

Turkish centres shut in Syria

AFP, Beirut

Turkey has closed its cultural centre and commercial office in Beirut after the kidnap of two Turkish Airlines pilots, Ankara's ambassador to Lebanon told AFP yesterday.

The two pilots were kidnapped on Friday by a group demanding Turkey use its influence with Syria's rebels, who it backs, to secure the release of nine Lebanese Shiites kidnapped

Mugabe in stinging attack on rival

AFP, Harare

Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe yesterday said those upset by his disputed landslide election victory could "go hang".

The 89-year-old vowed never to let go of his victory as his opponent Morgan Tsvangirai lodged a petition in court challenging the

Pakistan summons Indian deputy HC

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistan yesterday summoned the Indian deputy high commissioner to protest "ceasefire violations" by the BSF along the LoC, claiming that it resulted in the death of a civilian at Rawalakot in PoK.

Pakistan also asked India to uphold the 2003 ceasefire agreement while committing itself to a "constructive, sustained and result-oriented process of engagement"

Apple to unveil next iPhone on Sept 10

REUTERS, London

Apple, the world's largest technology company, is expected to present its redesigned iPhone in September, according to technology blog AllThingsD.

The blog cited unnamed sources as saying that Apple will unveil its next smart phone at a special event on September 10.

The company was not immediately available for

Nazi 'war criminal' Csatari dies

AFP, Budapest

Laszlo Csatari, a 98-year-old Hungarian who topped the Simon Wiesenthal Center's list of alleged Nazi war criminals, has died in hospital, his lawyer said yesterday.

Csatari was alleged to have been actively involved in the deportations of thousands of Jews to death camps in World War II from a town in present-day Slovakia.

After being sentenced to death in absentia by a Czechoslovakian court in 1948 he made it to Canada where he lived and worked.

Living in hiding felt like comedy routine

Rushdie says about his fatwa days

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Nine years living in hiding after a fatwa was issued against him may not sound like a particularly merry experience, but Sir Salman Rushdie has said his period in police protection felt at times like "a comedy routine".

On leaving a dinner at the London home of fellow novelist Hanif Kureishi, he recalled that "one of the police officers left his gun behind. And for Hanif of course this was like a transcendent moment of joy. He ran out into the street, holding the gun by the barrel, shouting, 'Here, you forgot your shooter!'"

"We were in this rural cottage in remote Ayrshire and there was this arsenal of armoured Jaguars parked outside. The hard thing was not concealing me, it was concealing them ... there was this police convention going on."

The author was speaking about his third-person-narrated memoir, Joseph Anton (his pseudonym under the fatwa, after the first names of Conrad and Chekhov), at the Edinburgh international book festival.

He had no premonition of the storm that would greet the publication of The Satanic Verses, he said, when Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa of death against him in 1989 – an event that led to the killing of one of Rushdie's translators, the serious injury of another, and bombings of bookshops.



INDIA LAUNCHES FIRST AIRCRAFT CARRIER

Tugboats guide the indigenously-built aircraft carrier INS Vikrant as it leaves the Cochin Shipyard after the launch ceremony in Kochi yesterday. When the INS Vikrant comes into full service in 2018, India will become the fifth nation to have designed and built its own aircraft carrier, pushing ahead of China to join an elite club that includes Britain, France, Russia and the United States.

PHOTO: AFP

Egypt govt extends Morsi detention

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's judiciary extended ousted president Mohamed Morsi's detention yesterday as his supporters marched through Cairo in defiance of the expiry of a government ultimatum to dismantle their huge protest camps.

The judiciary said it was extending Morsi's detention for a further 15 days pending an investigation into his collaboration with the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas which rules Gaza.

Overthrown by the military on July 3, Morsi was placed in detention on July 26 over his links with the militant group.

He is to be questioned on whether he collaborated with Hamas in attacks on police stations and prison breaks in early 2011, when Islamist and other political inmates escaped during a revolution which overthrew strongman Hosni Mubarak.

The court said on June 23 that Hamas militants facilitated the escape of prisoners. At the time, Morsi, then a senior Muslim Brotherhood leader and whose whereabouts are now being kept secret, told a television station that local Egyptians had helped the prisoners escape.

On the streets of Cairo, hundreds of demonstrators waving Egyptian flags and carrying pictures of the deposed leader marched through the central neighbourhood of Ramses, as tensions rose over a threatened crackdown by the authorities.

CHINA'S BO XILAI SCANDAL

Family of murdered Briton seeks compensation

REUTERS, Beijing

The family of a British citizen murdered in China, whose death triggered the nation's biggest political scandals in decades, is seeking compensation of up to \$8.2 million from his convicted killer, the wife of former top leader Bo Xilai, a lawyer with knowledge of the talks said yesterday.

Bo's wife, Gu Kailai, was jailed for life last year for the poisoning of British businessman Neil Heywood in a case that also led to a corruption probe into Bo, once a candidate for China's top leadership team.

It is customary for a murderer to be ordered to pay court-sanctioned compensation to the victim's family.

A source close to the family said Heywood's Chinese widow, Lulu, had been pushing for compensation for herself and their two young children from Gu. Lulu and the children are believed to be still living in Beijing.



Neil Heywood



Gu Kailai

Li Xiaolin, a lawyer who has represented Gu's family in the past, said Heywood's family was seeking between 30 million and 50 million yuan (\$8.17 million) in compensation.

"The talks started last year, but have not reached any agreement yet that I know of," Li told Reuters. "Gu Kailai has no money herself."

Money was not being sought from Bo though as he was not mentioned in the verdict for Gu's case, Li said.

Snowden's father to visit his son in Russia

AFP, Washington

The father of fugitive intelligence leaker Edward Snowden has obtained a visa to visit his son in Russia, the family lawyer said Sunday.

Attorney Bruce Fein said he and Lon Snowden will both visit Russia very soon, but would not say when.

"We have visas. We have a date which we won't discuss because of the frenzy," Fein said on ABC television's program "This Week".

Lon Snowden said on the same programme that he has not spoken to his son since he fled the United States.

Edward Snowden, a 30-year-old former National Security Agency computer administrator, is wanted in the United States for espionage and other charges after leaking details of vast US telephone and Internet surveillance programs.

Lon Snowden said he wants his son to return to America at some point but right now does not think he would get a fair trial, as many lawmakers and members of the public have branded Snowden a traitor.

"If you consider the statements by the leaders in Congress, they are irresponsible and inconsistent with our system of justice. They have poisoned the well in terms of a jury pool," he said.



Lon Snowden

BUDDHIST MOB ATTACK Muslims close Sri Lanka mosque

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Muslim leaders closed down a new mosque in Colombo yesterday after attacks by a Buddhist mob revived simmering religious tensions and sparked US concern.

The Sri Lanka Muslim Council said it had agreed to shut its Grandpass mosque and move to an older place of worship which the government had earlier earmarked for demolition as part of the city's development.

Local Buddhists had objected to the setting up of the new Grandpass mosque near a Buddhist temple even though it was built to replace the older mosque earmarked for demolition in line with city works.

The violence comes after Buddhist hardliners attacked several Muslim-run businesses outside the capital in March, the latest in a series of incidents targeting the minority group.

The US embassy in Colombo has expressed concern at the violence and urged authorities to prosecute those responsible.

The US, which in March initiated a UN Human Rights Council resolution against Sri Lanka over alleged war crimes against Tamil Tiger rebels in May 2009, also urged Colombo to ensure religious freedom.

Seventy percent of Sri Lanka's 20 million-strong population are Buddhists, while Muslims are the second largest religious group making up just under 10 percent.

Israel to free 26 Palestinian prisoners

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel announced it will release 26 veteran Palestinian prisoners ahead of a resumption of peace talks on Wednesday, but at the same time angered Palestinians by approving new settlement construction.

A special ministerial committee announced late Sunday it had approved the 26 prisoners to be released "following the government decision to renew peace talks with the Palestinians," according to a statement from the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The names of the prisoners – most of whom were arrested for killing Israelis and Palestinians suspected of collaboration with the Jewish state – were published early Monday morning.



HUNDREDS EVACUATED AFTER INDONESIA VOLCANO ERUPTS

A volcano on a tiny Indonesian island that erupted at the weekend and killed six people spewed more clouds of red-hot ash yesterday, as hundreds of villagers were evacuated to safety. Mount Rokatenda, on Palue island in East Nusa Tenggara province, was belching out columns of smoke up to 100 metres high, an AFP journalist on the nearby island of Flores said.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Myanmar clashes signal growing Muslim desperation

REUTERS, Myanmar

Attempts to bring stability to Myanmar's strategic northwest Rakhine State could be unraveling after police opened fire on Rohingya Muslims for the third time in two months, reviving tensions in a region beset by religious violence last year.

Villages outside the state capital Sittwe remain volatile after a dispute over custody of a dead Rohingya quickly escalated into a day of clashes on Friday in which police raked Rohingya crowds with gunfire, according to witnesses. The violence underscores the growing Rohingya desperation in the face of an increasingly unsparing police response. At least two people were killed and more than a dozen injured, locals said.

The renewed tensions come despite government efforts to bring calm to Rakhine State, after two eruptions of communal violence with ethnic Rakhine Buddhists last year killed at least 192 people and left 140,000 homeless, mostly Rohingya.

Apartheid-like policies have segregated Buddhists from Muslims, many of whom fester in primitive camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) with little hope of resettlement.

A Reuters photographer and video journalist who visited the area said the situation remained tense as Tomas Ojea Quintana, UN special rapporteur on HR in Myanmar, arrived in Sittwe on Monday.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Rakhine State is one of Myanmar's poorest regions, but in the reform era it is emerging as one of its most strategic. In Sittwe's harbor, India is funding a \$214 million port, river and road network that will carve a trade route into India's landlocked northeast. From Kyaukphegyu, a city 105 km southeast of Sittwe, gas and oil pipelines stretch to China's energy-hungry northwest. Both projects capitalize on Myanmar's growing importance at Asia's crossroads.

"Rumors of extensive mineral wealth in Rakhine State would add or perhaps are now adding fuel to the existing ethnic tensions," said the Harvard Ash Center in a July 2013 report.

Aung Win, a well-known Rohingya activist who visited the troubled area on Sunday, blamed the unrest on deteriorating relations between the displaced Rohingya and police.

Chris Lewa of the Rohingya advocacy group Arakan Project sees the latest violence as an attempt to resist oppressive measures common in northern Rakhine State, a Rohingya-majority region of three townships bordering Bangladesh.

In two townships, Buthidaung and Maungdaw, the state government recently announced the enforcement of a two-child limit on Rohingya families, one of several measures that the United Nations has called a violation of human rights.

ODDLY enough

A decorated staircase

STAR DESK

Located in the Sicilian town of Caltagirone, La Scala di Santa Maria del Monte is an old 142-step staircase, each of which are decorated with a different ceramic pattern.

It's a wonder to behold, but during the Spring and Summer seasons it becomes even more breathtaking as locals adorn it with potted flowers and lanterns, creating intricate designs.

Situated 68 kilometers from Catania, the town of Caltagirone has long been famous for its production of pottery.

