

NEWS IN brief

Pak PM pushes new talks with Taliban

AFP, Islamabad
Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif yesterday said he is trying to revive peace talks with the Taliban after the latest round was derailed by untimely news of the death of leader Mullah Omar. Islamabad organised the first set of direct peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government in July.

Mother Teresa charity stops adoption in India

PTI, Kolkata
Following revision in guidelines on adoption by the Centre, the Missionaries of Charity, set up by Mother Teresa, on Saturday said it had stopped adoption at their orphanages two months ago. The Missionaries said it would continue to serve wholeheartedly and free of charge unwed mothers, children with malnutrition and differently-abled children in all homes/centres run by it, irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

Nepali PM resigns to run for second time

AFP, Kathmandu
Nepal's Prime Minister Sushil Koirala yesterday filed his nomination for re-election, a day before the parliament of the troubled Himalayan nation elects a new premier. As a formality, Koirala resigned from his post yesterday. The leader of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), KP Sharma Oli, has already thrown his hat in the ring for the prime minister's post.



Musician Ravindra Jain passes away

TNN, Mumbai
Ravindra Jain, whose unassuming music and lyrics for Chitchor, Geet Gaata Chal and Ankhiyon Ke Jharokhe Se stormed the countdown charts in the 1970s, died owing to multiple organ failure at Mumbai's Lilavati hospital on Friday. He was 71. Jain, born in Aligarh, burst into public consciousness with the romantically rebellious track, Le Jayenge le jayenge dilwale dulhania le jayenge (film: Chor Machaye Shor) that wedding bands play to this day.

China restaurant explosion kills 17

AP, Beijing
A liquefied gas container exploded in a restaurant in eastern China at lunchtime yesterday, causing a fire and killing 17 people, according to a local authority. The explosion happened just before noon at a small private-run restaurant in Wuhu city's Jinghu district, the Wuhu city government said on its microblog.



These pictures were taken from different locations of Gaza, West Bank and Jerusalem yesterday during clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian protesters.



PHOTO: AFP

Third 'intifada' on the cards?

5 more Palestinians killed in clashes with Israeli forces as violence spirals

AGENCIES
Violence between Israelis and Palestinians threatened to spiral out of control yesterday with two more Palestinians killed in Gaza, two stabbings outside Jerusalem's Old City and more West Bank clashes. Israeli security forces yesterday shot dead two Palestinians aged 12 and 15 in protests along Gaza's border fence, Palestinian medics said, and Israeli police said they killed three Palestinian assailants in separate violence in Jerusalem. While Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and president Mahmud Abbas have sought to avoid an escalation, frustrated Palestinian youths have defied efforts to restore calm and a wave of stabbings has spread fear in Israel. The violence has raised concerns about a new Palestinian uprising. Police said two ultra-Orthodox Jewish men were wounded in the knife

attack by a 16-year-old Palestinian near Jerusalem's walled Old City. Earlier, paramilitary police shot dead a militant who had opened fire at them during late-night clashes at the Palestinian Shuafat refugee camp, police said. Tensions have surged in 11 days of violence in which four Israelis and 19 Palestinians - including several Palestinians shot by police, have been killed in Jerusalem, the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Gaza and in Israeli cities. Scores of Palestinians have been injured in clashes with Israeli troops and at least 12 Israelis have been wounded in almost daily Palestinian stabbing attacks. The violence has been fuelled by Palestinian fears that visits by Jewish groups, including lawmakers, to the Jerusalem Old City plaza revered in Judaism as the site of two destroyed biblical temples are eroding Muslim religious control of the al-Aqsa mosque compound, Islam's third holiest shrine. The violence is not of the intensity

of two Palestinian uprisings in the late 1980s and early 2000s but it has prompted talk of a third "intifada". The clashes came as Hamas's chief in Gaza, Ismail Haniya, called the overall violence an intifada and urged further unrest. Ali al-Qaradaghi, a prominent Muslim cleric, urged worshippers yesterday to join what he described as an uprising. On Friday Israeli soldiers shot dead seven Palestinians in protests near the Gaza border and a knife-wielding Israeli wounded four Arabs in the southern Israeli town of Dimona. It was the worst day of violence in the Palestinian enclave since last summer's war with Israel, which killed more than 2,200 and left 100,000 homeless. Also on Friday, the Israeli military said Gaza militants fired a rocket into southern Israel. No group claimed responsibility. The attack caused no casualties or damage.

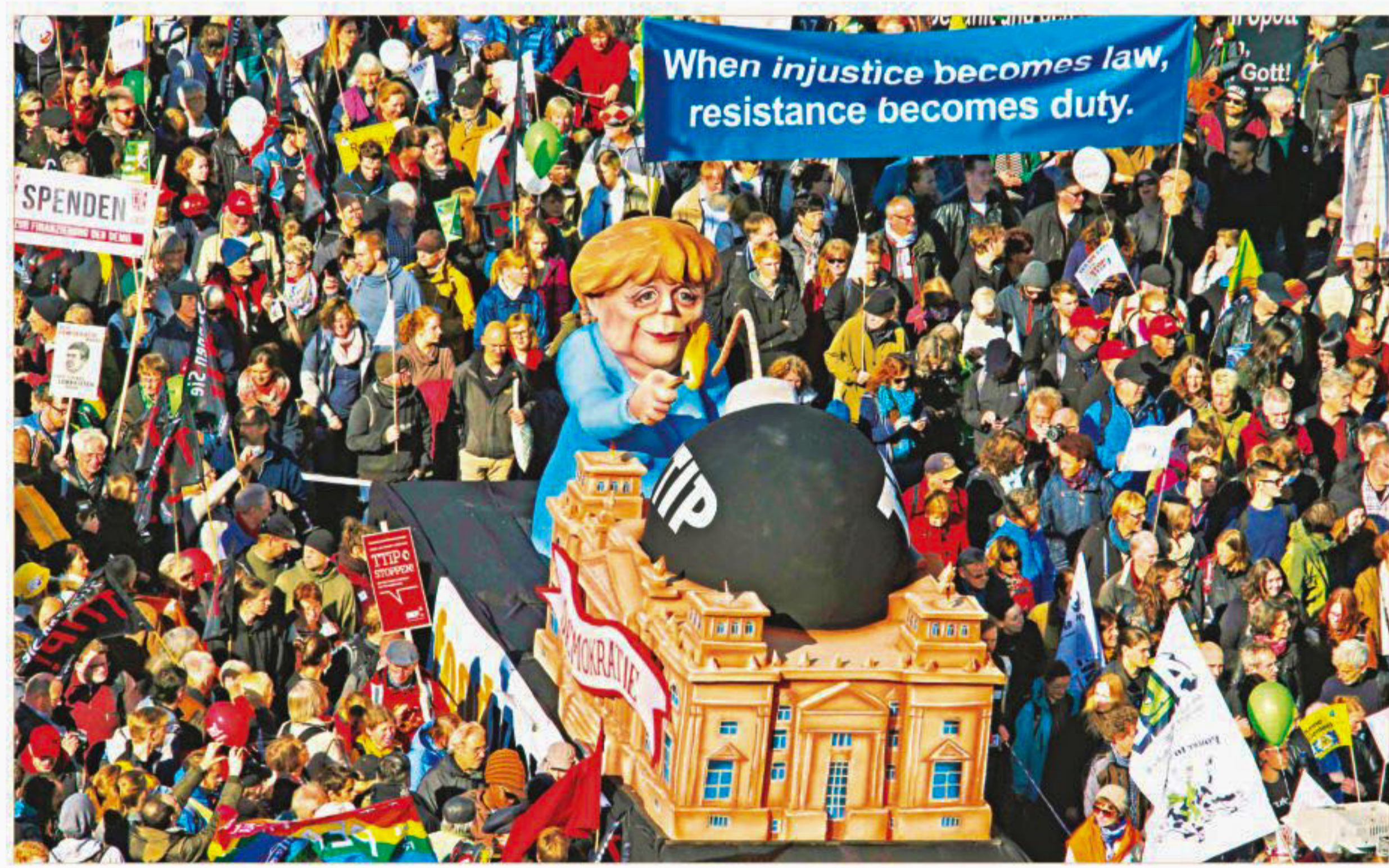
Saudi crush deadliest hajj tragedy: report

AP, Dubai
One survivor of last month's crush and stampede at the hajj in Saudi Arabia recalled seeing so many bodies that he couldn't tell how many there were. The Associated Press sought to answer that question, arriving at a death toll of at least 1,470. That made the September 24 disaster the deadliest accident ever at the annual pilgrimage. And hundreds remain missing. The AP count is 701 higher than Saudi Arabia's official tally of 769 killed and 934 injured in the September 24 disaster in Mina, a few miles from the holy city of Mecca. Saudi authorities have not updated their casualty toll since September 26. The previous deadliest-ever incident at the hajj happened in 1990, when a stampede killed 1,426. The AP figure comes from statements and officials' comments from 19 of the over 180 countries that sent citizens to the five-day annual pilgrimage. Iran says it had 465 pilgrims killed, while Egypt lost 165 and Indonesia 120. Others include India with 101, Nigeria with 99, Pakistan with 93, Mali with 70, Bangladesh with 63 (according to Bangladeshi officials the death toll now stands at 79), Senegal with 54, Benin with 51, Cameroon with 42, Ethiopia with 31, Sudan with 30, Morocco with 27, Algeria with 25, Ghana with 12, Chad with 11, Kenya with eight and Turkey with three. Hundreds remain missing.

Modi's reform push faces crunch test in Bihar vote

AFP, Patna
Prime Minister Narendra Modi faces a crucial test tomorrow when Bihar, one of India's largest and poorest states, begins voting in polls that could have major consequences for his troubled reform drive. Modi has mounted a no-holds barred campaign, promising Biharis billions of dollars for development in a state where many of its 104 million people still vote along caste lines. He is up against an unlikely alliance of two powerful local leaders, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and his predecessor Lalu Prasad Yadav, who has served time in prison for corruption. Their rivalry goes back decades, but both men -- who command widespread support among the lower castes -- have put their differences aside to thwart Modi, highlighting the premier's polarising nature. Voting begins on October 12 and runs in five phases, with the results due on November 8.

Modi himself has been at the forefront of his party's campaign, addressing a host of rallies, including one on Friday near the town of Aurangabad attended by about 10,000 people. But analysts say the outcome is too close to call. And as criticism mounts that Modi's pledge to transform the economy is running out of steam, observers say a defeat for his right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will heighten the sense of declining momentum. Sanjay Kumar, of the Delhi-based Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, said there was a widespread fear within the party that defeat could signal "the beginning of an end of the BJP government", even though the next general election is not until 2019. Assembly elections are important not only because state leaders wield significant power, but because parties gain seats in India's upper house of parliament, where the BJP lacks a majority.



Consumer rights activists take part in a march to protest against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), mass husbandry and genetic engineering, in Berlin, Germany, yesterday. The European Union is pursuing a trade accord with the United States, called the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), that would encompass a third of world trade and nearly half of global GDP. PHOTO: REUTERS

North Korea ready for 'any' US war

AFP, Pyongyang
North Korea's leader Kim Jong-Un yesterday said his country could fight any war provoked by the United States, as he presided over a vast military parade to mark the 70th anniversary of the ruling Workers' Party. Thousands of troops marched through the capital followed by columns of tanks, armoured vehicles and ballistic missiles, in what was tipped to be one of the largest ceremonial displays of military strength in North Korea's history. Dressed in his customary dark Mao suit, Kim struck a more belligerent note than in previous public addresses, telling the assembled masses in Kim Il-Sung square that North Korea could fight any war begun by the US. "Our party dauntlessly declares that our revolutionary armed forces are capable of fighting any kind of war provoked by the US and we are ready to protect our people and the blue sky of our motherland," he said. His words were met with rapturous applause from tens of thousands of flag-waving spectators, while above the square, a large banner slung from a gas-filled balloon read: "Long live the invincible Workers' Party of Korea." Poor but nuclear-armed North Korea often threatens to destroy the US and South Korea, with which it technically remains at war after their 1950-53 conflict ended in a truce, not a treaty. The North remains deeply politically isolated on the world stage, and its closest ally China was the only country to send a diplomat to the event. North Korea has conducted three nuclear tests and threatened a fourth as part of a nuclear weapons and missile programme that it has pursued through a barrage of international sanctions.



A soldier cries as her vehicle drives past a stand with North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un during a parade in Pyongyang, yesterday.

Indian cops arrest 21 after new violence

AFP, New Delhi
Indian police yesterday arrested 21 men after a mob thrashed two Muslims suspected of slaughtering a cow and set fire to some dozen shops. The incident was reported from northern Uttar Pradesh state, where a mob recently murdered a 50-year-old Muslim man for supposedly eating beef -- a taboo in the Hindu-majority nation. The Times of India said some 500 people armed with bamboo sticks and iron rods had set fire to shops belonging to Muslims before police dispersed the mob using tear gas. Police said a post-mortem of the cow showed it had been dead for a while and the men were only removing its skin when they were attacked by the mob.

RUSSIAN MILITARY MOVES IN SYRIA

West left with limited options

AFP, Paris
Blind-sided by Russia's sudden escalation in Syria, Western powers must abandon hopes of toppling the regime and instead make do with steering Moscow away from actions that deepen the conflict, analysts say. The strategy of the United States and its allies looked uncertain long before Russian President Vladimir Putin decided to dramatically increase his military involvement in Syria in recent weeks. The West's strategic shortcomings were demonstrated by the disastrous \$500-million (440-million-euro) US programme to train and arm moderate rebels, which generated only a handful of fighters, many of whom surrendered or were captured almost immediately. The scheme was finally scrapped on Friday. The confusion has looked all the greater since the start of Russia's far more clear-eyed engagement in support of its old ally, President Bashar al-Assad. "The Russian mission is tight and focused around the aim of preserving Assad while the West has had a muddled approach, trying to remove Assad, prevent the rise of extremists and preserve state institutions at the same time," said Julien Barnes-Dacey, Middle East fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. Russia has flexed its muscles with repeated air strikes and the launching this week of 26 cruise missiles from the Caspian Sea.



"The Russians have shown a naval capacity that was not expected," said Thomas Gomart, head of the French Institute for Foreign Relations. "They are in the process of creating a bubble over Syria and challenging the West's aerial supremacy." The message goes beyond the immediate concerns of the Syrian conflict, he said. Since the Gulf War in 1991, the West has prioritised control of the skies -- a fact that Russia is trying to challenge. Russia's moves have severely limited the West's options about what to do next in the war-torn country. With Russia's planes in Syrian airspace and its advisors surrounding Assad, any remaining Western hopes of toppling his regime are effectively over for the time being. "There's no desire in the West to go to war with Russia over Syria, and there is a legitimate fear that counter-escalation will only lead to more violence, state breakdown, extremism and refugees," Barnes-Dacey said. "There is no win to be had from making things more difficult for the Russians, when Europe will pay the cost as well." Camille Grand, head of the Strategic Research Foundation in Paris, counts herself among the analysts who feel Putin has bitten off more than he can chew in Syria, and may soon realise that the best move is to rein in Assad's excesses and make an accommodation with the West.