

# NEWS IN brief

## Saudi forces arrest armed 'extremist'

AFP, Riyadh  
Saudi forces have arrested a heavily armed "extremist" after wounding him in an exchange of gunfire in the kingdom's conservative central heartland, the interior ministry said early yesterday. The man had embraced the IS group's "ideology" and was found to be in possession of a machine gun, a pistol and multiple rounds of ammunition.

## Malaysian PM begins visit to China

AFP, Kuala Lumpur  
Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad begins a visit to China today, seeking to renegotiate or even cancel major Beijing-backed projects signed under the country's scandal-plagued, former regime. The 93-year-old leader has railed against a series of deals struck with Chinese companies by the administration of Najib Razak.

## 22 children dead in Nile boat accident in Sudan

AFP, Khartoum  
At least 22 children drowned on their way to school when their boat capsized in swollen waters of the Nile river north of the Sudanese capital on Wednesday, official media said. A woman on board also died when the vessel carrying more than 40 children sank about 750 kilometres from the capital, SUNA news agency reported.

## Mali president Keita wins landslide victory

AFP, Bamako  
Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita has been re-elected for a five-year term after winning a landslide victory in a runoff ballot, according to official figures yesterday. The elections have been closely watched abroad, as Mali is a linchpin state in the jihadist insurgency raging in the Sahel.



India residents stand on the shore as Periyar river flooded following monsoon rains at Aluva, in the Indian state of Kerala, yesterday. Inset, rescue workers evacuate people from flooded areas after the opening of Idamalayar, Cheruthoni and Mullaperiyar dam shutters following heavy rains, on the outskirts of Kochi. PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

# DEVASTATING FLOODS IN KERALA Red alert issued as 100 feared dead

AFP, Kochi  
Helicopters airlifted stranded families from rooftops and dam gates were thrown open as incessant torrential rain yesterday brought fresh havoc to the Indian state of Kerala where about 100 people are feared dead.  
Hundreds of extra troops were deployed in the southern state, a major tourist hotspot, as the government issued a "red alert" over the region's worst floods in decades.  
State authorities said the confirmed death toll was 72 but officials and media reports said up to 30 more people were feared dead yesterday in landslides and as rivers burst their banks, flooding scores of villages.  
At least eight people were reported dead and 15 others including a three-month-old infant, were trapped inside three houses hit by a landslide near an irrigation dam in Malappuram district, the Hindu newspaper said.  
Authorities said many people were trapped inside their houses. More than 60,000 people have sought refuge in relief camps.  
"At least 6,500 people are stranded in different parts of Kerala and the situation in three districts is particularly grim," a Kerala state disaster management official told AFP.  
Kerala, famed for its pristine palm-lined beaches and tea plantations, is battered by the monsoon every year but this year's damage has been particularly severe. Floods have also caused havoc in other states, including Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh.  
Some 540 army, navy and air forces reinforcements were sent to Kerala yesterday to join the rescue effort.  
The army said it had rescued scores of people with helicopters sent to the region. Defence forces and government boats were also used in an increasingly desperate rescue operation.

# Afghan violence continues

## Gunmen attack Kabul intelligence training centre; IS claims responsibility for Wednesday's bombing in coaching centre

AFP, Kabul  
Gunmen attacked an intelligence training centre in Kabul yesterday, officials said, as families buried loved ones killed by a suicide bomber a day earlier in the war-weary Afghan capital.  
The attack on the training facility was the latest incident in a blood-soaked week that saw militants deliver crippling blows to government forces across Afghanistan.  
"Clashes are ongoing and the area is cordoned off by the Afghan security forces," said Kabul police spokesman Hashmat Stanikzai.  
The firefight erupted near a training centre overseen by the National Security Directorate -- Afghanistan's intelligence agency -- with the gunmen holed up in a construction site near residential buildings, an official at the scene said.  
Live television footage showed humvees patrolling the empty streets while gunfire echoed and a helicopter circling above.  
Commandos were also deployed to the scene to help contain the fighting, according to another security official.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the incident.  
The attack comes just hours after a suicide bomber detonated explosives inside an education centre in a predominantly Shia area of western Kabul, where students were studying for college entrance exams, killing at least 37 people.



A drone carries tear gas during the battle with insurgents in Kabul. PHOTO: REUTERS

The attack was claimed by the Islamic State (IS) group yesterday via their Amaq propaganda service, as families of the dead held a mass funeral where mourners wept and clutched the wooden coffins.  
An industrial-sized digger helped soften the arid ground for the fresh graves as men removed rocks from the soil with pickaxes.  
Mourners decried the unrelenting bloodshed, while others dismissed murmurs of possible ceasefires and peace negotiations between the government and the Taliban, even though the attack was claimed by IS.  
"Death to your ceasefire and death to your ghost peace talks," cried one of the funeral attendees. "They are killing our educated people and everyday they are killing us."

# Imran's ascent to PM Office all but certain

## Rift persists in opposition over PML-N chief's candidature

DAWN ONLINE  
Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan's victory in the election for the office of prime minister today has become almost certain as a rift persisted in the grand opposition alliance over the candidature of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz president Shahbaz Sharif.  
Khan, whose nomination papers were filed by Awami Muslim League chief Sheikh Rashid in the NA secretariat after senior PTI leaders formally decided to nominate their chairman at a party meeting held at his Banigala residence, may take a lead of 30 to 35 votes in today's election for the office of prime minister.  
While efforts were under way to remove differences between the PML-N and the Pakistan Peoples Party over Sharif's candidature, if the two major opposition parties stick to their stance till yesterday noon (the deadline for filing of nomination papers for PM's election) it may have an effect on the

fate of the grand opposition alliance and even on the upper house of parliament.  
The PPP has asked the PML-N to review its decision and nominate someone else as a joint candidate of the 11-party opposition alliance in place of Shahbaz Shaif, who was said to have passed derogatory remarks against PPP co-chairman and former president Asif Ali Zardari in the recent past. However, the PML-N came up with a strong reaction to the demand and threatened that this could lead to change of the leader of the opposition and the chairman of the Senate.  
When contacted, PML-N's leader Mushahid Hussain dismissed the suggestion that the party should change their nominee for the office of prime minister. "It has been decided that Shahbaz Sharif will remain our nominee," he said.  
He said the grand opposition alliance was formed to ensure fair and free elections in the country but if the PPP stuck to its stance the alliance would collapse.



# Kim murder trial to go on

## Rules Malaysian court as two women charged with assassination of North Korean leader's half-brother

AFP, Shah Alam  
The murder trial of two women accused of assassinating the half-brother of North Korea's leader can proceed, a Malaysian court ruled yesterday, in a blow to their families who insist the pair were tricked into carrying out the dramatic hit.  
After hearing the prosecution case, the judge said there was sufficient evidence to support a murder charge against Siti Aisyah from Indonesia and Doan Thi Huong from Vietnam, accused of murdering Kim Jong Nam with nerve agent VX at Kuala Lumpur airport.  
Judge Azmi Ariffin said the evidence presented in court since the trial started in October pointed to a "well-planned conspiracy" with a group of North Korean suspects who are still at large.  
"I must therefore call upon (the suspects) to enter their defence on their respective charges," he said at the Shah Alam High

Court outside Kuala Lumpur.  
The women, who are set to testify during the defence stage of the trial, looked shocked and tearful as the ruling was handed down. The judge could have chosen to acquit the women if he thought the evidence was insufficient.  
Their families maintain the pair were fooled into carrying out the Cold War-style killing, and had been hopeful they would be acquitted, although state prosecutors insisted they had a strong case.  
"She knows nothing, she was fooled. The case (against her) was made up," Aisyah's father, Asria, told AFP from the family's village on Indonesia's Java island.  
Her mother Benah added: "This is unfair. I wanted her to be released today but if the court refuses what can I do? I can only pray for the final verdict."  
The trial is set to resume in November and go on for several months. Aisyah, 26, will be the first witness to take the stand when proceedings restart.

Judge says evidence points to a 'well-planned conspiracy'  
The trial set to resume in November and go on for several months



Vietnamese Doan Thi Huong, who is on trial for the killing of Kim Jong Nam, the estranged half-brother of North Korea's leader, is escorted as she leaves the Shah Alam High Court on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

# HATE SPEECH ROW

## FB says it was too slow to act in Myanmar

REUTERS, Yangon  
Facebook has been "too slow" to address hate speech in Myanmar and is acting to remedy the problem by hiring more Burmese speakers and investing in technology to identify problematic content, the company said in a statement yesterday.  
The acknowledgement came a day after a Reuters investigation showed why the company has failed to stem a wave of vitriolic posts about the minority Rohingya.  
Some 700,000 Rohingya fled their homes last year after an army crackdown that the United States denounced as ethnic cleansing. The Rohingya now live in teeming refugee camps in Bangladesh.  
"The ethnic violence in Myanmar is horrific and we

# Malaysia repeals 'fake news' law

AFP, Kuala Lumpur  
Malaysia's parliament yesterday repealed a controversial law that punished spreading "fake news" with up to six years in jail and which critics said was aimed at stifling dissent.  
The legislation was pushed through in April by the former, scandal-tainted regime in the run-up to a hotly contested general election, sparking a storm of anger.  
Political opponents said the law was a crude tool aimed at silencing criticism of the then government and its leader Najib Razak, particularly over the corruption mega-scandal surrounding sovereign wealth fund 1MDB.  
As well as hefty jail terms, the legislation punished the dissemination of what authorities deemed fake news with a fine of up to 500,000 ringgit (\$120,000).  
However, Najib and his long-ruling coalition unexpectedly lost power at the landmark elections in May, bringing to power a reformist alliance which had campaigned on a pledge to abolish the law.  
Making good on that promise, lawmakers voted in favour of repealing the fake news law yesterday after a three-hour debate.  
Charles Santiago, an MP from the ruling Pact of Hope coalition, told AFP the move was part of the new government's "commitment to take away all legislation that impinges on human rights and freedom of expression".  
Teddy Baguilat, a member of a Southeast Asian grouping of MPs who fight for better human rights, praised the move as "a huge step forward."

# 300 Indian kids sold to US buyers at Rs 45 lakh each

TNN, Mumbai  
The Mumbai police arrested the kingpin of an international child trafficking racket that allegedly sent at least 300 children from India to the US.  
Rajubhai Gamlewala aka Rajubhai, a Gujarat resident, started the racket in 2007 and would charge Rs 45 lakh for each child from his US-based clients. The fate of the trafficked children is not yet clear. Some members of the racket were arrested in March.  
The children, aged 11-16, came from poor families, usually in Gujarat. "Finding it difficult to take care of them, their parents or guardians would sell them," said a police officer. Police said after receiving an order from clients in the US, Gamlewala, 50, would instruct his gang to find a poor family, usually in Gujarat, willing to sell a child.  
They would also find families willing to rent out their children's passports. A passport with a picture with some resemblance to the child would then be selected.  
The gang would then pay a carrier to take the child to the US. Before that, makeup would be applied on the child for a stronger resemblance with the picture on the passport. After the carrier returned from the US, the passport would be returned to the original holder. It is unclear how the passport would be stamped by immigration without its bearer's presence, the police said.  
The racket was busted in March when actor Preeti Sood received a call from a friend that two minors were being applied makeup at a Versova salon. "I went there on a suspicion that the girls were being readied for brothels. But once there, I realised that the racket was bigger than I thought," she told TOI on Wednesday.



CHILD TRAFFICKING

# DUTERTE'S TIRADE OVER S CHINA SEA China asserts right to warn planes

REUTERS, Beijing  
China rebuffed Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's call for Beijing to rethink its conduct in the South China Sea yesterday, saying China had the right to react to foreign ships or aircraft that get close to its islands.  
Duterte said China has no right to repel foreign aircraft and boats passing by its artificial islands in the disputed waterway, and that he hoped China would "temper" its behaviour and stop restricting movements.  
In a statement sent to Reuters, China's Foreign Ministry said the Spratly Islands are China's inherent territory and that China respects the right to freedom of navigation and overflight that all countries enjoy in the South China Sea under international law.  
"But China has a right to take necessary steps to respond to foreign aircraft and ships that deliberately get close to or make incursions into the air and waters near China's relevant islands, and provocative actions that threaten the security of Chinese personnel stationed there," it said.  
"China urges the relevant party to meet China halfway, and jointly protect the present good situation that has not come easily in the South China Sea," the ministry added, without elaborating.



have been too slow to prevent misinformation and hate speech on Facebook," Facebook said.  
The Reuters story revealed the social media giant for years dedicated scant resources to combating hate speech in Myanmar, which is a market it dominates and where there have been repeated eruptions of ethnic violence.  
In yesterday's statement, posted online, Facebook said it was using tools to automatically detect hate speech and hiring more Burmese-language speakers to review posts, following up on a pledge made by founder Mark Zuckerberg to US senators in April.