

China scores victory

Southeast Asian nations break deadlock over sea dispute; Beijing thanks Cambodia for support

REUTERS, Vientiane
Southeast Asian nations overcame days of deadlock yesterday when the Philippines dropped a request for their joint statement to mention a landmark legal ruling on the South China Sea, officials said, after objections from Cambodia.

China publicly thanked Cambodia for supporting its stance on maritime disputes, a position which threw the regional block's weekend meeting in the Laos capital of Vientiane into disarray.

Competing claims with China in the vital shipping lane are among the most contentious issues for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, with its 10 members pulled between their desire to assert their sovereignty while finding common ground and fostering ties with Beijing.

In a ruling by the UN-backed Permanent Court of Arbitration on July 12, the Philippines won an emphatic legal victory over China on the dispute.

The Philippines and Vietnam both wanted the ruling, which denied China's sweeping claims in the strategic seaway that channels more than \$5 trillion in global trade each year, and a call to respect international maritime law to feature in the communique.

Backing China's call for bilateral discussions, Cambodia opposed the wording on

the ruling, diplomats said.
Manila agreed to drop the reference to the ruling in the communique, one Asean diplomat said yesterday, in an effort to prevent the disagreement leading to the group failing to issue a statement.

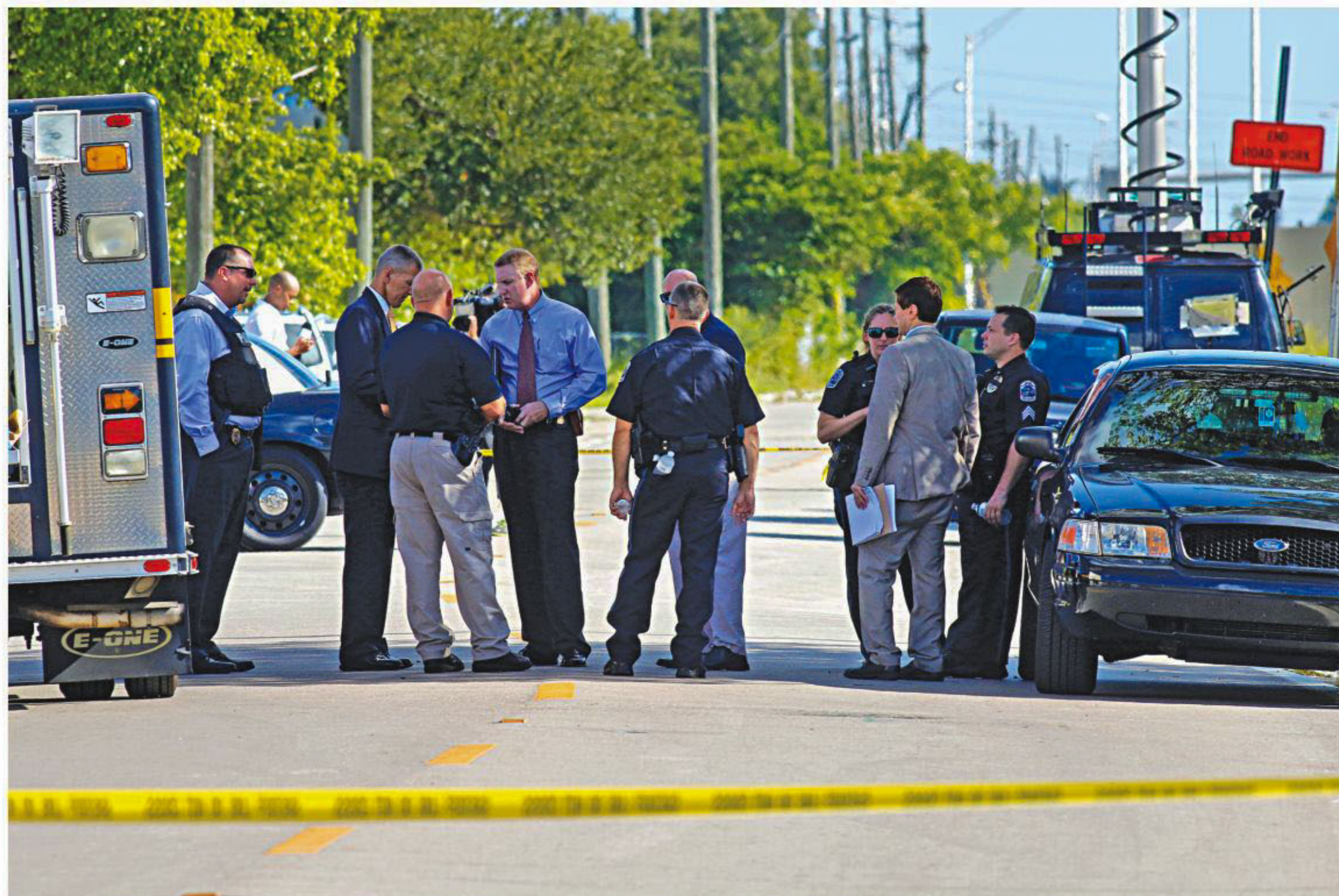
The communique referred instead to the need to find peaceful resolutions to disputes in the South China Sea in accordance with international law, including the United Nations' law of the sea, to which the court ruling referred.

"We remain seriously concerned about recent and ongoing developments and took note of the concerns expressed by some ministers on the land reclamations and escalation of activities in the area, which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions and may undermine peace, security and stability in the region," the Asean communique said.

In a separate statement, China and Asean reaffirmed a commitment to freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea and said they would refrain from activities that would complicate or escalate disputes. That included inhabiting any presently uninhabited islands or reefs, it added.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi said a page had been turned after the "deeply flawed" ruling and it was time to lower the temperature in the dispute.

SOUTH CHINA SEA ROW



Fort Myers police officers confer next to Club Blu after a shooting attack in Fort Myers, Florida, US yesterday. At least two people were killed and 14 others wounded when a shooting broke out early in the morning in the parking lot of the nightclub that was hosting a party for young teenagers. Story on page 16.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Withdraw kids from local schools

India asks its diplomats in Pakistan

TNN, New Delhi

As tension simmers between India and Pakistan over recent developments in Kashmir, India has asked its diplomats and other officials to withdraw their kids from local schools in Islamabad.

Indian officials can either send their kids back to India or return themselves, official sources said.

"What it means is that no Indian official based in Pakistan can have his or her children living with them. Those who seek a posting in Pakistan will have to keep that in mind too," an official here told TOI. Spouses, however, can remain in Pakistan for now.

There are about 50 children of Indian officials currently studying in Islamabad's American School. Indian officials did not rule out the possibility of a "tit-for-tat" response by Islamabad in the form of recall of children of Pakistani diplomats from India.

"It is a normal practice for all countries to review staffing and related policies for their diplomatic missions, including in view of prevailing circumstances at those stations. With effect from this academic session, officials posted in the High Commission of India in Islamabad have been advised to make arrangements for education of their wards outside Pakistan, till further notice," said MEA spokesperson vikas Swarup. Officials, however, added that the decision had been taken in 2015 so that diplomatic staff had sufficient time to make alternative arrangements.

After the protests against India in Pakistan over alleged Indian atrocities in Kashmir, the Indian government had appealed to Pakistan to strengthen security for Indian officials stationed there.

Clinton struggles for unity

Democratic convention starts under cloud as party chair resigns amid furor over embarrassing leaked emails

AFP, Philadelphia

The Democratic Party kicked off its national convention yesterday to anoint Hillary Clinton its presidential nominee, as a row over leaked emails showing party leaders sought to undermine campaign rival Bernie Sanders threatened to upstage the gathering.

Sanders lost the primary race but he has endorsed his bitter rival, and in a show of unity he has been offered a prime speaking slot on day one of the four-day confab.

Sanders will stress that the party mission is to elect Clinton in November and prevent Republican Donald Trump from becoming the 45th president of the United States.

The brash billionaire, who was formally nominated the Republican Party's flagbearer in Cleveland last week, topped Clinton 48 to 45 percent in a two-way matchup CNN poll out yesterday. The figure represents a drastic six-point convention bounce.

While the former secretary of state is set to make history as the first female flagbearer of any major American political party, the process has fallen under a cloud that Trump has been all too eager to exploit.

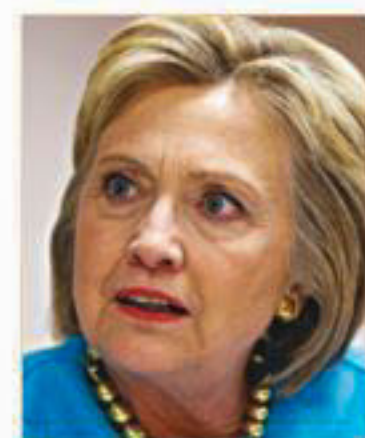
Anti-secrecy website WikiLeaks at the weekend released nearly 20,000 emails from between January 2015 and May 2016, gleaned by hackers who apparently raided the accounts of seven Democratic National Committee leaders.

At least two of the messages showed senior committee members were keen to undermine the Sanders campaign by seeking to raise questions about Sanders' faith and heritage.

Amid efforts to draw a line under the damage that threatened to revive tensions with Sanders followers, the Democratic Party's chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz abruptly announced her resignation, effective at the end of the convention.

After a hard-fought primary campaign, the party had been heading to the convention seeming far more unified than the Republicans, whose fissures were laid bare in Cleveland last week. Now the Democrats are struggling with the fallout from a scandal that threatened to mushroom into a major crisis just as the party was supposed to coalesce around its nominee.

"The Democrats are in a total meltdown," Trump taunted on Twitter. "E-mails say the rigged system is alive & well!"



A Syrian man carries the body of a girl after she was trapped under the rubble following reported air strikes by Russian warplanes on the rebel-held neighbourhood of al-Mashhad, Aleppo yesterday. Air strikes and barrel bomb attacks killed 16 civilians in rebel-held parts of Aleppo, with rebel rocket fire onto government areas killing three more.

NEPAL GOVERNMENT CRISIS

Ex-Maoist rebel chief eyes comeback as PM

AFP, Kathmandu

The leader of Nepal's former Maoist rebel movement yesterday looked set for a comeback as prime minister after the main opposition party gave him its backing to head a new coalition.

A day after K P Sharma Oli quit as premier ahead of his likely defeat in a no-confidence motion, the Nepali Congress and the Maoists confirmed they were in talks on forming an administration led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

Better known by his nom de guerre Prachanda (Nepali for "the fierce one"), Dahal led a decade-long insurgency in which around 16,000 people lost their lives.

In 2006 he emerged from hiding to sign a peace deal with mainstream parties that paved the way for the abolition of the world's last Hindu monarchy and his own rise to power via the ballot box.

Dahal became Nepal's first elected premier in August 2008 but his government collapsed nine months later in a row over the integration of former Maoist fighters into the army, a key tenet of the peace process.

His decision to withdraw support for Oli has now opened up the path for his own return to the premiership, with the Nepali Congress pledging support.

"We are in consultations for the formation of a new government... Dahal will be the next prime minister, with us playing an important role," senior Nepali Congress leader Minendra Rijal told AFP.

There was no immediate reaction from Dahal but a Maoist spokeswoman, Pampha Bhusal, said that efforts would be made to bring others on board.



NEWSIN brief

Fire kills 38 people in Madagascar

AFP, Antananarivo

A house fire during a party in central Madagascar on Saturday night killed 38 people including 16 children as the blaze ripped through a thatched roof, police said yesterday. The victims -- the youngest only six months old -- were trapped inside the house in Ambalavato village of Ikalamavony district in the rural centre of the island. The party-goers were celebrating the renovation of the same house in which they perished.

Int'l push to tackle ransomware threat

AFP, The Hague

Dutch police, Europol and a coalition of cyber security firms launched a new website yesterday to fight a surge in "ransomware" which locks users' data until they pay criminals to retrieve it. The "No More Ransom" initiative is the new online portal "aimed at informing the public about the dangers of ransomware and helping victims to recover their data," said a combined statement.



Salman Khan cleared in poaching cases

AFP, Jodhpur

An Indian court yesterday acquitted Bollywood superstar Salman Khan of killing protected wildlife 18 years ago, ending the latest long-running case against the actor. Khan was convicted in 2006 of hunting rare gazelles while he was shooting a film in the northern state of Rajasthan eight years earlier. He was sentenced to one and five years in jail for two separate cases of shooting the animals.

Duterte declares communist ceasefire

AFP, Manila

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday announced a unilateral ceasefire with communist rebels waging one of Asia's longest insurgencies, saying it is his "dream" to end the rebellion. In his first "State of the Nation Address" to Congress, Duterte called for the rebels to reciprocate as he laid the groundwork for peace talks due to begin in Norway next month.

IS suicide bomber kills 12 in Iraq

AFP, Baquba

A suicide car bombing claimed by the Islamic State group killed 12 people at a crowded checkpoint north of Baghdad yesterday, security and medical officials said.

The blast at the entrance to the town of Khales also wounded 37, according to Diyala province police spokesman Colonel Ghalib al-Attiyah and health department spokesman Faris al-Azzawi.

Attiyah said the checkpoint was crowded with cars, and that a number of them were burned in the blast.

IS issued a statement claiming the attack, saying it was carried out by an Iraqi national.

The blast came a day after a suicide bombing claimed by IS killed at least 15 people in Baghdad's Kadhimiyah neighbourhood.

Earlier this month, IS carried out a suicide bombing in a crowded shopping area in Baghdad's Karrada district that killed 292 people -- one of the deadliest such attacks to ever hit Iraq.

IS overran large areas north and west of Baghdad in 2014, but Iraqi forces have since regained significant ground and are conducting operations to set the stage for the battle to recapture Mosul, the last IS-held city in the country.

The jihadists have responded to the battlefield setbacks by striking civilians, and experts have warned there may be more such attacks as the jihadists continue to lose ground.

Shameful rise in Afghan child deaths: UN report

AFP, Kabul

Civilian casualties in Afghanistan soared to a record high in the first half of 2016, the UN said yesterday, with children in particular paying a heavy price for growing insecurity as the conflict escalates.

The UN report, which comes days after the deadliest attack in Kabul since the Taliban were ousted from power in 2001, cited increasing ground combat around heavily populated areas as the leading cause of casualties.

Between January and June, 1,601 civilians were killed and 3,565 were wounded -- a four percent increase in casualties compared to the same period last year, the United Nations Assistance

Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said.

The casualties have reached their highest level since the UN began issuing its authoritative reports in 2009.

"Every single casualty documented in this report -- people killed while praying, working, studying, fetching water, recovering in hospitals -- every civilian casualty represents a failure of commitment and should be a call to action for parties to the conflict to take meaningful steps to reduce suffering," UNAMA chief Tadamichi Yamamoto said.

"Platitudes not backed by meaningful action ring hollow over time."

The casualties include 1,509 children, a figure the UN described as "alarming and shameful".



Cop, who forgot life jacket, fines himself

AFP, Oslo

No one is above the law in Norway, it would seem, after a policeman fined himself for failing to wear a life jacket.

Officer Arne Stavnes was pictured in the pages of the Verdens Gang newspaper at the helm of his police boat during a patrol of Utøya island. The photo prompted several witty comments from readers who noted that the skipper was flouting the law by not wearing his police-issue lifesaver.

The honest policeman moved to stay one step ahead of the criticism and published a photo of his self-issued 500 Norwegian kroner penalty.

May rules out return of hard Irish border

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday promised a "practical solution" on the Irish border after Britain leaves the European Union in a bid to allay fears about a return to tough checks.

She spoke on her first visit since taking office to Northern Ireland, which has what would become the United Kingdom's only border with the EU after Brexit.

"Nobody wants a return to the borders of the past," May said in Belfast, where she met Northern Ireland's First Minister Arlene Foster and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness.

"What we do want is to find a way through this that is going to work and deliver a practical solution for everybody,"

May said in televised comments.

Cross-border relations with the Republic of Ireland are a prime concern for Northern Ireland in negotiations on Britain's departure from the European Union, and May said Belfast would be involved in the talks.

Britain and Ireland share an open-border Common Travel Area (CTA) that dates back to the 1920s, continuing arrangements from before Irish independence.

However, questions and concerns have been raised about what Brexit would mean for the CTA and for both economies on the island of Ireland -- and whether the reimposition of border checks could undermine the peace process.

Northern Ireland was riven by three decades of sectarian violence until the 1990s over whether it should remain part of Britain or join with the Republic to the south.

