

Park 'loses majority'

AFP, Seoul
 South Korea's conservative ruling party appears to have lost its parliamentary majority in yesterday's general election, early election results and exit polls showed.
 With vote-counting under way, the Saenuri Party of President Park Geun-Hye was tipped to win 132 seats in the 300-member National Assembly, Yonhap news agency said.
 The left-leaning main opposition Minjoo Party was tipped to win a total of 105 seats and the splinter opposition People's Party was predicted to bag 36 seats.
 Earlier exit polls by major TV stations also showed Saenuri giving up its majority but remaining the largest single party. Turnout was 58 percent, up 3.8 percentage points from the 2012 election.
 The election was clouded by North Korean nuclear threats and the multiple challenges facing Asia's fourth-largest economy, as President Park enters the final stretch of her term in office.
 Political power in South Korea is firmly concentrated in the presidency, with incumbents limited to a single five-year term. Elections to the single-chamber national assembly are traditionally dominated by local issues.
 If the ruling party, which won 152

parliamentary seats four years ago, fails to hold a majority it would be forced to rely on independent lawmakers to retain power in parliament.
 Final official results are expected this morning. Rising unemployment, plunging exports and worryingly high levels of household debt have led to criticisms of Park's handling of the economy -- and, by extension, of Saenuri.
 Dissatisfaction is especially high among young people, with the jobless rate among those aged 15-29 at record levels.
 The left-wing opposition sought to frame yesterday's vote as a referendum on Park's economic policies. But it has suffered from factional infighting and break-aways that threaten to split the liberal vote.
 Kate Kim, an unemployed 25-year-old college graduate, said crippling levels of joblessness had persuaded her and many of her previously apathetic friends to vote.
 "This is the first time I have voted... our country desperately needs change, especially for young and jobless people like me," Kim said.
 Analysts had earlier predicted a majority for Saenuri, saying its prospects would be boosted by surging military tensions on the divided peninsula.



SOUTH KOREA ELECTION



A migrant throws back a tear gas canister during scuffles with police at a makeshift camp for refugees and migrants at the Greek-Macedonian border near the village of Idomeni, Greece, yesterday. Macedonian police fired tear gas to disperse around 50 migrants stranded in Greece who tried to pull down part of the razor wire fence separating the two countries. PHOTO: REUTERS



Presidential Eligibility: Ted Cruz is US citizen: judge

BBC ONLINE
 A judge in New Jersey has ruled that Republican presidential hopeful Ted Cruz is a "natural-born citizen" under the US constitution and may run in the state's primary elections in June.
 A group of residents had challenged the Texas senator's eligibility for the presidency. He was born in Canada to a Cuban father and American mother.
 But Judge Jeff Masin found that Cruz met the constitutional requirements. New Jersey's Lt Governor, Kim Guadagno, is now expected to review the decision.
 Sen Cruz's main rival for the Republican nomination, Donald Trump, has also questioned his eligibility for the presidency.
 "There's a big question mark on your head," the billionaire businessman said at a debate in January. "You can't do that to the party."
 The South Jersey Concerned Citizens Committee and law professor Victor Williams, a presidential write-in candidate, argued in court in on Monday that Sen Cruz's birth in Canada meant he could not be a "natural-born citizen" as envisaged by those who wrote the US constitution.
 On Tuesday, Judge Masin dismissed the challenge. Masin added that his decision might be adopted, modified or rejected by Lt Gov Guadagno, New Jersey's secretary of state, who is authorised to make a final decision on the matter.
 A similar legal challenge was rejected a court in Pennsylvania, where Sen Cruz will appear on the state's Republican primary ballot later this month.

Syrians go to the polls

Fresh fighting threatens peace talks; Pentagon says first step in anti-IS battle 'complete'

AFP, Damascus
 Syrians went to the polls yesterday in areas controlled by President Bashar al-Assad's regime for parliamentary elections dismissed by the opposition as illegitimate.
 The vote coincides with the beginning of another round of UN-brokered peace talks in Geneva aimed at ending the devastating five-year conflict, with Assad's future a key sticking point.
 Around 7,200 polling stations opened at 7:00 am in government-held areas -- around a third of the country's territory where about 60 percent of the population lives.
 They will remain open for 12 hours unless the electoral commission decides to extend the deadline.
 Assad's Baath party, which has controlled the country for more than half a century, is expected to extend its dominance of parliament, although several parties are participating in the polls.
 Meanwhile, talks to end Syria's brutal five-year conflict were to resume in Geneva yesterday, although the negotiations were likely to be overshadowed by a surge of violence that threatened a fragile truce.
 The UN-brokered talks in Geneva are aimed at forming a transitional government and a new constitution followed by general elections to end a conflict that has killed more than 270,000 people and displaced half of the country's population.

UN Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura met with Assad's key allies Tehran and Moscow ahead of a sit-down with the main opposition High Negotiations Committee yesterday afternoon and regime representatives later in the week, probably Friday.
 Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stressed the importance of this round of talks, which is scheduled to last about 10 days.

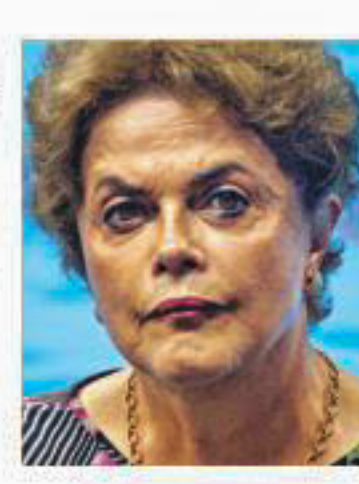


The coalition is working through three main steps as it wages its 20-month-old fight against the IS group, Baghdad-based spokesman Colonel Steve Warren said.

IMPEACHMENT VOTE: Brazil President Rousseff decries conspiracy

REUTERS, Brasilia
 Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff said on Tuesday her vice president was orchestrating a conspiracy to topple her, as efforts to impeach the leftist leader gained momentum in Congress.
 Aided by her mentor and predecessor, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Rousseff scrambled to secure enough support from a dwindling array of allies to block impeachment in a lower house vote due on Sunday that analysts project she will lose.
 A congressional committee voted on Monday by a larger-than-expected margin to recommend that Rousseff be impeached for breaking budget laws to support her re-election in 2014, a charge Rousseff says was trumped up to remove her from office.
 Political risk consultancies estimate at 60 to 65 percent the odds of impeachment clearing the lower

house, since the committee vote was expected to sway undecided lawmakers to join the opposition.
 While Rousseff fights for her political survival, her government is largely paralyzed as Brazil, the world's seventh-largest economy, struggles with a deep recession and its biggest-ever corruption scandal.
 "They now are conspiring openly, in the light of day, to destabilize a legitimately elected president," Rousseff said in a speech on Tuesday, referring to an audio message sent by Vice President Michel Temer to his supporters on Monday in which he called for a government of national unity to overcome Brazil's political crisis.
 The congressional committee's 38-27 decision was backed by Temer's PMDB party, formerly her main coalition ally. The party's defection last month greatly increased the likelihood the lower house will send her impeachment



NEWS IN brief

US dropping 'cyber bombs' on IS

REUTERS, Buckley Air Force Base
 The US military is dropping "cyber bombs" on Islamic State for the first time as part of a stepped-up coordinated effort that has put increasing pressure on the militant group, Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work said on Tuesday. He said US and coalition forces were putting pressure on Islamic State from all directions, using every possible military

Spain holds Paris siege 'gun supplier'

AFP, Madrid
 Spanish police said yesterday they had detained a French national suspected of heading a weapons trafficking ring that provided arms to Amedy Coulibaly, who staged a deadly attack on a Jewish supermarket in Paris last year. In a statement, police said Antoine Denevi, a 27-year-old originally from the northern French region of Pas-de-Calais, was detained on

Egypt's Sisi warns of 'evil' conspirators

AFP, Cairo
 President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi yesterday hit back at criticism of a deal to hand Saudi Arabia two islands and of the probe into an Italian student's murder, saying "evil" people were conspiring against Egypt. Sisi is weathering a storm of controversy over a deal announced at the weekend that set maritime boundaries with Saudi Arabia, placing two islands in

Crane collapse kills 18 in southern China

AFP, Beijing
 A huge crane which collapsed in high winds killed 18 people at a construction site in southern China early yesterday, state media said. The crane's gantry plunged onto a two-storey temporary building made of shipping containers during a thunderstorm

Saudi orders 'gentler' religious police

AFP, Riyadh
 Saudi Arabia has stripped its frequently criticised religious police of their powers to arrest, urging them to act "kindly and gently" in enforcing Islamic rules. Some Saudis called the move long overdue. Under changes approved by the cabinet, religious officers will no longer be allowed to detain people and instead must report

Trump accuses Republican leaders of conspiracy

BBC ONLINE
 Republican Donald Trump yesterday said the party's leaders did not want him to win the presidential nomination.
 The system was "stacked" against him, he said in New York, accusing the Republican National Committee (RNC) of conspiring against him.
 His comments came after his rival Ted Cruz was awarded all the delegates in Colorado without a state-wide vote.
 Trump leads the race but may fall short of getting enough delegates to get the nomination outright.
 That would lead to a contested convention in July, where delegates are free after the first ballot to back whom they want, opening the door for Texas Senator Cruz or even the third candidate in the race, John Kasich.
 The Washington Post reported on Wednesday that Cruz is likely to win on a second vote, because he has persuaded so many delegates to vote for him when they are "unbound" to vote as pledged.
 But Republican National Committee chairman Reince Priebus rejected Trump's charge that the rules in states like Colorado had been changed in response to his rise in the polls.
 Priebus tweeted that the nomination process had been well known for more than a year.
 "It's the responsibility of the campaigns to understand it. Complaints now? Give us all a break."



People crowd onto the street during an earthquake in Agartala, capital of India's northeastern state of Tripura, yesterday. A magnitude 6.9 earthquake hit northern Myanmar, the United States Geological Survey said, as strong tremors were felt across northeastern India. PHOTO: AFP

Kashmir remains tense

AFP, Srinagar
 A protester was killed in Indian Kashmir yesterday as angry residents clashed with police, a day after three people died when the army fired into a crowd of civilians incensed by the alleged molestation of a girl.
 Local police superintendent Aijaz Ahmed said the young man died of injuries sustained when a tear gas canister hit his head during the unrest in the frontier town of Kupwara.
 Authorities in the restive region had imposed a partial curfew after separatist leaders called for a general strike over Tuesday's deaths of two civilian protesters and a woman working in a nearby field who was hit by a stray bullet.
 The soldiers opened fire Tuesday when protesters stormed an army bunker and set it on fire in the northern town of Handwara.
 "We imposed restrictions in the old town of Srinagar and in Handwara to prevent violence," director general of police, K. Rajendra, told AFP.
 But groups of residents took to the streets of Handwara after the woman was buried,



Kashmiri mourners react during the funeral of Raja Bejum, 70, who was killed in clashes with security forces in Langate near Handwara. PHOTO: AFP

Yemen clashes go on despite truce

AFP, Marib
 Yemeni rebels killed a senior loyalist officer yesterday and deadly clashes erupted elsewhere in the country despite a UN-brokered ceasefire, sources said.
 The fragile truce has been in place since midnight Sunday and is meant to lay the groundwork for peace talks next week in Kuwait.
 The Shia Huthi rebels, pro-government forces and the Saudi-led coalition have all promised to abide by the ceasefire, but sporadic fighting has continued.
 Loyalist military sources and medics said a rebel sniper shot dead the commander of a pro-government army brigade, Major General Zaid al-Huri, early yesterday.

No law and order in West Bengal: Sonia Gandhi

THE HINDU ONLINE
 Hitting out at the Mamata Banerjee government, Congress president Sonia Gandhi yesterday said she forgot all her promises after assuming power in West Bengal where there was "no law and order and atrocities against women are maximum in the country".
 "Five years ago we believed her but she forgot all her promises after assuming power in the state and did not give the people their due," she said referring to Congress' alliance with TMC in the 2011 Assembly election.
 "Despite the chief minister being a woman, atrocities against women in the state are highest in the country and there is no law and order in the state. But Mamata government is not concerned about it," Gandhi told an election meeting here.
 Describing TMC and BJP as "two sides of the same coin", the Congress president said, "Both (Narendra) Modi and Mamata bluffed the people".
 Gandhi questioned Banerjee for not raising her voice when Congress-led governments in the States were toppled.
 "I am cautioning you [voters] that one who calls herself Didi and one who keeps raising the chant of 'Namo Namo' are hand in glove with each other," Gandhi said in Sujapur in Malda district. She further questioned Banerjee's role saying that the Chief Minister never objected to Center's decision to topple Congress-led government's in the States.
 "When Modi was toppling one Congress State Government after another, only one Chief Minister remained silent: Mamata Banerjee. Is it not TMC-BJP collusion?" Gandhi said in her meeting in Birbhum.
 Gandhi addressed two rallies in Malda and Birbhum district and shared the dais

