

# NEWSIN brief

## Turkey to probe 50m 'personal data leak'

AFP, Istanbul  
Turkey's authorities yesterday launched a probe into a leak of the personal data of some 50 million Turkish citizens, the latest breach to expose weaknesses in the country's information security. The massive database -- containing Turks' names, identity numbers and addresses -- was posted online by hackers earlier this week along with sharp jabs at the country's leadership.

## Truce largely holding in Karabakh region

AFP, Matagis  
Azerbaijani and Armenian forces yesterday said they were largely observing a truce that halted four days of clashes which claimed scores of lives in the worst outbreak of violence in decades over the disputed Nagorny Karabakh region. At least 75 people were reported killed.

## Punjab on high alert after intel input

PTI, Chandigarh

Punjab, which had witnessed two terror attacks in less than six months, was put on high alert yesterday following an input from the Delhi Police warning about entry of three heavily armed Pakistani terrorists. The alert said their target could be in Delhi, Goa or Mumbai.

## Country music star Merle Haggard dead

REUTERS, California

Country musician Merle Haggard, who emerged from prison to become the poetic voice of the working man with hits such as "Mama Tried" and "If We Make It Through December," died yesterday, his 79th birthday, said his manager. The country legend had canceled all his concerts for April due to illness.



A Pakistani migrant threatens to hang himself from a utility pole during a demonstration inside the Moria registration centre on the Greek island of Lesbos, yesterday.

# Syria launches Aleppo attack

IS strikes regime near capital; Iraq puts Mosul offensive on hold

REUTERS, Beirut

The Syrian army and its allies launched a major attack on insurgents south of Aleppo, described as the fiercest government assault in the area since an agreement to ease the fighting came into effect in February. Fighting south of Aleppo in recent days has put further strain on the already widely violated ceasefire deal brokered by the United States and Russia with the aim of launching a diplomatic process towards ending the five-year-long war. The indirect talks organised by the United Nations are struggling with no sign of compromise over the main issue dividing the sides: the future of President Bashar al-Assad. A second round of talks is due to begin on Monday in Geneva. Rebels described intense air strikes in the southern Aleppo area where the al Qaeda-linked Nusra Front shot down a Syrian warplane on Tuesday

and captured its pilot. Nusra Front, which along with Islamic State is not part of the ceasefire, last week attacked and captured a town in the area, killing dozens of Syrian soldiers and their allies, among them 11 members of the Lebanese Shi'ite group Hezbollah. A statement from the Syrian army and its allies said they were targeting armed groups in areas south of Aleppo, supported by "heavy and concentrated air strikes", the website of the Hezbollah-controlled al-Manar reported. Syria's crisis erupted five years ago with protests against Assad which were put down with force. It descended into a civil war which has killed more than 250,000, drawn in global military powers and helped Islamic State establish its self-declared caliphate. Nearly five million refugees have been driven abroad. In an apparent response to setbacks including the loss of Palmyra to government forces last month, Islamic State launched attacks on government-held areas some 50 km (30 miles)

northeast of Damascus overnight. The jihadist group said in a statement it had attacked the Tishrin power station 50 km (30 miles) northeast of the capital and a Syrian military source acknowledged the group had staged assaults, but said all those who took part had been killed. An Iraqi army offensive touted as the first phase of a campaign to recapture the northern city of Mosul from Islamic State has been paused until more forces arrive to hold ground, the commander in charge said on Wednesday. Almost three weeks into the operation, Iraqi forces have retaken just three villages from Islamic State in the Makhmour area, which is set to be a key staging ground for a future assault on Mosul, around 60 km (40 miles) further north. The faltering start has cast renewed doubt on the capabilities of the Iraqi army, which partially collapsed when Islamic State militants took around a third of the country in 2014.

## PANAMA PAPERS

# Amitabh denies offshore links

BBC ONLINE

Bollywood star Amitabh Bachchan has denied any connection with offshore companies in tax havens.

The Indian Express reported that Bachchan was appointed director in at least four offshore shipping companies in 1993, registered in the British Virgin islands and Bahamas.

He and Bollywood actress Aishwarya Rai are among the 500 Indians listed in the Panama papers, the newspaper said.

Rai's media adviser has questioned the authenticity of the documents.

The Indian Express reported that Bachchan had initially not responded to requests for comment, but he issued a statement on Tuesday denying any involvement.

"I have never been a director of any of the... stated companies. It is possible that my name has been misused," the statement said.

"I have paid all my taxes including on monies spent by me overseas have been in compliance with law, including remittances through Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS), after paying Indian taxes."

"In any event the news report in Indian Express does not even suggest any illegality on my part."

The Indian Express also reported that Aishwarya Rai and her family were appointed as directors of a company incorporated in the British Virgin Islands in 2005, which was dissolved in 2008.



# UAE leader, Pak PM's daughters own UK properties

AFP, London

The president of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan owns London properties worth more than £1.2 billion (\$1.7 billion, 1.5 billion euros) through offshore companies revealed in the so-called Panama Papers, The Guardian reported yesterday.

Three children of Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif have also been shown to own London real estate through offshore companies administered by Mossack Fonseca.

The Guardian reported that Sharif's daughter Maryam was the beneficial owner of two offshore companies that each own flats on the prestigious Park Lane. The premier has insisted his family has done "nothing wrong".

# Leak a boon for Sanders

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The revelation that the rich and wealthy are shovelling money in overseas tax havens is not a particularly surprising one. Nevertheless, the sheer scale of the 11.5 million document leak from Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca has whipped up an overdue storm and forced the issue of tax justice back on the agenda. It is likely that the Panama papers is just the tip of the iceberg, and if even more is revealed about the financial affairs of world leaders, the implication for global politics will be huge.

The Democratic presidential primaries in the US have been characterised by surging anger at the global elite. The Panama papers scandal will only fuel popular indignation at the actions of perceived establishment figures - those who have stood idly by and allowed this huge miscarriage of justice to take place. Although there have been no major American casualties over the leak at this

stage, all of the presidential candidates will be questioned about the scandal. And nobody is going to be under more pressure than Hillary Clinton. For some Americans, she is the embodiment of a "global elite", while Bernie Sanders is its antithesis.

The huge leak exposes governments across the globe wilfully ignoring tax avoidance by the rich.

It has been revealed Clinton pushed through the Panama Free Trade Deal at the same time that Sanders vocally opposed it, citing research warning that it would strictly limit the government's ability to clamp down on questionable or even illegal activity.

As this scandal looks intent on dragging on, it is now increasingly likely that undecided voters will swing towards the Sanders camp in the vital primaries coming up, including New York. The longer this scandal this kept alive the more beneficial will be for Sanders. And if any more skeletons in the Clinton closet see the light, it will parachute Bernie Sanders into the White House.



## US-INDIA RELATIONSHIP

# 'Stronger, closer, but nothing exclusive': Ashton Carter

THE HINDU ONLINE

The US is looking for stronger and closer relations with India but not for "anything exclusive," Defence Secretary Ash Carter said, days ahead of his three-day visit to India that starts on April 8. Carter, a strong proponent of deeper cooperation between India and the US, said he spent "a lot of time on it," and reiterated that the US Pivot to Asia and India's Act East policy implied convergence of concerns and interests.

Carter will also be visiting the Philippines, where he will witness a joint military exercise and visit a US navy ship in the South China Sea.

"What we are looking for is a closer relationship and a stronger relationship as we can, because it is geo-politically grounded," Carter said, speaking at the Centre of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).



"They (India) want to do things their own way. They don't want to do things just with us. They want to do things themselves. So all that's fine. So we're not looking for anything exclusive," Carter, said adding that both countries would be announcing a "whole bunch of things" during his visit. The defence secretary said there were two key elements to the U.S-India strategic cooperation. First, the Pivot to Asia -- Act East convergence, which, he said was "like two hands grasping one another." He named the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) as the second defining component. "...they don't just want to be a buyer. They want to be a co-developer and co-producers. So, they want that kind of relationship," Carter said, adding that this approach was in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Make in India' initiative.



Pope Francis talks with Elizabeth 'Lizzy' Myers, a 5-year-old girl from Ohio, US who suffers from a genetic disease known as Usher syndrome, which leads to blindness and hearing loss at the end of the weekly audience in Saint Peter's Square at the Vatican, yesterday. Lizzy, whose case has received big media coverage in the United States, is not aware that she is suffering from the disease. She could be blind in about seven years so her parents have started what they call a "visual bucket list" of sites and people they think she should see while she can.

# Diabetes 'leading killer in world'

WHO says number of adult patients quadrupled since 1980

AFP, Geneva

The number of adults estimated to be living with diabetes has nearly quadrupled over 35 years, the World Health Organization (WHO) said yesterday, urging huge efforts to change eating habits and exercise more.

The UN's health agency said the number of adults with the disease had surged to 422 million by 2014, compared to 108 million in 1980.

The explosion in prevalence was because of worldwide changes "in the way people eat, move and live," WHO said, in its first-ever global report on the disease. An estimated 8.5 percent of the world's adults now have diabetes, compared to 4.7 percent in 1980.

The disease directly caused 1.5 million deaths in 2012 -- the latest available global figures -- but elevated blood glucose levels linked to diabetes were responsible for an additional 2.2 million deaths that year, the report said.

Diabetes "is one of the leading killers in the world today," said Etienne Krug, who is heading WHO's response to the disease. The region worst affected, with 131 million esti-

mated cases in 2014, was the WHO's Western Pacific region, which includes China and Japan.

The Southeast Asia region -- which includes heavily populated India and Indonesia -- was the next most affected, with 96 million cases. Europe and the Americas were third and fourth on the list, with 64 million and 62 million cases respectively.

The WHO estimated that the annual global cost of diabetes, including health care needs, exceeds \$827 billion (728 billion euros). Citing a separate study, the agency said the global GDP losses linked to diabetes could reach \$1.7 trillion by 2030, with the damage split roughly evenly between developed and developing nations.

Noting both the health and macroeconomic damage caused by the growing diabetes epidemic, WHO chief Margaret Chan called for a coordinated, holistic response.

This should include greater efforts to curb smoking, a push to entrench physical activity in education systems and working with food companies to promote availability of healthier products, the organisation said.



# US begins waging cyber war against IS

AGENCIES

The US has begun waging cyber warfare against IS, Defence Secretary Ashton Carter has confirmed. As the Financial Times reports, Carter said he has issued orders to the US Cyber Command to launch online attacks against the fundamentalist group.

Speaking to the paper, he said: "I have given Cyber Command really its first wartime assignment...and we're seeing how that works out."

He added: "Even a few years ago, it would not have occurred to a Secretary of Defence to say, 'let's get cyber in the game', but here we have real opportunities."

## POLITICAL CHAOS IN LIBYA

# Rival govt refuses to cede power

AFP, Tripoli

Efforts by Libya's UN-backed unity government to assert its control over the capital were thrown into chaos yesterday as the head of a rival Tripoli-based authority backed away from ceding power.

Contradicting an earlier announcement that his so-called National Salvation Government was ready to step aside, Tripoli's unrecognised prime minister Khalifa Ghweil urged his ministers not to stand down. He threatened to prosecute anyone working with the new government.

The reason for the U-turn was not immediately clear but could suggest a split within the Tripoli authority.

There was no immediate reaction from the UN-sponsored administration of prime minister-designate Fayez al-Sarraj, which until the about-face had appeared to be cementing its control over the country's finances and institutions.

Ghweil's administration seized control of Tripoli in mid-2014 with the support of powerful militia groups, forcing a government backed by Libya's internationally recognised parliament to flee to the country's far east. Sarraj's Government of National Accord was created under a power-sharing deal agreed by rival lawmakers in December.

# Suu Kyi gets new role as state adviser

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's president yesterday signed a bill giving Aung San Suu Kyi a new role of state adviser, shoring up her influence across all branches of government despite vehement opposition from the still-powerful military.

The bill outlining her advisory role, which mentions the Nobel laureate by name, enables Suu Kyi to wield influence over parliament as well as in the cabinet in a position officially called "state counsellor".

It was signed into law by President Htin Kyaw, Suu Kyi's longtime aide and effective proxy, following debates in both houses of parliament that have seen protests by the army's legislative representatives.

Suu Kyi is determined to



rule the former junta-run nation regardless of an army-scripted constitution that bars her from becoming president, as she strives to meet the aspirations of millions of voters who gave her pro-democracy party a landslide election victory last November.

She is already foreign minister and met her Chinese counterpart for talks on Tuesday, prioritising Beijing in her first foray into international diplomacy since her National League for Democracy officially took power last week.