

## NEWSIN brief

### India to build 5,500 bunkers along LoC

PTI, Jammu

Authorities in Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir have initiated the process of constructing over 5,500 underground bunkers and 200 community halls to help border dwellers facing the brunt of Pakistani shelling and firing. The project, targeted to be completed in the current financial year at a cost of Rs 153.60 crore, has already been approved by the state government.

### 3 Ukrainian soldiers killed in clashes

AFP, Kiev

Three Ukrainian servicemen were killed in fighting with pro-Russian rebels in the east of the country as fighting intensified in the region, Kiev said yesterday. More than 10,000 people have been killed since the Moscow-backed insurgency broke out in April 2014 following Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.

### Air strike kills 4 in Yemen's Sanaa

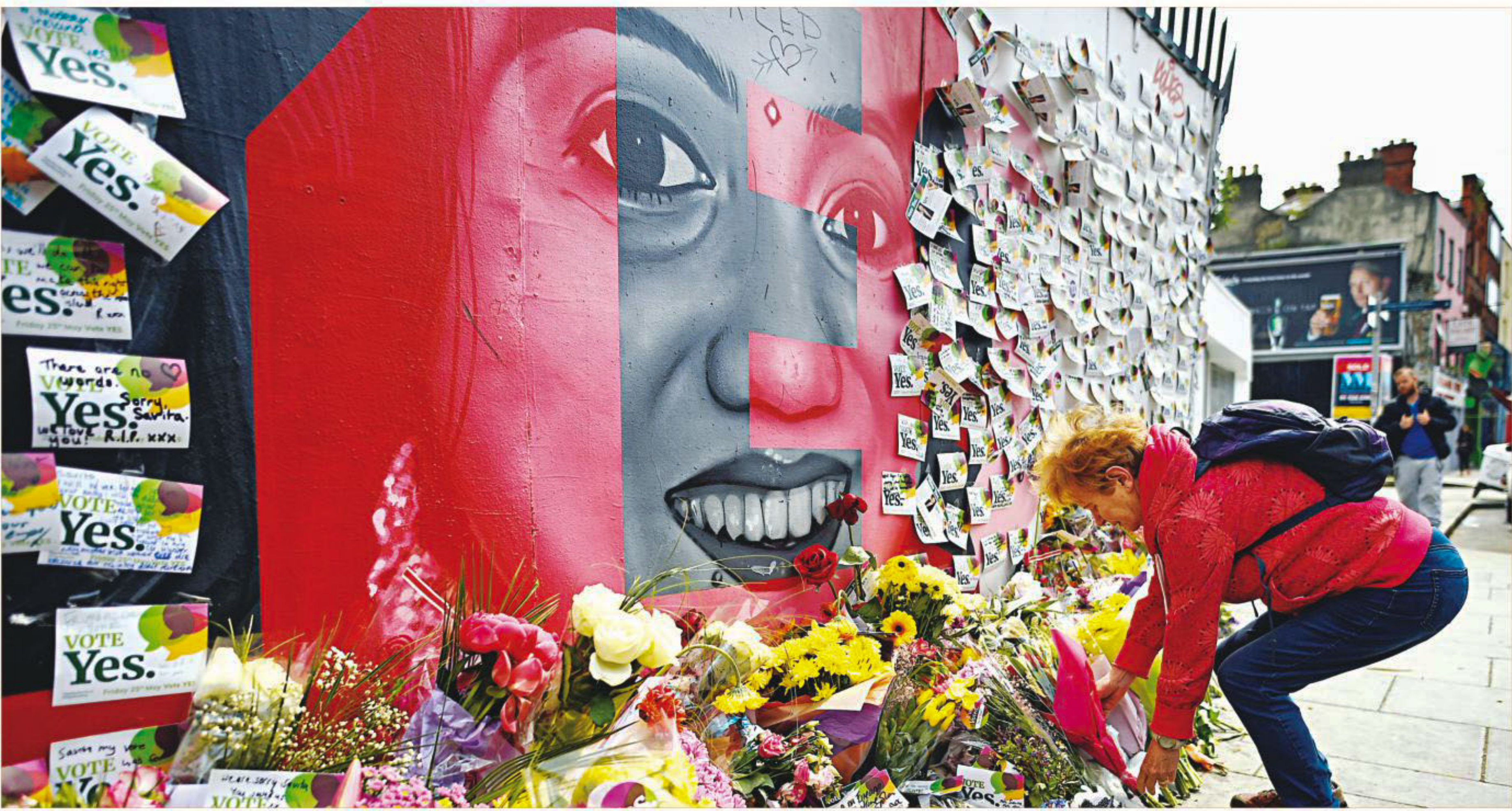
AFP, Sanaa

A woman was among four people killed in an air strike that hit a petrol station in Yemen's rebel-held capital late Saturday, medical sources said. Eleven people were wounded in the air strike on Sanaa, they said. It was not immediately clear who had carried out the strike.

### Colombia vote poses test for peace deal

AFP, Bogota

Colombians was to vote yesterday in a divisive presidential election likely to impact on the government's fragile peace deal with the former rebel movement FARC. Conservative front-runner Ivan Duque has vowed to rewrite an accord he sees as too lenient on a group that waged a decades-long war of terror on Colombians, before it transformed into a political party.



Messages are left at a memorial to Savita Halappanava a day after an Abortion Referendum to liberalise abortion laws was passed by popular vote, in Dublin, Ireland, yesterday. Savita, a 31-year-old dentist of Indian origin, died at University Hospital Galway in Ireland in 2012 following a septic miscarriage after she was denied an abortion despite asking for one several times. Her death had triggered a massive debate in the country over the issue. The Irish Parliament voted to legalise abortion in cases of medical emergencies as well as the risk of suicide in July 2013. Saturday's result paves the way for introduction of a much more liberal law. PHOTO: REUTERS

## US warships in show of force

Sail near Paracel Islands; move likely to anger Beijing ahead of possible Trump-Kim meet; Pentagon says ops routine

REUTERS, Washington

Two US Navy warships sailed near South China Sea islands claimed by China yesterday, two US officials told Reuters, in a move likely to anger Beijing as President Donald Trump seeks its continued cooperation on North Korea.

The operation was the latest attempt to counter what Washington sees as Beijing's efforts to limit freedom of navigation in the strategic waters.

While this operation had been planned months in advance, and similar operations have become routine, it comes at a particularly sensitive time and just days after the Pentagon uninvited China from a major US-hosted naval drill.

The US officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Higgins guided-missile destroyer and the Antietam, a guided-missile cruiser, came within 12 nautical miles of the Paracel Islands, among a string of islets, reefs and shoals over which China has

territorial disputes with its neighbors. The US military vessels carried out maneuvering operations near Tree,



Lincoln, Triton and Woody islands in the Paracels, one of the officials said.

Trump's cancellation of a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has put further strain on US-China ties

amid a trade dispute between the world's two largest economies.

Satellite photographs taken on May 12 showed China appeared to have deployed truck-mounted surface-to-air missiles or anti-ship cruise missiles at Woody Island.

Earlier this month, China's air force landed bombers on disputed islands and reefs in the South China Sea as part of a training exercise in the region, triggering concern from Vietnam and the Philippines.

Neither China's foreign nor defence ministries immediately responded to a request for comment.

China's claims in the South China Sea, through which about \$5 trillion in shipborne trade passes each year, are contested by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.

The United States has said it would like to see more international participation in freedom-of-navigation operations in the South China Sea.

### IS ATTACK IN SYRIA

## Russian soldiers among 35 killed

AFP, Beirut

At least 26 Syrian regime forces and nine Russian fighters were killed in an Islamic State group attack earlier this week in Syria's eastern desert, a monitor said yesterday.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the jihadists had targeted a group of Syrian and allied Russian fighters near the town of Mayadeen in Deir Ezzor province on Wednesday.

"There were 35 pro-government forces killed, including at least nine Russians. Some of those Russian nationals were government troops, but not all of them," said Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman.

The remaining 26 were all Syrian forces, he told AFP. The Russian military is backing Syria's army with air strikes and troops, but there are also widespread reports of private Russian mercenaries on the ground.

The defence ministry in Moscow yesterday said four Russian servicemen had been killed in clashes with militants in Deir Ezzor.

It did not give a date or precise location, but the Observatory said it was the same incident as the IS attack near Mayadeen.

The ministry said the fighting lasted around an hour and left 43 militants dead.

## 'Stop us if you can'

Imran Khan eyes victory as Pakistan sets date for polls

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani cricket star-turned-politician Imran Khan's party yesterday vowed to oust the country's "corrupt" rulers, as the nuclear-armed state announced it will hold general elections on July 25.

The poll will bring to a head political tensions that have been building since former prime minister Nawaz Sharif was ousted by the Supreme Court on corruption charges and later barred from politics for life.

Khan is hoping to achieve a years-long dream of leading the country as its prime minister, and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party is the main challenger to the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), which was headed by Sharif until his ban.

PTI leaders have said they are confident they will be able to defeat the PML-N.

"The Pakistani nation... can see the dawn of a new Pakistan, which will not be ruled by the corrupt," the party said in a statement posted Sunday on Twitter along with a

graphic that read "Mafia's Game Over".

"Stop us if you can," it said in another tweet.

The current government, led by Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, is expected to hand over power to a caretaker administration in the coming days.

PTI has vowed to fight corruption, presenting itself as a polar opposite of what it calls status-quo politicians.

Since he was ousted, Sharif and the PML-N have become increasingly vocal in their confrontation with the country's powerful military establishment and the courts, claiming there is a conspiracy afoot to reduce the party's power.

Sharif was the 15th prime minister in Pakistan's seven-decade history -- roughly half of it under military rule -- to be removed before completing a full term.

The country saw its first ever democratic transfer of power following elections in 2013, which the PML-N won by a landslide.

Despite the numerous court rulings against the PML-N, the party has won a string of recent by-elections, proving it will likely remain a powerful force.



Palestinian relatives of 28-year-old Islamic Jihad member Abdul Haleem al-Naqa mourn during his funeral in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza strip yesterday, after he was killed by Israeli tank fire targeting an observation post earlier in the day east of Rafah. Three members of the militant group died in the shelling. PHOTO: AFP

## Qatar bans Saudi goods from stores

AFP, Doha

Qatar has ordered shops to remove goods originating from a group of Saudi Arabian-led countries which a year ago imposed a wide-ranging boycott on the emirate, Doha officials said Saturday.

A directive from the economy ministry ordered shops to immediately strip shelves of products from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt.

Inspectors will visit stores to ensure they comply with the order, the ministry said.

The government will also try and stop products such as Saudi dairy goods from entering Qatar via a third country.

Qatar's Government Communications Office (GCO) said it was trying to "protect the safety of consumers".

The order comes just days before the anniversary of a bitter Gulf crisis.

Since June 5 last year, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt have cut all relations with Qatar, accusing it of financing terrorist groups and having close ties with Iran.

The countries subsequently imposed a trade and diplomatic boycott on Qatar, which rejects the charges and says the countries are seeking regime change in Doha.

The row has forced isolated Qatar, which previously relied on its Gulf neighbours, to look elsewhere for food imports, including Turkey, Morocco and Iran.

Many such imports enter the country via ports such as Kuwait and Oman.

It is through these ports, and also via individuals, that goods from the boycotting countries manage to get in to Qatar, said a source with knowledge of the situation.

"Businessmen from the blockading countries are trying to go around the blockade... by using third parties," said the source.

## Spain rescues more than 500 migrants at sea

AFP, Madrid

Spain's maritime rescue service yesterday said it had rescued 532 migrants who were attempting the perilous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea from north Africa this weekend.

Rescue boats intercepted 239 migrants travelling in eight small boats off Spain's southern coast yesterday, a day after 293 migrants were pulled from nine vessels.

Three of the boats sank right after the migrants were plucked from them due to their "poor state", the maritime service said in a Twitter message.

According to the International Organisation for Migration, more than 22,400 people arrived in Spain by sea last year, nearly triple the number for 2016. Some 223 people died along the way.

### DECISION TO SEPARATE CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT PARENTS

## 'Cruellest' US policy draws anger

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Anger is mounting in the United States at the government's policy of separating children from migrant and refugee parents who are caught crossing the US-Mexico border.

The administration of US President Donald Trump has taken a tough stance on what it deems to be unlawful crossings of the US-Mexico border and has vowed to prosecute the refugees and migrants who do so.

"If you cross the border unlawfully... then we will prosecute you," Attorney General Jeff Sessions said earlier this month. "If you're smuggling a child, then we're going to prosecute you, and that child will be separated from you, probably, as required by law," he added. "If you don't want your child separated, then don't bring them across the border illegally. It's not our fault that somebody does that."

This "zero-tolerance" policy reverses previous precedent that placed those detained in immigration proceedings while their asylum claims were examined or deportation proceedings finalised. Families were often kept together in shelters, or

released to await their hearings.

As a result of the recent arrests, thousands of children have been separated from parents who have been detained and placed in the care of sponsors, but officials say some 1,500 are unaccounted for, according to figures first reported by The New York Times and Associated Press last month.



Thousands of children separated from parents; 1500 missing

The scale of that number has sparked outrage on social media, especially amid reports that some of the children had fallen into the hands of human traffickers.

"This [policy] is without a doubt one of the cruellest, most inhumane decisions President Trump has proposed so far," said Democrat

legislator Joe Crowley, earlier in May, adding: "Shame on him and shame on any Republican who doesn't immediately speak out against it."

Weeks later, there has been no let up in anger towards the Trump administration, and many are demanding to know the whereabouts of the unaccounted children.

The Twitter hashtag #WhereAreTheChildren trended in the US overnight on Saturday and drew thousands of tweets.

"Ripping young children away from their mothers is already beyond horrifying. But having some of the children sold into human trafficking is the greatest injustice this administration has ever done. It is a crime against humanity," wrote Dr Eugene Gu, a frequent Trump critic.

Author Maggie Smith said: "My kids are asleep upstairs in their beds. It makes me physically ill to imagine having them pulled from me, going months without seeing them, not knowing if they are safe or even alive. This is, simply, evil."

There is no evidence to suggest undocumented migrants are more likely to be involved in criminal activity. To the contrary, studies show that they are less likely to break the law.

## For saving the turtles

AFP, Hong Kong

More than two thousand volunteers hit the beach on an outlying island of Hong Kong for a mass rubbish clean up yesterday as environment campaigners warned plastic is killing sea turtles and other wildlife.

There has been increasing concern over the amount of rubbish in Hong Kong waters which washes up on its numerous beaches. Authorities and environmentalists have pointed the finger at southern mainland China as the source.

Last year, a massive palm oil spillage from a ship collision in mainland Chinese waters clogged Hong Kong beaches.

But there is evidence that Hong Kong is also to blame. In 2016, local media reported that syringes and medical waste washed ashore from clinics in the city.

Yesterday's clean-up took place on Shek Pai Wan, near Sham Wan -- known as "Turtle Cove" - on Hong Kong's Lamma Island.

Sham Wan is one of the few regular sea turtle nesting grounds in southern China and is closed to visitors from June to the end of October, but campaigners said no nests have been recorded in the area in the past six years.

"Turtles aren't making it to the beach to lay eggs," said Aquameridian campaigner Sharon Kwok, adding that turtles are dying, ending up tangled in nets, hit by high-speed boats and ships, and most often, because of trash ingestion.

"Turtles are mistaking plastic bags for jellyfish and eating them," said Kwok, explaining they are incapable of throwing



them up as they have barbs in their mouths.

Campaigners are urging the government to expand the "restricted area" around Sham Wan, extending it beyond the dry-sand beach which is already protected to the rocky shoreline as well as the shallow waters of the bay.

"I hope that they can expand the restricted area further along the sea and the survival rate of turtles will be higher," said 13-year-old volunteer Caitlin Chiu.