

NEWSIN brief

American, Australian kidnapped in Kabul

AFP, Kabul

Gunmen wearing police uniforms kidnapped an American and an Australian in the heart of Kabul, officials said yesterday, the latest in a series of abductions of foreigners in the conflict-torn country. The two professors at the American University of Afghanistan were seized from their vehicle on Sunday evening, as the kidnappers smashed the passenger window and hauled them away at gunpoint.

Two BSF jawans, rebel killed in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Two border guards and a suspected rebel were killed yesterday in a gunbattle in Indian-administered Kashmir, the Indian army said. The shootout took place near the de facto border with Pakistan, although it was not immediately clear whether the dead fighter had crossed into India from there. Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since the two won independence from British rule in 1947.

Turkish leader backs death penalty

AFP, Ankara

If the Turkish public want the death penalty following last month's failed coup then political parties will follow their will, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said at a rally in Istanbul on Sunday evening. He attacked critics who said there was no death penalty in the EU, of which Turkey is a candidate nation, countering that capital punishment is used in the United States, Japan and China.

Seven killed in Nepal chopper crash

AFP, Kathmandu

A helicopter crashed into a hillside in Nepal yesterday, killing all seven people on board including a baby, officials said. The Kathmandu-bound Fishtail Air helicopter was carrying six passengers when it lost contact with air traffic control about 30 minutes after taking off from the western district of Gorkha. Among them was a new mother seeking medical treatment in the capital.

26/11 case: Pak asks India to send witnesses

PTI, Lahore

Pakistan has directed a top official to follow up with India the matter of sending 24 witnesses of the Mumbai attack case to Pakistan to record their statements so that the trial in the case could be completed at the earliest. Recently the foreign office of Pakistan said it had asked India to provide "additional evidence" for the early completion of the Mumbai attack trial.



Pakistani volunteers move the bodies of victims after a bomb explosion at a government hospital premises in Quetta yesterday. *Inset*, local journalists react over the body of a news cameraman. At least 70 people were killed and 100 more wounded after the blast. Story on page 1.

PHOTO: AFP

Aleppo war escalates

Syrian regime, rebel forces send hundreds of reinforcements as opposition fighters announce all-out offensive to take the city

AFP, Beirut

Syrian regime forces and rebel factions sent hundreds of reinforcements to Aleppo yesterday as opposition fighters announced an all-out offensive to take the country's second city.

The battle for Syria's former economic powerhouse is intensifying after an opposition advance at the weekend broke through a three-week government siege of the city's rebel-held east, dealing a major setback to regime troops.

Rebel forces on Sunday announced a bid to capture all of Aleppo city, which if successful would mark the biggest opposition victory yet in Syria's five-year civil war.

But forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad are putting up a fierce fight and have begun pouring reinforcements into the city.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a monitoring group, said some 2,000 pro-regime fighters from Syria, Iraq, Iran and Lebanese Shia movement

Hezbollah had arrived in Aleppo since late Sunday.

"Both sides are amassing their fighters in preparation for the great battle of Aleppo," said Rami Abdel Rahman, the head of the Britain-based Observatory.

Yesterday's edition of Al-Watan, a Syrian daily close to the government, reported that the army had received "the necessary military reinforcements to launch the battle to retake the areas from which it withdrew."

Citing a source on the ground, the paper said military warplanes "are carrying out a barrage of air strikes targeting the armed groups."

Aleppo has been roughly divided between government forces in the west and rebel groups in the east since fighting first broke out there in mid-2012.

After years of stalemate, fighting for the city entered a new phase last month when government forces took control of the last supply road into rebel-held areas, leaving some 250,000 people in eastern districts surrounded.



WAR ON DRUGS IN PHILIPPINES

Dozens of govt officials surrender

REUTERS, Manila

Dozens of Philippine government and police officials turned themselves in yesterday, a day after President Rodrigo Duterte linked them to the drugs trade, stepping up a war on narcotics that has killed hundreds since he took office in June.

More than 400 suspected drug dealers have been killed by police across the Philippines since Duterte took over, officials say. Broadcaster ABS-CNN put the number at over 800, though this includes executions by anonymous vigilantes.

Yesterday, 27 mayors and 31 police officers, including a colonel, went to the national police office in the capital, Manila, to clear their names, fearing the president's order to hunt them down if they failed to surrender within 24 hours.

Several local officials reported to regional police offices to beat the deadline set by Duterte, who won the elections in May on a single platform of fighting crime and drugs.

On Sunday, he identified about 160 officials in a name-and-shame campaign.

"I want to change," a Cebu-based businessman tagged as a top-level drug trafficker told reporters after he met national police chief Ronald dela Rosa.

Nicknamed "the punisher" and "Duterte Harry" for his brutal fight on crime, Duterte has hit back at activists incensed by the surge in the killings of suspected drug traffickers.

Alarmed human rights groups have urged the United Nations to condemn the rise in extrajudicial killings. The Philippine Senate is to hold a legislative inquiry.

SUCCESSION TO THE JAPANESE THRONE

Naruhito an unlikely critic of the monarchy

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's Crown Prince Naruhito may be heir to one of the world's oldest monarchies, but he is not shy about knocking the institution he represents or his country's warring past.

The 56-year-old has levelled subtle yet unprecedented criticism at the monarchy, blaming the rigid lifestyle imposed on royals for a decade of stress-related illness suffered by his wife, who was once a high-flying diplomat.

And, like his popular father Akihito, the heir apparent has warned that Japan must not downplay its early 20th-century militarism and actions in World War II -- remarks seen as a rebuke to the nationalist stance of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

The comments are unusual as Japan's royals are not supposed to wade into political matters under a post-WWII constitution imposed by occupying US forces, which stripped Akihito's father of his divine status.

As the eldest of two brothers, Naruhito will succeed his father on his death or if the 82-year-old monarch were to step down -- a prospect he hinted at in an historic address to the nation yesterday.

Naruhito briefly took over official duties in 2012 as his father recuperated from heart bypass surgery, and the prince has said the emperor should cut back because of his age.

Born on February 23, 1960, Naruhito was the first



prince who grew up with his parents and siblings under the same roof -- it had been a custom for royal children to be raised by nannies and officials in charge of education.

The Crown Prince studied at the University of Oxford for two years in the 1980s after graduating with a history degree in Japan.

A poster of American actress Brooke Shields was splashed across the wall of his residence at Oxford, where he met with Britain's royals.

Naruhito married Masako Owada, the daughter of a diplomatic family, in 1993, promising he would "protect her at any cost" as she entered the unfamiliar world.

But the imperial family lead a cloistered life inside their palace, encircled by stone walls and a large moat, and public appearances are highly choreographed.

In 2004, the palace disclosed Masako had been undergoing treatment for a stress-induced adjustment disorder for almost her entire marriage.

In response, Naruhito accused palace minders of stifling his wife's personality in unprecedented public remarks. He later apologised, but has called for "new royal duties" to fit the 21st Century.

Protests 'don't pay'

Warns Zimbabwe's Mugabe after a string of public strikes quelled by police

AFP, Harare

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe yesterday warned that protests against his rule "don't pay", after a string of public strikes across the country were quelled by police.

"Things like protests don't pay because usually they end up being violent protests," Mugabe said while addressing hundreds gathered to commemorate Heroes Day in the capital Harare.

The day is marked to remember fallen heroes of the liberation war of the 1970s.

"What does it help to go in the streets with the intention to show that you are able to throw stones? To throw stones, to hit the police with stones -- we do not want that."

The 92-year-old leader's comments come after a series of street protests erupted in past weeks, sparked by Zimbabwe's faltering economy.

Last week riot police used tear gas and water cannons to break up a protest by several hundred demonstrators in the capital.

Several war veterans' leaders, long seen as loyal allies of Mugabe, have also been arrested after issuing a strongly-worded statement last month calling on the president to step down.

Yesterday, Mugabe accused his opponents -- including popular pastor Evan Mawarire, the figurehead of recent demonstrations -- of trying to topple him through protest, "like in the Arab countries".



Mexican soldiers help dig out damaged homes in the community of Tlaola, Puebla in eastern Mexico on Sunday in the wake of Tropical Storm Earl. Landslides triggered by Tropical Storm Earl's remnants have killed at least 38 people, as a new storm threatened the country's Pacific coast.

PHOTO: AFP



Junta polls win sends country 'backwards'

Says ex-Thai PM Yingluck

AFP, Bangkok

A referendum victory for Thailand's ruling generals over a new constitution is a "backwards" step for the country, the toppled ex-premier said yesterday as the democracy movement reels from its first poll defeat in a decade.

The bitterly divided kingdom has been ruled by a junta for two years since Yingluck Shinawatra's government was booted from office.

The majority "yes" vote in support of the charter was the first test of public opinion since the 2014 coup, although independent campaigning and open debate was stifled ahead of the polls.

The draft was heavily criticised in the poll run-up for clauses that embed military power and straitjacket the role of elected officials.

But Sunday's vote lends legitimacy to a junta that says it alone can stabilise Thailand.

Unofficial results released by the Election Commission showed 61.4 percent of the country backed the document, with 38.6 percent voting "no".

"I accept the decision of the people," Yingluck said in a social media post, in her first reaction to Sunday's poll, adding she was "not surprised" at the result due to the bar on debating the document.

"I am saddened by the fact that our country is going backwards to an undemocratic constitution," she added.

Sunday marked her family's first loss at the polls since a charter referendum in the wake of a 2006 coup that toppled Thaksin Shinawatra -- Yingluck's billionaire elder brother.

Android bug fear in 900m phones

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Almost one billion Android devices are affected by a serious security flaw which can give attackers access to all data and hardware, including the camera.

The vulnerability, dubbed 'Quadroter', was flagged by researchers from Check Point, an international cyber security company.

It affects all devices which use a Qualcomm chip -- thought to be in around 900 million phones and tablets.

Michael Shaulov, head of mobility product management at Check Point, told tech news website ZDNet two weeks ago of his frustration.

He said: "No-one at this point has a device that's fully secure. That basically relates to the fact that there is some kind of issue of who fixes what between Qualcomm and Google."

An attacker would have to dupe a victim into installing a malicious app on

the phone, by sending them a link to download, for example.

The app would not require special permissions, allowing a hacker 'root' access.

That means they could see all data and use the camera and microphone.

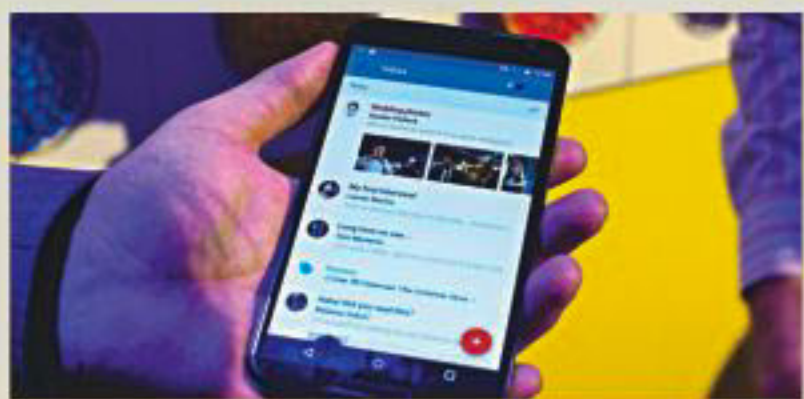
Qualcomm says it has issued a patch which Google will release next month in its monthly fixes update.

Nexus devices will get it first with other manufacturers expected to follow suit a few days later.

The list of popular affected devices includes but is not limited to, BlackBerry Priv and Dtek50, Google Nexus 5X,

Nexus 6, Nexus 6P, LG G4, LG G5, LG V10, Sony Xperia Z Ultra, HTC One, HTC M9, HTC 10, Blackphone 1 and Blackphone 2.

Apple, BlackBerry, Google, HTC, LG, Microsoft, Motorola, and Samsung were all sent letters by America's Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Trade Commission earlier this month as part of an investigation into how and when they create fixes.



Dump Trump makes its move

Former CIA operative to declare independent run for White House

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The anti-Trump ferment continues inside the Republican Party amidst the launch of an independent presidential bid yesterday by a little-known conservative activist and parallel grassroots efforts to force party officers to draft a replacement nominee.

Evan McMullin, 40, who formerly worked for Goldman Sachs and is a graduate of the Wharton School, the University of Pennsylvania where Donald Trump also studied, was being drafted by a group called "Better for America".

The group, led by Republican consultant Rick Wilson and Florida-based pollster and operative Joel Searby, had been trying for months to find a suitable candidate to make an independent run. McMullin, is a former operative for the Central Intelligence Agency, who has also advised Republicans on Capitol Hill.

"In a year where Americans have lost faith in the candidates of both major parties, it's time for a generation of new leadership to step up," McMullin told ABC News. "It's never too late to do the right thing, and America deserves much better than either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton can offer you. I humbly offer myself as a leader who can give millions of disaffected Americans a conservative choice for President."

In the meantime, two separate attempts are being revived



this week to seek ways to displace Trump or at least change the rules so a candidate of his ilk never emerges again.

Prominent party activists with a group called Delegates Unbound, led by Dane Waters, are to gather this week in Las Vegas to discuss ways of reigniting their campaign to stop Trump, The Independent can reveal.

Additionally, The Washington Post reported a push by another group of rebels called Free the Delegates, that aims to force an emergency meeting of the Republican National Committee, RNC, chaired by Reince Priebus, in the hopes that it would vote on stripping Trump of his status as party nominee for president and finding someone to replace him.

Both things - the McMullin campaign and the new spasm of activity by 'Free the Delegates' - smack of desperation. There is zero indication that the RNC would have any appetite at so late a stage to

throw out their party's presidential nominee.

"NYET!!" Bruce Ash, an RNC member from Arizona replied after receiving an email over the weekend asking for the special meeting, the Post reported. "You will not succeed. You are totally self absorbed. How embarrassing for you. When our nominee defeats Clinton you will try, no doubt, to claim success. If we fail to win your 2nd guessing and lack of support will not be overlooked."