

NEWS IN
*brief***UN condemns Afghan court massacre**

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council on Thursday strongly condemned the attack on an Afghanistan courthouse by Taliban forces that left more than 40 people dead.

100 people were also wounded in the assault, the officials said.

The UN Security Council reiterated its "serious concern" at the threat posed by Taliban, al-Qaeda and illegal armed groups but pledged that the violence would not derail peace efforts.

Kerry follows Obama, cuts salary

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State John Kerry will give five percent of his annual government salary to charity this year to show solidarity with federal workers forced to take unpaid leave due to budget cuts.

Kerry, the wealthiest member of the cabinet, will make the gesture after President Barack Obama said he would return part of his salary to the Treasury.

UN stops Gaza food aid

AFP, Gaza City

The United Nations said it has suspended food distribution to about 25,000 Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip, after demonstrators angry at aid cuts stormed a UN depot.

Dozens of Gazans forced their way into the field office of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) on Thursday, demanding reinstatement of a monthly cash allowance to poor families which was halted from April 1 due to

Ben Ali brother-in-law dies in custody

AFP, Tunis

Moncef Trabelsi, 69, the brother-in-law of ousted Tunisian strongman Zine El Abidine Ben Ali who was jailed for fraud, has died in custody of a brain tumour, the country's prisons chief said yesterday.

"He died at the neurological hospital where he was taken (from jail) on March 18. He had been operated on for a brain tumour," the prisons chief, Habib Sboui, told AFP. Trabelsi had been unconscious for the past "four or five days", he added.

But his lawyer, Wissem Saidi, blamed the authorities for his death, alleging that Trabelsi did not get proper care in custody.

Turkey adopts migration, asylum law

AFP, Ankara

Turkey, on a renewed push to join the EU, has adopted a long-awaited law to regulate migration and asylum in a move hailed Friday by the European bloc.

The new law, adopted by lawmakers late Thursday, will protect refugees from Syria and other non-European nations as "conditional refugees" instead of the previous description of "guests".

The law also introduces permanent residency for foreigners who remain in the country for eight years on residency permits and the right of individuals to challenge deportation orders in Turkish courts.

Blast kills top officials in Thai south

AFP, Bangkok

A bomb blast killed two top provincial officials yesterday in Thailand's insurgency-plagued south, authorities said, blaming the attack on rebel fighters seeking to derail peace talks.

The deputy governor of Yala province, Issara Thongthawat, was killed along with Yala permanent secretary responsible for security, Chavalit Krairik, after a roadside bomb struck their vehicle, officials said.

Thailand held its first official peace talks with southern insurgents last week. More than 5,500 people have been killed in nine years of bloodshed in Thailand's Muslim-majority south near the border with Malaysia.

*Facebook stakes out
Android 'home'*

AFP, Menlo Park

Facebook unveiled a software suite Thursday that stakes out a "home" on Android smartphones as it steps up its challenge to

Apple and Google in the booming mobile market.

Chief executive Mark Zuckerberg said the software weaves the social network into the homescreen of HTC and Samsung phones powered by the latest versions of Android to focus experiences on "people and not apps."

"We're not building a phone and we're not building an operating system, but we are building something that's a lot deeper than an app," Zuckerberg told a gathering at the company's headquarters in Silicon Valley.

Facebook called Home "a new way to turn your Android phone into a great, living, social phone."

The software, which allows users to see Facebook's "Cover Feed" when they turn on their phones, will be available for download from Google's online Play shop in the United States starting April 12.

**Musharraf's
poll dreams
suffer blow**

TNN, New Delhi

The returning officer in Kasur's NA-139 constituency has rejected the nomination papers of former Pakistan President Gen (retd) Pervez Musharraf for the coming general elections, according to Pakistani newspaper Dawn.

A local lawyer, Javed Kasuri Advocate, had raised objections over the candidacy of Musharraf, saying that he does not qualify to contest elections under Article 62, 63 of the constitution, the Dawn reported.

The returning officer, Mohammad Saleem, accepted the objections and rejected the former president's nomination paper.

Musharraf filed papers to contest the general elections from four seats, Karachi, Islamabad, Chitral and Kasur.

Meanwhile, a Supreme Court lawyer Barrister Zafarullah, has filed an application before the Election Commission seeking disqualification of Musharraf alleging that he can not contest polls due to his involvement in four cases, the Akbar Bugti killing case, the Lal Masjid case, the Benazir Bhutto killing case, and the missing persons case.

**Tension escalates as N Korea
urges evacuation of embassies**

AFP, Moscow

North Korea has said it cannot assure the safety of embassies in Pyongyang after April 10, and has urged Britain, Russia and other European nations to evacuate diplomatic staff amid soaring nuclear tensions.

Earlier a report said yesterday that North Korea has loaded two mid-range missiles on mobile launchers and hidden them in facilities near its east coast fuelling fears of an imminent launch that would sharply escalate tensions.

Countries across Europe yesterday reported receiving a letter suggesting they pull out of Pyongyang, as an increasingly bellicose North Korea moved two mid-range missiles to its east coast.

"Their communication said that from April 10, the North Korean government would be unable to guarantee the safety of embassies and international organisations in the country in the event of conflict," a spokeswoman for Britain's Foreign Office said.

"Our understanding is that the North Koreans were asking whether



embassies are intending to leave, rather than advising them to leave."

Britain was considering its next steps, she said, while reminding North Korea of its responsibilities under the Vienna Convention to protect diplomatic missions.

Russia, which has relatively close ties with North Korea, also received the missive.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov

Indian rescue workers cut metal rods as they look for survivors in the debris of a collapsed building on the outskirts of Mumbai on Thursday. 39 people died and up to 69 more were injured when an unauthorised building under construction collapsed.

PHOTO: AFP

**Hollande vows to clean French
politics after tax scandal**

AFP, Rabat

President Francois Hollande insisted Thursday he would go all the way to clean up French politics after an ex-budget minister was charged in a tax fraud probe linked to his secret foreign bank account.

He stressed that the French government itself was not involved in the scandal but "one man who failed."

"I will go all the way on these questions because I have nothing to fear from the strict application of the laws that exist and the application of the new laws" announced, Hollande told journalists at a news conference in Rabat.

"To be clear... it is not the government that is being challenged, it is one man who failed."

The man in question, Jerome Cahuzac, was charged on Tuesday with "launders the proceeds of tax fraud" after he admitted to having an undeclared foreign bank account containing some 600,000 euros



(\$770,000).

As budget minister, he was responsible for cracking down on tax evasion until he resigned two weeks ago.

The scandal has caused a major crisis for the French president and his government, which critics accuse of either trying to

cover up for Cahuzac or of mismanagement for having believed his denials.

Adding to Hollande's woes, Le Monde newspaper reported on Thursday that his campaign treasurer for last year's presidential vote had joint ownership of two firms registered in the Cayman Islands, a well-known tax haven.

Hollande, who is on a two-day visit to Morocco, denied any knowledge of Jean-Jacques Augier's private business activities.

"I know nothing about these activities, and if they do not conform to French tax law, I will ask the administration" to make the "necessary corrections," he said.

**China closes markets
amid bird flu fears**

AFP, SHANGHAI

Shanghai yesterday ordered the closure of all live poultry markets in the city and culled more than 20,000 birds to curb the spread of the H7N9 flu virus which has killed six people in China.

The latest fatality was a 64-year-old farmer who died in Huzhou, in the eastern province of Zhejiang, local officials said according to the state Xinhua news agency.

He is thought to be among 14 previously confirmed human cases of H7N9, and is the second person from Zhejiang to die from the new bird flu strain, with the other four fatalities in Shanghai, China's commercial hub.

Shanghai city government spokesman Xu Wei told a news conference its live poultry markets were being shuttered temporarily for "public safety" purposes.

The move came after the virus was found in pigeon samples from the Huhuai market in the city's western suburbs, where Xinhua said a total of 20,536 chickens, ducks, geese and pigeons had been slaughtered.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has played down fears over the H7N9 strain, saying there was no evidence of human-to-human transmission, but that it was crucial to find out how the virus infects humans.

**India-France fighter jet
deal stalled: Report**

AFP, New Delhi

India's negotiations with France's Dassault Aviation on a \$12-billion deal for Rafale fighter jets have stalled due to disagreements over the production of the planes in India, a report said yesterday.

The defence deal, one of the biggest ever, was to see the manufacture of the first 18 of the jets in France with the remainder to be produced under licence by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), a state-run Indian aerospace behemoth.

The Indian Express newspaper, citing anonymous sources in its report, said that Dassault had refused to take responsibility for the 108 jets to be manufactured by HAL, sparking a row with New Delhi.

The French firm reportedly told Indian officials that New Delhi would have to negotiate two contracts, one with Dassault for 18 fighters and the other with HAL for the remaining 108 aircraft.

The defence ministry "completely rejected this suggestion and made it clear to Dassault that it (the French company)



will be solely responsible for the sale and delivery of all 126 aircraft," the newspaper reported, citing sources.

Dassault is thought to have reservations about the ability of HAL, a firm renowned for its inefficiencies, to handle the complex manufacturing and technology transfers which are a crucial part of the deal.

The Rafale beat off stiff competition from six rivals from Russia, the US and Europe last year when India selected the French fighter to replace its ageing fleet.

Its main rival, the Eurofighter made by European group EADS, has remained in India and is still hoping to bag the deal in case Dassault is unable to conclude the negotiations successfully.

**Oops!
Uruguay leader
caught in open
mic incident**

AFP, Montevideo

Uruguay's President Jose Mujica was left red-faced Thursday after disparaging remarks apparently aimed at Argentine counterpart Cristina Kirchner and her late husband were picked up by an open microphone.

Buenos Aires swiftly responded with an official protest, calling the comments "unacceptable."

"This old hag is worse than the cross-eyed man," Mujica was caught saying at the start of a news conference while speaking quietly with another official.

El Observador newspaper, which posted the audio on its website, said Mujica was referencing the Kirchners and did not realize that the microphones were already on.

Nestor Kirchner died suddenly of a heart attack in 2010 and had a lazy eye.

Word of the slip-up shut down the paper's website, which recorded historic traffic, according to the outlet's digital content manager.

The comment also quickly gained traction on social media.

An hour later, Mujica told the online version of La Republica newspaper that he had not talked about Argentina and was not going to clarify anything.



Jose Mujica and Cristina Kirchner

**Debate on 2
power centres
useless**

Says Indian PM

PTL, New Delhi

India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday dismissed the debate over two power centres as "useless" even as he did not rule out his accepting the third term.

"This is the creation of the media. It is a useless debate," he said in New Delhi when asked about the issue of two power centres coming into focus after senior Congress leader Digvijay Singh raked it up recently.

Digvijay had said the two power centres -- one the Congress President Sonia Gandhi and another the prime minister -- had not worked well and should not be repeated.

Congress officially rejected this contention of Digvijay and said it was an "ideal model" for

**Rohingyas kill
8 Buddhists
in Indonesia**

AFP, Medan

A group of Myanmar Muslims beat eight Buddhists to death at an Indonesian detention centre yesterday after becoming enraged at news of deadly communal violence in their homeland, officials said.

The Rohingya Muslims launched the attack at the immigration centre on Sumatra island using weapons fashioned from smashed up beds and broom handles after seeing pictures of recent religious violence in Myanmar that left dozens dead.

The attack underscores the soaring Muslim-Buddhist tensions that have cast a shadow over political reforms in Myanmar, where the end of decades of authoritarian military rule has laid bare deep sectarian fault lines.

Agustian said 15 people, believed to Rohingya, were injured during the violence at the centre, where 106 of them are being held.

Many Rohingya Muslims arriving on Indonesian shores face long stints in detention awaiting UN assessment for refugee status. Myanmar views its population of roughly 800,000 Rohingya as illegal Bangladeshi immigrants and denies them citizenship.

**Egypt seizes
arms-laden
ship from Israel**

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's government yesterday strenuously denied it had any link to an arms-laden ship that Egypt said its navy seized as it sailed from the Israeli port of Eilat to Togo in West Africa.

"Nobody in Israel knows anything about this ship. It's clear that it did not come from Eilat or any other Israeli port," foreign ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor told AFP.

Egyptian security officials said on Thursday that the navy intercepted the vessel and detained its crew who had set off from the Red Sea port of Eilat en route to Togo.

The vessel with a crew of 14 and a cargo of 105 crates of unspecified weapons, belonged to an African security company, the officials said.