

NEWS IN brief

FARC rebels kill 10 Colombia soldiers

Ten soldiers were killed and 17 injured in western Colombia yesterday, in a dawn attack on an army garrison in Cauca province that officials blamed on leftist FARC guerrillas. The FARC in December declared a unilateral ceasefire. The five-decade-long conflict has killed more than 200,000 people and uprooted more

Holy iPad fetches \$30,500 at auction

An iPad that belonged to Argentina-born Pope Francis went under the hammer for \$30,500 on Tuesday, auctioneers in Uruguay said. Local media threw a spotlight on the iPad last year. The pope gave it -- complete with its His Holiness Francis label and a Vatican certificate of authenticity -- to an Uruguayan priest as a gift. It ended up being donated to a local school by the priest, before being auctioned off to raise

'07 gets UN license to save'

Years of rolling around in fictitious war zones as special agent 007 appears to have prepared Daniel Craig to take on one of his most challenging missions yet. The James Bond star has been appointed as the first United Nations global advocate for the elimination of mines and explosive hazards. "As 007, you have a licence to kill," secretary general Ban Ki-Moon said during a ceremony at the UN HQ in New York. "Today, we are giving you a licence to save."

Plane averts major disaster in Japan

An Asiana Airlines plane smashed into a communications antenna as it came in to land at a Japan's Hiroshima airport, footage showed yesterday, injuring 27 people. An aviation safety official told AFP news agency that the left side of the plane's tail was damaged and the country's transport safety board was

Top Qaeda leader killed in Yemen

The ideological leader of Yemen-based al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula was killed in a drone strike this week, allegedly by the United States, AQAP said in a statement published. Ibrahim al-Rubaish, who in January accused France of surpassing the United States as the top enemy of Islam, was killed with several other militants in a "crusader raid" on Monday,

Impose family planning for minorities: Shiv Sena

After stoking controversy with its demand that Muslims be stripped of their voting rights, Shiv Sena yesterday advocated compulsory family planning for Muslims and Christians to check their "rising" population. "By only increasing population, one can try and convert the country into Pakistan, but cannot give quality and healthy life to one's family," the BJP ally in Maharashtra said in an editorial in party mouthpiece 'Saamana'.

Sena backed the views of vice-president of All India Hindu Mahasabha Sadhvi Deva Thakur on the issue though it did say that her choice of words may have been wrong. "Sadhvi Deva says that the increasing population of Muslims and Christians is dangerous for the country and they should be, therefore, forcibly sterilized. She should have used the word family planning instead sterilization," it said. Thakur had on Saturday said Muslims and Christians must undergo sterilization to restrict their growing population which was posing a threat to Hindus. "The population of Muslims and Christians is growing day by day. To rein in this, Centre will have to impose emergency, and Muslims and Christians will have to be forced to undergo sterilization," Sadhvi had said.



Democratic Presidential hopeful and former US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton has coffee with members of the community at the Tremont Grille in Marshalltown, Iowa, yesterday. Clinton has spent the last two days in Iowa to focus on smaller communities, where she kicked off her second bid for President of the United States, and have discussions about how to make the economy work for everyday Americans.

US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

DEMOCRATS

HILLARY CLINTON (Age 69)
★ Former secretary of state, First Lady, senator

JOE BIDEN (Age 72)
○ Vice-president, ex-Delaware senator

ELIZABETH WARREN (Age 65)
○ Massachusetts senator. Expert on bankruptcy law

REPUBLICANS

JEB BUSH (Age 62)
○ Son and brother of 2 former presidents. Ex-governor of Florida

TED CRUZ (Age 44)
★ Texas senator. Evangelist. Ultra-conservative

RAND PAUL (Age 52)
★ Kentucky senator. Libertarian

MARCO RUBIO (Age 43)
★ Florida senator. Miami Cuban

★ OFFICIAL ○ EXPECTED

ISIS lost 25-30 pc of Iraq territory: US

The Islamic State group has lost control of "25 to 30" percent of the territory it holds in Iraq after coalition airstrikes and an Iraqi offensive, the Pentagon has said. The radical group took control of large swathes of the north and western parts of the country months ago after an offensive and the collapse of Iraqi military units. Following months of an air campaign by a US-led coalition and a rallying of Iraqi forces, the Islamic State (ISIS) grip on parts of the country is fading, the Pentagon claims. The lost territory amounts to some 13,000 to 17,000 square kilometers (5,000 to 6,500 square miles), Warren said. Since August, coalition aircraft have conducted airstrikes on 3,244 IS targets, 1,879 in Iraq and 1,365 in Syria. The US has carried out about 80 percent of the strikes, according to Pentagon data. In Syria, ISIS has maintained its influence on the ground, recently losing areas around Kobane, but gaining ground around Homs and Damascus, Warren said.

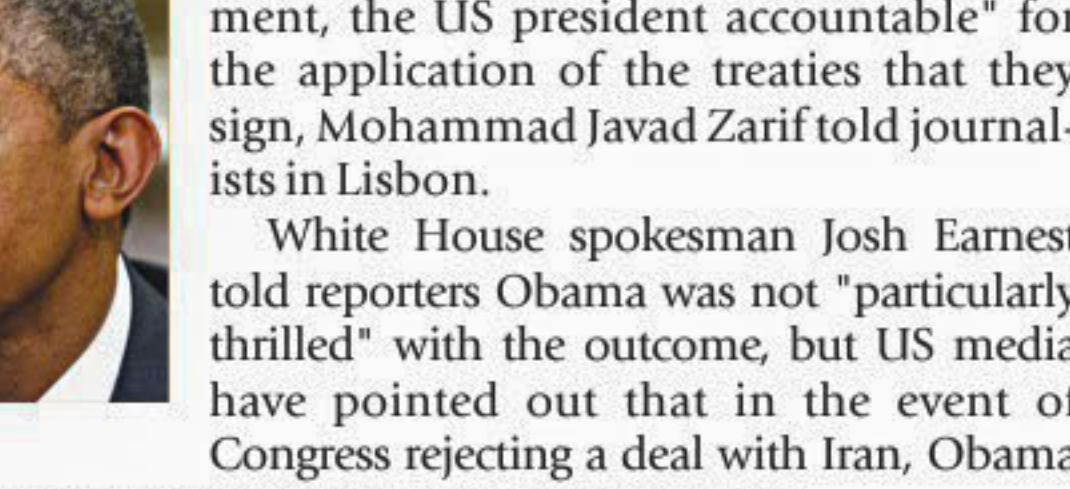
Obama blinks on Iran deal

US Congress to have right to reject deal; Israel hails development

AGENCIES In the standoff with Congress over the Iranian nuclear deal, President Obama just blinked. Now the US Congress will have a say on a nuclear deal with Iran, under a new agreement reached with the White House. Faced with the prospect of a backlash from members of Obama's own party on his signature foreign policy initiative, the White House said it'd be willing to sign a bill that will prevent the administration from lifting sanctions on Iran while Congress reviews whatever final deal is reached with Tehran over its nuclear program. The bill was passed unanimously, 19-0, by members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, of which declared Republican presidential candidates Marco Rubio and Rand Paul are members. However, a Congressional No vote would not be binding and could be vetoed by Obama.

They have always insisted they must have a say if any agreement means economic sanctions levied by Congress against Iran will be lifted. The Israeli government, which has been fiercely critical of the deal with Iran, welcomed the agreement between Obama and Congress. Iran yesterday said that Obama was 'responsible' for making sure that Washington respects a final agreement over Iran's nuclear programme. "It is the obligation of the government of the United States to implement its international agreements. And we will hold the US government, the US president accountable" for the application of the treaties that they sign, Mohammad Javad Zarif told journalists in Lisbon.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest told reporters Obama was not "particularly thrilled" with the outcome, but US media have pointed out that in the event of Congress rejecting a deal with Iran, Obama would be able to use his presidential veto. A two-thirds majority would then be needed for Congress to override the veto, which is viewed as unlikely. The bill is now likely to clear both houses in the Republican-controlled Congress. An earlier version of the bill had placed a 60-day halt to any plan by Obama to lift sanctions on Iran. But that review period has been reduced to 30 days. Obama will still be able to lift sanctions he himself imposed through executive action but he would be unable to ease those imposed by Congress.



US to drop Cuba from terror list

AGENCIES Cuba hailed US President Barack Obama's move to drop Cuba from a list of state sponsors of terror, a landmark step paving the way toward restoring ties frozen for five decades. Obama notified Congress on Tuesday of his "intent to rescind" Cuba's inclusion on the blacklist, after a lengthy review launched late last year as Washington openly began a rapprochement with its Cold War foe. US lawmakers now have 45 days to oppose the move. Otherwise, it will go ahead, removing a key hurdle to renewing US diplomatic relations with the communist authorities in Cuba. The decision comes just three days after Obama held a historic hour-long meeting with his Cuban counterpart Raul Castro on the sidelines of a weekend summit in Panama, the first face-to-face talks between the presidents of the two nations in half a century. Cuba was added to the terror list in 1982, originally designated for its support for armed revolution in Latin America. Its removal would leave only Iran, Sudan and Syria still on the blacklist.

Canada to sell uranium to India

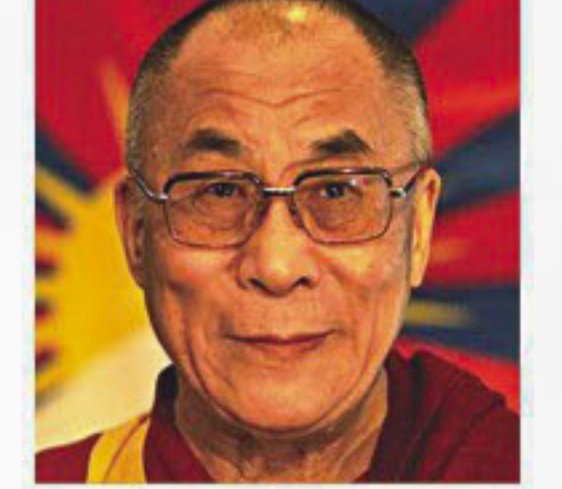
AGENCIES Canada's prime minister yesterday announced a breakthrough deal to supply uranium to India for electricity generation, putting behind decades of discord over India's surreptitious use of Canadian technologies to build atomic bombs. The agreement was signed in Ottawa during a visit by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi -- the first Indian leader to visit Canada in 42 years, since Indira Gandhi. The US\$283 million contract is for the supply of 7.1 million pounds of uranium concentrate over the next five years, for use in a growing number of Indian nuclear power plants. Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said a nuclear cooperation agreement concluded in 2012 laid the groundwork for the two Commonwealth nations "to turn the page on what had been in our judgment an unnecessarily frosty relationship for too long." The 2012 pact signed by Harper and Modi's predecessor, Manmohan Singh, allows Canadian companies to export nuclear materials for peaceful uses, in accordance with Canada's nuclear non-proliferation policy. Its ratification had been delayed several years as the two nations could not agree on how to track India's use of nuclear material to ensure it was put to peaceful purposes. New Delhi balked at Ottawa's demand to be allowed to monitor the safe use of its nuclear exports. In the end, the two countries agreed to set up a joint panel to supervise the exports. New Delhi -- backed by US -- also won an exemption in 2008 from the Nuclear Suppliers Group, which governs global nuclear trade, to allow it to buy reactors and fuel from abroad -- even though it has not signed the non-proliferation treaty.



A woman jumped on the table throws papers and confetti as she interrupts a press conference by Mario Draghi (C), President of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt / Main, Germany, yesterday. She called for the "end to the ECB dictatorship". PHOTO: AFP

SALE OF MISSILE DEFENCE TO IRAN Russia's move could secure nuclear deal

AGENCIES Russia's decision to supply Iran with the S-300 missile air defence system was seen by critics in Israel and the United States as proof this month's framework nuclear agreement was already making Tehran more of a threat. But some experts said the controversial move could make it difficult for Iran's enemies to propose air strikes against its nuclear facilities, thus bolstering the case for a diplomatic solution. "The goal of the Russians is certainly not to help out the West, but nor do they want to see a nuclear Iran," said Francois Heisbourg, chairman of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy. "This S-300 deal could be a way of ensuring Tehran stays in line with the negotiations." The announcement serves two purposes -- demonstrating to Tehran the advantages of sticking with the nuclear talks, while also making military alternatives more difficult for its opponents, said Jeremy Binnie, Middle East editor of IHS Jane's Defence Weekly in London. "It is a carrot to Iran. But it is also a stick against US and Israeli officials who say the military option is still on the table," he said. Israel and many US officials, particularly among the



China asks Dalai Lama to seek forgiveness

AGENCIES Beijing threw cold water on the possibility of re-launching talks with the Dalai Lama yesterday, saying greater autonomy for Tibet was "not up for discussion" and accusing the spiritual leader of backing "ethnic cleansing". The statement comes months after the exiled spiritual leader expressed optimism that China President Xi Jinping may be open to re-starting dialogue regarding the region. In its nearly 18,000-word white paper, the State Council Information Office, China's Cabinet, declared that the Dalai Lama must focus on seeking "forgiveness" from the Chinese government. "Any negotiations will be limited to seeking solutions for the Dalai Lama to completely abandon separatist claims and activities and gain the forgiveness of the central government and the Chinese people, and to working out what he will do with the rest of his life," it said. It also dismissed the Tibetan government-in-exile as "essentially a separatist political group". The 79-year-old Buddhist leader denies aspirations for independence and says he seeks "a high degree of autonomy" for the region.

Pressure mounts on rebels

Egypt, Saudi mull joint drills; UN imposes arms embargo

AGENCIES Saudi Arabia and Egypt are considering holding "large-scale" military exercises after launching air strikes on Yemeni rebels who have been slapped with a UN arms embargo and sanctions. In a possible sign the Saudi-led air campaign against the Shia rebels may expand into a ground operation, Cairo said it and Riyadh were mulling the drills in Saudi Arabia with other Gulf countries participating. "It was decided to form a joint military committee to look into a large-scale strategic manoeuvre on Saudi territory," Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's office said late Tuesday after he met the Saudi defence minister.

YEMEN CRISIS

southern city of Aden, where President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi had taken refuge. Saudi Arabia has accused Tehran -- the main Shia power -- of arming the rebels and the conflict has heightened tensions in the Middle East. World powers united against the rebels on Tuesday, with the UN Security Council voting to impose an arms embargo on them and hitting their leaders with sanctions. The UN resolution -- the first formal action taken by the Security Council since the start of the Saudi-led raids -- demands that Huthis withdraw from Sanaa and all other areas they have seized. It slaps an arms embargo on Huthi leaders and their allies and puts chief Abdulmalik al-Huthi and ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh's eldest son, Ahmed, on a sanctions list, imposing a global travel ban and an assets freeze on the two men.



Republicans, have opposed the nuclear accord, saying air strikes are the only way to prevent Iran getting the bomb. Iran currently lacks the sort of sophisticated air defences that could take down modern fighter planes. The capabilities of the S-300 are not fully known and have yet to be tested in a real-world combat situation. "We are talking about the really dark arts of air defence here," said Binnie. But the S-300 would be a major upgrade of the country's defences, and the updated V-series being offered by Russia will also allow Iran to intercept missiles fired by regional foes such as Saudi Arabia. It may not be a match for the latest US planes, said Andrey Babitskiy, from the PIR think tank in Moscow, "but they could make an operation more costly and make them think twice".