

NEWSIN brief

Drone kills 5 Qaeda suspects in Yemen

Five suspected members of Yemen's al-Qaeda branch were killed yesterday in what local authorities said was a US drone strike east of the capital Sanaa. The early morning strike targeted a car in central Marib province that had been transporting arms from Yakla in Baida province, a military official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

8 military personnel die in Cuba plane crash

A plane crash in western Cuba on Saturday killed eight military personnel, the ministry in charge of the island's armed forces said. The Russian-made AN-26 transport aircraft crashed in a mountainous region of western Artemisa province, killing all eight on board, state media said. An investigating has been launched to find the cause of the accident.

Trump invites Duterte to Washington for talks

US President Donald Trump on Saturday invited this Philippine counterpart to Washington in a "friendly" call in which the leaders discussed Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs and regional security threat posed by North Korea, the White House said. The time of the tour was not revealed.

11 killed as Pak van plunges into ravine

At least 11 people including women and children were killed when an overloaded passenger van plunged into a ravine in Pakistan's mountainous northwest yesterday, officials said. The accident happened at the Lowari Top pass to the scenic Chitral valley.



A protester in a costume depicting Trump sets an Earth on a tee as he holds a golf club while joining demonstrators moving down Pennsylvania Avenue during a People's Climate March, to protest US President Donald Trump's stance on the environment, in Washington, US, on Saturday.

'Not in a different galaxy' over Brexit

Says British PM Theresa May

British Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday denied she was "in a different galaxy" after European Union leaders were reportedly dismayed by her Brexit negotiating demands at a meeting this week. May told European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and chief negotiator Michel Barnier that a detailed potential trade deal needed to be drawn up before Britain would agree to pay its EU divorce bill, according to the Sunday Times. According to the paper, Juncker told German Chancellor Angela Merkel that May was "in a different galaxy," adding that it looked more likely now that no deal would be reached at all. May told BBC's Andrew Marr Show that she stood by her earlier comment that "no deal was better than a bad deal", and rejected claims that her negotiating stance was unreasonable. "I'm not in a different galaxy. What this shows is that there are going to be times when these negotiations are going to be tough," she said. EU leaders unanimously backed a tough Brexit strategy at a summit on Saturday, demanding a "serious response" from Britain on the rights of European citizens before trade talks can start. The prime minister surprised the political establishment earlier this month by announcing a snap general election for June 8, calling it the "most important election our country has faced in our lifetime."

Conflict can wipe out 'large part of humanity'

Fears Pope, calls for N Korea talks

Pope Francis said Saturday he worries that rising tensions between the United States and North Korea could lead to a wide military conflict that would wipe out a "large part of humanity." He called for renewed diplomacy using third-party intermediaries and for the United Nations to take a lead role in de-escalating tensions. The Pope, while returning to Italy from Egypt, took several questions from reporters and one asked him what he would say to world leaders at this critical moment. Francis said in Italian that the situation "has heated up too much. I always appeal for a solution through diplomatic means." The pontiff, who has spoken of a "piecemeal third world war" for several years, said increased conflict would be devastating. "It's piecemeal but the pieces are getting larger, and are concentrated in places which were already hot," Pope Francis said. "Today a wider war would destroy, I won't say half of humanity, but a large part of humanity and culture. It would be terrible. I don't think humanity today could bear it." Diplomacy is the best response in these times, he said. "I think the United Nations has the duty to resume its leadership, because it has been watered down a bit," he added. He suggested using a nation like Norway to facilitate talks between Pyongyang and Washington, but said there are many that could fill the role.



Military drills ratchet up tensions

N Korea threatens to sink US nuclear submarine as US, S Korea toughen stance

South Korea and the United States wrapped up their annual large-scale military drills yesterday, but continued a separate joint naval exercise that has triggered dire threats from nuclear-armed North Korea. Tensions on the Korean peninsula have been running sky-high for weeks, with signs that the North might be preparing a long-range missile launch or a sixth nuclear test -- and with Washington refusing to rule out a military strike in response. The massive "Foal Eagle" drill, which the defence ministry in Seoul said was ending as scheduled yesterday, involved around 20,000 South Korean and 10,000 US troops. Another annual joint exercise known as "Key Resolve" ended last month. Both play out scenarios for a conflict with North Korea, but Seoul and Washington insist they are purely defensive in nature, despite Pyongyang's claims that they are provocative rehearsals for invasion. Their conclusion normally signals a period of relative calm in North-South tensions, but this year the situation looks set to remain highly volatile. US President Donald Trump has warned of a possible "major conflict" while Pyongyang has carried out a series of failed missile tests, including one on Saturday, and a massive live-fire military exercise. Through state media, North Korea has threatened to attack the Carl Vinson aircraft carrier group, and a state-sponsored website yesterday also warned of a possible strike against a US nuclear-powered submarine despatched to the area. "The moment the USS Michigan tries to budge even a little, it will be doomed to face the miserable fate of becoming an underwater ghost without being able to come to the surface," the Pyongyang's show of defiance included a failed missile test on Saturday that came just hours after US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson warned the UN Security Council of "catastrophic consequences" if the international community -- most notably China -- failed to pressure the North into abandoning its weapons programme. North's propaganda website Urminzokkiri said. In excerpts of an interview with CBS News released on Saturday, Trump said the United States and China would "not be happy" with a nuclear test but gave no other details. The Chinese leadership will not be happy either, he added. Asked if "not happy" signified "military action," Trump answered: "I don't know. I mean, we'll see."



TENSIONS IN KOREAN PENINSULA
Trump warns Pyongyang over nuclear test; praises China's role
US security adviser reaffirms US will pay for THAAD



An Indian child jumps into a decorative pool in gardens surrounding the India Gate monument on a hot day in New Delhi, yesterday.

Asean gives Beijing a pass on S China Sea dispute

Southeast Asian countries took a softer stance on South China Sea disputes during a weekend summit, according to a statement issued yesterday, which went easy on China by avoiding tacit references to its building and arming of its manmade islands. A chairman's statement of the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean) was released about 12 hours after the summit ended, and dropped references to "land reclamation and militarization" included in the text issued at last year's meeting, and in an earlier, unpublished version seen by Reuters on Saturday. The outcome follows what two Asean diplomats on Saturday said were efforts by Chinese foreign ministry and embassy officials to pressure Asean chair the Philippines to keep Beijing's contentious activities in the strategic waterway off Asean's official agenda. It also indicates four Asean members who the diplomats said had wanted a firmer position had agreed to the statement's more conciliatory tone. China is not a member of the 10-member bloc and did not attend the summit but is extremely sensitive about the content of its statements. It has often been accused of trying to influence the drafts to muzzle what it sees as dissent and challenges to its sweeping sovereignty claim. The statement also noted "the improving cooperation between Asean and China", and did not include references to "tensions" or "escalation of activities" seen in earlier drafts and in last year's text. It noted, without elaborating, some leaders' concerns about "recent developments" in the strategic, resource-rich waterway. The softened statement comes as the current ASEAN chairman, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, seeks to bury the hatchet with China after years of wrangling over its maritime assertiveness.



Famed Swiss climber dies on Everest

Swiss climber Ueli Steck, one of the most feted mountaineers of his generation and famed for his speed ascents of iconic Alpine routes, has died on Everest, officials said. "Today morning, he had an accident on the Nuptse wall and died. It seems he slipped," Ang Tsering Sherpa, head of the Nepal Mountaineering Association, told AFP. Steck, 40, was on Everest to acclimatise before attempting to summit the world's tallest peak in May, using a never before climbed route. Everest and neighbouring peak Nuptse share a common ridge, which is where Steck apparently slipped and fell, according to a government official. "He skidded off about 1,000 metres from (Mt Nuptse) camp two early morning on Sunday. Other climbers ascending Everest saw him and asked for his rescue," said Dinesh Bhattarai, director general at the Department of Tourism. The accomplished alpinist sought to pioneer new routes throughout his mountaineering career, earning the nickname "the Swiss Machine" for his solo record ascents in the Alps. Steck made global headlines in 2013 when he and two other Western climbers traded blows with a group of furious Nepali guides over a climbing dispute on Mount Everest.

Iraqi commander vows to complete ops in May

A top Iraqi commander expects to dislodge Islamic State from Mosul in May despite resistance from militants in the densely populated Old City district. The battle should be completed "in a maximum of three weeks", the Iraqi army's chief of staff, Lieutenant General Othman al-Ghanmi, was quoted as saying by state-run newspaper al-Sabah yesterday. A US-led international coalition is providing air and ground support for the offensive in Mosul, the largest city in northern Iraq, which fell to hardline Sunni Muslim fighters in June 2014. Islamic State has lost most of the city's districts since the offensive began in October and is now surrounded in the northwestern districts, including the historic Old City centre. The United Nation believes that up to

Turkey fires 3,900 more officials

Turkey on Saturday expelled more than 3,900 people from the civil service and military as threats to national security, in the second major purge since President Tayyip Erdogan was granted sweeping new powers. Erdogan won those concessions in a referendum in mid-April, which rights groups and some Western allies believe has brought the country, a Nato-member and European Union candidate, closer to one-man rule. The expulsions affected prison guards, clerks, academics, employees of the religious affairs directorate and 1,200 members of the armed forces including nearly 600 officers. They were fired for suspected links to "terrorist organisations and structures presenting a threat to national security", according to a decree in the Official Gazette. On Wednesday more than 9,000 police were suspended and another 1,000 detained for alleged links to the network of the US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom Ankara blames for a coup attempt last July in which he has denied all involvement.

India's 'gift' to neighbours South Asia Satellite to enter orbit on May 5

Reinvigorating his 'neighbourhood first' foreign policy, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday announced India will launch the South Asian communication satellite on May 5 and said it will go a long way to address the region's economic and developmental priorities. Addressing the nation through his monthly radio programme "Mann Ki Baat", he said "the capacities of this satellite and the facilities it provides will go a long way in addressing South Asia's economic and developmental priorities. Natural resources mapping, tele-medicine, the field of education, deeper IT connectivity or fostering people to people contact - this satellite will prove to be a boon in the progress of the entire region." He said the launch of the satellite "is an important step by India to enhance co-operation with the entire South Asia... it is an invaluable gift. This is an appropriate example of our commitment towards South Asia. Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka have agreed to join the Rs 450-crore South Asia satellite project. The satellite will be launched from Sriharikota island in southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. The South Asia Satellite is reported to have 12 Ku band transponders with a coverage extending all over the South Asia region which India's neighbours can make use of to enhance communications. Each country will receive access to at least one transponder through which they could beam their own content and programming. However, each country has to develop its own ground infrastructure technology. India has also offered to extend assistance in this regard.



FIGHT AGAINST IS IN WEST MOSUL

State from its stronghold of Raqqa, 40km downstream. In a statement it circulated on social messaging sites, the SDF, a group of Kurdish and Arab militias, said it had captured six more districts of Tabqa and distributed a map showing that Islamic State now controlled only the northern part of the town, next to the dam.