



Members of two Palestinian families walk next to a fire amid destroyed homes on their block in Shejaiya on Wednesday. Shejaiya was one of the hardest hit neighborhoods in fighting between Hamas militants and Israel during the 50 days of fighting. The fire was set by the home owners in an effort to keep mosquitoes away from their shattered homes which have no water or electricity. *Inset*, Trucks loaded with goods entering the Gaza Strip from Israel through the Kerem Shalom crossing in Rafah.

PHOTO: AFP



## Aid flows into Gaza after truce

AFP, Gaza City

Vital humanitarian aid was arriving in Gaza yesterday as residents began rebuilding their lives following a devastating 50-day war killing 2,143 Palestinians.

Millions in and around the war-torn coastal enclave were enjoying a second day of peace after the guns fell silent following a permanent ceasefire agreement, allowing people to begin putting their lives back together.

The truce, which went into force on Tuesday evening, saw the warring sides agree to a "permanent" halt to seven weeks of bloodshed in a move hailed by Washington, the United Nations and top world diplomats.

Under the deal, Israel agreed to immediately lift restrictions on fishing, allowing boats to work up to six nautical miles from the shore in a move which went into effect early on Wednesday.

It also pledged to ease restrictions at the two crossings into Gaza, Erez and Kerem Shalom, to allow the entry of goods, humanitarian aid and construction materials, in a move which began yesterday.

Debate on crunch issues such as Hamas's demand for a port and an airport, and the release of prisoners, as well as Israel's calls to demilitarise Gaza have been postponed for another month until the sides resume talks in Cairo.

For now, the focus is catering for the immediate needs of the 1.8 million residents of the Gaza Strip, nearly half a million of whom were forced to flee their homes because of the fighting.

At the Kerem Shalom commercial crossing, a steady trickle of lorries were arriving early in the day, most carrying commercial goods, although some were transporting aid, bearing the logo of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA).

On Wednesday, more than 200 tonnes of aid from Saudi Arabia, Oman and Turkey trundled into Gaza from Egypt, entering via the Rafah border crossing, an official at the frontier told AFP.

A World Food Programme (WFP) aid convoy arrived in Gaza for the first time since 2007, also crossing from Egypt, and carrying enough food to last 150,000 people for five days, the Geneva-based agency said.

## IS militants execute 160 Syria troops

US seeks coalition against militants; 43 UN peacekeepers abducted from border

AFP, Damascus

Islamic State jihadists boasted Thursday they had executed scores of Syrian troops after capturing a key air base, the latest in a string of abuses that have shocked the world.

News of the killings came as US President Barack Obama weighed air strikes on IS positions in Syria and edged closer to greenlighting a mission to aid Shiite Turkmen trapped in an Iraqi town besieged by the jihadists.

It also came as rival Islamist rebels led by Al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Nusra Front seized 43 UN peacekeepers on the Golan Heights, part of a mission that has monitored an armistice between Syrian and Israeli troops on the strategic plateau for decades. All the forces were from Fiji.

The UN Security Council condemned the action and demanded the "unconditional and immediate release" of the peacekeepers, a statement said.

Obama administration officials said on Wednesday said US is intensifying its push to build an international campaign against Islamic State jihadist fighters in Iraq and



This photo shows captured troops being marched along a desert road before being allegedly executed.

Syria, including recruiting partners for potential joint military action.

Britain and Australia are potential candidates, U.S. officials said. Germany said on Wednesday it was in talks with the United States and other international partners about possible military action against Islamic State but made clear it would not participate.

Washington has so far balked at cooperating with Damascus against the jihadists.

IS posted grisly video footage on the Internet of scores of bodies heaped in the desert they boasted were those of Syrian soldiers they captured and executed following its seizure of Tabqa air base.

The jihadists have repeatedly posted gruesome videos, which have appalled international opinion but served as a propaganda tool to recruit volunteers.

Britain-based monitoring group the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that IS had executed at least 160 soldiers, among some 500 who had made a desperate bid to escape to government-held territory after their defeat last Sunday.

## Ukraine cries Russia 'invasion'

West, Nato decry dangerous escalation of crisis, threaten more sanctions

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine and the West yesterday said that Russian troops were actively involved in the fighting tearing apart the east of the country, raising fears of a direct military confrontation between Kiev and its former Soviet master.

The UN Security Council geared up for an emergency meeting on the crisis as European leaders warned Moscow to change course or suffer "very serious consequences."

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko described the situation as "extremely difficult" but "manageable for us not to panic", as security chiefs announced that mandatory army conscription will restart in the autumn.

Nato said at least 1,000 Russian troops were on the ground supporting pro-Kremlin separatists who have been fighting against Kiev's rule since April.

A senior Ukrainian diplomat earlier decried the move as a "direct invasion" but Moscow insisted none of its soldiers were on Ukrainian soil.

US officials accused Russian troops of being behind a lightning counter-offensive that has seen pro-Moscow rebels seize swathes of territory from government forces, dramatically turning the tide in the four-month conflict.

US yesterday warned it was considering new sanctions against Russia.

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said Russian President Vladimir Putin had a choice to make over whether he wanted his people to feel the effects of deepening sanctions.

Psaki, however, appeared to rule out a military response to the crisis.

Kiev said Russian soldiers had seized control of a key southeastern border town and a string of villages in an area where fighting had been raging for days.

The US ambassador to Kiev Geoffrey Pyatt wrote on Twitter that Moscow's troops were now "directly involved in the fighting" in Ukraine.

EU leaders also warned of possible further penalties, with German Chancellor Angela Merkel saying a summit which is scheduled for tomorrow will discuss new sanctions.

Fears that the flare-up in the Ukraine conflict could lead to all-out war pushed stocks down in Europe and US.

Kiev had called on the West for urgent help after a counter-offensive from the southeast border smashed through an army blockade around the separatist stronghold of Donetsk and threatened the government-held port city of Mariupol.

The gains by the separatist fighters come after weeks of government offensives that had seen troops push deep into the last holdout rebel bastions in Ukraine's industrial heartland.

Ukraine's Prime Minister Arseniy



A Ukrainian man holds a placard reading "Putin get out!" during a rally in the center of the southern Ukrainian city of Mariupol, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Yatsenyuk blasted Russian President Vladimir Putin for having "deliberately unleashed a war in Europe" and pleaded for urgent action.

Yatsenyuk said on Wednesday it was time for Nato to act, calling for "practical help" when it holds a summit in Wales next week that will be attended by Poroshenko.

The spiralling tensions come only days after Poroshenko and Putin held their first meeting in three months on Tuesday but failed to achieve any concrete breakthrough despite talk of a peace roadmap.

Kiev said Russian troops on Wednesday seized control of the key border town of Novoazovsk and a

string of surrounding villages along the southeastern strip of the frontier. Ukraine's military also claimed a Russian battalion had set up its headquarters near a village in the same area, while local authorities in Donetsk said 26 people had been killed in heavy shelling since Wednesday.

The latest claims of Russian manoeuvres are sparking fears that Moscow is seeking more than Crimea, which it annexed in March in the face of Western outrage.

The United Nations estimates the conflict has killed over 2,200 people and forced more than 400,000 to flee since April.

## British PM urges Scotland to stay

200 business leaders sign open letter backing independence

AFP, Glasgow

British Prime Minister David Cameron heads to Scotland to make the business case for it remaining part of Britain yesterday as 200 business leaders signed an open letter backing independence.

Questions over whether Scotland's economy could go it alone have been at the heart of the campaign, with a rival group of 130 captains of industry claiming Wednesday that independence would be "bad for business".

Scotland votes in three weeks' time on whether to become a separate country after over 300 years of union with the rest of the United Kingdom.

Most opinion polls currently suggest the proposal is set to be rejected.

The "Yes" and "No" camps have traded statistics and accusations on everything from whether Scotland could keep using the pound to what share of Britain's national debt it should take on if it broke away.

Cameron kept a low profile on the campaign trail due to this centre-right Conservative Party's unpopularity north of the border, where it only holds one out of 59 House of Commons seats.

But he will re-enter the fray by urging Scots not to turn their backs on "one of the oldest and most successful single markets in the world" in a keynote speech to CBI Scotland, a leading business lobby group, in Glasgow.

Cameron is set to say that Scotland does twice as much trade with the rest of the United Kingdom as with the rest of the world put together, according to pre-released extracts of his speech.

He is also expected to highlight "the opportunities that come from being part of something bigger".

As the prime minister was set to arrive in Glasgow, The Herald newspaper published a letter from 200 business people arguing that an independent Scotland would be better for business.

MH370 TRAGEDY

## Search area refined

AFP, Canberra

The hunt for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 will focus on the southern part of the existing search zone after a new clue to the plane's possible location emerged, Australia said yesterday.

Fresh information suggested the jet "may have turned south" earlier than thought, Deputy Prime Minister Warren Truss said.

The detail came to light following "further refinement" of satellite data and as investigators attempted to map the plane's position during a failed attempt to contact it earlier in its flight path.

"The search area remains the same, but some of the information that we now have suggests to us that areas a little further to the south -- within the search area, but a little further to the south -- are of particular interest and priority in the search area," he said.

His comments came as Australia and Malaysia inked a memorandum of understanding in Canberra over the next phase of the hunt for the plane, which disappeared on March 8 with 239 people on board en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing.

The plane is believed to have crashed into the southern Indian Ocean far off the west coast of Australia after mysteriously diverting off-course, but a massive air, sea and underwater search has failed to find any wreckage.

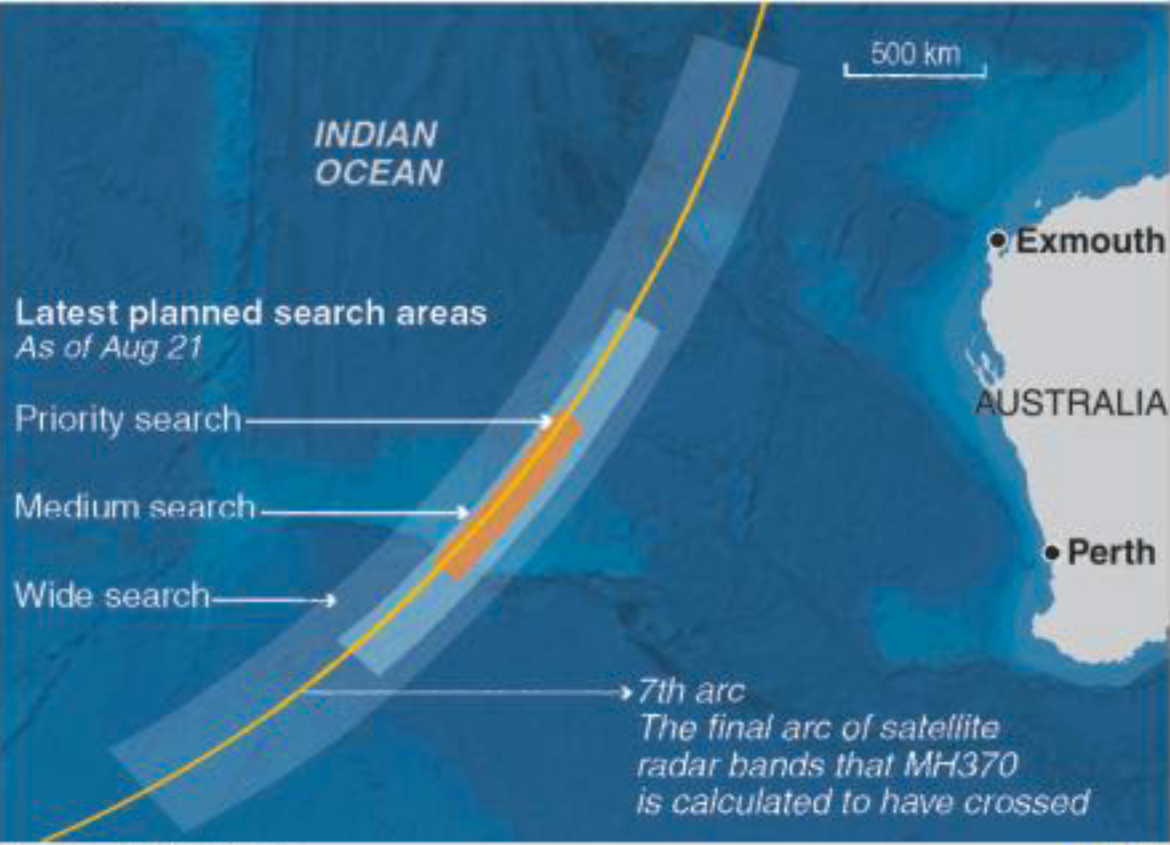
Experts have now used technical data to finalise its most likely resting place deep under the Indian Ocean and are preparing for a more intense underwater search, beginning next month.

It will focus on a dauntingly vast stretch of ocean measuring 60,000 square kilometres. Truss said that during efforts to map MH370's location when Malaysia Airlines tried to contact the jet, it was "suggested to us that the aircraft may have turned south a little earlier than we had previously expected".

"After MH370 disappeared from the radar, Malaysia Airlines ground staff sought to make contact using a satellite phone. That was unsuccessful," he said. "But the detailed research that's being done now has been able to... trace that phone call and help position the aircraft and the direction it was travelling."

The minister said investigators still believed MH370 was somewhere on the search zone's seventh arc, where it emitted a final satellite "handshake".

### Flight MH370 search area



## Britain still a 'deeply elitist' society: Report

AFP, London

Britain is still a "deeply elitist" society where top jobs are dominated by people educated at fee-paying schools and Oxford and Cambridge universities, a report found yesterday.

Many politicians, military chiefs, judges and journalists were "formed on the playing fields of independent schools" and "finished in Oxbridge's dreaming spires", the study from the country's social mobility watchdog said.

This means that those making key decisions in public life are often unfamiliar "with the day-to-day challenges facing ordinary people in the country," the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission added.

Prime Minister David Cameron, educated at Britain's top fee-paying school Eton College and Oxford University, has faced repeated criticism for surrounding himself ministers and advisors from a similarly privileged background.

This has even come from his closest allies. In March, the then Education Secretary Michael Gove, who comes from more humble origins, said the number of Old Etonians in Cameron's inner circle was "preposterous".

The study found that 59 percent of Cameron's Cabinet went to Oxford or Cambridge along with 75 percent of senior judges. That compares with less than one percent of the overall population who attended the elite universities.

Some 62 percent of senior military officers attended fee-paying schools along with 33 percent of lawmakers.

That compares to seven percent of Britain's population overall.

"Our examination of who gets the top jobs in Britain today found elitism so stark that it could be called 'social engineering,'" the report said.

## Ebola death toll passes 1,500

AFP, Accra

Ebola-hit nations met for crisis talks yesterday as the death toll topped 1,500 and the World Health Organization warned that the number of cases could exceed 20,000 before the outbreak is stemmed.

Nigeria announced that the virus had reached its oil-producing hub, dashing hopes that the country had successfully contained it to its biggest city, Lagos.

Hopes were raised meanwhile of a vaccine for the haemorrhagic fever after British medical charity the Wellcome Trust and pharmaceuticals giant GlaxoSmithKline said safety trials on a new drug could begin as soon as next month.

But new figures from the WHO showed the scale of the crisis. It said it was working on an assumption that it would take six to nine months to bring the epidemic under control, by which time the number of infections could have passed 20,000.

As of August 26, 1,552 people had been confirmed dead from Ebola in four countries -- Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea and Nigeria -- while 3,062 had been infected.