

NEWS IN brief

Next round of Syria talks at end Oct
AFP, Astana
Fresh talks on the Syria conflict will be held in Astana at the end of the month, Kazakhstan said yesterday, as part of a Moscow-led push to end the six-year conflict. The two-day meeting will be the seventh round of negotiations this year that are co-sponsored by Russia, Iran and Turkey.

Seven dead in India firework factory blast
AFP, New Delhi
An explosion at an illegal firecracker factory in eastern India killed seven workers and injured nine others in the hours before yesterday's Dussehra festival, officials said. Firework use hits peak each India during the Hindu festival but New Delhi authorities have tried to restrict sales to tackle mounting pollution.

Fire destroys landmark hotel in Myanmar
AFP, Yangon
A Japanese man was killed when a fire tore through a luxury teak wood hotel in Yangon Myanmar's largest city on Wednesday, destroying an iconic resort popular with foreign visitors. Hundreds of firefighters tried to quell the blaze but were unable to stop the flames from consuming Kandawayi Palace Hotel.

Boko Haram kills 33 soldiers in Nigeria
AFP, Kano
At least three soldiers were killed when Boko Haram fighters ambushed a military convoy in northeast Nigeria, security and civilian sources told AFP yesterday. The attack happened on Wednesday near the town of Damboba, is the second in a week.



Demonstrators chant during a "NoMuslimBanEver" rally and march to protest discriminatory policies that unlawfully target and hurt American Muslim and immigrant communities across the country in Washington, DC, on Wednesday. Trump has battled with the courts since the first version of the travel ban, and in June finally gained Supreme Court approval to implement an amended second version for 90 days, which ended last month.

MALTESE JOURNALIST KILLING

Sons dismiss reward, tell PM Muscat to quit

AFP, Valletta
The sons of a murdered Maltese journalist yesterday dismissed Prime Minister Joseph Muscat's offer of a reward to help find her killers and called for him to quit.
Muscat has ruled out quitting and has vowed to bring those responsible for killing a reporter he has described as his "greatest adversary" to justice, with the help of FBI investigators.
On Wednesday Muscat told parliament that the government would put up a "substantial and unprecedented reward," for information leading to a conviction over Monday's car bombing killing of anti-corruption campaigner Daphne Caruana Galizia.
Her sons revealed that the government was putting up a million euros, but said they would not bow to pressure to endorse the idea.
"We are not interested in a criminal conviction only for the people in government who stood to gain from our mother's murder to turn around and say that justice has been served," they said.
"The Prime Minister asked for our endorsement. This is how he can get it: show political responsibility and resign."
Caruana Galizia had used her widely-read blog to highlight numerous cases of suspected corruption, including several scandals implicating Muscat's inner circle which had left her facing a string of legal suits.
Her sons, Matthew, Andrew and Paul, said Muscat should resign because he had worked to "cripple our mother financially and dehumanise her so brutally and effectively that she no longer felt safe walking down the street."

US hails India partnership

Accuses China of undermining norms needed for global stability; Beijing urges Washington to abandon biased views

AGENCIES
Secretary of State Rex Tillerson called Wednesday for the US and India to expand strategic ties. He also pointedly criticised China, which he accused of challenging international norms needed for global stability.
Tillerson's remarks on relations between the world's two largest democracies, ahead of his first trip to South Asia as secretary of state, risked enflaming Washington to one Asian power while alienating another.
Tillerson said the world needed the US and India to have a strong partnership. He said the two nations share goals of security, free navigation, free trade and fighting terrorism in the Indo-Pacific, and serve as "the eastern and western beacons" for international rules based order which is increasingly under strain.
Both India and China had benefited from that order, but Tillerson said India had done so while respecting rules and norms, while China had "at times" undermined them. To make his point, he alluded to China's island

building and expansive territorial claims in seas where Beijing has long-running disputes with Southeast Asian neighbours, reported AP.
"China's provocative actions in the South China Sea directly challenge the international law and norms that the United States and India both stand for," Tillerson said in an address at the

Tillerson says China's actions in S China Sea challenge intl'l law
Calls for Pakistan to take decisive action against terror groups



Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank.
He also accused China of economic activities and financing that saddles developing countries in the region with enormous debt.
Beijing responded yesterday by saying that America was biased, reported AFP.

"We hope the US side can look at China's development and role in the international community in an objective way, and abandon its biased views of China," foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang said during a regular press briefing.
"Based on the purposes and principles of the UN charter, we will firmly uphold multilateralism, yet we will also firmly safeguard our own rights and interests."
Tillerson said US and India were leading regional efforts on counterterrorism. He said they were "cross-screening" known and suspected terrorists, and later this year will convene a new dialogue on terrorist designations. In July, the US sanctioned Hizbul Mujahideen, a Pakistan-based rebel group that fights against Indian control in the divided Himalayan region of Kashmir.
Tillerson called Wednesday for Pakistan "to take decisive action against its terror groups based within their own borders that threaten its own people and the broader region."

Pak court indicts ex-PM, daughter in graft case

REUTERS, Islamabad
A Pakistani anti-corruption court yesterday indicted ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his daughter over allegations linked to ownership of London properties, opening a trial that had called the former leader jailed.
The Sharifs have called the corruption proceedings against them a conspiracy, hinting at intervention by the powerful military, but opponents have hailed it as a rare example of the rich and powerful being held accountable.
Sharif, 67, resigned in July after the Supreme Court disqualified him from holding office over an undeclared source of income, but the veteran leader maintains his grip on the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party.
Judge Bashir Ahmad of the court that tries cases registered and investigated by an anti-graft body, National Accountability Bureau (NAB), indicted Sharif, his daughter Maryam Sharif and her husband, Muhammad Safdar. They all pleaded not

guilty.
Maryam and Safdar were present in court, but Sharif, who was prime minister twice in the 1990s, a representative while he tends to his aging wife in Britain as she undergoes cancer treatment.
Maryam said in the court that the charges were unfounded and baseless.
"This will go down in history as a travesty of justice," she said.

Outside the court, Maryam again hinted at military interference in the judicial process by saying the trial was "a repeat of 1999", the year her father was toppled in a military coup led by former army chief Pervez Musharraf.



It is not clear if he was comparing the trial to the coup, or subsequent corruption accusations and investigations that Musharraf ordered into Sharif.
Sharif's disqualification stemmed from the Panama Papers leaks in 2016 that appeared to show that his daughter and two sons owned offshore holding companies registered in the British Virgin Islands and used them to buy posh flats in London.

Bangladesh's birth most significant event of life

Ex-Indian president Pranab Mukherjee tells TOI

TOI CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi
Former Indian President Pranab Mukherjee has said in an interview published yesterday that the birth of an independent Bangladesh remains the "most significant event" in his long public life.
Asked about any incident that stands out in his long political life, Mukherjee told The Times of India "TOI" that in his mind it is 12 or 13 crore, the birth of a nation in Bangladesh in 1971.
He said he still remembers that Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister, made a short statement in both Houses of parliament saying "I am happy to inform the House that Pakistan army has surrendered to the joint command of the Indian army and the Bangladesh Mukti Bahini and now Dhaka is the free capital of free Bangladesh. This is the most significant event since I joined public life."

It was a pronouncement on the two-nation theory, Mukherjee said "That will be an oversimplification of the whole issue because the two-nation theory was challenged at the very time of its pronouncement. It (the partition of Pakistan) once again established that there religion cannot be the basis of a State. There are many other factors: religion, language, customs, culture and social systems."
Asked if he thought that after the 1971 war, India could have settled the Kashmir issue to its satisfaction, the former president said Indira Gandhi "took the wisest decision by declaring the unilateral ceasefire."
"If India had not declared unilateral ceasefire, there would have been expansion of the conflict. It would have engulfed both India and Pakistan because America was bent on protecting the unity of western Pakistan after they had lost the hope on eastern Pakistan. Soviet Russia also did not want the war to be extended," Mukherjee said.



In this handout photograph released by the Indian Press Information Bureau yesterday, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi takes part in Diwali celebrations with military personnel stationed near the Line of Control in the Gurez Valley near the Pakistan border.

Blast pirates out of the sea: Duterte

AFP, Manila
Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday said he would ask the leaders of Indonesia and Malaysia to "blast" pirates out of regional waters and would refocus security efforts to solve the problem.
"The Abu Sayayf, a kidnapping-for-ransom network that has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group, has been kidnapping dozens of sailors on fishing vessels and cargo barges, prompting warnings the region could become the 'next Somalia,'" Duterte's remarks came two days after he declared the southern city of Marawi "liberated from terrorists' influence" following a nearly five-month battle against militants including Abu Sayayf members.
"Blast them out of the seas to keep our shipping lanes open and safe. They have committed enough piracy, there enough money collected from ransoms," Duterte said in a speech at a forum for Southeast Asian diplomats and leaders in Manila.
"I just finished the war in (Marawi) then perhaps I can refocus the entire armed forces to deal with this problem once and for all."
Pro-IS gunmen occupied parts of Marawi, the largest Catholic Philippines, on May 23 in what Duterte said was a bid to establish a Southeast Asian caliphate there.
"The Philippines' longest urban conflict has claimed more than 1,000 lives and displaced 400,000."

Huge cave found on moon: scientists

AFP, Tokyo
Scientists at Japan's space agency have discovered a huge moon cave that could one day house a base that would shelter astronauts from dangerous radiation and wild temperature swings, officials said yesterday.
Data taken from Japan's SELENE lunar orbiter has confirmed the existence of the 50 kilometre (31 miles) long and 100 metre wide cavern that is believed to be lava tube created by volcanic activity about 3.5 billion years ago.
The major finding was published this week in US science magazine Geophysical Research Letters.
"We know about these locations that were thought to be lava tubes... but their existence has not been confirmed until now," Junichi Harayama, a researcher at the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, told AFP yesterday.
The underground tunnel, located under an area called the Marius Hills, would help protect astronauts from huge amounts of ionising and damaging radiation that they would be exposed to on the moon's surface, he added.
"We haven't actually seen the inside of the cave itself... exploring it will offer more details," Harayama said.
The announcement comes after Japan in June revealed ambitious plans to put an astronaut on the Moon around 2030.
That was the first time the agency had said it aimed to send an astronaut beyond the International Space Station.

PREVENTABLE ILLNESSES OF UNDER FIVE

15,000 die each day: UN

Pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria top the list of child killers
AFP, New Delhi
Despite a dramatic fall in the infant mortality rate, 15,000 children aged under five still die each day around the world from preventable diseases, a UN report said yesterday.
The report warned that because African and South Asian countries are lagging behind in giving better treatment, more than 60 million young children will die between now and 2030 from illnesses that can be cured.
In 2016, an estimated 5.6 million children died before reaching their fifth birthday, said the UN Children's Fund (Unicef), the World Health Organisation and the World Bank in the report.
"That marks a huge fall from 12.6 million deaths in 1990. But the agencies said the 15,000 under-five deaths each day is still an intolerably high number."

Insect populations fall by 75pc: study

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK
The number of flying insects has plummeted by 75 percent in the last 25 years, according to a study that suggests we are approaching an "ecological Armageddon".
The implications for humanity are profound, with insects providing an essential role for life on earth as pollinators of plants and prey for larger animals.
Although it was known species such as bees and butterflies were declining, scientists were left shocked by the drop in numbers across nature reserves in Germany.
While no single cause was identified, the widespread destruction of wild areas for agriculture and the use of pesticides are considered likely factors. Climate change was also cited as playing a potential role.
David Gibson, professor of life sciences at the University of Sussex and the study's co-author, said "Insects make up about two-thirds of all life on Earth but there has been some kind of horrific decline."
"We are not making vast tracts of land inhospitable to most forms of life, and are currently on course for ecological Armageddon. If we lose the insects then everything is going to collapse."
The researchers were able to rule out weather events and changes in the landscape of nature reserves as possible causes.