

NEWS IN

brief

Gunmen torch Nato trucks in Pakistan

AFP, Quetta

Gunmen in Pakistan yesterday set ablaze five trucks carrying Nato equipment out of Afghanistan as the international military alliance winds down its combat mission there, officials said.

Four masked gunmen on two motorbikes opened fire at the vehicles, forcing them to stop and then doused them in petrol to set them on fire in the southwestern province Baluchistan.

Suicide truck bomb kills 9 in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

A suicide truck bomber killed nine people at a police headquarters yesterday as data showed March was Iraq's deadliest month since August, raising fears of a surge in violence leading up to elections.

The latest attack, in Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit, comes as Iraq marks 10 years since the US-led invasion of the country that intended to oust Saddam and install a stable, democratic ally in the Middle East but instead unleashed

Mandela is improving

AFP, Johannesburg

Nelson Mandela's condition has improved further, the South African government said as the ailing anti-apartheid icon spent his fifth day in hospital yesterday receiving treatment for a recurrence of pneumonia.

Doctors "have reported a further improvement in his condition," President Jacob Zuma's office said in a statement late Sunday.

11 killed in flash floods in Mauritius

AP, Port Louis

Officials say flash floods blamed on climate change killed at least 11 people in the capital of the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius.

Officials said most drowned in rivers of water that rose swiftly Saturday in a pedestrian underpass and an underground car park.

Torrential downpours slammed Port Louis. The meteorological office reported 152mm (6 inches) of rain fell in less than an hour. It warned



PHOTO: AFP

South Korean tanks crossing a river during military drill in Hwacheon near the border with North Korea yesterday. South Korea's new president promised a strong military response to any North Korean provocation after Pyongyang announced that the two countries were now in a state of war.

South Korea vows fast response to North

US deploys stealth jets; North names new PM amid tensions

REUTERS, Seoul

South Korea will strike back quickly if the North stages any attack on its territory, the new president in Seoul warned yesterday, as tensions ratcheted higher on the Korean peninsula amid shrill rhetoric from Pyongyang and the US deployment of radar-evading fighter planes.

North Korea says the region is on the brink of a nuclear war in the wake of United Nations sanctions imposed for its February nuclear test and a series of joint US and South Korean military drills that have included a rare US show of aerial power.

Meanwhile, North Korea Monday announced the appointment of Pak Pong-Ju, an economics expert, as

new prime minister in a reshuffle endorsed by its rubber-stamp parliament.

Pak took the oath at the annual meeting of the Supreme People's Assembly, the official news agency said. He replaces Choe Yong-Rim, reports AFP.

North Korea said on Saturday it was entering a "state of war" with South Korea in response to what it termed the "hostile" military drills being staged in the South. But there have been no signs of unusual activity in the North's military to suggest an imminent aggression, a South Korean defense ministry official said last week.

"If there is any provocation against South Korea and its people,

there should be a strong response in initial combat without any political considerations," President Park Geun-hye told the defense minister and senior officials at a meeting on Monday.

The South has changed its rules of engagement to allow local units to respond immediately to attacks, rather than waiting for permission from Seoul.

Stung by criticism that its response to the shelling of a South Korean island in 2010 was tardy and weak, Seoul has also threatened to target North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and to destroy statues of the ruling Kim dynasty in the event of any new attack, a plan that has outraged Pyongyang.

Myanmar failed to stop killing, arson: HRW

AFP, Bangkok

Human Rights Watch (HRW) yesterday urged Myanmar to investigate the failure of police to stop a recent wave of Buddhist-Muslim killing and arson attacks.

The New York-based rights watchdog released satellite images which it said showed more than 800 buildings were totally destroyed in the central town of Meiktila, leaving several charred areas where homes and properties once stood.

"The government should investigate responsibility for the violence in Meiktila and the failure of the police to stop wanton killings and the burning of entire neighborhoods," said HRW Asia director Brad Adams.

Last month's unrest, which later spread to several other towns, has left 43 people dead and more than 1,300 homes and other buildings destroyed, according to state media in the former army-ruled nation.

According to the United Nations, about 12,000 people have been displaced.

The worst-hit areas in Meiktila are believed to be neighbourhoods once home to "a significant number of Muslims", said HRW deputy Asia director Phil Robertson.

The violence "was allowed to run for days on end", he told AFP. "There's been plenty of information that we found, and that others have reported, of essentially the police allowing it to go on and not intervening."

HRW said the destruction bore similarities to sectarian unrest in a different area in western Myanmar last year that killed at least 180 people and left "large, clearly defined residential areas in ashes".



The combo satellite images of New-York based Human Rights Watch (HRW) group show Myanmar town of Meiktila on December 13, 2012, top, and the same area on April 1, 2013, bottom, after a wave of violence targeting Muslims that destroyed a number of residential, commercial structures and mosques.

PHOTO: AFP

Egypt seeks strong ties with France

AFP, Cairo

Egypt wants to maintain close ties with France following the uprising, which brought Islamists to power, Foreign Minister Mohammed Kamel Amr told AFP on Sunday on the eve of a visit to Paris.

"It's a message of continuity," Amr said ahead of the trip during which he will hold talks with President Francois Hollande and Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius on Tuesday.

"Relations are based on interests, on strategic cooperation, not depending on who is in power," he told AFP in an interview.

Adviser to Libyan PM seized in Tripoli

REUTERS, Tripoli

An adviser to Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeidan was grabbed from his car by unknown assailants on the outskirts of Tripoli on Sunday evening, a government source said.

Mohamed Ali Ghatous, in his 50s, was seized after passing a checkpoint into the eastern Tripoli suburb of Tajoura. A source at Zeidan's office said Ghatous was a senior adviser to the prime minister.

"Nobody knows where he is. They left his car behind, probably they thought it could be traced," he said.

Ghatous had last spoken to his family by mobile phone from his car before he was taken. An investigation is underway.

Since the end of the 2011 uprising that toppled Muammar Gaddafi, Libya's new rulers have struggled to control myriad armed groups who refuse to lay down their weapons and often take the law into their own hands.

Last week, five British nationals who were part of an aid convoy passing through Libya on the way to Gaza were briefly kidnapped by an armed group, and one was sexually assaulted in the eastern city of Benghazi, security officials said.



French-backed Mali forces battle rebels

AFP, Bamako

Malian troops swept Timbuktu for remaining Islamist fighters after a weekend battle that left seven dead and forced France to dispatch reinforcements and fighter jets to help Mali's army.

By late Sunday relative calm had been restored, after Islamist militants used the chaos created by a suicide bombing Saturday night to infiltrate the city and engage French and Malian troops in a day-long battle that left four more rebels, a soldier and a civilian dead.

Shakespeare the 'hard-headed businessman' uncovered

AP

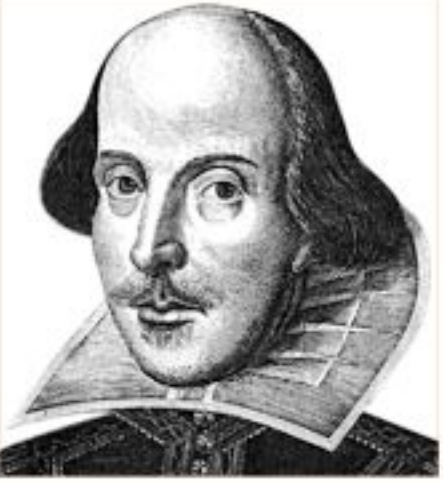
Hoarder, moneylender, tax dodger — it's not how we usually think of William Shakespeare.

But we should, according to a group of academics who say the Bard was a ruthless businessman who grew wealthy dealing in grain during a time of famine.

Researchers from Aberystwyth University in Wales argue that we can't fully understand Shakespeare unless we study his often-overlooked business savvy.

"Shakespeare the grain-hoarder has been redacted from history so that Shakespeare the creative genius could be born," the researchers say in a paper due to be delivered at the Hay literary festival in Wales in May.

Jayne Archer, a lecturer in medieval and Renaissance literature at Aberystwyth, said that oversight is the product of "a



willful ignorance on behalf of critics and scholars who I think — perhaps through snobbery — cannot countenance the idea of a creative genius also being motivated by self-interest."

Archer and her colleagues Howard Thomas and Richard Marggraf Turley combed through historical archives to uncover details of the playwright's parallel life as a grain merchant and property owner in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon whose practices sometimes brought him into conflict with the law.

"Over a 15-year period he purchased and stored grain, malt and barley for resale at inflated prices to his neighbours and local tradesmen," they wrote, adding that Shakespeare "pursued those who could not (or would not) pay him in full for these staples and used the profits to further his own money-lending activities."



BRICS bank to complement, not compete

Says P Chidambaram

AFP, Tokyo

The mooted BRICS bank of emerging powers is intended to complement, rather than compete with Western-dominated institutions on the world stage, the Indian Finance Minister said yesterday.

Finance Minister P Chidambaram also said India supports Japan's nomination of a senior finance ministry official for the top job at the Asian Development Bank (ADB), as Tokyo looks to keep hold of a role it has held for almost 50 years.

The BRICS bank is seen as a way of challenging the rules set by existing institutions like the World Bank, countering Europe's economic crisis and addressing the \$4.5 trillion in infrastructure spending the BRICS are estimated to need over the next five years.

"The BRICS bank will not be a competitor for the World Bank or the ADB. It will complement the World Bank or the ADB," Chidambaram told a news conference in Tokyo during a two-day visit to Japan.

"Why do we need the bank? Because, the funds that are now available through the existing multilateral institutions are insufficient. The World Bank, the ADB, provide funds but (they are) insufficient," he said.

Black holes living on edge of Milky Way!

Pti, London

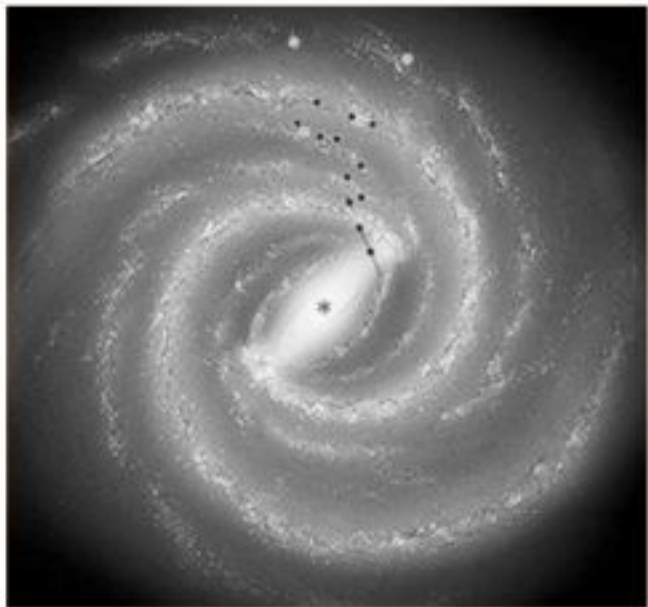
As many as 2,000 black holes kicked away from their homes are now living on the outskirts of our Milky Way galaxy, according to a new study.

Researchers from the University of California, Santa Cruz, used new computer simulations to look at how our galaxy grew through mergers with smaller galaxies.

Scientists believe that every galaxy may have a black hole at its centre. As galaxies merge, their central black holes merge too, building a super massive black hole millions of times the mass of the Sun.

But collisions between black holes create gravitational waves, which can kick a newly merged black hole out of its host galaxy, New Scientist reported.

Valery Rashkov and Piero Madau of the University of California, ran simulations that show 70 to 2,000 of these outcasts may now linger in the halo of the Milky Way, depending on the properties of the objects that collided.



Vote out corrupt politicians: Hazare

PTI, Jalandhar/Ludhiana

"Corrupt" politicians will never allow Lokpal Bill to be passed in Parliament, anti-graft activist Anna Hazare has said while urging people to elect representatives with clean image in next Lok Sabha polls.

"Politicians are elected to serve the public but they take the role of robbers once they enter Parliament and state assemblies and rob people of their wealth," said Hazare, whose Janatantra Yatra reached Jalandhar on Sunday evening.

Appealing the public to vote for politicians with a clean image, who can serve the public rather than "rule them", in the general elections due next year, the activist said, "163 members and 15 ministers are tainted in the present Parliament. It is for you to understand whether their priority will be to try to wash off their taint or serve you".

Stressing the importance of Lokpal bill Hazare said, "Jan Lokpal Bill is important for a corruption-free India and this is the reason the corrupt politicians won't



allow it to be passed.... Rise from your slumber. Don't let them cheat you any longer".

Unfazed by the lukewarm response to his agitation this time, Hazare said he will fight for the bill to be passed "till my last breath" and rooted for "complete change" of the system.

Former Army chief VK Singh, who has accompanied Hazare, said, "The country is corruption ridden. Politicians try to divide us on caste, religion and regional lines and we are foolish enough to fall prey to it. So it is important that we wake up and elect the right people who can serve the nation."

The 'Janatantra Yatra' arrived in Ludhiana on its second day on Monday amidst tight security.

Hazare said he will call a 'Jan Sansad' in Delhi after five months to chalk out the future strategy of the movement.

"Several important issues like the right to recall elected representatives, the role of the movement in the next Lok Sabha elections are part of his yatra. The basic unit of the Jan Sansad is the village," he added.