

NEWSIN brief

Palestinian 'attacker' shot dead: Israel

AFP, Nablus
A 16-year-old Palestinian tried to stab an Israeli soldier in the occupied West Bank yesterday and was shot dead, Israel's army said, the latest incident in a nearly five-month wave of violence. The attack occurred at the Bitot Junction south of Nablus in the West Bank.

Pope calls for ban on death penalty

AFP, Vatican City
Pope Francis yesterday urged Catholic politicians in places which still have the death penalty to suspend executions during his ongoing Holy Year of Mercy. The specific request was made as part of a broader appeal for an international consensus on abolishing capital punishment, which did not refer to any particular territory or country.

N Korea confirms new military chief

AFP, Seoul
North Korean state media yesterday confirmed the country has a new military chief following earlier reports in Seoul that the former holder of the post had been executed. Ri Myong-Su was referred to as "chief of the Korean People's Army General Staff" when the Korean Central News Agency reported on an army exercise guided by leader Kim Jong-Un.

Australia issues security alert for Kuala Lumpur

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur
The Australian government warned yesterday that terrorists may be planning attacks in and around the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur. "Attacks could be indiscriminate and may target Western interests or locations frequented by Westerners," read a travel advisory post on the Australian government website.



Burnt-out buses and fire damage to buildings are seen at a school following violent caste protests in the Indian city of Rohtak, yesterday. Ten people have died in caste protests which triggered widespread arson and looting in a north Indian state, police said yesterday. Inset, protesters shout slogans in presence of police. Story on page 16.



PHOTO: AFP

MILITARY-REBELS STANDOFF IN J&K Battle continues, death toll hits 6

AFP, Srinagar
A third soldier was killed yesterday in an ongoing gunbattle between militants and troops and police in Indian Kashmir, taking the overall death toll to six, police said.
Javid Gillani, inspector general of police for the region, told AFP a second army captain was killed during the clashes that have lasted more than 24 hours.
Exchanges of fire stopped as darkness fell but the firefight is set to enter a third day.
The attackers, thought to number three or four, ambushed a paramilitary convoy on the outskirts of the restive region's main city of Srinagar on Saturday, killing two soldiers and wounding another 13, officials have said.
The militants, who are fighting against Indian rule over the disputed Himalayan region, then fled to a nearby government building and forced more than 120 trainees and staff inside to leave.
As the gunbattle raged, hundreds of nearby residents came out on the streets in a show of support for the rebels, throwing stones at government forces who fired tear gas to disperse them.
Fresh firing erupted yesterday morning after the Central Reserve Police Force and soldiers surrounded the training institute overnight, with the militants still holed up inside.
An army captain and another soldier were killed earlier in the day as government forces tried to storm the building. Police said a civilian gardener injured during the initial crossfire also died.
Since 1989 several rebel groups have been fighting Indian forces deployed in the Kashmir region, seeking either independence or a merger of the territory with neighbouring Pakistan. The fighting has left tens of thousands, mostly civilians, dead.

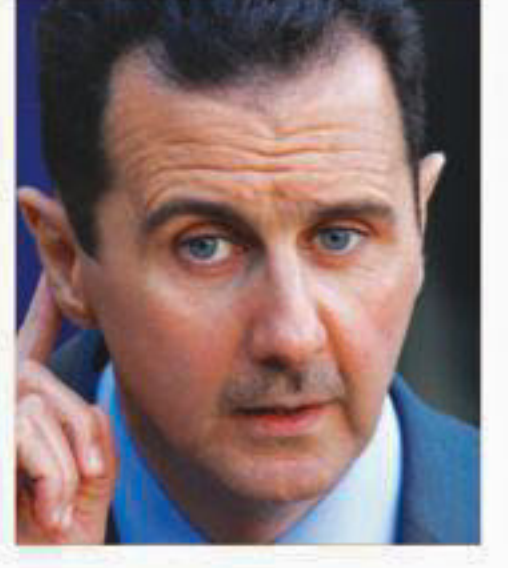
Super cyclone kills 6 in Fiji

AFP, Suva
Fiji began a massive clean-up yesterday after the most powerful cyclone in the Pacific nation's history left a trail of destruction, killing six people, flattening scores of homes and crippling infrastructure.
The super-storm lashed the popular tourist destination overnight Saturday, packing wind gusts of 325 kilometres per hour, according to the UN humanitarian agency OCHA. OCHA said six people were killed during severe tropical cyclone Winston, the first-ever storm system to hit Fiji measuring a maximum category five.
"Homes have been destroyed, many low-lying areas have flooded," Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama said earlier yesterday in a statement. "In the aftermath of this great tragedy, many are without power and full access to water, and are cut off from communication."
Bainimarama declared a state of natural disaster, to remain in place for one month.
Aid agencies admitted they simply had no idea about the full extent of the destruction, as Fijians shared pictures on social media of roofless houses, flooded streets and metal signposts bent over by the wild winds.
Save the Children Fiji chief Iris Low-McKenzie said it was too early to assess the impact on outlying islands, although unconfirmed reports said thousands of homes had been destroyed and entire villages flattened.

'Want to be remembered as the man who saved Syria'

Assad says he is ready for truce if 'terrorists' do not exploit it

AGENCIES
President Bashar al-Assad says he wants to be remembered 10 years from now as the person who saved Syria, according to an interview with Spanish newspaper El Pais published on Saturday.
Assad, whose fate has been a key sticking point in efforts to end Syria's bloody civil war as it enters its sixth year, left open the question of whether he would still be president by then.
And he said he was ready to implement a long-sought ceasefire, but only if the rebels and their international backers such as Turkey did not use it as a chance to gain ground.
"In 10 years, if I can save Syria as president -- but that doesn't mean I'm still going to be president in 10 years, I'm just talking about my vision of the 10 years," he said in an interview published on the newspaper's website.
Assad said the support of his Russian and Iranian allies had been "essential" in the recent major advances made by regime forces. "We definitely need that help for a simple reason: because more than 80 countries supported those



terrorists in different ways," he told El Pais.
RUSSIA COMMITTING WAR CRIMES: AMNESTY
Meanwhile Amnesty International accused Russia of committing some of the most "egregious" war crimes seen in decades.
The leading human rights organisation said Moscow's air force has not only been targeting civilians and aid workers in Syria over the last week, but that warplanes have been deliberately attacking those attempting to treat the victims.
Tirana Hassan, director of Amnesty's crisis response programme, told Sky News: "We've documented strikes on schools, strikes on hospitals and civilian homes. And one of the most egregious parts of what Russia and the Syrian forces are doing is that they're bombing these civilian targets when it itself is a war crime.
The Kremlin has in the past rejected suggestions that it has intentionally been hitting civilian zones, insisting that it is only dropping bombs on terrorist targets. Russian president Vladimir Putin's official spokesperson denied the country is guilty of war crimes, dismissing them as "unfounded accusations".

Conspiracy on to finish me: Modi

TNN, Bargarh
Prime Minister Narendra Modi here yesterday said various forces are conspiring to topple his government because of his resolve for corruption-free governance.
Making a frontal attack on the opposition political parties at a farmers rally here, just two days ahead of the budget session from February 23, Modi said, "there is round-the-clock storm against me. Certain people can't digest the fact that a tea vendor has become the PM." Without naming anyone, the PM said they had come together because of his move to check corruption. "They are conspiring to finish Modi," he added.



Jeb Bush ends White House bid

Trump takes South Carolina, Clinton wins in Nevada

AFP, Spartanburg
Republican presidential candidate Jeb Bush said on Saturday he was suspending his campaign after a disappointing finish in the South Carolina primary.
Bush, who also fared poorly in earlier contests in Iowa and New Hampshire, said the race had been "hard fought" but that voters of those three states had spoken. In what appeared to be a jab at Republican frontrunner Donald Trump, whom Bush has accused of lacking ideas, the former Florida Governor said, "ideas matter, policy matters."
His decision came after Donald Trump grabbed a big win in the South Carolina primary, while Democrat Hillary Clinton breathed life into her sluggish campaign with a victory over Bernie Sanders in Nevada.
The wins for the brash billionaire and the former US secretary of state give them a major boost heading into the crucial next phase of the White House race -- Super Tuesday on March 1, when about a dozen states go to the polls.



After several nail-biting hours, final results showed Florida Senator Marco Rubio in second place in the Republican contest with 22.5 percent of the vote, narrowly ahead of Texas Senator Ted Cruz, who had 22.3 percent.
In Nevada, Clinton claimed a major win in the Democratic race. Final results gave her 52.7 percent of the vote against 47.2 percent for Sanders.
Sanders congratulated Clinton, and said he was proud of having significantly narrowed the gap.
Saturday's results were bad news for Bush, Ohio Governor John Kasich and retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson, who were relegated to the second tier of candidates. Bush did not wait long to fold.
"In this campaign, I have stood my ground, refusing to bend to the political winds," he said.
Bush, the son of former President George HW Bush and brother to former president George W Bush, entered the 2016 campaign as the favorite, but was unable to convert a sizable fundraising advantage into success at the polls.



Syrians gather at the site of a double car bomb attack in the Al-Zahraa neighbourhood of the central Syrian city of Homs yesterday. At least 57 people died in the attack. Story on page 1.

PHOTO: AFP

London mayor to campaign for 'Brexit'

REUTERS, London
London Mayor Boris Johnson yesterday said he backed leaving the European Union, dealing a blow to Prime Minister David Cameron by giving the "out" campaign a de facto leader who is one of the most charismatic politicians in British politics.
Cameron announced a June 23 referendum on Saturday after clinching a deal from 27 other leaders to give Britain what he said was a special status.
But Boris remained silent on Cameron's deal for nearly two days before making his dramatic announcement on the steps of his north London home.
"I will be advocating Vote Leave ... because I want a better deal for the people of this country to save them money and to take back control," Johnson told a crowd of reporters.
British voters - and Cameron's ruling Conservative Party - are split on membership. Polls suggest about a fifth of voters are undecided, though one poll published on Sunday showed the "in" campaign with a lead of 15 percentage points.
Pro-Europeans have warned that an exit could also trigger the break-up of the United Kingdom by prompting another Scottish independence vote if England pulled Scotland out of the EU.



Would return to US if I get fair trial

Says Snowden
AP, Manchester
Speaking via Skype from Russia, Edward Snowden told an audience of supporters in New Hampshire on Saturday that he is willing to be extradited to the United States if the federal government would guarantee he would get a fair trial.
The former National Security Agency contractor in 2013 leaked details of a secret government eavesdropping program and left the country. He faces US charges that could land him in prison for up to 30 years.
Snowden has previously spoken of making offers to the government to return home and his willingness to discuss a plea deal and even go to jail.

Indian parties to amend electoral laws

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi
Indian political parties, including West Bengal's ruling Party, have agreed to pass a bill in parliament to amend electoral laws to give voting rights to estimated 14,000 people who became Indian citizens following exchange of adversely-held enclaves with Bangladesh.
The bill would be passed without discussion and debate to save time as fresh elections in West Bengal state legislature are approaching soon, sources said.
Two days ago, the Indian cabinet gave its nod to amend Section 11 of the Delimitation Act, 2002 and Section 9 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, allowing the move.
The budget session of Indian parliament would begin on February 23 while the proposed bill is likely to be introduced on March 1. The term of West Bengal legislature ends on May 29.
Once passed, the proposed Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2016 will enable the Election Commission to carry out limited delimitation of state legislature and parliamentary constituencies in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal following the exchange of 51 Bangladeshi and 111 Indian enclaves in July last year.

Last Treblinka death camp survivor dies

BBC ONLINE
Samuel Willenberg, the last survivor of Nazi Germany's Treblinka death camp in Poland, has died in Israel aged 93.
Only one of 67 people known to have survived the camp, he escaped by clambering over bodies piled up by a fence as the Nazis shot prisoners during a mass break-out. In 2013, he returned to the site to mark 70 years since his escape.
About 870,000 people died in the gas chambers at Treblinka - more than anywhere else except Auschwitz.
In October 1942, aged 19, he was among 6,000 Jews from the Opatow ghetto who arrived by train at the camp. They were told they were at a transit camp and had to undress and shower before being sent onward. In reality, the shower rooms were gas chambers.
But because he was a bricklayer he was assigned to manual labour duties and escaped an early death. His job was to sort through the belongings of the people sent to the gas chambers.
After the war Willenberg - whose two sisters were killed at the camp - moved to Israel and became a surveyor. "I live two lives, one is here and now and the other is what happened there," he said. "It never leaves me. It stays in my head. It goes with me always."
Most of Treblinka's guards were never prosecuted for their part in the crimes there. Treblinka's commandant, Franz Stangl, was sentenced to life imprisonment in October 1970 following his trial in the west German city of Duesseldorf.
Today nothing remains of the extermination camp apart from the ashes of the mostly Jewish men, women and children murdered there.

