

NEWSIN brief

India test-fires nuclear capable Agni-5 missile

PTI, Odisha

India yesterday successfully test-fired its indigenously developed nuclear-capable Long Range Ballistic Missile Agni-5, which has a strike range of 5,000 km, off the Odisha coast. The surface-to-surface missile was launched from launch pad-4 of the Integrated Test Range at Dr Abdul Kalam Island in the Bay of Bengal at 9.48am, defence sources said.

Assad to meet Kim in North Korea

AFP, Seoul

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said he plans to visit North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un, Pyongyang's state media reported yesterday, potentially becoming the first head of state to meet Kim inside the isolated country. Pyongyang and Damascus have maintained warm ties for decades and reportedly shared a military relationship for some years, including during the ongoing Syrian civil war.

Cattle rustlers kill 23 in northern Nigeria

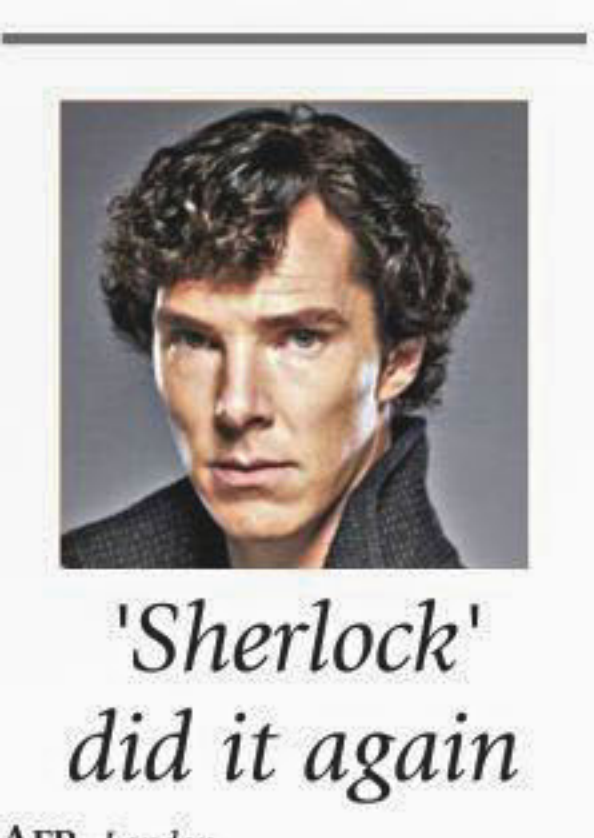
AFP, Kano

Cattle thieves have killed 23 people in Nigeria's Zamfara state which has been battling cattle rustling and kidnapping in recent months, a government official said late Saturday. Armed bandits on motorcycles invaded Zanoka village in the state on Friday, opening fire on residents and burning homes, sources said.

US, Nato launch war games in the Baltic

AFP, Vilnius

Some 18,000 troops from 19 mostly Nato countries began annual US-led military exercises in Poland and the Baltic states on Sunday to boost combat readiness on the alliance's eastern flank as it faces an increasingly assertive Russia. The eighth Saber Strike manoeuvres will run until June 15.



'Sherlock' did it again

AFP, London

Hollywood actor Benedict Cumberbatch channelled his inner Sherlock Holmes by leaping to the defence of a cyclist under attack by four men, according to reports. The 41-year-old -- famous for playing Sherlock in the BBC detective series and superhero Doctor Strange -- jumped from a car to rescue a food delivery rider working for Deliveroo, according to tabloid The Sun over the weekend.

The man had been cornered by a group of four and was being beaten up when Cumberbatch passed in an Uber vehicle on Marylebone High Street in central London with his wife, Sophie Hunter, 40. They witnessed the cyclist being hit over the head with a bottle, prompting Cumberbatch to jump into the fray, according to the report.

"Benedict was courageous, brave and selfless. If he hadn't stepped in the cyclist could have been seriously injured," the driver of the car, Manuel Dias, told the newspaper. "Here was Sherlock Holmes fighting off four attackers just round the corner from Baker Street," home to the fictional crime character created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. "They tried to hit him but he defended himself and pushed them away. He wasn't injured. Then I think they also recognised it was Benedict and ran away." "He asked the rider how he was and when he said, 'I'm OK' Benedict just hugged him."



People cool off in a canal on a hot day in Muradnagar on the outskirts of New Delhi, India, yesterday. This heatwave-like condition is likely to continue till monsoon rains hit the capital around June 20.

PHOTO: REUTERS

US-N KOREA SUMMIT IN SINGAPORE

A bumpy road ahead

Warns Mattis, rules out sanctions relief for Pyongyang without steps to denuclearisation

REUTERS, Singapore

US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said yesterday North Korea will receive relief only after it takes clear and irreversible steps to end its nuclear programme, adding it would be a bumpy road to a summit between US and North Korean leaders.

The comments sought to address concern the United States may be rushing to strike a breakthrough in the unprecedented summit between the two leaders after US President Donald Trump put the meeting back on track for June 12 in Singapore.

"We can anticipate, at best, a bumpy road to the (negotiations)," Mattis said at the start of a meeting with his South Korean and Japanese counterparts on the sidelines of Shangri-la dialogue in Singapore.

"We will continue to implement all UN Security Council resolutions on

North Korea. North Korea will receive relief only when it demonstrates verifiable and irreversible steps to denuclearisation," Mattis added.

Trump said on Friday he would hold the meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on June 12 in a



dramatic turn of course in the high stakes diplomacy aimed at ending Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programme.

Eight days after cancelling the summit citing Pyongyang's "hostility", Trump announced the decision to go ahead with

the meeting after hosting Kim's envoy in the White House, saying he expected "very positive result" with North Korea.

North Korea's nuclear weapons programme has been a source of major security tensions that persisted despite a series of UN and US sanctions and it has also demonstrated advances in ballistic missile technology that experts believe now threatens the US mainland.

North Korea has conducted six nuclear tests starting in 2006 but has declared it would no longer need such tests. In May, it invited foreign journalists to witness what it said was the demolition of its nuclear test site.

The Trump administration wants the North to "denuclearize", meaning to get rid of its nuclear arsenal, in return for relief from economic sanctions.

But North Korea's leadership is believed to regard nuclear weapons as crucial to its survival and has rejected unilaterally disarming.

Indo-Pak clash along border ends brief truce

Two border guards killed, seven civilians injured

AFP, Srinagar

India and Pakistan exchanged fire across the Kashmir border yesterday, officials said, killing two guards and ending a days-old agreement to honour a ceasefire in the disputed region.

Seven civilians were also injured at Aknoor, near the contested territory's border with Pakistan, in a barrage that claimed the lives of two Indian border officers.

India's Border Security Force said its troops returned fire after Pakistani border rangers in Sialkot fired into Kashmir without provocation in the early hours of yesterday.

"The injured soldiers were immediately evacuated to a military hospital where they later succumbed (to their injuries)," border force spokesman Manoj Yadav told AFP from Jammu, the winter capital of the restive Himalayan region.

Pakistan authorities did not immediately comment on India's allegations or whether any damage was sustained on their side of the border.

The salvo of gun and mortar fire came just four days after Pakistan and India promised to end ceasefire violations in Kashmir.

The two sides had pledged to respect the conditions laid out in a 2003 ceasefire "in letter

and spirit" following some of the highest levels of violence in Kashmir since the pact was signed. Both sides blame each other for violating the 15-year ceasefire.

Dozens have been killed in border clashes in recent months along the border that divides the territory into zones of Indian and Pakistani control, leaving residents terrified.

The renewed commitment to the ceasefire had encouraged thousands of civilians to return to their homes after weeks of shelling.

Kashmir has been divided since the end of British colonial rule in 1947 and both New Delhi and Islamabad claim the former Himalayan kingdom in full.

India has about 500,000 soldiers in the part of Kashmir it controls, where armed groups are fighting for independence or a merger with Pakistan.

The flare-up along the border comes amid a rise in street riots and militant violence in the Kashmir valley, which witnesses near-daily demonstrations against Indian rule.

New Delhi accuses Pakistan of fuelling an insurgency that has left tens of thousands of civilians dead. Islamabad denies this, saying it only provides diplomatic support to Kashmiris' right to self-determination.

Nearly half of Afghan children out of school

AFP, Kabul

Nearly half of Afghanistan's children are not attending school because of worsening security, poverty and sex discrimination, according to a new UN report released yesterday.

The number of children deprived of schooling is at its highest rate since 2002 -- the year after the US-led ouster of the repressive Taliban regime, which had banned girls from the classroom.

Girls remain more likely to miss out on a formal education, making up 60 percent of the 3.7 million children aged between seven and 17 not at school.

The figure rose as high as 85 percent in some of the worst-affected provinces, reflecting pervasive gender-based discrimination in parts of the deeply conservative Muslim country.

Child marriages and a shortage of female teachers were additional factors keeping girls away from the classroom.

The report by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) also estimated that up to 300,000 children are at risk of dropping out before the end of the year.

Those children most at risk often live in rural areas and face displacement, insecurity and a lack of schooling facilities. While the numbers are worrying, the study also noted some progress.

It said school dropout rates are low in comparison to neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and Nepal, with some 85 per cent of Afghan boys and girls who start primary school going on to complete the last grade.

'PLOT' TO ATTACK ASSEMBLIES

REUTERS, Jakarta

Indonesian anti-terrorism police have detained a former student and are questioning two others after a raid on a university campus in Pekanbaru, on Sumatra island, where crude bombs and other explosive material were seized, police said.

The former student is thought to have been planning attacks on the Indonesian parliament in Jakarta and the local assembly in Pekanbaru, the capital of Riau province, national police spokesman Setyo Wasisto told a news conference on Sunday.

Philippines' Duterte tells UN expert to 'go to hell'

AFP, Manila

President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday told a United Nations rights expert to "go to hell" over criticism of the Philippine leader for threatening the country's top judge.

Duterte's latest profanity-laced diatribe came after Diego Garcia-Sayan, the UN special rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, said the president's statements against former chief justice Maria Lourdes Sereno were a "vicious attack" on the judiciary.

Sereno's colleagues voted to remove her from office last month, shortly after Duterte openly called her his "enemy" and demanded her swift ouster.

"Tell him (Garcia-Sayan) not to interfere with the affairs of my country. He can go to hell," Duterte told reporters in Manila, insisting he had nothing to do with Sereno's dismissal.

"He is not a special person and I do not



An explosion is seen in Gaza City after an airstrike by Israeli forces late Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Israeli warplanes pound Gaza

AFP, Gaza City

Israeli aircraft pounded over a dozen militant targets in Gaza, the army said yesterday, after Palestinian projectile fire shattered a ceasefire reached just days ago after the worst flare-up since a 2014 war.

The latest escalation came hours after thousands of Palestinians attended the funeral of a young female volunteer medic killed by Israeli fire on Gaza's border.

In a first wave of air strikes, Israeli "fighter jets targeted 10 terror sites in three military compounds belonging to the Hamas terror organisation in the Gaza Strip," the army said in a statement early yesterday.

The strikes came in retaliation for rockets fired at Israel, as well as "various terror activities approved and orchestrated by the Hamas terror organisation over the weekend," the army said.

A few hours later aircraft shot at "five terror targets at a military compound belonging to the Hamas terror organisation's naval force in the northern Gaza Strip," the army said in a separate statement.

There were no reports of casualties in Gaza.

On Saturday evening, militants in the Palestinian enclave fired two projectiles at southern Israel, where air raid sirens sent residents to bomb shelters.