

NEWS IN brief

**North Korea to open party congress on May 6**

REUTERS, Seoul  
North Korea yesterday said its ruling Workers' Party would hold a congress from May 6, ending its silence on the date of the first such conference in 36 years, as South Korea said another North Korean nuclear test appeared imminent. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is expected to use the congress to cement his leadership and to formally adopt this policy, known as "byongjin", to push simultaneously for economic development and nuclear weapons capability. North Korea's last party congress was in 1980, before Kim was born.

**German spy agency chief resigns**

REUTERS, Berlin  
The German government yesterday confirmed that Gerhard Schindler, the head of the BND foreign intelligence agency, would leave this post two years early but provided no reason for the surprise change. In a short statement, Chancellor Angela Merkel's chief of staff Peter Altmaier said Schindler, who has run the BND since 2012 and is not due to retire until 2018, would be replaced on July 1 by Bruno Kahl, an official in the finance ministry responsible for privatisations and government real estate.

**Paris bans cars once a month to 'breathe'**

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK  
The Champs-Elysees - often described as 'world's most beautiful avenue' - will soon be closed to traffic once a month as the city tackles its air pollution problem. The famous boulevard, along with four other areas, is one of nine new routes which will be car-free on the first Sunday of every month, joining 13 others already announced as part of the cities 'Paris Breathes' campaign. Another four zones will also be pedestrian-only on Sundays, but just during summer months.

**Pro-EU camp leads in UK referendum**

AFP, London  
Support for Britain to remain in the European Union stands at 45 percent while support for "Leave" is at 38 percent ahead of a referendum on EU membership on June 23, according to a survey poll for online brokerage group IG published yesterday. It was the first in a series of polls IG said it would release between now and the referendum.

**Exiled Tibetans re-elect Sangay as their leader**

AFP, Dharamsala  
Exiled Tibetans have reelected Lobsang Sangay as their leader, the election commission said yesterday, five years after the Dalai Lama ceded political power in a bid to foster democracy and secure his succession. The 48-year-old former academic won 57 percent of the vote in the second round held last month, easily retaining the role that he first took on in 2011 when the Dalai Lama announced he was stepping back from political life and devolving his responsibilities. After the result was announced, he vowed to continue the "freedom struggle" of the Tibetan people until they won genuine autonomy. "We will continue as long as it takes till basic freedom is restored in Tibet. Till genuine autonomy is granted to Tibetan people inside Tibet," he told journalists in Dharamsala.



**A Palestinian woman argues with an Israeli border policeman near the scene where two Palestinians were shot dead by Israeli forces near Qalandia checkpoint near the West Bank city of Ramallah, yesterday. Israeli police shot dead a Palestinian woman and her teenage brother, saying they tried to carry out an attack on security officials. In the last half year, Israeli forces have killed at least 193 Palestinians, 130 of whom Israel says were assailants.**  
PHOTO: REUTERS

**End 'madness' of nuclear weapons testing: UN chief**

AFP, Vienna  
UN chief Ban Ki-moon yesterday called for the US, China and other nuclear-armed states to end the "madness" of atomic testing by finally ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which turns 20 this year. "I call on remaining states, the eight remaining states, to sign and ratify the treaty without further delay," Ban said in Vienna at an event marking the anniversary. "Nuclear testing poisons water, causes cancers and pollutes the area with radioactive fallout for generations and generations to come," he said. "We are here to honour the victims. The best tribute to them is action, to ban and to stop nuclear testing. Their sufferings should teach the world to end this madness." The CTBT, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 1996, bans all nuclear explosions. It has been signed by 183 states and ratified by 164 including Russia, France and Britain, three of the nine countries which have, or are thought to have, nuclear weapons. But to enter in force, the treaty needs 44 particular "nuclear technology holder" states to ratify it, eight of whom have yet to do so. These eight include the other six in the nuclear club -- the United States, China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel -- as well as Iran and Egypt. The US, China, Egypt, Iran and Israel -- the latter widely assumed to have nuclear weapons although it has never confirmed it -- have signed the treaty but not ratified it. US President Barack Obama said in a major speech on nuclear weapons in Prague in 2009, shortly after taking office, that he would "immediately and aggressively pursue US ratification".



**UNSC rejects Israel's claim over Syria's Golan Heights**

Russia says has enough forces in Syria to safe guard ceasefire  
AGENCIES  
The UN Security Council has rejected Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's claim that the annexed Golan Heights in Syria would "for ever" remain under Israeli control. The 15-member council agreed on Tuesday that the status of the Golan, which Israel seized from Syria in 1967, "remains unchanged", Chinese Ambassador Liu Jieyi, who holds this month's council presidency said. Liu recalled a 1981 resolution which states that Israel's "decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights was nul and void and without any international legal effect." Liu said that the Council members "expressed deep concern" over Netanyahu's remarks from earlier this month that "the Golan Heights will remain in the hands of Israel for ever." Israel's UN Ambassador Danny Danon issued a statement rejecting the council complaint. "It's unfortunate that interested parties are attempting to use the council for unfair criticism of Israel," he said. Netanyahu's April 17 declaration came on the occasion of the first Israeli cabinet session on the Golan since the area was seized from Syria in a 1967 war and annexed in 1981. Israel's annexation of the Golan has never been recognised by the international community. Past US-backed Israeli-Syrian peace efforts were predicated on a return of the Golan, where some 23,000 Israelis now live alongside roughly the same number of Druse Arabs loyal to Damascus. Liu said the council supported a negotiated arrangement to settle the issue of the Golan. Meanwhile, a senior Russian Defence Ministry official said his country holds enough forces at its Hmeimim air base in Syria to safeguard the ceasefire and assist Syrian government forces in fighting rebels from Islamic State and the Nusra. The comment came as the United Nations yesterday said no date had been set for the next round of Syria peace talks, contradicting a report quoting Russia's deputy foreign minister as saying talks would resume in Geneva on May 10. UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura is struggling to keep the peace process alive after the main opposition High Negotiations Committee (HNC) left formal talks last week.

**Panama Papers to go public on May 9**

AFP, Washington  
The "Panama Papers" trove of leaked documents revealing the vast extent of global tax evasion will be made available to the public on May 9, the organization behind the leak said yesterday. The searchable database will include information about more than 200,000 secret companies, trusts and foundations based in 21 tax havens "from Hong Kong to Nevada in the United States," said the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). Since early April, the ICIJ coordinated limited release through roughly 100 media outlets of the "Panama Papers" have become a worldwide scandal, spurring numerous investigations. About 11.5 million leaked documents of the Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca, reveal the large-scale use of offshore entities to conceal assets from tax authorities.



**Sanctions lifted only on paper**

Says Khamenei, slams US of hostility, bad faith  
AFP, Tehran  
Iran's supreme leader and president yesterday accused the United States of hostility and bad faith saying the implementation of its nuclear deal with world powers was not being honoured. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei echoed other officials in Tehran who allege that Washington is creating hurdles for European financial institutions, more than three months after the agreement came into force. With nuclear-related sanctions lifted, US and European diplomats have said there is no bar on non-American banks doing business with Iran. But it is not happening in reality, Khamenei said. "On paper they say that foreign banks can do business with Iran but, in practice, they are fomenting Iranophobia to prevent relations. "The United States creates disruptions and then asks us afterwards: 'Why are you suspicious?'" Khamenei told workers in the capital. At a separate event, President Hassan Rouhani criticised a decision by the US Supreme Court last week to make \$2 billion of frozen Iranian assets available to American victims of terror attacks. Tehran threatened on Monday to take action in the International Court of Justice against the US if the \$2 billion belonging to Iran's Central Bank is "diverted" to 1,000 Americans affected by the ruling.

**AUSTRALIA IMMIGRATION TURMOIL PNG to shut migrant camp after court ruling**

AFP, Sydney  
Australia's hardline immigration policy was thrown into turmoil yesterday after Papua New Guinea ordered a processing camp to close, leaving the fate of hundreds of asylum-seekers hanging in the balance. The move to shutter the Australian-funded Manus island facility follows a Supreme Court ruling on Tuesday that detaining people there was unconstitutional and illegal. Piling further pressure on Canberra, just weeks out from an expected election campaign, an Iranian refugee set himself on fire during a visit by UN officials to Nauru, the other Pacific nation where Australia sends boatpeople. Four others on the tiny outpost reportedly attempted suicide by drinking washing powder on Tuesday. "Respecting this (court) ruling, Papua New Guinea will immediately ask the Australian government to make alternative arrangements for the asylum-seekers currently held at the Regional Processing Centre," Prime Minister Peter O'Neill said of the Manus camp. Papua New Guinea's former opposition leader Belden Namah had challenged the Manus arrangement in court, claiming it violated the rights of asylum-seekers. In a 34-page finding on Tuesday, the Supreme Court found that detaining them on the island was "contrary to their constitutional right of personal liberty".



**A Kosovo Albanian woman stands by the grave of her son during a ceremony to mark the Day of Missing Persons at the cemetery in the village of Meje, yesterday. Kosovo marks the Day of Missing Persons with a ceremony in the Gjakova village of Meje, where in 1999 Serbian forces left about 400 civilians dead. More than 1,700 people, most of them ethnic Albanians, are still unaccounted for from the Kosovo war. The conflict in Kosovo claimed the lives of more than 13,000 people, mostly ethnic Albanians.**  
PHOTO: AFP

**INDIA'S WORST DROUGHT IN DECADES Trafficking risk rises as tens of thousands flee villages**

REUTERS, Mumbai  
The worst drought in decades across several states in India is forcing tens of thousands of people to migrate from rural areas in search of water, food and jobs, increasing the risk that they may be trafficked or exploited, activists said. About 330 million people, almost a quarter of the country's population, are now affected by drought, the government estimates. Destitute women, children and older family members left behind in the villages are most at risk of exploitation. "People in the rural areas have always been vulnerable because they want better jobs, better lives," said Mangala Daithankar at non-profit Social Action for Association and Development in Pune, in western Maharashtra state. "The drought has aggravated the situation because they are so desperate now. They have absolutely nothing," said Daithankar, who has worked in the state's drought-hit Marathwada region for about two decades. Maharashtra is one of the worst affected states, with successive years of poor rainfall ravaging crops, killing livestock, drying up reservoirs and forcing farmers into indebtedness that has led to thousands of suicides. In the state's Jalna district, scores of villages house only destitute women and children left in the care of older relatives who keep an eye on their homes and parched fields. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has pledged a nationwide drive to conserve water, but activists and economists have slammed the government's lack of "compassion" on the issue.



**CHOPPER SCAM 'I have nothing to hide': Sonia**

TNN, New Delhi  
Breaking her long silence on the issue, India's Congress chief Sonia Gandhi yesterday said that she isn't afraid and has nothing to hide in the AgustaWestland chopper scam. "We have nothing to hide. Let them take my name, I am not afraid," Sonia said. "I am not afraid of anyone cornering me as there is no basis to that. All the accusations they are throwing at us are false," Sonia told reporters in the Parliament complex as the BJP sought to target her on the deal. Sonia Gandhi asked the Modi government what it has been doing on the issue while it has been in power for the last two years and demanded that the ongoing inquiry be completed impartially.

**Belgium extradites Paris attack suspect to France**

BBC ONLINE  
Belgium has extradited Paris attacks suspect Salah Abdeslam to face trial in France. He was wounded and arrested in a dramatic raid in Brussels on 18 March after four months on the run. The 26-year-old French national was born in Brussels and lived there before the Paris attacks. He would be held in solitary confinement in a maximum-security prison in the Paris area, said Justice Minister Jean-Jacques Urvoas. The co-ordinated attacks carried out by so-called Islamic State in Paris on 13 November claimed 130 lives and left dozens more severely wounded. Belgium's federal prosecutor said Salah Abdeslam had been "surrendered to the French authorities this morning (in execution of the European Arrest Warrant issued by France on 19 March 2016)". He was then formally placed under arrest. Although he was initially held at a prison in Bruges, he had most recently been in custody at a high-security jail at Beveren, near Antwerp. Salah Abdeslam is charged in France with participation in terrorist murder and the activities of a terrorist organisation. He was also indicted by Belgian authorities last week over a shoot-out in the Forest area of Brussels in which four police were wounded, three days before he was arrested. Earlier, French criminal lawyer Frank Berton told French media that he would be taking on Salah Abdeslam's defence in France following a two-and-a-half-hour meeting between the two last Friday at Beveren. Berton BFMTV (in French) he hoped the man would be judged "for what he has done and not what he has not done... not for what he represents because he is the last survivor". Most of the Paris attackers are now dead.

