

NEWS IN brief

23 killed in Nepal bus accident

PTI, Kathmandu
At least 23 people were killed yesterday when the bus they were travelling in plunged some 300 metres down the road in a mountainous region in eastern Nepal. Thirty one people have been rescued alive, said police and added that the injured have been admitted to a hospital.

US issues S Arabia travel warning

AFP, Washington
The US State Department has issued a travel warning for the US citizens planning to visit Saudi Arabia ahead of President Barack Obama's visit to the Gulf country. Obama is scheduled to visit Saudi Arabia on April 21.

3 more charged over Brussels attacks

AFP, Brussels
Belgium yesterday charged two new suspects over last month's deadly Brussels airport and metro bombings and made three fresh arrests in the probe into the November Paris attacks. The two suspects, Smail F and Ibrahim E, were

charged with participation in the activities of a terrorist group, terrorist murders and attempts to commit terrorist murders, as a perpetrator, co-perpetrator or accomplice," a statement from prosecutors said.

Seven arrested over India temple tragedy

AFP, Kollam
Police arrested seven people yesterday over a massive explosion and fire during a banned fireworks display that claimed more than 100 lives in southern India, a senior officer said. The blast ripped through concrete buildings and ignited a fire at a Hindu temple complex in Kerala state where thousands had gathered early Sunday to watch the display.



Activists take part in a demonstration outside the European Commission (EC) headquarters ahead of statements by the EC on the effectiveness of existing measures against tax evasion and money-laundering in light of the recent Panama Paper revelations, in Brussels, Belgium, yesterday.

Spies used Mossack Fonseca

Says report; EU cracks down on tax havens, targets big companies

AFP, Berlin
The Panama Papers also reveal that "current or former high-ranking officials of the secret services of at least three countries... Saudi Arabia, Colombia and Rwanda" are listed among the company's clients, the Sueddeutsche said. Among them was Sheikh Kamal Adham, the former Saudi intelligence chief who died in 1999. Adham "spent the 1970s as one of the CIA's key inter-

SYRIA TRUCE strained on eve of talks

AFP, Beirut
Syria's landmark ceasefire was threatening to fall apart yesterday amid a surge of fresh fighting, especially in northern Aleppo province, just as peace talks were set to resume in Geneva. The UN's Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura, who has said the negotiations due to start today would be "crucially important," was in Iran for talks with a key backer of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad. This week's round of talks in Geneva will be the second since Assad's regime and rebel forces agreed to a partial truce brokered by Moscow and Washington, which has largely held since February 27. It has raised hopes that steps may finally be taken towards resolving the five-year-old conflict, which has devastated the country and left more than 270,000 dead. But concern has been growing that a recent rise in violence focused mainly in Aleppo province, which borders Turkey, is putting intense strain on the ceasefire. Pro-government forces were yesterday pressing an advance against the town of Al-Eis, held by fighters from al-Qaeda's local affiliate, Al-Nusra Front, and allied rebels, reports said. Jihadists like those from Al-Nusra and the Islamic State group are excluded from the ceasefire but in some areas the al-Qaeda militants are allied with rebel forces meant to be covered by the truce.

PANAMA PAPERS

mediaries" in the Middle East, the daily said. Meanwhile, the EU yesterday unveiled plans to force the world's biggest multinationals to faithfully report earnings and pay their fair share of taxes, saying the Panama Papers scandal added to the need for change. The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, said under the new rules big companies operating in Europe would have to make public

US, India to share military logistics

Deepen maritime ties with eye on China
REUTERS, New Delhi
India and the United States have agreed in principle to share military logistics, the countries' defence ministers said yesterday, as both sides seek to counter the growing maritime assertiveness of China. Washington has for years urged New Delhi to sign a Logistics Support Agreement that allows the two militaries to use each other's land, air and naval bases for resupplies, repair and rest. India has had concerns that a logistics agreement would commit it to hosting US troops at its bases, or draw it into a military alliance with the United States and undermine its traditional autonomy. But after years of delays, the two sides said an agreement was in hand, although not yet ready for signing. "We have agreed in principle that all the issues are resolved," US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter told reporters in New Delhi after talks with his Indian counterpart, Manohar Parrikar. The two sides would finalise the text of an agreement in coming weeks, Carter said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration, faced with an assertive China expanding its influence in the South China Sea and into the Indian Ocean, has signalled its desire to draw closer to the United States. China is also a close ally of India's arch rival, Pakistan. Carter is on his second visit to India in less than a year, aimed at cementing defence cooperation in the final months of Barack Obama's presidency. Washington's desire for deeper security cooperation with India has been tricky without the signing of the logistics agreement, as well as two other pacts that would allow for secure communications and the exchange of nautical and other data. The agreements are considered routine between the United States and its other defence partners.



Supporters of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) burn a poster of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas during a protest against Abbas's policies, in Gaza City, yesterday. The poster reads, "Leave."



Brazil Impeachment Battle for last votes to seal Rousseff fate

AFP, Brasilia
Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff's fate rested yesterday on the loyalties of the last 100 or so congressional deputies yet to declare how they will vote in a looming impeachment showdown. In a ruthless and complex contest, supporters and opponents of Brazil's first female president raced to amass the magic number that will make history when the lower house of Congress votes in a week's time. A congressional committee voted late Monday in a non-binding measure to approve impeachment. The full house is expected to start voting Sunday or the following Monday. This time, a two-thirds majority, or 342 deputies, will be needed to send Rousseff's case to the Senate for impeachment trial. Anything less and Rousseff -- accused of fiddling accounts to mask the dire state of the government budget during her 2014 re-election -- will have won. The latest survey of the 513 deputies in the lower house by Estadão daily on Monday showed 298 in favour, still short of 342. The count showed 119 opposing impeachment. That left the result in the hands of the 96 deputies still undecided or not stating a position. After winning Monday's skirmish in the committee -- where only a simple majority was required to win -- opponents of Rousseff declared they were on a roll.

GOP's 'delegate rules rigged'

AGENCIES
Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump lashed out at what he called the party's "rigged" delegate selection rules on Monday after rival Ted Cruz swept all of Colorado's 34 delegates over the weekend. The New York billionaire, who has been outmaneuvered by Cruz in a series of recent state meetings to select national convention delegates, said the process was set up to protect party insiders and shut out insurgent candidates. "The system is rigged, it's crooked," Trump said on Fox News on Monday, alleging the Colorado convention results showed voters were being denied a voice in the process. Trump has 743 bound delegates to 545 for Cruz, according to an Associated Press count, in the battle for the 1,237 delegates needed to win the nomination on the first ballot and avoid a messy floor fight at the Republican National Convention from July 18-21. But both are at risk of not acquiring enough delegates for a first-ballot victory, leaving many free to switch their votes on later ballots. Trump, who has brought in veteran strategist Paul Manafort to lead his delegate-gathering efforts, complained about Cruz's recent success at local and state party meetings where activists pick the actual delegates who will attend the national convention. Trump accused Cruz of trying to steal delegates in South Carolina. Trump won the state primary in February, but Cruz supporters got four of the first six delegate slots filled at congressional district meetings on Saturday, according to local media. "Now they're trying to pick off those delegates one by one," Trump said. "That's not the way democracy is supposed to work. They offer them trips, they offer them all sorts of things and you're allowed to do that. You can buy all these votes."



Dozens killed in Turkey clashes

REUTERS, Diyarbakir
Six Turkish soldiers and 30 Kurdish militants have been killed in the past 24 hours in attacks and clashes across Turkey's turbulent southeast region, security sources and the army said yesterday. An estimated 57 people, including eight civilians, were wounded in the attacks, they said. Thousands of militants and hundreds of civilians and soldiers have been killed since the banned Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) resumed its insurgency last summer following a 2-1/2-year ceasefire and peace process. The government has ruled out any return to the negotiating table and has vowed to crush the PKK, which is considered a terrorist organisation by Turkey and its Western allies. The security sources said operations in Sirnak province and in neighbouring Iraq and Syria had been stepped up and that gunfire and explosions could be heard in the area where earlier one soldier was killed and three others wounded.

Hunt begins for new UN chief

AL JAZEERA ONLINE
For the first time in history of the United Nations all member states will get a chance to question the candidates for secretary-general, in a move designed to make the usually secret selection process for the world's top diplomatic post more transparent. The eight hopefuls for one of the world's most high-profile jobs will also hold town hall meetings with the UN General Assembly in New York on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. They will each pitch their credentials and then answer questions in a two-hour session. Last year, the General Assembly responded to a demand from many countries that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's successor be chosen in a more open process, unanimously adopting a resolution allowing public hearings on how candidates would respond to global crises and run the UN's far-flung bureaucracy. The search for a successor to Ban - a former South Korean foreign minister who will step down at the end of the year after two five-year terms - has also prompted a push by more than a quarter of UN states for the first female leader. While the 15-member Security Council will formally recommend a candidate to the 193-member General Assembly, the General Assembly vote has long been seen as a rubber stamp. Nations with veto powers - the US, Russia, Britain, China and France - must agree on the nominee. As part of the changes introduced by the General Assembly last year, the list of candidates has been made public for the first time, with nomination letters and even the candidate's CVs posted online. On the surface, it is a shift towards democratisation of a secretive process controlled by the five veto powers. But there is no requirement for the five to pay attention to the popularity of candidates with the General Assembly, and the winner could still be selected in a backroom Security Council deal as has been the case for seven decades. Diplomats told the Reuters news agency that Moscow wanted the UN chief to come from Eastern Europe, in line with an informal tradition of rotating the post between regions. The council is expected to hold its first "straw poll" - a sort of informal vote - behind closed doors in July and aims to have a decision by September. Also in the race are former Macedonian Foreign Minister Srgjan Kerim; Montenegro Foreign Minister Igor Luksic; former Slovenian President Danilo Turk; and former UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres, who is also a former Portuguese prime minister.

