

NEWS IN
briefLebanon receives
French arms for anti-
jihadist fight

AFP, Beirut

Lebanon yesterday received the first French weapons in a \$3 billion Saudi-funded programme intended to bolster its army to take on jihadist threats, particularly along its border with Syria. French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian accompanied the first tranche of weapons, including anti-tank guided missiles, which were handed over at an air

Zulu king denies
triggering S Africa
attacks

AFP, Durban

Zulu king Goodwill Zwelithini yesterday denied whipping up xenophobic hatred in South Africa after he was accused of triggering violence that has left at least seven people dead and forced thousands from their homes. Zwelithini last month made an angry speech blaming immigrants for rising crime and saying they must leave the country, in an outburst seen as encouraging the spate of attacks on Zimbabweans, Somalians, Malawians and

6.0 magnitude quake
rattles Indonesia's
Sumatra

AFP, Jakarta

A powerful 6.0 magnitude earthquake struck off Indonesia's western Sumatra island yesterday, the US Geological Survey said, but no tsunami warning was issued and there were no reports of casualties or damage. The undersea tremor hit at 4:05 pm at a depth of 10 kilometres (six miles), 215 kilometres south of Bengkulu, and almost 500 kilometres west of the capital

9 killed in Somali bomb
attack on UN vehicle

REUTERS, Bosaso

Somali militant group al Shabaab bombed a minivan carrying staff to a United Nations office in the semi-autonomous Puntland region yesterday, killing nine people including four from the global body's children's fund UNICEF, officials said. Images posted on social media show a blood-spattered white vehicle, its windows shattered and the roof blown off by the blast in the region's administra-

Student kills teacher
at Spanish school

AFP, Barcelona

A young teenage student reportedly armed with a crossbow was in police custody on suspicion of killing a teacher and wounding four other people at his school in Barcelona yesterday. "A teacher is dead," killed "by a bladed weapon," just after classes started at the Joan Fuster secondary school in the northeastern Spanish



The body of person who died after fishing boat carrying migrants capsized off the Libyan coast, is brought ashore along with 23 others retrieved by the Italian Coast Guard vessel Bruno Gregoretti at Boiler Wharf, Senglea in Malta yesterday. More than 700 people are feared dead following the capsizing off Libya of a fishing boat that had been crammed with migrants trying to reach Europe.

PHOTO: AFP

'Acche din' govt has
failed India

Rahul Gandhi says in Lok Sabha

TNN, New Delhi

Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi yesterday attacked the Narendra Modi-led NDA government in Lok Sabha, accusing it of being 'pro-corporate and anti-farmer'.

"The farmer is India's backbone. The farmer gave us green revolution, because he was provided with the idea of MSP," Rahul said.

"Everything has been built on the foundations built by farmers. On the issue of MSP the 'acche din' govt has failed this country," he added.

Earlier in the day, amid uproar by the opposition MP, minister of state for parliamentary affairs Rajiv Pratap Rudy laid a copy of the land ordinance, promulgated by the President on April 3.

Opposition members raised slogans like "withdraw the bill" and "down with the anti-farmer government", terming the re-promulgation of the ordinance as "murder of democracy".

Top opposition leaders, including Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi of Congress and Mulayam Singh Yadav of SP, were present in the House.

Speaker Sumitra Mahajan sought to pacify the members, saying the bill was yet to be introduced and they could protest when that happens.

The fresh ordinance, which is the 11th by the Narendra Modi government, incorporates nine amendments that were part of the bill passed in Lok Sabha last month.

Egypt confirms
death for 22
Morsi backers

AFP, Cairo

An Egyptian court confirmed death sentences against 22 supporters of ousted Islamist president Mohamed Morsi yesterday over an attack on a police station in which one officer was killed.

The judgement comes ahead of an expected verdict today against Morsi himself on charges of inciting the killing of protesters in December 2012 when he was president.

The attack in the town of Kerdasa on the outskirts of Cairo on July 3, 2013 came on the same day that then army chief and now President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi announced he was overthrowing Morsi.

Yesterday's court ruling confirmed the death sentences it handed down against the 22 defendants in March after they had received the statutory approval of the country's highest Muslim religious authority, the mufti.

Yemen rebel head
vows to defy Saudis

Yemen rejects Iran mediation, Insists rebels surrender

AGENCIES

The leader of Yemen's Houthi rebels has vowed to resist a Saudi-led bombing campaign that has been targeting his forces since late March.

In a televised speech, Abdul Malik al-Houthi said Yemenis would never give in to the Saudis' "savage aggression".

Hundreds have died as the rebels and allies battle government supporters, who are backed by the air campaign.

A BBC correspondent in the contested port city of Aden says its hospitals lack the supplies to treat patients.

Meanwhile, Yemeni Foreign Minister Riyadh Yassin yesterday rejected Iran's offer to mediate a solution to the crisis in his war-torn country, insisting that Tehran-backed rebels surrender.

"Any mediation effort coming from Iran is unacceptable because Iran is involved in the Yemen issue," Yassin said on the sidelines of an Arab-Turkish economic meeting in Kuwait City.

"Iran has become a major part of the Yemeni crisis and those who are a party to the crisis... cannot become mediators," he said.

Iran has been backing the Shiite Huthi rebels who along with forces loyal to former president

Ali Abdullah Saleh have taken control of most of Yemen, prompting air strikes from a Saudi-led coalition to support the government.

The Saudi-led air campaign was launched following a plea from President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi after rebels closed in on his refuge in the southern city of Aden. He has since fled to Riyadh.

In a vital show of support for Hadi, the military command of 25,000 troops in Yemen's largest province said they were standing behind the embattled leader.

"The officers, non-commissioned officers and the soldiers of the First Military Region based in Hadramawt back President Hadi, who represents constitutional legitimacy," their chief, General Abdelrahman Al-Halili, said in a statement.

Saudi-led air strikes on a missile depot in Yemen's rebel-held capital yesterday sparked explosions that left at least 18 people dead and 300 wounded, flattening houses and shaking faraway neighbourhoods.

Many more people were feared to have been killed after the two strikes that hit the depot in the Fajj Attan area of Sanaa, which was covered in thick black clouds of smoke.

Netanyahu
given extension
to form govt

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was yesterday given a 14-day extension to form a new government as he struggles to build a coalition after four weeks of intensive talks.

Such a move is far from unusual in Israel where it is almost unheard of for a single party to win an outright majority, and lengthy negotiations with multiple potential coalition partners are the norm.

He was given 28 days to complete the task, but with the Wednesday deadline looming, and no agreement in sight, he went to Rivlin early yesterday to request the extension.

Iran to give Australia ISIS data

AFP, Sydney

Australia and Iran will share intelligence to track foreign fighters working with the Islamic State group in Iraq, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said yesterday, as lawmakers urged caution.

In the first trip to Iran by an Australian minister in more than a decade, Bishop said it would be an informal arrangement.

Her comments came after a meeting with Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif, President Hassan Rouhani and Ali Akbar Velayati, foreign affairs adviser to supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"We have a common purpose with Iran in defeating Daesh and helping the Iraqi government," she told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, using an Arabic acronym to refer to the militant ISIS organisation.

"During my discussions with the national leadership here, it was agreed that we could share intelligence, particularly on the foreign terrorist fighters from Australia who are taking part in this conflict in Iraq."

More than 100 Australians have travelled to Iraq and Syria to fight with the jihadists, raising concerns about the threat of "home-grown" extremists.

On Saturday, two men were arrested in

Melbourne for allegedly planning an IS-inspired attack at Anzac Day commemorations on April 25 honouring soldiers who fought and died for Australia.

Bishop said Tehran has a strong military presence and long relationship with Iraq, coupled with a sophisticated intelligence network in places where Canberra had no presence.

"I believe that Iran has information that we would seek and they were very agreeable to share that information with us," she said, without spelling out what Tehran would get in return.

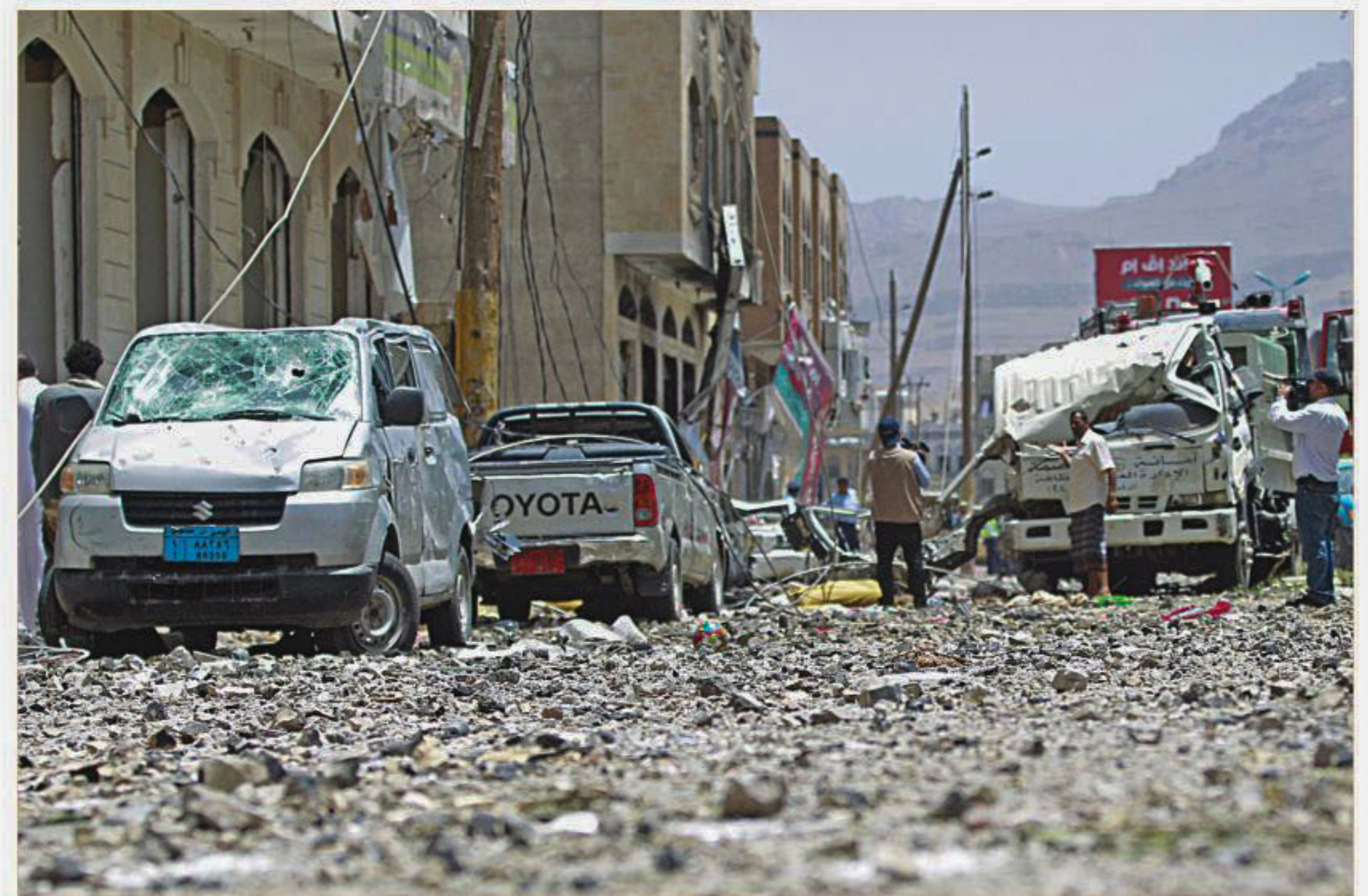
"I won't go into detail of our intelligence-sharing arrangements," she said.

"But obviously if Iran has information that will be of interest to us, if we have information that would be of interest to them, in pursuing our common purpose of defeating Daesh, then that is an appropriate exchange."

Independent MP Andrew Wilkie, a former intelligence analyst, warned Canberra it was "flirting with evil".

"The regime in Iran can't be trusted and Australia is flirting with evil by establishing any sort of security relationship with it," he said, adding that Tehran had a track record of disseminating disinformation to further its own agenda.

The Labor opposition also urged caution. "We need to keep our eyes open whenever we deal with them," Labor leader Bill Shorten said.



Yemeni men check a damaged street following a raid by Saudi-led coalition warplanes on a nearby missile depot on Fajj Attan hill, in the rebel-held part of the Yemeni capital, in southern Sanaa, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Bill Clinton 'proud' of Hillary

MAIL ONLINE

Former president Bill Clinton said he is 'proud' of wife Hillary Rodham Clinton's presidential bid for the 2016 election.

The comment was made while on a visit to Oklahoma City and is the first he's made about his wife's second presidential campaign, according to CNN.

The former secretary of state and first lady kicked off her campaign, which was launched last week, in Iowa and will move on to New Hampshire yesterday. "I'm proud of her," Bill Clinton said of his wife to CNN reporter Ryan Nobles.

Bill Clinton was in Oklahoma City to speak at a ceremony marking the 20th anniversary of the car bombing that killed 168 people including 19 toddlers at the Alfred P Murrah federal building.

He addressed hundreds of people gathered at the site of the federal building to commemorate the dead, hailing the city as an example to the world of a strong and compassionate community.



The service for survivors, victims' families, and other citizens began at 9:02 am with a 168-second moment of silence followed by a reading of the names of those killed.

"I mostly came here to thank you today," Clinton said. "For a whole country you burned away all the petty squabbles in which we engaged leaving only our basic humanity."

Visibly emotional, he wiped his eyes as he drew parallels between the 'evil' behind the Oklahoma City bombing and the terrorism of Boko Haram in North Africa, ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and lone wolf militants in cities such as Paris.

Thailand deliberates
new constitution

AFP, Bangkok

Deliberations began yesterday on a new Thai constitution, which includes clauses to stop parties winning a majority and allows unelected officials to govern, in a bid by the Thai junta to end a near-decade of political turmoil.

However, the charter is widely seen as an assault on the electoral success of the former ruling Shinawatra clan.

Parties led-by or aligned-to Thaksin Shinawatra's billionaire family have won every election since 2001, prompting two coups backed by the royalist establishment and nearly a decade of acrimony that has frequently spilled into violence.

The junta-appointed National Reform Council yesterday began a week of discussion on the draft charter, a process which could see the document receive royal endorsement by September.

Thailand's constitution has undergone more than a dozen rewrites since the end of absolute monarchy in 1932.

The leaders of last May's coup say another new charter is needed to soothe Thailand's caustic divides ahead of fresh elections slated for next year.

Borwornsak Uwanno, chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee, said yesterday the new charter "will not allow a majority government which can become a parliamentary dictatorship."

Speaking in the televised debate he denied it was "a blueprint" to end the domination of the Shinawatras, but would instead empower the Thai people at the expense of politicians.

Under the draft, future elections will be decided by a proportional representation system similar to Germany's that will favour smaller parties and coalition governments.

Philippines
warns over
China islands

AFP, Manila

The Philippines voiced alarm yesterday about Chinese "aggressiveness" in disputed regional waters as it launched giant war games with the United States that were partly aimed as a warning shot to Beijing.

Philippine military chief General Gregorio Catapang released what he said were satellite photos of intense recent Chinese construction over seven reefs and shoals in the Spratly archipelago of the flashpoint South China Sea.

He said this was causing concern "not only because it would deter freedom of navigation, but also due to its possibility of military purposes".

MYANMAR UNREST
Rebels to meet,
broker peace

AFP, Yangon

Leaders of a dozen Myanmar ethnic armed groups will meet next month in a remote region bordering China to discuss a peace deal, spokesmen said Monday, as the nation edges closer to a full ceasefire.

The self-administered Wa region, where visitors require a permit, is home to the 30,000-strong United Wa State Army, who hold sway over the area on the northeast border with China that is believed to be awash with drugs.

"We have invited 12 ethnic armed groups to attend the meeting," Aung Myint, a spokesman for the United Wa State Army, told AFP, without saying which groups they have invited.

The three-day meeting is due to start on May 1, just over a month after President Thein Sein secured a draft deal with 16 rebel groups to end decades of fighting.

The government wants a full nationwide ceasefire before elections in November as a test of reforms after decades of military rule.