

NEWS IN brief

Taliban raid kills 6 in Afghan courthouse

AFP, Ghazni
Taliban suicide bombers wearing police uniforms raided a courthouse in the eastern Afghan city of Ghazni yesterday, killing six people in what they said was revenge for last month's execution of six Taliban-linked prisoners. The interior ministry said five civilians and one policeman were killed in the 30-minute attack. 13 others were wounded.

Pak teen burnt alive for refusing proposal

AFP, Islamabad
A young Pakistani woman died yesterday after she was tortured and set alight in the country's conservative northeast for refusing a marriage proposal from the son of a former colleague, relatives and police said. Maria Sadaqat, 19, was attacked by a group of people on Monday in the village of Upper Dewal close to the summer hill resort of Murree, outside the capital Islamabad.

Strike brings rail misery to France

AFP, Paris
Transport chaos hit France yesterday, just nine days before the Euro 2016 football tournament, as railway workers went on strike in the latest salvo of a months-long battle between the government and unions. Around half of France's trains were cancelled.

Two people shot at UCLA campus

AFP, Los Angeles
Two people were reported shot yesterday at the University of California's Los Angeles campus which was placed on lockdown as police searched for an active shooter. The shooting was reported shortly before 10 am. The motive of the shooting is not known till filing this report.



A delegation of Asia News Network (ANN) met Chinese Premier Li Keqiang (sixth from right) in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Tuesday. The media representatives gathered in Beijing for a two-day annual board meeting of ANN, an alliance of 21 media houses in 19 countries. PHOTO: CHINA DAILY

Falluja assault stalled

IS resistance, fear of civilian casualties halt Iraqi forces' advance

AFP, Near Fallujah
Iraqi forces yesterday stalled at the fringes of Fallujah, slowed in their advance by concerns over the fate of trapped civilians and resistance from the Islamic State group. Fighting also raged hundreds of kilometres (miles) further up the Euphrates Valley in Syria, as US-backed Kurdish and Arab fighters opened a new front against the jihadists in the strategic Manbij pocket on the Turkish border. After a week of shaping operations aimed at sealing the siege of Fallujah, which lies just 50 kilometres west of Baghdad, elite forces launched a new, more aggressive phase on Monday morning. But they have so far been unable to reach the city centre and battle IS fighters in the streets of one of their historical strongholds. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said concern for the estimated 50,000 civilians the United Nations has said IS was using as human shields was slowing progress. Inside Fallujah, trapped residents were under increasing pressure from worsening shortages and nervous IS

fighters preparing for a desperate holdout. The United Nations Children's Fund said at least 20,000 of them were thought to be children, most vulnerable to dire living conditions and to forced recruitment as fighters. No aid has reached Fallujah since September last year and residents have been living on dates, dirty water from the Euphrates and animal feed.

WAR ON IS IN IRAQ AND SYRIA
Major front opened in Syria to cut IS's foreign fighters' recruitment
First aid convoy enters Daraya since 2012: Red Cross

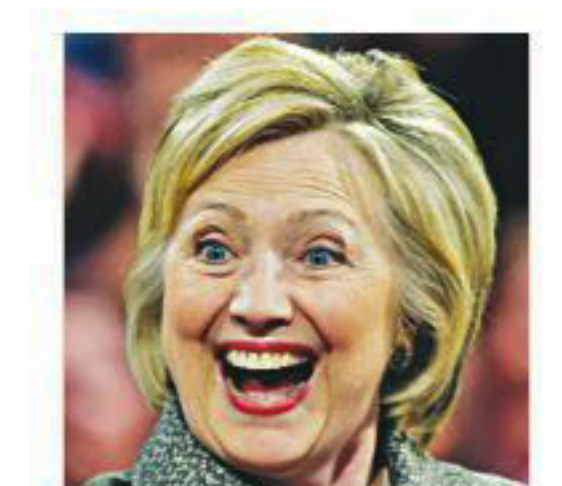
Commanders said another factor slowing the operation is the resistance they are meeting from jihadists fighters. "Our forces are still pushing to break into the city centre but there is tough resistance from Daesh," said Lieutenant General Abdelwahab al-Saadi, the overall commander of the operation, using an Arab acronym for IS. Iraqi commanders claim they have killed dozens of IS fighters since the

start of the operation on May 22-23 but have been coy about releasing their own casualty figures. Meanwhile, a US-backed alliance of Kurdish and Arab fighters launched an offensive against IS-held territory along the Turkish border that is seen as a main entry point for foreign fighters. The advance brought the Syrian Democratic Forces to within 18 kilometres of Manbij, a strategic town held by IS since 2014 which was hit by intensive US-led coalition air strikes, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The Pentagon has deployed more than 200 special forces alongside the SDF, a Kurdish-led alliance in which it has been trying to boost the Arab element. A humanitarian aid convoy also entered the rebel-held Syrian town of Daraya yesterday, the Red Cross said, in the first such delivery since a regime siege began in 2012. The International Committee of the Red Cross said both United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent staff were involved in yesterday's delivery. An estimated 8,000 people live in the town, which lies just a 15-minute drive southwest of Damascus.

China 'committed to safeguarding' peace

PM tells leading Asian media outlets

CHINADAILY.COM
China does not intend to assume a role as Big Brother, but instead seeks to build a community of a shared future with all its neighbors, Prime Minister Li Keqiang said in Beijing on Tuesday. "There are no grounds for China to become a superpower, and neither does China have the intention to be one," Li said. "China has a long way to go to realize modernization. It needs a stable regional and peaceful international environment, and China is committed to safeguarding that environment." The premier made the remarks while answering a question from Suthichai Yoon, chief adviser of Nation Multimedia Group, at the Great Hall of the People on Tuesday during a meeting with a delegation from 21 Asian media outlets. The media representatives gathered in Beijing for the two-day annual board meeting of the Asia News Network (ANN). The ANN, founded in 1999, is one of the world's biggest media alliances. It comprises leading, mostly English-language news groups with a combined readership of at least 14 million. Li said that even if China can realize modernization in the coming decades, Beijing will not seek hegemony, and will not bully any country, however small that nation is in terms of population or landmass. It is only natural that neighbors will have differences. But the key to address such disparities is diplomacy, the premier added.



US ELECTION 2016 Clinton could lose race for nominee: poll

AGENCIES
Hillary Clinton could lose the race for Democratic nominee as the focus shifts to California, where an influx of voter registrations threatens to derail her lead over Bernie Sanders. Sanders will be looking to the state to boost his campaign with news of a further 1.5 million people registering to vote since January this year. The latest statistics from the Institute of California will be encouraging to Sanders a big win in the 7 June California primary, where the candidates are currently virtually deadlocked, could hand him hundreds more delegates. Sanders currently has 1,501 pledged delegates to Clinton's 1,769. The influx of additional registrants - a 218 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2012 - is likely to include large numbers of young voters and could make this scenario a reality, reports Independent. Recent open primaries have shown that the Vermont senator tends to underperform in pre-election surveys and over-perform on primary and caucus days, thanks to the participation of new registrants and young voters. If Sanders were to win in California it would seriously call into question Clinton's candidacy in the general election and could result in a number of superdelegates, including distinguished party leaders and elected officials who are free to support any candidate for the presidential nomination, withdrawing their support. Meanwhile, Trump stepped up his assault on the US media Tuesday, branding the political press "dishonest," calling one journalist "a sleaze" and promising more such attacks if elected US president, reports AFP. He laid into the press at Trump Tower in New York for questioning his claim to have raised \$6 million for veteran charities on one night in Iowa last January after skipping a Fox News Republican debate.



A general view shows the scene of a suicide car bombing outside Hotel Ambassador on Maka Al Mukaram Road in Somalia's capital Mogadishu, yesterday. Somalia's Al-Qaeda-linked Shabaab yesterday launched a deadly attack on a top Mogadishu hotel popular with MPs, setting off a car bomb and fighting security forces inside the complex. At least 10 people were killed in the attack. Officials said death toll is expected to rise as many people were seriously wounded in the attack. PHOTO: REUTERS

black box pings detected

AFP, Cairo
A French navy vessel equipped with deep-water listening devices has detected signals from one of the black boxes of the EgyptAir plane that crashed in the Mediterranean, investigators said yesterday. The flight recorders could contain crucial information to help solve the mystery of why the Airbus A320 plunged into the sea with 66 people on board en route from Paris to Cairo on May 19. The signals were picked up by French survey ship Laplace which is using acoustic detection systems to listen for the "pings" emitted by the flight recorders, France's aviation safety agency BEA said. Egypt's ministry of civil aviation had announced the potential breakthrough earlier, saying the signals were "assumed to be from one of the data recorders". Some of the wreckage has already been pulled from the Mediterranean along with passenger belongings. No survivors have been found. Another vessel sent by Deep Ocean Search (DOS), a private company hired to help find the black boxes, is on its way to the area carrying a ship with a robot capable of diving up to 3,000 metres (yards) to retrieve the recorders. The ship is due to arrive at the site within a week, the Egyptian ministry said. The black boxes have enough battery power to emit signals for four or five weeks. Investigators have said it is too soon to determine what caused the disaster although a terror attack has not been ruled out. France's aviation safety agency has said the aircraft transmitted automated messages indicating smoke in the cabin and a fault in the flight control unit minutes before disappearing from radar screens. The passengers were 30 Egyptians, 15 French citizens, two Iraqis, two Canadians, and citizens from Algeria, Belgium, Britain, Chad, Portugal, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. They included a boy and two babies. Seven crew and three security personnel were also on board.



Four UN Mali mission staff killed in attack

AFP, Bamako
A Chinese peacekeeper and three civilians working for the UN's Mali mission have become the latest casualties of the troubled outfit, the UN and China's foreign ministry said yesterday. The last month alone has seen three attacks on members of the mission, known as MINUSMA, fuelling concern over its future with 65 killed in under three years. It is the deadliest active deployment for UN peacekeepers. Al-Qaeda's North African affiliate AQIM claimed responsibility for Tuesday's attacks. The MINUSMA camp was targeted in a mortar or rocket attack on Tuesday night, a statement from the mission said.

Political Science is about cooking!

Exam topper's answer shocks India
TNN, Patna
One of the toppers of Bihar School Examination Board intermediate exam thinks that the subject of Political Science is about one's cooking skills. What's worse is the fact that she could not even pronounce the name Political Science correctly, calling it 'Prodigal Science'. This has led the authorities to ask the students to appear in an interview and once again take a small examination related to their subject, in spite of the fact that their results have been declared on May 29. A video that went viral on social media on Tuesday, shows state's Arts topper Ruby Ray completely clueless regarding her subject. The video has posed many questions on the functioning of BSEB and the way examination was conducted. Ray scored 444 out of 500. While talking to TOI, BSEB chairman Lalkeshwar Prasad Singh said that top five students of all the streams - Arts, Commerce and Science - would be interviewed by a special committee about their subject and also take a small test. "I have received a complaint that arts topper was not competent enough to top the subject. But we have re-examined her papers and could not find any problem in that. Hence we have decided to call the top five students of all the streams and interview them. This is to find out the root cause behind this problem," he said.

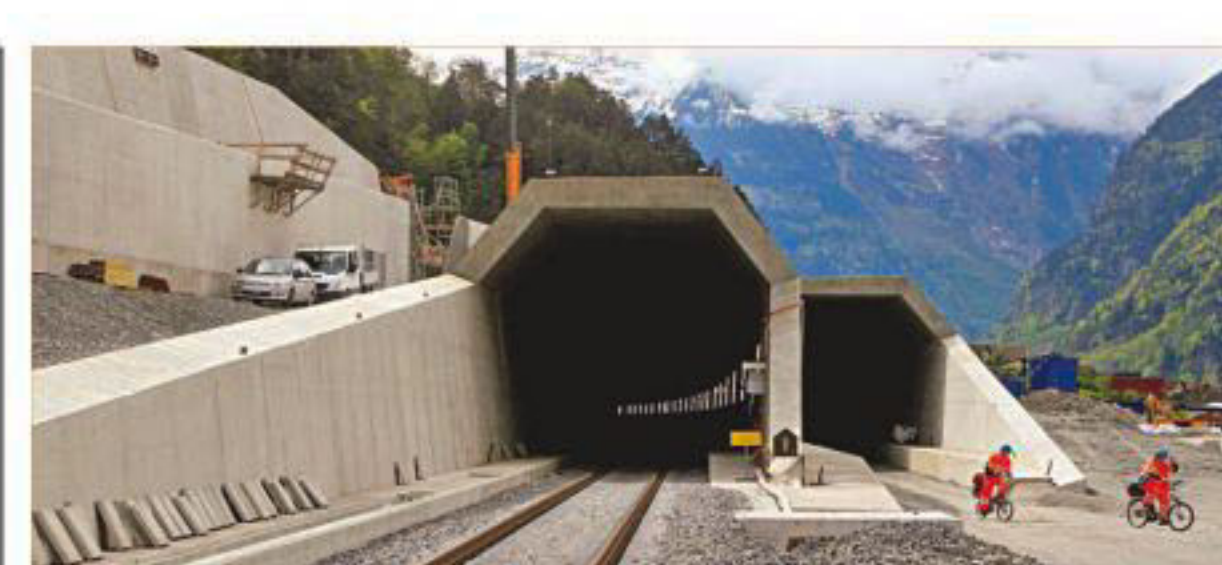
Green energy surges to record levels: report

AFP, Paris
Developing countries spent more on renewable power than rich ones for the first time last year, driving the fastest increase in sources of green energy on record, a study said yesterday. Global investment in renewable power was more than double the amount spent on new coal and natural gas-fired power generation in 2015, the Renewables Global Status report found. Overall spending on green energy rose five percent from 2014 to \$286 billion, beating the previous record set in 2011. China opened its coffers the widest, accounting for more than a third of total investment worldwide, while India, South Africa, Mexico and Chile also significantly increased spending. In total, some 147 gigawatts of capacity was added during the year -- the largest increase ever and reportedly the equivalent of all of Africa's generating capacity. "Renewables are now established around the world as mainstream sources of energy," the report said. Wind and solar power were the biggest winners, with more than half of the money committed to renewables in 2015 spent on harnessing the sun's energy, according to the report. But investment in other types of renewable energy, such as biofuels and hydropower, fell while the use of alternative fuels in transport continued to lag behind other areas, the report found. Spending on green energy in developed countries also slipped, particularly in Europe, where overall investment slumped by around a fifth compared to the previous year. "Policy makers should think on a long-term basis in order to increase investment in clean energy and advance the energy transition in their countries," the report said.



Saudi blames Iran for Hajj impasse

STAR REPORT
Saudi Arabia, which oversees the pilgrimage to Makkah, accused Iran of depriving its citizens of the religious duty after talks on the issue failed to bridge gap between the regional rivals. In a press release, the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Bangladesh said the Iranian delegation left the talks despite agreeing on conditions for its citizens to attend hajj. Earlier, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said his country did not prevent any country from performing the religious duty. "Iran ... was practically demanding the right to hold demonstrations and to have other advantages ... that would create chaos during hajj, which is not acceptable," he added.



World's longest tunnel opens in Switzerland

AFP, Erstfeld
The world's longest tunnel officially opened yesterday, with the trailblazing rail passage under the Swiss Alps aiming to ease transit through the heart of Europe. With political unity on the continent shaken by a massive influx of migrants and the looming threat of Britain's EU departure, Swiss president Johan Schneider-Amman said the tunnel would "join the people and the economies" of Europe. He spoke before the 57-kilometre Gotthard Base Tunnel (GBT) made its ceremonial first run with European leaders on board. The passengers included German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Francois Hollande and Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi. The Gotthard Base Tunnel was designed to offer a better option for both private travellers and commercial freights. The work took 17 years at a cost of more than 12 billion Swiss francs (\$12 billion, 11 billion euros).