

# NEWSIN brief

## Mumbai plotter 'worked for ISI'

An American who helped survey targets for the deadly 2008 Mumbai attacks told a special Indian court yesterday that Pakistan's spy agency provides support to Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) blamed for the atrocity, according to a prosecutor. David Headley, who was sentenced by a Chicago court to 35 years for his role in the attacks that killed 166 people, also said he worked for Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

## Indonesia jails 7 for supporting IS

An Indonesian court yesterday sentenced seven men to between three and five years in jail for supporting the Islamic State group. Court officials said four of the men on trial had travelled to Syria to undertake military training with IS, while the three other culprits helped purchase tickets and recruited people to join the group.

## Pakistan approves Hindu Marriage Bill

After decades of delay and inaction, the Hindu minority community in Pakistan will soon have a marriage law as a parliamentary panel has unanimously approved the Hindu Marriage Bill. The National Assembly standing committee on law and justice on Monday passed the final draft of Hindu Marriage Bill 2015.

## Scientists study India's 'killer meteorite'

Scientists from Indian Institute of Astrophysics were yesterday analysing a small blue rock that authorities say was a meteorite that fell from the sky and killed a bus driver in Tamil Nadu. Experts say other explanations were possible for the incident on Saturday. But if proven, it would be the first confirmed death by a meteorite in recorded history, they say.

# GERMAN TRAIN TRAGEDY



Aerial view shows firefighters and emergency doctors working at the site of a train accident near Bad Aibling, southern Germany, yesterday. Inset, An injured passenger being air lifted for treatment. Two Meridian commuter trains operated by Transdev collided head-on near Bad Aibling, around 60 kilometres southeast of Munich, killing at least ten people and injuring around 100, police said. The cause of the accident was not immediately clear.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

## SIACHEN AVALANCHE 'Miracle' survivor in critical state

An Indian soldier rescued nearly a week after he was buried by a deadly avalanche on the world's highest battleground was being treated in Delhi in "extremely critical" condition, the army said yesterday. Hanamantappa Koppad spent six days trapped after a massive block of ice fell onto his army post 5,900 metres high in the Himalayas, killing nine of his colleagues. He miraculously survived under nearly 25 feet of snow in temperatures of minus 45 degrees Celsius. The soldier, who was found unconscious but severely hypothermic and in shock, was airlifted to a hospital in Delhi on Tuesday. His rescue late Monday came days after India said there was little hope of any survivors.

# UN fears for hundreds of thousands in Aleppo

### UN asks Turkey to do more as refugees flood border camps

Hundreds of thousands of civilians could be cut off from food if Syrian government forces encircle rebel-held parts of Aleppo, the United Nations said yesterday, warning of a massive new flight of refugees from a Russian-backed assault. Syrian government forces, backed by Russian air strikes and Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters, have launched a major offensive in the countryside around Aleppo, which has been divided between government and rebel control for years. The assault to surround Aleppo, once Syria's biggest city with 2 million people, amounts to one of the most important shifts of momentum in the five year civil war that has killed 250,000 people and already driven 11 million from their homes. The United Nations is worried the government advance could cut off the last link for some 300,000 civilians in rebel-held parts of Aleppo with the

main Turkish border crossing, which has long served as the lifeline for insurgent-controlled territory. Turkey, already home to 2.5 million Syrians, the world's biggest refugee population, has so far kept its frontier mostly closed to the latest wave of displaced civilians. Turkey, already home to 2.5 million Syrians, the world's biggest refugee population, has so far kept its frontier mostly closed to the latest wave of displaced civilians. Turkey, already home to 2.5 million Syrians, the world's biggest refugee population, has so far kept its frontier mostly closed to the latest wave of displaced civilians.

**SYRIA WAR: DEVELOPMENTS**

- More than 1m civilians living under siege around country
- Car bomb hits Damascus police club; 8 killed
- Kremlin refutes Berlin's over air campaign criticism

campaign continues. Fifty thousand people had reached Turkey's borders in the latest wave, Ankara had admitted 10,000 so far and would allow in others in a "controlled fashion", he said. German Chancellor Angela Merkel accused Russia this week of bombing civilians, against a UN Security Council resolution Moscow signed up to in December. Russia says it is targeting only Islamist militants. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said there was no credible evidence of civilian deaths. Meanwhile, a new NGO report yesterday said more than one million Syrians are living under siege after nearly five years of war, warning the crisis was "far worse" than UN officials have acknowledged. A Islamic State suicide bomber drove his car into a police officers' club in a residential quarter in central Damascus yesterday, blowing himself up and killing nine people including eight police officers. 20 people were also wounded in the attack.

## IS executes 300 in Mosul

The jihadist group IS has reportedly executed around 300 Iraqis in Mosul. The official spokesman of the Iraqi army in the region, Mahmoud Souraji, said victims included former troops and national security as well as civilian activists, according to the pro-Kurdish Syrian news agency ARA News. Speaking on local television on Sunday, ARA News reported that Souraji said the executions were carried out by firing squad and the victims were buried in a mass grave. Meanwhile, pro-Kremlin Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov has claimed spies from his region of Russia are being sent to infiltrate the IS group and assist Moscow in its bombing campaign in Syria. On the ground, US and its allies conducted 21 strikes against IS in Iraq and Syria on Monday.

## Lanka must confront demons of the past

Sri Lanka must "confront and defeat the demons of its past", the UN human rights chief yesterday said at the end of a visit to assess the island's progress in investigating war crimes. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said Sri Lanka had come a long way since this time last year, when former president Mahinda Rajapakse was ousted after a decade in power. But he said opinions differed about the extent of the progress, with police in some areas still resorting to "violence and excessive force" and new cases of torture continuing to emerge. He urged the country's armed forces to face up to the "stain on their reputation" by addressing allegations of war crimes during the 37-year ethnic conflict that ended in 2009, including the killing of tens of thousands of civilians. "Sri Lanka must confront and defeat the demons of its past. It must create institutions that work, and ensure accountability," said Zeid. Zeid is due to deliver two assessments to the UN Human Rights Council in June and March 2017. The Human Rights Council adopted a resolution late last year calling for an investigation into atrocities committed by both the government-backed military and Tamil Tiger separatists. A UN report in September described horrific wartime atrocities committed by both the Sri Lankan military and Tamil Tiger rebels during the conflict which claimed at least 100,000 lives.



Zeid Hussein

## TAIWAN QUAKE TRAGEDY Frantic search on for 100 missing

The developer of a 16-storey Taiwan apartment complex that collapsed during a quake was taken in for questioning yesterday as rescuers deployed heavy machinery to find 100 people still feared trapped in the rubble. Prosecutors in the southern city of Tainan launched an investigation into Saturday's disaster after photos showed cans and foam had been used to fill parts of the complex's concrete framework. The district court will later decide whether the developer, identified as Lin Ming-hui, and two of his employees should be formally detained. Around 40 people have been confirmed dead and some 100 are still missing after the collapse of the Wei-kuan building. Yesterday's hearing came as the 72-hour "golden window" for finding survivors expired. President Ma Ying-jeou yesterday repeated his pledge to continue searching for those trapped deep within the rubble, even beyond the 72-hour window when the chance of survival rapidly diminishes.



Protesters stand behind a fire set by them at a junction at Mongkok district in Hong Kong, China yesterday. Inset, A protester shouts as he is arrested by plainclothes policemen. Scores of police officers were hurt yesterday when a riot erupted in Hong Kong over official attempts to move illegal hawkers, in the most serious violence the city has seen since mass pro-democracy protests in 2014.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Former Nepal PM Sushil Koirala dies

Former Nepal prime minister Sushil Koirala, a veteran politician once jailed for helping to hijack a plane, died in Kathmandu Tuesday aged 77 after suffering from pneumonia, his doctor said. Koirala, premier for 20 months until last October, played a pivotal role in drafting a controversial new constitution aimed at unifying the impoverished country following the end in 2006 of a decade-long Maoist insurgency. Hundreds of tearful officials, ministers and opposition party lawmakers converged at Koirala's house and at the Nepal Congress office to pay their respects. "He made an extraordinary contribution to Nepali politics," Nepal's Prime Minister Oli told reporters. "All Nepalis will remember his role in promulgating a constitution (and) establishing a federal democratic republic," he said. Koirala had a strong links with lawmakers in neighbouring India. Koirala was born in 1939 in eastern Nepal, but his family fled to India in 1960 after the then-suspended democracy and jailed dozens. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tribute to Koirala, describing him as "a big leader who served Nepal for decades".

## Trump, Sanders eye first victories

New Hampshire voters headed to polls yesterday for the crucial first US presidential primary, with Donald Trump chasing victory and Hillary Clinton looking to narrow the gap on Bernie Sanders. The northeastern state, home to just 1.3 million people, sets the tone for the primaries -- and could shake out a crowded Republican field as the arch-conservative Senator Ted Cruz and establishment candidates led by Marco Rubio battle for second place behind the frontrunner Trump. A RealClearPolitics poll average shows Sanders -- who has called for nothing short of a "political revolution" -- leading 53.3 percent to 40.5 percent for Clinton in New Hampshire. But a week after the Iowa caucuses kicked off the White House nomination race, everything remains in play in New Hampshire due to a high number of registered independents, who can choose to vote in either party, along with up to 30 percent of voters still undecided in recent days. On Republican side, Trump needs to turn his soaring lead in the polls into a convincing win in New Hampshire if he is to recover from the embarrassment of finishing second behind Cruz in Iowa. Trump told MSNBC as voting began he had been urging the supporters packing his rallies in the state to get out and cast ballots. The rest of the Republican pack has been fighting it out, aiming for a strong second or even solid third-place showing that could reinstate them for South Carolina and Nevada, the next stops on the long road to becoming the party's nominee. A poor result will likely rupture the presidential dreams for 2016 for former and current governors Bush, Kasich and Chris Christie. On the Democratic front, Clinton is looking to confound polls that predict a large victory for her insurgent challenger Sanders. Clinton won Iowa by a hair, and remains the overall favorite to win the Democratic nomination.



Hillary Clinton reacts to a Trump poster in Nashua, New Hampshire, yesterday.

## Child soldiers make up a third of Yemen fighters: UN

Yemen could become a new breeding ground for child soldiers, Unicef has warned, as the rise of extreme violence around the world undermines efforts to end the practice. Twenty years on from a landmark report that put child soldiers on the global agenda, Unicef says tens of thousands of children are engaged in warfare, as conflicts rage in the Middle East and East Africa. Around a third of combatants in Yemen's civil war are children, Unicef estimates. Both the Houthis rebels and militias fighting on behalf of the internationally recognised President Abdullah Mansour Hadi have recruited children to fight on their behalf in the 11-month war, which has so far killed at least 2,800 civilians. Children as young as 14 are fighting on the front line, according to a Unicef report to be formally published yesterday, which says that both the Houthis and the government have gone back on pledges to the UN that they would end the practice. Meanwhile, the widespread destruction of schools and infrastructure in the Saudi-led bombardment of the country is further encouraging more children to pick up guns and fight, in exchange for pay of between £3 to £6 a day. Elsewhere, the rise of terrorist groups such as IS and al-Shabaab has made negotiation over the issue impossible. In Iraq and Syria, Isis has featured very young children prominently in their propaganda, and have employed new tactics, such as the use of social media, to lure children into the fight. The group has released videos showing children beheading prisoners and training in military camps. South Sudan remains the greatest source of concern, with some 16,000 children recruited by both sides in the country's two-year civil war. Many are taken from their homes, often after local communities are threatened into giving them up in exchange for protection.