

NEWS IN brief

IS fighters kill six Afghan police

AFP, Jalalabad
Islamic State fighters stormed a police base in eastern Afghanistan yesterday, killing at least six officials in a pre-dawn attack, months after the government claimed to have defeated the group. The attack in Haska Mina district in Nangarhar, bordering Pakistan, comes a day after three worshippers were killed and 70 others wounded in a bombing inside a mosque during Friday prayers in the restive province.

Fujimori concedes defeat in Peru

AFP, Lima
Keiko Fujimori, the daughter of jailed former president Alberto Fujimori, conceded defeat Friday in Peru's photo-finish presidential election to former Wall Street banker Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, who now faces the task of uniting a deeply divided country. Kuczynski, 77, has called for unity in a country left torn by the election, in which he took 50.12 percent to Fujimori's 49.88 percent.

Turkish jets kill 13 PKK militants

REUTERS, Istanbul
Turkish warplanes killed 13 suspected Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants on Saturday in the southeastern province of Diyarbakir, military sources said yesterday. They said the rebels were spotted by drones in the Lice region. Warplanes also struck PKK targets in the provinces of Siirt and Hakkari and in some areas of neighbouring northern Iraq where the PKK has bases, the army said.

Air France pilots start 4-day strike

REUTERS, Paris
Air France pilots went on a four-day strike over pay cuts yesterday that could disrupt transport plans for football fans on the second day of Europe's soccer championship. The pilots strike comes amid weeks of nationwide protests against plans to reform France's strict labour laws, which have blocked refineries, disrupted rail travel and left garbage piling up on the streets of Paris.



The mother of Palestinian assailant Murad Idais holds a Palestinian flag as she stands at the rubble of their house after it was demolished by Israeli forces in the West Bank village of Yatta, south of Hebron June 11, 2016. The Palestinian teenager is accused of stabbing a Jewish woman to death at her home in a West Bank settlement. The demolition took place in the West Bank village of Beit Amra, with bulldozers flattening an entire building as family members looked on, according to an AFP photographer.

Poll indicates rising chance of Brexit

REUTERS, London
Betting odds on a British vote to exit the European Union narrowed yesterday after an opinion poll gave the "Leave" camp a double-digit lead over "Remain". The implied probability of a vote to stay in the EU in a June 23 referendum fell to 70 percent from 78 percent earlier this week, according to odds supplied by bookmaker Betfair. It was responding to the publication of an opinion poll by ORB for The Independent newspaper on Friday showing support for "Leave" on 55 percent versus 45 percent for "Remain". Financial markets have been paying close attention to bookmakers' odds on the referendum, especially as opinion pollsters suffered a blow to their credibility when they failed to predict last year's outright election victory for Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservatives. Friday's survey showed the biggest lead enjoyed by the so-called Brexit camp since the poll series started a year ago, The Independent said. But the official Vote Leave campaign reacted cautiously, saying on Twitter: "We don't believe the ORB online poll, our data suggests it's closer to 50-50." Bookmaker Ladbrokes said the ORB poll had caused it to shorten its Brexit odds to 9/4 from 11/4 previously. Britain's decision on whether to leave the world's largest free-trading area carries far-reaching implications for politics, the economy, trade, defence and migration in Britain and the rest of the EU. The mixed picture from bookmakers and pollsters has heightened market jitters about the outcome, with sterling repeatedly reacting to poll results. The pound lost more than half a cent against the dollar soon after the ORB poll was released. Separately, a group of Britain's most eminent scientists yesterday endorsed the campaign for the UK to remain in the EU, saying that leaving could damage research. On Friday, however, billionaire entrepreneur James Dyson came out in favour of Brexit, a significant endorsement for the "Leave" camp with less than two weeks to go before the vote.

WAR ON ISLAMIC STATE IN SYRIA, LIBYA

Militants losing ground in sirte

Unity forces capture part of biggest IS base outside Iraq, Syria; retakes key port

AGENCIES
Libyan forces have retaken parts of Sirte from IS militants, gaining ground in the extremist group's most significant stronghold outside Syria and Iraq, a monitor said yesterday. In the ongoing offensive, forces supporting the UN-brokered government gained control of a port late Friday after fierce clashes with IS militants and are in complete control of the al-Sarawa area east of Sirte, according to Al-Bunyan al-Marsous, a Libya monitor. Sirte has been the main IS base in the North African country. The jihadists are now surrounded in a densely populated area of around five square kilometres inside the city where they are laying booby traps, officials said. Most of the city's residents have fled but about 30,000 remain, they added. The offensive that has lasted almost two weeks has left dozens of fighters dead and around 400 others wounded, the Government of National Accord said. The fall of Sirte, the hometown of ousted dictator Muammar Gaddafi, would be a major setback for the extremists who have also lost territory in Syria and Iraq where they have declared an Islamic "caliphate". The forces reopened a road between Sirte and a village around 70 kilometres east after sweeping for and removing improvised explosive devices, while the country's airforce carried out six air raids against the militants and their weaponry in Buhari, 3 kilometres to Sirte's south, according to Al-Bunyan al-Marsous. US officials estimate there are 4,000 to 6,000 ISIS militants in the country. The forces allied with the GNA said on Thursday they expected to announce the liberation of Sirte in "two or three days," after thrusting into the city centre.

Thousands trapped as SDF forces surround Manbij

Blasts kill at least 20 outside Shia shrine near Damascus

AFP, Jebb Hassan Agha
A siege by US-backed Kurdish and Arab forces of the key jihadist-held town of Manbij in northern Syria left tens of thousands of civilians trapped yesterday. Near Damascus, suicide bombings claimed by the Islamic State group outside a Shia shrine killed at least 20 people, the latest deadly strike on the revered site. The Syrian Democratic Forces alliance supported by US air strikes encircled Manbij on Friday, severing the jihadist group's main supply line between Turkey and its de facto Syrian capital of Raqa. Manbij lies at the heart of the last stretch of IS-controlled territory along Turkey's border, and it was a key point on the jihadists' supply line. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said warplanes from a US-led coalition have carried out heavy bombing raids on and around the town held by IS since 2014. "Tens of thousands of civilians still there can't leave as all the routes out of town are cut," the Britain-based monitor's head Rami Abdel Rahman said. He said at least 159 IS fighters and 22 SDF troops had been killed as well as 37 civilians, most of the last group in coalition air raids, since the alliance offensive against Manbij began on May 31. Dakish Fatimi, a Kurdish Red Crescent official, said his team had treated dozens of civilians wounded by landmines planted by retreating IS fighters.



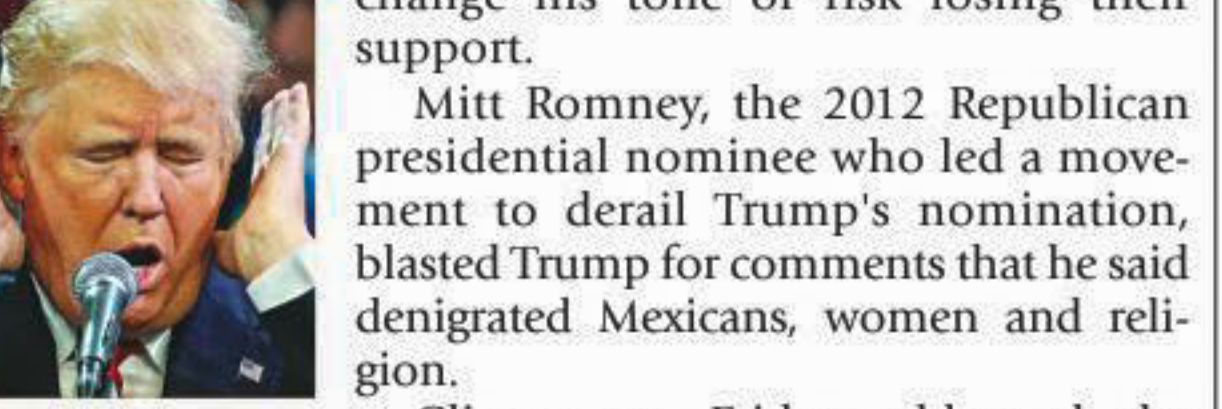
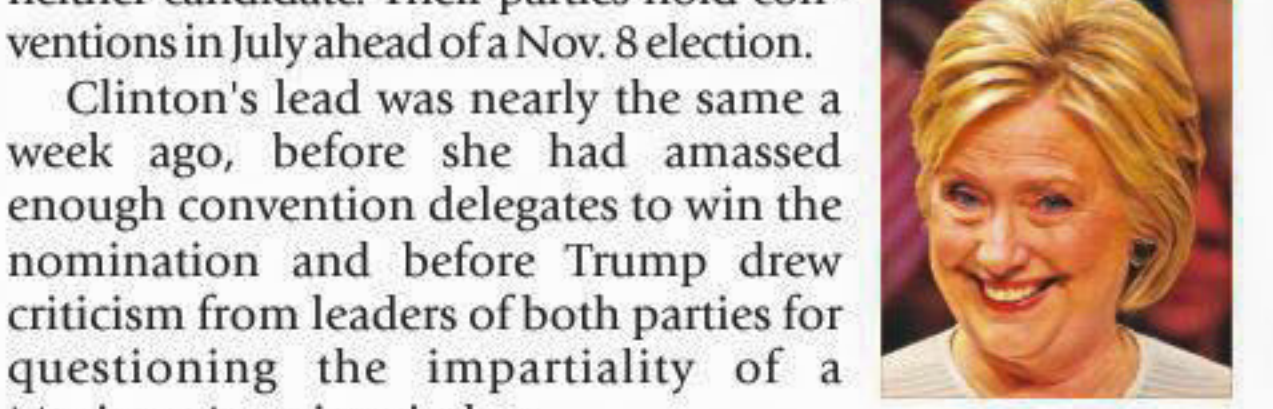
South of Manbij, pro-regime fighters backed by Russian air strikes yesterday were 15 kilometres from the jihadist bastion of Tabqa's military airport. Near the capital yesterday, bombings outside a Shia shrine killed at least 20 people including 13 civilians, the Observatory said. IS claimed the attacks saying they were carried out by three suicide bombers. IS bombings near the shrine in February killed 134 people, mostly civilians. In January, another IS attack killed 70 people. Lebanese Shia militant group Hezbollah cited the threat to Sayyida Zeinab as a main reason for intervening in Syria's war. The shrine contains the grave of Zeinab, a venerated granddaughter of the Prophet Mohammed.

Clinton leads Trump by 11 points

Stung by criticism, Trump vows to work for ethnic harmony

AGENCIES
Hillary Clinton leads Donald Trump by 11 points in the US presidential race, showing little change after she became the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee this week, according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll released on Friday. The online poll, conducted from Monday to Friday, shows 46 percent of likely voters support Clinton while 34.8 percent back Trump. Another 19.2 percent support neither candidate. Their parties hold conventions in July ahead of a Nov. 8 election. Clinton's lead was nearly the same a week ago, before she had amassed enough convention delegates to win the nomination and before Trump drew criticism from leaders of both parties for questioning the impartiality of a Mexican-American judge. Meanwhile, Trump offered a message of ethnic harmony on Friday at a Christian evangelical conference as he sought to calm concern about his criticism of a Mexican-American judge. Speaking to the annual conference of the conservative Faith & Freedom Coalition, Trump did not mention the controversy over his charge that U.S. District Judge Gonzalo Curiel cannot treat him fairly because of his Mexican heritage. But Trump did make a point of saying he would repre-

sent all Americans if elected president on Nov. 8. "Freedom of any kind means no one should be judged by their race or their color and the tone of his hue," Trump said. "Right now, we have a very divided nation. We're going to bring our nation together." Paul Ryan, the top elected US Republican, had criticized Trump for what he called a "textbook definition of a racist comment" for his remarks about the judge. Other Republican leaders warned Trump to change his tone or risk losing their support. Mitt Romney, the 2012 Republican presidential nominee who led a movement to derail Trump's nomination, blasted Trump for comments that he said denigrated Mexicans, women and religion. Clinton on Friday addressed the Planned Parenthood Action Fund, the nonpartisan arm of the women's health group, and had Trump trained in her sights. "This is a man who has called women pigs, dogs and disgusting animals, it's kind of hard to imagine counting on him to respect our fundamental rights," said Clinton, the first woman to become the presumptive presidential nominee of a major party.



Erdogan skips Ali's funeral after rift with organisers

MAIL ONLINE
Turkey's President has cut short his trip to the US and will not attend the funeral of boxer Muhammad Ali, his office said Friday, amid reports of a rift with the ceremony's organizers.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan had specially flown to Louisville in the southern US state of Kentucky to say farewell to Ali, who the Turkish president is known to have admired hugely as a committed Muslim and civil rights campaigner. Erdogan on Thursday attended a prayer ceremony for Ali and had been due to attend the funeral on Friday along with several other high profile political leaders. But the president's office said that Erdogan left the United States for Turkey late Thursday after attending the prayer ceremony and joining a Ramadan fast-breaking dinner with the US diaspora of Meskhetian Turks who were expelled from

their homeland by Stalin in the 1940s. Erdogan and King Abdullah II of Jordan were scheduled to speak at the champion boxer's service on Friday, but was cut due to lack of program space. "It's not about who they are, it's about the fact that we just don't have room on the program for them," family spokesman Bob Gunnell said, adding that their representatives were 'gracious and understood' when told. In addition, The Dogan news agency quoted presidential sources as saying funeral organizers refused to allow Erdogan to lay a cloth from the Kaaba on Ali's coffin during the ceremony. The Turkish president's bodyguards and US Secret Service agents also clashed briefly while he was in Louisville. During his trip, Erdogan was full of praise for Ali, hailing him as a fighter not just in the ring but for Muslims in general.



'The Voice' singer dies in US shooting

AFP, Miami
Singer Christina Grimmie, who starred in NBC's "The Voice," died Friday after being shot at a concert in Orlando, Florida by an unidentified gunman, who then killed himself, police said. The 22-year-old Grimmie had performed with the group Before You Exit at Orlando's Plaza Live Theater and stayed after to sign autographs and sell merchandise. A man, who was armed with two guns, walked toward her and shot her, police said. The motive of the gunman, who was not identified, was unclear. "We don't know if he was just a crazy fan that followed her on Twitter or on social media. We really don't know," police spokeswoman Wanda Miglio said at a news conference. The shooting seemed likely to add fuel to the long simmering debate over gun laws in the United States, where guns were used in more than 11,200 murders in 2013. Grimmie, who competed in the sixth season of "The Voice" in 2014, released her debut EP "Find Me" in 2011.



A police officer carries a woman who fainted while gathering to try to buy pasta outside a supermarket in Caracas, Venezuela, June 10, 2016. Facing mounting pressure from food shortages, looting and increasingly violent protests, Venezuelan authorities on Friday announced the next stage of a recall referendum against embattled President Nicolas Maduro.

Obama in dad-in-chief mode

AFP, Washington
President Barack Obama made the short but sentimental drive across Washington on Friday to attend his oldest daughter's high school graduation. Obama has joked that Malia's graduation was the one event where he could not give an address. "Malia's school asked if I wanted to speak at commencement and I said no," Obama said in Detroit earlier this year. "I'm going to be wearing dark glasses... and I'm going to cry." True to his promise, Obama was photographed by guests at Sidwell Friends School wearing dark glasses. He was accompanied by First Lady Michelle Obama, Malia and his youngest daughter Sasha. Malia was 10 years old when Obama entered office, almost eight years ago. She is expected to attend Harvard in 2017, after a gap year. Obama earlier this year told television host Ellen DeGeneres of his sorrow at thinking that she would soon fly the nest. He said he would be "sobbing" at the graduation. "She's one of my best friends. And it's going to be hard for me not to have her around all the time. But she's ready to go. You can tell. She's just a really smart, capable person and she's ready to make her own way."