

# world

## Putin proposes peace treaty with Japan

Vladivostok, Russia

President Vladimir Putin suggested yesterday that Russia and Japan sign a peace treaty this year, ending World War II hostilities “without any preconditions” as a territorial dispute has led to decades of deadlock.

But Putin’s sudden proposal was received coolly in Japan, where a government spokesman said the two countries should first resolve the dispute before signing a peace deal.

The dispute between Russia and Japan centres on four islands in the strategically-located Kuril chain which the Soviet Union occupied at the end of war in 1945 but are claimed by Japan.

It has kept the two countries from signing a peace accord that would formally end their wartime hostilities.

## Ally of Ahmadinejad gets 6 years

Tehran, Iran

A close ally of Iran’s ex-president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was handed more than six years in prison yesterday for protesting against the system, Iranian media reported.

Esfandiar Rahim Mashaie, 57, was Ahmadinejad’s chief of staff during his controversial two terms as president between 2005 and 2013.

He was given one year for propaganda against the state, five years for collusion with intent to commit a crime against national security, and six months for insulting judicial officials, said Gholamhossein Esmaili, head of the Tehran prosecutor’s office, according to the conservative Tasnim news agency.

## Detained Russian ship released

Port Elizabeth, South Africa

South African police said yesterday they had released a Russian-registered cargo ship which was detained for three weeks on suspicion of carrying illegal weapons and explosives en route to the Nigerian city of Lagos. The vessel, named Lada, had reportedly left Madagascar before stopping at Ngqura port outside the eastern city of Port Elizabeth. Local reports said police had searched the vessel after an anonymous tip-off and found weapons and explosives worth about \$3.5 million in 20 containers on board.

# Damascus shells Idlib as UN warns of ‘bloodbath’

● Russia-backed government forces have been massing for weeks around Idlib

● Intermittent artillery fire hit southern districts of Idlib province

AFP | Beirut, Lebanon

Government forces shelled Syria’s last major rebel bastion yesterday, hours after UN chief Antonio Guterres warned the Security Council any full-blown offensive in Idlib risks triggering a “bloodbath”.

As troops massed for a Russian-backed offensive in the northwest, Kurdish-led rebels launched a US-backed assault in the east to oust the Islamic State group from its last redoubt in the Euphrates Valley, the US-led coalition confirmed.

Intermittent artillery fire hit southern districts of Idlib province and adjacent rebel-held areas of Hama province, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The Britain-based war monitor did not immediately



Syrian rebel fighters from the recently-formed “National Liberation Front” take part in military training at an unknown location in the northern countryside of the Idlib province

report any casualties from the bombardment which came after shelling and air strikes killed at least 15 civilians in the rebel zone since September 4.

UN agencies and relief organisations have warned repeatedly that any major assault could spark one of the worst human-

itarian disasters of Syria’s war. “It is absolutely essential to avoid a full-scale battle in Idlib,” Guterres said on Tuesday.

“This would unleash a humanitarian nightmare unlike any seen in the blood-soaked Syrian conflict.”

More than half of Idlib prov-

ince is held by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a jihadist alliance led by Syria’s former Al-Qaeda affiliate, and Turkey has warned a government offensive could scatter thousands of foreign jihadists abroad, posing a security threat to the West.

A major battle would trig-

ger a “massive wave of refugees and tremendous security risks for Turkey, the rest of Europe and beyond,” Turkish ambassador Feridun Sinirlioglu told the Security Council on Tuesday.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian expressed strong support for the Turkish position, warning there were “many terrorists from other nations who could scatter” in the event of a joint Syrian-Russian offensive, posing “risks for our security”.



Russia claimed that Syrian rebels had been working on film footage that would be presented to the world as the aftermath of an alleged chemical attack by the Syrian army

## Don’t ‘play games’ with Florence, warns Trump

Washington, United States

US President Donald Trump promised yesterday that the federal government was “ready” and “able” to handle Hurricane Florence, warning residents to get out of the way as the monster storm bears down on the East Coast.

“They say it’s about as big as they have seen coming to this country, and certainly to the East Coast as they’ve ever

seen,” Trump said.

“We’ll handle it. We’re ready, we’re able, we’ve got the finest people I think anywhere in the world,” he added in a video message posted on his Twitter account. Florence is currently a Category 4 hurricane on the five-point Saffir-Simpson scale and was forecast to slam into the Carolinas later this week.

More than a million people are under mandatory evacuation orders.

## Pakistan’s former PM released on parole

Islamabad, Pakistan

Pakistan’s jailed former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his daughter have been temporarily released on parole for the funeral of his wife, government and party sources said yesterday.

Kulsoom Nawaz died of cancer in London on Tuesday, two months after her husband and daughter returned to Pakistan and were immediately jailed for corruption.

Handout pictures released by



Nawaz Sharif arrives in Lahore

PML-N on Wednesday showed Sharif and his daughter Maryam aboard a plane after their

release late Tuesday and arriving in the city of Lahore, where the former first lady’s funeral will be held.

The pair “have initially been released for 12 hours to attend the funeral but the release can be extended by the home department”, an official at Rawalpindi central jail told AFP.

Local media reported the funeral would be held on Friday, with their parole likely to last until after the service concluded.

## Russia denies suspecting US of drilling hole on ISS

Moscow, Russia

Russia yesterday reacted angrily to a report that it suspects US astronauts of deliberately drilling a hole in the International Space Station, one of the few remaining areas of cooperation between the countries.

The hole was detected on the ISS last month and quickly sealed up, but Russia has suggested that it was drilled deliberately.

Russian daily Kommersant reported Wednesday that a Russian space agency investigation is probing the possibility US astronauts deliberately drilled the hole in order to get a sick colleague sent back home.

Kommersant reported that



The ISS found a hole in the Russian part of the station

this scenario was being looked into “as a priority,” quoting a source participating in the investigation.

But deputy prime minister

Yury Borisov rejected Kommersant’s report, saying that “it is absolutely unacceptable to cast a shadow either on our cosmonauts or on American

astronauts,” RIA Novosti state news agency reported.

The deputy prime minister said it was “shortsighted and dangerous” to speculate until the findings of the investigation were released.

He also stressed the ISS was “a unified group where there are no political disagreements.” Russian space agency Roscosmos said it would make no official comment until the findings are released, which is expected to happen this month.

Astronauts located the hole on August 30 in a Russian-made spacecraft docked to the ISS after an air leak was detected onboard, and closed it up with sealant. Space agency chief Dmi-

try Rogozin told journalists last week that the hole could have been a deliberate act of sabotage and suggested this could have happened in space as well as back on Earth.

On Wednesday Rogozin wrote on Facebook that “spreading speculation and rumours about the incident on the ISS doesn’t help the experts at Roscosmos and is aimed at undermining relations between comrades in the space station crew.”

He told journalists Tuesday that initial findings showed “the situation is much more complicated than it seemed before.”

The ISS crews are ferried to and from the space station in Russian Soyuz spacecraft.