

NEWSIN brief

Indonesia rejects Atlaoui demerency

French drug convict, Serge Atlaoui, 51, lost an appeal against his death sentence yesterday, but his lawyers vowed to fight on and prevent another foreigner from facing the firing squad in Indonesia after a series of executions that generated an international uproar. He was due to be executed alongside seven other foreign drug offenders two months ago but won a temporary reprieve after Paris stepped up pressure, with authorities agreeing to let an outstanding appeal run its course.

Police team to hunt ISIS web accounts

A Europe-wide police team is being formed to track and block social media accounts linked to Islamic State. A recent US study found there were at least 46,000 accounts on Twitter linked to the militant group, many of which help to recruit new ISIS members. The European police agency Europol will now work with unnamed social media companies to track the accounts. They aim to get new accounts closed down within two hours of them being set up.

Japan intends to resume whale hunt

Japan's chief whaling negotiator said yesterday the country intends to resume hunts in the Antarctic this year, despite a call by global regulators for more evidence that the expeditions have a scientific purpose. Joji Morishita said the whole debate about whether or not Japan should be killing the mammals had long since moved away from science and into politics. The scientific committee of the International Whaling Commission said in a report Friday that Japan had failed to give enough details to explain why it wanted to kill almost 4,000 minke whales in the Antarctic over the next 12 years.



A picture taken yesterday in Ventimiglia near the Italian-French border post, shows the makeshift camp set up by a group of migrants that has been denied entry into France. Italy warned that EU solidarity is at stake if the 28-nation bloc fails to reach a deal on sharing the burden of the Mediterranean migrant crisis.

'War crimes' likely by both sides

Finds UN report in 2014 Gaza war

Both Israel and Palestinian militants may have committed war crimes during last year's Gaza war, a widely anticipated United Nations report said yesterday, decrying the "unprecedented" devastation and human suffering. The Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza conflict announced it had gathered "substantial information" and "credible allegations" that both sides had committed war crimes during the conflict, which killed more than 2,140 Palestinians, most of them civilians, and 73 people on the Israeli side, mostly soldiers. "The extent of the devastation and human suffering in Gaza was unprecedented and will impact generations to come," said the chair of the commission, New York judge Mary McGowan Davis. Israel, which has been harshly critical of the commission since its inception last year, blasted the report as biased, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisting his country "does not commit war crimes." "Israel defends itself against a terror organisation which calls for its destruction and that itself carries out war crimes," Netanyahu said in a statement, referring to Islamist movement Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip. The report criticised both sides, but especially decried the "huge firepower" Israel had used in Gaza, with more than 6,000 airstrikes and 50,000 artillery shells fired during the 51-day operation. The bombings of residential buildings had especially dire consequences, wiping out entire families, with 551 children killed, a choked-up McGowan Davis pointed out to reporters. According to the report, which will be presented to the UN Human Rights Council on June 29, at least 142 families lost three or more members in an attack on residential buildings during last summer's war, resulting in 742 deaths. "The fact that Israel did not revise its practice of air-strikes, even after their dire effects on civilians became apparent, raises questions of whether this was part of a broader policy which was at least tacitly approved at the highest level of government," the commission said in a statement. The investigators meanwhile also decried the "indiscriminate" firing of thousands of rockets and mortars at Israel, which it said appeared to have been intended to "spread terror" among Israeli civilians. Palestinian armed groups fired 4,881 rockets and 1,753 mortars towards Israel, killing six civilians and injuring at least 1,600 others, it pointed out. And the two-member commission pointed out that tunnels dug by Palestinian militants into Israel had traumatised Israeli civilians "who feared they could be attacked at any moment by gunmen bursting out of the ground." While the conflict has ended, McGowan Davis pointed to a "pervasive failure on all sides to achieve justice" for the wrongs committed. The investigators voiced particular concern that a sense of "impunity prevails across the board for violations... allegedly committed by Israeli forces, whether it be in the context of active hostilities in Gaza or killings, torture and ill-treatment in the West Bank." They urged Israel to "break with its recent lamentable track record in holding wrongdoers accountable." The commission was not granted entry to Israel or the conflict area, and relied instead on more than 280 confidential interviews and some 500 written submissions for its findings. The report had been scheduled to be published during the council's main annual session in March, but the investigators obtained a delay after the head of the team quit under Israeli pressure.

Pak heat waves kill 132 in Karachi

At least 141 people, including 132 alone in capital Karachi, have died due to an intense ongoing heatwave sweeping across many parts of Pakistan's southern Sindh province. Nine deaths were reported from Thatta and Tharparkar in the interior of the Sindh province, health officials said. "Five people died from dehydration and heat stroke in Thatta and four in Tharparkar yesterday," a Sindh health ministry official told PTI. The total number of deaths in Sindh province has climbed to around 141 since the heatwave started on Friday. Sindh Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah told reporters in Karachi on Sunday that emergency had been declared in all the government hospitals of Karachi and other cities in the province. "Orders have been issued for uninterrupted supply of power and water to the emergency centres of all hospitals to deal with the mortality cases due to the heat wave," Shah said. Temperatures of around 44 to 45 degrees Celsius have been recorded in the port city of Karachi since Friday, which was also the first day of the holy month of Ramadan. Pakistan's Meteorological Department recorded Saturday as the hottest day of this year's summer in Karachi, where the mercury shot up to 45 degrees Celsius. Frequent power outages have also compounded people's woes and led to violent protests in several parts of Karachi, Pakistan's largest city with a population of 20 million.

S Korea, Japan mark 50 years of ties

East Asian neighbours South Korea and Japan marked the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties yesterday with a push to mend relations strained for years by feuds over the legacy of Japan's wartime past. The key US allies are also working towards their first leaders' meeting in three years, hoping to move past tension that has complicated efforts to improve security cooperation in the face of an unpredictable North Korea and an assertive China. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe attended a reception hosted by the South Korean embassy in Tokyo, while South Korean President Park Geun-hye was to attend a ceremony hosted by the Japanese embassy in Seoul. Until Sunday, the two leaders had been expected only to send messages. "Let us build a new era for our two countries together, while looking back at the 50 years of history of friendship and development and looking forward at the next 50 years," Abe said at the reception, where guests were serenaded with traditional Japanese and Korean music. "For that, I would like to join forces with President Park Geun-hye and work together." Park echoed the message, calling for the two countries to make a fresh start at a reception hosted by the Japanese embassy in Seoul and attended by heads of missions from around the world, including US Ambassador Mark Lippert. "As we seek to do so, what is important is to ensure that circumstances are put in place that allow us to free ourselves of the heavy burden of history, our single greatest impediment, in the spirit of reconciliation and harmony," Park added.



Yun Byung-se (L) presents Shinzo Abe (R) with photos of his father.

Ukraine Crisis EU extends Russia sanctions to 2016

EU foreign ministers formally agreed yesterday to prolong to January 2016 damaging economic sanctions against Russia to ensure it fully implements Ukraine peace accords, officials said. "EU has extended economic sanctions against Russia until 31 January 2016, with a view to complete implementation of (the) Minsk agreement," an EU spokeswoman said in a tweeted message. The 28-nation bloc hit Russia's banking, oil and defence sectors with punitive measures after Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 was shot down in July last year over territory held by pro-Moscow rebels. Up to that point, many EU members had been reluctant to adopt full scale economic sanctions, agreeing only to travel bans and asset freezes against Russian and Ukrainian figures. Those reservations remain but as the crisis has deepened, the EU has stuck with the tougher sanctions. It has also warned, alongside the United States, that more could follow unless Moscow withdraws support for the rebels and use its influence with them to implement a ceasefire accord signed in the Belarus capital Minsk in February. In March, EU leaders agreed in principle to roll the sanctions over by linking them directly to the Minsk accord, which runs to December this year. The ceasefire has largely held but Kiev and the rebels swap charges daily over breaches, and observers reported a sharp pick up in fighting earlier this month in a conflict which has claimed more than 6,500 lives and destroyed much of eastern Ukraine. The foreign ministers of France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia are due to meet in Paris on Tuesday to review the situation. NATO head Jens Stoltenberg welcomed the EU decision, stressing how important it was that Russia face the consequences of its actions. Russia meanwhile expressed disappointment, blaming partisan EU groups for the decision.



Turkish police officers arrest protesters in front of the Education ministry in Ankara yesterday as students demonstrate against the complex exams system.

Germany 'frees' Jazeera joumo

German authorities yesterday ordered the release of Al-Jazeera journalist Ahmed Mansour, two days after detaining him at the request of his native Egypt in a move that sparked outrage from rights groups. "We welcome this decision by the German prosecutor," said Al-Jazeera spokesman Hareth Adlouni, adding that all charges had been dropped against 52-year-old Mansour, one of the best known TV journalists in the Arabic world. Berlin prosecutors in a short statement said they would not seek his extradition and had ordered Mansour's release, citing both "legal aspects and possible political-diplomatic concerns", without detailing them. Mansour, an Egyptian-British dual national, was controversially arrested Saturday at a Berlin airport, where he had been due to fly to Doha. He had been sentenced last year by an Egyptian court in absentia to 15 years in prison on torture and other charges which he has rejected as "absurd". Supporters and journalists massed outside the Berlin prison where the journalist was being held. They waved banners that said "Freedom for Mansour", with some demonstrators taping their mouths shut to symbolise what they charge is Egypt's crackdown on free expression.

Pakistan to monitor foreign aid groups

Pakistan's Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan yesterday said the government planned to centralise responsibility for monitoring and regulating the activities of foreign aid organisations under his ministry. He said aid groups including Save the Children would be allowed to operate for the next six months but must re-register with the authorities within three months, in line with an announcement last week.

SA denies plot to protect Bashir

South Africa's government has denied reports that ministers secretly plotted the departure of Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir last week. He faced the possibility of arrest because of an International Criminal Court warrant on charges of genocide. The government argued that Bashir was covered by diplomatic immunity while he was at the summit. South Africa's Sunday Times newspaper quotes a government source as saying that at a meeting of security ministers it was agreed that South Africa would protect Bashir "even if it meant flouting court rulings and undermining the constitution". In a statement, the government "categorically denies there was a secret meeting" and adds that it will give the court an explanation of how Bashir came to leave the country. The High Court has given the government until Thursday to reveal how he was allowed to depart.

'OBAMA COFFEE' GAG Israel minister's wife apologises

The flamboyant wife of Israeli Interior Minister Silvan Shalom published an "inappropriate joke" Sunday about US President Barack Obama on her Twitter account, only to later delete it and apologise. "Do u know what Obama Coffee is? Black and weak," Judy Shalom Nir-Mozes wrote to her 74,400 followers. Online shock, condemnation and accusations of racism later led her to delete the incriminating tweet. "I apologize, that was a stupid joke somebody told me," she wrote on her @JudyMozes Twitter account in English.

Obama uses n-word to make point on racism

President Barack Obama used the n-word to make a point about the reality of racism in America during an interview released yesterday with comedian Marc Maron. Obama weighed in for the podcast "WTF with Marc Maron" on the national debate on race relations and gun control that has been reignited after the Charleston shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Obama said that progress on race relations has been made, citing his own experience as a young man who was born to a white mother and an African father. "I always tell young people, in particular, do not say that nothing has changed when it comes to race in America, unless you've lived through being a black man in the 1950s or '60s or '70s. It is incontrovertible that race relations have improved significantly during my lifetime and yours," Obama said. But he added that "the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, discrimination" exists in institutions and casts "a long shadow and that's still part of our DNA that's passed on." Obama used the N-word and explained that the absence of racist language does not mean that racism doesn't exist. "Racism, we are not cured of it. And it's not just a matter of it not being polite to say nigger in public," Obama said. "That's not the measure of whether racism still exists or not. It's not just a matter of overt discrimination. Societies don't, overnight, completely erase everything that happened 200 to 300 years prior."

