

NEWSIN brief

Ghani backs suicide bomb fatwa

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani yesterday condemned Monday's suicide bomb attack outside a peace tent gathering of Muslim clerics in Kabul and backed their fatwa against suicide attacks, saying they violated the tenets of Islam. The bomb killed 14 people, including seven clerics.

Harvey Weinstein set to plead not guilty

Fallen movie mogul Harvey Weinstein was expected to plead not guilty yesterday to rape and sexual assault charges in New York, opening a legal battle for the #MeToo movement that dreams of seeing him behind bars. The 66-year-old Weinstein was charged with rape and another sex crime in New York late last month, nearly eight months after his career imploded in a blaze of accusations of sexual misconduct.

11 killed, 25 trapped in China mine blast

Eleven people were killed and nine injured yesterday in an explosion at an iron-ore mine in northeast China's Liaoning province, state media reported. Twenty-five people are trapped in the mine run by China National Coal Group Co, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

Cartoonist jailed for insulting Erdogan

Turkish police have jailed one of the country's most prominent cartoonists to serve out a 14 month sentence first handed down last year on charges of insulting President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkish media reported on Tuesday. Nuri Kurtcebe, 69, was detained and sent to prison Monday. Kurtcebe was sentenced to a one year, two months and 15 days jail term for several caricatures he drew in 2015.



Residents carry coffins of people who died following the eruption of the Fuego volcano, along the streets of Alotenango municipality, Sacatepequez, about 65 km southwest of Guatemala City, on Monday. Inset, An aerial view of the ash-filled area around the volcano. Rescue workers pulled more bodies from under the dust and rubble left by an explosive eruption of Guatemala's Fuego volcano, bringing the death toll to at least 69.

JUNE 12 SUMMIT

Trump, Kim set to meet at 9:00am

The White House said on Monday that a first meeting between President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un will take place at 9:00am (0100 GMT) in Singapore on June 12. "We are actively preparing for the June 12th summit between the president and the North Korean leader," spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said in announcing the timing of the meeting. Sanders said that the White House "advanced team" -- which features military, security, technical and medical staff -- were already on the ground in the Southeast Asian state. US has demanded North Korea embark on full and verifiable denuclearisation. It remains unclear whether Pyongyang is willing to take that step, or whether it is using the promise of talks as a way of easing Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign.

World choking on plastic: UN

Up to five trillion grocery bags are used each year and like most plastic garbage barely any is recycled, the UN said yesterday as it warned the world was choking on trash. In a report for International Environment Day, the UN warned at current levels the earth could be awash with 12 billion tonnes of plastic trash by the middle of the century. "Our oceans have been used as a dumping ground, choking marine life and transforming some marine areas into a plastic soup," said Erik Solheim, head of UN Environment, in the report.

INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT DAY



Nearly 10m plastic bags consumed per minute. Some 79pc of plastic ever made ended up dumped.

Most of this plastic garbage clogging waterways and landfill is single-use items like straws, bags and cutlery. The report said the five trillion plastic bags consumed each year equalled nearly 10 million plastic bags per minute. "If tied together, all these plastic bags could be wrapped around the world seven times every hour."

and waterways as the resting place for the world's plastic trash, where it takes thousands of years to decompose. Plastic clogging sewers -- a major problem in Delhi and slums across the developing world -- can spread disease or wind up in the stomachs of animals, the UN said. In India, plastic has been found inside dead cows while a whale in Thailand died after consuming waste bags. Garbage floating at sea costs fishing, shipping and tourism industries in Asia-Pacific \$1.3 billion a year, the report says. The UN said more than 60 countries had introduced bans and levies on single-use plastic items like bags. But better waste management, financial incentives to change consumers' buying habits and research into alternative materials were needed to make any real change, it added. "To meet the rising tide of plastics, we urgently need strong government leadership and intervention," the report said.

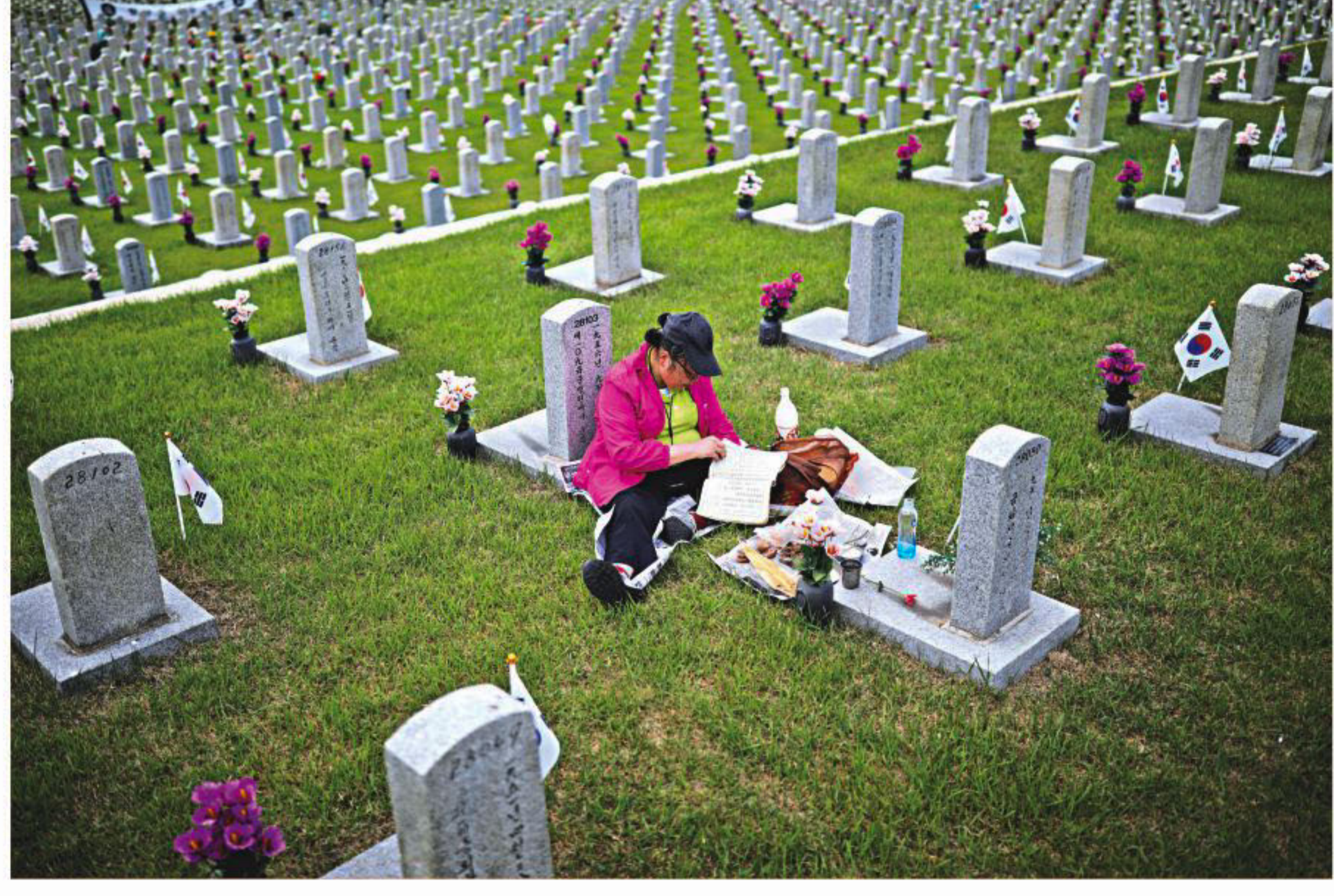
Kurds to pull out of strategic Syria town

IS kills 45 pro-regime fighters. The leading Syrian Kurdish militia yesterday said it would withdraw from Manbij, easing fears of a direct clash between Nato allies Washington and Ankara over the strategic northern town. The Kurds were key players in the fight against the Islamic State group, whose last holdout fighters have launched a deadly offensive against pro-regime forces further south. Manbij is a Sunni Arab-majority town that lies just 30 kilometres south of the Turkish border, and where US and French troops belonging to the Western coalition against IS are stationed. The Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) spearheaded a victorious offensive in 2016 to rid Manbij of IS and had kept military advisers in the town to train local forces. The Pentagon said US troops would remain in the town. For months, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has threatened to march on Manbij, accusing the YPG of being the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is blacklisted in Turkey. US President Donald Trump has said he intends to pull US troops out of Syria but his defence establishment has stressed it wants to retain a presence to fully defeat IS. On Sunday, IS fighters launched a raid on villages controlled by mostly Shia forces allied to the Syrian government in the Euphrates Valley. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said "fierce" fighting had left at least 45 dead among pro-regime ranks and 26 among IS fighters.

ALLEGED RUSSIA COLLUSION PROBE

Ex-Trump aide accused of witnesses tampering

US prosecutors on Monday accused Donald Trump's former campaign chairman Paul Manafort, who is facing multiple charges of money laundering, bank fraud and illegal lobbying, of attempting to tamper with witnesses. A motion submitted by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, who is heading up the main investigation into alleged Russian election meddling, said that Manafort had contacted witnesses by phone and encrypted text messaging for the purpose of securing "materially false testimony." According to the court document, he had sought to suborn perjury from witnesses who would be called to testify regarding the activities of the so-called "Hapsburg group" which allegedly carried out unlawful lobbying for Ukraine. In February, the 69-year-old pleaded not guilty to charges of money laundering, illegal lobbying and lying, setting up the first trial to result from Mueller's investigation, due to begin on September 17. Then in March he pleaded not guilty to charges of bank and tax fraud, setting up a separate trial for July 10. Mueller's investigation has now entered its second year, and continues to dominate US politics while menacing Trump's presidency.



A woman reads a bible in front of the gravestone of a family member who died for the country, on the eve of South Korea's Memorial Day, at the national cemetery in Seoul, South Korea, yesterday.

MALAYSIA GRAFT PROBE

Ex-PM's wife grilled for three hours

The wife of Malaysia's ousted prime minister Najib Razak was yesterday questioned for more than three hours by the nation's anti-corruption agency over a massive financial scandal involving a state sovereign wealth fund. The spotlight is now on Rosmah Mansor after police last month raided two condominiums linked to Najib and his family as part of an investigation into his role in the 1MDB scandal -- seizing bags of cash, jewellery and hundreds of designer handbags. Rosmah, 66, is widely reviled in Malaysia for her reported luxurious tastes and imperious manner. She last month issued a statement lashing out at media

Melania reappears after vanishing act, wild rumours

Melania Trump attended a White House event for military veterans on Monday, ending a 25-day absence from the public eye that had sent the rumor mills into overdrive. The US first lady, known for her privacy and independence, had not been seen in public following a surgery last month. In pictures posted on her official Twitter account, she was seen sitting next to President Donald Trump at a private reception for families of US soldiers killed in action. She and Trump "were honored to pay tribute to our fallen heroes. Thank you to the Gold Star families that joined us in celebration & remembrance," the tweet said. Melania, 48, had not been

spotted since May 10, when she joined the president in greeting three American hostages released by North Korea. Shortly afterwards, she entered Walter Reed National Military Medical Center for what the White House said was a benign kidney procedure. Despite the operation's routine nature, Melania remained there for five days, returning to the White House on May 19. On Sunday, her spokeswoman

Stephanie Grisham confirmed that the first lady will not accompany the president to the G7 summit in Canada or the North Korea nuclear summit in Singapore. Her recent schedule has seen a noticeable shift from the weeks prior to the surgery, when she engaged in several high-profile events. White House silence, including about why Melania spent five days in hospital for a routine procedure, only fueled the speculation. Some said Melania had moved back to New York or was cooperating with special counsel Robert Mueller, head of the main investigation into alleged Russian election meddling that President Trump has branded a "witch hunt."

'No space for war'

Says Pak military amid tensions with India, urges Delhi to maintain ceasefire in Kashmir

Pakistan's military says there is "no space for war" with its eastern neighbour India, calling upon its regional rival to respect a reiterated commitment to a ceasefire in the disputed region of Kashmir made last week. Speaking at a press briefing on Monday, Pakistani military spokesperson Major-General Asif Ghafoor said he wished for all issues between the nuclear-armed neighbours to be resolved through dialogue. "War is a failure of diplomacy," he said. "We are two nuclear states, there is no space for war. So dialogue continues. India has always been the one to back out from dialogue, not Pakistan." India and Pakistan, partitioned when the Indian subcontinent gained independence from the British in 1947, have fought two of their three wars over the disputed northern region of Kashmir, which both claim in full but administer separate portions. Pakistan and India-administered Kashmir are divided by the Line of Control (LoC), a boundary along which both sides have massed military personnel. A ceasefire was signed in 2003, but has been frequently violated in recent years. This year, Indian forces fired upon targets on the Pakistani side of the LoC at least 1,577 times, Ghafoor alleged, killing 48 people. India's foreign ministry says Pakistan has violated the ceasefire at least 1,088 times in 2018, killing 36 people. On May 29, the Indian and Pakistani militaries renewed their commitment to the 2003 ceasefire, according to statements released by both. Sporadic firing, however, has continued on both sides.



coverage of the police raids, calling them a "premature public trial". Following her departure from the agency headquarters, her lawyer said anti-graft investigators had completed recording her statement after a session lasting over three hours during which she gave her "utmost cooperation". Abdul Razak Idris, former investigations and intelligence director at the Malaysia Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), earlier told AFP that Rosmah would likely "be asked to reveal her bank accounts and explain about the source of the cash and jewellery found by police in two condominiums recently."