

NEWSIN brief

Turkey seeks jail terms for journalists

AFP, Istanbul
Turkish prosecutors said yesterday they were seeking jail terms of up to 43 years for 19 journalists and employees of opposition daily Cumhuriyet, in a case that has intensified concerns over press freedom under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The journalists are accused of membership of a banned "terror group" and aiding outlawed organisations.

Duterte fires minister after 'corruption' row

AFP, Manila
Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said yesterday he had fired his interior minister for corruption as signs of infighting rocked his government. "It's corruption," Duterte said about the sacking of Ismael Sueno, who supervised the president's war on drugs that has left thousands dead.

EU denounces Israel's WB demolitions policy

REUTERS, Jerusalem
The European Union has expressed frustration with Israel over its demolition of Palestinian homes in the occupied West Bank, with the EU ambassador taking the unusual step of reading out a joint statement denouncing the practice. The issue came to a head after Israel issued demolition orders last month against 42 homes in east of Jerusalem.

Thai junta secures \$58m for Chinese tanks

AFP, Bangkok
Thailand's government yesterday agreed to buy 10 tanks from China for \$58 million in the latest defence spending by a junta with a taste for Chinese hardware. The military is replacing its US-made M41 rolling stock with Chinese VT-4 tanks, as it continues to upgrade its equipment three years after seizing power from a civilian government.



Syrians flee following a reported government air strike on the rebel-controlled town of Hamouria, in the eastern Ghouta region on the outskirts of the capital Damascus yesterday.

RUSSIAN METRO BLAST

St Petersburg train driver hailed as hero

AFP, Saint Petersburg
Alexander Kaverin, the driver of the Saint Petersburg metro train hit by a deadly explosion, has become an unlikely hero in a tragedy that has claimed 14 lives and injured dozens.



The 50-year-old Russian appeared stunned in the spotlight of state television, describing how he had driven the train through to the next station despite smoke from a blast in one of its carriages. "I followed the instructions," Kaverin said. "We have already had explosions and smart people developed smart instructions." "At that moment there was no time to be afraid, it was time to work," he added. Kaverin said he had learned that in such situations, he needed to drive the train all the way to the next station. Russian investigators on Monday said Kaverin had made the "right decision" by not stopping the train between two stations, which enabled quick evacuation of injured passengers. The head of Saint Petersburg's metro, Vladimir Garyugin, said that Kaverin had been a "hero." "In emergency situations people become heroes," Garyugin said of the driver. "It would have complicated the (evacuation) task to carry people out" of the tunnel, he added. Kaverin, who has worked at the Saint Petersburg metro for 15 years, will be rewarded for his actions, along with another unnamed employee who discovered a second bomb and called in experts to defuse it, said Garegin.

US, Egypt will fight terror

Trump tells Sisi in landmark meeting in White House; two leaders agree on importance of advancing peace throughout ME

REUTERS, Washington
US President Donald Trump moved to reset US relations with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on Monday after the prior Obama administration's strained ties, giving him firm backing and vowing to work together to fight Islamist militants.

years after Sisi, then a general, overthrew President Mohamed Mursi in mid-2013 after mass protests against Mursi's rule. Mursi, a Muslim Brotherhood member, had been elected the previous year. The one-on-one meeting between Trump and Sisi, followed by a separate

counter this evil ideology." The joint statement said Trump and Sisi agreed that Islamist militants could not be defeated solely by military force. It said the leaders "agreed on the necessity of recognizing the peaceful nature of Islam and Muslims around the world."



gathering with top aides, showed how intent the new US president is on rebooting the bilateral relationship and building on the strong connection the two presidents established when they first met in New York last September. "I just want to say to you, Mr President, that you have a great friend and ally in the United States, and in me," Trump said. Sisi said he appreciated that Trump has been "standing very strong ... to

While Trump noted the United States and Egypt "have a few things" they do not agree on, he made no public airing of US concerns about human rights in Egypt. Rights groups have called for the release of Aya Hijazi, an Egyptian-American who works with street children and was arrested in May 2014 on human trafficking charges. Hijazi has been held in custody for 33 months in violation of Egyptian law, which states that the maximum period for pre-trial detention is 24 months. A senior administration official said the subject of Hijazi did not come up in the meeting with Trump, Sisi and their advisers, but said the detention was an issue of concern and a case that was being watched closely by the Trump administration.

'Two years is not enough'

German FM pours cold water on timeline for EU talks; May defends her claim on divorce deal

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK
Theresa May has been forced to defend her claim that it will be possible to seal both a divorce deal and a new trade relationship with the EU in two years, despite Germany's Foreign Minister casting doubt on it. May was asked about comments made by Sigmar Gabriel in an interview with The Independent, but said it was "sensible" to ensure there is a clear idea of future arrangements by March 2019.

between us and the European Union will be. "That's the sensible thing, it's the pragmatic way to look at this, and I believe that's what we will do." The Prime Minister stopped short of claiming that a new trade deal could be signed within the two-year period however. Asked by The Independent whether it is possible to seal both deals in the two years, Gabriel questioned the feasibility of what has now become a key premise of May's approach to Brexit. "We are as keen as the UK is to complete both agreements as soon as possible," he said. "First, we have to get things right on the orderly withdrawal, then we will want to talk as soon as possible about our future relationship and get as far as we can within the next two years. "However, I don't want to speculate on time frames at a time when negotiations have not even started yet. Both sides must recognise that an agreement on a wide-ranging partnership will be quite a laborious endeavour," he added.

BREXIT TRANSITION



Sigmar Gabriel

Macron, Le Pen tied in first round vote

REUTERS, Paris

Centrist French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron and far-right rival Marine Le Pen are tied on 25 percent of the first-round election vote, although Macron would go on to beat Le Pen in the second round, a Le Monde/Cevipof opinion poll said. The poll, which surveyed 14,300 people between March 31 and April 2, one of the biggest samples among the many regular surveys, said Macron would beat Le Pen in the May 7 second-round vote by 61 percent to 39 percent. Conservative candidate Francois Fillon, whose campaign has been hit by allegations that he paid his wife, a son and daughter hundreds of thousands of euros of public money for minimal work, would come third in the first-round. That would eliminate him at that stage

FRENCH ELECTION POLL



along with the other remaining candidates. It said Fillon would get 17.5 percent of first-round votes, unchanged from the last poll in mid-March, while far-left candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon was seen getting 15 percent, up 3.5 points and ahead of Socialist candidate Benoit Hamon on 10 percent. Voter certainty rose sharply compared with the previous survey, with 64 percent of those surveyed sure of their decision, up 5 points. Le Pen voters were the most certain, with 82 percent sure of their choice, up 4 percentage points. Fillon's certainty score was up 7 points at 75 percent, Macron's up 9 points to 61 percent, Melenchon's unchanged at 60 percent, and Hamon's up 5 points at 52 percent. All 11 candidates were due to face each other in a televised debate yesterday evening.



A relocated rhino charges a Nepalese forestry and technical team after being released as part of a relocation project in Chitwan National Park, South of Kathmandu, on Monday. Conservationists captured a rare one-horned rhinoceros in Nepal as part of an attempt to increase the number of the vulnerable animals.



S Africa's top trade union tells Zuma to go

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa's powerful trade union federation Cosatu, a key coalition partner of the ruling ANC, yesterday called for embattled President Jacob Zuma to resign following a deeply unpopular cabinet reshuffle. Union general secretary Bheki Ntshahintshali said it was time for Zuma to "step down" after his purge last week of cabinet critics, which included the removal of the respected former finance minister, Pravin Gordhan. Gordhan's sacking contributed to a credit ratings downgrade to junk status on Monday by Standard & Poor's as pressure on Zuma grew over his move to oust opponents within the cabinet. "We no longer believe in his leadership abilities," Ntshahintshali said at a media briefing. "The president was careless and reckless," he said, adding that the downgrade would "cost the country a lot". Cosatu, along with the South African Communist Party and the ANC, was at the forefront of the effort to dislodge white-minority rule in South Africa that led to non-racial elections in 1994. It has openly backed Zuma's deputy, Cyril Ramaphosa, who led Cosatu during the anti-apartheid struggle, to succeed him in 2019 when the president must stand down.

West Bengal jails may open for private firms

TNN, Kolkata

In a bid to cut down costs, the West Bengal prison department is planning to allow its inmates to work for private companies. The department is also planning to launch its own company - "Jail Inc" and is also in talks with company law experts and chartered accountants to implement the vision. "At a time 20-25 thousand jail inmates reside in different correctional homes in the state, the state government has to bear all the cost," Prison Minister Abanimohan Joardar said on Monday. "If this initiative gets a green signal from the government

then it will be of great help," he added. Joardar also said that through this initiative not only the inmates can earn monthly salary but the government exchequer will also benefit. The trend of introducing the jail inmates to a better living started with Alokanda Roy's initiative Balmiki Pratibha. After that regular training has been arranged for them to hone their skills in painting, sculpturing. Not only that they are also learning fashion designing. Now the aim is to bring all this under one roof and give it a corporate look.

MOSUL OFFENSIVE

IS used 17 car bombs to help Baghdadi flee

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of IS and self-declared Caliph, escaped from the siege of Mosul two months ago when the road to the west was briefly re-opened by a fierce counter attack by IS fighters, according to a senior Kurdish official. "IS used 17 suicide car bombs from Mosul and some of their units from Syria to clear the road leading out of Mosul for a few hours," said Fuad Hussein, chief of staff to Kurdish President Masoud Barzani, in an interview with The Independent. He says that he and other Kurdish leaders believe that IS would only carry out such an elaborate operation, in which they suffered heavy casualties, in order to bring al-Baghdadi to safety. The escape took place after the fall of east Mosul and before the Iraqi security forces began their final attack on IS-held west Mosul on 19 February. Hussein says that IS "brought 300 of their fighters from Syria and it was a very fierce fight."

India snubs China

Says no 'artificial controversy' should be created around Dalai Lama's visit

PTI, New Delhi

Amid persistent Chinese objections to the Dalai Lama's trip to Arunachal Pradesh, India said on that no "artificial controversy" should be created around the Tibetan spiritual leader's visit. External affairs ministry also asserted that the government has clearly stated on several occasions that the Dalai Lama is a revered religious leader, who is deeply respected by the Indian people. "No additional colour should be ascribed to his religious and spiritual activities and visits to various states of India," the ministry said in a release. "India respects 'one-China' policy. We also expect China's reciprocal attitude," Riji said.

The government, therefore, urges that no "artificial controversy" should be created around his present visit to Arunachal Pradesh, it said. "India never interferes in the internal affairs of China. We expect that China should not interfere in our internal matters either," Riji said and added that the people of Arunachal Pradesh desire to maintain a good neighbourly relationship. A wary China has kept a close watch ahead of the Dalai Lama's visit, which has been rescheduled due to bad weather conditions in the Himalayan region. Earlier, the Chinese foreign ministry had warned India that the visit of the Dalai Lama to Arunachal Pradesh, which Beijing claims as part of Tibet, will cause "serious damage" to bilateral ties.

