

NEWSIN brief

Egypt says 7 cops killed in Sinai jihadist attack

AFP, Cairo

Seven police officers have been killed in a jihadist attack in restive North Sinai, Egypt's interior ministry said yesterday. The attack near the regional capital El-Arish targeted an "assembly centre" for police, according to the ministry. Four assailants died "during clashes" following the attack, one when he detonated an explosives belt, it said.

Fake cops steal \$3.7m from Swiss woman

AFP, Geneva

Fraudsters posing as police officers stole 3.3 million euros (\$3.7 million) from a Swiss woman, Swiss media reported yesterday. A female suspect first contacted the victim in Zurich in November, posing as an officer who claimed to be investigating a network of thieves, according to the ATS news agency. The woman was told that employees at her bank were planning to rob her. They then instructed her to transfer her assets to a new account through a series of payments, in order to protect her savings from being stolen by her own bank.

2 US soldiers killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Two US service members were killed in Afghanistan yesterday, Nato said, the latest international casualties as the US and the Taliban prepare for a new round of talks. Nato's Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan gave no further details, but the deaths came less than 24 hours after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made an unannounced visit to Kabul and said he hopes for a peace deal with the Taliban "before September 1".



The bodies of Salvadorian migrant Oscar Alberto Martinez Ramirez and his daughter Valeria are seen after they drowned in the Rio Bravo river while trying to reach the United States, in Matamoros, in Tamaulipas state, Mexico. The photo shows the 23-month-old girl lies face down in the waters of the river, tucked into her father's black t-shirt. Her arm is draped around his neck, suggesting she died clutching his body. A Mexican newspaper says Ramirez crossed the river which separates the neighbouring countries on Sunday, carrying his child. The 25-year-old placed the girl on the US bank of the river and started to return to the other side, to fetch his wife, when his daughter jumped after him. Martinez caught hold of Valeria, but both were swept away by the current. The pair were found dead shortly afterwards.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Protect women from rape at home: UN

Urges reform of legal framework

REUTERS, Thomson Reuters Foundation

The home is one of the most dangerous places for women, the United Nations said on Tuesday, as research showed only four in 10 countries criminalise marital rape.

A dozen countries allow rapists to avoid prosecution by marrying their victims, UN Women said in its flagship annual Progress of the World's Women report.

"We have seen great progress on eliminating discrimination against women in laws, however it is no accident that family laws have been the slowest to change," Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, executive director of UN Women, said in its foreword.

"The shocking pervasiveness of intimate partner violence means that statistically, home is one of the most dangerous places to be for a woman." In 2017, nearly 60% of female victims of intentional homicide were killed by family member, a rate of 137 women killed each day, the report said.

Nearly one in five women aged 15 to 49 globally experienced physical or sexual abuse from a former or current partner or spouse in the previous year, the report also found, describing violence against women as "serious and ubiquitous".

From Iraq to Malaysia, women are ramping up pressure to abolish marry-your-rapist laws after Tunisia, Jordan and Lebanon scrapped similar articles in 2017.

In more than 50 countries, including the United States, Nepal, Britain and South Africa, it is a crime for a husband to rape his wife, but that is not the case in most of Asia, where campaigners are pushing for legal reform.

MIGRANT CRISIS AT US-MEXICO BORDER

House passes \$4.5b aid bill, Trump vows veto

Images of drowned migrants stir outrage

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The US House of Representatives on Tuesday approved a \$4.5 billion aid package to address the migrant surge along the US-Mexico border, including new standards for migrants in custody following reports of poor conditions facing young children at overcrowded facilities.

The Democratic-led House voted 230-195, mostly along party lines, to pass the measure, but its future is uncertain. The Republican-run Senate is working on its own version of the bill, and Republican President Donald Trump has vowed to veto the House legislation, with White House officials saying it would hamstring the administration's border enforcement efforts.

Trump on May 1 requested the aid for programs that house, feed, transport and oversee record numbers of Central American families seeking asylum in the United States and straining capacity at migrant shelters in border cities, reported Reuters.

Amid the ensuing outcry, the acting commissioner of the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency, John Sanders, said on Tuesday he was resigning. Meanwhile, shocking images of a drowned Salvadorian migrant and his two-year-old daughter who died while trying to cross the Rio Grande river from Mexico to the United States have sparked outrage, underscoring the dangers faced by asylum-seekers.

Twenty-five-year-old Oscar Martinez Ramirez fled El Salvador with his 21-year-old wife and their daughter and decided to make the risky crossing from Mexico to the US on Sunday afternoon, according to a Mexican court report seen by AFP.

Ramirez carried the little girl on his back, stowing her inside his t-shirt to keep her safe as they attempted to cross the river. But the pair were swept away by violent currents, drowning before her mother's eyes, who survived the ordeal and arrived on shore.

The two bodies were found Monday in Matamoros in Tamaulipas state.

Iran 'never seeks war'

Says Rouhani amid raging war of words; Trump says no boots will be on the ground if US attacks Iran

AFP, Tehran

Iran "never seeks war" with the United States, President Hassan Rouhani said as he sought to rein in soaring tensions between the two archfoes. On Tuesday, Tehran's top security official, Ali Shamkhani, said Iran would "forcefully" reduce further commitments from July 7.

"Iran has no interest to increase tension in the region and it never seeks war with any country, including (the) US," the president said, quoted by state news agency IRNA yesterday.

Rouhani was speaking by phone to his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron, as Tehran and Washington engaged in an escalating war of words following Iran's shooting down of a US drone last week.

"We have always been committed to regional peace and stability and will make efforts in this respect," the Iranian president told Macron.

US President Donald Trump said yesterday he hopes the US does not

go to war with Iran but if it did, America's use of force would be overwhelming.

In an interview on Fox Business News, Trump was asked if America is going to go to war with Iran.

"Well, I hope we don't but we're in a very strong position if something should happen. We're in a very strong position. It wouldn't last very long. I



can tell you that. And I'm not talking boots on the ground," Trump said amid acute tensions between the two countries.

Trump earlier said he pulled back from retaliatory strikes on Iran at the last minute, rejecting Tehran's claim that the aircraft was in its airspace.

But pressure mounted this week

with Trump announcing sanctions on Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and top officials.

General Hossein Salami, commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, mocked the latest sanctions as an "irrational" reaction to the loss of the sophisticated drone.

The new measures are the latest against Tehran since Trump pulled out of a landmark nuclear accord between Iran and world powers.

Khamenei said yesterday that the Islamic republic remains unbowed by pressure exerted by the United States and its "insults".

"The Iranian nation seeks dignity, independence and progress; that's why pressures by cruel enemies do not affect Iranians," Khamenei said in a speech to a crowd in Tehran.

"The graceful Iranian nation has been accused and insulted by the world's most vicious regime, the US," he said, quoted by his office.

"The Iranian nation won't give up over such insults," said Khamenei.



Moon denies US-N Korea nuclear talks in 'stalemate'

South Korean President Moon Jae-in yesterday dismissed the idea that nuclear negotiations between Pyongyang and Washington had stalled, saying patience was needed to bridge a 70-year "sea of mistrust". Moon is set to host the US leader this weekend as he tries to rekindle nuclear talks that have stalled since the collapse of a second summit between Trump and Kim in Hanoi in February. Trump and Kim's willingness to engage in dialogue had "never faded," he added in the interview with editors of major news agencies including AFP, noting a recent exchange of letters between them.

San Francisco bans e-cigarettes

San Francisco on Tuesday became the first major US city to effectively ban the sale and manufacture of electronic cigarettes, as concerns grow over a sharp rise in vaping among youths. The city's legislature unanimously approved an ordinance suspending the sale in shops or online of e-cigarette products that lack approval by federal health authorities. No such approvals currently exist. Backers said the ban was necessary due to the "significant public health consequences" of a "dramatic surge" in e-cigarette use among teenagers. But the move triggered a swift backlash from critics who say it could drive former smokers back to conventional cigarettes. The number of young Americans using e-cigarettes grew by 1.5 million in 2018, with about 3.6 million middle and high school students using vaping products.

French restaurant crowned as world's best

France's Mirazur restaurant -- whose Argentine chef Mauro Colagreco draws inspiration from the sea, the mountains, and his own garden -- was crowned the world's best by an influential trade list, beating contenders from Denmark and Spain. The accolade came just months after Colagreco was awarded a third Michelin star, and was the first time a French establishment has triumphed in the World's 50 Best Restaurant list. In second spot in the awards -- which took place in Singapore, their first time in Asia -- was Noma in Copenhagen, and third was Asador Etxebarri in Spain. Gaggan in Bangkok was fourth, the highest ranked Asian restaurant. Fifth was Geranium in Copenhagen, and sixth was Central in Lima, tagged as Best in South America. The top restaurant award has gone to Spain seven times, the most of any country.

SOURCE: AFP

Oman to open embassy in Palestinian territories

Countries pledge \$110m for UNRWA

AFP, Muscat

Oman yesterday said that it has decided to open an embassy in the Palestinian territories in support of the Palestinian people, in a first for a Gulf Arab state.

The announcement coincides with a US-led economic workshop in Bahrain to unveil a Middle East peace plan which is not expected to recognise an independent Palestinian state.

"In continuation of Oman's support for the Palestinian people, the Sultanate of Oman has decided to open a diplomatic mission at the level of embassy in the State of Palestine," the foreign ministry said on Twitter.

A delegation from the foreign ministry will travel to Ramallah, the seat of the Palestinian Authority, to take the necessary measures to open the embassy, it said.

Oman is not participating in the Bahrain workshop, where US President Donald Trump's administration hopes to raise \$50 billion of investments to improve the economic conditions of Palestinians.

The conference is boycotted by the Palestinian Authority which fears the US administration is dangling money to impose pro-Israeli political solutions. Meanwhile, more than \$110 million was raised Tuesday at a pledging conference to support the UN agency for Palestinian refugees UNRWA, which has been struggling since the United States slashed funding.

UNRWA chief Pierre Kraehenbuehl said the funding would allow the agency, which provides education and health services to Palestinians, to cover costs for the coming months and avoid a budget crisis.

Climate a 'red line' at G20

Macron says France won't sign any deal that snubs climate goals; Putin, Trump to discuss Iran, arms

AFP, Tokyo

France wants the G20 to issue a statement committing to strong action on climate change and considers the issue a "red line", President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday ahead of the summit.

Macron was speaking in Tokyo on a visit ahead of this week's Group of 20 meeting, where climate change will be among several contentious issues on the table, along with trade and tensions with Iran.

The French leader held bilateral talks with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe yesterday.

The G20 is expected to be dominated by the ongoing trade war between China and the United States, as well as concerns that spiralling tensions between Washington and Tehran could lead to war.

But climate change will also be a battleground, with Washington likely to oppose strong references to the Paris climate deal, an agreement from which it plans to withdraw.

Macron said France would refuse to sign any agreement that bowed to such demands, amid reports that Japan is seeking consensus language that could water down previous communique wording on climate change.

"I have a red line," he told a gathering of French citizens before meeting Abe.

"If we do not talk about the Paris accord and if, in order to find agreement among the 20 in the room, we are not able to defend climate ambitions, it will be without France."

Meanwhile, the Kremlin yesterday said Russian President Vladimir Putin and US leader Donald Trump will discuss arms control and Iran and Syria crises on the sidelines of this week's G20 summit in Japan.

Putin is also set to have talks with outgoing British Prime Minister Theresa May, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, foreign policy aide Yuri Ushakov told journalists.

Putin and Trump will meet in Japan's western city of Osaka tomorrow.



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during their meeting at the Prime Minister's Residence, in New Delhi, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

India will do what is in its national interest

Jaishankar tells Pompeo; trade, defence issues remain unresolved

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India yesterday told the US that it will go by its national interest while dealing with other countries, including with sanctions-hit Russia from whom New Delhi is procuring S-400 missile defence systems.

This was conveyed by Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to his American counterpart Mike Pompeo during an extensive bilateral meeting in New Delhi.

However, Pompeo sought to reduce heightened trade tension with India, promising a renewed focus on negotiating improved trade and investment ties between the two nations.

In a joint press interaction, Pompeo said India is an important partner of the US and that the bilateral ties were reaching new heights.

The disputes have led to higher trade tariffs by the two countries and created unease over the depth of their security alliance. In particular, the sudden introduction of

new e-commerce rules for foreign investors in February angered the Americans because it showed New Delhi was prepared to move the goalposts to hurt two of the largest US companies, discount retailer Walmart, and Amazon.com Inc.

Walmart last year invested \$16 billion to buy control of Indian e-commerce firm Flipkart.

Just days before Pompeo's visit, India slapped higher retaliatory tariffs on 28 US products following Washington's withdrawal of key trade privileges for New Delhi.

US pressure has led India to stop buying oil from Iran, a top energy supplier. The United States has also stepped up pressure on India not to proceed with its purchase of S-400 surface-to-air missile systems from Russia.

The missile deal and Iranian oil were both discussed during their meeting, Jaishankar and Pompeo said, but mentioned no resolution of either at the news conference.