

# NEWSIN brief

## Five Thais charged with royal defamation

Five men were charged with violating Thailand's draconian royal defamation law for sharing Facebook posts written by an exiled dissident academic, a human rights lawyer said yesterday. The case is the largest known lese majeste prosecution so far under Thailand's new King Maha Vajiralongkorn.

## Maldives police arrest 2 over blogger killing

Maldives police on Wednesday announced the arrest of two potential suspects in the killing of a liberal blogger last month that sparked international outrage and demands for a foreign-backed investigation. Yameen Rasheed, 29, who poked fun at the nation's politicians on his blog, had his throat slit at the stairwell of his apartment on April 23.

## Two dead in US college shooting

A gunman on Wednesday shot and killed a woman on a college campus in the Dallas area, before committing suicide, police said, two days after a deadly stabbing at another college in Texas. Adrian Victor Torres, 21, shot and killed Janeera Nickol Gonzalez, 20, in a common study area at North Lake College in Irving, before taking his own life in a locker room shower.

## Facebook hires 3,000 to review content

Facebook Inc will hire 3,000 more people over the next year to speed up the removal of videos showing murder, suicide and other violent acts, in its most dramatic move yet to combat the biggest threat to its valuable public image. The hiring spree comes after users were shocked by two video posts in April showing killings in Thailand and US.



Indian army soldiers take position during an operation against suspected rebels in Turkwangam Lassipora in Shopian south of Srinagar yesterday.

# Major anti-terror ops underway in J&K

Thousands of soldiers and paramilitaries were yesterday engaged in a huge anti-militant operation in Indian-administered Kashmir, where armed rebels have repeatedly attacked government forces in recent weeks. Police said government forces had surrounded at least 20 villages in the drive, launched early yesterday in Shopian district in the volatile south of the disputed Himalayan region. "It is an unprecedented operation," deputy inspector general of police S P Pani told AFP. "It is impossible to capture the militants, but we hope there will be contact (exchange of fire) with them in the course of the day." Suspected militants are frequently killed in shoot-outs with government forces in Kashmir, but are only rarely captured alive. Witnesses said hundreds of residents came out onto the streets in two villages, Sug and Tarkwangan, during the search operations and threw stones at the soldiers. One said soldiers had attacked private homes in his village with sticks and rocks. "It was scary. Many houses were damaged," the villager told AFP by phone, requesting anonymity. Witnesses said army helicopters were hovering above the area as the search operations were going on. Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since the end of British rule in 1947, but both claim the territory in its entirety. Rebel groups have fought for decades the roughly 500,000 Indian soldiers deployed in the Himalayan territory, demanding independence or a merger of the entire territory with Pakistan.

# China wants to be good neighbour with N Korea

China said yesterday it wants to be good neighbours with North Korea, after the isolated country's state news agency published a rare criticism of Chinese state media commentaries calling for tougher sanctions over the North's nuclear programme. The United States has urged China, North Korea's only major ally, to do more to rein in the North's nuclear and missile programmes, which have prompted an assertive response from the Trump administration, warning that an "era of strategic patience" is over. A commentary carried by North Korea's KCNA news agency referred to recent commentaries in China's People's Daily and Global Times newspapers, which it said were "widely known as media speaking for the official stand of the Chinese party and government". In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said China's position was consistent and clear. "China's position on developing friendly, good-neighbourly relations with North Korea is also consistent and clear," Geng told reporters, in response to a question about the KCNA commentary. China was unwaveringly devoted to the denuclearisation of the peninsula and maintaining peace and security and resolving the issue through talks, Geng added. The WeChat account of the overseas edition of the People's Daily, in its reaction to the KCNA piece, said it was clear that North Korea's nuclear and missile activities were a threat to China. Geng on Wednesday said "We again urge all relevant parties to remain calm and exercise restraint, stop irritating each other, work hard to create an atmosphere for contact and dialogue between all sides, and seek a return to the correct path of dialogue and negotiation as soon as possible." US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said on Wednesday that Washington was working on more sanctions against North Korea if Pyongyang takes steps that merit a new response.

**TENSIONS IN KOREAN PENINSULA**  
US reading new sanctions if needed: Tillerson  
Pyongyang media carry out rare criticism of Beijing

## Afghan warlord returns to Kabul after 20 yrs

A former warlord branded the "Butcher of Kabul" returned to the Afghan capital yesterday, met by uneasy residents two decades after leaving the city where he stands accused of killing thousands of people. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a former prime minister, has returned to mainstream political life after his dormant Hezb-i-Islami militant group signed a peace deal with the government last September which sparked revulsion from human rights groups. Hekmatyar earned his bloody nickname for laying siege to Kabul while during the 1992-1996 civil war, bombarding it with rockets that inflicted some of the worst damage in nearly 40 years of conflict, destroying one-third of the city and killing thousands of civilians.

## 35 killed in Iran coal mine explosion

A coal mine explosion that struck northern Iran killed at least 35 people, semi-official news agencies reported yesterday, as rescuers worked a second day to reach those trapped inside after the blast. The Fars, Mehr and Tasnim news agencies all carried similar reports yesterday morning. State media did not immediately report on the rise in the death toll in the disaster Wednesday at the Golestan province mine. In a live broadcast by state television, Sadeq Ali Moghadam, the provincial director general of disaster management, said 22 dead bodies had been recovered. The province will observe three days of mourning after the explosion, Iranian state television reported. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei expressed deep sorrow over the "heartbreaking" and "disastrous" incident at a coal mine in Golestan province, which claimed the lives of a number of workers and entrapped several others, state TV's website reported yesterday. Khamenei said, "It is required that all possible measures are taken to rescue the stranded people." Meanwhile, President Hassan Rouhani issued an order demanding his government use all available resources to rescue those still trapped, according to the state-run IRNA news agency. Provincial spokesman Ali Yazerloo said the blast happened at 12:45 p.m. local time (0945 GMT) Wednesday. Several officials blamed the explosion on an accumulation of methane gas and said it was affecting rescue efforts.

## Over half of Rohingya girls who fled became child brides: UN

More than half of Rohingya Muslim girls who fled violence in western Myanmar ended up becoming child brides, according to a United Nations survey that also showed widespread domestic abuse. Since 2012, violence and communal clashes in Myanmar's Rakhine state have forced more than 168,000 of the ethnic Muslim Rohingya minorities to flee, including a rising number of women and girls, according to the UN refugee agency UNHCR. In a survey of 85 Rohingya women and girls who have fled to India, Malaysia and Indonesia, UNHCR found about 60 percent married before the age of 18. The average age that they gave birth to their first child was 18. One in every three women and girls also said they were victims of domestic violence, according to UNHCR's 2016 Report on Mixed Movements in Southeast Asia. "We generally counsel them about their options and, if they agree, refer them to a partner or shelter that cares for vulnerable women," UNHCR Asia spokeswoman Vivian Tan told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. The growing number of Rohingya women and girls fleeing persecution in Buddhist-majority Myanmar has raised concern that they may be vulnerable to human trafficking, sexual exploitation and child marriage, activists say. UNHCR said the interviews with the 85 women in its latest report were to assess "continuing vulnerabilities" they face. There are about 8,000 Rohingya women and girls aged between 14 and 34 in India, Indonesia and Malaysia - the countries where the study was carried out late last year.

# Suu Kyi visits Pope Francis

The Vatican and Myanmar established full diplomatic relations yesterday in the latest step in the former pariah Asian state's rehabilitation by the international community. The Vatican said it would appoint a papal nuncio to Yangon and that the country would open an embassy at the Vatican, formally wrapping up an accord approved by Myanmar in March. The move came as Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi met Pope Francis on the latest leg of a European tour overshadowed by her country's treatment of the Rohingya, a persecuted minority Muslim group in the 90-percent Buddhist country. Pope Francis has spoken out in the past on behalf of the Rohingya while Nobel peace prize winner Suu Kyi has come under fire for not condemning repression of them by her country's security forces. Kuu Yi and a small group of officials spent around 20 minutes in yesterday's audience with the leader of the world's 1.3 billion Catholics. Francis presented the former dissident with a bronze medalion with an image of a blooming desert. Suu Kyi had talks on Wednesday with Italian foreign minister Angelino Alfano and with EU and Belgian officials in Brussels on Tuesday. She is also due to visit Britain. In Brussels she reiterated her opposition to a decision by the UN human rights body to send a fact-finding mission to Myanmar to investigate allegations of murder, rape and torture against the Rohingya in Rakhine state.



South Korean presidential candidate Moon Jae-in (C) of the Democratic Party waves to his supporters during an election campaign in Goyang city, northwest of Seoul, yesterday. South Korea will hold a presidential election on May 9 to replace former President Park Geun-hye, who was ousted from office in March over a corruption and abuse-of-power scandal.

## 'Heaviest woman' leaves India for UAE

An Egyptian once believed to be the 'world's heaviest woman' left an Indian hospital yesterday for the United Arab Emirates where she will continue treatment following drastic weight-loss surgery, doctors said. Eman Ahmed Abd El Aty weighed roughly 500 kilograms when she arrived in Mumbai in February, but has shed an astonishing 323 kilograms since undergoing a series of medical procedures. With her weight now standing at 176.6 kilograms, she will begin a year-long course of physiotherapy at VPS Burjeel hospital in Abu Dhabi, her doctors in Mumbai said. "We have arranged for a hydraulic stretcher from Italy for Eman's journey and she will have doctors, paramedics and nurses with her during the journey," Sanet Meyer, director of medevac at VPS Burjeel, told AFP. Abd El Aty was put on a special liquid diet in India to reduce her weight enough so that doctors could perform bariatric surgery. The stomach-shrinking bypass procedure is increasingly common in India, which has a growing problem with obesity, particularly in urban areas. She had not left her home in Egypt's Mediterranean port city of Alexandria for two decades until she arrived in India on a specially-modified Airbus plane in February. Her family told doctors that as a child she was diagnosed with elephantiasis, a condition that causes the limbs and other body parts to swell, leaving her almost immobile.

## Turks arrested in Malaysia 'for funding IS'

Two Turkish nationals arrested in Malaysia are being held on suspicion of funding the Islamic State group, Kuala Lumpur said yesterday, after a rights organisation raised concerns of pressure from Ankara for the detentions. Malaysia's anti-terrorism police unit had been investigating the two men, along with a number of others, for "spreading, influencing and funding" IS activities, deputy prime minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said. Officers had a raft of communications between Turgay Karaman and Ihsan Aslan, Zahid told reporters. News of the arrests broke Wednesday, when national police chief tweeted that the men were being held "because they threatened the security of Malaysia."

# Dust storm hits Beijing

Official data from the Beijing government showed average readings of small breathable particles known as PM 2.5, a major component of China's air quality index, had risen to 630 micrograms per cubic metre in parts of the city by yesterday morning, though it dropped slightly later in the day. The World Health Organization recommends concentrations of just 10 micrograms. The city government said the storm would affect the capital until this afternoon when air quality would improve as a high pressure system moved in. State television said old people and children should stay inside to avoid the worst effects. The dust storm underlines the environmental problems China faces, added to concern about choking smog from coal powered power plants and factories that also periodically covers much of north China. A dust storm enveloped a swathe of northern China yesterday dragging down air quality and visibility and prompting warnings for children and old people to stay indoors. At least 48 flights were cancelled, including six international routes in Asia and Russia, according to the Beijing Capital Airport's website. Spring is China's dust-storm season, when winds whip across the Gobi Desert picking up fine sand and dust particles and dumping them along a belt of heavily populated land further south. The official People's Daily said the worst of the storm would be concentrated on a remote area along the Mongolian border, but that Beijing and locations as far away as the remote northeast of China would be affected for at least 24 hours.



# China makes world's first quantum computer

Chinese scientists have successfully built the world's first quantum computing machine that is 24,000 times faster than its international counterparts and may dwarf the processing power of existing supercomputers. The scientists announced their achievement at a press conference in the Shanghai Institute for Advanced Studies of University of Science and Technology of China. Quantum computing could in some ways dwarf the processing power of today's supercomputers. The manipulation of multi-particle entanglement is the core of quantum computing technology and has been the focus of international quantum computing research. Recently, Pan Jianwei of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Lu Chaoyang and Zhu Xiaobo of the University of Science and Technology of China and Wang Haohua of Zhejiang University set international records in quantum control of the maximal numbers of entangled photonic quantum bits and entangled superconducting quantum bits. Pan said quantum computers could, in principle, solve certain problems faster than classical computers. Despite substantial progress in the past two decades, building quantum machines that can actually outperform classical computers in some specific tasks - an important milestone termed "quantum supremacy" - remains challenging.