

NEWS IN brief

Manila backtracks on threat to pull out of UN

Aides to Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday sought to backtrack on his threat to leave the United Nations, saying he only meant to express frustration at UN criticism of his deadly war on crime. "It was a way of stating that the nation is sovereign. Okay? It was not a statement of fact that we are leaving," presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella told reporters.

Sarkozy announces new presidential bid

Former French leader Nicolas Sarkozy yesterday announced he will seek his party's nomination to stand in next year's presidential election. "I have decided to be a candidate in the 2017 presidential election," Sarkozy, who was president between 2007 and 2012, wrote in a foreword to a new book to be released Wednesday.

Rapper remanded for 'insulting Islam'

A Malaysian court yesterday remanded a rap artist in custody for a music video entitled "Oh my God" which allegedly insults Islam because it was partly filmed in a mosque. Namewee, whose real name is Wee Meng Chee, will be held for four days, a Penang district police chief said.

Protesters attack Pak TV station, one dead

Activists of a key political party clashed with police and ransacked ARY television station in the southern Pakistani port city of Karachi yesterday, leaving at least one man dead and seven others injured. The violence erupted soon after the influential Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) party's exiled chief, Altaf Hussain, stoked up his supporters, castigating the media for not giving them due coverage.



IS USES CHILD BOMBER IN HORRIFYING TACTIC

Iraqi security forces remove a suicide vest from a boy in Kirkuk on Sunday night. The would-be suicide bomber thought to be as young as 12 has told police he was kidnapped by masked men who placed an explosive vest on him. The boy was displaced from the IS-held city of Mosul by recent military operations in the area and arrived in Kirkuk a week ago, police said. Story on Page 16.

COUNTERING EXTREMISM IN JAILS Britain to create isolation units

Britain will isolate Islamist extremists in special units in high security jails to limit their ability to radicalise other inmates, the government said yesterday. Justice Secretary Liz Truss said she was taking action to reduce the spread of radical ideology within the mainstream prison population, including training officers to disrupt activity that could influence vulnerable prisoners. "But there are a small number of individuals, very subversive individuals, who do need to be held in separate units," she told BBC radio yesterday. "We are establishing special units in the prison estate to hold those individuals." The new policy follows a review into extremism in prisons led by former prison governor Ian Acheson. The BBC said Acheson found there was "institutional timidity" in tackling extremist ideology in prisons because staff were afraid of being labelled racist. Truss said governors and prison officers would have the training and the authority to root out extremism. The government moves come as Britain's most notorious Islamist preacher, Anjem Choudary, is due to be sentenced next month after being found guilty of inviting support for Islamic State. Critics have said special units could become hothouses where the most dangerous extremists can exchange ideas and create networks, repeating some of the mistakes made in Northern Ireland in the 1980s.

Eye on security, Sushma meets Suu Kyi in Myanmar

India's External affairs minister Sushma Swaraj held talks with Myanmar's de facto ruler Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday, the first high-level contact between the two countries since the National League for Democracy came to power last year. Swaraj also met President Htin Kyaw. Her day-long trip comes close on the heels of Suu Kyi's visit to China, where she was given a welcome fit for a head of state and held talks with President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Li Keqiang. The visit has been projected by the external affairs ministry as part of the "Act East" policy of engaging with countries in Southeast Asia to drive an agenda of cooperative development. Myanmar is also crucial for India's security calculus, as New Delhi has worked with the erstwhile military junta to counter militants from the northeastern states who have taken refuge in the neighbouring country. Swaraj, who was accompanied by foreign secretary S Jaishankar, is the first senior Indian leader to visit Myanmar after Suu Kyi's party scored a landslide victory in polls last year and ended five decades of military rule. Talks between the two sides are expected to focus on bilateral relations, the forthcoming BRICS-BIMSTEC Outreach Summit in India, and security cooperation aimed at countering the activities of Myanmar-based militant groups from northeastern states such as Nagaland, Manipur and Assam. Factions of the United Liberation Front of Asom and National Socialist Council of Nagaland currently operate camps in Myanmar. External affairs ministry spokesman Vikas Swarup said Swaraj's visit reaffirms India's commitment to heighten the partnership with Myanmar. The two sides are currently engaged in development cooperation in agriculture, IT, human resource development, infrastructure development and culture. National Security Adviser Ajit Doval had visited Myanmar as a special envoy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June, and minister of state for commerce Nirmala Sitharaman led a business delegation to the India-Myanmar Business Conclave in May.

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It's over for now Says Iran on Russian raids from one of its airbases

Iran yesterday said that Russian raids on jihadists in Syria from one of its airbases had ended for now, after accusing Moscow of "showing off" when it revealed the bombing runs. "It was a specific, authorised mission and it's over for now. They conducted it and they are gone now," foreign ministry spokesman Bahram Ghasemi told reporters in Tehran. He left open the possibility of future Russian combat flights from the Islamic republic, saying it would depend on "the situation in the region, and according to our permission". The Russian ambassador to Tehran, Levon Dzhagaryan, said yesterday all Russian planes have left Iran's air base in Hamedan but that nothing prevents them from using it again in the future. "There are no reasons to worry. If the leaders of our two countries consider it necessary and reach the relevant agreements, what sort of problems can there be?" he told Russia's Interfax news agency. "For the time being, there are no

(Russians) remaining in Hamedan" airbase, he added. Ghasemi's comments came a few hours after Iranian Defence Minister Hossein Dehghan made a rare public criticism of Russia for revealing that its warplanes were using Hamedan to attack insurgents in Syria, reports AFP. Meanwhile, Turkey said yesterday the Syrian border region must be "com-

WAR ON IS IN SYRIA, LIBYA Border region must be 'cleansed' of militants: Turkey Libyan forces capture mosque, prison in Sirte

pletely cleansed" from the Islamic State group, after a weekend suicide bombing in Gaziantep blamed on the jihadists left at least 54 dead. In a sign of a key battle to come, Syrian rebel fighters have amassed on the Turkish side of the border in preparation for an offensive on the town of Jarablus, IS's last major transit point on the Syrian side of the border.

"Our border must be completely cleansed from Daesh," Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said in televised remarks, using an Arabic acronym for IS. "It is our most natural right to fight at home and abroad against such a terrorist organisation." In Libya, fighters of unity government, backed by US air strikes, have recaptured more ground from jihadists holed up in the centre of the coastal city of Sirte, loyalist forces said yesterday. "Our forces have retaken the internal security building used as a prison by the Islamic State (IS)" group, as well as a courthouse, the Al-Naga district and Dubai Street, the operations centre for fighters loyal to the Government of National Accord (GNA) said. A statement said "the new victory was achieved in clashes which raged throughout Sunday in the face of 'desperate resistance by the jihadists'". IS sniper positions were "neutralised" in two US air strikes and "our forces destroyed two booby-trapped cars...without loss in our ranks," it said.

Voting begins in Labour leader contest in UK

Voting started yesterday to decide if veteran leftist Jeremy Corbyn will remain leader of Britain's Labour party, with an ill-tempered campaign deepening divisions that threaten the party's future. Ballots and online voting forms were being sent to party members, who have until September 21 to decide whether to replace Corbyn with MP Owen Smith, previously little known outside parliament. Corbyn, 67, is favourite and retains the backing of most trade unions and many grassroots supporters who signed up last year to propel him to a shock leadership election win. But he has failed to win over many of the party's MPs, 80 percent of whom backed a recent vote of no-confidence in Corbyn. Britain's vote on June 23 to leave the European Union provided the catalyst for the leadership challenge, with many law-

makers criticising Corbyn's performance during the campaign as lacklustre. London mayor Sadiq Khan and Labour's leader in Scotland, Kezia Dugdale, are among those backing Smith over Corbyn. Smith triggered the contest by declaring his candidacy last month, warning that Corbyn's leadership was making the possibility of a split in the party "dangerously real". The 46-year-old is, like Corbyn, targeting voters to the left of the party but says he is better placed to sell the message to the country and take Labour to ballot box success, reports AFP. Smith distanced himself from the centrist New Labour governments under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown -- the last time the party held power, between 1997 and 2010 -- in a speech in Wales yesterday. Meanwhile, supporters of Corbyn boomed and jeered a mention of Labour's London Mayor Sadiq Khan on Sunday night, underlining tensions within the party.



Mahvish (2R), the sister of Kashmiri Irfan Ahmed, who was killed by a teargas shell, breaks down as local residents visit the family to offer their condolences in Srinagar's Fatah Kadal area yesterday. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed "deep pain" and concern over the prevailing situation in Kashmir Valley and emphasised on the need for dialogue to find a lasting solution within the framework of the Constitution. PHOTO: AFP



Jihadist pleads guilty at ICC Timbuktu trial Urges Muslims not to follow 'evil' ways

A Malian jihadist asked for forgiveness as he pleaded guilty yesterday to the 2012 attacks on the fabled city of Timbuktu, and urged Muslims not to follow such "evil" ways at his unprecedented war crimes trial. "Your honour, regrettably I have to say that what I heard so far is accurate and reflects the events. I plead guilty," Ahmad al-Faqi al-Mahdi said as his trial opened at the International Criminal Court, where he admitted a sole war crimes charge of cultural destruction. Armed with videos, graphics and 360 degree landscapes, ICC prosecutors showed images of the destruction of the centuries-old sites in the west African city. Aged about 40, Mahdi is the first person ever to confess his crimes at the ICC, is also the first Islamic extremist to appear before the tribunal and the first charged with crimes arising out of the conflict in Mali. The razing of the ancient shrines by jihadists triggered global outcry, and archaeologists hope the trial will send a stern warning that such plundering of our common heritage will not go unpunished. Mahdi is accused of "intentionally directing attacks" against nine of Timbuktu's famous mausoleums as well as the Sidi Yahia mosque between June 30 and July 11, 2012.

Indian minister ridiculed for flood photo

India's Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan was caught on camera yesterday, being carried by two policemen during his visit to the flood-hit areas of the state. The Chief Minister was visiting Amanganj Tehsil in Panna district. In the cellphone photographs that were doing the rounds on social media, Chouhan, 57, is seen carried through what is obviously ankle-deep water. In another place, he was seen walking barefoot through mud, an aide is seen carrying his white sneakers. Sources in the government said the Chouhan was carried as there was water in the nullah and the collector and the local police chief decided that they could not risk the chief getting hurt or being bitten by snakes. The Chief Minister has so far visited flood affected Rewa, Satna and Panna districts. The floods in the

BJP-ruled state have already claimed 17 lives. Altogether, 4,500 people have been rescued but heavy rainfall is expected tomorrow. Last week, an Odisha minister triggered outrage after he was caught on camera allowing a personal security officer to strap on his shoes after unfurling the national flag at an Independence Day function. Reacting to the backlash, Biju Janata Dal's Jogendra Behara, the minister for micro, small and medium enterprise, had repeatedly said, "I am a VIP".



S Korea, US begin military drill

South Korea and the United States kicked off large-scale military exercises yesterday, triggering condemnation and threats of a pre-emptive nuclear strike from North Korea. The two-week annual Ulchi Freedom drill, which plays out a scenario of full-scale invasion by the nuclear-armed North, is largely computer-simulated but still involves around 50,000 Korean and 25,000 US soldiers. The exercise always triggers a rise in tensions on the divided Korean peninsula, and this year it coincides with particularly volatile cross-border relations following a series of high-profile defections. Seoul and Washington insist the joint military drills are purely defensive in nature, but Pyongyang views them as willfully provocative. The North Korean Foreign Ministry yesterday condemned Ulchi Freedom as an "unpardonable criminal act" that could bring the peninsula to "the brink of war". The Korean People's Army (KPA), meanwhile, threatened a military response to what it described as a rehearsal for a surprise nuclear attack and invasion of the North.

Most people support 2-state solution: poll

A slim majority of both Israelis and Palestinians still favour a peace settlement with a Palestinian state alongside Israel, a new poll showed yesterday as Israeli authorities confirmed granting permission to plan the expansion of an Israeli settlement in the flashpoint West Bank city of Hebron. The poll found that 51 percent of Palestinians and 59 percent of Israelis still support a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Tamar Hermann, an Israeli political scientist who conducted the survey with Palestinian pollster Khalil Shikaki, said that under the current circumstances, the results were "not amazingly encouraging," but also "not discouraging." "It showed there is still some

basis for optimism with the right leadership," she said. "Right now I don't see on the horizon a leader on either side willing or capable of using this as a springboard for intensifying the negotiations. But it's not impossible." The poll comes amid nearly a year of low-level violence between Palestinians and Israelis. Since September, Palestinians have killed 34 Israelis in shootings, stabbings and vehicular attacks. At least 206 Palestinians have died by Israeli fire in the same period, most of whom Israel says were attackers. Hebron has been a focal point of violence in the West Bank. About 1,000 Jewish settlers live in the city, in heavily fortified enclaves surrounded by tens of thousands of Palestinians.

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT