

# NEWS IN brief

## US to destroy largest stockpile of mustard gas

ALJAZEERA ONLINE  
The United States army plans to start operating a \$4.5 billion plant next week that will destroy the nation's largest remaining stockpile of mustard gas, complying with an international treaty that bans chemical weapons, officials said on Wednesday. The largely automated plant at the military's depot in Colorado will begin destroying about 780,000 chemical-filled artillery shells soon after this weekend.

## British public in favour of burqa ban: poll

AFP, London  
Twice as many British people support a ban on women wearing a burqa than oppose one, with a majority also in favour of outlawing the burkini, according to a poll published yesterday. Some 57 percent of the 1,668 adults polled by YouGov said they supported "a law that bans people from wearing the burqa in the UK", with 36 percent "strongly supporting" the ban compared with only 10 percent who were "strongly opposed".

## Delhi women's minister sacked for 'sex tape'

AFP, New Delhi  
The Delhi women's minister has been sacked after a 'sex video' showing him kissing two women was leaked to the media, in the latest scandal involving the Indian capital's government. Women's and children's minister Sandeep Kumar was removed from his post by the Delhi chief minister late Wednesday shortly after the "objectionable" tape was sent to him and national television stations.

## Tremor near New Zealand

AFP, Wellington  
A powerful 7.1 magnitude earthquake rocked New Zealand early today, the US Geological Survey said, but no tsunami warning was issued. The shallow tremor was estimated at a depth of around 30 kilometres off the coast of the country's north island, some 167 kilometres from Gisborne, according to the agency. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

## British Airways starts flights to Iran

AFP, London  
British Airways was yesterday to become the first British airline in four years to fly directly to Iran following the lifting of some sanctions against Tehran. Flagship carrier BA is to operate six flights per week between London Heathrow and Tehran, with the first service set to depart London at around 9:00 pm.



Sri Lankan nationalists, led by Buddhist monks, demonstrate outside the United Nations (UN) compound in the capital Colombo yesterday. The protest came ahead of a visit to the compound by UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon who is in Sri Lanka on his second visit after the end of the country's ethnic war in May 2009. PHOTO: AFP

# Malaysia reports first suspected Zika case

### S'pore confirms 115 people tested positive for the virus

AFP, Singapore  
Malaysia yesterday reported its first suspected case of Zika, a 58-year-old woman believed to have contracted it in neighbouring Singapore where more than 100 cases have been confirmed.

Singapore authorities say 115 people have now tested positive for the virus, including a pregnant woman and 57 foreigners living and working in the city-state. Singapore depends heavily on foreign labour, and industries like construction and the marine sector are dominated by workers from China and South Asia.

The Malaysian woman had made a brief trip in late August to visit her daughter, who has already been confirmed as having the Zika virus, Malaysia's health ministry said in a statement. After returning to her home near Kuala Lumpur, the woman fell ill and was diagnosed with "suspected" Zika, based on a urine test. Full confirmation via blood tests is pending. "The source of infection is suspected to have occurred in Singapore," the statement said.

Among the foreigners infected, 23 are from China, 15 are from India and 10 from Bangladesh, the health ministry said yesterday. The rest are from Malaysia, Myanmar, Indonesia and Taiwan.

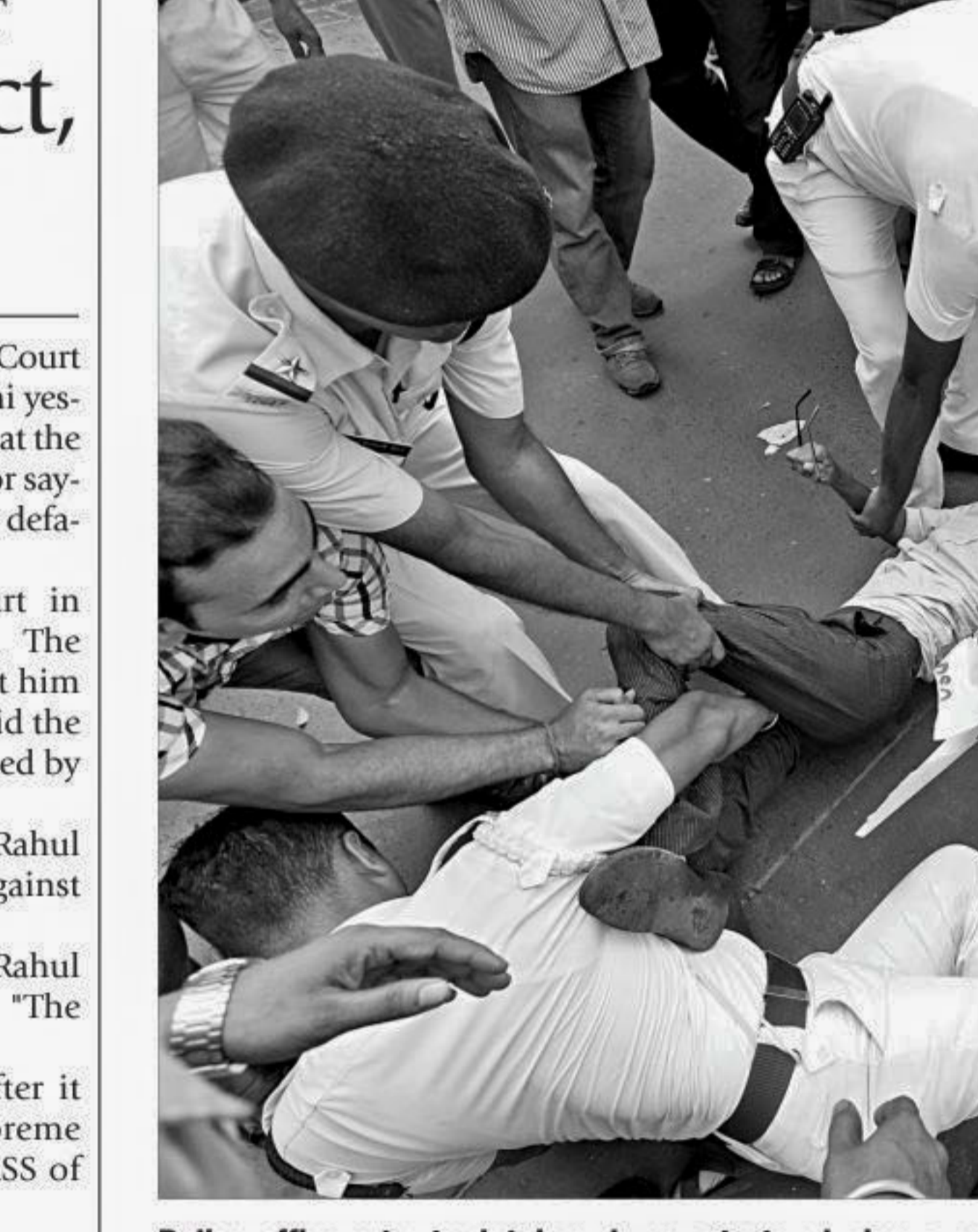


The Aedes mosquito-borne Zika, which has been detected in 67 countries and territories including hard-hit Brazil, causes only mild symptoms for most people such as fever and a rash. But pregnant women who catch it can give birth to babies with microcephaly, a deformation marked by abnormally small brains and heads.

"All had mild illness. Most have recovered while the rest are recovering well," the ministry said in a statement. The city-state's environment agency workers have been ramping up efforts to eradicate mosquitoes in a bid to curb the spread of the disease, expanding a fumigation campaign centred on the "ground zero" of the outbreak in the eastern suburb of Aljunied. They have also turned efforts to three other areas beyond the original cluster, sending teams of inspectors round homes fumigating and checking for breeding sites.

## 'RSS KILLED GANDHI' COMMENT Rahul won't retract, will face SC trial

TNN, New Delhi  
After being criticised for backtracking in the Supreme Court last week, India's Congress vice president Rahul Gandhi yesterday told the court he stands by his 2014 statement that the RSS killed Mahatma Gandhi and is ready to face trial for saying that, and withdrew his petition seeking to quash a defamation case against him. Rahul will now face trial in a Bhiwandi court in Maharashtra where the defamation case is filed. The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday said it will not exempt him from making a personal appearance. The top court said the trial court will decide the case without being influenced by any other court's orders.



Police officers try to detain a demonstrator during a protest against what the demonstrators said was the rape and murder of a twelve-year old girl in Kolkata, India yesterday. At least 34,651 cases of rape were reported across India last year, statistics released by the country's National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) have revealed.

Sibal wanted the SC to record in its order that Rahul wants to face trial as he stood by every word he said against RSS. The SC refused. "RSS ke logon ne Gandhiji ko goli mari", is what Rahul said in a Mumbai rally in 2014. That is, Rahul said, "The RSS's people shot and killed Gandhiji." This development comes a little over a week after it seemed like Rahul backtracked and told the Supreme Court he never meant to accuse the whole of the RSS of assassinating Gandhi. "Rahul Gandhi never accused the RSS as (an) institution for the crime," the Congress vice president's counsel, Kapil Sibal, told the court over a week ago.

# Powerful militia storms out of historic gathering

AFP, Naypyidaw  
Delegates from one of Myanmar's most heavily armed ethnic groups stormed out of peace talks yesterday in an early blow to a landmark gathering aimed at ushering in a new era of peace.

following discussions last month with de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi and after pressure was applied by China, which retains significant influence over the group. Yet on day two of the talks four UWSA delegates walked out, officials said, reportedly after being told they could not address the gathering.

The five-day conference in the capital Naypyidaw has been hailed as the best chance in a generation for Myanmar to end wars that have raged for up to 70-years, claiming thousands of lives and keeping the country mired in poverty.

Government peace negotiator Khin Zaw Oo said the Wa had been given observer badges, instead of ones allowing them to speak, angering their delegation. But he played down their departure, saying it was a "misunderstanding" that could be solved.

## MYANMAR PEACE TALKS

Among the militias attending is the powerful 20,000-strong United Wa State Army. They stopped fighting the government years back in exchange for control of a remote portion of territory bordering China which is now a notorious drug manufacturing hub.

A spokesman for the Wa militia told the Democratic Voice of Burma the group left after being told they were only accredited as observers, calling it discrimination.

They had originally refused to make this week's talks, arguing they signed their own ceasefire with the previous military government back in 1989. But they eventually agreed to attend

But Lian Hmung Sakhong, from the Chin National Front, another ethnic group at the talks, denied the Wa were treated unfairly. "We give equal rights to them and gave them a front row seat. I would like to confirm again that we did what they demanded," he said.

# Pak military admits IS presence in country

AFP, Rawalpindi  
Pakistan's military yesterday admitted for the first time that the Islamic State group had a presence in the country but said it had apprehended hundreds of its militants and prevented them from carrying out major attacks.

group have now been apprehended," army spokesman Lieutenant General Asim Bajwa told a press conference, using the group's Arabic acronym.

The army's spokesman Lieutenant General Asim Bajwa said forces had foiled planned attacks by IS on foreign embassies and Islamabad airport, but denied the group was behind last month's suicide blast on a hospital that killed 73, as it had claimed.

Bajwa added that a total of 309 militants -- from both its planning wing (Kutaiba Haris) and fighter wing (Kutaiba Mubashir), including its "mastermind" Hafiz Umar and top commander Ali Rehman had been held and the group had been

IS gained its first toe-hold in the country in January 2015 when six Pakistani Taliban leaders switched their allegiance over from al-Qaeda, but has since struggled for traction in the face of competition from well-established groups.



Pakistan has been battling an Islamist insurgency since shortly after it decided to ally with the US following its invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. In 2007, Pakistani jihadists formed their own Taliban faction that has deep ties to al-Qaeda, IS's main rival. "Daesh tried to make an ingress into Pakistan, but the core of its

contained. The group's leader in Pakistan and Afghanistan was killed in a US drone strike in Afghanistan last month. The spokesman said IS had carried out several small-scale attacks including the killing of human rights activist Sabeen Mahmud in Karachi in 2015, clashed with and killed security personal, as well as committing several grenade attacks on TV channels.

# Islamabad very 'suspicious' of India-US pact

PAK DAILY REPORT  
TNN, New Delhi

Islamabad views with great "concerns and suspicion" the pact India and the US recently signed to use each other's land, air and naval bases, Pakistan's The Express Tribune newspaper reported citing senior government sources. The article in the newspaper said that even though Washington assured Islamabad that the military logistics pact would not jeopardise its strategic interests, senior officials in Pakistan privately admitted that the Indo-US agreement could alter the strategic balance in restive South Asia.

On Monday, India and the US signed an important agreement that will make the two nations logistical allies and enable both the militaries to use each other's assets and bases for repair and replenishment of supplies. The agreement was signed by US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter and Manohar Parrikar, both of whom said the agreement will facilitate opportunities for "practical engagement and exchange".

The Pakistani newspaper quoted unnamed Islamabad diplomatic sources as saying that last week - before the India-US pact - senior US officials travelled to Islamabad to address Pakistan's concerns.

These sources also said that Special Assistant to the US President and Senior Director for South Asia Dr Peter Lavoy, and US Special Representative to Pakistan and Afghanistan Richard Olsson, assured Pakistani authorities that Indo-US agreement would not hurt Islamabad's interests.

"However, background discussions with officials in Islamabad suggested that Pakistan was left unconvinced and considers the pact with great 'concerns and suspicion'", the newspaper wrote.

# Singur land survey will be over in two weeks

### Says Mamata, assures farmers of returning their plots in cultivable condition

HINDUSTAN TIMES ONLINE  
The farmers of Singur will get back the same plots that they had before the land was acquired for the Nano project, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee announced yesterday. Moreover, she assured the farmers that the government will return the land in a condition where they can start cultivation.

was that the land may be unfit for cultivation as it was low lying and filled up by the government with fly ash, rubbish and sand. On some of the land concrete structures came up. "The government will turn the part of the land that is no longer cultivable into a condition where agricultural work can be resumed," said Mamata Banerjee. However, she did not elaborate how it could be done.

The chief minister convened an emergency meeting yesterday to thrash out how it will implement the supreme court order.

Her announcement follows the verdict of the Supreme Court on Wednesday declaring the acquisition process in 2006 and illegal and directing the government to return the land to the farmers.

Moving at lightning speed the chief minister also said her government will issue the notification for the process of returning the land.



# 'Pak to stop airing Indian TV channels'

TNN, Islamabad  
The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) has decided to launch a crackdown on the airing of excessive foreign content by TV channels and cable operators.

This move has been taken as Pakistani DTH service is set to be introduced in the coming months. "Adequate time is being given to the cable operators and satellite channels to adjust their timings as per the legal requirements. Otherwise, punitive action will be taken against the two important segments from October 15," the Dawn quoted PEMRA chairman Absar Alam as saying on Wednesday.

However, he added that action against the dealers of Indian DTH would be launched with immediate effect. A PEMRA board meeting also decided to completely stop the airing of any Indian channel in the country since none of them had landing rights in Pakistan.

Alam said the PEMRA would write letters to the Federal Board of Revenue, the State Bank and agencies, including the Federal Investigation Agency, for curbing the sale of Indian DTH decoders in the country.

"Around three million Indian DTH decoders are being sold in the country. We not only want this sale stopped but will also ask the relevant agencies to trace the money trail to determine the mode of payments made to Indian dealers selling these decoders to Pakistanis," he said.

# Obama must listen to me on human rights

### Says Philippines' Duterte ahead of Asean summit in Laos

REUTERS, Manila  
Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said on Wednesday he was ready to discuss any issues with Barack Obama when they meet in Laos next week, but added that the US president must listen to him first before bringing up the question of human rights.

the meeting would be an opportunity for the president to "communicate his advocacy to improve the peace and order situation in the country, especially towards eradicating the scourge of illicit drugs". Police data released on Tuesday showed that the number of drug-related killings since Duterte took office now stands at around 2,000, nearly half of them in police operations and the rest in shootings by unidentified gunmen.

Washington has expressed concern about a surge in drug-related killings since Duterte became president two months ago promising to wipe out narcotics in the Southeast Asian nation.

Duterte has been unapologetic over unleashing the police on drug users and dealers and has responded robustly to criticism from the United Nations and other countries over his campaign.

Asked if he would be willing to discuss human rights at his meeting with Obama on the sidelines of an East Asia summit on Sept 6, Duterte told reporters: "Depends to what degree. They must understand the problem first before we talk about human rights. I would insist, listen to me: this is what the problem is, then we can talk."

Recently he lashed out at Washington's ambassador to the Philippines, branding him a "gayson of a whore".

In a statement, the foreign ministry said

The White House said on Monday that Obama would raise concerns about some of Duterte's recent statements when the two meet.

