

NEWS IN brief

Rocket hits Afghan school, killing three

REUTERS, Kabul

A teacher and two students were killed when a rocket struck a school compound in eastern Afghanistan yesterday, government officials said, as intensifying combat across the country takes a high toll on civilian life. Four other people were injured in Sunday's attack in Logar and it was so far unclear who was responsible, district chief Baraki Barak said.

Egypt starts demolishing Mubarak party HQ

AFP, Cairo

Egypt yesterday began tearing down the headquarters of the once-dominant party of ex-president Hosni Mubarak that was torched during the 2011 uprising that toppled him. Demolition workers, using cranes and bulldozers, began razing the four-storey headquarters of Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP) located on the Nile in central Cairo. An adjacent 14-storey tower that once housed offices of state-run organisations was also



Joe Biden's son dies of cancer, aged 46

AFP, Washington

Beau Biden, the eldest son of US Vice President Joe Biden and the former attorney general of Delaware, has died of brain cancer, his family announced Saturday. He was 46. Beau Biden, who had served in Iraq as a lawyer with the Delaware Army National Guard, had been undergoing treatment at the Walter Reed Medical Center just outside Washington. Beau Biden was a popular Democrat in his East Coast state of Delaware and had once been expected to follow his father onto the national political stage.



Swordfish kills Hawaii man

BBC ONLINE

A man has died in Hawaii after apparently being impaled by the bill of a swordfish. The fishing boat captain spotted the fish swimming in Honokohau harbour on Hawaii island, said a local government office. He jumped into the water and speared the fish, but the fish then struck him in the chest, said witnesses.

Ghani demands Pak action against Taliban

AFP, Kabul

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani demanded tough action from Pakistan against Taliban militants in a letter seeking greater anti-terrorism cooperation, after facing strong public criticism over a controversial intelligence-sharing deal between the neighbours. The spy agencies of both countries this month agreed to trade intelligence and bolster cooperation in their fight against the Taliban, the latest sign of a thaw in

ISIS suicide bomber kills five in Libya

REUTERS, Misrata

Five people were killed and eight wounded in a suicide bombing claimed by Islamic State outside the Libyan city of Misrata yesterday, security officials said. A suicide bomber rammed a car laden with explosives into the main security checkpoint west of Misrata, the officials said.



Nepalese schoolgirl Ankita Kapali (R), 11, walks with her mother past damaged buildings to school in Bhaktapur in Bhaktapur on the outskirts of Kathmandu, yesterday. Schools are reopening in Nepal following a devastating earthquake on April 25, 2015 which killed over 8,600 people, and damaged nearly 8,000 schools and 30,000 classrooms. PHOTO: AFP

World powers agree way to reinstate sanctions

REUTERS, New York/paris/ankara

Six world powers have agreed on a way to restore UN sanctions on Iran if the country breaks the terms of a future nuclear deal, clearing a major obstacle to an accord ahead of a June 30 deadline, Western officials told Reuters.

The new understanding on a UN sanctions "snapback" among the six powers - US, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China - brings them closer to a possible deal with Iran, though other hurdles remain, including ensuring UN's access to Iranian military sites.

The six powers and Iran struck an interim agreement on April 2 ahead of a possible final deal that would aim to block an Iranian path to a nuclear bomb in exchange for lifting sanctions. But the timing of sanctions relief, access and verification of compliance and a mechanism for restoring sanctions if Iran broke its commitments were among the most difficult topics left for further negotiations.

US and European negotiators want any easing of UN sanctions to be automatically reversible if Tehran violates a deal. Russia and China traditionally reject

such automatic measures as undermining their veto power as permanent members of the UNSC.

As part of the new agreement on sanctions snapback, suspected breaches by Iran would be taken up by a dispute-resolution panel, likely including the six powers and Iran, which would assess the allegations and come up with a non-binding opinion, the officials said.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) would also continue regularly reporting on Iran's nuclear program, which would provide the six powers and the Security Council with information on Tehran's activities to enable them to assess compliance. If Iran was found to be in non-compliance with the terms of the deal, then UN sanctions would

be restored.

"We pretty much have a solid agreement between the six on the snapback mechanism, Russians and Chinese included," a Western official said. "But now the Iranians need to agree."

A senior Iranian diplomat said Iran was now reviewing several options for the possible "snapback" of Security Council sanctions against Tehran.

FINAL IRAN NUKE DEAL

'I am committed to Palestinian state'

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday said he was committed to the establishment of a Palestinian state, calling on the Palestinian leadership to return to negotiations unconditionally.

"I remain committed to the idea that the only way we can achieve a lasting peace is through the concept of two states for two peoples -- a demilitarised Palestinian state that recognises the Jewish nation state of Israel," he said.

Netanyahu spoke after talks with visiting German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

He said they had discussed "our common quest to move forward on peace with the Palestinians".

"I think the only way to move that is through direct negotiations. Unfortunately, the Palestinian Authority has moved away from these negotiations," Netanyahu said.

"Tell the Palestinians to stop their campaign to delegitimise Israel. Tell them to get back to the negotiating table. Tell them that we should negotiate without preconditions," Netanyahu said to Steinmeier.

Netanyahu sparked international concern when he ruled out the establishment of a Palestinian state while campaigning for the March 17 general election but later backtracked on the comments.

Prospects for a renewal of the peace talks, which fell apart in April 2014, look bleak with the lack of trust between the sides exacerbated by the formation of Netanyahu's new hardline coalition.



Indian heatwave toll tops 2,200

AFP, Hyderabad

Scattered rain yesterday brought much-needed but only temporary relief to parts of India hit by a long heatwave as the death toll from the blistering temperatures crossed 2,200, officials said.

Thunderstorms struck sections of southern states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, which have borne the brunt of the deadliest heatwave in more than two decades, as well as the capital New Delhi.

But the toll continued to climb and the weather bureau warned that temperatures in swathes of southern, western and northern India would hover around 45 degrees Celsius in coming days.

"1,636 people have now died in the Andhra state," P. Tulsi Rani, a top disaster management official, told AFP.

Another 541 people have died in neighbouring Telangana from the heatwave, an official said.

In the eastern state of Orissa, 21 deaths have now been recorded from the heat, with at least another nine deaths reported elsewhere in the country, the Press Trust of India news agency reported.

Hundreds of mainly poor people die at the height of summer every year in India, but this year's figures are already the highest since 1995 when official Indian data showed 1,677 people succumbed to the heat.



A Syrian man reacts over the body of his son following reported shelling by rebel fighters in Aleppo's Jamilia district, on the regime-held side of the northern city, yesterday. More than 220,000 people has died in Syria war since it began in March 2011. PHOTO: AFP



Solar Impulse eyes history

AFP, Nanjing

The revolutionary Solar Impulse 2 aircraft took off early yesterday for a six-day, six-night flight over the Pacific Ocean, the most ambitious leg of its quest to circumnavigate the globe powered only by the sun.

Pilot Andre Borschberg, 62, left the ground in Nanjing, in eastern China, heading for the US island of Hawaii, at about 2:40am, after extended delays awaiting a suitable weather window over safety concerns.

The 8,500 kilometre flight could set a record for duration by a single pilot, organisers said.

"I cross my fingers and I hope to cross the Pacific," Borschberg told reporters just hours before the take-off.

It is the seventh and longest section of the maiden solar-powered global circumnavigation, an attempt to promote green energy. The journey began in Abu Dhabi in March and is scheduled for 12 legs, with a total flight time of around 25 days.

Solar Impulse 2 is powered by more than 17,000 solar cells built into wings that, at 72 metres, are longer than those of a Boeing 747 and approaching those of an Airbus A380 superjumbo.

Fire at clinic in Syria kills 27

AFP, Damascus

A fire at a small clinic in northeast Syria yesterday killed 27 people, mostly children, and injured about 30 others, official media said.

State news agency SANA, citing police, said dry branches had caught fire and the blaze spread to a fuel tank which exploded.

"At least 27 people were killed ... and at least 30 people are being treated for burns," it said, citing a doctor at the scene.

It said the clinic had also suffered "significant material damage".

State television said most of the victims of the blaze at the Maysalun clinic in the majority Kurdish city of Qamishli were children.

ISIS could obtain nuke weapon from Pakistan

Warns India's defence minister at security summit

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

India's defence minister has voiced concern that the radical Islamist group ISIS could obtain a nuclear weapon from "states like Pakistan".

Rao Inderjit Singh made the comments on the sidelines of the Shangri-La regional security conference in Singapore, Bloomberg has reported.

"With the rise of Isis in West Asia, one is afraid to an extent that perhaps they might get access to a nuclear arsenal from states like Pakistan," Bloomberg quoted him as saying.

Earlier in the month ISIS suggested it could attempt to buy its first nuclear weapon within a year and that it might come from Pakistan.

An article in its propaganda magazine Dabiq said: "The Islamic State has billions

of dollars in the bank, so they call on their wilayah [official] in Pakistan to purchase a nuclear device through weapons dealers with links to corrupt officials in the region."

Political analysts see the scenario as unlikely.

Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme began in the 1970s in response to India's development and testing of its own nuclear device.

Abdul Qadeer Khan, the Pakistani scientist who helped develop Pakistan's nuclear bomb, confessed in 2004 that his network had sold nuclear know-how on the black market to states such as North Korea and Iran.

But both Pakistan and India rank poorly in terms of nuclear security. According to the Nuclear Threat Initiative's "nuclear materials security index", out of 25 countries Pakistan is ranked 22nd, while India is ranked 23rd.



SOUTH CHINA SEA ROW

China rejects US criticism

AFP, Singapore

China yesterday rejected US demands to stop reclamation works in the South China Sea, saying it was exercising its sovereignty and using the controversial outposts to fulfil international responsibilities.

Admiral Sun Jianguo, deputy chief of the general staff department in the People's Liberation Army, told a security summit in Singapore that "the situation in the South China Sea is on the whole peaceful and stable, and there has never been an issue with the freedom of navigation."

"China has carried out construction on some islands and reefs in the South China Sea mainly for the purpose of improving the functions of the relevant islands and reefs, and the working and living conditions of personnel stationed there."

"Apart from meeting the necessary defence needs, it is more geared to better perform China's international responsibilities and obligations regarding maritime search and rescue, disaster prevention and relief, maritime scientific research, meteorological observation, environmental protection, safety of navigation, fishery production, services," he added.

China insists it has sovereignty over nearly all of the South China Sea, a major global shipping route believed to be home to oil and gas reserves, but rival claimants accuse it of expansionism.

Sun was speaking a day after US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter demanded an immediate end to all reclamation works by claimants and said Beijing was "out of step" with international norms with its behaviour in disputed waters.

Beijing has accused Washington of carrying out provocative moves in the South China Sea in the recent days.

US cops kill more than 2 people a day: report

AFP, Washington

US police have killed people at a rate of more than two a day this year, The Washington Post reported yesterday, using its own tally for lack of complete federal statistics.

The federal government must rely on partial data because the country's 17,000 or so state and local police agencies are not required to report such killings.

The newspaper is tracking the deaths as a national debate rages over police use of deadly force, especially in black and other minority communities.

The Post found that relative to the overall population, blacks were killed at three times the rate of other minorities or whites in the police killings it analyzed this year.

The report noted that most of the people killed were armed with potentially lethal objects -- mainly guns, but also knives and other items. Sixteen percent were carrying a toy or were unarmed.

The Post found that so far this year, at least 385 people have been shot and killed by police across the United States -- a rate of more than two a day.

"These shootings are grossly underreported," former police chief Jim Bueermann, head of a non-profit organization dedicated to improving law enforcement, told The Post. "We are never going to reduce the number of police shootings if we don't begin to accurately track this information."

The Post found that many of the killings stemmed from minor interactions between police and community members that escalated into sudden violence.