

# NEWSIN brief

## Mysuru cleanest city in India

TNN, New Delhi  
Mysuru in Karnataka has retained its position as the cleanest among all million plus and capital cities while Dhanbad in Jharkhand has been ranked the worst. These are findings of the first ever cleanliness ranking of cities since Swachh Bharat Mission was launched in October 2014. Cities in the top 10 club include Chandigarh, Visakhapatnam, Surat, Rajkot and Greater Mumbai.

## Bosnia applies to join EU

AFP, Brussels  
Bosnia yesterday formally submitted an application to join the EU, hoping to catch up with its Balkan neighbours after years lost following the bloody break-up of Yugoslavia. Dutch Foreign Minister Bert Koenders, whose country holds the six-month EU rotating presidency, said the bloc was happy to see "Bosnia back on the reform path".

## Britain to ban boycotts on Israeli goods

AFP, London  
British town halls and publicly funded universities face "severe penalties" if they institute boycotts of "unethical" companies or Israeli goods under controversial new rules to be outlined by the government this week. "Locally imposed boycotts can roll back integration as well as hinder Britain's export trade and harm international relationship," the Cabinet Office said yesterday.

## Leopard escapes from Indian zoo

AFP, Bangalore  
A male leopard which injured five people in southern India earlier this month has escaped from a zoo, sparking a frantic search for the big cat, wildlife officials said yesterday. The 45 kilogram feline squeezed out of the narrow bars of an iron cage at the Bannerghatta zoo in Bangalore city late Sunday, the chief wildlife warden of the state Ravi Ralph said.

## Bahrain arrests four Americans

AFP, Dubai  
Bahraini authorities have arrested four Americans, including journalists, during protests marking the fifth anniversary of a Shia-led uprising in the kingdom, police said yesterday. "We are aware of reports that US citizens have been arrested (in Bahrain). We have no comment due to privacy considerations," a State Department spokesperson said.



People gather around the rubble of a hospital supported by Doctors Without Borders (MSF) near Maaret al-Numan, in Syria's northern province of Idlib, yesterday, after the building was hit by suspected Russian air strikes. MSF confirmed in a statement that a hospital supported by the aid group in Idlib province was "destroyed in air strikes". PHOTO: AFP

# Turkey vows 'harsh reaction'

REUTERS, Kiev/Istanbul  
Turkey will not allow the northern Syrian town of Azaz to fall into the hands of a Kurdish militia and its fighters will face the "harshest reaction" if they approach it again, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said yesterday.  
A major offensive supported by Russian bombing and Iranian-backed Shia militias has brought the Syrian army to within 25 km of the Turkish border. The Kurdish YPG militia has exploited the situation, seizing ground from Syrian rebels to extend its presence along the Turkish border.  
Davutoglu also accused Russia of acting as a "terrorist organisation" in Syria and vowed to deliver a robust response.  
"If Russia continues behaving like a terrorist organisation and forcing civilians to flee, we will deliver an extremely decisive

response," Davutoglu said through an official translator during a visit to Kiev.  
"Unfortunately, barbaric attacks on civilians are continuing in Syria and these attacks are being waged by both Russia and YPG elements were forced away from around Azaz. If they approach again they will see the harshest reaction. We will not allow Azaz to fall," Davutoglu said.  
He said Turkey would make the Menagh air base north of the city of Aleppo "unusable" if the YPG, which seized it over the weekend from Syrian insurgents, did not withdraw. Turkish Defence Minister Ismet Yilmaz denied a report that some Turkish soldiers had entered Syria at the weekend and said Ankara was not considering sending troops there, according to the state-run Anadolu Agency.

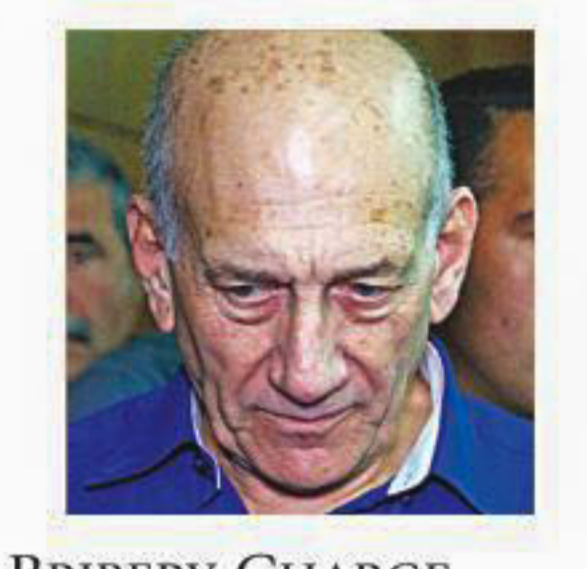
SYRIA WAR
Russia acts as 'terrorist organisation': Davutoglu
Turkey alarmed by advance of Kurdish YPG militia
Defence minister denies Turkish soldiers entered Syria

Speaking to reporters on his plane en route to Ukraine, Davutoglu said YPG fighters would have taken control of rebel-held Azaz and the town of Tal Rifaat further south had it not been for Turkish artillery firing at them over the weekend.  
"YPG elements were forced away from around Azaz. If they approach again they will see the harshest reaction. We will not allow Azaz to fall," Davutoglu said.  
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# Most Russians support strikes in Syria: poll

REUTERS, Moscow  
Public support in Russia for the country's air strikes in Syria has slipped since the Kremlin launched its air campaign more than four months ago, a poll showed yesterday, but a comfortable majority still back the bombing.  
The survey, by the independent Levada Center, showed that 59 percent of Russians backed a continuation of Moscow's air campaign in Syria, which began on Sept. 30, compared to 27 percent who were opposed.  
Approval levels were slightly higher than a Nov. 15 Levada poll which found 55 percent of Russians broadly supportive.  
However both surveys suggest support has fallen since the start of the bombing campaign when Levada found that 72 percent of Russians were broadly supportive

of the strikes when asked at the start of October.  
That may reflect fears, expressed in earlier surveys, that Russia could get sucked into a protracted Afghanistan-style conflict and follows the downing of a Russian passenger jet over Egypt in October, an episode described as a terrorist act by the Kremlin in which 224 people were killed.  
Islamic State militants claimed responsibility for the plane bombing, saying it was revenge for Russia's Syria intervention.  
Yesterday's survey also found Russians were not following events in Syria as closely as they were at the end of last year. Pollsters say people are more preoccupied with Russia's economic crisis, which has prompted the steepest fall in real incomes since President Vladimir Putin came to power 15 years ago.



## Bribery charge Israel ex-PM begins prison term

AFP, Ramle  
Ehud Olmert, once feted for his peace efforts with the Palestinians, yesterday became Israel's first former premier to serve jail time as he began a 19-month sentence for bribery and obstruction of justice.  
With the nation transfixed and Israeli television broadcasting live, the 70-year-old entered the Maasiyahu prison in the central city of Ramle just before 10:00 am.  
He was escorted to the prison by officers of Israel's Shin Bet domestic security agency as a crowd of journalists watched from nearby.  
The charges against him date to before his time as prime minister, to the years when he served as mayor of Jerusalem and economy minister, among other positions.  
In a video message released yesterday morning before he began his sentence, Olmert maintained his innocence. "You can imagine how painful and strange this change is to me, my family, loved ones and supporters," said Olmert, looking haggard and downcast. "I totally deny all the bribe charges attributed to me."  
He added that "over the course of my extensive career I also made mistakes, though none of them were criminal by nature in my opinion. I'm paying a dear price for some of them today, perhaps too dear."

# SEDITION CONTROVERSY IN INDIA Students attacked in court premises

THE HINDU ONLINE  
The Delhi Police yesterday claimed that the students of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and journalists were beaten up by a group of men dressed as lawyers at the Patiala House Courts complex in the Capital.  
The students had come to express solidarity with Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union (JNUSU) president Kanhaiya Kumar, who is expected to be produced before the court in connection with a sedition case.  
The incident took place despite heavy police deployment in the area. Alok Singh, an Indian Express correspondent was among those who were attacked. Their identity has not been established but according to Singh, the group had indiscriminately been attacking whosoever they spotted and suspected to be Kumar's supporter.  
Commenting on the incident, Home Secretary Rajiv Mehri said that "law will take its own course" and anybody found violating it will be dealt accordingly.  
A plea was filed in the Delhi High Court seeking National Investigation Agency (NIA) probe in the sedition case in which JNUSU president Kanhaiya Kumar has been arrested.



An Israeli soldier carries away a colleague, reportedly injured by a stone, during clashes with Palestinians at the Amari refugee camp, near the West Bank city of Ramallah, yesterday after Israeli soldiers entered the camp early in the morning. PHOTO: AFP

# First 'Silk Road' train arrives in Tehran from China

AFP, Tehran  
The first train to connect China and Iran arrived in Tehran yesterday loaded with Chinese goods, reviving the ancient Silk Road, the Iranian railway company said.  
The train, carrying 32 containers of commercial products from eastern Zhejiang province, took 14 days to make the 9,500-kilometre journey through Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.  
"The arrival of this train in less than 14 days is unprecedented," said the head of the Iranian railway company, Mohsen Pourseyedy Aqayi.  
"The revival of the Silk Road is crucial for the countries on its route," he said at a ceremony at Tehran's rail station attended by the ambassadors of China and Turkmenistan.  
The journey was 30 days shorter than the sea voyage from Shanghai to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas, according to Aqayi.  
The railway will not stop in Tehran "as we are planning to extend the railway to Europe in future," generating more income for Iran from passing trains, he added.  
The train will leave every month and the frequency will be increased if necessary, Aqayi said.  
The train is run by private companies

using existing routes, Iranian railway company spokesman Sadegh Sakari told AFP.  
According to Iranian media, more than a third of Iran's foreign trade is with China, which is Tehran's top customer for oil exports.  
Chinese President Xi Jinping and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani agreed last month to build economic ties worth up to \$600 billion within the next 10 years.  
It came during a visit to Iran by Xi, the first by a Chinese president in 14 years, and just days after sanctions against Tehran were lifted under a historic nuclear deal with world powers.  
Xi's signature foreign policy initiative known as "One Belt One Road" is touted as a revival of ancient Silk Road trade routes.



# THREAT OF TERROR ATTACKS Indonesia nabs IS-linked groups

AFP, Jakarta  
Indonesian police have arrested dozens of people from radical Islamic groups who were plotting attacks against the airport and other targets in the near future, the national police chief said yesterday.  
The 33 people were arrested by the police anti-terror unit following last month's attacks in Jakarta which killed four civilians and four assailants, Badrodin Haiti said.  
The gun and suicide bomb attacks claimed by the Islamic State group and centred around a Starbucks outlet were the country's worst terror incident in seven years, ending a long lull in major terror.  
Police have launched a crackdown across the country, saying they suspect a broader extremist network helped carry out the assault. Seventeen of those arrested were directly linked to the Jakarta attacks, while 16 others were members of three other radical groups, Haiti said.  
A group led by an extremist called Hendro Fernando had received 1.3 billion rupiah from Jordan, Iraq and Turkey, he said, adding that it planned to launch attacks against Jakarta's main airport and the national police headquarters.  
Haiti said another group led by a person identified only as 'Helmi' planned to use a car bomb to attack the Jakarta police complex in the city's main business district. A third group, according to the police chief, planned stabbing attacks on traffic police. "Terrorism attacks will still happen in the future because there are other groups who are linked to Bahrnun Naim in Syria," he said.

# China urges US, North to hold direct talks

Kim Jong-Un pushes for more satellite launches  
AGENCIES  
China's foreign ministry yesterday urged the United States and North Korea to sit down with each other face-to-face and resolve their problems, as tension continues to climb on the Korean peninsula after North Korea's latest rocket test.  
While China was angered by the launch, it has also expressed concern at plans by Washington and Seoul to deploy an advanced US missile defence system, saying it would impact upon China's own security, reports Reuters.  
"The focus of the nuclear issue on the peninsula is between the United States and North Korea," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei told a daily news briefing.  
"We urge the United States and North Korea to sit down and have communications and negotiations, to explore ways to resolve each other's reasonable concerns and finally reach the goal we all want reached."  
North Korea launched a long-range rocket on Feb 7 carrying what it called a satellite, drawing renewed international condemnation just weeks after it carried out a nuclear bomb test.  
Meanwhile, North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un has promised to put more satellites in space, even as the international community prepares to punish his regime over a long-range rocket launch just last week, reports AFP.  
At a banquet to congratulate the scientists, technicians and officials who contributed to the February 7 launch, Kim noted that the mission had come at "a complex time when hostile forces are more bloody-eyed than ever to strangle" the North, the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported yesterday.

