

NEWS IN brief

Indian group bans films with Pak artists

AFP, Mumbai
Cinema Owners and Exhibitors Association, a group of Indian cinemas, yesterday said they would not screen any films featuring Pakistani artists in protest at an attack by militants that killed 19 Indian soldiers in Kashmir. The ban applies to single screen cinemas in four states -- Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa and Karnataka -- and not big multiplexes.

US further eases Cuba restrictions

REUTERS, Washington
The United States yesterday announced new measures to further ease trade, travel and financial restrictions on Cuba. The changes will allow export to Cuba of some US consumer goods sold online and let US firms improve Cuban infrastructure for humanitarian purposes.

Turkey seeks arrest of judges over 'Gulen app'

AFP, Ankara
Turkish prosecutors yesterday issued arrest warrants for 189 judges and prosecutors over suspected links with the US-based Islamic cleric accused of ordering the failed July coup, state media reported. The warrants claimed that they used an encrypted messaging app, ByLock, which the Turkish authorities say was employed by followers of the movement.

12 Egypt soldiers killed in Sinai attack

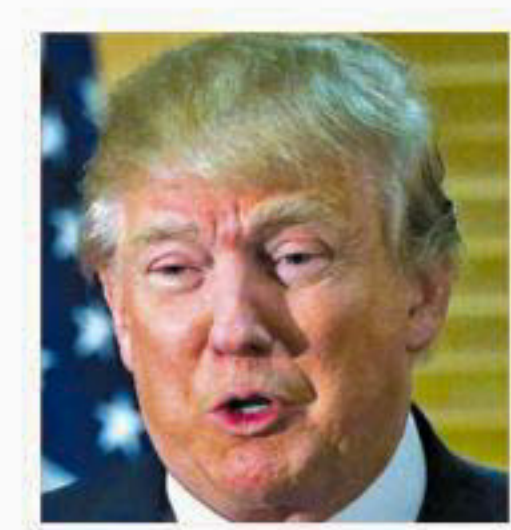
AFP, Cairo
An attack on an Egyptian military checkpoint yesterday killed 12 soldiers and wounded six others in the Sinai Peninsula, the army said. The attack took place in the Bir al-Abd area west of El-Arish, the provincial capital of North Sinai. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.



People wait in line to pay their respects to Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej at the Grand Palace in Bangkok, yesterday. Inset, A woman cries as a motorcade passes with the beloved king's body. King Bhumibol Adulyadej, long a unifying figure in politically fractious Thailand, died on October 13. Story on page 16.



PHOTO: AFP



Trump denies sex assaults as 'outright lies'

AFP, Washington
Donald Trump savaged US media Thursday for reporting "outright lies" that he groped and forcibly kissed women, as First Lady Michelle Obama blasted the Republican nominee in a powerful tirade. Just 26 days before the American electorate chooses a successor to her husband on November 8, a visibly angry first lady delivered a fiery takedown of the real estate mogul and his "disgraceful" behaviour. "Now is the time for all of us to stand up and say, enough is enough," Obama told a rally for Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton in New Hampshire. "This has got to stop right now." But the 70-year-old Trump was defiant, castigating his accusers as "horrible liars" and accusing Clinton of conspiring in a coordinated media attempt to sabotage his campaign. At least six women have accused Trump of making unwanted physical advances in accounts reported by The New York Times, NBC, People Magazine and others, most of them after Trump asserted in Sunday's debate with Clinton that he had never sexually assaulted a woman. Trump said his lawyers were preparing a lawsuit against The New York Times -- which published the accounts of two women who accused him of groping and kissing them. Meanwhile, some of the Republican Party's biggest financial donors urged its national committee on Thursday to drop Donald Trump in the wake of accusations he sexually assaulted women, The New York Times reported.

Russia to stay in Syria

Putin ratifies deal on 'indefinite' troops deployment

AFP, Moscow
Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday approved a law ratifying Moscow's deal with Syria to deploy its forces in the country indefinitely, in a move seen as firming their long-term presence. The agreement -- signed between Moscow and Damascus in August 2015 -- allowed Russia to establish its Hmeimim airbase to launch operations in support of ally President Bashar al-Assad's forces. Putin's official signing off on the pact, that lasts for an "indefinite" period, is a legal move that many believe will now pave the way for Moscow to make the base permanent. The ratification of the deal, which follows votes by both Russia's parliament and senate, comes as tensions with the West spike over Russia's bombing of rebel-held, besieged eastern Aleppo. Putin in August asked lawmakers to ratify the deal, which grants Russian forces immunity from prosecution in Syria. Since the collapse last month of a truce brokered by Washington and

Moscow, Aleppo has been engulfed by some of the worst violence of the conflict. The latest assault by government forces in Aleppo with the support of Russian airpower has sparked Western accusations of potential war crimes. Just days after the deal fell apart, Syria's military announced an offen-

WAR IN SYRIA
Intense air strikes batter Aleppo ahead of peace talks
Obama to meet senior aides to discuss options



sive to capture the whole city, divided between rebels in the east and the government in the west since 2012. Scores of people, including children, died in the assault. On the ground, overwhelmed rescue workers combed rubble for victims of intense air strikes yesterday, ahead of fresh diplomatic efforts to end the

country's intractable conflict. The United States and Russia, which support opposite sides in the five-year war, will meet in Switzerland today to try to resurrect the peace process. UN Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura will also attend, along with the chief diplomats from Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar -- all backers of Syrian opposition forces. Then in London tomorrow, Kerry will likely meet up with his counterparts from Britain, France and Germany. In an interview with Russia's Komsomolskaya Pravda tabloid published yesterday, Assad said he would use a victory in Aleppo as a "springboard" to capture other rebel strongholds. He indicated that his next target could be Idlib province, held by an alliance of rebels and jihadists including the Fateh al-Sham Front, which changed its name from Al-Nusra Front when it cut ties with al-Qaeda. Meanwhile, US President Barack Obama was set to meet his top aides yesterday to discuss the options on the Syria crisis as his policy on the issue has been criticised by both friends and foes.

IS crushes Mosul rebellion plot

'58 plotters' executed; Turkish-trained forces to join Iraqi forces in offensive

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Islamic State has crushed a rebellion plot in Mosul, led by one of the group's commanders who aimed to switch sides and help deliver the caliphate's Iraqi capital to government forces, residents and Iraqi security officials said. IS executed 58 people suspected of taking part in the plot after it was uncovered last week. Residents, who spoke to Reuters from some of the few locations in the city that have phone service, said the plotters were killed by drowning and their bodies were buried in a mass grave in a wasteland on the outskirts of the city. The aim of the plotters was to undermine IS's defence of Mosul in the upcoming fight, expected to be the biggest battle in Iraq since the 2003 US-led invasion. Mosul is the last major stronghold of IS in Iraq, Iraqi officials say a massive ground assault could begin this month, backed by US air power, Kurdish security forces and Shia and Sunni irregular units. Meanwhile, Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency reported yesterday that forces trained by the Turkish military at the Bashiqa camp in northern Iraq will take part in the planned operation to drive IS out of Mosul. It cited officials who took part in talks between Turkey and the United States, as well as Iraqi sources, as saying the operation would begin within a few days, "if there is no extraordinary development".

Nobel Prize another step towards Bob's immortality

Says Joan Baez; no response from Dylan yet

AFP, New York
Joan Baez, one of the closest collaborators and former partner of Bob Dylan, on Thursday hailed his Nobel Prize for Literature as a step toward the rock legend's "immortality." Her praise for Dylan came as more than 24 hours after awarding the prize, the Swedish Academy yesterday said they had still not managed to speak to the reclusive singer. "The Nobel Prize for Literature is yet another step towards immortality for Bob Dylan," Baez wrote on Facebook. "The rebellious, reclusive, unpredictable artist/composer is exactly where the Nobel Prize for Literature needs to be," she said, amid surprise that an artist best known for music won literature's highest honor. Baez, a folk singer, said that his "gift with words is unsurpassable." "Out of my repertoire spanning 60 years, no songs have been more moving and worthy in their depth, darkness, fury, mystery, beauty, and humor than Bob's. "None has been more of a pleasure to sing. None will come again," she wrote. Baez and Dylan were romantically involved before a painful separation during a tour of England in 1965.

PM SHEIKH HASINA GREETS DYLAN

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has extended her heartiest congratulations to Dylan on his winning the prestigious Nobel Literature Prize. In a congratulatory message, the prime minister recalled Bob Dylan's unequivocal support to Bangladesh's war of liberation in 1971. Bob Dylan made outstanding contribution to Bangladesh's independence war as he performed in a concert organised by George Harrison and sitar maestro Ravi Shankar at New York's Madison Square Garden on Aug 1 in 1971 aimed at raising money, medicine and supplies for the displaced refugees and drawing global attention to the ravaging war.



Residents fearful of more conflict flee from Maungdaw in Rakhine State. Inset, A heavily armed soldier guards a street in Maungdaw.



PHOTO: AFP

CURBING SUPER GREENHOUSE GASES

Hope rises for deal

AFP, Kigali
Hopes were high Friday that world envoys meeting in Rwanda will agree to phase out potent gases used in refrigerators and air conditioners that are one of the biggest contributors to global warming. While delegates expressed optimism that a deal was in reach, there was still horse-trading to be done, especially on the timetable on phasing out production of the gases. US Secretary of State John Kerry was to meet with delegations from India and China, both major producers of hydrofluorocarbons or HFCs, whose agreement is crucial in reaching a deal. These gases were introduced in the 1990s to replace chemicals that had been found to erode the ozone layer, but turned out to be catastrophic for global warming. But it emerged that HFCs, while safe for the now-healing ozone, are thousands of times worse for trapping heat than carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas. According to the Berkeley National Laboratory, air conditioning is the cause of the largest growth in HFCs -- and the world is likely to have another 700 million air conditioners by 2030. Banning HFCs could slow the global temperature increase by half a degree Celsius by the end of the century.

Crackdown widens in Rakhine

Terrified Myanmar residents flee homes fearing communal violence

AFP, Maungdaw
Towns and villages across northern Rakhine state were deserted yesterday, as terrified residents fled a deadly military crackdown on foot and by air, fearing Myanmar's restive western state could once again be ripped apart by violence. Local officials believe hundreds of people from the area, home to many from the persecuted Muslim Rohingya minority, spent months planning attacks on police posts along the Bangladesh border that sparked the crisis this week. Twenty-six civilians have died in the ensuing military lockdown, state media reported -- rights groups say the army is gunning down unarmed Muslims on the streets but the army says troops are defending themselves against attack. Law enforcement said 50 "violent attackers" tried several times to overrun a security office on Thursday but were repelled by police and soldiers. Families have been streaming out of Maungdaw on foot, their worldly possessions stuffed into carrier bags and plastic buckets or strapped to the front of bicycle rickshaws.



Burned houses are seen in Warpait village, a Muslim village in Maungdaw, yesterday.

Around 180 teachers, workers and residents were also airlifted out of the region at the epicentre of the crisis, while hundreds of government staff have poured into the state capital Sittwe. Many of those fleeing are local Buddhists, who make up the majority of the country but account for less than 10 percent of the population in northern Rakhine, where most people are Muslim Rohingya. Rakhine state government spokesman Min Aung said a group of 200-300 border-post assailants had spent months plotting the raids. The military said late Thursday troops had captured a fifth suspect, along with a gun, ammunition and flags featuring the logo of the RSO, a Rohingya militant group long considered defunct. The RSO vigorously denied involvement in a statement sent to AFP. But videos showing armed men speaking the Rohingya language calling for jihad that have been circulating on social media have raised concerns some others from the persecuted minority may be turning toward militancy.

UNESCO RESOLUTION ON EAST JERUSALEM

Israel freezes ties with the UN body

AGENCIES
Israel has suspended cooperation with UNESCO a day after the United Nations cultural body passed a resolution that sharply criticised Israeli policies around the al-Aqsa Mosque compound, while supposedly rejecting Jewish ties to the holy site in occupied East Jerusalem. The resolution condemned Israel for restricting Muslims access to the site, and for aggression by police and soldiers. It also referred to Israel as an "occupying power". Israel and the United States denounced the decision. "Israel is furious about this resolution by UNESCO because it essentially nullifies any Jewish connection to the al-Aqsa Mosque compound," said Al Jazeera's Bernard Smith, reporting from the Occupied East Jerusalem. "The resolution does assert Jerusalem is holy to the three monotheistic religions - Judaism, Islam and Christianity - but there is a special section in the resolution that says al-Aqsa Mosque compound is sacred only to Muslims. "It does not mention that it is sacred to Jews as well. This is what infuriated the Israeli government." Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement on Thursday that UNESCO has lost its legitimacy by adopting this resolution.