

NEWS IN brief

EU urges Saudis to stop lashing blogger
AFP, Brussels

The EU yesterday renewed calls on Saudi Arabia to stop lashing blogger Raif Badawi after the country's top court upheld the sentence against him for insulting Islam. Badawi received the first 50 of the 1,000 lashes he was sentenced to outside a mosque in the Red Sea city of Jeddah on January 9. Subsequent rounds of punishment were post-

Washington Post reporter begins trial defence in Iran
AFP, Tehran

Jason Rezaian, the Washington Post correspondent accused of spying on Iran, began his defence yesterday in a trial that is taking place behind closed doors in Tehran, local media reported. Rezaian, a 39-year-old Iranian-American, has been in custody since last July in a case that has clouded nuclear talks between Iran and world powers led by

Pak Taliban call for jihad in Myanmar
AFP, Islamabad

The Pakistani Taliban yesterday urged Muslims in Myanmar to rise up and fight the country's rulers, saying the Taliban's resources and training facilities were available to help them "take up the sword". Ehsanullah Ehsan, spokesman for the hardline Jamaat-ul-Ahrar faction of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) movement, said they "shared the grief" of Myanmar's beleaguered



Leaders of the member countries of the G7 and United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon pose for a group photo during the G7 Summit at the Schloss Elmau castle resort in southern Germany yesterday. Inset, an activist cleans the ground of a tent at the camp site of anti G7 protesters in Garmisch-Partenkirchen on the second day of the summit.



PHOTO: AFP

TURKEY POLLS
No party can rule alone: Erdogan

BBC ONLINE
Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday said the inconclusive election result means no party can govern alone. His party, AKP, is meeting to try to form a government after losing its majority in a general election for the first time in 13 years. It secured 41%, a sharp drop from 2011, and must form a coalition or face entering a minority government. Erdogan has called on all parties to "preserve the atmosphere of stability" in Turkey. "I believe the results, which do not give the opportunity to any party to form a single-party government, will be assessed healthily and realistically by every party," Erdogan said. He said the high turnout - 86% - indicated Turkey's "determination for democracy". The AKP is now likely to try to form a coalition, but no party has yet indicated it is willing to join forces with it. Opposition parties may yet try to form a coalition against the AKP. But Numan Kurtulmus, one of Turkey's four deputy prime ministers, said there would be no government without representation by the AKP. Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu is meeting AKP cabinet members and officials to assess the election results in Ankara. After the official final result is declared, he will have 45 days to form a government.



G7 SUMMIT
Obama, Hollande agree on Ukraine crisis, Iran nuke deal

AGENCIES
United States President Barack Obama and French President Francois Hollande have reportedly agreed on some of the world's most pressing issues, including the imposition of sanctions on Russia in the light of its actions in Ukraine and the need to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions, the White House said. The two leaders agreed that the economic sanctions against Russia should stay in place until the country fully abides by the terms of the peace accord that was struck with Ukraine last year, reported The New York Times. Although Paris had taken a harder line and had expressed more scepticism than Washington DC on the Iran nuclear talks, both Obama and Hollande concurred that the two nations, along with other world powers, will stay united in pursuit of a nuclear deal with Tehran. The White House further informed that the two leaders also discussed climate change, trade, countering

Islamic State (IS) militants in Iraq and Syria and the instability in Libya. The two leaders met on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Elmau, Germany, reports ANI. German Chancellor Angela Merkel urged Group of Seven (G7) leaders to commit to tough goals to cut greenhouse gases on the final day of their summit in Bavaria yesterday, at which they also discussed the threat from Islamic militants. Merkel, once dubbed the "climate chancellor", hopes to revitalize her green credentials by getting the G7 industrial nations to agree specific emissions goals ahead of a larger year-end United Nations climate meeting in Paris. Climate change topped the agenda for yesterday's sessions, at which the leaders were also set to discuss combating epidemics and other health issues, the fight against terrorism from Boko Haram to Islamic State, and African development. Merkel won support for her climate drive from French President Francois

Hollande, who will host a UN summit on fighting climate change at the end of the year, reports Reuters. Hollande was also looking for an ambitious G7 commitment to ending their dependence on fossil fuels by mid-century, and sought a financial commitment to help poorer countries transform their energy sectors so they can reduce carbon emissions. "Commitments must be made at this G7. For the moment, the communicate is going in the right direction," the French president told reporters on the sidelines of the summit at the foot of Germany's highest mountain, the Zugspitze. The Europeans were pressing their G7 partners to sign up to legally binding targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. A G7 official said France led discussion on climate while Italy took the lead on energy security during yesterday morning's talks, before the leaders turned their attention to global threats to international security.

Convert challenge into opportunity
Says Modi on monsoon

THE HINDU ONLINE
With monsoon rainfall predicted to be deficient this year, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday said the "challenge" should be converted into an "opportunity" for looking at other avenues of irrigation as he pitched for boosting the creation of farm ponds as a short-term effort. Chairing a meeting in New Delhi to review the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana, he pressed for quick adoption of a multi-pronged strategy to augment the country's irrigation network. He sought a relook at the administrative mechanisms, financial arrangements and technology applications in the irrigation sector, to result in a shorter, more comprehensive decision-making process, which could deliver quick results for the farmers. The PM pitched for an intensive short-term effort to boost the creation of farm ponds across the country. The irrigation plans need to be worked out at the district level, and young officers from the civil services should be asked to propose district-level irrigation plans, Modi said. Expansion of irrigation has to be linked with a comprehensive evaluation of cropping patterns across states, as well as a judicious mix of modern and micro irrigation systems such as drip and sprinkler irrigation, he said.

MERS OUTBREAK
South Korea reports surge in infections

AFP, Seoul
South Korea recorded its sixth death and biggest single-day jump in Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) infections yesterday, with 23 new cases in the largest outbreak of the potentially deadly virus outside Saudi Arabia. From just four cases two weeks ago, the total number of infections now stands at 87, including six people who have died. The latest fatality was an 80-year-old man who died yesterday morning in a hospital in Daejeon, the health ministry said. The outbreak has triggered widespread public concern in South Korea, with 2,500 people placed under quarantine orders and nearly 2,000 schools -- mostly in Seoul and surrounding Gyeonggi province -- closed down. But experts say the likelihood of a serious epidemic is remote, given that the MERS virus is not easily transmitted person-to-person. "The chance of a massive outbreak in South Korea is not high," said Ho Pak-leung, a microbiology expert at the University of Hong Kong. "Rather I think there will be continued transmissions at a low level," Ho told AFP. Among the new cases announced yesterday, most were infected at the Samsung Medical Centre in southern Seoul -- one of the country's largest hospitals where nearly 900 patients and staff have now been placed under observation. A 16-year-old student became the first teenage case, but the education ministry stressed he had contracted the virus while already in hospital, so it was "not possible" that he had infected any classmates at school.



PHOTO: AFP



Pistorius release set for August 21
AFP, Johannesburg

Oscar Pistorius, the South African double amputee sprinter who shot dead his girlfriend, is scheduled to be freed on parole on August 21 after serving just 10 months in jail, officials said yesterday. The proposed release date provoked an angry reaction from the parents of model and television presenter Reeva Steenkamp, 29, who Pistorius shot on Valentine's Day in 2013. Pistorius, a role model around the world after competing in the Paralympics and Olympics, claimed that he mistook Steenkamp for an intruder, firing four shots through a

Syrian air raids kill 49 in Idlib

AGENCIES
Government airstrikes on a northwestern Syrian village yesterday killed at least 49 people and destroyed homes, shops and cars, activists said. The Local Coordination Committees said two air raids on the village of Janoudiyeh in Idlib province killed 60 people and wounded others. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the air raid killed 49 people, including six children. It said the death toll could rise as some people are still missing. Conflicting reports often emerge in the chaotic aftermath of such events, reports AP. The Observatory said the air raid struck a public square in Janoudiyeh, near the town of Jisr al-Shughour, which was captured by insurgents in April. It said the village has become home to many displaced people from nearby areas. A video uploaded onto the Internet by activists showed a chaotic, smoke-filled scene, with people running past damaged cars, and bodies scattered on the street. Women screamed as men hurriedly covered bodies and pulled wounded people from the rubble before an ambulance arrived.



Some 150 delegates take part in a two-day meeting with Syrian opposition representatives aiming at forming a new coalition as an alternative to an exiled Western-back alliance in the Egyptian capital, Cairo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

World's first 'feeling' leg prosthesis

AFP, Vienna
The world's first artificial leg capable of simulating the feelings of a real limb and fighting phantom pain was unveiled by researchers in Vienna yesterday. The innovation is the result of a two-fold process, developed by Professor Hubert Egger at the University of Linz in northern Austria. Surgeons first rewired remaining foot nerve endings from a patient's stump to healthy tissue in the thigh, placing them close to the skin surface. Six sensors were then fitted to the foot sole of a lightweight prosthesis, and linked to so-called stimulators inside the shaft where the stump sits. "It's like a second lease of life, like being reborn," Austrian amputee Wolfgang Ronger, told AFP ahead of yesterday's media launch. The former teacher, who lost his right leg in 2007 after suffering a blood clot caused by a cerebral stroke, has spent the last six months testing the new prosthesis. "It feels like I have a foot again. I no longer slip on ice and I can tell whether walk on gravel, concrete, grass or sand. I can even feel small stones," he said. The 54-year-old also runs, cycles and goes climbing. When he moves, the limb is barely noticeable. Every time Ronger takes a step or applies pressure, the small sensor devices send signals to the brain. "In a healthy foot, skin receptors carry out this function but they are obviously missing here. However, the information



conductors -- the nerves -- are still present, they're just not being stimulated," Egger said. "The sensors tell the brain there is a foot and the wearer has the impression that it rolls off the ground when he walks. All things considered, the procedure is a very simple one given the results."

Rohingya Muslims deserve citizenship
Says Malala

AFP, London
Nobel Prize winner Malala Yousafzai yesterday urged Myanmar leaders to take "immediate action" to prevent the persecution of the country's Rohingya Muslims, most of whom are considered by the government to be illegal immigrants. The 17-year-old, who was shot by militants in her native Pakistan for campaigning for girls' rights, said that Rohingyas deserved "equal rights and opportunities" and called for them to be integrated into the country. "I call on the leaders of Myanmar and the world to take immediate action to halt the inhuman persecution of Burma's (Myanmar) Muslim minority Rohingya people," said Malala. "The Rohingyas deserve citizenship in the country where they were born and have lived for generations," added the teenager, who won the Nobel prize last year for her activism. "Today and every day, I stand with the Rohingyas, and I encourage people everywhere to do so." Myanmar considers the Rohingya to be illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, and places a raft of restrictions on them, such as family size, movements and access to jobs.



Myanmar arrests 93 traffickers
None from Rakhine

AFP, Yangon
Myanmar police have arrested more than 90 people for human trafficking offences this year, media reported yesterday, but no cases have been uncovered in Rakhine state where persecuted Rohingyas have fled in droves. Police gave a breakdown of their anti-trafficking activities with 56 cases recorded between January and May, the Global New Light of Myanmar reported, citing police captain Min Naing. The report added that police had made 93 arrests over the last five months. "Most Myanmar victims were sold into forced marriages in China and forced labour in Thailand," the report said. The majority of cases were uncovered in eastern Shan state followed by Mandalay and Yangon.

UN talks not for reconciliation
Says Yemen president

AFP, Dubai
Yemen's exiled president said his government will not negotiate with Iran-backed rebels at UN-sponsored peace talks due to open in Switzerland this weekend, in comments broadcast yesterday. President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi said the sole item for discussion would be the implementation of a resolution adopted by the UN Security Council in April demanding that rebels withdraw from the swathes of the country they have seized. "There will be no negotiations," Hadi told Al-Arabiya television. "It will be just a discussion about how to implement UN Security Council Resolution 2216. We will have a consultation." Asked if his government's delegation would discuss reconciliation with the rebel negotiating team, Hadi said: "Not at all." Yemen's Prime Minister Khaled Bahah echoed Hadi's remarks, telling a news conference in Riyadh that the Geneva meeting will be merely a "consultative" process. Bahah, who is also vice president, said the exiled government will head to the meeting with only one goal: "implementing 2216 and reinstating the state" overran by Huthis.

