

NEWSIN brief

Saudis 'causing most Yemen casualties': UN

The UN human rights chief has accused the Saudi-led coalition of causing twice as many civilian casualties as all the other forces fighting in Yemen. Zeid Raad Al Hussein condemned "the repeated failure" of the coalition to prevent repeated deadly incidents. Riyadh has denied causing large-scale civilian deaths, saying it is making efforts to avoid hitting civilian targets.

Indian politician arrested over horse attack

An Indian politician was arrested yesterday on suspicion of attacking a police horse whose injuries led to a leg amputation. Police said Ganesh Joshi, from India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was remanded in custody for two weeks on charges of cruelty to the horse, which was wounded during a party protest in the northern state of Uttarakhand on Monday.

Pakistan's Musharraf arrives in Dubai

Pakistan's former military ruler Pervez Musharraf, who faces charges of treason and murder, arrived in Dubai yesterday for what his lawyers said was urgent medical treatment after a three-year travel ban was lifted. Lawyers for the former president have said he needs urgent medical treatment not available in Pakistan.

JNU 'sedition' students freed on bail

Two students from a top university arrested for allegedly shouting "anti-India" slogans have been granted bail yesterday. Umar Khalid and Anirban Bhattacharya, charged with "sedition" along with student leader Kanhaiya Kumar, received six months' bail from a Delhi court. They were arrested after a rally against the execution of a Kashmiri separatist who was convicted over the 2001 Indian parliament attack.

Ebola clinic reopens in Guinea

A medical charity confirmed yesterday its specialist Ebola clinic has reopened in rural southern Guinea to treat an infected woman and her child after the virus killed at least two of their relatives. The Alliance For International Medical Action (ALIMA) said the pair were receiving treatment following positive tests for Ebola on Thursday.

EU, Turkey strike migrant deal

Expulsion of refugees arriving on Greek islands would begin on Sunday

EU leaders approved a controversial deal with Turkey to curb the huge flow of asylum seekers to Europe, with all migrants arriving in Greece by Sunday to be sent back.

Finland's Prime Minister Juha Sipila said the 28 EU leaders approved yesterday the deal negotiated with Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in a bid to end an unprecedented crisis dividing the continent.

"The Turkey deal was approved," Sipila wrote on Twitter. Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka confirmed that the expulsion of migrants arriving on the Greek islands would begin on Sunday.

"Deal with Turkey approved. All illegal migrants who reach Greece from Turkey as of March 20 will be returned!" Sobotka wrote on Twitter. More than 1.2 million migrants have come to Europe since January 2015 in the continent's biggest migration crisis since World War II, and around 4,000 have drowned while trying to cross the Aegean Sea between Turkey and Greece.

But the deal comes at a heavy cost for Europe, with many members of the bloc expressing misgivings about the legality of the deal and Turkey's human rights record.

Turkey has demanded an acceleration of its

long-stalled bid for EU membership, the doubling of refugee aid to six billion euros (\$6.8 billion) and visa-free travel in return for taking back all new irregular migrants coming to Greece, the main entry point to Europe.



Refugees line up for a goods distribution at a makeshift camp at the Greek-Macedonian border near Idomeni, Greece, yesterday.

Davutoglu is now set to formally sign off on the accord at a final meeting with EU leaders. "Tusk's proposal for the EU-Turkey agreement approved by EU leaders, in principle, as it is now

up for final talks with the Turkish prime minister," a senior EU official told AFP.

But in a sign of the tensions that remain between Ankara and Brussels, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan blasted several EU states for taking only a "handful of refugees" in contrast to the nearly three million Turkey has admitted, most of them fleeing the Syrian war.

Erdogan also accused the Europeans of supporting the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) days after a bombing in Ankara claimed by Kurdish rebels allegedly linked to the group.

"European countries are paying no attention, as if they are dancing in a minefield," he said. Critics have said the mass expulsion planned under the EU-Turkey deal could infringe international law on the treatment of asylum seekers.

Under the terms of the plan, the EU would take in one Syrian refugee from Turkish soil in exchange for every Syrian readmitted to Turkey from Greece.

The move is meant to discourage them from risking their lives in often rickety and overcrowded boats operated by smugglers.

EU officials insisted the deal would be stressed repeatedly each application would be treated individually, with full rights of appeal and proper oversight.

New Chinese activity seen at S China Sea

Says US Navy chief; Beijing terms the claim preposterous

The United States has seen Chinese activity around a reef China seized from the Philippines nearly four years ago that could be a precursor to more land reclamation in the disputed South China Sea, the US Navy chief said on Thursday.

The head of US naval operations, Admiral John Richardson, expressed concern that an international court ruling expected in coming weeks on a case brought by the Philippines against China over its South China Sea claims could be a trigger for Beijing to declare an exclusion zone in the busy trade route.

Richardson told Reuters the United States was weighing responses to such a move. China claims most of the South China Sea, through which more than \$5 trillion in global trade passes every year. Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines and Taiwan have rival claims.

Richardson said the US military had seen Chinese activity around Scarborough Shoal in the northern part of the Spratly archipelago, about 125 miles west of the Philippine base of Subic Bay.

"I think we see some surface ship activity and those sorts of things, survey type of activity, going on. That's an area of



concern ... a next possible area of reclamation," he said.

Richardson said it was unclear if the activity near the reef, which China seized in 2012, was related to the pending arbitration decision.

Asked about Richardson's statement, Lu Kang, a spokesman for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said it was hypocritical for the United States to criticize China for militarizing the region when it carries out its own naval patrols there.

"This is really laughable and preposterous," he said. The Philippine foreign ministry said it had yet to receive a report about Chinese activity in Scarborough Shoal.

A Philippine military official who declined to be identified because he is not authorized to speak to the media said he was unaware of a Chinese survey ship in the area.

"China already has de facto control over the shoal since 2012 and they always have two to three coastguard ships there. We are also monitoring their activities and movements," the official told reporters.

Richardson said China's pursuit of South China Sea territory, which has included massive land reclamation to create artificial islands elsewhere in the Spratlys, threatened to reverse decades of open access and introduce new "rules" that required countries to obtain permission before transiting those waters.

UN envoy urges clear proposals from Syria

The UN's Syria envoy wrapped up a week of fragile peace talks yesterday with plans to meet both sides, after urging the regime put forward clear plans for political transition.

Staffan de Mistura, the United Nations mediator at the Geneva negotiations, has said agreeing on a unity government to lead Syria out of five years of civil war was the most daunting roadblock to peace.

He praised the main opposition High Negotiations Committee (HNC) for offering "substantive" plans for a transition on Thursday. But the HNC has made the departure of President Bashar al-Assad an unalterable demand, while Damascus has termed any talk of the president's removal as "a red line."

"I hope I will get similar in-depth clarity from the government" about options for political transition, the UN envoy told reporters. He described previous talks with the regime this week as "more on the formal side." "Time is going by," he said. "What we need to do is

start looking (at)... what the government sees as a possible political transition."

Efforts to negotiate an end to the violence that has killed more than 270,000 people and displaced millions face daunting obstacles.

Acknowledging the "large" distance between the two sides, de Mistura said his goal in the coming days was to look for glimpses of common ground between the HNC and Damascus to identify what he described as "the grey zones."

HNC spokeswoman Bassma Kodmani told reporters that the opposition was weary of drawn out negotiations that ultimately lead nowhere. "We are keen to move quickly," she said. "We are very keen to avoid a process that does not deliver."

Aside from the disputes in Geneva, the talks risk further complications from changing facts on the ground.

If the talks make progress before pausing on March 24, a second round of negotiations is tentatively scheduled for next month in which Kurdish leaders could possibly be included.

Jewish leaders plan Trump boycott

Several groups of rabbis and Jewish religious leaders are planning to protest Donald Trump's speech to a major pro-Israel conference in Washington on Monday, accusing the presidential candidate of encouraging hatred.

Trump is scheduled to address the American Israel Public Affairs Committee conference Monday night, and several groups are organizing boycotts of the speech.

Rabbis David Paskin and Jesse Olitzky organised one such campaign, called Come Together Against Hate, a play on the conference's theme of "Come Together."

The pair and their allies have created a website and Facebook group to organize a protest that they say is not designed to disrupt AIPAC but to signal their condemnation of Trump.

"This is not about policies, this is not about parties, this is about one particular person, Donald Trump, who has encouraged and incited violence at his campaign rallies," said Paskin, a rabbi in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. "We are against the hatred, the incitement of hatred, the ugliness that has engulfed this political season."

An AIPAC spokesman wouldn't comment on the planned protest, but said the group has a "longstanding policy" to invite all the active presidential candidates to its conference.



BRUSSELS RAIDS Paris attacks suspect Abdeslam arrested

Paris attacks suspect Salah Abdeslam was wounded and arrested in a raid in Brussels, officials said yesterday.

At least one other suspect was believed to be holed up in a building in the Molenbeek area and the raid was ongoing. Abdeslam, who had been on the run since the attacks in November, was wounded in the leg as police moved in on a flat in Molenbeek area.

The raid comes after his fingerprints were found in a Brussels flat that was raided on Tuesday.

One of Europe's most wanted men, Abdeslam is a key suspect in the jihadist attacks in Paris which left 130 people died. Abdeslam's fingerprints were found in a flat in the southern Forest suburb of Brussels that was raided on Tuesday, although prosecutors said the prints could not be dated.

One man -- identified as Algerian national Mohamed Belkaid and linked to the Paris attacks -- was shot dead in the raid.

Officials said at the time they believed as many as two other suspects may have escaped.

The man killed on Tuesday, Belkaid, is believed to have used a false ID in the name of Samir Bouzid, which was used to cross the border between Austria and Hungary with Abdeslam and another man last September, the Belgian prosecutor's office said.

The false ID was also used four days after the Paris attacks at a Western Union office in Brussels to transfer money to Hasna Aitboulahcen, who Belgian prosecutors say was the niece of the suspected ringleader of the Paris attacks, Abdelhamid Abaouod.



Campaigners from Amnesty International carry model missiles through Westminster in central London yesterday to highlight the export of UK-manufactured arms to Saudi Arabia. The human rights organisation believes that British-made weapons could be used to commit war crimes in Yemen.

North Korea launches missiles

Japan protests

North Korea fired at least one ballistic missile which flew about 800 km before hitting the sea off its east coast, South Korea's military said yesterday, as the isolated state stepped up its defiance of tough new UN and US sanctions.

A US official told Reuters in Washington it appeared to be a medium-range missile fired from a road-mobile launcher. That would mark North Korea's first test of a medium-range missile, capable of reaching Japan, since 2014.

The missile, launched from north of the capital, Pyongyang, flew across the peninsula and into the sea off the east coast early yesterday morning, South Korea's Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

It appeared the North may have fired a second missile soon after from the same region, with a projectile disappearing from radar at an altitude of about 17 km, the statement said.

South Korea did not confirm the type of the missiles. But 800 km was likely beyond the range of most short-range missiles in North Korea's arsenal. The North's Rodong missile has an estimated maximum range of 1,300 km.

Yesterday's launch quickly provoked a barrage of criticism and appeals. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang urged North Korea to abide by UN resolutions and not do anything to exacerbate tensions.

Japan lodged a protest with North Korea through its embassy in Beijing, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told parliament.

"Japan strongly demands North Korea to exercise self-restraint and will take all necessary measures, such as warning and surveillance activity, to be able to respond to any situations," Abe said.

Cuban woman receives letter from Obama

A woman who invited US President Barack Obama to her home in Cuba has received a response from the president, as direct mail links between the two countries were restored.

Ileana Yarza, 76, wrote to Obama in February, inviting him to have "a cup of Cuban coffee" at her home in Havana. The president's letter, thanking Yarza, was dispatched to Cuba on Wednesday. It was among the first batch of letters to reach Cuba from the US in 50 years.

Direct postal service between the two countries was suspended at the height of the Cold War, meaning mail was re-routed through other countries - usually Mexico or Canada.

Yarza wrote to Obama on 18 February after finding out he would be visiting Cuba in March, telling him: "There are not many Cubans so eager as I to meet you in person."

The president thanked Yarza for her support, adding that the letter "serves as a reminder of a bright new chapter in the relationship between [their] two nations."

'Everyone else so bad' Trudeau begged to become next US president

During a visit to New York on Thursday, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was approached in a restaurant by two Americans, who got on their knees and begged him to run for the office of US president.

Footage of the encounter, which took place in the East Village's Mile End Deli, a Montreal-style delicatessen, was captured by Canadian journalist Marie-Joelle Parent.

"Could you run for president here?" they asked Trudeau. The Canadian prime minister tried to explain that even if he wanted to, he couldn't run for president because he wasn't born in the United States. But the two men wouldn't take no for an answer.

"All our guys are so bad," they said. "They're either boring, weird, you have to settle for them -- please!"

Trudeau tried to explain that he already had a pretty important job. But his fans wouldn't relent, as this video by journalist Marie-Joelle Parent shows.



Eventually Trudeau just had to walk away, leaving them still kneeling on the floor. Since coming to power late last year, Trudeau has emerged as something of a darling of North American liberals, who admire his outspoken stand on issues such as the settlement of refugees, climate change and multiculturalism. WorldViews noted earlier this month how Trudeau stood in conspicuous contrast to the Republican 2016 field, particularly front-runner Donald Trump.

KUNDUZ BOMBING US troops punished over hospital attack

US military personnel involved in a devastating air strike on a hospital run by Doctors Without Borders in Afghanistan have been or will be punished, officials said Thursday.

The bombing last October of the MSF hospital in Kunduz -- which came as Nato-backed Afghan forces clashed with insurgents for control of the northern provincial capital -- left 42 people dead.

The US military carried out an investigation and blamed human error. "I can tell you that those individuals most closely associated with the incident have been suspended from their duties and were referred for administrative action," said Colonel Patrick Ryder, a spokesman for US Central Command.

More than 10 military personnel face administrative action, another official said. He said this can range from 'negative counseling', or being told not to do something again, to a letter of reprimand, which generally blocks further promotion. Removal of command is also a possibility.

Meanwhile, rights campaigners yesterday lambasted US "punishments" handed to officers involved in a catastrophic bombing raid on an Afghan hospital, saying the failure to criminally investigate them is an "injustice and insult" to the victims. Next week, the Pentagon is due to publish a version of its report on the attack. It will be redacted to remove classified material.