

NEWS IN brief

WB announces \$500m for quake-hit Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu
The World Bank yesterday announced it will provide up to \$500 million for reconstruction in quake-devastated Nepal which is preparing to host a major conference to increase donations. The twin quakes that struck in April and May killed more than 8,800 people, destroyed nearly half a million houses and damaged another 280,000, leaving thousands in need of food, clean water

UK arrests Rwanda spy chief over 'war crimes'

AFP, London
British police have arrested the head of Rwanda's intelligence service on a warrant issued by Spain, officials said Tuesday, sparking outrage from Kigali. The police said Karenzi Karake was held on suspicion of war crimes, apparently in reference to a 2008 arrest warrant from a Spanish court for genocide, war crimes, crimes against

Myanmar starts charter debate

AFP, Yangon
Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday called again for changes to Myanmar's junta-era constitution as lawmakers began a debate that will test the army's determination to preserve its political power before landmark elections. The opposition leader is focusing on a clause (436) that effectively hands the army a veto over any amendments. The clause calls for a 75 percent majority in votes on major constitutional changes, ensuring that unelected soldiers -- who are reserved a quarter of the parliamentary seats

Afghans recapture key district from Taliban

REUTERS, Kabul
Afghan government forces regained control of a key district near the northern city of Kunduz yesterday, after Taliban fighters had threatened to capture a provincial capital for the first time since being driven

US data hack' 4 times larger'

CNN ONLINE
The personal data of an estimated 18 million current, former and prospective federal employees were affected by a cyber breach at the Office of Personnel Management -- more than four times the 4.2 million the agency has publicly acknowledged. US investigators believe the Chinese government is behind the



Protesters gesture as a riot police vehicle sprays a jet of water to disperse them during a rally against a recent decision to raise public electricity prices in Yerevan, Armenia, yesterday. Nearly 6,000 demonstrators rallied in the Armenian capital yesterday after riot police used water cannon to break up an earlier protest against electricity price hikes.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Kurds seize town near ISIS 'capital'

REUTERS, Beirut
Kurdish-led forces in Syria seized a town from Islamic State yesterday after capturing a military base overnight, aided by US-led air strikes in some of the most dramatic gains yet against the militants.
The Kurdish march deep into the heart of Islamic State territory follows their capture of a town on the Turkish border last week, halting the momentum of militants who had seized major towns in both Syria and Iraq last month.
The Kurdish YPG-led forces had taken full control of Ain Issa, said Redur Xelil, a spokesman for the group. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which reports on the war, said Islamic State fighters had completely withdrawn from the town.
Overnight, the advancing forces took control of the nearby Liwa-93 military base, a strategic objective which Islamic State had captured last year from government forces.
The advance to Ain Issa brings the Kurdish forces and smaller Syrian rebel groups fighting alongside them to just 50 km (30 miles) from Raqqa, Islamic State's de facto capital, from which it rules over a "caliphate" across much of Syria and Iraq. Xelil said an assault on the city was not currently on the agenda.
The YPG fighters have emerged as the most credible ally of the US-led campaign on the ground in Syria, where Washington has fewer friends than in Iraq. Xelil described the US-led air support as "excellent".

RUSSIAN AGGRESSION FEARS IN BALTICS, EASTERN EUROPE US to deploy heavy weapons

AFP, Tallinn
The US will deploy heavy weapons in central and eastern Europe for the first time, Washington said yesterday, in the midst of the worst standoff between Russia and the West since the Cold War, triggered by the crisis in Ukraine.
"We will temporarily stage one armoured brigade combat team's vehicles and associated equipment in countries in central and eastern Europe," US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter said at a joint press conference with three Baltic defence ministers on the eve of NATO ministerial talks.
"This pre-positioned European activity set includes tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, artillery," he said, adding that Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania and Poland had "agreed to host company- to battalion-sized elements of this equipment" which would be "moved around the region for training and exercises."
"While we do not seek a cold, let alone a hot war with Russia, we will defend our allies," Carter added.
The US embassy in Warsaw said the "temporary" deployment would include approximately "250 tanks, Bradleys, and self-propelled howitzers, and

associated armoured brigade combat team equipment in Baltic and Central European countries."
"The American move sends a signal to both Russia, US allies and other global powers that the US is a leading global military power able to counter Russian threats in the region -- that it's not a power in decline," Marcin Terlikowski, a security analyst with the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM), told AFP.
The US announcement comes as Nato vowed Monday to step up its military presence in eastern Europe against the backdrop of the conflict in Ukraine.
Ukrainian rebels yesterday accused government forces of killing three civilians in attacks launched hours before the start of crunch talks in Paris on ways to halt the 15-month separatist war.
Attending exercises in Poland last week, Nato head Jens Stoltenberg said the alliance was "implementing the biggest reinforcement of our collective defences since the end of the Cold War", after Russia announced that it would expand its nuclear arsenal.
Moscow made the announcement after reports about the US plans to deploy heavy weapons to eastern Europe emerged.



Ashton Carter

US-CHINA ANNUAL STRATEGIC TALKS World's seaways must remain 'open': Biden

AFP, Washington
The United States and China must be "honest and direct" about future ties, US Vice President Joe Biden said yesterday, warning Beijing that the world's seaways must remain open for trade.
Welcoming a top delegation of Chinese officials to Washington for annual strategic and economic talks, Biden said Beijing must be at the table in all important global negotiations.
"I believe that the future of China's success and global influence is directly tied to the extent to which it acts as a responsible stakeholder," Biden said.
"Essential to this is to find new ways to work together even as we seek to manage future competition."
But he delivered a sharp warning to Beijing amid territorial disputes

with Asian neighbors over the South and East China Seas that the world's waterways must remain "open and protected" for trade.
The world's two leading economies remain at odds over China's claims to much of the South China Sea and Washington has repeatedly urged Beijing to stop building artificial islands in the area.
But China said last month it will project its military power further beyond its borders at sea and more assertively in the air.
"Nations that discard diplomacy and use coercion and intimidation to settle disputes, or turn a blind eye to aggression of others only invite instability," Biden warned.
Although the US vice president did not gloss over differences, he praised China for being "a partner" on many issues from nuclear negotiations to climate change.

Iran MPs pass bill to protect nuke rights'

AFP, Tehran
Iran's parliament approved a controversial bill yesterday that it said would protect the country's nuclear programme, but which could also hinder final negotiations on a deal with world powers.
The move re-exposed persistent tension between President Hassan Rouhani's government and lawmakers in Tehran, where hardliners routinely voice doubt about the merit of talking to the West.
One of Rouhani's vice presidents said the bill, which still has to be signed into law by Iran's Guardian Council, was unconstitutional and would not help its negotiators at "a sensitive point" in the talks.
The move, just one week before the deadline for an international agreement on the Islamic republic's disputed nuclear programme, lays down terms for MPs' accepting it.
Rohani, a moderate who aims to end Iran's diplomatic isolation, wants an agreement that can lift sanctions that have hobbled the economy.
The draft law says the government must "preserve the country's nuclear rights and achievements", a reference to retaining the ability to enrich uranium and keeping all nuclear facilities open.
Such demands have already been enshrined in an outline agreement struck on April 2 between Iran and the P5+1 powers.
But the bill, whose backers said it would protect Iran's negotiating team from further demands, goes further and says sanctions must be lifted "on the day Iran starts implementing its obligations". P5+1 have said it can only happen upon international verification that Iran has met require-

Pak heatwave toll nears 700

AFP, Karachi
Nearly 700 people have died in a severe three-day heatwave in Pakistan, officials said yesterday, with medics battling to treat patients as a state of emergency was declared in hospitals.
The majority of people died in government-run hospitals in the port city of Karachi, Pakistan's economic hub of around 20 million people, as temperatures reached 45 degrees Celsius (111 Fahrenheit) at the weekend.
"The number of people who have died in the heatwave has now reached 692," said Saeed Mangnejo, a senior provincial health official, adding that the toll may rise further.
The highest number of deaths have been recorded at Karachi's largest hospital, Post Graduate Medical College Hospital, where they have treated more than 3,000 patients, doctor Semi Jamila told AFP.
Pakistan's largest charity, Edhi Welfare Organisation, said their two morgues in the city had received more than 400 corpses in the last three days.
Meanwhile, seven people have died from the heat in Punjab province over the past 24 hours, officials said.
The deaths came as the overwhelmingly Muslim country of around 200 million people observes the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, during which eating and drinking is forbidden from sunrise to sunset.
Some clerics have issued public warnings saying that physically weak people can abstain from fasting in these



A Pakistani resident helps a heatstroke victim at a market area during a heatwave in Karachi, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



SISTER NIRMALA PASSES AWAY

AFP, Kolkata
Sister Nirmala Joshi, who succeeded Mother Teresa as head of her Missionaries of Charity in the eastern Indian city of Kolkata, died yesterday at the age of 81, church officials said.
Joshi had been suffering from a heart condition and her health had been deteriorating recently, confining her to a Missionaries of Charity home, Archbishop of Kolkata Thomas D'Souza and media reports said.
"She had been suffering from a heart disease for quite some time, but she never lost her smile and was always cheerful," D'Souza told AFP.
Hundreds are expected to turn out for her funeral which is to be held in Kolkata today.

ACTION AGAINST PAKISTAN ON LAKHVI China blocks India's move at UN

PTI, United Nations
China has blocked India's move in the UN demanding action against Pakistan over release of Mumbai attack mastermind and LeT commander Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi in violation of a resolution of the world body as it contended that India provided insufficient information.
As the UN sanctions committee met here at India's request, a clarification was to be sought from Pakistan over Lakhvi's release in the 26/11 trial but the Chinese representatives blocked the move on grounds that India did not provide sufficient information, official sources said.
In a letter to the current chair of the UN sanctions committee Jim McLay, India's permanent representative to the UN Asoke Mukherjee last month had said Lakhvi's release by a Pakistani court was in violation of the 1267 UN resolution dealing with designated entities and individuals.
The sanctions measures apply to designated individuals and entities associated with terror groups including al-Qaeda and LeT, wherever located.
The sanctions' committee has five permanent and 10 non-permanent UN member states in it.
The release of Lakhvi had also raised concerns in the US, UK, Russia, France and Germany with Washington calling for him to be re-arrested.
Lakhvi and six others -- Abdul Wajid, Mazhar Iqbal, Hamad Amin Sadiq, Shahid Jameel Riaz, Jamil Ahmed and Younis Anjum -- have been charged with planning and executing the Mumbai attack in November, 2008 that left 166 people dead.

LALITGATE SCAM Voice of 'dissent' in BJP

TNN, New Delhi
In a remark that is likely to give more ammunition to opposition in the Lalitgate, former Indian home secretary and BJP MP RK Singh yesterday said that "it is absolutely wrong to help a fugitive".
RK Singh urged the government to take all measures to bring Lalit Modi back to India to face the law.
Singh's strong comments are the first public criticism by a ruling party MP against the help extended to Lalit Modi by external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj and Rajasthan chief minister Vasundhara Raje, an issue which has snowballed into a major political storm for the Narendra Modi government even though BJP has defended both the leaders.

WIKILEAKS Saudi offered \$10b to release Mubarak

ANI, Karachi
Saudi Arabia allegedly offered \$10 billion to secure the release of ousted Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, according to documents released last week by WikiLeaks.
Some of the several documents leaked by WikiLeaks quoted a Brotherhood leader as saying that the group could ensure Mubarak would not go to prison in exchange for \$10 billion, reported The Express Tribune.
However, a handwritten note said that paying ransom for Mubarak was 'not a good idea' because the Brotherhood could not prevent his incarceration.
Mubarak, who has been Saudi's ally for a long time, is currently serving his jail term in Egypt and facing legal trials.
WikiLeaks released the first part of over a half-a-million cables and other documents from the Saudi Foreign Ministry, termed 'The Saudi Cables,' on Friday.
While it did not say where it obtained the documents from, it referred to a statement released by Riyadh in May that said its computer networks had suffered a security breach. The cyber attack was later claimed by a group that called itself the 'Yemeni Cyber Army.'
Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has asked its citizens to ignore the diplomatic documents leaked by WikiLeaks, saying they were forged.

