

NEWSIN

brief

Ukraine flag hoisted on Moscow skyscraper

AFP, Moscow

A Ukrainian flag was unfurled on the top of a Moscow skyscraper within sight of the Kremlin yesterday, officials said, as fighting in eastern Ukraine has frayed bilateral ties. The Soviet star crowning the Stalin-era skyscraper, located just a kilometre from the Kremlin, was also painted in the yellow and blue colours of the national flag.

Japanese becomes world's oldest man

Mail Online

A 111-year-old retired Japanese teacher who enjoys poetry has been recognised as the world's oldest man. Sakari Momoi received a certificate from Guinness World Records yesterday after succeeding Alexander Imich of New York, who died in June at the age of 111 years, 164 days. The world's oldest living person is also Japanese: Misao Okawa, a 116-year-old woman from Osaka. Momoi is one of 54,000 centenarians in Japan.

Court stays execution of Indian sisters

AFP, Mumbai

An Indian court yesterday put on hold the execution of two sisters on death row for murdering five children, a lawyer for the women said. Renuka Shinde and her step-sister Seema Gavit will be the first women executed in post-independence India if the punishment goes ahead. The pair were convicted in 2001 of kidnapping 13 children, forcing them to join a gang of thieves, and killing at least five of them.

Five Tibetans die after China cops shooting

AFP, Beijing

Five Tibetans have died in China after police opened fire on unarmed protesters, a rights group said yesterday, the latest report of unrest linked to ethnic minority rights. Police last week opened fire on locals in Kardze, a Tibetan-majority area of China's southwestern Sichuan province, rights groups said, citing local sources.

Landslides kill 39 in Japan

AFP, Tokyo

Huge landslides in western Japan killed at least 39 people and left rescuers scrambling to find another seven still missing, authorities said yesterday, after a wall of mud smashed into their homes. Dozens of houses were buried when hillsides collapsed after torrential downpours in Hiroshima, television pictures showed, leaving rescuers to pick through the devastation for any signs of life.

A spokesman for Hiroshima Police told AFP the death toll was still climbing. Among the dead was a 53-year-old rescuer, who was killed by a secondary landslide after he had pulled five people to safety, the Fire and Disaster Management Agency said. Torrents of brown water raced off the mountains behind the homes and through the wrecked buildings, hampering rescuers' efforts as they searched for anyone still trapped.

Troops were deployed to help in the rescue after a request from the local government. Japan's weather agency warned more heavy rain was on the way to the area, raising the risk of further landslides in places where tonnes of mud have already been displaced.

BEHEADING OF US JOURNALIST IN IRAQ

IS 'cancer' must go: Obama

Urges concerted efforts to fight jihadists; killing sparks global outrage; Germany moves to arm kurds; Qatar accused of financing militants

AGENCIES

US President Barack Obama on Wednesday demanded the world take action against the "cancer" of jihadist extremism in Iraq, after an American reporter was murdered by militants.

As US jets continued to strike jihadist targets despite a threat to kill a second reporter, Obama said: "When people harm Americans anywhere, we do what's necessary to see that justice is done."

US Central Command said 14 air strikes had been carried out on IS targets in Iraq in the 24 hours since the video was released.

Obama was speaking after the so-called "Islamic State," which has seized much of eastern Syria and northern Iraq, released a video showing a masked militant beheading US reporter James Foley.

The black-clad man said the 40-year-old freelance journalist, who was kidnapped in northern Syria in November 2012, had been killed to avenge American air strikes against his movement.

He paraded a second US reporter, Steven Sotloff, before the camera and said he too would die unless Obama changes course. Pentagon confirmed that airstrikes would continue.

Obama said the entire world was appalled by the beheading of 40-year-old reporter James Foley, which the IS fighters videotaped and published on the Internet.

"There has to be a common effort to extract this cancer so it does not spread. It has to be a clear rejection of these kind of nihilistic ideologies," Obama said.



A file photo of US journalist James Foley, left, and a video grab of the beheading video that the militants posted online.

PHOTO: MAIL ONLINE

"One thing we can all agree on is that a group like ISIL has no place in the 21st century," he said. He said the group speaks for no true religion, and threatens Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

US intelligence believes the video is genuine, and the British government held a crisis meeting to launch an investigation because Foley's executioner spoke English with a London accent.

The United Nations and Europe's top powers condemned the killing, and France warned the world faces the "most serious international situation" since 2001, the year of the September 11 attacks.

In a significant shift from its usual policy, Germany said it was ready to send weapons to support Iraqi Kurds against IS, while France vowed to hold a conference on the security of the region.



UKRAINE CRISIS

Dozens killed in army offensive

AFP, Donetsk

Fierce fighting between government forces and pro-Russian rebels left dozens of civilians dead with artillery pounding central Donetsk yesterday as Ukrainian troops pushed on with a bloody offensive.

Deadly battles to crush the ailing rebellion appeared to intensify ahead of a fresh round of diplomacy that will see the presidents of Russia and Ukraine meet next week for the first time in months.

Clashes in and around the besieged main rebel stronghold of Donetsk killed 43 civilians in the past 24 hours, local authorities said.

AFP journalists saw fierce mortar fire tear through the centre of the city close to the state-of-the-art stadium of football team Shakhtar Donetsk, as Ukrainian troops tightened the vice on insurgents holed up in the mining hub.

Street battles were raging in Ilovaysk, a key railway hub some 45 kilometres east of Donetsk, with authorities saying nine soldiers died in the area in the last 24 hours, including a US national who fought for a Ukrainian volunteer battalion.

The renewed offensive comes as Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko gears up for a meeting in Minsk with Russia's Vladimir Putin, the heads of Belarus and Kazakhstan, and EU officials next week.

Kiev has accused Moscow of ratcheting up arms flows to help bolster the separatists as Ukrainian forces have pushed deeper into dwindling rebel territory with clashes killing around 2,200 people since April.

Western powers also fear Putin could be preparing to send in the 20,000 troops Nato says he has massed on the border as a last roll of the dice.

A Ukrainian military spokesman could not confirm claims from a commander in the field that a massive convoy of Russian armoured vehicles had entered the second-largest insurgent city of Lugansk.

Meanwhile, there seemed to be some signs of progress in the week-long saga that has seen some 300 Russian lorries with humanitarian aid parked up at the border with Ukraine's Lugansk region.

Kiev fears that the convoy may be attacked if allowed to cross into rebel territory and could give the Kremlin a pre-text to invade.



Thai junta chief tipped to become PM

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's coup leader is expected to be picked as prime minister by the kingdom's new army-dominated national assembly, junta sources said yesterday, cementing the military's hold on power in the politically turbulent nation.

Army Chief Prayut Chan-O-cha is likely to be the sole candidate for the premiership when the 197-strong appointed assembly convenes on Thursday to select a new leader for the Southeast Asian country, the sources told AFP.

"It was difficult to find people to become prime minister other than General Prayut. If it's not him, who else should it be? He staged a coup. He has to be responsible for solving all the problems by himself. By becoming prime minister, he will have full power" one junta official said on condition of anonymity.

Prayut seized power from an elected government in a bloodless coup on May 22, shortly after Yingluck Shinawatra was dismissed as prime minister in a controversial court ruling.

Pakistan hopeful of stronger India ties

Defends decision to meet Kashmiri separatists

AFP, New Delhi

Pakistan remains hopeful of strengthening ties with India despite an angry New Delhi last week cancelling scheduled talks between the nuclear-armed rival neighbours, Pakistan's high commissioner said yesterday.

Pakistan's top envoy to India yesterday meanwhile defended his decision to meet Kashmiri separatists, a move that prompted an angry New Delhi to cancel high-level talks between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

High Commissioner (ambassador) Abdul Basit said he met Kashmiri separatist leaders as part of efforts to resolve tensions between the two arch-rivals, including over the disputed Himalayan region.

Basit said Pakistan was confident of "overcoming this setback" after Delhi called off the diplomatic talks in Islamabad in a blow to warmer ties between the new Indian government and Islamabad.

"We believe Kashmiris are a stakeholder in this (diplomatic) process," Basit told reporters in the capital, explaining that the meetings with the separatists were a "longstanding" practice.

"We will not allow the process (of stronger ties) to be distracted in any way," Basit said, adding, "You will find Pakistan seriously committed to the process."

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surprise move to invite his Pakistani counterpart, Nawaz Sharif, to his swearing-in ceremony in May spurred hopes that peace talks between the two countries could resume. The warmer ties were dented last week when Modi accused Islamabad of waging a "proxy war" by sending militants to attack Indian targets.

PROTESTS TO OUST PAKISTAN GOVERNMENT

Talks begin to end crisis

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani ministers and opposition politicians met anti-government protesters yesterday, but talks ended for the day with the two sides appearing no closer to resolving a week-long political crisis that has rattled the restive, nuclear-armed nation.

Thousands of followers of cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan and populist cleric Tahir-ul-Qadri have been demonstrating outside the parliament building, trying to force Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif from office.

Khan and Qadri say last year's election that swept Sharif to power by a landslide was rigged and are demanding his resignation.

A cross-party delegation met members of Qadri's team in the evening to try to resolve the standoff, but the session finished with no concrete result. It was unclear if talks would resume the next day.

Despite few signs protest leaders were prepared to back down, Abdul Qadir

Baloch, part of the government team, had said prior to negotiations that he was hopeful for a positive outcome.

Khan had earlier struck a defiant note, insisting Sharif must go before he would participate in negotiations.

"We are ready for talks but there will be no use of such talks until Nawaz Sharif resigns," he told several thousand supporters rallying outside parliament.

If PAT were to reach a settlement with the government and withdraw, PTI's position would be significantly weakened, despite Khan's tough stance.

Neither movement has mobilised mass support beyond their core followers and opposition parties have shunned Khan's call to unseat the government and begin a campaign of civil disobedience.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court, which has played an influential role in Pakistani politics, ordered Khan and Qadri to appear before the court today to explain their protests.



Pakistani riot policemen sit on top of shipping containers, used as roadblocks leading to Prime Minister House, during yesterday's protest.

PHOTO: AFP

MICHAEL BROWN SHOOTING

Holder visits US riot-hit town

AFP, Ferguson

US Attorney General Eric Holder traveled to St Louis, Missouri yesterday after the latest in a sting of violent protests over the police shooting of an unarmed black teenager.

Holder, the top US law enforcement officer, was expected to visit the St Louis suburb of Ferguson even as a grand jury investigation into the death was to get underway.

Holder, who is himself African American, is to oversee the federal response to the August 9 killing of 18-year-old Michael Brown.

A grand jury was to begin hearing witnesses to Brown's killing yesterday, with widespread calls for the police officer, Darren Wilson, to be put on trial for murder.

In an op-ed column in the St Louis Post-Dispatch newspaper Wednesday, Holder pledged what he called a full, fair and independent investigation.

In Tuesday's protest three guns were seized and protesters threw glass and plastic bottles of water and urine at police towards the end of the demo, prompting officers to intervene and arrest 47 demonstrators, said Captain Ron Johnson of the Missouri Highway Patrol.

But Johnson stressed that, unlike during a violent protest on Monday night, this time protesters did not fire guns at police and officers refrained from using tear gas to break up the rally.

Fears that the fatal police shooting of a knife-wielding black man in St Louis itself on Tuesday might renew tensions failed to materialize, after successive nights of clashes with police in Ferguson.

Meanwhile Brown's family was preparing for his funeral, which their lawyer said would take place on Monday.

Congress will comeback, says Sonia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Opposition Congress President Sonia Gandhi yesterday said her party will stage a comeback as she attacked ruling Bharatiya Janata Party accusing it of having woven "false dreams" and people got caught in the "trap".

She targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi government -- charging it with copying the schemes and programmes of the previous Congress-led UPA dispensation and taking credit for the same.

Addressing a convention of the party's women wing, Sonia, along with her son Rahul Gandhi, sought to reach out to women by promising a larger electoral role for them at all levels and making a strong pitch for reservation of seats for them in Parliament and state legislatures.

The Congress chief expressed confidence about staging a comeback. "May be the path of our struggle is a bit longer and we may have to work a little more. But if all of us work hard and do it together, the day is not far when Congress will regain its peak."

Human Barbie



MAIL ONLINE

Meet Lolita Richi, the youngest 'Human Barbie' yet to emerge, who claims to be the most doll-like beauty yet.

Lolita, 16, from Kiev, Ukraine, boasts the same improbable body proportions and blank facial features as a Barbie. She has a tiny 20-inch waist, a 32F bra size and wears contact lenses that give her a wide-eyed, doll-like stare.

Lolita maintains that her striking looks were achieved without plastic surgery, dieting or Photoshop.

One person who is wholly supportive of her eccentric look is Lolita's mother, Anya Richi, 33. Anya is her photographer and captures all of the snaps that Lolita uploads online.

Lolita says there is no man out there at the moment who is a worthy candidate for her affections.

"I want to be with a really manly man who is polite, sensible and who doesn't run away from problems. He also needs to have a full head of hair. I don't like bald men."

Lolita wants to become a psychologist after she finishes school but would love to achieve fame for her look.