

NEWS IN brief

Indian forces kill 8 Maoist rebels

Security forces killed eight suspected Maoist militants, including five women, in a raid on a rebel training camp in central India yesterday, police said, breaking a six-month-long lull in violence linked to an insurgency that has raged for years. Operating across a vast swath of eastern and central India, the guerrillas say they are fighting for the rights of peasants and landless.

Israeli troops kill Palestinian 'attacker'

Israeli forces shot dead a Palestinian in the occupied West Bank as troops fought to rescue two soldiers who were attacked after straying into a refugee camp. Since October, Israeli security forces have killed at least 170 Palestinians.

UNSC to vote on N Korea sanctions

The UN Security Council was to vote yesterday on a resolution that would dramatically expand existing UN sanctions on North Korea in response to its Jan 6 nuclear test, the US mission to the United Nations said on Monday. The vote is expected to come during a meeting that begins at 2000 GMT yesterday.

Irom Sharmila resumes fast

Manipuri rights activist Irom Sharmila, who was acquitted by a court of the charge of attempt to suicide, resumed her 15-year-long indefinite fast yesterday demanding repeal of the controversial Armed Forces Special Powers Act in the state. Sharmila had started her fast in 2002 demanding the repeal of the Act which she termed "draconian".

Nepal to extend Everest permits

The authorities in Nepal are to extend for free permits for foreigners prevented from climbing Mount Everest by last year's earthquakes. More than 800 foreign climbers had paid up to \$11,000 for permits. Climbers who missed out will be able to use the same permit for 2016 and 2017.

Cheating in military exam? No way

India's army made candidates at a recruitment day in Bihar take a written exam in their underwear to prevent them from cheating, reports said yesterday, after a spate of exam scandals in the eastern state. Images in the Indian Express showed dozens of men sitting cross-legged in a field clad only in underpants, with many resting their test papers on their thighs, while a uniformed supervisor stood guard.

FBI can't make Apple provide iPhone data

A New York jurist has scolded the government in a stinging rebuke of arguments it has used to shame Apple for refusing to surrender information from its customers' iPhones, saying it's stretching a 1789 law to get "impermissibly absurd results."

The ruling Monday by US Magistrate Judge James Orenstein in Brooklyn came a day before a congressional hearing that will include testimony from FBI Director James Comey and Apple General Counsel Bruce Sewell on encryption and "balancing Americans' security and privacy."

Nawaz Sharif took money from Osama bin Laden

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif received money from al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden to contest elections against Benazir Bhutto-led Pakistan People's Party in 1990, a new book has claimed.

The book titled 'Khalid Khawaja: Shaheed-i-Aman' by Shamama Khalid, the wife of former ISI operative Khalid Khawaja, claims that Sharif's pledge of introducing an Islamic system attracted Khawaja as well as Osama.

US elite force to target top IS leaders in Iraq

The United States has deployed its elite counter-terrorism unit Delta Force for covert operations in Iraq to capture or kill high-ranking Islamic State operatives and gather intelligence, according to a media report.

Army's elite Delta Force operations to target, capture or kill top IS operatives have begun in Iraq, after several weeks of covert preparation, an official with direct knowledge of the force's activities was quoted as saying by CNN.

Assad sees 'glimmer of hope' UN delays Syria peace talks to March 9; truce largely holding

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad described the cessation of hostilities in force since Saturday as a "glimmer of hope" and accused the opposition of violating the agreement intended to halt nearly five years of fighting. The opposition has in turn accused the Syrian government of breaching the fragile truce by repeatedly attacking its positions, which the government denies.

"The terrorists have breached the deal from the first day. We as the Syrian Army are refraining from responding in order to give a chance to sustain the agreement. But in the end there are limits and it all depends on the other side," Assad said. He also said people in Syria were suffering from a "humanitarian disaster". The war has killed at least 250,000 people and forced millions to flee their homes. The United Nations hopes the cessation of hostilities will allow it to deliver aid to more than 150,000 people in besieged areas of Syria.

US Secretary of State John Kerry said on Monday that while efforts were being made to track down alleged violations of the cessation of hostilities, there was currently no evidence to suggest they would destabilise the fragile peace. The agreement does not include Islamic State and the Nusra Front, and Assad and his Russian backers have made clear they intend to keep attacking the jihadist groups. Moscow, meanwhile, called for the Syrian border with Turkey to be closed. Russia's Lavrov said it was a channel being used to supply weapons to groups he described as terrorists, with some arms hidden in humanitarian aid deliveries.

More than \$1b 'deposited' in Najib's account: WSJ

The office of Malaysia's scandal-plagued prime minister yesterday denounced a Wall Street Journal report which alleged that he accepted hundreds of millions of dollars that originated from a state firm he established. The Wall Street Journal report, citing investigators in foreign countries and other anonymous sources with knowledge of the money movements, also said the sums received by Najib Razak may have topped \$1 billion -- far more than previously thought.

Najib's office released a statement saying the newspaper had become a "willing vehicle" for those plotting to oust him. It did not specify who was behind the alleged plot, but former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad has led calls for Najib to be removed. "They (the newspaper) keep repeating the same old allegations without providing evidence; they keep relying solely on anonymous sources that may not even exist; and they keep choosing to omit key known facts," the statement said. The statement did not directly refute the key allegations in the story. It also repeated a Malaysian government claim that the money Najib received was a gift from the Saudi government.

Myanmar brings forward presidential vote date

The new president will be elected by the upper and lower house from a list of three candidates put forward by MPs. The NLD dominates both houses after taking 80% of contested seats in the election. But the military, which ran Myanmar for decades, still has an automatic 25% of all seats. Analysts say Suu Kyi may actually be stronger outside the presidency. Little was said officially, but it was suggested that the army might trade suspending Clause 59F for more power.

That was rumoured to include the positions of chief minister in sensitive states like Rakhine and Kachin and almost certainly included promises that the military's political clout and financial muscle be left untouched. It would have been a fudge and Ms Suu Kyi would have been accused of putting personal ambition over principle.

RACE TO WHITE HOUSE

Table showing delegate counts for Democratic and Republican candidates: Clinton (546), Sanders (87), Trump (82), Cruz (17), Rubio (16), Kasich (6), Carson (4).

Why Super Tuesday is so important?

Super Tuesday is the name given to the day when the largest number of US states are given the chance to cast votes for Republican and Democratic candidates bidding for their party's ticket in the November US presidential election. It is usually seen as a turning point in most presidential campaigns, and a key indicator as to who the nominees will be from each party.



'Donald will change tone if elected'

Melania Trump has said her husband will change his tone if he is elected president of the United States. Her comments came during a CNN interview with Anderson Cooper in which the host brought up the frequent insults fired between the Republican presidential candidates and the criticism Donald Trump has received for his tone on the campaign trail.



'warehouse of souls'

Pictures of destruction of the Jungle camp in Calais (picture no 2 and 3) and teargassing of people protesting the razor-wire barrier on the Greek-Macedonian border (picture 1 and 4) on Monday have caused outrage around the world. Macedonian police fired tear gas and stun grenades at around 300 men, women and children when some attempted to force their way through a cordon and break down parts of the fence. An overnight downpour left stranded refugees shivering in the mud yesterday. Around 7,000 people are stranded in Greece currently, and experts fear the number could swell to 70,000 by next month as the so-called 'refugee trail' from Greece to Berlin is closed off.

PHOTO: AFP, AP, REUTERS