

NEWS IN brief

Gujarat on high alert amid terror fears

India has rushed elite security forces to its western state of Gujarat after an intelligence report that some 10 militants of Lashkar-e-Taiba may have crossed over from Pakistan, police said yesterday. Security has been strengthened at all major installations in the coastal state, it added.

Saudis execute 70th convict this year

Saudi Arabia executed a citizen convicted of murder yesterday, bringing to 70 the number of people it has put to death this year. The 70 executions so far this year include 47 death sentences for "terrorism" carried out in a single day on January 2. Most people sentenced to death in Saudi Arabia are beheaded with a sword.

Pakistan frees 87 Indian fishermen

Pakistan yesterday released 87 Indian fishermen held for violating its territorial waters and officials said a similar number would be freed later this month. "We have total 536 Indian fishermen in prison and today we released 87 of them while 86 more will be released on 20th of this month," an official told AFP.

Syria peace talks to resume March 10: UN

Syria peace talks are to resume on March 10, the UN envoy said yesterday, despite opposition reluctance and its backers Saudi Arabia saying President Bashar al-Assad must step down.

The new round of indirect negotiations between the Damascus regime and the opposition will be the first since a truce between government forces and rebels began more than a week ago.



Migrants push a woman in a wheelchair as they walk through a field towards a makeshift camp at the Greek-Macedonian border, near the village of Idomeni, Greece yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

IS suicide blast kills 47 in Iraq

Islamic State claimed responsibility for a suicide attack with an explosive-laden fuel tanker on an Iraqi police checkpoint south of Baghdad, killing at least 457 people and wounding more than 70, medical and security officials said.

The massive blast completely destroyed the checkpoint manned by security forces guarding the northern entrance to Hilla, an area that had recently been spared such attacks. "The suicide bomber used an explosives-laden truck, at a time when there was dense traffic," Faleh al-Radhi, the head of the security committee at Babil provincial council, said.

A doctor at Hilla hospital put the number of people killed by the blast at 47, including around 20 members of the security forces, and said at least 72 people were also wounded.

Radhi and police officers confirmed the casualty toll, the heaviest from any car bomb attack in Iraq this year. But Reuters put the death toll to more than 60.

The blast went off at around 1:00pm, a time of day when vehicles are usually bumper-to-bumper, waiting to be checked by security personnel.

An AFP photographer at the scene said that there was almost nothing left of the checkpoint. He said one distraught man was asking rescuers, survivors and journalists to help him retrieve the body of his baby child from under the mangled wreckage of a car.

A March 2014 suicide bombing at the same checkpoint outside Hilla, 80 kilometres south of the capital, killed 50 people and wounded more than 150.

Observers have warned that, as its self-proclaimed "caliphate" shrinks towards extinction, IS will likely revert to its old guerrilla tactics and ramp up suicide car bomb attacks on civilian targets.

EU to push Turkey to take back, cut migrant flow

Nato accuses Russia of trying to oust Merkel

wealthy Germany and Scandinavia.

European leaders will push Turkey at a summit today to agree to "large-scale" deportations of economic migrants from Greece which is bracing for a fresh surge of migrant and refugee arrivals by the end of March.

The European Union's 28 leaders are hoping for new commitments from Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu at their talks in Brussels in order to curb the chaos on the west Balkans route.

The EU will also push Ankara to drastically reduce the huge flow of migrants into Europe, as Turkey is the launch pad for most of the more than one million refugees and migrants who have come to the continent since early 2015.

On Saturday, European Migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos said Greece -- already struggling with a buildup of 30,000 migrants -- was expected to receive "another 100,000" by the end of March.

EU leaders will also try to increase aid for Greece which has seen non-EU Macedonia and EU countries on the Balkans route tighten their borders, stranding asylum seekers desperate to head northward to



Centre of Excellence, told the Observer it had gathered evidence of Russia interfering in Germany against Merkel, adding that Russia already had a track record for funding extremist forces in Europe.

Nato analysts have reportedly identified these attempts to topple the German leader, who has been a leading advocate of economic sanctions against Vladimir Putin's regime.

Jānis Sārts, director of Nato's Strategic Communications

Germany has welcomed more than one million refugees over the past year. But it has put Merkel under heavy criticism. A recent poll suggesting 81% of German citizens believe the Chancellor has lost control of the situation.

BATTLE FOR US PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION

Trump, Cruz seek 'one-on-one' duel

Urge GOP rivals to quit race

US Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump has called for a "one-on-one" battle with Ted Cruz, urging other rivals to quit the nomination race.

Cruz also suggested it was time for other hopefuls, like Marco Rubio and John Kasich, to step aside. Trump and Cruz won two states each in Saturday's voting.

In the Democratic race, Bernie Sanders took two states - but Hillary Clinton maintained her front-runner status after a big victory in Louisiana.

Speaking after wins in the Republican Kentucky caucuses and Louisiana primary election, Trump told a news conference: "I would love to take on Ted Cruz one on one."

"Marco Rubio had a very very bad night and personally I call for him to drop out of the race. I think it's time now that he dropped out of the race. I really think so."

Meanwhile, Texas Senator Cruz - who won Republican caucuses in Kansas and Maine - said he believed that "as long as the field remains divided, it gives Donald an advantage".

Florida Senator Rubio and Ohio Governor Kasich have so far made no public comments on the issue.

Cruz now appears to be the only candidate who can stop Trump, analysts say, after a week in which the Republican establishment did everything it could to attack Trump, a New York tycoon.

Observers also point out that Cruz and Vermont Senator Sanders - who beat Clinton in Kansas and Nebraska - both won in states holding caucuses but lost in the Louisiana primary elections, involving far more voters.

The election itself, on 8 November, will see America vote for a successor to Barack Obama, a Democratic president standing down after two terms in office which have seen the Republicans take control of both houses of Congress.

TRUMP POSES THREAT TO PEACE, PROSPERITY German Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel has criticized leading Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump as a right-wing populist whose political views pose a threat to peace and prosperity.

The comments by Gabriel, economy minister and leader of the Social Democrats, are the clearest sign yet that ruling politicians in Europe are increasingly worried about the outcome of the US presidential elections.

"Whether Donald Trump, Marine le Pen or Geert Wilders - all these right-wing populists are not only a threat to peace and social cohesion, but also to economic development," Gabriel told Welt am Sonntag newspaper in an interview published on Sunday.

DELEGATE TRACKER	
DEMOCRATS	REPUBLICANS
Need 2383 to win nomination	Need 1237 to win nomination
CLINTON 1121 (1262 short)	TRUMP 378 (859 short)
SANDERS 479 (1904 short)	CRUZ 295 (942 short)
	RUBIO 123 (1114 short)

Iranian tycoon gets death for 'corruption on earth'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

An Iranian billionaire tycoon has been sentenced to death for corruption, the country's justice official has said.

Babak Zanjani, one of Iran's richest men, was arrested in December 2013 after accusations he withheld billions in oil revenue through his companies. He is said to be worth around \$13.5 billion - or £9.5 billion.

The long trial held in public - a rarity for such a major case in Iran - convicted the 41-year-old businessman of fraud and economic crimes. Two other defendants were found guilty of "corruption on earth", the most serious offence under the country's criminal code, meaning they too will face the death penalty.

As well as facing the death penalty Mr Zanjani will also be forced to repay money to the state, judiciary spokesman Gholam Hossein Mohseni-Ejeie said at his weekly press conference. "The preliminary court has sentenced



Babak Zanjani

these three defendants to be executed, as well as paying restitution to the plaintiff," Mr Mohseni-Ejeie said.

By his own account, Mr Zanjani for years arranged billions of dollars of oil deals through a network of companies stretching from Turkey to Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates. He amassed a fortune of \$10 billion - along with debts of a similar scale, the tycoon once told an Iranian magazine.

At the time of his arrest in December 2013, a judicial spokesman said: "He received funds from certain bodies ... and received oil and other shipments and now has not returned the funds". Prosecutors accused him of owing the government more than \$2.7 billion for oil sold on behalf of the oil ministry.

Iran emerged from years of economic isolation in January when world powers led by the United States and the European Union lifted crippling sanctions against Tehran in return for curbs on Tehran's nuclear ambitions.



Turkish anti riot police officers detain a woman yesterday, during a march in Kadikoy district in Istanbul to mark International Women's Day. PHOTO: REUTERS

Nancy Reagan dies at 94

AFP, Los Angeles

Nancy Reagan, devoted wife and trusted confidante to late US president Ronald Reagan who after his death became the most ardent guardian of his political legacy, died yesterday. She was 94.

The former first lady passed away at her home in Los Angeles from congestive heart failure, her spokeswoman Joanne Drake said.

She will be buried next to her husband at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California, Drake said.

Late in her life, Reagan earned praise for many of the very qualities that saw her savaged by critics during Ronald Reagan's two White House terms



from 1981-1989 -- her fierce protectiveness and outsized influence on the president.

She made her own mark as first lady with her signature "Just Say No" drug awareness campaign, launched in 1982.

Warm tributes noting Nancy Reagan's steadfast dedication to her husband poured in as news of her death broke.

US President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle praised the former first lady as a "proud example."

They said Reagan transformed the role of first lady during her 1981-1989 White House tenure, and later became an advocate for millions suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Brothers burn alive sister in India for the sake of 'honour'

AFP, Jaipur

A woman was burnt to death by her brothers for marrying a man belonging to a different caste, police said yesterday, in the latest incident of a honour killing in India.

Rama Kunwar, 30, had eloped with her lover eight years ago and returned to her village in western Rajasthan state on Friday, hoping her family had forgiven her for marrying against their wishes.

But her still enraged brothers barged in as she was visiting her in-laws' house and dragged her outside before setting her on fire as other villagers watched.

"She thought that her parents would now accept her but as soon as her brothers came to know that she was in the village, they rushed to that house and dragged her out," Brijran Singh, a senior administrative officer of Dungarpur

Seized Turkey daily adopts pro-govt line

Ankara's EU hope dented by crackdown on press freedom: source

AFP, Ankara

A leading Turkish newspaper which had staunchly opposed President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday printed its first new edition since its seizure by authorities, strongly supporting the government line.

Turkish police on Friday raided the Istanbul premises of the Zaman newspaper using tear gas and water cannon to enter the building in order to impose a court order placing the media business under administration.

The front page of the paper, normally strongly critical of the president, yesterday was full of articles supporting the government. Zaman headlined an ambitious three billion dollar government project to connect Asian and European sides of Turkey's mega city Istanbul by a third bridge.

In common with traditionally pro-government newspapers the front page also contained images of the funerals of "martyrs" killed in the military clashes with Kurdish rebels in the southeast.



hopes have been "jeopardised" by a crackdown on press freedom. Johannes Hahn, the European Enlargement Commissioner, wrote on Twitter that human rights are "not negotiable" for prospective EU members.

"Extremely worried about latest developments on Zaman newspaper which jeopardises progress made by Turkey in other areas," he said.

"We will continue to monitor this case closely. Turkey, as a candidate country, needs to respect freedom of the media."

With an estimated circulation of 650,000, the newspaper has been closely affiliated with Erdogan's enemy, exiled Islamic preacher Fethullah Gulen, believed to be wielding significant influence in the police and judiciary, as well as media and financial interests.

Yesterday's edition was the first issue after the takeover, which critics said was aimed at eradicating opposition media in Turkey.

"The Sunday edition was not produced by Zaman's staff," a journalist of the daily said.