

NEWS IN brief

US transfers 6 Gitmo detainees to Oman

Washington has transferred six inmates from its Guantanamo Bay prison to Oman, the Pentagon said yesterday, as part of a drive by President Barack Obama to close the controversial jail. The Omani foreign ministry said all six were Yemeni. The transfer means 116 inmates remain at the prison in at a US naval base in southeastern Cuba.

2 road accidents kill nearly 40 in India

Two accidents killed nearly 40 people in India yesterday in the latest deadly crashes on some of the world's most dangerous roads. Twenty-two people, including seven children, were killed when a van carrying Hindus returning from a pilgrimage to the famous Tirupati-Tirumala temple in southeastern Andhra Pradesh state lost control on a bridge and plunged into the river. Separately, a head-on collision between a truck and two tractors carrying dozens heading to a prayer ceremony killed another 17 people in northern Uttar Pradesh state, reported PTI.

Taliban kill 17 cops in southern Afghanistan

At least 17 Afghan policemen were killed yesterday when dozens of Taliban militants stormed their outpost in the country's volatile south, the latest attack of an increasingly deadly summer fighting season. The pre-dawn raid occurred in Helmand province.

New curfew in Sierra Leone to halt Ebola

Sierra Leone's President Ernest Bai Koroma said Friday he was imposing a three-week day-time curfew in the last Ebola-hit areas in a bid to curb a resurgence of the deadly virus. The latest lockdown was called over fears that the disease that has killed about 3,900 in Sierra Leone was making a comeback in the northwest.

Pakistan air strikes kill 20 militants

Pakistan's military said it killed 20 militants yesterday in air strikes on a tribal region near the Afghan border, as part of a major offensive against insurgents that began last year. The attack took place near the Datta Khel area in North Waziristan tribal region. The army began a major campaign against militants in the North Waziristan tribal area in June last year.



Syrian refugees run away as Turkish soldiers use water cannon to move them away from fences at the Turkish border near the Syrian town of Tal Abyad, at Akcakale in Sanliurfa province, yesterday. Turkey said it was taking measures to limit the flow of Syrian refugees onto its territory after an influx of thousands more over the last days due to fighting between Kurds and jihadists. Under an "open-door" policy, Turkey has taken in 1.8 million Syrian refugees since the conflict in Syria erupted in 2011.

POST-QUAKE REBUILDING Nepal needs \$6.6b

Earthquake-battered Nepal will ask international donors to support a reconstruction plans that is expected to cost \$6.6 billion over five years, the government said yesterday. Two quakes on April 25 and May 12 killed 8,787 people and destroyed more than 500,000 homes, affecting 2.8 million of the Himalayan nation's 28 million people. Losses to the economy from Nepal's worst disaster on record stand at \$7 billion, including from tourism, the government said in a Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) report. Suman Prasad Sharma, a senior finance ministry official, said 36 countries and 24 donor agencies had been invited to a conference on June 25 to pledge support for reconstruction. Currently, Nepal gets two-thirds of the cost of its economic development in international aid. Government officials said some donors who cannot pledge more aid could still help Nepal by writing off debt the country owes or delaying repayment schedules. Nepal does not have commercial borrowings from international lending agencies. Concessional loans mainly from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank account for 18 percent of Nepal's gross domestic product, according to the officials. The government spends \$300 million in debt repayment every year. Local donors say post-disaster reconstruction must be more accountable in a country that ranked 126 of 176 nations surveyed in Transparency International's corruption perception index in 2014, compared with 116 a year earlier.

US military, intelligence data 'accessed' in major hacking

Report says US weighs sanctions after second breach of federal computer system

Hackers with suspected links to China appear to have accessed sensitive data on US intelligence and military personnel, American officials say. Details of a major hack emerged last week, but officials have now given details of a potential second breach. It is feared that the attack could leave US security personnel or their families open to blackmail. The agency involved, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), is yet to comment on the reports. Officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to the Associated Press (AP) news agency, believe the attackers have targeted the forms submitted by intelligence and military personnel for security clearances. The document includes personal information - everything from eye colour, to financial history, to past substance abuse, as well as contact details for the individual's friends and relatives.

PREVIOUS HACK ATTACKS ON US GOVT

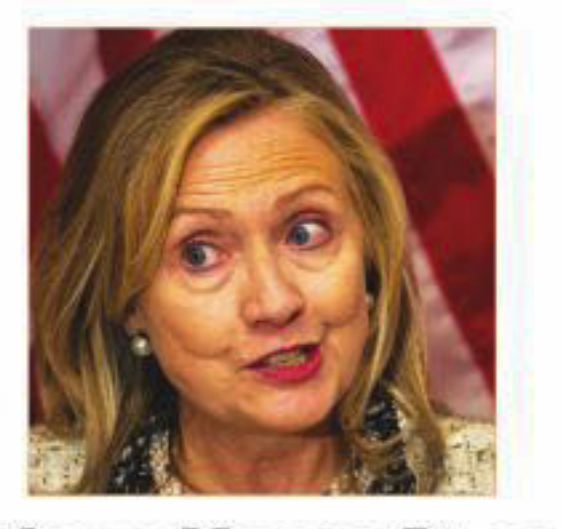
- In November 2014 a hack compromised files belonging to 25,000 employees of the Department of Homeland Security, as well as thousands of other federal workers.
- In March 2014 hackers breached OPM networks, targeting government staff with security clearance, but the attempt was blocked before any data was stolen. The intrusion was traced to China.
- In 2006, hackers believed to be based in China breached the system of a sensitive bureau in the US Department of Commerce. Hundreds of workstations had to be replaced.

potentially affected at four million, but officials close to the investigation told AP that as many as 14 million might be involved. The US has said the hackers, thought to be behind both attacks, are believed to be based in China. Beijing called the claims "irresponsible". According to a New York Times report, the White House also revealed that President Barack Obama was considering financial sanctions against the attackers who gained access to the files of millions of federal workers. At the White House, officials said that Obama was weighing the use of an executive order he signed in April that allows the Treasury secretary to impose sanctions on individuals or groups that engage in malicious cyberattacks, or people who benefit from them. But the use of the sanctions authority could be more significant this time if Obama wielded it against China, which officials believe has continued to sponsor cyberattacks.

Suspect shot in Dallas police HQ attack

Snipers shot and presumably killed a man yesterday after he attacked the police headquarters in Dallas and planted bombs in a dramatic rampage in the Texas city, though there were no known links to terrorism.

Officers from the Dallas Police Department's specialized SWAT unit shot the suspect through the front windshield of the armored van he used in his attack, then shortly afterward opened fire on the man, Police Chief David Brown said. Police sent in a bomb disposal robot to examine the vehicle and determine whether the suspect was dead. "After the robot clears the van and we're able to identify the deceased, what we believe is the deceased, inside the van," technicians will collect evidence, Brown said. The apparent culmination of a stunning night of violence began just after midnight when a van, described by witnesses as an armored vehicle, rammed into police squad cars at the headquarters and someone inside opened fire. Police had earlier suggested there may have been up to four suspects, but Brown said police now believed that only one suspect shot from different angles and positions. Brown said there was no connection to terrorism and that the incident stemmed from an issue surrounding custody of the suspect's child. The suspect identified himself as James Boulware, but police were not immediately able to confirm his identity. The Dallas Police Association, which represents Dallas officers, tweeted that the suspect "had three family violence cases against him. (He) was very disgruntled against law enforcement and the criminal justice system."



Clinton makes bid official with NY rally

Ardent supporters streamed into a manicured New York park yesterday to watch Hillary Clinton lay out her bid to become America's first woman president and her vision for the future. Thousands poured onto Roosevelt Island, a tiny sliver of land in the East River between Manhattan and Queens, where black clouds threatening rain did little to dampen the enthusiasm of devoted fans. Clinton, the 67-year-old former secretary of state New York senator and first lady is expected to be joined by husband Bill and daughter Chelsea in the family's first joint appearance of the campaign. In her hotly anticipated speech, she is expected to draw heavily on her mother's disadvantaged background to convince voters that she understands their problems and promises to fight for the middle classes. Her team sees the rally, on home turf in a state where Clinton was senator for eight years, as a chance to turn the tables on flagging opinion polls and position her as the champion of America's squeezed middle class. Her political foes paint her as out of touch and not trustworthy. A CNN poll found last week a growing number of Americans say she is not honest and trustworthy (57 percent, up from 49 percent in March).

S Korea MERS virus outbreak 'large and complex': WHO

South Korea's outbreak of the deadly MERS virus is "large and complex" and more cases should be expected, a team of World Health Organization (WHO) experts said yesterday. WHO and South Korean health authorities have conducted a joint mission to review the outbreak of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), the largest outside Saudi Arabia. The outbreak in South Korea has been spreading at an unusually fast pace, with 138 confirmed infections as of Saturday, with the country's first case diagnosed on May 20. South Korea on Saturday reported the 14th death from the disease and 12 new cases, including that of an ambulance driver who transported a patient infected with the deadly virus. "Now the outbreak has been large and is complex, more cases should be anticipated", WHO Assistant Director-General for Health Security Keiji Fukuda told journalists. "And because of this, the government should remain vigilant and should continue its intensified disease surveillance and prevention measures until the outbreak is clearly over". But he praised South Korean authorities for their strong tracing, monitoring and quarantine measures, backed by expanded laboratory diagnostic testing. Fukuda said there was a "great deal of anxiety" among Koreans over the outbreak, particularly over whether the virus has mutated to make human-to-human transmission easier. "Based on available sequencing studies of the genetics of the virus, we do not see any changes that appear to have made the virus itself more transmissible", Fukuda said. The outbreak is showing epidemiological patterns similar to the one occurring in hospitals in the Middle East, he said.



Participants of 'The Sun Never Sets on Yoga' practice yoga at The Art of Living in Bangalore, yesterday. The event is being held in about 108 cities around the globe as a prelude to International Yoga Day to be celebrated on June 21.

'MH370 plunged vertically into ocean'

It has been 15 months since Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing did an unexplained about-face, flew in the wrong direction and disappeared without a trace with 239 souls on board. In the absence of physical evidence, theories on what happened to the plane continue to proliferate: The crew passed out. It was pilot suicide. Or was it a paranormal event? Now comes the latest contribution to the debate: This week, a mathematician from Texas A&M University announced that he had run data through a computer and determined it was likely the plane had plunged vertically into the ocean. Goong Chen, using "applied mathematics, computational fluid dynamics and numerical simulations of a Boeing 777 in a classic 'water entry' problem," determined that a plane that piercing vertically into the sea would not break apart. This explains why no debris has been found, he said.

ALLEGED PAYMENT TO HUMAN TRAFFICKERS Indonesia demands answers from Australia, launches probe

Indonesia yesterday demanded answers from Australia over allegations an official paid thousands of dollars to turn back a boat of asylum-seekers, saying such a development would mark a "new low". The call came after Prime Minister Tony Abbott on Friday refused to deny allegations that the captain and five crew of a boat carrying asylum-seekers were each paid US\$5,000 by an Australian immigration official to return to the Southeast Asian nation. The claims were made to local police on Rote island in eastern Indonesia, where the boat carrying 65 asylum-seekers came ashore late May after being intercepted by the Australian navy. The escalating row risks further damaging relations between Australia and its northern neighbour, which are already tense after Indonesia executed two Australian drug smugglers by firing squad in April. Indonesian foreign ministry spokesman Arrmanatha Nasir said Jakarta was seeking clarification from Australia on the issue. "We have consistently said that the Australian government's push-back policy is on a slippery slope," he told AFP, referring to the Abbott administration's hard-line policy of turning back asylum boats when it is safe to do so. "If this latest incident is confirmed, this will be a new low for the way that the Australian government is handling this issue." Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi also raised the issue Saturday on the sidelines of a conference in Jakarta with Australia's ambassador to Indonesia, Paul Grigson, adding Jakarta would be "really concerned" if the claims were true. Indonesian authorities have launched an investigation into the alleged payments to the crew of the boat carrying asylum-seekers from Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka, which was intercepted en route to New Zealand. Abbott on Friday said Australia would do "whatever we need" to combat people smuggling -- but repeatedly refused to deny that a payment was made. Canberra has embarked on a tough immigration policy since Abbott's conservative coalition came into power in September 2013 and refuses to accept asylum-seekers arriving by boats. The policy includes military-led efforts to turn back such boats, which mostly come from Indonesia, and sending asylum-seekers to camps on the Pacific island outpost of Nauru and Papua New Guinea for resettlement despite strong criticism from human rights groups.

US lawmakers derail Obama's trade agenda

US lawmakers dealt a stinging blow Friday to President Barack Obama and his ambitious trade agenda, stalling a measure that would have given him fast-track authority to conclude a trans-Pacific trade accord. The vote, in which two-thirds of the House of Representatives opposed a workers aid program in the trade package, marked a defeat for the president, who had personally come to Capitol Hill earlier in the day in a failed bid to persuade fellow Democrats to back him. Immediately afterwards, the House actually passed the bill that would give Obama "Trade Promotion Authority" (TPA) to rapidly conclude the Pacific trade deal and send it to Congress for an up-or-down vote. But it was merely a show vote because the rejection of the workers aid measure automatically put the brakes on TPA. Both measures passed the Senate as a package; if either of them fails in the House, neither reaches the president's desk. A bruised Obama urged the House to vote again "as soon as possible" so US businesses can "sell goods made in America to the rest of the world," while his spokesman Josh Earnest cast the failure as "another procedural snafu." House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy told reporters he was "disappointed" in the result and warned Democrats it was time to "seriously rethink" their position ahead of a possible new vote on the measure next week. TPA would allow Obama to finalize negotiations with 11 other Pacific Rim countries on what would be the largest trade agreement ever, a massive pact with Japan, Australia, Canada, Chile, Vietnam and others encompassing some 40 percent of global commerce.



Real-life Cinderella story

In a real-life Cinderella story, a former model and reality star will become a princess when she marries Sweden's Prince Carl Philip. Sofia Hellqvist, 30, is known for appearing in the popular reality show, Paradise Hotel in 2005, in which a group of young singletons compete to stay the longest in a luxury resort. She has also been photographed with a boa constrictor for men's magazine Slitz. The couple reportedly met at a restaurant in 2010 and are set to marry in a lavish wedding ceremony in Stockholm. 36-year-old Carl Philip is third in line to the Swedish throne and acts as royal representative in the absence of his father and older sister. After her time on Paradise Hotel, Hellqvist spent time in New York where she studied accounting and worked as a yoga instructor, setting up her own yoga centre in Manhattan. She has also worked as a volunteer in Ghana and co-founded the organisation Project Playground which helps young people in South Africa through sport and activity programmes. Despite opinion polls showing that the Swedish Royal family's popularity has slumped in recent years as many as half a million people are expected to take to the streets of Stockholm to greet the newly-weds.

