

NEWS IN brief

100 Indian fishermen caught by Pakistan

PTI, Ahmedabad
Over 100 Indian fishermen were allegedly apprehended and around 18 of their boats seized by Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) off Jakhau coast in Gujarat's Kutch district, a fishermen association official said on Sunday. The development comes after the Indian Coast Guard captured nine Pakistani nationals along with a fishing boat off Jakhau coast in Kutch on Friday.

Iran to sanction 15 US companies

AFP, Tehran
Iran yesterday said it will impose sanctions on 15 US companies for supporting Israel's "terrorist actions" as part of reprisals for the increasing pressure being announced by Washington lawmakers. The decision, which is largely symbolic since the firms do not do business with Iran, come two days after the US announced new sanctions against groups and individuals that it accuses of collaborating with Iran's weapons programme.

Hamas shuts Gaza crossing

AFP, Gaza City
Hamas shut the crossing between the Gaza Strip and Israel on Sunday after blaming the Jewish state for the assassination of one of its officials in the Palestinian enclave. It did not give details on the reason behind the closure, though there was speculation authorities may be seeking to prevent those responsible for the killing from leaving.

Indian forces kill 2 terrorists in J&K

PTI, Srinagar
Two terrorists were killed yesterday when they tried to ambush a police party that included three officers of the rank of superintendent of police in south Kashmir. The incident happened at Padgampora. Police retaliated and killed the terrorists.



An Iraqi man sits amid the rubble of destroyed houses in Mosul's al-Jadida area yesterday, following air strikes in which civilians have been reportedly killed during an ongoing offensive against the Islamic State (IS) group. Iraq is investigating air strikes in west Mosul that reportedly killed more than 200 civilians in recent days, a military spokesman said.

Pakistan starts building fence along Afghan border

AL JAZEERA ONLINE
Pakistan's military has begun fencing parts of its disputed northwestern border with Afghanistan to curb the movement of Pakistani Taliban fighters it says are based on Afghan soil, according to a statement. Fencing started in the Pakistani Bajaur and Mohmand districts, which border the eastern Afghan provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar, Pakistan's Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa announced on Saturday. Pakistan shares a mountainous and largely unpatrolled 2,500km-long border with Afghanistan, which the latter disputes. Previous attempts to fence or formally demarcate the border have met with resistance from Kabul. In June, at least four people were killed when Pakistan and Afghanistan exchanged artillery fire over Pakistan building a formal border control complex at Torkham, the main border crossing between the two countries. The clash marked a continuing souring of relations between the South Asian neighbours. Pakistan sealed all border crossings with Afghanistan in mid-February, during a wave of attacks on Pakistani soil that killed at least 130 people. Those attacks were followed by frequent skirmishes between Pakistani Taliban fighters and Pakistan's military along the border in the Mohmand, Khyber and other districts. The border closure remained in place for more than a month, leaving thousands of visitors and tons of perishable goods stranded on either side of the border. The Pakistan-Afghanistan border has been at the centre of accusations hurled by both governments against each other. Pakistan and Afghanistan accuse each other of sheltering elements of the Pakistani and Afghan Taliban respectively.

Lam wins HK leadership

Vows to heal rifts; activists decry Beijing's 'interference' in race
AFP, Hong Kong
Hong Kong's new leader Carrie Lam yesterday pledged to mend political rifts after winning a vote dismissed as a sham by democracy activists who fear the loss of the city's cherished freedoms. Hong Kong has been semi-autonomous since it was handed back to China by colonial ruler Britain in 1997. But 20 years on, there are serious concerns Beijing is disregarding the handover agreement designed to protect Hong Kong's way of life. The former career civil servant was chosen as the next chief executive by a mainly pro-China committee and was widely seen as Beijing's favourite to head the city. Critics say she will deepen divisions in the city, but Lam said she wanted to unify Hong Kong. "Hong Kong, our home, is suffering from quite a serious divisiveness and has accumulated a lot of frustrations. My priority will be to heal the divide," she said after her victory. Lam pledged to uphold Hong Kong's semi-autonomous "one country, two systems" set-up and protect its core values, including freedom of expression and an independent judiciary. Asked how she would address concerns that Beijing is tightening its grip, she said there was "no difference" between the Hong Kong government and Chinese authorities' views in terms of safeguarding the city's status and freedoms. It was the first leadership vote since mass "Umbrella Movement" rallies calling for fully free elections in 2014 failed to secure reforms, and came after a turbulent term under current chief executive Leung Chun-ying. Leung, who is seen by opponents as a Beijing puppet, will step down in July after five years in charge. Lam, who will be the city's first woman leader, was formerly his deputy. An emotional Lam, 59, bowed to supporters as it was announced she had won comprehensively with 777 votes against 365 for John Tsang, seen as a more moderate establishment figure. The third and most liberal candidate, retired judge Woo Kwok-hing, received just 21 votes. Analysts said Lam's definitive win showed public opinion was not a major factor for Beijing. "Loyalty trumps everything else," said Willy Lam, of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He said the new government and Beijing would want to steer clear of the "hot potato" of political reform for fear of igniting further conflict. Lam has said she wants to focus instead on social issues, including housing.



LONDON TERROR ATTACK

UK targets WhatsApp encryption

AFP, London
The British government yesterday said that its security services must have access to encrypted messaging applications such as WhatsApp, revealing it was used by the killer behind the parliament attack. Khalid Masood, the 52-year-old Briton who killed four people before being shot dead in a rampage in Westminster on Wednesday, reportedly used the Facebook-owned service moments before the assault. Home Secretary Amber Rudd told Sky News it was "completely unacceptable" that police and security services had not been able to crack the heavily encrypted service. "You can't have a situation where you have terrorists talking to each other -- where this terrorist sent a WhatsApp message -- and it can't be accessed," she said. Police said Saturday that they still do not know why Masood, a Muslim convert with a violent criminal past, carried out the attack and



said it was likely that he acted alone, despite a claim by the Islamic State group. US authorities last year fought a legal battle with tech giant Apple to get it to unlock a smartphone used by the perpetrator of a terror attack in California. The FBI's own experts ended up breaking into the device. Germany this month proposed fining social networks such as Facebook if they fail to wipe illegal hate speech from their sites. Meanwhile Google has faced a boycott by companies whose adverts appeared alongside extremist content on its internet platforms, particularly its video-sharing site YouTube.



A man waves traditional daggers, or Jambiyas, as he attends with supporters of the Houthi movement and Yemen's former president Ali Abdullah Saleh a rally to mark two years of the military intervention by the Saudi-led coalition, in Sanaa, Yemen, yesterday.

Thousands protest against corruption across Russia

Opposition leader Alexei Navalny among dozens arrested
AFP, Moscow
Thousands of Russians yesterday demonstrated across the country to protest at corruption, defying bans on rallies which were called by prominent Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny -- who was arrested along with at least 130 others. Navalny called for the protests after publishing a detailed report this month accusing Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev of controlling a property empire through a shadowy network of non-profit organisations. The report has been viewed over 11 million times on YouTube but Medvedev has so far made no comments on the claims. Navalny, who has announced his intention to run for president in next year's election, has been rallying supporters in major Russian cities in recent weeks. In Moscow, Navalny called on supporters to walk along the main Tverskaya street, and people congregated on the nearby squares lined with dozens of police vans and rows of riot officers as a police helicopter hovered overhead. Police detained Navalny shortly after 2:00pm as he was walking to the protest, putting him in a police minibus, and the surrounding crowd briefly tried to block it from driving off shouting "Shame!" and "Let him out!" Moscow police estimated protest turnout at seven or eight thousand people. Police moved to detain protesters to clear the square, with some using truncheons and pepper spray apparently dispersed in the crowd, AFP correspondents observed.



Biden says he regrets not running to be president

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK
Joe Biden has expressed regret about deciding not to run for president and insisted he would have been able to beat Donald Trump if he had been the Democratic candidate. The former Vice President to Barack Obama ruled out running for office in 2016 in a race that would have seen him pitted against Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders. This was partly prompted by his son's brain cancer diagnosis and subsequent death. "I had planned on running for president and although it would have been a very difficult primary, I think I could have won," Biden said at a speech at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York, late on Friday night. "I don't know, maybe not. But I thought I could have won. I had a lot of data and I was fairly confident that if I were the Democratic Party's nominee, I had a better than even chance of being president." But Biden said he did not regret the time he was able to spend with his son before he died. "But do I regret not being president? Yes," he said. "I was the best qualified."

US strike kills key al-Qaeda leader

AFP, Washington
A senior al-Qaeda commander linked to major attacks in Pakistan including the bombing of a luxury hotel and an assault on a cricket team has been killed in a drone strike in Afghanistan, Washington said Saturday. Qari Yasin, a member of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan group (Pakistani Taliban), was killed on March 19 in Afghanistan's eastern Paktika province, the Pentagon said. "The death of Qari Yasin is evidence that terrorists who defame Islam and deliberately target innocent people will not escape justice," Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said in a statement. Yasin, who went by several aliases including Ustad Aslam, was accused of plotting the September 20, 2008 bombing on the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad that killed dozens of people, including two US servicemen. He was also said to have been behind a 2009 attack on a bus carrying the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore that killed six Pakistani police officers and two civilians, and wounded six members of the team. According to official Pakistani 'Most Wanted' lists he was also behind failed attempts to kill former President Pervez Musharraf in 2003 and former Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz in 2004.

Germans in tiny Saarland vote in big test for Merkel

REUTERS, Berlin/saarbruecken
Germans in the small western state of Saarland yesterday voted in a regional election that could deliver an upset to Chancellor Angela Merkel and hurt her prospects of winning a fourth term in September's national election. The election carries significance as it is the first of three regional votes ahead of the Sept 24 federal vote and as such it offers an opportunity for the parties to build - or lose - momentum in their quest to prevail at national level. The vote is the first electoral test for the Social Democrats under their new leader, Martin Schulz, who has re-energised the centre-left party with a promise to tackle inequality that is resonating with many voters tired of Merkel. Like federal Germany, Saarland is currently governed by a 'grand coalition' of Merkel's conservatives and the Social Democratic Party (SPD). But polls suggest a left-leaning 'red-red-green' alliance of the SPD, the far-left Linke party and the environmentalist Greens - or even a 'red-red' coalition if the Greens fail to win enough votes - could emerge after the vote. A three-way leftist alliance in Saarland, which has some 800,000 eligible voters, would be the third at state level after Berlin and the eastern region of Thuringia and could give impetus to a similar format at national level. With the Linke and Greens both on 8 percent nationally, the poll suggested the three left-leaning parties could form a federal coalition government after September's election. Under Merkel, Germany has enjoyed economic growth and high employment, but the gap between rich and poor has grown. Schulz is trying to win over dissatisfied working class voters with a message of social justice.



OHIO NIGHTCLUB SHOOTING

One killed, 14 hurt

AFP, Washington
One person was killed and 14 others wounded early yesterday in a shooting at a packed nightclub in Cincinnati, Ohio, police reported. Police said earlier there were at least two shooters, but in a subsequent tweet assistant Cincinnati police chief Paul Neudigate said there was "only one reported shooter at this time, still investigating if others involved." "Motive is still unclear but there are no indications this incident is terrorism related," he said. The Cincinnati Police Department said there were "15 gunshot victims, one deceased" and that its "homicide unit and all available resources are being utilized." "We are in the middle of a very horrific situation that occurred at the nightclub with multiple victims," Neudigate said earlier. He said hundreds of people were in the Cameo nightclub when the shooting broke out, causing many to flee the scene. It was not immediately clear where the shooter was but no one has been taken into custody, Sergeant Eric Franz told ABC News, describing the aftermath as a "large and complicated homicide scene." He said police were interviewing multiple witnesses to the shooting, which broke out at around 1:00am (0500 GMT).