

NEWSIN brief

Egypt cabinet sworn in

AFP, Cairo

An Egyptian cabinet led by Ibrahim Mahlab was sworn in yesterday, with most positions from the previous military-installed government retained but the foreign minister replaced and an investment minister appointed. The ministers took the oath of office before newly installed President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in an early morning ceremony broadcast live on state television.

Islamists kill 15 more in Kenya

AFP, Mpeketoni

At least 15 people have been killed in a new attack near Kenya's coast, officials said yesterday, just 24 hours after Somalia's Shebab rebels massacred close to 50 people in the same area. The al-Qaeda-linked Islamist group said its fighters carried out the latest attack on a village, and that its commando unit had managed to return to base unhindered after

US launches probe on Bergdahl disappearance

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

The US military said it had begun an investigation into the 2009 disappearance in Afghanistan of Bowe Bergdahl, the US soldier freed last month after five years in Taliban captivity. Bergdahl, 28, returned to the United States on Friday after spending nearly two weeks at a US military hospital in Germany and is being treated at Brooke Army Medical Center in

UK eases visa access for China

AFP, London

Britain on Monday announced it would ease access to visas for Chinese tourists and business people ahead of a visit by Premier Li Keqiang aimed at strengthening ties. The changes include a single visa to allow Chinese and Indian tourists to travel to both Ireland and Britain, and a simplified online application form for inde-

Asylum-seekers sue Australia

AFP, Sydney

Families of asylum-seekers killed in a shipwreck off Australia's Christmas Island in 2010 are suing the government, arguing it breached its duty of care in a move Canberra yesterday blasted as "shameful". Fifty people died when a rickety fishing boat crowded with nearly 100 Iraqi, Kurdish and Iranian asylum-seekers was dashed against jagged rocks in dangerous seas at the remote Indian Ocean



IRAQ CRISIS

An Iraqi young boy holds a weapon from the window of a car as people gather to show their readiness to join Iraqi security forces in the fight against Jihadist militants in the southern Shia Muslim shrine city of Najaf. Inset, Displaced Iraqis queue to register at a temporary refugee camp in Kurd-controlled Askikalak, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



Sectarian divide widens

Iraqi rulers defy west's call to reach out to Sunnis

REUTERS, Baghdad

Iraq's Shia rulers yesterday defied Western calls to reach out to Sunnis to defuse the uprising in the north of the country, declaring a boycott of Iraq's main Sunni political bloc and accusing Sunni power Saudi Arabia of promoting "genocide".

Washington has made clear it wants Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to embrace Sunni politicians as a condition of US support to fight a lightning advance by forces from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

But the Shia prime minister has moved in the opposite direction, announcing a crackdown on politicians and officers he considers "traitors" and lashing out at neighbouring Sunni countries for stoking militancy.

The latest target of his government's fury was Saudi Arabia, the main Sunni power in the Gulf, which funds Sunni

militants in neighbouring Syria but denies it is behind ISIL.

"We hold them responsible for supporting these groups financially and morally, and for the outcome of that - which includes crimes that may qualify as genocide: the spilling of Iraqi blood, the destruction of Iraqi state institutions and historic and religious sites," the Iraqi government said of Riyadh in a statement.

Maliki has blamed Saudi Arabia for supporting militants in the past, but the severe language was unprecedented. On Monday Riyadh blamed sectarianism in Baghdad for fuelling the violence.

ISIL fighters who aim to build a Caliphate based on mediaeval Sunni precepts across the Iraqi-Syrian frontier launched their revolt by seizing the north's main city, Mosul, last week and swept through the Tigris valley towards Baghdad.

The fighters, who consider all Shi'ites to be heretics deserving death, pride themselves on their brutality and have boasted of massacring hundreds of troops who surrendered.

Most Iraqi Sunnis abhor such violence, but nevertheless the ISIL-led uprising has been joined by other Sunni factions, including former members of ousted dictator Saddam Hussein's Baath Party and tribal figures, who share widespread anger at perceived oppression by Maliki's government.

Western countries, including the United States, have urged Maliki to reach out to Sunnis to rebuild national unity as the only way of preventing the disintegration of Iraq.

"There is a real risk of further sectarian violence on a massive scale, within Iraq and beyond its borders," UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said yesterday.



Pakistani rescuers carry an injured follower of preacher Tahir-ul-Qadri during a protest in Lahore, yesterday. At least 7 people were killed when Pakistani police clashed with followers of the fiery preacher in the eastern city of Lahore, hospital officials said. The Canadian-Pakistani cleric is due to arrive on June 23 in Pakistan where he hopes to lead a "peaceful revolution" against the country's parliamentary democracy.

PHOTO: AFP

UK to reopen embassy in Tehran

AFP, London

Britain plans to reopen its embassy in Iran, Foreign Secretary William Hague announced yesterday, as the West steps up its engagement with Tehran amid rapid jihadist advances in neighbouring Iraq.

Sunni militants from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group are moving towards the Iraqi capital Baghdad after a week-long offensive which has seen them make key gains including taking the second city of Mosul.

The British embassy in Tehran closed nearly three years ago after it was stormed by a mob angry at sanctions imposed over Iran's nuclear programme.

"The circumstances are right to reopen our embassy in Tehran. There are a range of practical issues that we will need to resolve first," Hague said in a written statement to parliament.

"However, it is our intention to reopen the embassy in Tehran with a small initial presence as soon as these practical arrangements have been made."

Hague's statement to parliament's lower House of Commons did not directly mention the situation in Iraq but noted that "Iran is an important country in a volatile region".

Diplomatic ties between Iran and Britain, the former colonial power, were strained long before the closure of the embassy in 2011.

There have been a string of major flare-ups in recent decades including over a fatwa issued against British author Salman Rushdie by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 and the seizure of 15 British sailors by an Iranian naval patrol in the northern Gulf in 2007. Britain appointed a non-resident charge d'affaires to Iran in November, restoring direct diplomatic contacts severed in 2011.

MILITARY OFFENSIVE AGAINST MILITANTS

Pak PM vows to eliminate terrorism

AGENCIES

Showing new resolve, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said his country has had enough of terrorism and the military operation launched in North Waziristan tribal region on Sunday would continue until terrorist safe havens are destroyed in the country.

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif also urged Afghanistan's leader Hamid Karzai to help stop insurgents escaping the major military offensive near their border.

Sharif asked President Hamid Karzai to seal their border along the mountainous tribal area, where the Pakistan military has deployed troops, tanks and jets in a long-awaited crackdown on the Taliban and other militants.

Fresh air strikes early yesterday targeted three Taliban strongholds in the town of Mir Ali in the North Waziristan area and killed 25 of the militants, according to official statements, raising the total insurgent death toll to 201.

Thousands of people have fled across the border into the Gorbaz district of Afghanistan's Khost province, according to local officials there, and are being provided with food and aid.

Others have made their way to the town of Bannu in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, 10 kilometres to the east of the border with North Waziristan.

The operation called Zarb-e-Azb (strike of the Prophet's sword) was launched days after a terrorist siege at Pakistan's busiest airport in Karachi killed over 30 people. Earlier, Pakistan got back control of the neighboring South Waziristan and Swat after separate military offensives in 2009.

Sharif said he was forced to order the operation after the Taliban did not reciprocate his sincere efforts to pursue peace talks with the Taliban.

Sharif earlier got a short in the arm after Imran Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) party endorsed the operation. PTI, which rules the provincial Khyber Pakhtunkhwa adjoining the tribal region, has been a staunch opponent of military actions. The province is feared to take the brunt of Taliban reprisals.

Army Chief General Raheel Sharif echoed the prime minister and said the operation would continue until the elimination of all terrorists and their sanctuaries. "We will rid the country of terrorists," he said.



Pakistan children whose families fled a military operation in the North Waziristan tribal agency pose for a photograph in Bannu, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

TEENS' ABDUCTION IN WEST BANK

Israel takes aim at Hamas as hunt intensifies

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel stepped up efforts to crush Hamas in the West Bank yesterday as the hunt for three Israeli teenagers believed kidnapped by the Islamist movement entered its fifth day.

Thousands of Israel troops engaged in the search for the youths turned their attention during the night to the northern West Bank city of Nablus and surrounding area, arresting 41 Palestinians, the army said.

So far, Israel has arrested around 200 Palestinians, most of them Hamas members, as it conducts a vast search operation for the students, two of them minors.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has accused militants from the Islamist movement of kidnapping the youths last week.

"We are here in the midst of a complex operation. We need to be prepared for the possibility that it may take time. This is a

serious event and there will be serious consequences," Netanyahu said on Monday evening.

Israel has said it holds Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas responsible for the safe return of the three, with Netanyahu phoning him to demand his help in the search efforts in what was their first direct political contact since 2012.

So far, there has been no formal claim of responsibility, and Hamas has dismissed Israel's accusations as "stupid".

At a meeting of the Israeli security cabinet on Monday, ministers decided to expand moves against Hamas in order to smash its political and social infrastructure in the West Bank, officials said.

A series of punitive steps aimed at decapitating Hamas in the West Bank were discussed on Monday by ministers, who examined the possibility of banishing its senior members to Gaza and demolishing

The incredible one-sided Popeye



MAIL ONLINE

When Matthais Schlitte was 16 he wandered into a bar and discovered that he was pretty good at arm-wrestling, due to his super human arm.

Over the past decade, Schlitte has travelled the world as a professional arm wrestler, honing his highly developed limb.

The 27-year-old German's arm measures 46cm around the forearm and has propelled him to eight national championships as well as 14 on an international level.

He has even beaten a specially designed arm-wrestling robot. Schlitte's right forearm dwarfs his 'normal' left arm.

Let Burmese people choose their leader

US urges Myanmar over Suu Kyi's presidency

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's opposition yesterday welcomed a US call for voters to have a free choice over their next president, amid efforts to change rules that bar Aung San Suu Kyi from standing.

The US State Department urged reforms to ensure Myanmar's people could "freely choose their president", in a statement responding to concerns that the army-affiliated ruling party would use its majority to quash amendments to the constitutional clause which currently bars Suu Kyi.

A spokesman for Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) said Washington's support was a positive sign.

But he warned of hurdles ahead as the party strives to amend the military-drafted charter before 2015 parliamentary elections seen as a key test of Myanmar's democratic transition.

The NLD is widely expected to win the majority of seats in next year's poll, if the vote is free and fair. The president is chosen

by parliament and Suu Kyi has indicated that she would like to stand.

But the former political prisoner is ineligible under the 2008 constitution, which prohibits anyone whose spouse or children are overseas citizens from leading the country.

Many suspect the clause was added by the then-ruling generals deliberately to exclude Suu Kyi. She was married to a now-deceased British academic and their two sons are British.

The NLD has launched a countrywide petition to promote its calls for a change in the charter, which also reserves

a quarter of the seats in parliament for unelected military personnel. Any change to the charter needs the support of over 75 percent of the legislature, so at least some soldiers would have to vote for the reforms.

Last month Suu Kyi earned a rebuke from the country's election commission for urging the army top brass and soldiers to support reforms in a speech to a crowd of thousands.



More deadly riots flare in Sri Lanka

AFP, Alutgama

More deadly violence flared in a Sri Lankan coastal resort where Buddhist hardliners set shops and homes alight for a second night running in defiance of a curfew, police and residents said yesterday.

Amid mounting international concern at the unrest, residents of a town which has borne the brunt said an unarmed security guard was killed in an attack outside a Muslim-owned farm, raising the overall death toll to four.

"More than a dozen houses and shops have been burnt overnight," a police source told AFP from the mainly Muslim town of Alutgama after another night of mob violence by followers of the extremist Buddhist Force.

Western embassies in Colombo advised their nationals holidaying in the area to stay indoors, while other foreigners were urged to avoid crowded areas and respect the curfew.

The attacks are the latest in a series of religious clashes to hit the island following unrest in January and also last year when Buddhist mobs attacked a mosque in the capital Colombo.

Muslims make up about 10 percent of the 20 million population, but are accused by nationalists of having undue influence.

Chennai stops to save a life

TIMES OF INDIA ONLINE

When it's more common to read reports of people losing their lives because of their inability to reach the hospital on time because of VIP traffic restrictions, here is a heart-warming story of traffic coming to a halt on Monday in Chennai to save the life of an ordinary patient.

In a textbook example of precise coordination between surgeons of two hospitals and the city traffic police, a medical team transported a heart from Government General Hospital to Fortis Malar Hospitals in Adyar, about 12km away, in less than 14 minutes by creating a "green corridor" - that is, red-light free access.

"As soon as the heart was brought, the transplant began. By 10.15pm, the heart was beating in the patient's chest," said Dr Suresh Rao, chief anaesthetist at Fortis Malar.

For those unfamiliar with Chennai, it's important to know that the road connecting the two hospitals is a key arterial road, usually carrying heavy traffic. That the police, doctors and the ordinary people cooperated to block it off for saving a life is obviously a great gesture by a city with a big heart.

The ambulance carrying the heart, harvested from a 27-year-old man who died in a traffic accident and preserved in a special container at 4 degrees Celsius, started from Government hospital at 6.44pm and reached Fortis Malar 13 minutes and 22 seconds later, at 6.57pm. Normally, a vehicle takes 45 minutes to cover the stretch at peak hour.

At the private hospital, the parents of Hvovi Minocherchomji's, a 21-year-old BCom student from Mumbai, received the heart - the mother in tears, the father with a prayer on his lips.