

NEWSIN brief

German minister calls for burka curbs

AFP, Berlin

Germany's interior minister yesterday proposed partially banning the full-face burqa Islamic veil, as a debate on integration rages after two jihadist attacks and ahead of key state elections. The call by Thomas de Maiziere comes as Chancellor Angela Merkel's government attempts to address public fears surrounding last year's record influx of nearly 1.1 million migrants and refugees.

Trump campaign chairman quits

AFP, New York

Trump's campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, resigned yesterday under fire over a Ukrainian corruption investigation and after being sidelined by a recent personnel reshuffle as the Republican nominee languishes in the polls. The departure of the smooth-talking strategist, who has advised Republican presidential candidates going back to Gerald Ford, follows weeks of damaging US media reports about a White House campaign in crisis.

China lawmaker given 5 yrs for sinkhole

AFP, Beijing

A Chinese lawmaker was sentenced to five years in jail yesterday for trying to dig a basement under his Beijing home so deep it created a giant sinkhole that swallowed four of his neighbours' houses. Li Baojun and two men he hired to expand his courtyard home five storeys underground had violated construction safety regulations, the Beijing Xicheng District People's Court ruled.

Firefighters attack California wildfires

REUTERS, California

Firefighters were gaining ground yesterday against a wildfire burning in a Southern California mountain pass that has forced some 80,000 residents to flee their homes and has consumed dozens of structures. The Blue Cut fire has blackened 35,969 acres of drought-parched heavy brush and chaparral after breaking out on Tuesday.

Rahul tweets a prayer for Indian PM Modi

PTI, New Delhi

Taking a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi yesterday tweeted a prayer for him, a day after Modi said that BJP suffered more adversities in independent India than the Congress did during the British rule. "Lead me from ignorance to truth — from darkness to light — from death to immortality. Let there be peace for all living creatures," the Congress vice-president said in two tweets.



IS HUMAN SHIELDS IN MANBIJ

IS terrorists fled a northern Syrian stronghold using a civilian convoy as human shields in an effort to prevent coalition airstrikes from destroying their forces. The jihadis were filmed running away from Manbij by a drone launched by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces yesterday. The Kurdish-led group recaptured the strategically important town less than 20 miles from the Turkish border and close to an important bridge across the River Euphrates.

PHOTO: MAIL ONLINE

Xi pledges to support Myanmar peace talks

Suu Kyi meets Chinese president ahead of conference with armed groups near countries' troubled joint border

AFP, Beijing

Chinese President Xi Jinping promised to support Myanmar's peace process yesterday as he met with the country's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Beijing ahead of historic talks with armed groups near the countries' troubled joint border.

During the sitdown between the leaders Xi pledged to "play a constructive role in promoting Myanmar's peace process" the official Xinhua news agency reported.

"China attaches great importance to developing relations with Myanmar," Xi said, according to an official statement.

Myanmar will hold a long-planned conference with armed ethnic groups later this month, with Suu Kyi targeting peace as a prelude to rebooting the economy after her party won a landslide election victory.

"As a good neighbour, China will do everything possible to promote our peace process,"

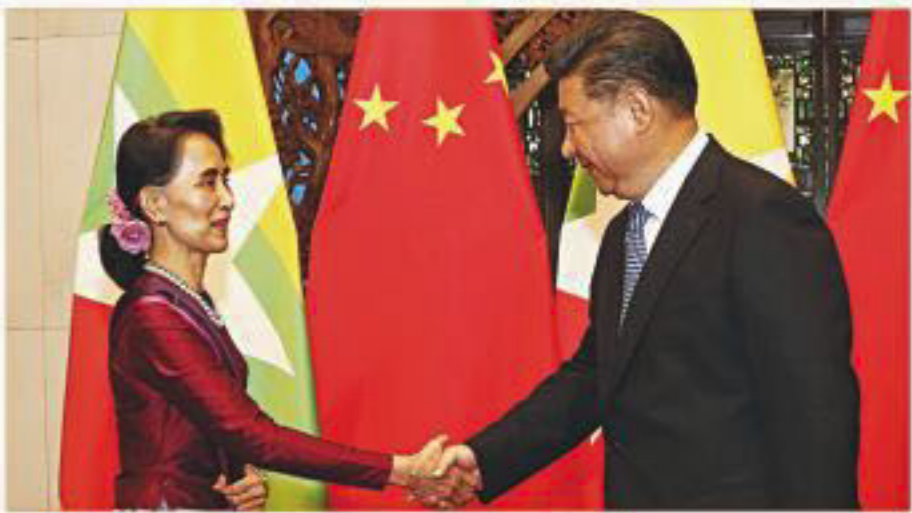
Suu Kyi told reporters in Beijing ahead of meeting China's President Xi Jinping.

China's goodwill was particularly important as the two countries share "a very important border along which there are many ethnic armed groups," she added.

Several complex ethnic conflicts -- with some groups fighting the government for decades -- simmer across Myanmar's poor and militarised borderlands, hampering efforts to build up the country's economy after the end of junta rule.

Some of the groups have ethnic and cultural links to the neighbouring Chinese province of Yunnan, and the porous border is notorious for trade in drugs, arms and precious stones.

"If you ask me what my most important aim is for my country, that is to achieve peace and unity among the different peoples of our union," Suu Kyi said. "Without peace, there can be no sustained development".



KASHMIR VIOLENCE

Victims of clashes overwhelm hospital

REUTERS, Srinagar

More than 40 days of clashes between protesters and security forces have overwhelmed the main hospital in Indian-administered Kashmir, where some patients with severe injuries said they had been beaten in their homes by troops. House-to-house searches continued yesterday, authorities said, for suspected ringleaders of street protests set off by the killing on July 8 of a popular field commander of a Pakistan-based separatist group.

At least 65 people have been killed and 6,000 injured in the ensuing clashes, many of them wounded by shotgun rounds fired by security forces enforcing a curfew across the Muslim-majority region.

Pictures taken by a Reuters photographer at Srinagar's main SMHS Hospital on Thursday showed men with wounds across their backs and buttocks they said had been caused by beatings.

Another showed a crying boy, his head swathed in bandages, being comforted by his family, who said he had been wounded by shotgun pellets.

The Indian army has apologised for the death in custody of Shabir Ahmad Mangoo, a 30-year-old college lecturer. The commander of India's Northern Army denounced the beatings and ordered an inquiry.



A handout picture released on Thursday by the Italian Red Cross shows a crew member of the rescue Responder vessel taking part in a MOAS operation in which 304 migrants were rescued from dinghies in the international waters between Malta and Libya.

PHOTO: AFP

POST-COUP PURGE

Dozens of Turkish academics held

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey yesterday detained dozens of academics suspected of backing Fethullah Gulen, the alleged mastermind of last month's failed coup, while pressing ahead with raids on businesses linked to the US-based Muslim preacher.

Turkish prosecutors have issued arrest warrants for 84 academics nationwide, the private Dogan news agency reported, while the state-run Anadolu agency said Istanbul authorities were separately hunting 62 academics from the city's main university.

A total of 74 scholars had been detained so far in both operations, media said.

A large majority of the suspects in the nationwide raids were from Selcuk University in Konya, central Anatolia -- a conservative bastion of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) -- including the university's former rector Professor Hakki Gokbel.

To the alarm of its Western partners, Turkey has pressed ahead with a vast crackdown on alleged coup plotters in the wake of July 15 military action seeking to oust President Recep Tayyip Erdogan from power.

Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said this week that more than 40,000 state employees had been detained in the purge, with more than 20,000 remanded in custody.

More than 5,000 civil servants have been dismissed and almost 80,000 others suspended, he added.

Gulen, a former Erdogan ally, has a powerful network of influence in institutions such as the judiciary and police and has long been accused of running a "parallel state" in Turkey.

Ready for Aleppo pause

Says Russia; denies its strikes hit five-year-old boy whose photo sparked outrage, concern on social media

AFP, Beirut

Russia said it was ready to halt fire for 48-hour periods in Aleppo from next week, following UN calls to extend humanitarian pauses to deliver aid.

"Russia's defence ministry is ready to support the proposal by UN envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura regarding the introduction of weekly 48-hour 'humanitarian pauses' (in Aleppo)," defence ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said in a statement.

"We are ready to implement the first 48-hour 'humanitarian pause' to deliver humanitarian aid to Aleppo residents as a 'pilot project' already next week in order to ensure safe cargo deliveries to the city's civilians."

"Specific dates and times will be determined after information regarding the readiness of humanitarian convoys is received from the UN, as well as confirmation of safety guarantees from American partners," he said.

The defence ministry also issued an official denial that it carried out a strike on eastern Aleppo on Wednesday evening when the images of five-year-old Omran were taken.

"The Russian planes operating in Syria never work on targets that are inside settled areas," Konashenkov said in a statement yesterday.

The photographer who shot the video for Aleppo Media Centre, a network of activists, told AFP he took the images after an air strike on Wednesday night hit the Qaterji neighbourhood in eastern Aleppo.

Konashenkov said Qaterji was

SYRIA WAR

Regime pounds Kurdish positions for second day

Ill children evacuated from besieged Madaya

particularly out of bounds for Russian strikes because it adjoins two of the humanitarian corridors Moscow has opened for residents to flee.

He branded Western media reports on Omran as a "cynical exploitation" of the tragic situation in eastern Aleppo and "clashed anti-Russian propaganda".

He suggested the attack could have been carried out by rebels in Aleppo

using homemade rockets to target roads close to the humanitarian corridors to undermine Russia's efforts.

Meanwhile, 13 sick children were among 18 people evacuated by aid workers from the besieged Syrian town of Madaya yesterday, a doctor that was treating them told AFP.

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent confirmed in a tweet that it was evacuating "36 humanitarian cases" from Madaya and two government-held towns, Kafraya and Fuua, in northwestern Idlib province.

Syrian regime warplanes bombarded the northeastern city of Hasakeh for the second day yesterday, targeting positions held by Kurdish forces, a monitor and a journalist in the city said.

The journalist said eight air strikes could be heard throughout the day yesterday, mostly focused in the city's southwestern neighbourhoods.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights -- which monitors the conflict and determines what planes carry out raids according to their type, location, flight patterns and the munitions involved -- said the strikes were conducted by regime jets.

Twitter shuts more 'extremist' accounts

THE NEW YORK TIMES ONLINE

Twitter suspended 235,000 accounts that promoted terrorism over the last six months, as part of a continuing effort to keep people from using the social network for extremist causes, the company said Thursday.

"The world has witnessed a further wave of deadly, abhorrent terror attacks across the globe," Twitter said in a statement. "We strongly condemn these acts and remain committed to eliminating the promotion of violence or terrorism on our platform."

Twitter's latest action brings the total number of accounts that the company has suspended to 360,000 since it began cracking down on terrorism and violent

extremism in mid-2015. While Twitter has long championed free speech on the web and said that it was a "global town square," its positioning has drawn bullies, racists and extremist groups to the service to spread their messages. That has drawn criticism from government agencies and the Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, among others.

While Twitter is trying to find a way to reconcile its free speech stance with how women and minorities can be targeted on the service, the company has been clearer about combating terrorism. Daily suspensions for violating Twitter's prohibition on terrorism are up over 80 percent since last year, with spikes in suspensions immediately following terrorist attacks, the company said.



Pak misogynist stabs 17 women

AFP, Islamabad

A Pakistani man has stabbed 17 women this year, killing one, in a misogynistic spree because he wanted "revenge" for a cruel stepmother, police in the garrison city of Rawalpindi said yesterday.

Mohammad Ali, 22, targeted women in the streets at random from late January until this month, police investigator Malik Zulfiqar Hussain told AFP.

"He told police, 'I hate women, I was taking revenge,'" Hussain said.

"He has confessed to injuring 17 women," Hussain said, adding that Ali had used a knife. "One of them was a hospital nurse, who died this week."

Ali told officers his mother had died when he was young and his father married again, but that the second wife had mistreated him.

He has been charged with murder and attempt to murder, Hussain added. A second police official confirmed the account.

Ali said his only target was women of any age, and described how he would lay in wait and attack whenever the opportunity arose, according to Hussain. All the attacks took place in the streets of Rawalpindi, adjacent to the capital Islamabad.

Women in deeply conservative Pakistan have fought for their rights for years, in a patriarchal society where so-called "honour" killings and attacks on women remain commonplace.

Aussie PM defends giving AU\$5 to homeless man

AGENCIES

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has said he is sorry if people thought he shouldn't have given money to a man begging on a Melbourne street.

"I felt sorry for the guy," he told Neil Mitchell on 3AW radio yesterday, after he was photographed shaking the man's hands and giving him \$5.

"It was a human reaction and I'm sorry if that has disappointed some people."

Whenever he sees someone in that situation, Turnbull said he always thinks "there but for the grace of God go I".

The now-infamous photograph was brought to the attention of social media by The Guardian columnist Van Badham. Badham posted it on Facebook with the caption "Check Malcolm's right hand, then

check his left hand -- and you'll know why this photo doesn't even need a caption."

The image shows Malcolm Turnbull placing a \$5 note into the cup of a homeless man with his right hand. In the Prime Minister's left hand, however, is a thick wad of cash including \$50, \$20 and \$5 notes.

The gesture was met with backlash after some people questioned why he did not give up more.

"Five bucks for a homeless dude whilst he gives big biz [business] fifty billion dollars. Nice one Mr Harbour Side Mansion," one person wrote. Others have taken an opposite stance, instead supporting the prime minister and calling out those criticism his gesture.

"Most people would walk straight past this homeless man and not give a cent!!!! It's not about how much it's about the thought to begin with," Emily Audino wrote.

