

NEWS IN brief

IS car bomb kills 7 north of Baghdad

A suicide bomber killed at least seven people north of Baghdad yesterday, security and medical sources said, in the second bombing claimed by Islamic State in the district in as many days. Eleven others were injured when the attacker detonated his car, laden with explosives, at a checkpoint.

French missions in Turkey shut down

French diplomatic missions in Turkey's two main cities have shut until further notice and cancelled planned events to mark France's July 14 National Day due to security concerns, the embassy in Ankara said yesterday.

Trump expected to choose VP on Friday

Presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump is expected to announce his choice for running mate at a campaign event on Friday, campaign sources said yesterday.

Among the possible picks are former US Speaker Newt Gingrich, Indiana Governor Mike Pence, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie and retired Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, according to media reports.

Japan emperor Akihito intends to abdicate

Japanese Emperor Akihito, who has spent much of his time on the throne trying to heal the wounds of World War Two, intends to abdicate in a few years, public broadcaster NHK said yesterday. The 82-year-old monarch, who has had heart surgery and been treated for prostate cancer in recent years, expressed his intention to the Imperial Household Agency, NHK said. It did not cite a reason.



(From top, anti-clockwise) David Cameron (LC), who resigned yesterday, gives a wave as he gets a standing ovation from members of parliament at the end of his last Prime Minister's Questions at the House of Commons; Cameron outside 10 Downing Street with his family in central London before going to Buckingham Palace to tender his resignation to Queen Elizabeth II; and the Theresa May kneels before the Queen before she took oath as prime minister.

BRITAIN'S NEW PRIME MINISTER. Theresa May's background and voting record table.

THERESA MAY A tough pragmatist

Incoming prime minister Theresa May is a tough, hard-working pragmatist who now has the task of uncoupling Britain from the European Union, and of uniting her country and her party. May took over yesterday as Britain's second female prime minister after fellow Conservative Margaret Thatcher, succeeding David Cameron after he resigned in the wake of the shock vote for Brexit on June 23. The 59-year-old, who has been Cameron's interior minister for the past six years, had officially backed her boss's campaign to stay in the EU. But she kept a low profile, emerging relatively unscathed after the vote and presenting herself as the leader who could unify a nation deeply split by the referendum. She insists "Brexit means Brexit" but has promised to work for the best deal for Britain outside the bloc. In an unguarded moment, senior Conservative Ken Clarke labelled her a "bloody difficult woman" -- a description that May has embraced. "The next person to find that out will be Jean-Claude Juncker," she reportedly told MPs, referring to Brexit negotiations with the European Commission president. May became a Conservative lawmaker in 1997, holding the post of party chairman before entering the cabinet after the Conservatives won the 2010 general election. May was born Theresa Brasier in the southern English seaside town of Eastbourne in 1956. Her father Hubert was a pastor, one of several points which has drawn comparisons between her and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Her education -- at a series of little-known state and private schools -- has been contrasted with the elite Etonian background of Cameron and many of his inner circle. Like Cameron, she attended Oxford University, where she met her husband, a banker. They were reportedly introduced by Benazir Bhutto, who later became Pakistani premier, and were married in 1980. May worked in finance, including at the Bank of England, before being elected. May's job for the past six years, home secretary, is viewed as one of the hardest jobs in government which has wrecked a string of other political careers. A source who has worked closely with her told AFP on condition of anonymity she has "always got up three hours before everybody else and knows five times more than anyone else in the room". "Theresa is not going to do anything radical... she's incredibly risk-averse, a safe pair of hands," the source said.

Laughter, tears as Cameron bows out

David Cameron's last appearance in parliament as British Prime Minister ended in a standing ovation after a bravura 36-minute performance that taunted his rivals, reflected on his legacy and confessed his love for the office cat. After six years as leader, Cameron resigned yesterday, passing control of the country to fellow Conservative Theresa May, who will be in charge of negotiating Britain's exit from the European Union. Speaking in a packed parliament, with lawmakers, media, aides and spectators jammed into every corner of the ornate debating chamber, Cameron answered questions with the air of a man looking forward to an afternoon off. "This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others," he said. "Other than one meeting this afternoon with her majesty the Queen, the diary for the rest of my day is remarkably light," he said to laughter, as his wife Samantha and their children looked on from the public gallery. Cameron, often praised for his statesman-like demeanour, cut a more relaxed figure as he laid into his political rival Jeremy Corbyn, whose own future is subject to a protracted and acrimonious battle within the opposition Labour Party. Even the usually earnest Corbyn came with his own pre-prepared gags to the box-office weekly "Prime Minister's Questions" session. Giving up one of his allotted six questions to pay tribute to Cameron, Corbyn asked him thank his mother for her fashion advice - a nod to a previous rowdy exchange where Cameron said his mother would want the often unkempt Corbyn to "put on a proper suit, do up your tie and sing the national anthem." Jokes apart, Cameron sought to shore up his legacy as a reforming prime minister, highlighting his government's efforts to stabilise the post-financial crisis economy and the passing of gay marriage laws. "I'll never forget the day actually at Number 10 when one of the people who works very close to the front door said to me 'I'm not that interested in politics Cameron, but because of something your lot have done I'm able to marry the person I've loved all my life this weekend,'" he said. "There are many amazing moments in this job but that was one of my favourites." He said he would miss the "roar of the crowd" in parliament, but assured his colleagues that he would be willing them on from his new position as a regular lawmaker representing his English constituency of Witney, near Oxford. "You can achieve a lot of things in politics, you can get a lot of things done and that in the end - the public service, the national interest - that is what it is all about," he said during heartfelt closing remarks that drew tears from some of his fellow Members of Parliament. Cameron's final words, which were greeted by a standing ovation from his party and many rival lawmakers, recalled a memorable 2005 taunt when he mocked then-Prime Minister Tony Blair with the words: "He was the future once." Bowing out, Cameron said: "Nothing is really impossible if you put your mind to it. After all, as I once said: 'I was the future once.'"

Beijing warns against conflict Claims right to air defence zone as tensions flare after the Hage court ruling

China yesterday warned rivals against turning the South China Sea into a "cradle of war" and threatened an air defence zone there, after its claims to the strategically vital waters were declared invalid. The surprisingly strong and sweeping ruling by a UN-backed tribunal in The Hague provided powerful diplomatic ammunition to the Philippines, which filed the challenge, and other claimants in their decades-long disputes with China over the resource-rich waters. China reacted furiously to Tuesday's decision, insisting it had historical rights over the sea while launching a volley of thinly veiled warnings at the United States and other critical nations. "Do not turn the South China Sea into a cradle of war," vice foreign minister Liu Zhenmin told reporters in Beijing, as he described the ruling as waste paper. Liu also said China had "the right" to establish an air defence identification zone over the sea, which would give the Chinese military authority over foreign aircraft. "Whether we need to set up one in the South China Sea depends on the level of threat we receive," he said. "We hope other countries will not take the chance to blackmail China." The Chinese ambassador to the United States, Cui Tiankai, was even more blunt. "It will certainly intensify conflicts and even confrontation," Cui said in Washington on Tuesday. And the ruling Communist Party's mouthpiece, the People's Daily, said yesterday that China was prepared to take "all measures necessary" to protect its interests. The Philippines, under new President Rodrigo Duterte, declined to celebrate the verdict. "We have to be magnanimous in victory," Foreign Secretary Perfecto Yasay told reporters in Manila yesterday. "In very delicate matters like this you cannot be provocative in statements. We urge everybody including China to exercise restraint and sobriety." Taiwan, which was another loser in the verdict as its claims are very similar to those of China, sent a warship yesterday to the sea to protect its claims. Indonesia also announced it would sharply strengthen security around its islands in the sea, where there have been clashes with Chinese vessels recently. China used deadly force to seize control of the Paracel Islands from South Vietnam in 1974, and Johnson Reef from a united Vietnam in 1988. China faced immediate pressure to abide by the ruling from Western powers, which insist they have legitimate interests in the dispute because of the need to maintain "freedom of navigation" in waters that host more than \$5 trillion in shipping trade annually.



SOUTH CHINA SEA VERDICT

Turkey seeks to mend Syria ties

Turkey aims to develop good relations with Syria and Iraq, and both countries need to be stable for counter-terrorism efforts to succeed, Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said on Wednesday in an apparent reversal of its policy towards its war-stricken neighbours. Turkey has long said the only solution for regional peace would be for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to go. But Turkish PM Binali Yildirim insisted good ties with Syria were needed "for the fight against terrorism" and for stability in the region. Turkey recently moved to end rifts with both Russia and Israel. Turkey-Syria diplomatic ties were severed after the Syrian conflict began in 2011 and Turkey has since argued that only Assad's departure could bring stability. Yildirim said in comments broadcast live on television: "It is our greatest and irrevocable goal: developing good relations with Syria and Iraq, and all our neighbours that surround the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. "We normalised relations with Russia and Israel. I'm sure we will normalise relations with Syria as well. For the fight against terrorism to succeed, stability needs to return to Syria and Iraq." Turkey's new initiative comes at a time of great political instability in the country. In the past year, Turkey has been hit by a wave of bombings from both Kurdish militants and the so-called Islamic State. Turkey is also playing host to some 2.7 million Syrian migrants and refugees who have fled the conflict in their homeland. Some 10% live in more than 20 refugee camps built across Turkey. The rest reside in cities, often in poor conditions.



Nepal Political Crisis No-confidence motion filed against PM

Nepali opposition lawmakers yesterday filed a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli after former rebel Maoists quit his coalition, triggering fresh political turmoil in the quake-hit nation. The former guerrillas announced on Tuesday that they were withdrawing support for Oli's government, leaving his coalition without a majority. After Oli refused to resign, opposition lawmakers from the Nepali Congress and the Maoists filed a motion against the embattled premier in parliament, an official told AFP. "A no-confidence motion against the PM has been registered, 280 members have signed it," said parliament spokesman Bharat Gautam. According to procedure, Oli will now have a week to secure support for a majority government before parliament hosts discussions and a possible vote on the motion, Gautam said. Oli's Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) currently holds 175 elected seats in parliament, far fewer than the 299 needed to win a vote of confidence. The Maoists joined the government last October, weeks after Nepal adopted a divisive new national constitution. Oli survived that attempt by drawing up an 11th-hour deal with Maoist chief, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, better known by his nom-de-guerre Prachanda. But Dahal later pulled out of the coalition, citing the government's failure to implement the agreement to withdraw civil war cases from Nepal's courts and offer amnesties to people accused of abuses during the decade-long Maoist insurgency which ended in 2006.

Aung San Suu Kyi a 'dictator'!

A firebrand monk slammed Aung San Suu Kyi as a "dictator" yesterday, accusing Myanmar's civilian-led government of trying to destroy an ultra-nationalist Buddhist group blamed for a surge in sectarian violence across the country. The attack came after the body representing Myanmar's top monks distanced itself from the headline Ma Ba Tha movement, a blow to its clerical legitimacy. The Ma Ba Tha is a noisy, monk-led group at the forefront of virulently anti-Muslim protests in Myanmar in the three years since it was founded. Wirathu, the movement's most prominent figure, posted his scathing remarks on Facebook. "I have seen that the ruling party and the new civilian government is stepping forward to target me as 'Enemy Number One' to destroy the whole Ma Ba Tha group to the end," he wrote. He also described the administration as "a woman dictator's government which is going to put me in prison". Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won a landslide victory at last November's elections. Wirathu's comments came after the Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee, which represents the upper echelons of the clergy in the overwhelmingly Buddhist country, issued a statement late Tuesday saying it had never endorsed Ma Ba Tha. The ultra-nationalist group recently said it was established under the committee's rules, a claim refuted by the country's top monks, putting clear water between the mainstream Buddhist clergy and the headline group for the first time. The statement came hours ahead of a two-day gathering of around 50 of Myanmar's top monks inside a man-made cave on the outskirts of Yangon at which Ma Ba Tha is expected to be discussed. In his Facebook post Wirathu suggested the Sangha was being controlled by the government because it was "part of the state's religious ministry" and "has to carry out the will of the government." The Ma Ba Tha emerged as a potent political force under the former military-backed government, successfully lobbying for a series of laws that rights groups say discriminate against women and religious minorities.



EU proposes new migrant asylum rules

The European Commission proposed more unified EU asylum rules yesterday, in a bid to stop people waiting for refugee status moving around the bloc and disrupting its passport-free zone. The proposal would standardise refugee reception facilities across the bloc and unify the level of state support they can get, setting common rules on residence permits, travel papers, access to jobs, schools, social welfare and healthcare. But if migrants do not effectively cooperate with the authorities, their asylum application could be jeopardised.

South Sudan VP leaves Juba, says not seeking war

South Sudan's vice president has withdrawn with his troops to outside of Juba but is not planning for war, his spokesman said on Wednesday, as a ceasefire that ended heavy fighting with the president's forces entered its third day. Forces loyal to longtime rivals Vice President Riek Machar's forces and President Salva Kiir fought street battles in the capital during a five-day period until a ceasefire was reached on Monday. The events mirror those of December 2013, when a two-year civil war began after Machar, sacked from his post as Kiir's deputy, withdrew his forces from Juba and launched a full-scale insurgency. "We had to move away from our base (in Juba) to avoid further confrontation," Machar's spokesman James Gatdet Dak in Nairobi told Reuters, saying he was in contact with Machar's forces. "He is around the capital. I cannot say the location." It was not clear what caused the latest rift between the two men who have long jostled for power, even before South Sudan's independence from Sudan in 2011. The flare-up was apparently sparked on Thursday when Kiir's forces stopped and demanded to search vehicles with Machar's troops. Gatdet Dak said Machar would stay away from Juba until ceasefire details were worked out. "He is not returning to the bush, nor is he organising for war," the spokesman said, calling for an outside force to be deployed to act as a "buffer" between Machar and Kiir's forces.

