

NEWS IN brief

Pak executions pass 400 amid protests

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The number of people executed in Pakistan since it resumed hangings just 18 months ago is feared to have passed 400. The human rights organisation warned that the figure could be higher as not all executions may be recorded.

NY renames street 'Muhammad Ali Way'

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New York has temporarily renamed 33rd Street to honor the late boxing legend Muhammad Ali. The Manhattan street was christened "Muhammad Ali Way" on Tuesday, near the iconic Madison Square Garden where the three-time world champion boxer fought eight times. The 73-year-old fighter passed away on Friday after experiencing respiratory issues.

Annual monsoon arrives in India

AFP, New Delhi

Annual monsoon rains arrived in southern India yesterday, easing fears of millions of desperate farmers after two straight years of drought, the weather department said. Farmers rely on the monsoon rains, which hit the Kerala coast every year and then sweep across the country, to water their crops and replenish dams and reservoirs.

Fresh blast kills 4 in Turkey

AFP, Ankara

Four people including a pregnant policewoman were killed yesterday in a car bombing in Kurdish majority southeastern Turkey, a day after a deadly attack hit mega city Istanbul. Both bombings targeted Turkish police and have been blamed on Kurdish rebels waging a decades-long insurgency against the state.

EU REFERENDUM UK extends registration deadline

REUTERS, London

Britain will extend the voter registration period for its June 23 referendum on EU membership by 48 hours after a late surge in applications crashed a key website shortly before the Tuesday night deadline. More than a million potential voters applied to register online over the last week, half of them on the final day, the government said, with a peak of more than 200,000 per hour ahead of the previous deadline of midnight on Tuesday. Turnout is expected to be important in determining the outcome of the close-fought referendum, with young people considered to be more pro-EU but also less likely to vote.



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi waves as he arrives to address a joint meeting of Congress at the US Capitol in Washington, DC, yesterday. The speech is the fifth such address by an Indian premier, and the first in more than a decade. PHOTO: AFP

IS loses ground on fronts in Syria, Iraq

15 killed as air strikes hit hospital in Aleppo

REUTERS, Beirut/baghdad

Islamic State's far-fungling enemies in Syria and Iraq yesterday pressed ahead with major advances on multiple fronts that have put some of the greatest pressure on the ultra-hardline Islamists since they declared their caliphate two years ago. A spokesman for a US-backed the Syrian Democratic Forces alliance in northern Syria said it was poised to enter the city of Manbij, a week after launching an assault with the aim of cutting off the last stretch of Turkish frontier still under Islamic State control. The goal of the offensive, launched last week, is to capture the area around the town of Manbij west of the Euphrates. The frontier has been used for years by Islamic State as their main supply route for arms and manpower, and more recently to send followers back to Europe for attacks like those carried out in Brussels and Paris since last year.

WAR ON ISLAMIC STATE
Iraqi troops push into built-up district of Falluja; UN says 90,000 civilians could be trapped there
IS abandons villages near Turkish border; US-backed fighters say they are poised to enter Manbij

newspaper in Lebanon characterised last week as a "race to Raqqa" -- to capture territory around Islamic State's de facto Syrian capital before the area falls to US allies. Meanwhile, at least 15 people are reported to have been killed and dozens wounded in a series of air strikes on rebel-held areas in the Syrian city of Aleppo. One of the strikes hit near the Bayan hospital in the eastern Shaar district, activists and a monitoring group said. Activists said children were among at least 10 people killed when the Bayan hospital was hit. It was not clear who was responsible, but government forces are seeking to regain control of the divided city. Assad has been fighting a civil war against a range of enemies for five years. He vowed on Tuesday to recapture "every inch" of Syria, in a defiant speech seen as a setback to diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict. He is supported by Moscow and Tehran, and opposed by Washington, European powers, Arab states and Turkey. And at the opposite end of the self-proclaimed caliphate, 750 km down the Euphrates River, Iraqi government forces said they had fought their way into built-up areas of Falluja, the second-biggest city in



A man reacts as he sits on the rubble inside the Al-Bayan clinic following reported air strikes by government forces in the rebel-held Shaar neighbourhood of the northern city Aleppo, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Taliban kill 12 Afghans, abduct 40

AFP, Ghazni

Afghan authorities yesterday recovered bullet-ridden bodies of 12 security officials recently captured by the Taliban in eastern Ghazni province, while gunmen kidnapped 40 others in the country's north as the insurgency escalates. The violence underscores Afghanistan's fragile security situation as the Taliban, who launched their annual spring offensive in April, rejected government calls this week for a ceasefire during the holy month of Ramadan. The 12 soldiers, police and intelligence officers were captured over the past two months from different highway crossings in the insurgency-prone province of Ghazni.

HONOUR KILLING IN PAKISTAN Daughter burnt alive by mother

AFP, Lahore

A Pakistani teenager was burnt alive by her mother yesterday after marrying a man of her own choice, police said, the latest in a string of so-called "honour killings" in the country. Zeenat Bibi, 16, was set on fire by her mother Perveen Bibi in the eastern city of Lahore a little more than a week after the wedding, police said. "Perveen Bibi killed her daughter Zeenat Bibi by burning her alive around 9:00 am on Wednesday," Haidar Ashraf, a senior police official told AFP, adding the teen had married a man named Hassan on May 29. It was the third such "honour killing" in as many months. Zeenat's husband Hasan told local TV station Geo News that the pair had eloped, but he had reluctantly allowed her to return to her family home after they promised they would hold a celebration and not harm her. Ashraf, the police official, said Perveen and other family members had confessed to the crime and that police had seized kerosene oil from the scene. Another senior police official confirmed the details of the killing. Hundreds of women are murdered by their relatives in Pakistan each year on the pretext of defending what

GLOBAL PEACE INDEX 2016

Only 10 countries are conflict-free

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The world is becoming a more dangerous place and there are now just 10 countries which can be considered completely free from conflict, according to authors of the 10th annual Global Peace Index. The worsening conflict in the Middle East, the lack of a solution to the refugee crisis and an increase in deaths from major terrorist incidents have all contributed to the world being less peaceful in 2016 than it was in 2015. And there are now fewer countries in the world which can be considered truly at peace -- in other words, not engaged in any conflicts either internally or externally -- than there were in 2014. According to the Institute for Economics and Peace, a think-tank which has produced the index for the past 10 years, only Botswana, Chile, Costa Rica, Japan, Mauritius, Panama, Qatar, Switzerland, Uruguay, and Vietnam are free from conflict. The index shows that 81 countries became more peaceful in the past year, while the situation deteriorated in 79. The index shows that political instability worsened in 39 countries in the last 12 months, including what the report described as the "striking case" of Brazil.



Iceland was once again named the world's most peaceful country, followed by Denmark, Austria, New Zealand and Portugal, the latter improving nine places. Syria was once again named the least peaceful country. Finally, the index identified Europe once again as the most peaceful region in the world, and by some margin, home to seven of the top 10 countries on the list. Yet the continent is not immune to war -- Britain, France, Belgium and others are heavily involved in external conflict in the Middle East, and face a growing threat to peace from international terrorism.

VIOLATION OF CHILD RIGHTS IN YEMEN Uproar as UN removes Saudi-led coalition from blacklist

AFP, United Nations

The United Nations was Tuesday forced to defend its decision to remove the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen from a blacklist of child rights violators after rights groups expressed dismay. UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric insisted that no final decision had been taken, and that the coalition was taken off the list pending a review that is expected to be completed before August. "I don't think it's a reversal of policy," Dujarric told reporters. "We will see what the review is and we will adjust the list as needed." Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International blasted Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon over the decision, accusing him of

caving in to Saudi pressure and damaging the world body's credibility. In its annual report on children in armed conflict published Thursday, the United Nations added the coalition to its list of child rights violators after concluding it was responsible for 60 percent of the 785 children killed in Yemen last year. Saudi Arabia reacted angrily and demanded that the report be "corrected." Saudi Ambassador Abdullah al-Mouallimi said the number of child deaths blamed on the coalition was "wildly exaggerated," and later proclaimed that the decision to be taken off the list was "irreversible." Dujarric said the United Nations stands by the content of the report, but was willing to review information that the coalition "insists is important for our analysis."



Can Hillary Clinton unify Democrats?

AFP, Washington

On June 7, 2008, Hillary Clinton made way for Barack Obama to conquer the White House, conceding defeat after a fractious primary race, and throwing her full weight behind him. Eight years later, it is she who faces the arduous task of unifying her camp after a -- sometimes bitter -- battle with Bernie Sanders. On paper, it seems an easier task than the one facing her Republican rival Donald Trump, whose insurgent candidacy and incendiary comments -- dubbed "racist" by leading GOP figures -- are tearing his party apart. But Clinton's challenge remains very real, with one big question still unanswered: how will "Bernie" behave towards the nominee he fought tooth-and-nail to stop?



The Vermont senator told supporters late Tuesday that "the struggle continues" and vowed to take his message about reforming Wall Street, the minimum wage and the role of money in politics to the Democratic party's convention in Philadelphia next month. Delivering her victory speech in New York, Clinton did not directly urge her rival to stand down. But she held out an olive branch to him and his supporters.

"Let there be no mistake, Senator Sanders, his campaign, and the vigorous debate that we've had about how to raise income, reduce inequality, increase upward mobility, have been very good for the Democratic Party and for America," she said. "As we look ahead, let's remember all that unites us." Obama called both Clinton and Sanders on Tuesday to congratulate them, but made it clear that his former secretary of state was the nominee. The US president was to meet Sanders at the White House on Thursday -- perhaps the first steps towards a unified approach to November. Tuesday's primaries "are no longer about the

nomination. They are about leverage in the peace talks that are sure to follow," the one-time Obama strategist David Axelrod tweeted on Tuesday. In 2008, Clinton threw her weight unequivocally behind her erstwhile rival, calling for her supporters "to take our energy, our passion, our strength, and do all we can to help elect Barack Obama, the next president of the United States." This time, Clinton will have to earn the support on November 8 of the young, passionate voters fired up by Sanders' grassroots campaign. Her biggest hurdle: the sizeable share of Bernie's fans who view the former first lady, senator and secretary of state as calculating and insincere -- echoing the favorite line of attack of her Republican rival Trump. "Clinton doesn't have the ability to do it alone," argued Larry Sabato, a political analyst from the University of Virginia. "A sizable minority of the Sanders troops have grown to despise her. Sanders will have to back Clinton repeatedly and with enthusiasm." They are also counting on Obama himself to enter the race in the role of unifier-in-chief. According to the latest Gallup poll, Obama's popularity with that segment of the electorate is sky-high -- at 92 percent.