

NEWSIN brief

Assange to be grilled in Ecuador embassy

Ecuador's president has said Julian Assange will be questioned at the embassy where he has been holed up for more than three years over allegations of sex assault. In a significant breakthrough in the case, Ecuador has struck a deal with Swedish prosecutors that will see the WikiLeaks founder face questions over allegations he sexually assaulted two women, without having to leave the

1,175 rhinos killed in S Africa last year

Nearly 1,200 rhinos were killed by poachers in South Africa last year, officials said yesterday, a slight decrease on 2014, but another year of carnage fuelled by Asian-led demand for their horn. Fewer than 100 rhinos were poached in 2008, since then numbers have rocketed. A record 1,215 were killed last year. South Africa is said to be home to around 20,000 rhinos, some 80 percent of the worldwide population.

5 Egyptian cops killed in IS attack in Sinai

Gunmen have killed five Egyptian policemen at a checkpoint in the Sinai Peninsula, the interior ministry said yesterday, in the latest attack claimed by the Islamic State group. The incident happened on Wednesday night in North Sinai province where security forces are battling a jihadist insurgency. IS fighters regularly target policemen and soldiers in the area.

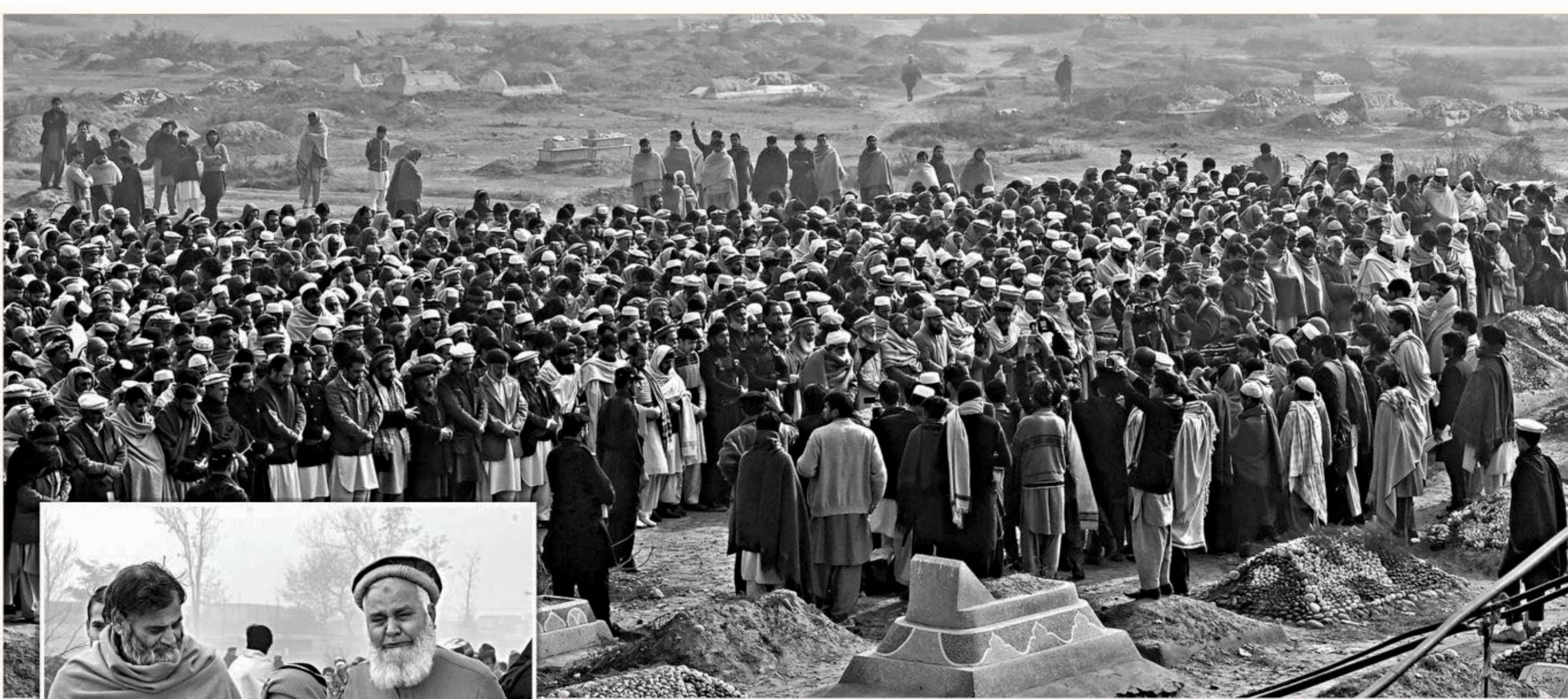
Suspension of 4 Dalit scholars lifted

THE HINDU ONLINE

Buckling under pressure from protests and the political backlash after the suicide of Rohith Vemula, the University of Hyderabad (UoH) administration on Thursday revoked the suspension of the four students who have been camping out in the open for the last 18 days. A Dalit research scholar, Rohith Vemula had killed himself on January 17 on this campus, triggering countrywide protests against atrocities on Dalits in educational institutions in India.

Afghan rocket kills 3 in NW Pakistan

A rocket fired from Afghanistan hit a shop in a restive Pakistani tribal region close to the Afghan border yesterday, killing three people, officials said. The incident happened in Angoor Adda Bazaar in the South Waziristan tribal district, one of the seven semi-autonomous regions where the Pakistani military has been battling Taliban and al-Qaeda linked militants for more than a decade.



Pakistanis gather for funeral prayers for victims of the January 20 Bacha Khan University attack in Charsadda yesterday. Inset, Relatives mourn the death of a victim. Pakistan observed a day of national mourning yesterday for the 21 people killed when heavily-armed gunmen stormed the university in the troubled northwest, exposing the failings in a national crackdown on extremism.

PHOTO: AFP

MASSACRE AT PAKISTAN UNIVERSITY Taliban send message of impunity

AFP, Islamabad

As grieving Pakistani parents lament the government's failure to keep their children safe, analysts say the Taliban have sent a message with their latest campus massacre -- a national crackdown on extremism has failed and they can hit targets at will. The rampage at Bacha Khan university left 21 people dead Wednesday and shattered the sense of security growing in the troubled northwest, a year after Pakistan's deadliest ever extremist attack, a 2014 assault on a school in nearby Peshawar. The chilling similarities between the two atrocities starkly underscored the failings of a government- and military-led initiative launched in the wake of the strike on the army-run school. "It happened again," said Zaheeruddin, father of Kashan Zaheer, a ninth grade student who was wounded in the assault which saw Taliban gunmen storm the Peshawar school and kill more than 150 people, most of them children, a year ago. "Staff and students were martyred again. The government has failed. It has not been able to provide us security." The Peshawar attack, carried out by the same Taliban faction that claimed the latest strike in nearby Charsadda, prompted the military to intensify an offensive in tribal areas where jihadists had operated with impunity. The military says it has killed thousands in the

campaign and swept others over the porous border into Afghanistan.

The government launched a much-vaunted National Action Plan to combat extremism, including the creation of military courts and the resumption of executions after a six-year moratorium.

Together the initiatives are credited with making 2015 the least deadly in terms of militant attacks since the formation of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistani (TTP) in 2007.

But the Bacha Khan attack was a message, said Peshawar-based senior analyst and retired brigadier Saad Khan -- that despite the pressure "they can hit any target".

Among the criticism is that little has been done about key issues including oversight of Pakistan's thousands of Islamic seminaries, widely seen as breeding grounds for intolerance.

The resumption of hangings has been particularly controversial, with rights activists saying that the majority of the more than 300 people executed in the past year were not linked to extremism. And observers such as the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies argue that execution is no deterrent for militants who are already prepared to die for their cause.

For those who survived the 2014 attack, described as Pakistan's 9/11 for the way it united the country in shock and outrage, "sequels" such as Wednesday's university assault are making their courage waver.

Nepal cops kill 3 in new charter clashes

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal police said yesterday they fired on demonstrators, killing three, after fresh violence erupted in the country's southern plains where ethnic minority protesters have mounted a months-long battle over a new constitution.

Clashes broke out in the southeastern district of Morang in the afternoon when hundreds of protesters armed with batons, knives and petrol bombs tried to disrupt a meeting of activists from the ruling CPN-UML party.

"Three were killed in Morang in two clashes today," police spokesman Kamal Singh Bam said, adding that the victims included a 65-year-old woman, one of two killed at the activists' programme venue. More than 50 people have been killed in clashes between police and people protesting against the Himalayan nation's new constitution, which demonstrators say leaves them politically marginalised.

Demonstrators from the Madhesi ethnic minority, mainly from the southern plains, have led a months-long blockade of a key border crossing, causing a crippling shortage of fuel and other vital supplies across the landlocked country.

In a bid to break the deadlock, parties tabled a bill to amend the constitution and increase the Madhesi presence in government bodies through proportional representation. But protesters say the bill, currently under discussion in parliament, is incomplete and does not address their main demand to revise the federal state borders laid out in the charter.

The constitution, the first drawn up by elected representatives, was meant to cement peace and bolster Nepal's transformation to a democratic republic after decades of political instability and a 10-year Maoist insur-

2015 the hottest year in history

AFP, Miami

Blistering heat blanketed the Earth last year making 2015 by far the hottest year in modern times and raising new concerns about the accelerating pace of climate change.

Not only was 2015 the warmest worldwide since 1880, it shattered the previous record held in 2014 by the widest margin ever observed, said the report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"During 2015, the average temperature across global land and ocean surfaces was 1.62 degrees Fahrenheit (0.90 Celsius) above the 20th century average," said the NOAA report. "This was the highest among all years in the 1880-2015 record."

Compared to 2014, last year was 0.29 degrees Fahrenheit warmer, the "largest margin by which the annual global temperature record has been broken."

Nasa said that the temperature changes are largely driven by increased carbon dioxide and other human-made emissions into the atmosphere.

"Climate change is the challenge of our generation," said NASA Administrator Charles Bolden.

"Since 1997, which at the time was the warmest year on record, 16 of the subsequent 18 years have been warmer than that year," said the NOAA report.

Last year alone, 10 months had record high temperatures for their respective months.

The heat was felt worldwide, with unprecedented warmth covering much of Central America and the northern half of South America.

Nasheed lands in London after prison release

AFP, London

Former Maldives president Mohamed Nasheed landed in Britain yesterday, his aide told AFP, after the Indian Ocean islands' government granted him prison leave for urgent surgery.

"We have just landed," said Sabra Noordeen, who was travelling with Nasheed, whose conviction last March on terror-related charges has been widely criticised.

He left the Maldives on Monday for Sri Lanka after resolving a last-minute legal dispute with the government over his 30-day release for the spinal cord surgery in the UK. He then left for Britain on Thursday.

The Maldives government said Nasheed was travelling under what diplomatic sources described as a deal brokered by India, Sri Lanka and Britain.



A French riot police officer gestures next to migrants near the A16 motorway near the site of the Eurotunnel in Coquelles, near Calais, northern France yesterday. Approximately 300 migrants yesterday tried to make their way across the channel to Britain. These incidents occurred after the prefecture of Pas-de-Calais had set an ultimatum which expired early in the afternoon for the last migrants to leave a deforested 100 metre strip of the "Jungle" camp along the ring road for safety reasons.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Don't have a machine that can bill humanity'

INDIA TODAY ONLINE

It is not often we come across people making kind gestures, especially to the underprivileged. But there are some, who know nothing but to be kind, nothing but to be generous.

Here's the story, cut short. A man entered a hotel in Kerala for dinner, after an all day long meeting, and placed his order. As his order arrived, the man noticed a pair of small eyes, outside the window, wistfully looking at the food served at various tables.

A little ragpicker. Man gestured the little boy to come in, and he came in with his little sister. He asked them what they'd like to have and the boy pointed at the plate on his table. He ordered another plate.

The kids quietly finished the food ordered for them. Neither did they speak to each other, or smile. When done, they rose, looked at the man, washed their hands and left. The man hadn't touched his food yet. He felt full.

He finished his meal and called for the bill. When he got back to the table after washing his hands, he saw the bill and it moved him to tears he had been holding back all this while.

The bill had no amount, but a message for him. It read, "We don't have a machine that can bill humanity. May good happen to you."

Xi eyes to boost ME clout with Saudi, Egypt deals

AFP, Cairo

Chinese President Xi Jinping yesterday signed a slew of trade deals with Egypt's leader as part of a regional tour aimed at bolstering Beijing's economic ties and clout in the Middle East.

After arriving late Wednesday from Saudi Arabia, Xi held talks with Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and was to address the Cairo-based Arab League.

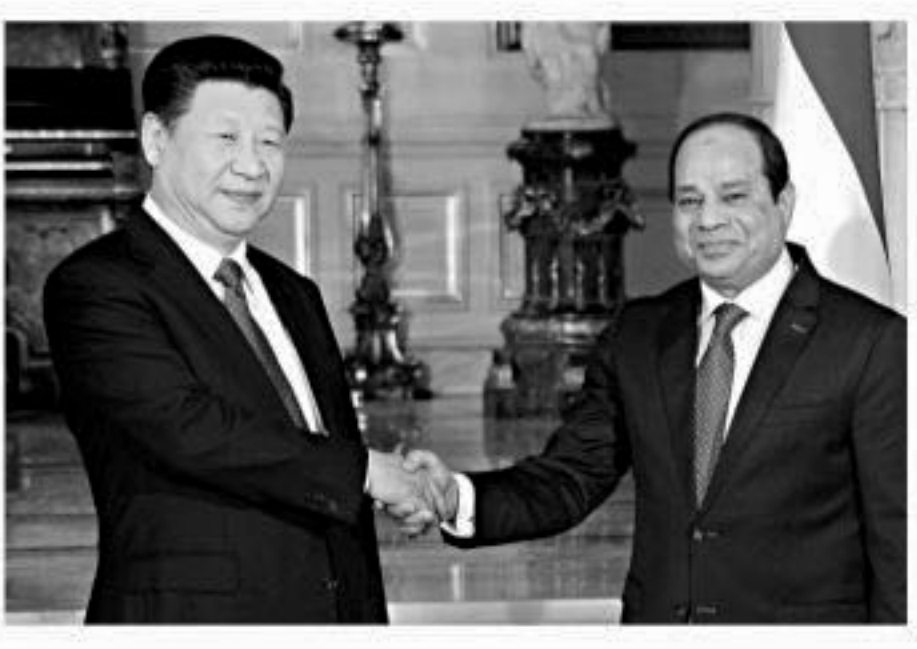
State television broadcast live the signing of 21 bilateral agreements at a presidential palace in Cairo in the presence of the two leaders.

Earlier state-run newspaper Al-Ahram reported that the deals were worth \$14 billion in the electricity, transportation, agriculture, civil aviation and housing sectors.

In an article in Al-Ahram ahead of his visit, Xi expressed China's backing for Egypt running its affairs without outside interference. He also said China supported Egypt "playing an active role in regional and international affairs".

Xi's regional tour, his first to the Middle East as president, will take him next to Iran.

Beijing has long taken a backseat to other diplomatic players in the Middle East but analysts say the region is crucial to Xi's signature foreign policy initiative -- known



as "One Belt One Road" -- touted as a revival of ancient Silk Road trade routes.

China, the world's second-largest economy, also relies heavily on oil and gas imported from the energy-rich Middle East.

In Saudi Arabia, Xi met with King Salman and oversaw the opening of a joint-venture oil refinery in the Yanbu Industrial City on the Red Sea. Saudi Arabia is China's biggest global

Don't adopt 'cruel' refugee laws

Amnesty urges Denmark parliament AGENCIES

Amnesty International has urged Denmark's parliament to reject proposed changes to the country's laws on refugees that it says would "have a devastating impact on vulnerable people" and may violate international human rights laws.

In a statement yesterday, the UK-based rights group said the reforms would see the Danish government seize assets of refugees and preclude them from reuniting with their family members for years.

Danish MPs are set to vote on proposed amendments to the Aliens Act on Thursday. If approved, a final vote on January 26 would determine whether they become law.

The amendments include one that would force refugees - who have fled war - to wait three years before being eligible to apply to reunite with relatives who are in conflict-ridden countries or refugee camps.

The legislation that has fuelled the most controversy proposes that Danish authorities seize asylum seekers' cash exceeding \$1450, as well as any individual items valued at more than that amount.

Some 2,000 migrants began crossing into Macedonia yesterday in freezing temperatures as the country conditionally reopened its border with Greece after closing it temporarily. After the border closure on Wednesday, leading children's charities have warned that young refugees were at



Legendary Indian dancer dies aged 97

BBC ONLINE

Legendary classical dancer Mrinalini Sarabhai has died at the age of 97 in the western Indian state of Gujarat.

Her daughter Mallika Sarabhai confirmed the news on Thursday on her Facebook page, saying "her mother has just left for her eternal dance".

Mrinalini Sarabhai founded the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts in Ahmedabad and trained thousands in Indian classical dance forms.