

NEWS IN brief

Massive power cut halts Turkey

AFP, Istanbul
A massive power cut caused chaos across Turkey yesterday, shutting down the metro networks in Istanbul and the capital Ankara, with the government saying an outside attack on the system was not ruled out. It was confirmed to have hit 49 of the country's total 81 provinces. The blackout trapped people in elevators in Istanbul and rescue teams rushed to subway stations to evacuate stranded travellers.

Peru sacks PM over 'domestic spying'

AFP, Lima
Peru's Congress sacked the prime minister, Ana Jara, Monday night over alleged spying against lawmakers, reporters, business leaders and everyday citizens. This is the first time the congress of Peru has deposed a prime minister since 1968. With a year left of his term, Humala must now name a prime minister for the seventh time.

Pakistan hangs four more convicts

IANS, Islamabad
Four death row convicts were hanged yesterday in different jails in Pakistan's Punjab province, a media report said. Pakistan lifted its moratorium on the death penalty in all capital cases on March 10. Initially executions were resumed only for terrorism offences in the wake of a Taliban massacre at the Peshawar Army Public School on December 16, 2014, which claimed lives of more than 140 people, mostly school children.

Kashmiri villagers carry bodies during a funeral in the village of Laden at Chadoora some 40kms west of Srinagar, yesterday. Inset, Relatives of victims mourn during a funeral. Emergency workers in there have recovered 15 bodies including that of a three-week-old baby after the landslide triggered by heavy rains buried several houses.

PHOTO: AFP



Thai junta to replace martial law

Retains key powers
AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's junta chief yesterday said he would lift martial law but only after replacing it with a new order retaining sweeping powers for the military. Critics said the move would "deepen dictatorship" in the kingdom. Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-cha said he had asked the ailing 87-year-old King Bhumibol Adulyadej for permission to lift the controversial law, which would then be replaced with special security measures. The former army chief imposed martial law and seized power last May following the ousting of Yingluck Shinawatra's democratically elected government after months of often violent street protests.

Talks to continue in new phase as deadline passes

AP, Lausanne
Wrapping up six days of marathon nuclear talks with mixed results, Iran and six world powers were yesterday preparing to issue a general statement agreeing to continue talks in a new phase aimed at reaching a final agreement to control Iran's nuclear ambitions by the end of June, officials told The Associated Press. Officials had set a deadline of March 31 for a framework agreement, and later softened that wording to a framework understanding, between Iran and the so-called P5+1 nations — the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China. And after intense negotiations, obstacles remained on uranium enrichment, where stockpiles of enriched uranium should be stored, limits on Iran's nuclear research and development and the timing and scope of sanctions relief among other issues. The joint statement is to be accompanied by additional documents that outline more detailed understandings, allowing the sides to claim enough progress has been made

thus far to merit a new round, the officials said. Iran has not yet signed off on the documents, one official said, meaning any understanding remains unclear. The talks have already been extended twice as part of more than a decade of diplomatic attempts to curb Tehran's nuclear advance. Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, who left Lausanne Monday, yesterday returned to the Swiss city, also indicating that an end to the talks was near. In Moscow, he told reporters: "Prospects for this round of negotiations were not bad, and I would even say good." Kerry and others said the sides have made some progress, with Iran considering demands for further cuts to its uranium enrichment program but pushing back on how long it must limit technology it could use to make atomic arms. In addition to sticking points on research and development, differences remain on the timing and scope of sanctions removal, the officials said.

IRAN NUKE TALKS

BABRI MOSQUE CASE Indian SC issues notices to BJP leaders

THE HINDU ONLINE
The Indian Supreme Court sought responses from Bharatiya Janata Party leader LK Advani and 19 others on an application moved in connection with the dropping of conspiracy charges and the fairness of the CBI probe into the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition case. A bench led by CJI HL Dattu issued notice to Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Uma Bharti, Kalyan Singh among others and directed them to reply in four weeks. The interim application by Haji Mahboob, whose house was ransacked after the demolition, cast doubts about the efficacy of the probe by the CBI into the conspiracy angle, especially with the party in power being associated with the accused.

Iraq forces 'liberate' Tikrit from ISIS

Jihadists execute dozens of civilians in Syria
AFP, Baghdad
Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi yesterday declared the "liberation" of Tikrit from the Islamic State group, after a weeks-long operation that was Baghdad's biggest yet against the jihadists. Abadi "announces the liberation of Tikrit and congratulates Iraqi security forces and popular volunteers on the historic milestone," his official Twitter account said, referring to allied paramilitaries who have played a major role in the fighting. And Abadi's spokesman Rafid Jaboori told AFP that: "Iraqi forces reached the centre of Tikrit, raised the Iraqi flag and are now clearing the city." But it was not immediately clear if resistance in the city by the Islamic State (ISIS) group had ended entirely, and the massive challenge of defusing explosives planted in roads and houses remains ahead. Iraqi soldiers and police and Popular Mobilisation units -- paramilitary forces dominated by Shia militias -- began the battle to retake Tikrit on March 2. In Syria, the extremist Islamic State group yesterday executed at least 30 civilians, including two children, in a raid on a regime-held village in Syria's central province of Hama, a monitor said. ISIS "executed at least 30 people, including women and children, by burning, beheading, and firing on them" in the village of Mabujeh, said Rami Abdel Rahman, director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.



In his first public comments on what might replace martial law, Prayut clearly indicated that the military would retain significant powers. The former army chief said he would use Article 44 of the junta's interim constitution to issue a new order protecting Thailand's security. The article grants Prayut power to make executive orders on national security issues without having to go through the military-stacked parliament. Prayut said military courts would still be used for security offences but convictions could now be appealed to higher tribunals. Security forces would continue to be able to make arrests without a court warrant, he added.

Failing humanity

AGENCIES
This picture shows how "humanity failed" in Syria. This is the heartbreaking moment a four-year-old Syrian girl 'surrendered' to a photographer when she mistook the man's camera for a gun. Taken at the Atmen refugee camp on Syria's border with Turkey last December, the image shows the young girl frozen in fear with her arms raised and her lips tightly pursed. The child has been identified as Adi Hudea, whose father died in the 2012 Hama massacre and who has been living with her traumatised mother and three siblings at Camp Atmen ever since. The image was taken by Turkish photo-journalist Osman Sagirli but went viral earlier this week when it was shared on social media. Millions of children are suffering from trauma and ill health, with a quarter of Syria's schools have been damaged, destroyed or taken over for shelter and more than half of the country's hospitals razed to the ground, the UNHCR said. The five-year-old Syrian Civil War has so far claimed more than 220,000 lives, including an estimated 10,000 children.



Saudi, Iran trade blame game over intervention

'Heaviest' raids rock capital; UN warns of 'total collapse'
AFP, Sanaa
Regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran yesterday traded accusations over the escalating conflict in Yemen, which the UN rights chief warned was on the brink of "total collapse". Explosions lit up the skies over the Yemeni capital overnight in the heaviest bombing raids yet of a six-day air war led by Riyadh against Shia rebels. The Huthi rebels and their ally, former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, "decided with the support of Iran to destabilise Yemen," Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal said. "We are not warmongers, but when they beat the drums of war we are ready," Saud told the Shura Council advisory body. Tehran hit back, accusing Saudi Arabia of putting the entire Middle East in jeopardy. "The fire of war in the region from any side... will drag the whole region to play with fire," Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said. "We believe that the Saudi military attack against Yemen is a strategic mistake," he told reporters in Kuwait, calling for the air campaign to "stop immediately". Iranian state media rejected as "utter lies" claims Tehran had sent arms to Yemen, but said it had dispatched non-military aid, including food and medicine, yesterday. The coalition has vowed to keep up the strikes until the Huthi rebels end their uprising against President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, who has fled to Saudi Arabia. Huge blasts were heard overnight in Sanaa when coalition forces hit a missile depot belonging to the renegade Republican Guard, which is loyal to Saleh. Early yesterday, air strikes targeted two camps held by Huthi rebels and Republican Guard soldiers in the southern town of Daleh. Coalition warplanes also raided a Republican Guard air base in Tazeh, witnesses there said.

YEMEN CRISIS

'ISRAELI CRIMES IN THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES' Anonymous vows to wreak 'electronic holocaust'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK
Anonymous has vowed to wreak an "electronic holocaust" on Israel next week to "erase" the country from cyberspace. A video by the hacking group entitled "Anonymous Message To Israel" threatens to take down servers and websites belonging to the government, military and banks in #Op_Israel on 7 April. It shows a suited man wearing a V for Vendetta style Guy Fawkes mask as an electronic voiceover delivers a speech to "foolish Zionist entities". "We are coming back to punish you again, for your crimes in the Palestinian territories," it says, in English with Arabic subtitles. "All we see is continuous aggression, bombing, killing and kidnapping of the Palestinian people, as in the last war against Gaza in 2014." The voice claims Anonymous will not stand by as foreign countries remain "silent" and will respond to "heinous crimes against humanity". Anonymous calls young Palestinians the "symbol of freedom, resistance, and hope", telling them to "never give in" and vowing support. It accuses the Israeli government of "endless" human right violations, illegal settlements, the killing of civilians and contraventions of international law. "This is why elite bersquadrans, from around the world, will decide to unite in solidarity, with the Palestinian people, against Israel, as one entity to disrupt and erase Israel from cyberspace," it finishes. "We'll show you on 7 April 2015 what the electronic holocaust means."



PRESIDENTIAL POLLS IN NIGERIA Opposition claims victory in tight race

AFP, Abuja
Nigeria's main opposition yesterday claimed victory in the country's tense general election as former military ruler Muhammadu Buhari pulled ahead of President Goodluck Jonathan in the vote count. If confirmed, it would be the first democratic change of power in the history of Africa's most populous country. With 32 out of 37 results in, Buhari's All Progressives Congress (APC) had won 19 states with Jonathan's Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) on 12 plus the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja. Asked if the APC was claiming victory over the PDP, party spokesman Lai Mohammed told AFP: "Yes. Buhari, 72, stretched his lead to nearly 2.9 million votes over 57-year-old Jonathan, with most of the remaining states in the opposition candidate's northern heartland. They included the northeastern states hit hardest by the six-year Boko Haram insurgency. The former military ruler won the key prize of Lagos in the southwest but at one point his lead was cut to 500,000 votes after landslide victories for Jonathan in his southern Delta homeland. The opposition leader, making his fourth run at the presidency, has been buoyed by frustration over endemic corruption, criticism over Jonathan's handling of Boko Haram and a stronger opposition. International observers gave broadly positive reactions to the conduct of the vote, despite late delivery of election materials and technical glitches with new voter authentication devices.

Malaysia cops arrest editors for sedition

AL JAZEERA ONLINE
Malaysian police have arrested five staff members of a news website after their publication ran an article discussing royal opposition to amendments to the constitution that would enable Islamic penal law. Lionel Morais, Zulkifli Sulong, and Amin Iskandar were held after authorities raided the offices of the Malaysian Insider late on Monday. The trio was charged with sedition later yesterday. A further two members of staff at the publication, Jahabar Sadiq and its CEO, Ho Kat Tat, were also arrested yesterday, a lawyer for the website told Al Jazeera. More than a hundred people have been arrested in an unprecedented crackdown on anti-government voices under the sedition law in the past month, according to the Reuters news agency.



Turkey prosecutor taken hostage to 'reveal truth'

AFP, Istanbul
An armed leftist group yesterday took hostage a Turkish prosecutor probing the politically sensitive death of an anti-government protester, threatening to kill him if their demands were not met. Mehmet Selim Kiraz was investigating the killing of Berkin Elvan, who died in March last year after spending 269 days in a coma due to injuries inflicted by police in the mass protests of early summer 2013. In a statement published by Turkish media, the hostage-taking was claimed by the radical Marxist Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front (DHKP-C), which has been behind a string of attacks over the last years. Turkish media said that the group had given a deadline of 3:36 pm for the prosecutor to identify the police officers who they say were behind the killing of Elvan or he would be shot.