

NEWS IN brief

US to return 2 Gitmo inmates to Algeria

AFP, Washington
The United States said Friday it will return two Algerians detained at Guantanamo Bay to their homeland as part of efforts to eventually close the War on Terror military prison.

President Barack Obama vowed to close the facility in 2009, but four years on the military prison set up in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks still holds 166 men.

EU, China settle solar panel row

AFP, Brussels
The European Commission yesterday said it has reached an "amicable solution" with Beijing over imports of Chinese solar panels, a dispute that had threatened to turn into a full-blown trade war.

The breakthrough comes as Brussels and Beijing remain locked in a series of tit-for-tat disputes on other products ranging from steel pipes and telecoms equipment to wine and chemicals.

Floods kill 21 in China province

AFP, Beijing
At least 21 people have been killed and four reported missing in floods and mudslides that hit a Chinese province where at least 95 others died this week in twin earthquakes, state media reported yesterday.

Floods, landslides and rockfalls have been reported since Thursday in the northwestern province of Gansu following heavy rains, officials said.

7 killed in Florida hostage drama

AFP, Miami
Six people were shot to death in a hostage drama near the US city of Miami that ended early yesterday when police killed the suspect, police said.

The man allegedly took neighbors hostage in a Hiialeah apartment building for reasons that were not immediately known, said police spokesman Sergeant Eddie Rodriguez.

Gunmen kill 7 Pak coastguards

AFP, Quetta
Gunmen attacked a coast-guard checkpoint in southwestern Pakistan yesterday, killing seven officials and wounding seven others, officials said.

Baluchistan suffers from both Islamist militancy and a regional insurgency which began in 2004, with rebels demanding political autonomy from the centre.



Egyptian supporters of the deposed Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi (back) clash with riot police in Cairo early yesterday (left) and a security personnel fires at pro-Morsi supporters as a pro-army supporter throws rock at opponents. Egypt's interior minister pledged that protests calling for the reinstatement of ousted president Mohamed Morsi would be dispersed as soon as possible after dozens of pro-Morsi supporters were killed in clashes.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

Pak soldier 'killed by India army' along LoC

AFP, Islamabad
Indian firing yesterday killed one Pakistani soldier and wounded another in the disputed Kashmir region, Pakistan's army said, as the nuclear-armed nations traded blame for provoking the clash.

The Pakistani army accused Indian troops of staging an "unprovoked" attack across the countries' disputed border in Kashmir while the Indian army said it had fired in a "calibrated manner" in response to Pakistani firing. "A soldier embraced martyrdom while another was seriously injured due to unprovoked firing by Indian troops in Rawala Kot area at the Line of Control (LoC)," the Pakistani army said in a statement.

CHEMICAL ARMS TALKS UN, Syria find common ground

AFP, United Nations

The United Nations said Friday it reached an agreement with Syria on an inquiry into the use of chemical weapons, but did not say UN inspectors would be allowed in.

Two UN envoys went to Damascus on Tuesday and Wednesday and held talks with Syria's deputy prime minister and foreign minister, read a brief UN statement.

"The discussions were thorough and productive and led to an agreement on the way forward," added the statement, without giving any other detail.

Ake Sellstrom, the chief inspector in the UN investigation team, and Angela Kane, the UN high representative for disarmament, were to report to UN leader Ban Ki-moon on the trip.

Ban has demanded widespread access to investigate all allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the 28-month-old conflict. Syria has insisted that the UN only investigate its claim that opposition rebels used chemical weapons in the town of Khan al-Assal on March 19. The UN says it has received reports of 13 attacks in the conflict.

Britain, France and the United States say all the attacks were carried out by President Bashar al-Assad's forces. Russia, Assad's main ally, says its inquiry found opposition rebels used sarin gas in Khan al-Assal.

MidEast peace talks to start on Tuesday

AFP, Ramallah

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators will meet in Washington on Tuesday for a round of talks after a three-year break, a Palestinian official said yesterday.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the official told AFP that the Palestinian delegation would be led by chief negotiator Saeb Erakat with the Israelis headed by Justice Minister Tzipi Livni.

US officials would also take part, he added.

The sides are expected to meet for an informal dinner tomorrow evening, he said.

Israel's Regional Development Minister Silvan Shalom said this week that talks could resume on Tuesday, but neither the date nor venue have so far been confirmed.

US ducks decision on Egypt 'coup'

AFP, Washington

Washington has decided to avoid the tricky question of whether the toppling of Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi was a coup, which would have forced a freeze of \$1.5 billion in aid.

"The law does not require us to make a formal determination... as to whether a coup took place, and it is not in our national interest to make such a determination," State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said Friday.

She clearly signaled that for the time being millions of dollars in US military and economic assistance would continue to flow to Egypt, the most populous Arab country and a key regional ally.

"Continued provision of assistance to Egypt, consistent with our law, is important to our goal of advancing a responsible transition to democratic governance and is consistent with our national security interest," Psaki told reporters.

The military drove Morsi from power on

July 3 during massive protests against Egypt's first democratically elected president.

After his ouster, President Barack Obama ordered his administration to review the legal implications for US aid under a law which forbids all but humanitarian aid to countries where an elected leader has been deposed by a military coup.

But earlier this week, in a veiled warning that the Egyptian military and interim government must return the country to democracy, Washington suspended delivery of four F-16 fighters that had been expected in the coming weeks.

The issue of whether to cut off aid to Egypt has polarized US political circles.

There are growing fears that Egypt -- one of only two Arab nations to have a peace treaty with Israel -- is plunging into a period of prolonged instability.

Annual US military aid to Egypt of some \$1.3 billion -- which is topped up by further economic aid -- covers some 80 percent of the yearly costs of buying new equipment for the Egyptian military.

North Korean soldiers march during a military parade past Kim Il-Sung square in Pyongyang yesterday. Inset, a Taepodong-class missile. North Korea yesterday mounted its largest ever military parade to mark the 60th anniversary of the armistice that ended fighting in the Korean War.

PHOTO: AFP



Earn six lakhs in thirty days ... 'begging'

TNN, Chennai

It's more than a fortnight since the month of Ramadan began and a regular stream of Indians has been heading to the Gulf countries, literally with begging bowls in hand. Reason: This is the time when alms (zakat) are given generously.

The huge money that can be made is a powerful magnet. Each beggar makes nearly Rs 6 lakh in the 30-day period, while the 'take' on Fridays can be as much as Rs 5,000, say officials.

Mohammad Amjad, 41, of Bihar, now in the UAE, said he made Rs 13,000 in the first two days of the holy month.

The fact that begging is illegal all over the Gulf and those caught face hefty fines and jail terms has not acted as a deterrent. About 57 Indian beggars have been arrested in Saudi Arabia and 29, including many women, picked up in Dubai since July 10 when Ramadan began. All of them entered the UAE on visit visas.

As many as 20 police patrols have been deployed in Dubai as part of the annual anti-begging campaign. In 2012, nearly 650 beggars were arrested in Dubai, one-third of them during Ramadan. Bahrain, Muscat and Qatar are preferred 'destinations' during Ramadan.

Every year, hundreds of Indians, Pakistanis, Sudanese and Africans travel to the Gulf on such visits, with those from India and Pakistan forming the majority. Immigration officials at Chennai airport say they see familiar faces leaving the city at the beginning of each Ramadan and returning home after Eid.

Judge weighs Manning verdict

AFP, Fort Meade

The military judge overseeing the trial of US soldier Bradley Manning over his massive transfer of secret files to WikiLeaks began considering her verdict after closing arguments Friday.

After hearing the final statements at Fort Meade outside Washington, Colonel Denise Lind closed the court. She is expected to give her verdict in the coming days.

At Manning's request, the judge -- and not a jury -- will decide his fate, and he will spend the rest of his life behind bars if convicted of the most serious charges against him.

Manning was a US army private serving as an intelligence analyst in Iraq when he sent anti-secrecy activist Julian Assange's WikiLeaks website a massive trove of diplomatic cables and classified military reports from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Supporters such as Assange argue that if he is convicted it will be a huge blow for the United States' cherished press freedoms, but opponents say Manning betrayed his country and his uniform while aiding America's enemies.

Defense attorney David Coombs told the military court Friday that Manning was no traitor but rather a "young, naive and good-intentioned" whistleblower.

Manning has pleaded guilty to 10 lesser charges, including espionage and computer fraud, that could carry a sentence of up to 20 years in prison but denied major charges, like "aiding the enemy" charge.

US will remain a Pacific power, vows Biden

Says presence needed for regional stability

AFP, Singapore

The United States will remain a Pacific power, Vice President Joe Biden yesterday vowed as he credited his country with maintaining peace and stability in the region for decades.

Biden, ending a two-day visit to Singapore, said the US presence there has allowed Asia-Pacific nations to focus on growing their economies.

"I state without apology that we are a Pacific power. America is a Pacific resident power and we will remain so," President Barack Obama's number two told sailors of the US Navy's littoral combat ship USS Freedom.

"The truth of the matter is our resident power status is the reason why this area of the world is able to grow and be stable," he said.

"Our mere presence in the Pacific is in and of itself the basis upon which stability of the region is built. You are the glue that holds all this together."

The USS Freedom is a modern vessel designed to fight close to shore in areas typical of Southeast Asia's maritime



geographical features. Deployed to Singapore and the surrounding region, the ship is seen as a symbol of Washington's strategic re-balance of its military presence towards Asia following long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In another speech at a facility of US aerospace giant Pratt & Whitney, Biden said "the increase in maritime incidents and assertive action which we see lately in the South China Sea represents a threat to the security of the region".

He did not mention any country but Vietnam and US treaty ally, the Philippines, have accused China of mounting aggressive actions in the sea.

Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam have laid vital claims to the sea, which hosts vital commercial and strategic shipping lanes. Taiwan is the other claimant.

Biden on Saturday warned that the risk of a miscalculation in the sea is real and urged claimants to hasten talks on legally-binding rules to prevent conflict.

"It would not take much of an incident to escalate, and tensions can turn into conflict," he said.

Kuwait votes in key poll

Turnout low

AFP, Kuwait City

Kuwaitis yesterday voted in the Gulf emirate's second parliamentary election in eight months with a less than moderate after the opposition urged a boycott.

Polling began slowly in the morning but increased slightly later to drop again at around noon. Turnout in some districts was under 20 percent by 02:00pm, according to state-run Kuwait Television.

Polling stations close at 1700 GMT, but the first results are not expected until after midnight as ballot papers are still counted manually.

Besides opposition calls for a boycott, the sweltering heat of around 45 degrees Celsius, combined with Muslim fasting, also apparently contributed to a low turnout.

It was the second time the opposition had called for a boycott in protest at an electoral law that it says enables the ruling Al-Sabah family-controlled govt to manipulate the outcome.

'Use my broken heart to stop such killing'

Travon Martin's mom slams controversial gun law

CNN ONLINE

Florida law kept George Zimmerman from being held accountable in last year's shooting death of Florida teenager Trayvon Martin, the teen's mom said Friday.

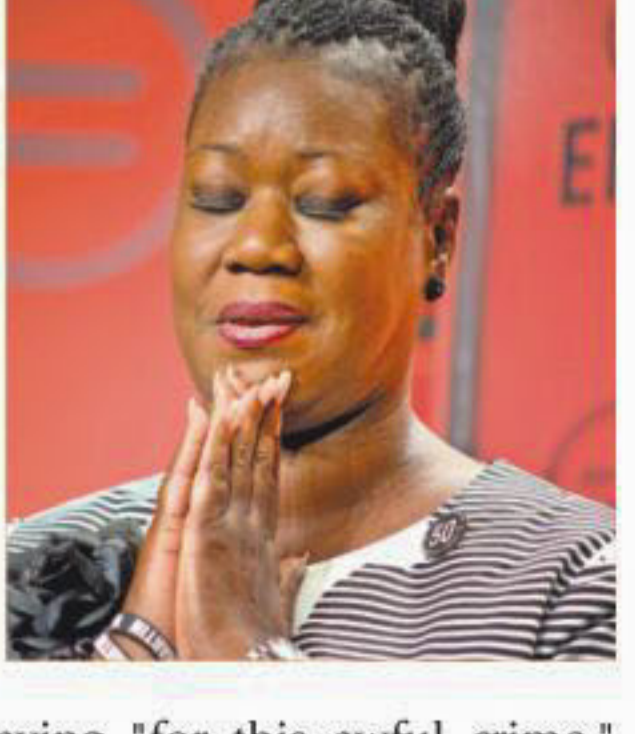
"Wrap your mind around no prom for Trayvon, no high school graduation for Trayvon ... all because of a law -- a law that has prevented the person who shot and killed my son" from paying "for this awful crime," Sybrina Fulton said Friday afternoon in Philadelphia.

Zimmerman, a former neighborhood watch volunteer, was found not guilty in the 17-year-old Martin's death on July 13.

He fatally shot Martin in the Sanford, Florida, neighborhood. Zimmerman, who is Hispanic, had a confrontation with the unarmed African-American teen after calling police to report a suspicious person, and he said he shot Martin in self-defense. The case became a flashpoint in debates over racial profiling, and thousands attended vigils across the country over the weekend, decrying the verdict.

Fulton asked attendees of the National Urban League gathering Friday to use her "broken heart" to ensure "there are no more Trayvon Martins again."

"My message to you is: Please use my story. Please my use my tragedy. Please use my broken heart to say to yourself, 'We cannot let this happen to anybody else's child,'" she said.



ODDLY enough

Happiness peaks at ages 23 and 69

YAHOO NEWS ONLINE

We enjoy life the most during our young adult lives and again when we are on the cusp of becoming septuagenarians.

However, the long years in between appear to present many emotional peaks and valleys. That's according to a new study, which finds that the two happiest years of a person's life are 23 and 69.

The results of the study are being published this week by the Center for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics.

However, the study found that happiness again begins to decline as individuals move into their 70s.