

NEWSIN brief

Jazeera journo detained in Berlin

AP, Cairo
Ahmed Mansour, a senior journalist with Al-Jazeera's Arabic service, was detained at 1320 GMT (9 am EDT) yesterday while trying to board a Qatar Airways flight at Berlin's Tegel airport heading to Doha over an Egyptian arrest warrant, the Qatar-based broadcaster reported. It said he previously had been sentenced in absentia in Egypt to 15 years in prison over allegedly torturing an unnamed lawyer in Tahrir Square in 2011, a charge both he and the channel rejected.

Taliban takes over northern Kunduz

AP, Kabul
Taliban insurgents have taken control of the Chardara district in northern Kunduz province, according to Afghan officials. Mohammad Yusuf Ayubi, head of the provincial council in Kunduz, said yesterday that Taliban fighters established control of the district after two days of attacks on local security forces. Sayed Sarwar Hussaini, spokesman for the provincial police chief, said that reinforcements are being dispatched and an operation to retake the

Thailand confirms first Mers case

BBC ONLINE
Thailand yesterday confirmed its first case of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, the deadly virus that has killed 24 people in South Korea. The man - whose name has not been released - is now in quarantine at an infectious diseases facility outside the capital Bangkok. Thai health officials said the 75-year-old from Oman was seeking treatment for a

Rebel shelling kills three in Aden

AFP, Aden
Rebel shelling of residential areas in Yemen's Aden killed at least three civilians yesterday, as air strikes by the Saudi-led coalition also hit the southern city, medics and witnesses said. Rebels fired Katyusha rockets and mortars at residential areas destroying four homes, residents and mili-



Lone protester ends Guatemala march

BBC ONLINE
A 62-year-old man in Guatemala has received a hero's welcome after a 200km march in protest against government corruption. Oswaldo Ochoa was met by cheers and applause from crowds of supporters on his arrival in Guatemala City. Ochoa, who said he had been inspired by Gandhi, wants social, political and agricultural change. A series of corruption scandals forced the resignation of Vice President Roxana Baldetti last month. Wearing a straw hat and a Guatemalan flag around his neck like a cape, Ochoa, known as "Quixote", left his home city of Quetzaltenango a week ago. He said he was joining a growing movement of Guatemalans who have been demanding the resignation of President Otto Perez Molina. Ochoa was on hunger strike during his journey, only drinking tea and juices. He got blisters on this feet and said he lost more than 4kg in weight.



The Dalai Lama (C) gestures to students during an event to celebrate his 80th birthday at Tsuglakhang temple in McLeod Ganj yesterday. The Dalai Lama marked his official 80th birthday yesterday, with prayers and celebrations at his hometown in exile but little to show for decades of lobbying for greater Tibetan autonomy. PHOTO: NDTV ONLINE

Suu Kyi eyes landslide poll win

AFP, Yangon
Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi called on her party yesterday to push for a landslide victory at crucial elections expected later this year as she celebrated her birthday with supporters. The comments came after the Nobel Peace Prize winner - who turned 70 on Friday -- cut a birthday cake alongside fellow National League for Democracy luminaries during an official celebration at a restaurant famed for being a dissident meeting place. Myanmar is expected to hold its first national vote in a quarter of a century sometime in October or November with many expecting Suu Kyi's NLD to sweep the board if the polls are free and fair.



But the dissident turned opposition politician warned party members against showing any complacency in the run up to the vote. "We the National League for Democracy need to have a landslide win in the election," she told supporters. "Whatever we continue to do, with the support of the people and the strong will of our party members we will be successful," she added. Her comments underscore the long road to electoral success the NLD still faces, even though military rule has

given way to a quasi-reformist government promising clean polls. Under Myanmar's current constitution, a quarter of parliamentary seats are still reserved for unelected soldiers. Analysts say the NLD needs to win as many seats as possible if they hope to effectively challenge the military's hold on parliament. Meanwhile Suu Kyi is barred from becoming president under a rule that excludes those with foreign spouses and children -- a provision seen as aimed directly at Suu Kyi, whose two sons are British. Technically Suu Kyi has yet to decide whether the NLD will even contest the polls. On Saturday she said a decision would be made shortly. But in many ways, she has already begun campaigning with a series of high profile public appearances and speeches in recent months designed to solidify her position as the country's pre-eminent opposition politician. The NLD are currently holding a two-day annual conference which has been dominated by discussions on the election. Around 300 supporters gathered outside the Royal Rose restaurant, a popular NLD meeting place close to the city's towering Shwe Dagon pagoda.

Belgium unfreezes Russian accounts

BBC ONLINE
Russian state accounts frozen by Belgium in a move condemned by Moscow have been unblocked, Belgium's foreign minister says. The assets were seized in a move triggered by a court ruling over the now-defunct Yukos oil firm. In July 2014, an international arbitration court said Russian officials had manipulated the legal system to bankrupt Yukos. Yukos was then taken over by a Russian state firm. Last year a court told Russia to pay Yukos shareholders \$50bn in compensation, after Yukos's break-up. But Russia does not acknowledge the court's findings.

IRAN NUKE DEAL Lawmakers curtailed on power to veto deal

AFP, Tehran
Iran's parliament curtailed its own power to block a nuclear deal with world powers yesterday, effectively removing a longstanding threat that a final accord could be torn up by lawmakers. A draft bill presented on Wednesday, which laid down strict criteria for Iran to accept any agreement, had threatened to complicate talks on a final accord, which are due to be finalised by June 30. However, in a boost to President Hassan government, key amendments to the proposed legislation will now move the formal supervision of a deal out of the hands of lawmakers. The original text had set criteria parliament would have to say had been met for an agreement to be binding. But the amended bill instead gives the right of supervision to the country's Supreme National Security Council. The council comprises ministers, military commander and handpicked appointees of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Chaired by Rouhani, who is pushing hard for a nuclear deal, it is ultimately controlled by Khamenei, who will have the final word on any nuclear accord. "Whatever decision the leader takes in this regard, we should obey in parliament," speaker Ali Larijani said after 199 MPs voted for the amendments in the 290-member chamber. "We should not tie the hands of the leader," he added. Only three lawmakers opposed the changes and five abstained, with six not voting and dozens more absent.

Israel PM rejects 'dictates' Fabius on visit to lay out parameters for peace talks

AFP, Jerusalem
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday rejected "international dictates" ahead of a visit by France's top diplomat, with Paris advocating a UN resolution laying out parameters for peace talks. With negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians stalled for more than a year, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius was to hold separate talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders yesterday in a push to revive talks. France has argued in favour of a UN resolution that would guide negotiations leading to an independent Palestinian state and which could include a timeframe for talks. But ahead of Fabius's arrival in Jerusalem, Netanyahu hit out at international diplomatic efforts to impose proposals which he said had so far neglected to address vital Israeli security concerns. "The only way to reach an agreement is through bilateral negotiations, and we will forcibly reject any attempts to force upon us international dictates," Netanyahu said at the weekly cabinet meeting, in comments quoted by his office. "In the international proposals that have been suggested to us -- which they are actually trying to force upon us -- there is no real reference to Israel's security needs or our other national interests."



Pope prays before Turin Shroud

BBC ONLINE
Pope Francis yesterday paused before the Turin Shroud in silent prayer for several minutes. The Pope led the Sunday prayers in Turin's cathedral as part of a special public exhibition. The linen cloth is said to bear the image of Jesus Christ, and some Christians believe that it was his burial shroud. Sceptics point to carbon dating that suggests it is a medieval forgery from the 1300s. The Pope sat in contemplation before the shroud. He then placed his hand on the protective glass case before walking away in silence. The shroud is on display for two months after a break of five years. The 4.4-metre-long (14 ft) cloth is on show until 24 June. The last public viewings were in 2010, when 2.5 million people came to see it. This visit coincides with the display of the most recent replica of the shroud in the Argentine Pope's hometown of Buenos Aires. The shroud is displayed in a climate-controlled case for 12 hours a day in Turin's Cathedral of St John the Baptist.



Pope Francis prays in front of the holy Shroud, believed by some Christians to be the burial shroud of Jesus of Nazareth, yesterday in Turin's cathedral. PHOTO: AFP

CHARLESTON SHOOTING FBI investigates online manifesto

AP, Charleston
Parishioners were let into the bullet-scarred Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church on Saturday, getting a first-hand glimpse of the room where nine people from their congregation were slain. Meanwhile, the FBI said it was investigating a manifesto purportedly written by the suspected gunman, 21-year-old Dylann Roof. The website linked to Roof contained photos of him holding a burning American flag and standing on one. In other images, he was holding the Confederate flag representing the pro-slavery South in the American Civil War, considered a divisive symbol by many. The hate-filled 2,500-word essay talks about white supremacy and the author says "the event that truly awakened me was the Trayvon Martin case." It's unclear if Roof wrote it but the rants are in line with what he has told friends and what he said before allegedly opening fire inside the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church on Wednesday night.



Nato force commitment extended

Says UK defence secretary
BBC ONLINE
The UK commitment to a rapid reaction force being set up by Nato is to be extended by three years, Defence Secretary Michael Fallon has said. Fallon told the BBC's Andrew Marr show 1,000 troops would be sent next year and 3,000 in 2017, chiefly in response to the threat posed by Russia. He accused Vladimir Putin of "sabre-rattling" and said it was important for the UK to commit to Nato's mission. Tory backbenchers and US officials have expressed concerns at UK defence cuts. On President Putin, Fallon told the BBC: "He's clearly building up his conventional forces, he's modernising his nuclear weapons. "So it is sabre rattling and that's why we have to continue to strengthen Nato, offer Nato more reassurance through these larger scale exercises. "We're doing our bit, but it's very important we send Putin this message that we are determined in our commitment to the collective defence of Nato." After 1,000 troops are sent next year and 3,000 the year after, a battle group will be committed in each year after that until 2021, Mr Fallon said. In addition to this, he said UK Typhoons currently flying over the Baltic would be sent back next year. A demand from the chancellor for a further £500m in Ministry of Defence cuts has fuelled worries that the UK may drop below Nato's target of spending 2% of GDP on defence. When pressed on whether the UK would continue to meet that target, Mr Fallon said: "We can't set the budget on this programme, we set the budget in September, then you'll have your answer."

BANK OF CHINA FRAUD Italy seeks trial for 300 people

BBC ONLINE
Italian prosecutors want to indict the Bank of China's Milan branch and almost 300 people over a money-laundering scheme. Prosecutors in Florence allege €4.5bn (\$5.1bn, £3.2bn) was transferred from Italy to China. It was earned through prostitution, counterfeiting, tax evasion and labour exploitation, they say. The Ansa agency said (in Italian) that four senior managers with the Bank of China could be indicted. Close to half the €4.5bn, transferred between 2007 and 2010, went through the bank's branch in Milan, investigators say. The Bank of China received €758,000 in commission for the transfers, it is claimed. There were millions of transactions, Ansa said, that were below the €2,000 threshold that would have triggered money-laundering checks. That threshold has since dropped to 1,000. A judge will now decide whether the Bank of China and 297 individuals will face trial. Neither the bank nor the Chinese government has yet responded. "The maxi-laundering strengthened the economic capacity of the Chinese mafia organisations devoted to illegal immigration from their country," said Ansa.