

# NEWS IN brief

## India 6th largest military spender

THE HINDU ONLINE

India is the sixth largest military spender in 2015 having spent \$51.3 billion even as the world spent \$1,676 billion reversing a global trend which was on the decline since 2011, as per the latest report from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). India moved one rank up from last year accounting for 3.1 percent of global military expenditure. The US remained by far the world's largest spender in 2015 despite its defence expenditure falling by 2.4 per cent to \$596 billion followed by China, Saudi Arabia, Russia and UK.

## One third of Pakistanis live below poverty line

AFP, Karachi

Nearly 60 million people live below the poverty line in Pakistan, making almost a third of the country poor under a new formula adopted by the government to measure poverty. The report, from Pakistan's Planning Commission, estimates that adults in up to 7.6 million households are earning less than 3,030 rupees per month (\$30), raising poverty levels to 29.5 percent from nine percent under former estimates.

## Fidel Castro makes rare public appearance

AFP, Havana

Cuban revolutionary icon Fidel Castro appeared in public yesterday for the first time in nine months, chatting with school children and criticizing Barack Obama's recent visit. Castro, 89, was seen on state TV seated as he spoke to children about a late fellow revolutionary leader, Vilma Espin. Castro, leader of the Cuban revolution of 1959, yielded power to his brother Raul in 2006 for health reasons.

## Indian temple lifts ban on women

AFP, New Delhi

A Hindu temple in western India yesterday lifted a centuries-old ban forbidding female devotees from entering, after a court said women had a fundamental right to worship. Activists have been campaigning to end Shani Shingnapur temple's traditional ban, after authorities last year blocked a woman who attempted to enter its inner sanctum.

## Denmark to toughen anti-terrorism laws

REUTERS, Copenhagen

The Danish government yesterday said it will seek to toughen laws on affiliation with terrorist organisations and stop its citizens from entering areas where such groups are in armed conflict. It also proposed increasing the maximum jail sentence for people "who let themselves be recruited for terrorism or promote terrorism in connection with armed conflicts," a statement said.



Greek Coast Guard officers in a speedboat approach an activist (bottom L) hanging from the anchor's chain of a Turkish-flagged passenger boat carrying migrants to be returned to Turkey, in an attempt to prevent it from leaving the port of Mytilene, on the Greek island of Lesbos, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# Greece expels more migrants to Turkey

AFP, Dikili

Greece deported a second batch of more than two hundred migrants to Turkey yesterday under a controversial EU deal to stem mass migration as Germany announced a sharp drop in asylum claims.

Greek officials said two boats carrying 124 migrants -- most of them Pakistani men -- had been sent back across the Aegean Sea where hundreds have lost their lives in a quest to reach Europe.

A small group of activists leapt into the water, clutching onto the anchor of the first ferry in an unsuccessful bid to stop the deportation, while a group of protesters chanted "EU, shame on you" and "Freedom for the refugees".

Hours later the boats arrived in the Turkish harbour town of Dikili where security officials escorted the downcast migrants, clutching blankets and with small backpacks on their shoulders, off the vessels.

A Greek government statement said the migrants included 111 Pakistanis, four Iraqis, as well as citizens of Bangladesh, India, Morocco, Egypt, and a man claiming to be of Palestinian origin. In a separate operation, another 97 people -- mainly Pakistanis and Bangladeshis -- were returned to Turkey via the land border, Greek police said.

The deportations are taking place under a deal between Turkey and the European Union, which is straining under the pressure from the unprecedented flow of migrants into its territory.

Meanwhile, German Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere said yesterday the number of new asylum applications in Germany dropped 66 percent in March to about 20,000. "In December 2015, it was 120,000 people, in January 90,000, in February 60,000 and in March 20,000," he said, weeks after a string of Balkan countries closed their borders to refugees, halting the mass influx.

## PANAMA PAPERS SCANDAL

# EU warns sanctions on low-tax havens

AP, Berlin

A European Union official has threatened to sanction Panama and other nations if they don't cooperate fully to fight money laundering and tax evasion, after a leak of data showed the small country remains a key destination for people who want to hide money.

The 11.5 million documents from the Panama-based law firm Mossack Fonseca showed it helped thousands of individuals and companies from around the world set up shell companies and offshore accounts in low-tax havens. Because such accounts often hide the ultimate owner of assets, they are a favoured tool to evade taxes, launder money or pay bribes.

"People are fed up with these outrages," said Pierre Moscovici, who heads financial affairs for the 28-nation EU. He took to task countries like Panama that facilitate such secretive, low-tax accounts.

"The amounts of money, the jurisdictions and the names associated with this affair are frankly shocking," he said.

Panama is listed by the EU as a country that is not cooperative on tax issues, and Moscovici urged the country to "rethink its position in this regard." The EU has to "be ready to hit them with appropriate sanctions if they refuse to change," he said.

The Central American country's government is offering to cooperate more. On Wednesday, President Juan Carlos Varela announced the creation of an international committee of experts to recommend ways to boost transparency in Panama's offshore financial industry.

# Thailand probes 16 citizens

PTI, Bangkok

Authorities in Thailand yesterday said they were investigating 16 citizens with reported ties to offshore companies set up by a Panama-based law firm.

Thai politicians and business figures are among those being investigated by the country's Anti-Money Laundering Office, but it did not name anyone at a news conference.

The agency's secretary-general, Seehanat Prayoonrat, said the 16 people were listed as directors or shareholders for companies set up by Mossack Fonseca.

Seehanat said AMLO was seeking confirmation on the Thai names from authorities in Panama.

# 175 civilians feared massacred in Syria

## Kerry, in Iraq, vows to 'turn up the pressure' on IS

Agencies

Doubts have emerged over reports that IS has massacred 175 civilians captured at a cement factory near the Syrian capital as US Secretary of State John Kerry yesterday vowed that America and Iraq will "turn up the pressure" on the jihadist group.

Reuters quoted Syrian military sources reporting the killings on Friday, days after officials said more than 300 workers were missing from the Al Badia Cement Company.

The news agency later said the source had been "misattributed" and warned that the report was unconfirmed.

Russian state media also reported the massacre, saying sources on the ground were "almost certain" a mass execution took place.

Sputnik News claimed 175 people were murdered "because of their religious affiliation" but that some fled and others were allowed to leave.

The cement factory lies north-east of Damascus in an area of countryside targeted by an IS advance in recent days.

The Syrian Arab News Agency said a "reconciliation committee" had been

handed 106 abducted employees on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Kerry made the vow in a visit to Iraq and said that retaking IS stronghold Mosul is a "top" priority.

"In the coming weeks and months, the coalition will work with Iraq to turn up the pressure even further. We will continue targeting and taking out (IS's) leaders, and we will train local forces to take and hold more ground," Kerry told journalists in Baghdad.

But operations aimed at recapturing the city are still in the early phase, he said.

Kerry arrived in Baghdad on Friday for an unannounced visit, his first to the country since 2014.

Meanwhile, the head of US forces in Africa yesterday warned that the number of Islamic State group fighters in Libya has doubled to up to 6,000 in as little as a year.

However, General David Rodriguez Rodriguez said it is significantly harder for IS extremists to grab large areas of Libya and then consolidate, as it did in Syria and Iraq.

Among them is the fact that the IS group does not "have the homegrown people that know as much about Libya like they did in Iraq and Syria," Rodriguez said.



# Pope urges greater family understanding

BBC ONLINE

Pope Francis has published new guidelines on family life that argue the Church should show more understanding of modern realities.

The document, based on two Synods on the issue, was eagerly awaited by the world's 1.3bn Roman Catholics. Entitled "On Love in the Family", it does not change Catholic doctrine.

But it opens the way for bishops in each country to interpret doctrine to suit their own culture, the BBC's religion correspondent reports.

He criticises the individualism that has led many in the West to value their own personal satisfaction over the needs of their spouse. While saying yes to sex education, he argues it must be within a framework of education about love.

The emphasis throughout is on better pastoral care: better preparation for couples on what marriage involves, and more understanding from parish priests and others for human frailty.

The document is the culmination of three years' work by the Pope, who sent a questionnaire to families across the world asking them about their hopes and their fears.

He then brought bishops and cardinals together for two Synods in Rome, at which he encouraged them to debate and even to disagree over issues that divide the Church in many countries. Among the most divisive issues are offering communion to the divorced and remarried, contraception and the treatment of gay Catholics.

# Snowden urges Brits to force Cameron to resign

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Fugitive whistleblower Edward Snowden has put further pressure on David Cameron following the release of the Panama Papers by urging the British public to force his resignation.

Cameron faced a difficult week of questions before he admitted on Thursday to profiting from the sale of shares in an offshore fund.

Snowden, who resides in Russia -- whose leadership has been linked with the Panama Papers revelations -- sought to ratchet up the pressure on the PM on social media.

Referring to growing criticism of David Cameron's admissions, Snowden stated "the next 24 hours could change Britain".

Snowden also said it was "up to the British public" if Cameron resigned.

He said that in Iceland, where the Prime Minister did resign, "ten per cent of all voters were in the streets within 24 hours, and for less [revelations]."

The Prime Minister admitted he had profited from selling shares he owned in the offshore Blaimore Investment Trust, set up by his father, Ian Cameron, and run from the Bahamas.

Cameron sold the shares for £31,500 before entering office in 2010. He and his wife Samantha Cameron made a £19,000 profit.

Despite paying income tax on the dividends there was no capital gains to pay on the sale as it was below the then tax threshold for Capital Gains Tax.

Cameron also came under criticism after he said of his father's £300,000 inheritance that he cannot "point to every source of the money."



Newly-released political student protester and family members cry after being reunited in Tharrawaddy town, Bago Region in Myanmar, yesterday. A Myanmar court yesterday freed 69 of jailed students a day after Aung San Suu Kyi pledged to release activists and political prisoners.

PHOTO: AFP

## PARIS AND BRUSSELS TERROR ATTACKS

# Key suspect 'arrested'

REUTERS, Brussels

Mohamed Abrini, wanted over November's Islamic State attacks in Paris, has been arrested in Brussels, Belgium's public broadcasters said yesterday, adding that he was probably involved in last month's Brussels bombings.

Public prosecutors confirmed in a brief statement only that police had made several arrests related to the Brussels attacks.

Abrini, a 31-year-old Belgian, was "more than likely" the "man in the hat" seen on security camera footage at Brussels airport on March 22 with two suicide bombers, VRT and RTBF said on their websites, citing unidentified sources.

If confirmed, the arrests could mark a success for Belgian security services which have faced fierce criticism at home and abroad since Brussels-based militants organised the attacks that killed 130 in Paris

on Nov 13.

They took place a day after police issued new images and detail on the "man in the hat" and follow the arrest in Brussels three weeks ago of the prime surviving suspect in those attacks. Four days after the March 18 arrest of Salah Abdeslam, with whom Abrini was seen driving towards Paris two days before the Paris attacks, brothers Brahim and Khalid El Bakraoui and a third local man Najim Laachraoui killed 32 people at Brussels airport and on a metro line running under EU institutions.

Abrini was arrested in the borough of Anderlecht, VRT said, next to the western district of Molenbeek which has been at the heart of Belgium's troubles with Islamist militants. He had been on Europe's most wanted list since being seen on a motorway service station CCTV video driving with Abdeslam towards Paris from Belgium.



# Indo-Pak peace talks 'suspended'

BBC ONLINE

Pakistan's ambassador to India has said the peace process between India and Pakistan is currently suspended.

Abdul Basit said no meetings were currently scheduled between the foreign secretaries of the two countries. Diplomatic talks were postponed after an attack on an Indian air base in January which Delhi blamed on Pakistan-based militants.

Pakistani investigators were in India recently to investigate the attack on the base in Pathankot. Indian media reports said that the team had told the Pakistan government the attack had been "staged" by India.

Last month, Pakistan also said it arrested an Indian spy in the restive Balochistan province. India denied the allegations, but said the man was an Indian national and a retired naval officer.

Basit told foreign journalists on Thursday that his country would like to have a comprehensive dialogue with Delhi to resolve their outstanding issues and were willing to wait if India isn't ready. However, a spokesperson for India's foreign ministry told The Hindu newspaper that the "countries are in contact" to work out dates for talks between the two foreign secretaries.

# Red Sea bridge to connect Saudi Arabia, Egypt

AFP, Cairo

Saudi King Salman yesterday announced an agreement with Egypt to build a bridge over the Red Sea connecting the two countries, on the second day of his visit to Cairo.

The monarch made the announcement in televised comments after meeting Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, and before representatives of the two countries began signing investment deals.

"I agreed with my brother his Excellency President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to build a bridge connecting the two countries," Salman said.

"This historic step to connect the two continents, Africa and Asia, is a qualitative transformation that will increase trade between the two continents to unprecedented levels," he added.

A beaming Sisi, who had minutes before presented the king with the ceremonial Nile



Collar, suggested they name the bridge "King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Bridge".

Following the announcement, representatives of both countries signed 17 investment deals and memorandums of understanding.

The king was given an honorary doctorate by Cairo University on Thursday and the Order of the Nile medal yesterday. A government official had said the deals agreed with Saudi Arabia throughout Salman's visit would amount to about \$1.7 billion.