

# NEWS IN brief

## Pak school massacre leader 'killed'

A militant who master-minded a deadly attack on a Pakistani school in 2014 has been killed in a US-led air strike, US and Pakistani officials say. Umar Naray allegedly planned the attack on an army public school in Peshawar that left 150 people dead - mostly children and female teachers. He led a group linked to the Pakistani Taliban.

## Tropical storm kills 21 in China

A tropical storm in China has left 21 people dead and 13 missing, reports said yesterday, after it lashed Taiwan with typhoon-grade winds and rain. Super Typhoon Nepartak brought chaos to Taiwan last week, forcing more than 15,000 people to flee their homes as part of the island saw its strongest winds in over a century.

## Rights group slams Afghan child labour

Afghanistan is failing to protect tens of thousands of children, some as young as five, from hazardous jobs that are prohibited by its own laws, a HRW report published yesterday said. The 31-page report titled "They Bear All the Pain: Hazardous Child Labor in Afghanistan," documents how child workers undertake dangerous jobs in Afghanistan's carpet industry.

## Venezuela's Maduro extends emergency

Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro has extended the country's state of "economic emergency" for another 60 days, an official newspaper reported, a sign of declining conditions in the crisis-hit country. The state of emergency was necessary due to "extraordinary... social, economic, political, natural and ecological" pressures, according to the decree.



Protester from a local pro-China party chants slogans against the United States supporting an international court ruling that denied China's claims to the South China Sea, outside US Consulate in Hong Kong, China yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

# US begins quiet diplomacy

AGENCIES  
The United States is using quiet diplomacy to persuade the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam and other Asian nations not to move aggressively to capitalize on an international court ruling that denied China's claims to the South China Sea, several US administration officials said on Wednesday.  
"What we want is to quiet things down so these issues can be addressed rationally instead of emotionally," said one official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe private diplomatic messages.  
Some were sent through US embassies abroad and foreign missions in Washington, while others were conveyed directly to top officials by Defense Secretary Ash Carter, Secretary of State John Kerry and other senior officials, the sources said.  
"This is a blanket call for quiet, not some attempt to rally the region against China, which would play into a false narrative that the US is leading a coalition to contain China," the official added.  
The effort to calm the waters following the court ruling in The Hague on Tuesday suffered a setback when Taiwan dispatched a warship to the

**TENSIONS IN S CHINA SEA**  
China vows 'decisive response' to provocations  
Asean to keep mum on court ruling

area, with President Tsai Ing-wen telling sailors that their mission was to defend Taiwan's maritime territory.  
The US officials said they hoped the US diplomatic initiative would be more successful in Indonesia, which wants to send hundreds of fishermen to the Natuna Islands to assert its sovereignty over nearby areas of the South China Sea to which China says it also has claims, and in the Philippines, whose fishermen have been harassed by Chinese coast guard and naval vessels.  
Meanwhile, China yesterday warned of a "decisive response" to provocations in the South China Sea, as it faced mounting pressure to accept an international tribunal's ruling against its claims to most of the strategically vital waters.  
"If anyone wants to take any provocative action against China's security interests based on the award, China

will make a decisive response," foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang said.  
Southeast Asia will not issue a statement on the rejection of Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea by an international tribunal, said regional diplomats yesterday, blaming the no-comment on pressure by Beijing.  
The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) had weighed whether to speak out on Tuesday's ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, said Southeast Asian diplomats with knowledge of the matter.  
But 10-member Asean, whose unity has increasingly come under strain in the shadow of Beijing's expanding presence in the South China Sea, could not find common ground on the highly sensitive issue involving its massive and powerful neighbour, they said.  
"Asean officials had prepared a draft text but there was no agreement to release a joint statement," said a Southeast Asian diplomat, adding that China was believed to have leaned on its Asean allies Laos and Cambodia to prevent a statement in the highly charged affair.  
"Some Asean countries are definitely not happy. Beijing's action can be seen as interference in Asean's centrality," the source said.

# Kuwait sets minimum wage for housemaids

AFP, Kuwait City  
Kuwait has set a minimum wage for its hundreds of thousands of mostly Asian domestic workers, in a first for Gulf states which have come under widespread accusations of abuse.  
A decree issued by Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Khaled Al-Sabah set the minimum wage at 60 dinars (\$200) a month and also granted domestic staff a raft of other rights, Al-Anbaa newspaper reported yesterday.  
Kuwait is the first country in the Gulf to regulate the work conditions of domestic staff through legislation and Human Rights Watch (HRW) and other rights groups have urged others to follow suit to tackle widespread abuses.  
The decree, which sets out measures to implement a landmark law adopted by parliament last year, also requires employers to pay overtime for any extra hours worked.  
It grants domestic workers the right to a weekly day off, 30 days of annual paid leave, a 12-hour working day with rest, and an end-of-service benefit of one month a year at the end of contract.  
The estimated 600,000 maids in Kuwait are among at least 2.4 million working at homes across the Gulf. They are not covered by ordinary labour legislation.  
HRW and other groups have documented widespread abuses, including non-payment of wages, long working hours with no rest days, physical and sexual assault, and no clear channels for redress.  
In its 2016 Trafficking in Persons report, the US State Department upgraded Kuwait from tier 3, the worst level, to tier 2 while keeping it on watch list, citing an improvement in its treatment of migrant workers, including maids.

# India hits back at Pakistan

Says it is 'fanning discontent' in Kashmir, vows more tough action against militants  
AGENCIES  
Continuing to hit back hard at Pakistan, India again asserted yesterday that its neighbour is fanning discontent in Kashmir and has no locus standi on commenting about it in international fora.  
"Our internal affairs are solely ours to handle, anyone trying to interfere will not change that reality," external affairs ministry Vikas Swarup said yesterday evening, after Pakistan brought up the issue of the ongoing unrest in Kashmir at a high-level United Nations forum.  
"The world has a very clear view on which country in our region covets the territory of others and uses terrorism as an instrument of state policy," Swarup said.  
Pakistan raised the Kashmir issue at a debate on human rights earlier. Its envoy Maleeha Lodhi called the killing of terrorist Burhan Wani, a commander of the Pakistan-backed terror outfit Hizbul Mujahideen, an "extra-judicial killing". She also described the dead terrorist as a "Kashmiri leader".  
Irrked at Pakistan's attempt to again internationalize the Kashmir issue, the external affairs ministry also said that India has always been open to dialogue with Pakistan, reports Times of India.  
"India has never shied away from dia-

logue with Pakistan, but talks and terror can't go hand in hand," the MEA spokesperson said.  
Earlier in the day, Syed Akbaruddin, India's Permanent Representative at the UN, commented on similar lines at a high-level thematic debate on human rights in the UN General Assembly in New York.  
Pakistan had raised the Kashmir issue at the same debate. Earlier this week, Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif expressed "shock" over the killing of Wani. Its foreign office in Islamabad also summoned India's high commissioner to express its "serious concern" on the killing of Wani, whom it called a "Kashmiri leader".  
Meanwhile, Indian officials said they will go on hunting militants in Kashmir despite widespread protests over the killing of a young separatist commander, as the government bets that force coupled with development will quell rebellion in the restive state, reports Reuters.  
The number of militants crossing into Jammu and Kashmir state from Pakistan to launch attacks against India has dropped in the last few years, and home-grown fighters are estimated to number only around 100, according to one security official.

# MOVE TO OUST MALAYSIA PM Mahathir declares plans to launch new party

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur  
Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad yesterday announced plans for a new party that would join an opposition alliance in a bid to oust the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition led by scandal-tainted Prime Minister Najib Razak.  
Speculation had been rife over the past week that Mahathir, 91, Malaysia's longest serving prime minister, was planning to start a party with three other former leaders of the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) which Najib now leads.  
"We who oppose Najib cannot achieve victory unless we work together as a coalition," said Mahathir.  
He added that he would not contest the next general election, due to be held in 2018, or position himself as a candidate for prime minister.  
Mahathir has been critical of Najib's handling of the 1MDB state fund scandal and called on him to resign.

Mahathir was coy when asked if the three former UMNO leaders - Muhyiddin Yassin, Mukhriz Mahathir and Shafie Apdal - would join him in the new party, just saying that he was "very open" to the idea.  
Mahathir said he and colleagues had yet to decide if the new party would represent the Malay-Muslim majority or eschew racial lines. He also did not give a time frame for when the party will be formed.  
Last month, Najib announced the UMNO's supreme council's decision to sack Muhyiddin, who was then deputy president, and Mahathir's son, former Kedah Chief Minister Mukhriz, from the party.  
Both have been tough critics of Najib, calling for his resignation following allegations of graft and mismanagement at 1MDB.  
UMNO vice-president Shafie later quit the party in protest against his suspension pending an investigation into his conduct in questioning Najib's handling of 1MDB.



An Indian policeman checks an identity card of a woman during a curfew in Srinagar yesterday. At least 36 people died and more than 1,500 others were injured in clashes between security forces and protesters in Indian-administered Kashmir over the weekend. PHOTO: REUTERS

# 'Avoid hate speech'

Myanmar minister warns nationalists  
AFP, Yangon  
Myanmar's minister for religion yesterday warned ultra-nationalist monks to avoid hate speech, in a rare government rebuke to Buddhist hardliners behind bilious anti-Muslim rhetoric.  
The warning came after a firebrand monk from the Ma Ba Tha movement on Wednesday decried Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi as a "dictator" intent on bringing down the Buddhist group.  
Anti-Muslim tirades by the monk-led group are blamed for a surge in sectarian hatred across the country which has seen repeated bouts of religious violence.  
The group's rise to power under the former military-backed government went virtually unchecked, with its leaders organising mass rallies and social media vilification of Muslims.  
But their star has waned in recent months. Myanmar's ruling council of monks has formally distanced itself from the group for the first time, raising speculation the network could be disbanded.  
Yesterday, Myanmar's new religion minister Aung Ko added a warning against "people spreading hate speech".  
The Ma Ba Tha's "future may be uncertain if they spread hate speech to create conflicts between religions... and among races," he said, adding the "the government is trying to create stability."  
It was the first time a top minister from Suu Kyi's administration has publicly tackled the group, whose influence was credited with swaying the Nobel laureate against fielding any Muslim candidates in November's polls.

# Philippines hails drugs war a success

AFP, Manila  
The Philippine government yesterday hailed its war on drugs a "success", as police confirmed killing nearly 200 people in a two-month blitz that has outraged rights groups.  
President Rodrigo Duterte's office released a statement calling for authorities to "seize the momentum" of the anti-drug campaign, which has also led to a spate of vigilante killings that one media group said had claimed roughly 200 more lives.  
"Anti-drug campaign a success," said the title of the statement, released by presidential spokesman Martin Andanan.  
"While the campaign against drugs is far from perfect, a generation of Filipinos have been saved from this scourge of society and destroyer of lives."  
His statement was issued as the national police released figures showing that officers had killed at least 192 people they said were involved in drugs from May 10 to July 10.  
Duterte won the May 9 elections in a landslide after campaigning largely on a platform to eradicate crime within six months by unleashing security forces with shoot-to-kill orders.  
He vowed on one occasion during the campaign that 100,000 people would die, and so many bodies would be dumped in Manila Bay that the fish there would grow fat from feeding on them.

# Sheila Dikshit is Congress' CM candidate in UP

TNN, New Delhi  
The Congress yesterday announced Sheila Dikshit as its chief ministerial candidate for next year's assembly polls in politically crucial Uttar Pradesh.  
"Sheila has been selected for her experience and good work," senior Congress leader Janardan Dwivedi said announcing the party's decision.  
"It's a huge responsibility and I want to thank Congress high command," Sheila Dikshit said reacting to the announcement.  
Asked if Priyanka Gandhi campaigning for the party for the polls next year would help, Sheila said she is looking forward to it. "Priyanka Gandhi is a very popular leader and I will be happy if she campaigns extensively in the state," she said.  
The Congress had on Tuesday announced Raj Babbar as the president of Uttar Pradesh unit of the party.  
Election strategist Prashant Kishor had recommended that Dikshit should play a

major role in the party's poll campaign in the state as she is a prominent Brahmin face and could help Congress regain support of the electorally sizeable community.  
Dikshit is the daughter-in-law of prominent Congress leader from UP Uma Shankar Dikshit, who was a Brahmin face and had served as a Union minister and governor for a long time.  
Earlier this month, Dikshit, a three-time Delhi Chief Minister, had said as UP's "daughter-in-law" she was ready to play any role in the state.  
Dikshit had met party President Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi last month during which she was said to have been sounded by them for a leading role in UP.  
The Brahmin community, a traditional vote bank of Congress, had shifted allegiance to BJP in the aftermath of the Mandir-Mandal politics and a section in Congress feels it should make efforts to win back the support of the community.



# Japan monarchy roils over abdication reports

AFP, Tokyo  
Japan's ancient monarchy was in tumult yesterday, with the imperial household insisting its ageing emperor had no plans to abdicate after reports he wanted to step aside.  
Respected national broadcaster NHK -- citing palace and other sources -- said Wednesday that 82-year-old Akihito wanted to pass the throne to his eldest son sometime within the next few years.  
Any such abdication -- the first since 1817 -- would be a severe jolt to a country where the 2,600-year-old royal family symbolises stability and continuity.  
Media watchers say NHK and Kyodo News, which separately carried a similar report, would be extremely careful before committing on such an explosive story.  
But the Imperial Household Agency, the tradition-steeped government body that runs royal affairs, was categorical in its denial.  
"It is absolutely not true," Vice Grand Steward Shinichiro Yamamoto told reporters late Wednesday.  
The emperor "has long refrained from discussing systematic issues out of consideration for his majesty's constitutional position," he told reporters.  
The throne, which Japan claims to be one of the world's oldest, is held in deep respect by much of the public, despite being largely stripped of its mystique and quasi-divine status in the aftermath of World War II.