

NEWSIN brief

Assam market attack death toll hits 15

AFP, Kokrajhar

The death toll from an attack in India's northeastern Assam state, where gunmen opened fire on a busy market, jumped to 15 yesterday as three more people succumbed to their injuries. The dead included a militant from a faction of the outlawed National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), which has waged a decades-long campaign for an independent homeland for the indigenous Bodo people.

8,000 Syria refugees resettled in US

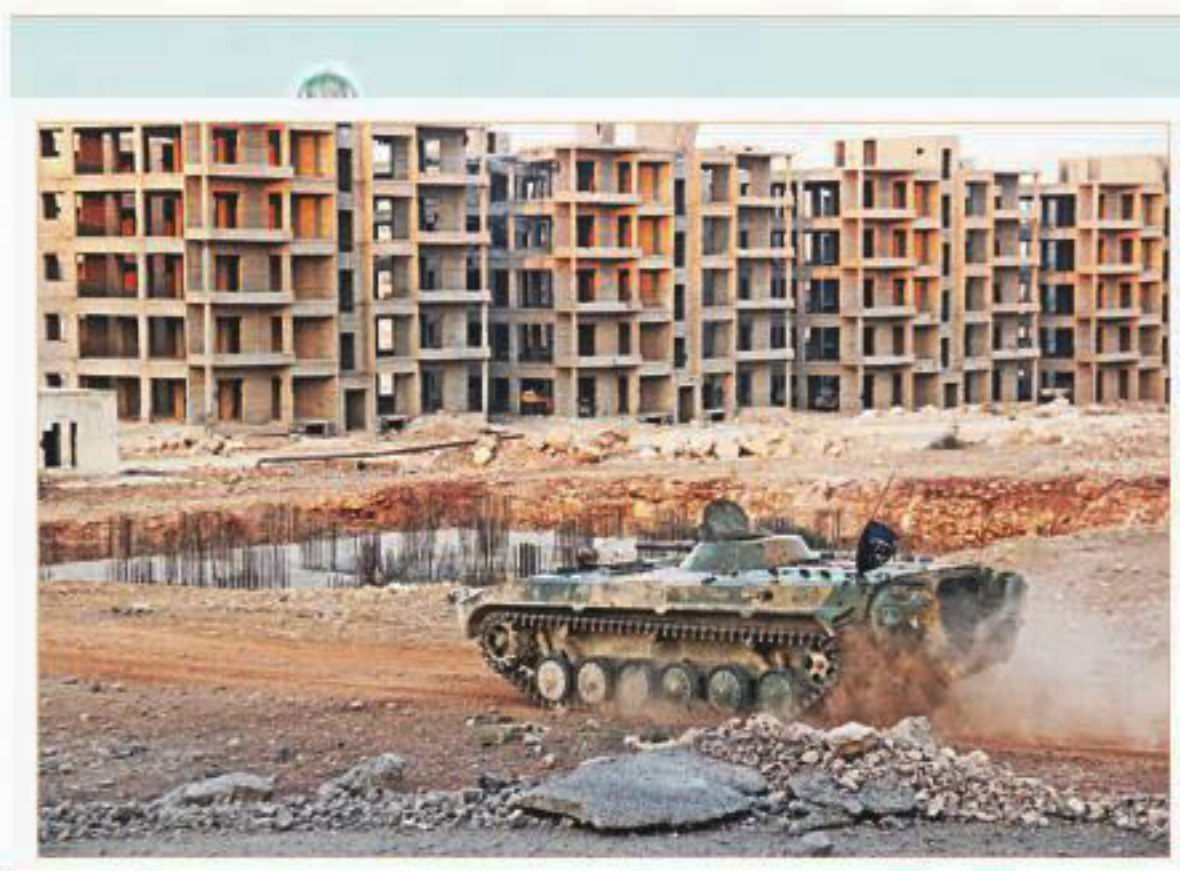
REUTERS, Washington

The United States has taken in 8,000 Syrian refugees since October and is on track to meet President Barack Obama's goal of resettling 10,000 by the end of the fiscal year, a US State Department official told reporters on Friday. The total number of Syrian refugees in the United States may even exceed the 10,000 goal by the end of the fiscal year on Sept 30, officials said on a call with reporters.

Ukraine rebel leader injured in car blast

AFP, Kiev

The leader of a self-proclaimed separatist republic in eastern Ukraine was injured in a suspected car bombing yesterday, local media reported. Igor Plotnitsky, the head of the Lugansk People's Republic, was being treated at a local hospital along with several other people who suffered injuries in the blast in the city of Lugansk, the report said. Ukrainian authorities have already dismissed claims that they could have been behind the blast.



Smoke billowing from an artillery school south of Aleppo yesterday as Islamist rebels captured two military academies and a third military position there. Inset, Rebel fighters drive a tank in an eastern government sieged neighbourhood of Aleppo. Story on page 16.

PHOTO: AFP

Fury as China vessels sail near 'Japanese islets'

REUTERS, Tokyo

Japan issued a new protest to Beijing yesterday after Chinese coastguard ships and about 230 fishing vessels sailed close to what Tokyo considers its territorial waters around disputed islets in the East China Sea, Japan's foreign ministry said.

The latest incident comes amid heightened tensions in Asia, less than a month after an arbitration court in the Hague invalidated China's sweeping claims in the disputed South China Sea, in a case brought by the Philippines.

China has refused to recognise the ruling. Japan called on China to adhere to the verdict, which it said was binding, prompting warnings from Beijing to Tokyo not to interfere.

Beijing claims the uninhabited, Tokyo-controlled East China Sea islands, called the Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China, and occasionally sends its coastguard vessels

near them.

A senior Japanese foreign ministry official on Saturday issued a protest to a Chinese embassy official in Tokyo calling on the coastguard ships to leave the area immediately and condemning the action as a unilateral escalation of tensions, the ministry said.

Japan's Vice Foreign Minister Shinsuke Sugiyama on Friday summoned China's ambassador to Japan, Cheng Yonghua, to lodge a strong protest, the ministry said.

China on Friday accused Japan's new defence minister, Tomomi Inada, of recklessly misrepresenting history after she declined to say whether Japanese troops massacred civilians in China during World War Two.

Ties between China and Japan, the world's second- and third-largest economies, have been plagued by the territorial row, the legacy of Japan's wartime occupation of parts of China and regional rivalry.



South Africans give ANC worst polls result

AFP, Johannesburg

The African National Congress lost its grip on local government in Tshwane, home of South Africa's capital Pretoria, as results yesterday gave the opposition Democratic Alliance a second big win in the ANC's worst election since the end of apartheid.

The ANC has also lost Nelson Mandela Bay metropolitan area in the Eastern Cape, which includes Port Elizabeth, to the DA.

Unemployment, a stagnating economy and scandals around President Jacob Zuma led voters to punish the ANC, changing the outlook for national elections in 2019 and potentially emboldening Zuma's rivals within the ANC to challenge him.

Stop using pellet guns

Urges Amnesty as up to 100 blinded in a month

AGENCIES

Pellet guns have no place in law enforcement and should be banned immediately, human rights group Amnesty International India has said, following the death of a third person owing to injuries inflicted by the weapons in Indian-administered Kashmir.

Earlier this week, a 20-year-old lost his life as 360 pellets were pumped into him. Two others have reportedly died from pellet injuries as well, reports NDTV. Pellet guns were introduced as a non-lethal alternative after the 2010 Kashmir unrest, when 120 people died as stone-throwing mobs took to the streets.

For 2016, the abiding picture will be blinded eyes.

Amnesty's comments come a week after the Indian government promised to set up a panel to investigate the use of pellet guns as a method of crowd control in the region.

Since July 8, at least 54 people have been killed and hundreds injured as Indian secu-

rity forces and protesters faced off and the tensions show little sign of abating.

Parts of Kashmir are still under curfew as protests and violence rock the Kashmir valley, almost a month after security forces killed rebel leader Burhan Wani and two other fighters in southern Kashmir.

Medical officials estimate that up to 100 people will lose the use of at least one eye after suffering injuries to the face owing to riot police using pellet guns to quell protests.

Amnesty said that the Jammu and Kashmir government should immediately stop using the weapons.

"Pellet guns are inherently inaccurate and indiscriminate, and have no place in law enforcement," Zahoor Wani, senior campaigner of Amnesty International India, said.

Organisers of the campaign "Kashmir Blind Spot" have urged people around the world to write to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and promote the issue on social media.



Birthday party fire kills 13 in France

AFP, Rouen

A fire apparently sparked by birthday cake candles tore through a bar in northern France early yesterday, killing at least 13 people in the nation's deadliest blaze in a decade.

Through the shattered front windows of the bar in Rouen melted stools and scorched liquor bottles were visible, as tearful mourners hugged each other and brought flowers to the scene of the tragedy.

Most of the dead were between 18-25 years old, with one person among the six injured still fighting for their lives. Authorities said the bar was crowded with young partygoers.

Prime Minister Manuel Valls expressed "deep sadness at the tragedy that claimed 13 young lives."

Local prosecutors described the blaze as accidental, but an investigation is underway to pinpoint the cause of the flames.



In a U-turn, Trump backs Ryan, McCain

AGENCIES

Donald Trump reversed course Friday and endorsed House Speaker Paul Ryan for re-election, as he sought to stop his presidential campaign's bleeding after several self-inflicted wounds and relentless criticism from his own Republican Party.

Facing sinking poll numbers and desperate to reset a campaign that has perhaps reached its lowest point of the year, Trump made a bald plea for unity and pledged to work with the very party leaders he had earlier dismissed as Washington's ineffective establishment figures.

"We need unity. We have to win this election," Trump told a rally in Ryan's state of Wisconsin, as he stressed a "big tent" Republican Party is the only way to defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton in November's election.

"In our shared mission to make America great again, I support and endorse our Speaker of the House Paul Ryan," he said. He also announced support for senators John McCain and Kelly Ayotte, two lawmakers facing tough re-election fights.

Meanwhile, a Reuters/Ipsos opinion poll released on Friday showed Clinton's lead over Trump narrowed to less than 3 percentage points, down from nearly eight points on Monday. About 42 percent of likely voters favored Clinton, to Trump's 39 percent.



HIROSHIMA DAY

A woman lights up a candle in front of the cenotaph for the victims of the 1945 atomic bombing at Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima, western Japan, yesterday. Japan yesterday marked 71 years since Hiroshima was destroyed by a US atomic bomb. American B-29 bomber Enola Gay dropped its deadly payload, dubbed "Little Boy", on Hiroshima at 8:15 am local time on August 6, 1945. Much of the city was incinerated by a wall of heat up to 4,000 C (7,232 F) -- hot enough to melt steel -- killing tens of thousands.

Duterte vows to keep 'shoot-to-kill' order

AFP, Manila

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has vowed to maintain his "shoot-to-kill" order against drug dealers while in office and says he "does not care about human rights".

About 800 people have been killed since Duterte won a landslide election in May, according to reports by the local press which has been tracking the maverick politician's campaign pledge to kill tens of thousands of criminals.

"This campaign (of shoot-to-kill) will remain until the last day of my term if I'm still alive by then," the 71-year-old said at a news conference in his southern hometown of Davao.

"I don't care about human rights, believe me," he said, according to official transcripts released by the presidential palace Saturday.

He said government officials who use

their positions to engage in a trade that wrecks the lives of many Filipinos were first on his list.

Duterte said he was also offering soldiers and police his "official and personal guarantee" of immunity from prosecution for killings undertaken in the performance of their duties.

The UN anti-drugs office on Wednesday joined international rights organisations in condemning the rash of killings. In June, UN chief Ban Ki-moon strongly condemned Duterte's apparent support of extra-judicial killings.

Duterte said he had no fear the anti-crime campaign would cause his impeachment and removal from office. "The Filipino is crying for justice" from crimes committed by drug dependents, he said.

Police say more than 500,000 people have surrendered to the local authorities and pledged to stop using illegal drugs.

PHILIPPINES' WAR ON DRUGS



Yemen peace talks tatters

AFP, Kuwait City

The UN suspended talks between Yemen's warring parties yesterday after the Iran-backed Shia rebels and their allies appointed a council to run the country in a blow to the peace process.

In July, the rebels and forces allied to former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh rejected a UN peace plan and announced the creation of a "supreme political council" to run Yemen.

At the time, UN envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed denounced the council as a "grave breach" of UN Security Council Resolution 2216 and a violation of commitments to the peace process.

More than 6,400 people have been killed in Yemen since 2014, mostly civilians.

A warning signal to West?

As Turkey's coup strains ties, detente with Russia gathers pace

REUTERS, Istanbul

As Turkey's relations with Europe and the United States are strained by the fallout from its failed coup, President Tayyip Erdogan travels to Russia on Tuesday to meet Vladimir Putin in a trip he may hope will give the West pause for thought.

Turkish officials insist Erdogan's visit to St Petersburg is no sign that the Nato member and European Union membership candidate is turning its back on the West.

But the thaw with Moscow, which imposed trade sanctions nine months ago after Turkey downed a Russian fighter jet near the Syrian border, comes as Ankara's relationship with the West could scarcely be more fractious.

Erdogan and many Turks have been incensed by what they see as Western concern over a post-coup crackdown but indifference to the bloody events themselves, in which more than 230 people were killed as rogue soldiers bombed parliament and seized bridges with tanks and helicopters.

The Turkish government has blamed the coup on followers of a cleric in self-imposed exile in the United States, and purged tens of thousands of his suspected followers from positions as teachers, police, judges, soldiers and even the ruling party members. Western countries say the purge has been too fast and indiscriminate.



So damaged are relations that Germany's foreign minister said this week there was no basis for discussions and that "we are talking with each other like emissaries from two different planets."

"For Erdogan, this meeting with Putin is certainly an opportunity to signal to Turkey's partners in the West

that it could have other strategic options," said Sinan Ulgen, a former Turkish diplomat and analyst at the Carnegie Europe think tank.

"There is this perception game that Turkey could strategically gravitate towards Russia if the relationship with the West cannot be maintained. There is also an incentive on the side of Russia to use the crisis between Turkey and the West to undermine Nato's cohesiveness," Ulgen said.

But Russia and Turkey are not on the same page on world affairs.

"The meeting between Putin and Erdogan ... will show how far both sides are willing to compromise. The question is whether the current tactical de-escalation can translate into a deeper strategic partnership," he added said.

Closer ties between Ankara and Moscow could be more troublesome for Europe, which sees a plan for a gas pipeline from Russia to Turkey, a project known as TurkStream, as a complication in its efforts to cut dependence on Russian energy.

Mothers 'so hungry they can't breastfeed babies'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Weeks after the outbreak of deadly fighting in South Sudan, aid groups say their movement is being restricted by continued violence and government checkpoints, harming their ability to get food and medicine to severely malnourished children.

"We already have an extremely serious food-insecurity crisis," said UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien in an interview. "And there are many circumstances where, appallingly, this only gets worse."

During the intense July clashes, South Sudanese government forces looted a UN warehouse where food for 220,000 needy people was kept, according to UN officials.

Humanitarian groups have reported that in parts of the country their access

is limited by government checkpoints or continued fighting.

South Sudan descended into civil war in late 2013, when a split between president Salva Kiir and vice-president Riek Machar spurred a brutal conflict that was waged largely along tribal lines.

Now, the international community is

once again trying to reconcile the warring factions - while simultaneously attempting to contain a growing humanitarian crisis.

The United Nations estimates that as many as 4.8 million people in the country face severe food shortages. It has so far

been able to assist only 2.8 million.

O'Brien said that during a trip to South Sudan this week, he met with mothers unable to breastfeed their babies because they themselves were not getting enough food. "It's that sheer level of desperation," he said.

