration on the future UK-EU relations if the position of the UK were

to evolve, but the withdrawal agreement is not open for renegotiation." Jean-Claude Juncker, chief of the European Commission, which led Brexit talks for the EU side, said there was nothing to add because leaders "repeatedly and unanimously there will be no renegotiation of the withdrawal agreement". Brexit has been delayed twice already and both Hunt and Johnson say Britain should leave the bloc on the current deadline date of October 31 -- even if it means walking away with no deal. But Hunt has suggested he might delay Brexit briefly if a deal with Brussels was close, and Johnson has refused to absolutely guarantee leaving on October 31. Patience across the Channel is wearing thin, with Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar warning at the Brussels summit on Thursday of "enormous hostility" in the EU to granting Britain yet another delay.



On this day 30 years ago we lost you



MUNAWAR MUJIB
A sunbeam lent to us too briefly
In fond remembrance
The bereaved family and friends