

NEWS IN brief

Cross-border Afghan fire kills 7 Pak soldiers

Heavy cross-border fire from Afghanistan killed seven Pakistani soldiers yesterday at a checkpoint in a troubled tribal area, the army said. It said the heavy fire from across the border targeted a checkpoint northeast of Angoor Adda in South Waziristan tribal region.

Malaysia becoming 'police state': HRW

Malaysia increasingly resembles a "police state" as the government uses repressive laws to silence critics including those demanding the prime minister answer corruption allegations, Human Rights Watch said yesterday. Those targeted increasingly include opponents who accuse Najib and state-owned company 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) of corruption, it added.

Carson takes lead over Trump in GOP race

Ben Carson has edged ahead of Donald Trump nationally in the US battle for the Republican presidential nomination, a new poll showed yesterday.



DEADLY TREMOR IN PAKISTAN, AFGHANISTAN

(From left, clockwise) Men look for their belongings after a massive earthquake, in Kishim district of Badakhshan province, Afghanistan, yesterday; rescue workers carry an injured Afghan girl to hospital; and injured Pakistanis are treated in a hospital in Peshawar. Desperate survivors appealed for food and blankets yesterday after a devastating earthquake killed more than 360 people in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

EU votes down net neutrality bill

The European Parliament has voted against a set of rules intended to safeguard "net neutrality" in the EU. A series of amendments to a regulation on how internet traffic is managed in Europe were all rejected by MEPs.

Proponents of net neutrality, who demand that web traffic be treated equally by networks, have already criticised the move.

The existing legislation, which was accepted, will be developed into regulations.

Campaigners have said that provisions for protecting net neutrality in the existing text of the rules are too vague and many worry that it will be easy for internet firms to strike deals with content providers which may not be advantageous for everyone.

Although some campaigners had suggested there might be growing support for the amendments within the parliament, all were voted down in large majorities.

Prior to the vote, the inventor of the world wide web Sir Tim Berners-Lee and a host of tech companies - including Netflix, Reddit and Kickstarter - had expressed their support for the amendments and urged MEPs to vote them through.

EU risks 'tectonic changes'

Warns European Council president; migrant arrivals top 700,000: UN

Europe's worst migration crisis since World War II risks triggering "tectonic changes", a top EU official warned yesterday, as figures showed more than 700,000 newcomers reached the continent's Mediterranean shores so far this year.

Leaders of France and Germany were due to discuss the crisis which has also prompted a spat between the premier of Germany's Bavaria state and neighbouring Austria over its handling of migrants.

"The situation will deteriorate even further," European Council president Donald Tusk said, warning of a "new wave of refugees (arriving) from Aleppo and other Syrian regions under Russian bombardment".

"I have no doubt that this challenge has the potential to change the European Union we have built," he told the European Parliament in

Strasbourg. "And what is even more dangerous, it has the potential to create tectonic changes in the European political landscape. And these are not changes for the better."

Meanwhile, European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker slammed EU member states for only providing less than half of the experts pledged to the bloc's

REFUGEE CRISIS IN EUROPE

Frontex border agency in migrant hotspots Greece and Italy. "Member states have been moving slowly at a time when they should be running," he said.

Of the 775 border guards needed, EU countries have only provided 326 over the past month, Juncker said, adding that many bloc members had also failed so far to keep their promises of financial support.

The stinging criticism came just days after the EU vowed to help set up 100,000 places in reception centres in Greece and along the route through the Balkans.

The move is part of a 17-point action plan devised with the countries most affected by the crisis.

More than half of this year's arrivals in Europe were from Syria, followed by Afghanistan and Iraq, the UN refugee agency said yesterday.

Some 562,355 people desperately fleeing war and misery reached Greece's shores, while around 140,000 arrived in Italy since January.

Children made up 20 percent of the arrivals, the agency said.

Of these, at least 3,210 people have either died or gone missing as they made the journey plagued with danger. International Organization for Migration reported the arrival of 5,239 people in Greece on Saturday and 4,199 on Sunday.

Political storm hits New Delhi after 'beef raid'

A police "raid" on Kerala House here to check if it served beef triggered a storm yesterday, with the chief ministers of Kerala, Delhi and West Bengal as well as Left leaders condemning the "intolerance" and demanding action against Delhi Police, which reports to the central government.

Although there was no response from the central government, Delhi Police commissioner BS Bassi insisted that his men did not "raid" Kerala House on Monday and broke no law. He said police only wanted to prevent possible trouble after they got a complaint that beef was served in the canteen of Kerala House.

Kerala House promptly took off "carabeef" (buffalo meat) from its menu after some 20 policemen entered the premises and made inquiries and made it clear that it was not cow meat.

Kerala House yesterday said beef would return to its menu from today.

After calling the police action "unwarranted and unfortunate", Kerala chief minister Oommen Chandy wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking action against Delhi Police.

"Kerala House is not a private hotel. It is the official building of the Kerala government," he added.

In Kolkata, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee said: "I strongly condemn what happened at Kerala House. An unwise and unhealthy attempt to curb fundamental rights of people. Intolerance."

Separately, the AAP, which governs Delhi and do not have control over police, said it "strongly condemns the completely unjustified raid at Kerala House."

'IS captives tied to Palmyra artifacts and blown up'

The Islamic State jihadist group executed three people in Syria's ancient city of Palmyra by binding them to three historic columns and blowing them up, a monitoring group said Monday.

Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said IS on Sunday "tied three individuals it had arrested from Palmyra and its outskirts to the columns... and executed them by blowing up" three columns.

The Islamic State group has captured swathes of territory across Iraq and Syria to create a self-styled "caliphate" where it enforces an extreme form of Islamic rule.

IS considers pre-Islamic artefacts to be idolatrous and therefore worthy of destruction.

Since the jihadists seized Palmyra from regime forces in May, they have destroyed



multiple sites and historic artefacts, including its celebrated temples of Bel and Baal Shamin as well as several funerary towers.

IS has used Palmyra's grand amphitheatre for a massacre in which child members of the group killed 25 Syrian soldiers, execution-style, in front of residents.

It also beheaded Palmyra's 82-year-old former antiquities director in August. Palmyra's ruins are on the Unesco World Heritage list, and before the war around 150,000 tourists a year visited the town.

Experts say the militants have used the destruction to raise their profile to attract new recruits, and are also funding their "caliphate" by selling treasures on the black market.

Syria's archaeology association, the APSA, says that more than 900 monuments and archaeological sites have been looted, damaged or destroyed during the four-year civil war.



A woman hugs her child wrapped in a thermal blanket as migrants and asylum seekers arrive to Lesbos island after crossing the Aegean sea from Turkey, yesterday.

CYBER-TERRORISM

NSA warns of growing state-backed threats

The deputy director of the US National Security Agency (NSA), Richard Ledgett, has warned of the increasing danger of destructive cyber attacks by states.

He told the BBC: "If you are connected to the internet, you are vulnerable to determined nation-state attackers." He said nations would need to identify red lines that should not be crossed.

He also said agency targets, numbered in "the high hundreds", had discussed leaks by contractor Edward Snowden, with some changing their behaviour.

In cyberspace, Ledgett said the agency was seeing a shift to more destructive attacks - such as those that hit Sony last year or Saudi Aramco in 2012 - as well as more aggressive postures by nation states.

Meanwhile, CIA chief John Brennan said yesterday he was "outraged" that hackers broke into his personal email account, and faulted the media for its coverage of the incident.

WikiLeaks, the anti-secrecy group, began releasing documents from Brennan's private AOL account last week, days after a teenage hacker was reported to have claimed he had gained access to the account.

'Gulf could be too hot for humans by 2100'

Scientists have estimated that by the end of the century some parts of the Persian Gulf will suffer heatwaves that are too hot for the human body to survive.

By 2100, parts of Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and others will experience combinations of temperature and humidity which make the deadly 2003 heat wave in Europe "look like a refreshing day".

A new study in the Nature Climate Change journal presented computer simulations of what will happen to global temperatures if carbon dioxide emissions continue at their current pace.

It predicts a new breed of super-heatwaves affecting the Persian Gulf, the likes of which have not been seen on Earth while humans have been around.

According to the study, the "heat index" - a measure of what temperature it feels like outside - for Persian Gulf countries could hit between 74C and 77C for at least six hours during the middle of the day.

That's so hot that the human body is incapable of producing sweat to get rid of heat, making it dangerous even for healthy, fit people to stay outside for any length of time.

Such temperatures wouldn't be expected every single day. But according to the simulations, super-heatwaves will come around once a decade or so by the end of the century - and bring mass fatalities.

Not everywhere in the Gulf would be rendered uninhabitable by these events. Developed cities such as Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Doha could still function thanks to the widespread availability of air conditioning.



Israel jails cleric for inciting Al-Aqsa violence

An Israeli court yesterday ordered the jailing of a firebrand cleric whose Islamist group has been accused of inciting a wave of violence over Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound.

Raed Salah, the head of the radical northern wing of the Islamic Movement in Israel, was found guilty on appeal of inciting violence at the holy site in a 2007 speech.

However he has also been on the government's radar for stoking current tensions over the compound that has led to a wave of anti-Israeli knife attacks, shootings and violent protests. The violence has seen 56 Palestinians and one Israeli Arab shot dead, about half of them alleged attackers.

'Geeta' symbol of Indo-Pak unity

Says Indian President Pranab Mukherjee

Geeta, an aurally and verbally challenged woman, who returned home after being stranded in Pakistan for over a decade, yesterday met President Pranab Mukherjee here.

The President blessed Geeta and said, "You are the daughter of both the countries, a symbol of India-Pakistan unity. God has listened to your prayers."

23-year-old Geeta and hearing impaired woman returned home on Monday from Pakistan. Geeta was reportedly just 7 or 8 years old when she was found sitting alone on the Samjhauta Express by the Pakistan Rangers 15 years ago at the Lahore railway station.

She was accompanied to the Rashtrapati Bhavan by officials of Pakistan's Edhi Foundation, who looked after her in the neighbouring nation.

Meanwhile, Edhi Foundation yesterday declined an offer of Rs 1 crore by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to his charity. "What the Edhi family has done is too priceless to be measured but I am happy to announce a contribution of Rs 1 crore for their foundation," Modi had tweeted on Monday.

