

NEWS IN brief

Indian girl, 16, dies after being raped and set on fire

AFP, New Delhi
A 16-year-old Indian girl who was raped and then set on fire on the roof of her home has died, police said yesterday, the latest in a string of horrific sexual crimes in India. The teenager sustained more than 90 percent burns in Monday's attack. Police have arrested the main accused who is 19 years old. The accused has been charged with a slew of offences including rape and murder, police said. Media reports quoted the girl's father as saying the suspect lived nearby in their village in Uttar Pradesh and that he had been harassing his daughter for a year despite several warnings.

Tunisian forces kill 7 'terrorists'

AFP, Tunis
Tunisian security forces killed seven "terrorists" overnight the Benniri area near Ben Guerdane after a deadly jihadist attack on the town near the border with Libya, the authorities said yesterday. Benniri is a few kilometres (miles) south of Ben Guerdane which is still under curfew after Monday's dawn attack in which 36 assailants, 12 members of the security forces and seven civilians were killed.

Palace slams 'Queen backs Brexit' report

AFP, London
Buckingham Palace hit out yesterday at a report which claimed Queen Elizabeth II is in favour of Britain leaving the European Union. The Sun, Britain's most-read newspaper, put the headline "Queen backs Brexit" on its front page with a photograph of the monarch, with the sub-heading "EU going in wrong direction, she says". Britain is due to vote on June 23 on whether to remain a member of the 28-member European Union.



Junior doctors protest with banners outside St Thomas' Hospital in central London yesterday, against proposed new conditions and pay rates for working unsociable hours. Thousands of operations and procedures across England have been cancelled as a result of the 48 hour strike which began Wednesday morning.

Joe Biden slams attacks on Israelis

Upsurge in violence kills 2 more

AFP, Jerusalem
US Vice President Joe Biden implicitly criticised Palestinian leaders for not condemning attacks against Israelis, as an upsurge in violence marred his visit.
Six separate attacks took place shortly before or after Biden's arrival Tuesday, including a stabbing spree on Tel Aviv's waterfront by a Palestinian who killed an American tourist and wounded 12 people.
The stabbings in the Jaffa port area took place as Biden met former Israeli president Shimon Peres about a kilometre away on Tuesday.
Biden said his wife and grandchildren had been having dinner on the beach not far from the site of the stabbings.
"The United States of America condemns these acts and condemns the failure to condemn these acts," Biden said while meeting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.
"The kind of violence we saw yesterday, the failure to condemn it, the rhetoric that incites that violence, the retribution that it generates, has to stop."
Biden offered his condolences to the family of the American victim, 29-year-old Taylor Force.
Biden was to travel to Ramallah later yesterday to meet Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas.
Many analysts say Palestinian frustration with Israeli occupation and settlement building in the West Bank, the complete lack of progress in peace efforts and their own fractured leadership have fed the unrest. Israel blames incitement by Palestinian leaders and media as a main cause of the violence, which has killed 188 Palestinians and 28 Israelis since October.

Iran tests more missiles defying US warning

AFP, Tehran
Iran fired two more long-range ballistic missiles on Wednesday as it continued military tests in defiance of US sanctions and fresh warnings from Washington.
The missile tests, described by Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guards as a show of force in the face of US pressure, come just weeks after the implementation of Iran's historic nuclear deal with world powers.
After similar tests on Tuesday, Washington had warned it could raise the issue with the UN Security Council and take further action after US sanctions were imposed in connection with Iran's missile programme in January.
The hard-fought deal, which saw international sanctions lifted in exchange for curbs on Iran's nuclear ambitions, did not extend to its missile programme.
Yesterday's tests saw two Qadr-H and Qadr-F precision missiles fired from launcher trucks tucked in the Alborz mountain range in northern Iran, hitting targets about 1,400 kilometres away in the south-eastern Makran area, the Guards said.
Ballistic missile tests have been seen as a way for Iran's military to demonstrate that the nuclear deal will have no impact on its plans, which it says are for domestic defence only.
Previous UN resolutions have aimed at stopping Tehran from developing missiles capable of carrying a nuclear warhead, although Tehran has always denied seeking the capability.
"The reason we have designed these missiles with such a range -- 2,000 kilometres -- is to be able to hit our remote enemies, the Zionist regime," Hajizadeh said, referring to Israel.
News agencies Fars and Tasnim, both close to the Guards, said the phrase "Israel must be wiped off the face of earth" was inscribed in Hebrew on the missiles, recalling a famous quote by the late revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.



DEFAMATION CASE Court issues summons to Kejriwal

TNN, New Delhi
Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and five other AAP leaders were yesterday summoned as accused by a trial court in a criminal defamation case filed against them by finance minister Arun Jaitley.
Chief metropolitan magistrate Sumit Dass issued summons to the AAP leaders and directed them to appear before it on April 7 in the case filed against them for allegedly defaming Jaitley in the DDCA controversy.
Jaitley has alleged that Kejriwal and other AAP leaders had made defamatory statements that Jaitley and his family had made pecuniary gains by associating with M/s 21st Century Media Pvt Ltd, a sports management firm.

Balkans shut borders

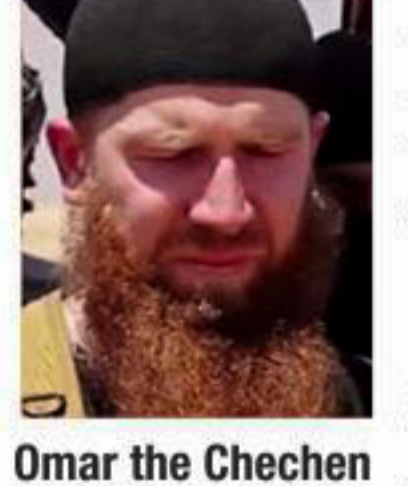
UN says proposed EU-Turkey deal violates law

AGENCIES
The Balkan trail from Greece to northern Europe used by floods of migrants was blocked yesterday after a string of nations slammed shut their borders, hiking pressure on the EU and Turkey to nail down a "game-changing" grand bargain.
Slovenia and Croatia, two of the countries along the well-trodden route, said late Tuesday that no migrants wishing to transit towards other countries would be allowed to enter. Serbia indicated it would follow suit.
EU member Slovenia said that from midnight (2300 GMT), the only exceptions were for people wishing to claim asylum in the country or for migrants "on humanitarian grounds and in accordance with the rules of the Schengen zone".
Prime Minister Miro Cerar said the move meant that "the (Balkan) route for illegal migrations no longer exists." Croatia's Interior Minister Vlaho Orepic called it a "new phase in resolving the migrant crisis".
In Greece, more than 13,000 people were stranded, according to state agency ANA.
More than a million people have crossed the Aegean Sea into Greece since the start of 2015, many from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq and most aiming to reach wealthy Germany, Austria and Scandinavia.
EU leaders hope that a mooted deal with Turkey discussed at an EU summit on Monday, and due to be finalised on March 17-18, will be the answer, with Turkey offering to take back all illegal migrants landing on the Greek islands.
In return though, Turkey wants six billion euros in aid, visa-free access for Turkish citizens to Europe's passport-free Schengen zone and a speeding up of Ankara's efforts to join the EU.
The UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, has criticised the plans drawn up by Turkey and the EU, saying they would amount to a violation of human rights. "The collective expulsion of foreigners is prohibited under the European Convention of Human Rights," Vincent Cochetel, UNHCR's Europe regional director, said in Geneva on Tuesday.



IS 'minister of war' likely killed in US air strike

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK
The reported death of the IS "minister of war" Omar the Chechen would represent a significant scalp for the US and could undermine the terror's group's ability to coordinate attacks and defend its strongholds.
Abu Omar al-Shishani, also known as Omar the Chechen, ranked among America's most-wanted militants under a US programme that offered up to \$5 million for information to help remove him from the battlefield.
Born in 1986 in Georgia, which was then still part of the Soviet Union, the red-bearded Shishani had a reputation as a close military adviser to Isis leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was said by followers to have relied heavily on Shishani.
The strike itself involved multiple waves of manned and unmanned aircraft, targeting Shishani near the town of al-Shadadi in Syria, a US official said.
The Pentagon believes Shishani was sent there to bolster troops after they suffered a series of setbacks at the hands of US-backed forces from the Syrian Arab Coalition, which captured al-Shadadi from the militants last month.
Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook said the US military was still assessing the results of the strike, but acknowledged its potential significance.
Shishani "was a Syrian-based Georgian national who held numerous top military positions within ISIL, including minister of war," Cook said, using an acronym for the group. Cook said Shishani's death would undermine the group's ability to coordinate attacks and defend its strongholds. It would also hurt Islamic State's ability to recruit foreign fighters, especially those from Chechnya and the Caucasus regions, he said.
If his death is confirmed, the strike would be one of the most successful operations to take out Islamic State's leadership in Iraq and Syria.



Omar the Chechen



Residents fights with policemen and demolition team during a demolition of shanty community in Manila, yesterday. Shantytowns dot the Philippine capital where many of the city's poor are forced to reside. PHOTO: AFP



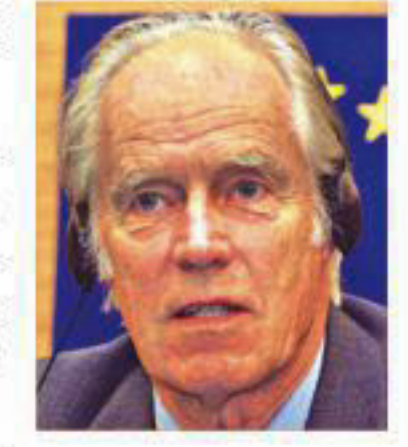
North Korea has miniaturised nuke warheads

Claims Kim Jong-Un

AFP, Seoul
North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un said his country has successfully miniaturised a thermo-nuclear warhead, as Pyongyang yesterday continued to talk up its nuclear strike capabilities amid rising military tensions on the Korean peninsula.
While the North has boasted of mastering miniaturisation before, this is the first time Kim has directly claimed the breakthrough that experts see as a game-changing step towards a credible North Korean nuclear threat to the US mainland.
His comments came a day after the North's powerful National Defence Commission threatened pre-emptive nuclear attacks on South Korea and the US mainland, as Seoul and Washington kicked off large-scale joint military exercises.
Military tensions have surged in the region since the North carried out its fourth nuclear test in January. The UN Security Council responded by imposing tough new sanctions last week.
Most experts rule out the prospect of North Korea launching any sort of nuclear strike with a largely untested system, saying it would be tantamount to suicide given overwhelming US technical superiority.

'Fifth Beatle' George Martin dies at 90

AFP, London
Legendary British music producer George Martin, who turned the Beatles into the best-selling band in history, has died at the age of 90, his family said yesterday, as tributes poured in.
Beatles drummer Ringo Starr was the first to give the news, writing on Twitter: "God bless George Martin peace and love to Judy and his family... George will be missed," alongside a black-and-white picture of the "Fab Four" with Martin.
British Prime Minister David Cameron led praise for the producer, who signed up the young band from Liverpool when he headed the Parlophone label after hearing their demo record in 1962.
"Sir George Martin was a giant of music -- working with the Fab Four to create the world's most enduring pop music," Cameron tweeted.
Martin's innovative recording techniques and role as authoritarian mentor was so essential to the band's success that he was nicknamed the "Fifth Beatle".
Martin produced 30 British number one singles, won six Grammys and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1996.
After the band split, Martin built the Air Studios on the Caribbean island of Montserrat and went on to work with other artists including Bob Dylan, Sting and Elton John.



Who will be Myanmar's next president?

AFP, Yangon
Myanmar's parliament meets today to put forward presidential candidates. Under the country's complex junta-drafted constitution, three names will be put forward but the NLD's candidate will almost certainly be the winner. Suu Kyi is barred from the presidency. Her party has remained tight-lipped on who she favours. But here are some figures that have emerged as contenders.
Htin Kyaw: He is often simply described as Suu Kyi's personal driver. But in reality he is much more than that. A school friend, NLD veteran and one of Suu Kyi's most trusted advisors he is seen as being unquestionably loyal. The genial 69-year-old commands wide respect among the establishment as the son of Min Thu Wun, a well-regarded writer and poet.
Tin Myo Win: Suu Kyi's charismatic family doctor was one of the few people allowed to see her during some 15 years she spent under house arrest during the junta era. He heads the NLD National Health Network and remains a close confidant, even attending crucial talks with army chief Min Aung Hlaing alongside Suu Kyi. But the 64-year-old lacks the military background that could endear him to the still-powerful army.
Tin Oo: A general turned democracy activist, the patron of the NLD commands huge respect in Myanmar. He is a founding member of the pro-democracy party following mass protests in 1988 that ended in a bloody crackdown. But he is nearly 90 and has shown little public enthusiasm to lead the nation.
Shwe Mann: A former junta general seen as the most reformist of his khaki-clad colleagues, he was purged from the army-backed party last year. Shwe Mann is the only non-NLD name doing the rounds. Observers have long speculated that Shwe Mann could be a compromise candidate who could bridge the divide between Suu Kyi and the military that still stands in the



Shwe Mann Tin Myo Win

Man sells daughter 'to buy iPhone'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK
A Chinese man has been jailed for three years after selling his 18-day-old baby daughter online so he could buy an iPhone.
The man, known only as "A Duan", from Tong'an, Fujian province, south eastern China, found a buyer for his infant daughter on the social media site QQ, who paid £2,500 for the baby, according to the People's Daily Online.
The man allegedly intended to buy an iPhone and a motorbike with the funds.
The mother, called "Xiao Mei" in reports, reportedly worked many part-time jobs while the father spent his most of time in internet cafes. Both parents were 19 when they went through with the unplanned pregnancy.
The baby was purchased for the un-named buyer's sister. As the parents are not in a financial position to raise the child it is understood the infant is still with the buyer's sister, the Epoch Times reports.
Mei had fled from Tong'an after the baby was sold, but was tracked down by police investigating the illegal sale.
Mei reportedly told police: "I myself was adopted, and may people in my hometown send their kids to other people to raise them. I really didn't know that it was illegal."
According to the Epoch Times, Mei has received a two-and-a-half year suspended sentence and A Duan was given three years in jail.