

NEWS IN brief

Suu Kyi sets date for crunch peace talks

Myanmar will begin long-planned talks with armed ethnic groups on August 31, as the government's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi targets peace as a prelude to rebooting the economy. The date of the talks emerged after discussions between Suu Kyi and army chief Min Aung Hlaing on Monday. For the first time, peace talks will include groups that have ceasefires in place as well as those outside of the agreements.

Thailand to hold polls in 2017: junta chief

Thailand will hold a general election in 2017, the country's junta chief confirmed yesterday, his first comments since voters backed a new military-crafted constitution in a referendum. Yesterday's vote in support of the charter was the first test of public opinion since the 2014 coup, although campaigning was curbed and open debate banned ahead of the polls.

Israel arrests UN's Gaza employee

Israel yesterday said it had arrested and charged a United Nations employee for allegedly providing "material assistance" to the Islamist movement Hamas. UNDP official Engineer Waheed Borsh was arrested on July 16 and indicted in a civilian court in Israel yesterday.

Mexico hunts for landslides missing

Hundreds of soldiers and rescue workers searched for the missing Monday after the remnants of Tropical Storm Earl triggered landslides in central Mexico that killed at least 45 people. Trudging through mud that was sometimes up to their knees, emergency teams used sniffer dogs to find more bodies in the rubble and worked to dig damaged homes out of the muck.



Nagasaki day marked

The Japanese city of Nagasaki yesterday marked 71 years since its destruction by a US atomic bomb. A bell tolled as thousands of people, including ageing survivors and relatives of victims, observed a minute's silence at 11:02am, the exact moment of the blast. Some 74,000 people died in the initial explosion, while thousands of others perished months or years later from radiation sickness. The attack came three days after US dropped the first ever atomic bomb on Hiroshima, which killed 140,000 people.



A protester throws stones towards the Indian police during a protest in Srinagar against the recent killings in Kashmir, yesterday. Inset, A policeman fires tear gas to a protester. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday called for an end to the violence, promising jobs for young people, in his first comments since deadly clashes began over a month ago. More than 50 people have been killed and thousands injured in the violence. PHOTO: REUTERS

'Most reckless president'

50 GOP national security officials reject 'dangerous' Trump

Fifty senior Republican national security officials have issued a stinging rejection of their party's White House nominee Donald Trump, warning if elected he would be "the most reckless president in American history".

"He is unable or unwilling to separate truth from falsehood," the group wrote, saying Trump possesses a set of "dangerous qualities" that should disqualify him from the presidency. "We are convinced that in the Oval Office, he would be the most reckless president in American history."

The group, some of whom had already announced they would not vote for Trump, included former homeland security chiefs, intelligence directors, senior presidential advisors and a former US trade representative. They served under Republican presidents from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush.

The signatories included Tom Ridge and Michael Chertoff, the first and second homeland security secretaries under president George W. Bush, former director of National Intelligence John Negroponte and Bush-era CIA director Michael Hayden.



"We are convinced that he (Trump) would be a dangerous president and would put at risk our country's national security and well-being," they wrote in a statement published in The New York Times on Monday.

Trump issued a sharply worded reprimand of the group, painting them as "nothing more than the failed Washington elite looking to hold onto their power" and saying they should be "held accountable" for making the world less safe.

While the US security experts did not say they would vote for Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton -- indeed they expressed "doubts" about her -- they were clear in stating that "none of us will vote for Donald Trump."

Meanwhile, Relatives of two men killed in the 2012 attack on a US consulate in Libya have filed a lawsuit blaming the deaths on Hillary Clinton's "reckless" handling of classified information in her private email server.

They essentially declared the brash billionaire unfit for office.

Parents of two American security agents at the consulate in their wrongful death suit file Monday against Clinton allege that terrorists were able to determine the men's whereabouts because of her use of a private server.

The assault on the US consulate, which occurred while Clinton was secretary of state, killed four Americans in all, including Washington's ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens.

The act is only in force in Jammu and Kashmir, and India's seven north eastern

'IRON LADY' ENDS HUNGER STRIKE

From Sharmila may have ended her record-breaking hunger strike. But she has not ended the struggle for justice.

Yesterday, the 44-year-old activist announced she was ending the hunger strike she began 16 years ago to draw attention to abuses by the military in the Indian state of Manipur. She was granted bail by a court and symbolically tasted honey - the first food to pass her lips since 2000 - in front of journalists gathered to ask her questions.

states, of which Manipur - Sharmila's home - is one. In the north east, the law was introduced in 1958. Sharmila had not eaten any food voluntarily since November 5 2000. Three days earlier, 10 civilians were killed by paramilitary troops in Malom, a small town on the outskirts of Imphal, the Manipur state capital.



Sharmila said she was ending her protest in order to participate in local elections, a clear shift in tactics that she recognised that some may not approve of.

The night before, she ate a final meal with her mother. She was force fed, three times a day, by nurses who poured a liquified mixture of vitamins, carbohydrates, proteins and laxatives into a plastic feeding-tube, which entered her nose. She refused to drink, and brushed her teeth only with a piece of dry cotton.

She said she had decided to "try a different [form of] agitation because I have been fasting for 16 years and I have not got anything from it yet".

She said she hoped she could challenge to become the chief minister of Manipur and remove AEFSPA.

Sharmila - quiet, shy, utterly defiant - began her protest in 2000 in order to bring attention to the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), a law that activist says allows troops and paramilitaries to behave with impunity.

She also set out a challenge to the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. "Mr Prime Minister, you indulge in violence," she said. "In civilisation, we need non-violence. Our father of the nation is the father of non-violence. You can connect with us, you can govern us with fatherly affection, without discrimination."

The act is only in force in Jammu and Kashmir, and India's seven north eastern

DEADLY HOSPITAL BLAST IN PAKISTAN

Quetta mourns terror victims

Pakistan's lawyers boycotted courts and staged protests nationwide yesterday after a horrific suicide bombing at a Quetta hospital which killed 72 people including many of their colleagues.



A Palestinian is being evacuated by Israeli border police as he tries to prevent Israeli authorities from destroying his house, yesterday in the village of Umm al-Kheir, south of the West Bank city of Hebron. Israel demolished five homes in the occupied West Bank, leaving 27 Palestinians homeless, more than half of them children. PHOTO: AFP

Monday's bloodletting, with medics battling to save scores of injured amid scenes of carnage, left the southwestern city reeling. Police stood guard yesterday at the Civil Hospital, where the bomb tore through a crowd of some 200 lawyers who had gathered there the previous day to mourn the fatal shooting of a colleague.

Both the Pakistani Taliban and the Islamic State group have asserted responsibility for the attack, though neither claim has been verified by Pakistani authorities.

The IS claim, if true, would make it the group's deadliest attack so far in Pakistan, where it has struggled for purchase. Scores of lawyers held rallies in major cities including Islamabad, Karachi and Quetta yesterday.

WAR IN YEMEN

Saudi-led air strikes kill 9 in capital

REUTERS, Aden

A Saudi-led military coalition conducted air strikes on the Yemeni capital Sanaa yesterday for the first time in five months, residents said, after UN-backed peace talks to end the conflict broke down over the weekend.

Medics said nine civilians were killed in a strike on a potato chip factory in the Nahda district of the capital.

The Saudi-led coalition is backing Yemeni forces loyal to the exiled government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi who are trying to oust Iran-allied Houthi forces from Sanaa.

The coalition also forced the suspension of flights into Sanaa International Airport for 72 hours from late on Monday, an airport official and aid agency sources said.

The air strikes hit a presidential compound and military base in Sanaa as well as a Republican Guard base in the Arhab area near the airport, residents said. Pro-government forces are trying to advance into the city from the north and east.

On Sunday night the Saudi-led coalition killed nine civilians in an air strike outside Sanaa.

Saudi Arabia and its mostly Gulf Arab allies intervened in Yemen's civil war in March 2015 after the armed Houthi movement had pushed the Hadi administration into exile in Saudi Arabia.

Nature's 'budget' used up

We have consumed enough resources in seven months what earth can reproduce in a year

In just over seven months, humanity has used up a full year's allotment of natural resources such as water, food and clean air -- the quickest rate yet, according to a new report.

The point of "overshoot" was officially reached on Monday, said environmental group Global Footprint Network -- five days earlier than last year.

"We continue to grow our ecological debt," said Pascal Canfin of green group WWF, reacting to the annual update on Sunday. "From Monday August 8, we will be living on credit because in eight months we would have consumed the natural capital that our planet can renew in a year."



MH370 plunged into ocean 'at high speed'

AFP, Sydney

MH370 plunged into the ocean at high speed -- up to 20,000 feet a minute -- reinforcing analysis that the missing Malaysia Airlines jet crashed in the current search zone, a report said yesterday.

The Boeing 777 disappeared on March 8, 2014 en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing with 239 people onboard.

According to the report, once MH370 ran out of fuel and the engines flamed, it slowed before plunging down towards the water in a series of swoops -- dropping from 35,000 feet at a rate of between 12,000 feet a minute and 20,000 feet a minute, Boeing said.

UN calls for aid as all-out war looms in Aleppo

Says 2m residents face water, electricity crises

AFP, Beirut

The United Nations has called for urgent aid access to Syria's Aleppo as regime forces and rebel fighters prepare for an all-out battle for control of the devastated city.

Fears are growing for trapped civilians ahead of what is expected to be a major battle for Aleppo, Syria's second city and a focal point of the country's five-year civil war.

Rebel factions and President Bashar al-Assad's regime have sent hundreds of reinforcements to Aleppo in anticipation of the fighting, after opposition forces broke a government siege at the weekend and vowed to capture the entire city.

Hundreds of thousands of civilians remain inside the city, once Syria's main economic hub, and UN officials have sounded the alarm over trapped residents. The UN's top humanitarian official in Syria, Yacoub El Hillo, and regional coordinator Kevin Kennedy said in a statement late on Monday that medical and food stocks "are running dangerously low" in Aleppo. They appealed for a full-fledged ceasefire or weekly 48-hour "humanitarian pauses" to reach those in need. UNICEF said children and families in Aleppo were facing "a catastrophic situation", with up to two million people without running water for four days after fighting damaged electricity networks needed to pump supplies. Aleppo has been divided between a rebel-held east and regime-controlled west since fighting erupted in the city in mid-2012. Emboldened by their recent win, the rebel alliance on Sunday announced an ambitious bid to capture all of Aleppo city, which if successful would mark the biggest opposition victory yet in Syria's conflict.

WAR IN SYRIA