

NEWSIN brief

Washington Post backs Clinton for president

AFP, Washington
The Washington Post yesterday became the latest US newspaper to emphatically endorse Hillary Clinton for the White House, saying it was swayed as much by her competence as by the alarming specter of a Donald Trump presidency. "Hillary Clinton has the potential to be an excellent

Iraq summons Turkish ambassador

AFP, Baghdad
The Iraqi foreign ministry summoned the Turkish ambassador yesterday to protest the continued presence of Turkish troops in northern Iraq without Baghdad's permission, a ministry spokesman said. Turkish troops are deployed in the Bashiqa area near the jihadist-held city of Mosul, and Turkey's prime minister has said that they will stay despite

Turkey, Israel plan to build gas pipeline

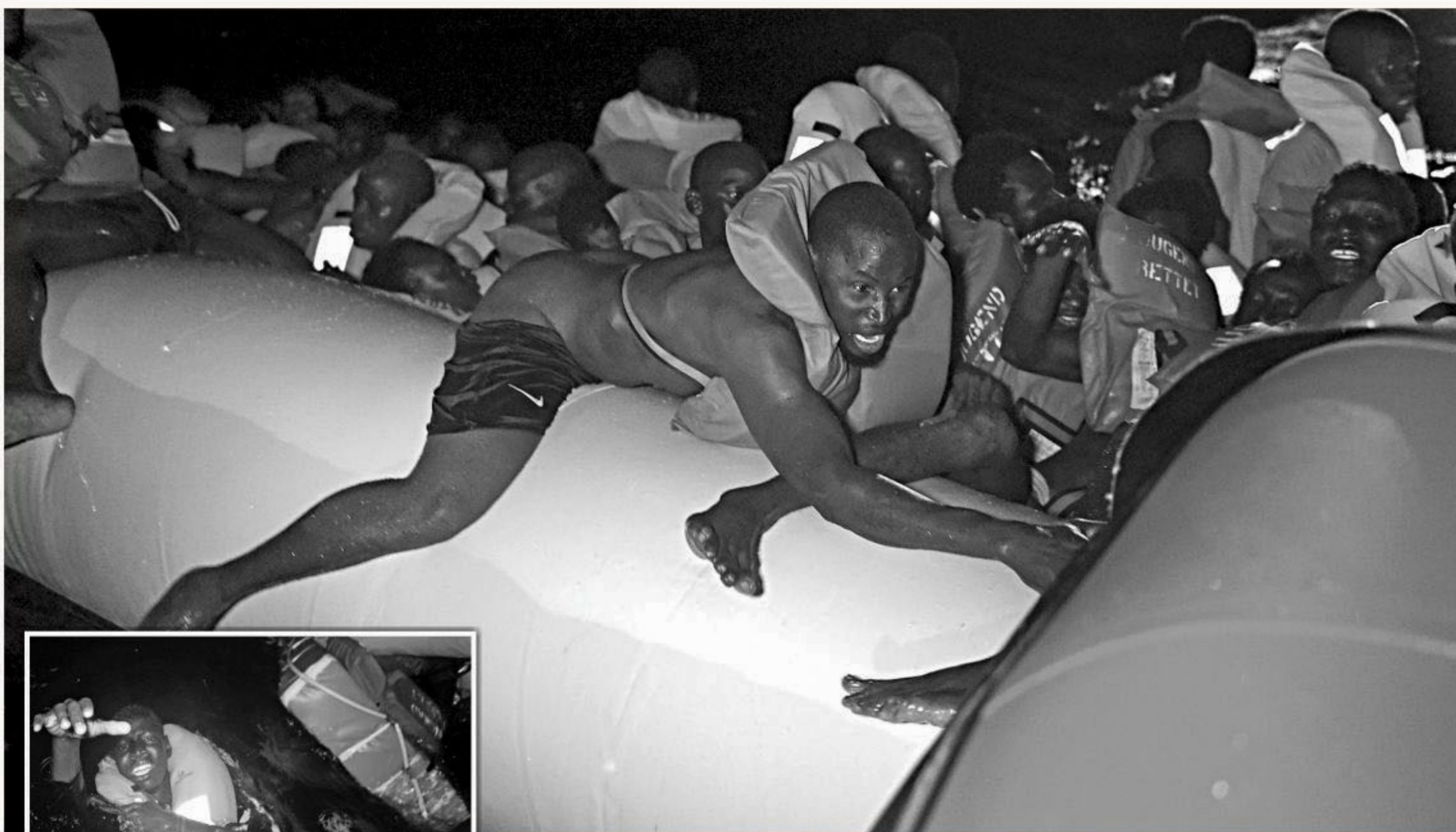
AFP, Istanbul
Israel and Turkey yesterday agreed to open discussions on building a gas pipeline to pump Israeli gas to Europe, as the Israeli energy minister made the first ministerial visit since a crisis in ties. Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz met his Turkish counterpart Berat Albayrak in Istanbul,

Yemen funeral strike 'apparent war crime'

AFP, Dubai
An air strike on a Yemeni funeral ceremony which killed at least 140 people "is an apparent war crime," Human Rights Watch said yesterday. The Saturday strike which Yemen's Huthi rebels blamed on a Saudi-led military coalition was one of the deadliest in the coalition's air campaign against the rebels and their allies. The coalition has

Lanka leader calls army prosecutions 'political'

AFP, Colombo
Sri Lanka's president on Wednesday accused top anti-corruption officials of launching politically motivated prosecutions against former military leaders, putting himself on a collision course with his own unity government. Maithripala Sirisena took the unusual step of publicly condemning criminal



Refugees and migrants wait to be rescued as their rubber boat sinks some eight nautical miles off Libya's Mediterranean coastline on Wednesday. Inset, a migrant reaches for help during the rescue operation. A growing number of people are attempting the treacherous sea journey from Libya or Egypt, after the closure of the Balkan migrant trail route leading from Greece to western Europe.

ROW OVER DEMOCRACY WARNING Maldives to leave Commonwealth

REUTERS, Male
The Maldives said yesterday it will leave the Commonwealth, weeks after the organisation warned it could be suspended because of its lack of progress in promoting rule of law and democracy. Best known as a paradise for wealthy tourists, the Indian Ocean archipelago has been mired in political unrest since Mohamed Nasheed, its first democratically elected leader, was ousted in disputed circumstances in 2012. The decision comes as the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group last month warned the Maldives that in the absence of substantive progress in rule of law and democracy, it would consider its options, including suspension. The Commonwealth comprises 53 states that were mostly former British colonies. "The decision to leave the Commonwealth was difficult but inevitable," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement. "Regrettably, the Commonwealth has not recognised that progress and achievements that the Maldives accomplished in cultivating a culture of democracy in the country and in building and strengthening democratic institutions." President Abdulla Yameen's administration reintroduced the death penalty in July, rejecting repeated requests by right groups and the West. Nasheed, in exile in Britain after being allowed out of jail to go there for medical treatment, formed the Maldives United Opposition in June with the aim of toppling Yameen.

China's Xi visits Cambodia

Looking to forge dozens of economic deals as Phnom Penh backs Beijing's position on the South China Sea

REUTERS, Phnom Penh
Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived in Cambodia for a two-day visit yesterday, praising the close ties that have seen Cambodia back China's position on the South China Sea, and looking to forge dozens of economic agreements. About 2,000 school students waving flags and holding portraits of Xi and Cambodian King Norodom Sihamoni lined the road from Phnom Penh airport into the city to greet the Chinese leader. It is Xi's first visit to Phnom Penh since he became president in 2013. Cambodia has shielded China from criticism by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) over the South China Sea. Asean members Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei are in disputes with China over rival claims to the waters. Last month, Cambodia was able to veto an Asean statement referring to a ruling at an international tribunal earlier in the year that largely denied Beijing's claims. China and Cambodia were "good neighbours, real friends who are loyal to each other", Xi wrote in a front-page commentary in Cambodia's biggest Khmer-language newspaper, Rasmei Kampuchea.

Xi said bilateral trade reached \$4.4 billion last year and was set to reach \$5 billion next year. Chinese investment in Cambodia was valued at \$864 million last year and a total of \$9.1 billion has been pledged since 1994, according to the Council for the Development of Cambodia. This year, China has pledged \$600 million in aid to Cambodia over the next three years. At least 28 agreements are expected to be signed when Xi meets Prime Minister Hun Sen later yesterday, mostly on exports of Cambodian agricultural products to China. China has become Cambodia's closest ally while relations between Cambodia and Western powers, including the United States and European Union, are frequently strained by differences over human rights. Miguel Chanco, regional lead analyst for the Economist Intelligence Unit, said Xi's visit represented a Chinese reassurance amid rising criticism from the West over a crackdown on government critics before a 2018 general election. "China's continued support of Cambodia, both economically and in the arena of international politics, will mean that the Hun Sen regime is unlikely to soften its



China's Xi Jinping shakes hands with Cambodian PM Hun Sen during a meeting at the Peace Palace in Phnom Penh. PHOTO: AFP

Russia completes S-300 missiles delivery to Iran

REUTERS, Moscow
Russia has completed the delivery of S-300 air defence missile systems to Iran, RIA news agency quoted Russia's state arms export agency as saying yesterday. Russia's agreement to provide Iran with S-300 has sparked concern in Israel. Moscow cancelled the contract to deliver S-300s to Iran in 2010 under pressure from the West. Russian President Vladimir Putin lifted that self-imposed ban in April 2016, following an interim agreement that paved the way for last year's full nuclear deal. Russia delivered the first parts of S-300, the missile tubes and radar equipment, to Iran in April 2016. Russia's defence ministry said last week it had deployed its S-300 air defence missile system to Syria's Tartus and warned Washington it would halt any attempted US strikes in Syria. Moscow also sent three missile ships to reinforce its naval forces off the coast of the conflict-racked nation. Defence minister Nikolai Pankov did not provide a timeline for turning the Tartus naval facility -- which dates back to the Soviet era -- into a permanent base, reports AFP. He said the main purpose of the S-300s was to protect the Tartus naval facility. Russian lawmakers last Friday ratified a deal with Syria on its "indefinite" deployment of air forces to the country, a move seen as paving the way for its jets to stay long-term. The deal, signed between Moscow and Damascus in August 2015, allowed Russia to establish its Hmeimim airbase to launch operations last year. Tensions have soared since Washington pulled the plug on talks with Moscow aimed at reviving a Syria truce deal, citing Russia's brutal bombing campaign. Russia on Saturday vetoed a UN draft resolution on stopping Russian and Syrian regime air strikes on the war-ravaged city of Aleppo, with the United States calling for a war crimes probe into the carnage.



ASIA BIBI BLASPHEMY CASE Pak delays appeal as judge steps down

AFP, Islamabad
Pakistan's Supreme Court delayed an appeal into a notorious blasphemy case against a Christian mother on death row yesterday after one of the judges stepped down, with thousands of security forces deployed following threats from Muslim clerics. Police and troops had been stationed across Islamabad as the court readied to hear a final appeal in the case of Asia Bibi, who has been on death row since 2010. Observers had warned of "tremendous" repercussions in the case. But one of the three-judge bench, Justice Iqbal Hameed ur Rehman, told the court he had to recuse himself, claiming a conflict of interest. "I was a part of the bench that was hearing the case of Salmaan Taseer, and this case is related to that," he told the court, which was overflowing with journalists, lawyers, activists and clerics. Taseer, a liberal provincial governor, was gunned down in Islamabad in 2011 after speaking out for Bibi. His assassin, Mumtaz Qadri, was hanged earlier in 2016 in a step liberals hailed as progressive, but which brought hardliners into the streets calling for Bibi's death. Rehman was chief justice on the Islamabad High Court which heard Qadri's appeal in 2011, according to local media.



A Myanmar air force helicopter arrives at Sittwe airport in Sittwe capital of Rakhine State yesterday, as troops pour into the area following attacks by armed groups. Myanmar's security forces have now killed at least 26 people in response to the attacks on police that have sparked a dramatic escalation in violence in the Muslim-majority region along its border with Bangladesh. PHOTO: AFP

Modi's legal reforms divisive

Say Indian Muslims
AFP, New Delhi
An influential Indian Muslim group yesterday accused the country's Hindu nationalist prime minister of triggering an "internal war" with plans to introduce a common civil code for all religions. The Indian constitution currently allows the country's 1.2 billion citizens to be governed by their own religious laws when it comes to marriage, divorce and property inheritance. But Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government wants bring in a common civil code that it says will enhance national unity. All India Muslim Personal Law Board yesterday said they would block any attempt to abolish Islamic family laws, which many Muslim women say discriminate against them. "You can't impose a single ideology in India. Modi has triggered an internal war in India," Maulana Wali Rahmani, head of AIMPLB, told reporters at a press conference in New Delhi. "A uniform civil code is not good for India, which has many cultures and religions. It will divide India," he said. India's Law Commission has sought public feedback on a common law that would ban controversial practices such as polygamy and triple talaq divorce, under which a Muslim man can divorce his wife instantly with just three words. The commission said the objective was to "address discrimination against vulnerable groups and harmonise various cultural practices." Muslim personal law has long been a controversial

No to bridge in Bengaluru that will cost 800 trees

NDTV ONLINE
Bengaluru is protesting against a government plan to build a steel bridge that will make travelling to the airport easier, in a project that will cost the city 1,800 crores and more than 800 trees. Citizens, some of who have also moved the High Court against the proposed bridge, have protested not only against the exorbitant cost of the project but also against what they call a lack of planning. They say it does not provide a larger mobility plan for an increasingly congested Bengaluru. Next Sunday, people are expected to come out on the streets of the city to form human chains to show their displeasure against the state cabinet's okay for the 6.72 km steel structure, to be built between Bengaluru's Basaveshwara circle and Hebbal. The state government argues that the bridge will serve multiple needs of the city, easing traffic jams on the route to

Boko Haram frees 21 Chibok girls

AFP, Kano
Jihadist group Boko Haram has released 21 of the more than 200 kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls held since April 2014 in a prisoner swap deal with the Nigerian government, local sources said yesterday. The girls were exchanged for four Boko Haram militants in Banki, northeast Nigeria, said the local sources. The Nigerian presidency said in a statement that the girls were released after negotiations between Boko Haram, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Nigerian and Swiss governments. The statement added that negotiations are ongoing, raising the prospect of more releases. "It is confirmed that 21 of the missing Chibok girls have been released and are in the custody of the department of state services," presidential spokesman Garba Shehu said in the statement. "The release of the girls... is an outcome of negotiations between the administration and the Boko Haram brokered by the International Red Cross and the Swiss government," Shehu said. "The negotiations will continue." "The girls were brought to Kumshe, which is 15 kilometres (nine miles) from Banki where a military base is stationed, in ICRC vehicles," said a local source. "The four Boko Haram militants were brought to Banki from Maiduguri in a military helicopter from where they were driven to Kumshe in ICRC vehicles." From Kumshe, the Chibok girls were taken by helicopter to Maiduguri, the capital of northeast Borno state. "The 21 (Chibok) girls arrived (in) Banki around 3:00 am (0200 GMT) where they found a military helicopter waiting. They were immediately ushered into the helicopter and flown to Maiduguri," said another local source. Over 200 girls were captured from the northeast Nigeria town of Chibok in April 2014 by Boko Haram militants as part of their fight to establish an Islamist state in the region. The audacious kidnapping drew global attention to the jihadist insurgency engulfing the area. Out of the 276 girls kidnapped, scores escaped in the hours after the kidnapping, while another was rescued earlier this year. In September, the Nigerian government said that it had opened negotiations with Boko Haram to secure the release of the remaining girls but that the talks were derailed due to a split in the extremist group. The identity of the girls has yet to be confirmed, said Bring Back Our Girls

