

NEWSIN brief

Chile flood: death toll hits 14

BBC ONLINE
Officials in Chile said 14 people were killed and 20 were still missing after flash floods devastated the Atacama region in the north of the country last week. The rains, which started on Tuesday, were the worst in 80 years to fall in the region, one of the driest on Earth. Almost 11,000 people have been affected and more than 4,500 are in shelters.

Singapore arrests teenage Lee critic

BBC ONLINE
A 17-year-old Singaporean has been arrested following an online rant criticising the country's recently deceased founding father Lee Kuan Yew and Christians. Amos Yee was detained on Sunday, the same day as Lee's state funeral. More than 20 police reports were lodged on the video, which sparked a huge backlash from grieving Singaporeans.

Tsunami warnings after New Guinea earthquake

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK
A powerful earthquake struck near the South Pacific nation of Papua New Guinea yesterday, prompting officials to warn that hazardous tsunami waves could affect some coastlines in the Pacific. The magnitude-7.7 earthquake struck at a depth of 40 miles, about 30 miles southeast of the town of Kokopo in northeastern Papua New Guinea, the US Geological Survey said. The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said hazardous tsunami waves were possible for coasts located within 620 miles of Kokopo. That includes Papua New Guinea and the nearby Solomon Islands.

76 Myanmar migrants arrested in Thailand

AFP, Bangkok
Thai police said yesterday they had charged 70 migrants from Myanmar and six Rohingya Muslims with illegal entry after they were arrested on a train bound for a southern province bordering Malaysia. The migrants were taken off the train from Bangkok at around 4:30 am in Nakhon Si Thammarat province when they failed to present valid travel documents, said local railway police sub-inspector Kraisor Boonlum.

Four S Korean tourists killed in Nepal bus crash

AFP, Kathmandu
Four South Korean tourists along with their driver were killed in a bus crash in central Nepal yesterday, police said. Another South Korean and 15 others were injured in the crash, which happened as the tourists were returning to the capital Kathmandu from the popular tourist town of Pokhara, said police officer Prakash Malla.

Air raid kills 45 at Yemen displaced camp

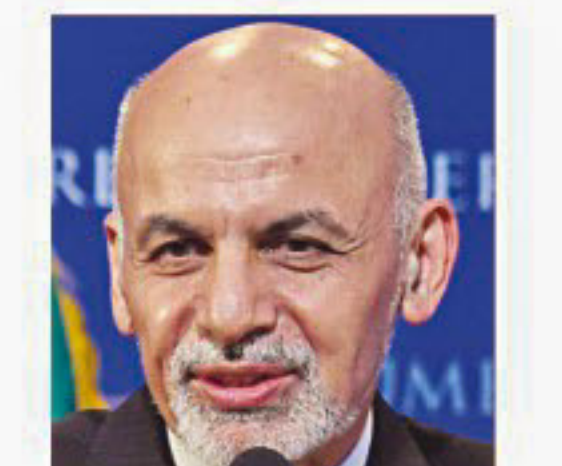
AFP, Sanaa
An air strike killed dozens of people at a camp for displaced people in northwest Yemen yesterday, aid workers said, as Arab warplanes bombard rebels around the country. The International Organization for Migration said 45 internally displaced people had been killed and 65 wounded at the Al-Mazrak camp in Hajja province. IOM spokesman Joel Millman told AFP that the organisation had 75 staff on hand assisting the victims. Earlier Doctors Without Borders said 15 dead bodies and 30 wounded were taken to a hospital where it operates near the Al-Mazrak camp. "It was an air strike," said MSF's Middle East programme manager Pablo Marco. The Al-Mazrak camp has since 2009 been housing Yemenis displaced by the conflict between northern Huthi rebels and the central government.

Marco said 500 new families had arrived at the camp over the past two days. A Saudi-led Arab coalition has been pounding rebel positions in Yemen since early Thursday. It has vowed to keep up the raids until the Iran-backed rebels abandon their insurrection against President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, who has fled to Riyadh. Warplanes carried out a fifth night of air strikes around the capital Sanaa, an AFP correspondent reported. Positions held by the Huthi rebels and soldiers of the renegade Republican Guard overlooking the presidential palace were believed to have been targeted. A Republican Guard camp in south Sanaa was also hit, witnesses said. In the area around Marib, 140 kilometres (90 miles) east of Sanaa, radar facilities and surface-to-air missile batteries were targeted, local officials said.

Deadly strike on displaced people's camp



Map of Yemen locating Hajja, where an air strike killed more than a dozen people yesterday.



Ghani walks tightrope over US, Pak ties

AFP, Kabul
In pursuing rapprochement with Pakistan and the United States, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani is the very antithesis of his fiery predecessor, but his unprecedented diplomatic overtures have prompted rumblings of unease back home. Since coming to power in September, Ghani has sought to jumpstart long-stalled negotiations with the Taliban for a peace agreement 13 years after they were toppled in a US-led invasion.

Ghani has courted Washington to slow the drawdown of US troops and longtime nemesis Pakistan, which has historically backed the Taliban, in what observers say is a calculated gambit to pressure the insurgents to the negotiating table.

But he walks a tightrope with conservatives, including some within his own fractious national unity government, who are distrustful of Pakistan and wary of Kabul being seen as too obsequious to Washington.

Former Afghan president Hamid Karzai, well known for his anti-US and anti-Pakistan tirades, and others have warned strongly against Afghanistan's tilt towards Islamabad -- often accused of playing a "double game" and covertly nurturing the Taliban.

Ghani, an American-educated former World Bank official who uses a more measured tone, has offered unprecedented concessions to Pakistan including cooperation on military and intelligence matters.

'Yes or no' time in crunch Iran nuclear talks

AFP, Lausanne
Foreign ministers from major powers raced against the clock yesterday on the eve of a deadline to nail down the final pieces of a framework deal aimed at putting any Iranian nuclear bomb out of reach. Adding to the drama, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov left the crunch talks with Iran in Switzerland after a series of meetings, Russian media reported. He will only return if there is a "realistic" chance of a deal, his spokeswoman said earlier. Lavrov and his counterparts from the United States, China, Britain, France and Germany met with the Iranians in a lakeside Lausanne hotel yesterday for their first full session since missing a previous November deadline. A Western diplomat said it was "yes or no" time, adding that the talks remained blocked on three major issues -- the length of the accord, the lifting of UN sanctions and a mechanism to ensure both sides stick to the deal. Global powers have set a midnight today deadline to agree the outlines of a

deal that they will then try to finalise by June 30. Only then would Iran receive sanctions relief, diplomats said. The global powers want Iran to scale back its nuclear programme to give the world ample notice of any dash to make the bomb and end a crisis that has threatened to escalate dangerously for 12 years. The diplomatically-isolated Islamic republic denies wanting atomic weapons and is calling for the lifting of sanctions that have strangled its lifeblood oil exports and its access to the global financial system. The threat of new US sanctions, and domestic pressure on Iranian President Hassan Rouhani for his attempts at rapprochement with the West, all but rule out any further extension of the deadline. "We had a very important meeting, and detailed discussions," Iran's lead negotiator Abbas Araghchi said, while insisting "we have solutions" for most of the remaining issues. Even before a deal is sewn up, opponents have railed against it, fearing it will not do enough to stop Iran getting the bomb. These include US President Barack

Obama's Republican opponents and Israel, widely believed to be the sole, if undeclared, nuclear-armed power in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia -- leading an Arab coalition which yesterday carried out a fifth straight night of air strikes on Iran-backed rebels in Yemen -- is also uneasy about any thawing in US-Iran ties. Western diplomats say some areas in a highly complex jigsaw puzzle are tentatively agreed. But they caution there is a long way to go. One said Sunday that Iran had "more or less" agreed to slash the number of its centrifuge enrichment machines from 20,000 to 6,000 and to ship abroad most of its stockpile of low-enriched uranium. This would make it a much more lengthy process to further purify these stocks to weapons-grade. Iranian officials dismissed the numbers as "speculation", with Araghchi ruling out sending the stocks abroad, although he said "other options" were being examined. This could include diluting low-enriched uranium or converting it to another form.

IRAN NUKE TALKS Deal rewards Iran for Yemen 'aggression'

Says Israel PM Netanyahu
AFP, Jerusalem
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned world powers yesterday that any nuclear deal they strike with Iran would be seen as a reward for Tehran's alleged "aggression" in Yemen. "The agreement being formulated in Lausanne sends a message that there is no price for aggression and on the contrary -- that Iran's aggression is to be rewarded," he said, referring to Iranian support for Shiite Huthi rebels in Yemen. "The moderate and responsible countries in the region, especially Israel and also many other countries, will be the first to be hurt by this agreement," said Netanyahu, who has waged a campaign against a nuclear deal with Tehran. His intervention came as foreign ministers of major powers raced in the Swiss city of Lausanne to beat a midnight today deadline to nail down a framework deal they hope will put any Iranian atomic bomb out of reach. "One cannot understand that when forces supported by Iran continue to conquer more ground in Yemen, in Lausanne they are closing their eyes to this aggression," Netanyahu said in a statement issued by his office. "But we are not closing our eyes and we will continue to act against every threat in every generation, certainly in this generation," said Netanyahu whose country has threatened military action to prevent Iran acquiring a nuclear bomb.



Kashmiri villagers and officials search for bodies following landslides due to heavy rainfall in the village of Laden at Chadoora some 40kms west of Srinagar yesterday. Landslides have buried at least 15 people in Indian Kashmir as hundreds fled their homes after heavy rain triggered flooding around the mountainous region. Police and witnesses said landslides had buried at least four houses in Chadoora, the worst hit area of the Himalayan region where hundreds were killed in devastating floods last September.

LANDMARK PEACE DEAL Myanmar, rebels agree on draft

AFP, Yangon
Myanmar peace negotiators agreed the draft text of a historic nationwide ceasefire agreement yesterday, as the country edges closer to ending decades of conflict between ethnic minority groups and the government. The tentative deal, which comes as heavy fighting between the military and rebel groups continues to ravage a northern border area, sets out the framework for a country-wide ceasefire -- a key target of the government as the nation heads towards crucial elections later this year. But the draft, which was negotiated by representatives of the government and the 16 ethnic armed groups involved in the talks, will only officially be signed after a conference of the rebel groups. "This is the first step to signing a nationwide ceasefire agreement and to move to political dialogue," said Naing Han Tha, who led the ethnic group negotiators. No date has so far been given for the rebel conference. But negotiators said they had managed to find mutually acceptable ground on most points, adding that some more difficult sections were excised from the agreement. "Now we have an understanding," said Hla Maung Swe, one of the senior government negotiators, at a press conference. "There is nothing left to discuss. From our side, we are ready to sign," he added. Myanmar has been racked by unrest since independence from Britain in 1948 as insurgencies flared among minority groups demanding greater autonomy. Conflicts were fuelled in part by tussles over the country's rich resources. The quasi-civilian government, which took power after decades of army rule in 2011, has made a peace agreement with an array of rebel groups a cornerstone of its political reforms.

500 plus Pakistanis evacuated from Yemen

China evacuates around 500 more nationals
AFP, Islamabad, Beijing
Pakistan on Sunday evacuated more than 500 of its citizens from Yemen by jumbo jet and sent a naval frigate to rescue others stranded in the war-torn country, officials said, while a total of 449 Chinese nationals were evacuated from the conflict-racked zone yesterday, state media said, as an Arab coalition continued air strikes against Shiite rebels near Sanaa. Six nationals from other countries were also rescued, the official Xinhua News Agency reported. On Sunday 122 Chinese citizens were evacuated, China's foreign ministry said. A People's Liberation Army naval detachment, which had been carrying out anti-piracy escort missions in the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters, was sent to Yemen on Sunday to allow Chinese nationals to leave the country, China's defence ministry said in a statement.

CHINESE PORT PROJECT Lanka says no deal to restart project

AFP, Colombo
Sri Lanka has yet to resolve a dispute with China over a \$1.4 billion development in Colombo despite a state visit to Beijing last week, a minister said yesterday. New Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena suspended the Chinese-backed construction of a "port city" in the capital following allegations that environmental clearances had not been obtained. Some reports had indicated the project would go ahead following Sirisena's three-day visit to Beijing last week. But Deputy Foreign Minister Ajith Perera said the president had not discussed the project with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping. "We have given them (Chinese companies) time to produce the environmental approvals, but they have not done that yet," the minister told reporters in Colombo. Sirisena made India his first foreign destination after winning elections in January, seeking to rebuild ties with Delhi damaged by tensions over Beijing's influence on the island under his predecessor. India is understood to be uneasy about China getting a foothold just outside the port of Colombo, which handles a considerable amount of Indian cargo.

EXAM CHEATS India police arrest 1,000 over fresh scandal

AFP, New Delhi
Police in eastern India have arrested around 1,000 aspiring constables for using "middlemen" to sit their exams for them, in the latest cheating scandal to hit Bihar state, an official said yesterday. Some 50,000 candidates sat the written exams last October for a highly-sought after place in the police force in underdeveloped Bihar, senior superintendent Jitender Rana said by phone from state capital Patna. But many of those candidates who sat the tough exam were not the same ones who turned up for the next stage of the selection process, Rana told AFP. "The fraud was detected when the signatures, photographs and fingerprints of the candidates were matched with those who



had appeared for the exam," Rana said. "We don't have the exact figures but approximately 1,000 people have been arrested so far over the last few days. These cases are of impersonation and providing false and forged documents." While most of those arrested had hired doubles for the exam, others were fingered for submitting documents which turned out to be forged. The Mail Today tabloid said some candidates had admitted paying nearly 150,000 rupees (\$2,395) to so-called middlemen to enable them to clear the exam. Earlier this month, police in the same state detained more than 1,000 people over another cheating scandal that saw relatives scale the walls of a school exam centre to help students.