

NEWS IN
brief

Senior Shebab official surrenders in Somalia

AFP, Mogadishu
A top leader of Somalia's al-Qaeda-affiliated Shebab rebels, intelligence chief Zakariya Ismail Ahmed Hersi, has surrendered to government and African Union forces and is now in custody, officials said yesterday. The militant is the subject of a \$3 million bounty as part of the US State Department "Rewards for Justice" programme.

Sweden reaches deal to avert snap polls

AFP, Stockholm
Sweden's minority centre-left government yesterday announced it has reached a deal with the opposition that will avert what would have been the country's first snap elections in more than half a century. The snap poll had been called to take place on March 22. If it had gone ahead, it would have been the first early elections in politically stable Sweden since 1958.

Indonesia arrests 6 for trying to join ISIS

AFP, Jakarta
Indonesian police yesterday arrested six people just before they were about to fly to Syria to join the Islamic State group, the latest in a growing wave of sympathisers emerging from the world's most populous Muslim nation. In total, an estimated 514 Indonesians have gone to Syria and Iraq to fight alongside.

Cop shot dead in Cairo

AFP, Cairo
Gunmen on a motorbike killed a policeman and wounded another in a drive-by shooting in the Egyptian capital yesterday, the interior ministry said. Scores of policemen and soldiers have been killed in bombings and shootings since the Egyptian military deposed Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in July 2013.

Argentine president hospitalised

AFP, Buenos Aires
Argentine President Cristina Kirchner was hospitalised Friday after spraining her ankle, local media reported, the latest in a series of physical ailments that have caused her to cancel public events. This is the fourth time in less than a year that Kirchner, Argentina's first elected woman president, who is in her last year in office, was sidelined by health issues.



MALAYSIA'S 'Worst Floods in Decades'

Clockwise from top, This aerial view shows houses and plantations submerged in floodwaters in Pengkalan Chepa, near Kota Bharu; A man makes his way to his house in the same area and; A woman looks on as she waits inside a boat as her house submerged in floodwaters in Pengkalan Chepa, yesterday. At least five people died and more than 160,000 have been evacuated till yesterday after the country's worst flooding in decades.



Russia changes military doctrine

Labels Nato as main threat; Poroshenko hails prisoner swap

AFP, Moscow

The Kremlin branded the expansion of Nato as a fundamental threat to Russia in a revised military doctrine that dramatically reflects deteriorating relations with the West.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko yesterday welcomed home as heroes 145 soldiers freed by pro-Russian rebels during the largest prisoner swap of the eight-month separatist war. Kiev on Friday freed 222 insurgent fighters captured around the main rebel stronghold of Donetsk and its surrounding regions.

Ukraine's allies in Europe hope that Friday's exchange will mark a watershed moment in a war that seems at a stalemate but still rages on because of the immense mistrust between the two sides.

The new document, approved by Russian President Vladimir Putin, decries the "reinforcement of Nato's

offensive capacities directly on Russia's borders, and measures taken to deploy a global anti-missile defence system" in Central Europe.

Nato was already seen a major threat in an earlier version of the doctrine published in 2010, but the war in Ukraine has further raised tensions to levels not seen since the Cold War.

The alarmed tone of the new ver-

UKRAINE CRISIS

sion comes in the wake of repeated protests by Moscow over Nato's decision to position troops in alliance member states like Poland or the Baltic states that border Russia.

The Kremlin has also opposed Nato's American-driven plan to base its anti-missile defence shield in Central Europe, which Moscow views as directed foremost against Russia.

The doctrine's harsher tone also follows Wednesday's decision by Ukraine to abandon its non-aligned status -- a symbolic move that provoked Moscow's anger by potentially clearing the way for Kiev to request Nato membership.

Ukraine faces a huge task to bring its military up to Nato norms, and key members of the alliance, including France and Germany, remain sceptical about it joining the alliance.

Despite its new anti-Nato edge, the Russian doctrine remains primarily defensive in nature, calling any military action by Russia justifiable only after all non-violent options to settle a conflict have been exhausted.

In the same vein, it notes the "decreased likelihood of a large-scale war against Russia", although it does list a number of increasing threats to stability like territorial disputes, "interference in the internal affairs" of nations, and the use of strategic arms in space.



A TV journalist prepares to do a piece to camera in front of an armoured personnel carrier (APC) on the frontline between Ukrainian forces and pro Russian separatists near the eastern Ukrainian city of Debaltseve, in the Donetsk region on Friday. Kiev, losing the media war against Russia, trying to be open to the press as it arranged a guided tour to dozens of foreign journalists.

PHOTO: AFP

Pak police 'reluctant' to arrest Lal Masjid cleric

55 militants killed as crackdown on terror continues

AGENCIES

Police have turned up the heat on controversial Lal Masjid supremo Abdul Aziz, issuing warrants for his arrest on Friday, following the registration of an FIR against the firebrand cleric for threatening civil society members who had protested against his refusal to condemn the Peshawar tragedy.

Police officers with whom Pakistan leading daily Dawn spoke to on Friday said that the government had already ordered the police to detain those who were included in the 4th Schedule of the Anti-Terrorism Act due to the tense situation, which had developed in the aftermath of the Army Public School massacre.

However, police officers said they were finding it hard to implement the orders in the case of Abdul Aziz, and feared that his detention under the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) may

create a law and order situation. The cleric has already threatened to launch a countrywide protest if he is arrested, a claim he made during a Friday sermon delivered last week.

The officer refused to answer when Dawn asked whether the cleric was currently at his residence. Other officials, however, claimed that Aziz had moved out of his residence and was currently living elsewhere, ostensibly to delay his possible arrest.

Meanwhile, at least 55 militants were killed in airstrikes and a gun battle with ground forces in Pakistan's troubled northwest where the military launched a major offensive this year, officials said yesterday.

The army intensified its offensive after the massacre of 150 people in a school in Peshawar this month, a carnage which Pakistan described as its own "mini 9/11" and a game-changer in the fight against extremism.



RUSSIA'S PEACE INITIATIVE Syria agrees to meet opposition in Moscow

AFP, Damascus

Syria is ready to meet with the country's opposition in Moscow in an effort to find a way out of the nearly four-year civil war, a government official said yesterday.

"Syria is ready to participate in a preliminary and consultative meeting in Moscow to respond to the aspirations of Syrians who are trying to find a solution to the crisis," the foreign ministry official said, quoted by SANA state news agency.

Russia has been trying to relaunch peace talks for Syria that would include meetings between delegates of the regime and the fractured opposition. Moscow said on Thursday that it planned to host delegations from the Syrian opposition in late January, possibly followed by a visit by regime representatives that could bring the two sides together for talks.

An estimated 200,000 people have been killed in Syria conflict, and half the population have been forced to flee their homes.

Meanwhile, the US-led coalition pounded the Islamic State group with 39 air strikes Thursday and Friday, including more than a dozen near the flashpoint Syrian town of Kobane.



Bilawal skips Benazir's death anniversary

PTI, Lahore

Pakistan People's Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari stayed away from Pakistan as his mother and former premier Benazir's death anniversary was observed across the country yesterday, giving credence to reports that he is having serious discussions with his father Asif Ali Zardari.

Although PPP co-chairman Zardari had gone to London to persuade his 'angry' son to return home so that he could attend the anniversary event in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh on Saturday, he did not succeed. There has been no word from Bilawal about his skipping the anniversary. For the first time since Benazir Bhutto's assassination in 2007, her son preferred to stay out of the country on his mother's death anniversary.

Although the PPP has cited "security concerns" but Bilawal's absence has led to widespread speculation about his differences with his father over party affairs.

Although Zardari did not oppose the choice, he told his son that he would be given a free hand to run the party affairs only after he was fully groomed, the leader said.

Banazir Bhutto was murdered on 27th of December, 2007 by terrorists in Rawalpindi while she was returning from a public meeting during 2008 general elections campaign. In a message on the 7th anniversary, Asif Ali Zardari said the nation today seemed more united than ever before in its determination to exterminate the militants.

The most fragile woman on earth!
Even yawning isn't safe for her

MAIL ONLINE

Opening a door, driving a car, even yawning - they are all daily activities we take for granted.

But for one mother-of-five, any one of those simple tasks means the risk of a very painful dislocation.

Jojo Meadows suffers from Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS) - a rare condition which causes her bones to dislocate up to ten times a day.

The agonising condition has seen the 38-year-old to break or dislocate almost every bone in her body.

Even simple tasks are enough to force her bones to pop out of their sockets. But despite her bizarre illness, Jojo, from Hereford, Shropshire, is determined not to the condition hold her back.

Jojo said: 'My bones pop out so often, that sometimes I don't even notice it. But it's still very painful. I'd say I end up in the hospital around 100 times a year.'

The condition is a genetic one which means the collagen in Jojo's body is too weak to hold her limbs in place.



Eying India, China raises Nepal aid 5 folds

TNN, Beijing

In what appears to be a straight competition for influence with India, China has increased its official aid to Nepal by more than five times. China has also promised to build electricity infrastructure in Nepal worth \$1.6 billion to counter an Indian offer of soft loan for the power sector.

Chinese aid to the Himalayan nation will rise from the present level of \$24 million to \$128 million in 2015-16. The announcement came after talks between Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi and his Nepali counterpart Mahendra Bahadur Pandey in Kathmandu on Friday.

Besides, Beijing is building a police academy for Nepal as a special gift. This is probably because Nepalese police help control the flow of Tibetan refugees trying to enter India through Nepal.

"As neighbors China and Nepal have common security needs ... we need to work together to crack down on illegal border crossings and transnational crimes," Wang said.

Nepali elite have for sometime complained that India has taken its relationship with the country for granted, and has not done enough to meet its development aspi-

rations. China appears to be filling in the gap besides competing with Indian companies in Nepal's power sector.

India has announced a \$1 billion soft loan to build the country's infrastructure including power projects. Nepal's hydropower sector has a potential to generate up to 42,000MW of electricity.

China has responding with a \$1.6 billion power project, which will be built by the government-owned Three Gorges International Corp over the Seti River in western Nepal. It is expected to generate 750MW of electricity.

"Nepal has power shortages and electricity is essential for Nepal's efforts to industrialize, to create more jobs, to build its capacity in independent development and to raise quality of lives of its people," Wang told reporters in Katmandu, Nepal's capital.

Relationship between the two neighbors is expected to further intensify as Chinese president Xi Jinping is due to visit the Himalayan nation next year.

Direct train connection from Nepal to Tibet in China is expected to become a reality in a year or so. China has begun extending the Tibet rail line in the 167km stretch from Lhasa and Xigaze, which brings it closer to the Nepal border.

Thatcher 'expressed fears of Asian rising'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Margaret Thatcher voiced fears of an Asian rising in Britain if Irish nationalists were allowed to express their identity in Northern Ireland, newly declassified government files reveal.

In a peace-building summit between the then Prime Minister and Ireland's premier Garret FitzGerald in 1984, Thatcher said she failed to understand why nationalists were calling for reforms in policing, justice, equality and power-sharing.

During talks in the run-up to the 1984 Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Tory leader warned FitzGerald that "if these things were done, the next question would be what comes next? Were the Sikhs in Southall to be allowed to fly their own flag?"

During exchanges between the two leaders at Chequers, her official residence, she also claimed that permitting Dublin an official role in the running of Northern Ireland would plunge it into civil war. During the exchanges, which were described by witnesses as "rapid and vigorous", Thatcher feared the wider consequences of addressing Catholic alienation in relation to ethnic minorities in Britain.

At one point Thatcher suggested redrawing the boundary between the north and south of Ireland which Garret FitzGerald immediately rejected, warning it would be a "fatal mistake". The pair later discussed a federal Belgium-style model - under a monarchy. She did reject Dublin's suggestion for a new "system" of governing based on agreed policies between Britain's secretary of state and an Irish government minister.

