

British PM urges unity 'against hatred'

Lawmakers return to Parliament to pay tribute to slain MP

AFP, London

Prime Minister David Cameron yesterday urged people to unite against hatred as Britain's parliament held a tearful special session to honour murdered lawmaker Jo Cox.

Cox, a 41-year-old mother of two who campaigned for British membership of the European Union in a June 23 referendum, was shot and killed last Thursday in her constituency in northern England.

To cries of "hear, hear" in parliament, Cameron called on fellow politicians to remember Cox by "uniting against the hatred that killed her today, and for ever more".

Minutes before the parliamentary session opened, her alleged killer, 52-year-old Thomas Mair, appeared in court in London via video link from prison after being charged at the weekend with murder.

During a short hearing at the Old Bailey court, he spoke only to confirm his name and was ordered to remain in custody.

Asked to give his identity at a lower court on Saturday, he had replied: "Death to traitors, freedom for Britain."

Cox's killing has sparked a fierce debate over the divisive nature of the European Union

referendum battle, as polls show the rival camps neck-and-neck with three days to go.

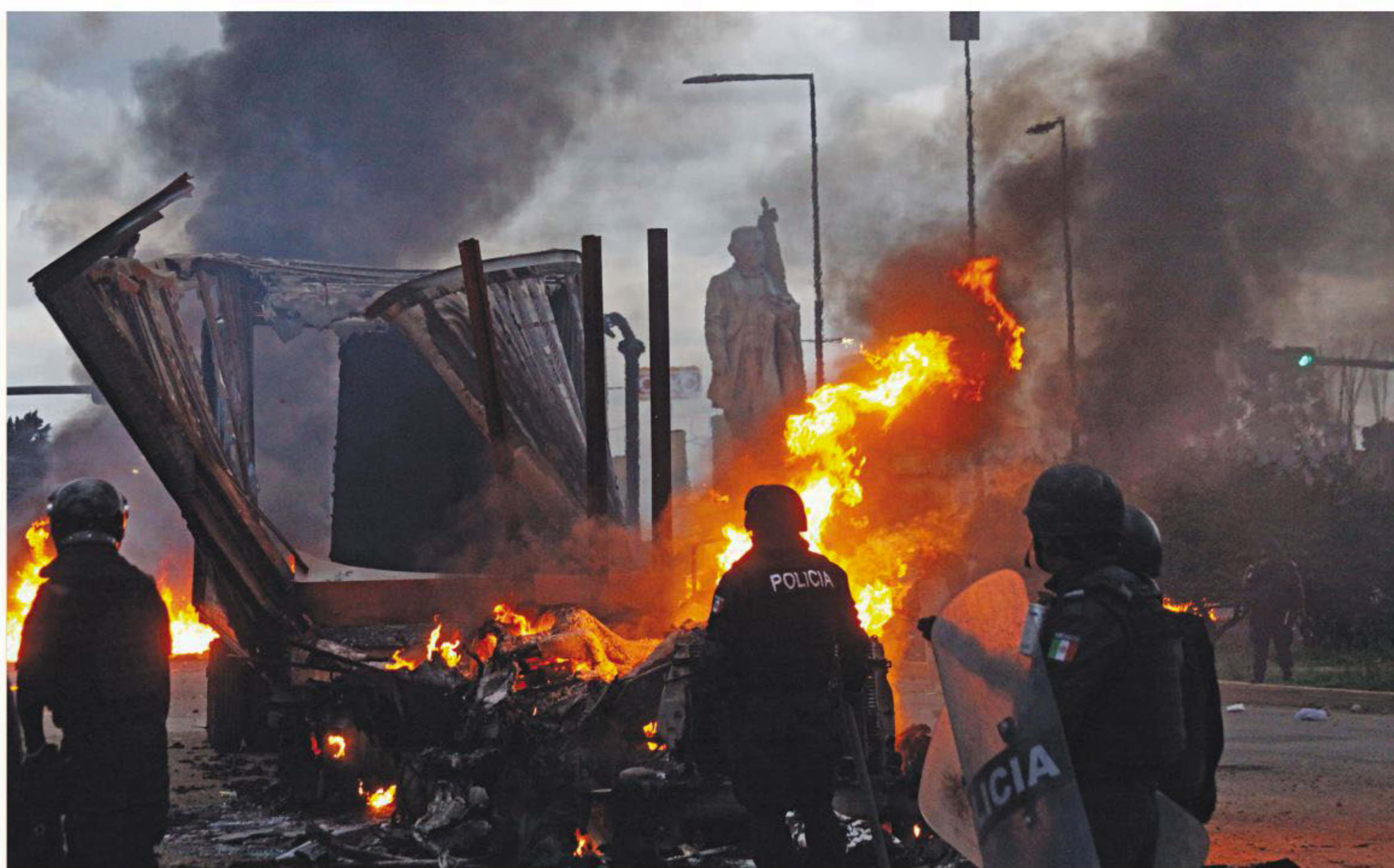
A close friend of hers in parliament, Stephen Kinnock, hit out at a Brexit campaign poster, released just hours before she was killed, that showed refugees trudging through a field with the headline: "Breaking Point".

"She would have responded with outrage and with robust rejection of the calculated narrative of cynicism, division and despair that it represents," Kinnock said.

"Jo understood that rhetoric has consequences. When insecurity, fear and anger are used to light a fuse, then the explosion is inevitable," he warned.

Despite withering criticism, leading Brexit campaigner Nigel Farage, head of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), has defended his use of the poster, saying it is an accurate depiction of the refugee crisis in the EU. On Cox's vacant seat in House of Commons lay a white rose representing her Yorkshire home and a red rose in memory of her political affiliation, the opposition Labour Party.

Cox's husband Brendan and her children, aged five and three, listened in the parliament's gallery as politicians, sporting white roses, paid tribute.



Mexican federal police clash with teachers during a protest against an education reform and the arrest of two of its leaders, in Oaxaca State, on Sunday evening. The protest left six people dead and more than 100 injured. Mexican authorities said yesterday they were conducting autopsies on six people to determine if any were killed by police bullets.

PHOTO: AFP

23 killed in Afghanistan

Taliban claims responsibility; parliament approves new defence, intel chiefs ahead of Nato summit

AFP, Kabul

A busload of Nepali security guards were among 23 people killed in a string of bombings across Afghanistan yesterday, days after Washington expanded the US military's authority to strike the insurgents.

The Taliban claimed the first attack which killed 14 Nepali security guards working for the Canadian Embassy in Kabul in a massive blast that left their yellow mini bus splattered with blood.

The insurgents also claimed a second, smaller blast in south Kabul targeting a local politician that the interior ministry said killed one person and injured five others, including the politician.

The Kabul blasts were followed just hours later by an attack on a market in the remote northeastern province of Badakhshan that authorities said killed at least eight people and wounded 18, with the death toll set to rise.

The wave of violence comes ten days after Washington announced an expansion of the US military's authority to conduct air strikes against the Taliban, a significant boost for Afghan forces who

have limited close air-support capacities.

Last month the militants, who have stepped up attacks in recent weeks as part of their annual spring offensive, named Haibatullah Akhundzada their new leader, in a swift power transition after former head Mullah Akhtar Mansour was killed in a US drone strike in Pakistan.

Police said the attack on the Nepali guards was carried out by a suicide bomber on foot shortly before 6:00 am on a main road leading east out of the capital towards the city of Jalalabad.

"As a result 14 foreigners were killed, all Nepali nationals," the interior ministry said in a statement, adding that nine other people were wounded, including five Nepali citizens and four Afghans.

Meanwhile, Afghan lawmakers yesterday approved President Ashraf Ghani's nominees for defence minister and intelligence director, two crucial posts that sat vacant for months as the country struggles to rein in an ascendant insurgency.

MPs voted for Abdullah Habibi, formerly a senior official in the defence ministry who holds the rank of army general, to become its new minister.

SUICIDE BOMBINGS



Rescue workers use heavy machinery to search for victims at Caok village in Purworejo, Central Java province, Indonesia, yesterday. Authorities raced to rescue victims of landslides and flash floods caused by torrential rain at the weekend that killed nearly 50 people and left many missing in the main island of Java.

'Myanmar will avoid using term Rohingya'

REUTERS, Yangon

Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi has told the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights that the government will avoid using the term "Rohingya" to describe a persecuted Muslim minority in the country's northwest, an official told Reuters yesterday.

Members of the 1.1 million group, who identify themselves by the term "Rohingya" and live in apartheid-like conditions, are seen by many Myanmar Buddhists as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. The term is a divisive issue.

The UN human rights investigator, Yanghee Lee, met Suu Kyi in the capital Naypyitaw on her first trip to Myanmar since the Nobel Peace Prize winner took power in April.

"At their meeting here this morning, our Foreign Minister Daw Aung San Suu Kyi explained our stance on this issue that the controversial terms should be avoided," said Aung Lin, the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Suu Kyi said during a visit by US

Secretary of State John Kerry last month that the country needed "space" to deal with the Rohingya issue and cautioned against the use of "emotive terms", that she said were making the situation more difficult.

The previous military-linked government of former junta general Thein Sein referred to the group as "Bengalis", implying they were illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, the United Nations warned yesterday widespread and ongoing violations against Myanmar's Muslim Rohingya minority, including denial of citizenship, forced labour and sexual violence, could amount to crimes against humanity.

In a report on the human rights situation for minorities in Myanmar, the UN human rights office said it had found "a pattern of gross violations against the Rohingya... (which) suggest a widespread or systematic attack... in turn giving rise to the possible commission of crimes against humanity if established in a court of law."

NEWSIN brief

Donald Trump drops campaign manager

AFP, Washington

Republican presidential hopeful Donald Trump has dropped his controversial campaign manager Corey Lewandowski, a spokeswoman told The New York Times yesterday, as the billionaire looks to reposition himself for the general election. "The Donald J Trump Campaign for President has today announced that Corey Lewandowski will no longer be working with the campaign," spokeswoman Hope Hicks said.

Erdogan condemns attack on rock fans

AFP, Ankara

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday condemned Islamists who attacked rock fans at a music store in Istanbul, but also said it was "wrong" for fans to have consumed alcohol in public. A group of about 20 men beat up customers at the music store who were listening to the new album by Radiohead on Friday night, angry that they were drinking alcohol during the Muslim holy month.

Indonesian navy fires on Chinese boat

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia yesterday defended opening fire on Chinese sailors as an action aimed at stopping illegal fishing, as China said it had overlapping maritime claims with Jakarta. Beijing protested strongly over Friday's clash near Indonesia's Natuna Islands in the South China Sea, saying one Chinese fisherman was injured. The Indonesian navy insisted no one was hurt when it detained seven sailors.

Bahrain revokes top Shia cleric's citizenship

AFP, Dubai

Bahraini authorities have revoked the citizenship of the most prominent Shia cleric in the Sunni-ruled kingdom, accusing him of sowing sectarian divisions, the interior ministry said yesterday. Sheikh Isa Qassim, considered the spiritual leader of Bahrain's Shia majority, was alleged to have used his position to "serve foreign interests and promote... sectarianism and violence," the ministry said in a statement.

Solar plane sets off on Atlantic flight

AFP, New York

The Solar Impulse 2 aircraft was soaring yesterday over the western Atlantic, one of the most difficult legs of its record-breaking bid to fly across the globe using only solar energy. The plane, which took off from New York's JFK airport at around 2:30 am, is piloted by Swiss adventurer Bertrand Piccard, who is expected to spend approximately 90 hours crossing the Atlantic.

Air strikes kill 23 IS fighters in Syria

REUTERS, Ankara

Artillery fire from Turkey and coalition air strikes killed 23 Islamic State militants in northern Syria, broadcaster Haberturk reported yesterday.

Haberturk said a total of 33 strikes targeted militants thought to be preparing an attack on Turkey. It did not say when the operation was carried out.

The US-led coalition has stepped up air strikes against Islamic State positions in the area in recent weeks, in response to rocket attacks by the militants on the border town of Kilis.

Kilis, just across the frontier from an Islamic State-controlled region of Syria, has been hit by rockets more than 70 times this year. More than 20 people have been killed and parts of the town reduced to rubble.

Turkey has also increased retaliatory fire but security sources say soldiers with heavy artillery stationed on the border find it difficult to hit the militants, who sometimes fire from the back of vehicles.

Nato member Turkey is also battling a Kurdish insurgency in its mainly Kurdish southeast. It has repeatedly said it needs more help from Western partners to keep Kilis and its Syrian border secure.

Meanwhile, an Iraqi military commander says his forces are battling Islamic State militants in the northern neighbourhoods of Fallujah days after most of the city was declared liberated.

India's NSG bid not on Seoul agenda: China

THE HINDU ONLINE

China yesterday asserted that India's membership was not on the agenda of the coming meeting of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in Seoul. It signals that in Beijing's perception detailed negotiations were still pending before New Delhi could enter the 48-nation club.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said in response to a question that admission of countries, who were yet to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), including India, was not on the agenda of the coming Seoul conference of the NSG. "The inclusion of non-NPT members has never been a topic on the agenda of NPT meetings. In Seoul this year there is no such topic," Hua said.

But in New Delhi, Foreign Ministry spokesman Vikas Swarup, contradicted Hua, when he said that the issue

of India's membership to the NSG was coming up at the plenary meeting of the group, which controls the flow of nuclear technology among its members. He, however, cautioned the media not to indulge in "needless speculation" about India's membership and await "factual developments" of the coming days.

Hua acknowledged that Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar last week visited Beijing to discuss India's membership of the NSG, citing India's growing demands for clean energy, and concerns regarding climate change, as the basis for its membership bid. She added that the Chinese side apprised Jaishankar of Beijing's stand.

Hua made three additional points, to signal that India's bid to make it into the NSG could turn out to be a marathon. "We understand that non-NPT countries are very concerned about their entry into the NSG," she observed.

Iran foils major terrorist attacks

AFP, Tehran

Iran's intelligence ministry yesterday said it had thwarted a major jihadist plot to carry out bomb attacks in the capital Tehran and other parts of the country, state media reported.

"One of the biggest takfiri-Wahhabi terrorist plots was discovered and foiled," the official IRNA news agency quoted the ministry as saying, using terms applied by Iran to Sunni extremist groups.

"A series of bomb attacks prepared in various areas deep inside the country and especially in Tehran and some other provinces... were foiled, the terrorists were arrested and a number of ready-made bombs were recovered," it said.

No more details were provided. The ministry said more information would come following investigations "both inside and outside the country."

The secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani, told the ISNA news agency the plot included plans for "suicide attacks in Tehran".

Algeria blocks social media to beat exam cheats

AFP, Algiers

Algeria temporarily blocked access to social networks on Sunday to prevent cheating after leaked papers forced hundred of thousands of students to resit high school final exams.

Facebook and Twitter have been blocked since late Saturday and are to remain inaccessible to millions of Algerians until after the last test on Thursday, a telecom source told AFP.

The decision "is directly linked to the baccalaureate" and aimed at "protecting students from falling prey to fake questions" posted online, the source said.

More than 500,000 students out of the 800,000 who had sat the exams known as the "baccalaureate" this month were being re-tested Sunday, the

education ministry said.

It said most of the leaks cover science subjects and mathematics.

"The authorities have chosen the simplest solution," said information technology expert Younes Grar.

He said the risk of fraud could have been prevented if the authorities had chosen to encrypt the exam questions and printed them at exam centres instead of transporting hard copies across the country.

"The decision to block social networks penalises millions of Internet users," he said.

According to official estimates, 18 million Algerians out of a population of 40 million are active on the Internet and social networks.

