

# US open to joint ops with Russia

## Trump torpedoed Pacific trade pact

Washington

**U**S President Donald Trump is open to conducting joint operations with Russia to combat the Islamic State group in Syria, his spokesman said yesterday.

"If there's a way we can combat ISIS with any country, whether it's Russia or anyone else, and we have a shared national interest in that, sure, we'll take it," press

secretary Sean Spicer told reporters when asked about the prospect of joint military action in Syria.

### Change in trade moves

President Donald Trump yanked the United States out of a major Pacific trade deal Monday, making good on an election campaign promise and delivering a hammer blow to Asian allies.

Trump said he had

"terminated" the Trans-Pacific Partnership -- a trade deal binding the United States, Australia, Canada, Japan, Vietnam and seven other allies against growing Chinese economic clout.

Together, TPP members represent 40 percent of the world economy.

After signing an executive order, Trump said he would be "going back to those countries one-on-one" to find

terms more favorable to the United States.

"We are going to have trade but we are going to have one-on-one," he said.

"And if somebody misbehaves, we are going to send a letter of termination -- 30 days and they'll either straighten it out or we are gone."

### Egypt military assistance

US President Donald Trump

is committed to providing military assistance to Egypt, White House spokesman Sean Spicer said Monday, after the new Republican leader spoke with counterpart Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Trump "underscored the United States remains committed to the bilateral relationship, which helped both countries overcome challenges in the region for decades," Spicer said.

Washington's annual \$1.3 billion in military aid was briefly suspended under Trump's predecessor Barack Obama in 2013, following the ouster of then president Mohamed Morsi, but was fully reinstated in 2015.

Ties have nonetheless been fraught amid disagreements over a rights crackdown and Egypt's support for renegade Libyan general Khalifa Haftar. (AFP)

Chief opposition negotiator Mohammad Alloush (Center)



## Rocky start to talks

Astana

**P**ace talks with Syrian rebels and the war-torn country's government got off to a rocky start yesterday.

The Syrian rebels' representatives vowed to keep fighting if peace negotiations with the government of President Bashar al-Assad fail, as the first day of talks in the Kazakh capital Astana ended with no apparent breakthrough.

Monday's meetings,

organised by key players Russia, Turkey and Iran, could have marked the first time armed rebel groups negotiated directly with the Assad regime since the conflict erupted in 2011.

But the rebels backed out of direct talks because of the regime's continued bombardment and attacks on a flashpoint area near Damascus.

However, they took part in indirect talks with the

government and held a three-way meeting with Russia, Turkey and the United Nations, an encounter rebel spokesman Yehya al-Aridi described as "long and productive".

"If the negotiations succeed, then we are with the negotiations," another rebel spokesman Osama Abu Zeid told on Monday.

"If they don't succeed, unfortunately we'll have no choice but to continue fighting."

## France FM in Saudi to reaffirm 'partnership'

Riyadh

**F**rance's Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault arrived in Saudi Arabia yesterday to reaffirm the allies' "strategic partnership", as European concerns mount over US President Donald Trump's foreign policies.

Ayrault, on his first ministerial visit to the kingdom, "will discuss the main regional issues, particularly the situations in Yemen, Iraq, Libya and Syria",

the French foreign ministry said in a statement.

The minister is to meet his Saudi counterpart Adel al-Jubeir as well as King Salman. France's ties with Saudi Arabia have grown under President Francois Hollande.

At the same time, Riyadh has been building alliances beyond with the US, to counter Iran, after concerns that former president Barack Obama had eased US policy towards Riyadh's regional rival.



Jean-Marc Ayrault

## Indonesia holds IS-linked group deported from Turkey

Jakarta

**I**ndonesian police have detained 17 people with suspected links to the Islamic State (IS) group after Turkey deported them due to concerns they wanted to enter Syria, an official said yesterday.

Hundreds of people from Indonesia, which has the world's biggest Muslim population, have flocked to join IS in the Middle East in recent years, stoking fears that radicals could launch attacks on home soil on their return.

The group, which included several children, was arrested at the international airport serving Jakarta on Saturday after arriving on a flight from Istanbul, said national police spokesman Rikwanto. Turkish authorities became suspicious the group was planning to enter Syria, where IS controls territory, and decided to send them back to Indonesia.

## Gang rape in Sweden streamed live on Facebook

Stockholm

**T**hree young men suspected of gang raping a woman in Sweden and livestreaming the attack on Facebook have been detained, police said, urging social media users on Monday to turn over the footage.

The suspects, aged 18, 20 and 24, were arrested early Sunday in an apartment in Uppsala, 70

kilometres (45 miles) north of Stockholm, in the presence of their 30-year-old victim after members of a Facebook group saw the attack streamed live and alerted police.

The closed Facebook group has 60,000 members.

Josefine Lundgren, 21, was one of the first to call authorities.

She told *daily Expressen* that the 24-year-old suspect, a repeat offender considered by police to be the main attacker, "tore the clothes off" his victim before raping her.

The attacker also "had apparently filmed everything and took pictures that he put on (messaging site) Snapchat," she said.

At a press conference on Monday, investigators appealed to social media users who had images of the attack to turn them over to police.

"We have some picture and video material. But we don't have any images showing the attack itself," Uppsala deputy chief prosecutor Magnus Berggren said.