

Election audit ends in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

A UN-supervised audit of votes cast in Afghanistan's disputed election was completed yesterday, officials said, but the results will not be known for days as the contentious process of invalidating fraudulent ballots continues. Both presidential candidates claim to have won the June 14 election, triggering a political stalemate and rising ethnic tension as US-led Nato combat troops withdraw after 13 years of fighting the Taliban.

Shabab leader Ahmed Godane killed: US

BBC ONLINE

The leader of the Somali Islamist group al-Shabab, Ahmed Abdi Godane, was killed following a US attack earlier this week, the Pentagon said yesterday. The US carried out air strikes on Monday night destroying a vehicle and an encampment south of the capital. Godane was one of the US state department's most wanted men.

Death toll from Pak floods hits 70

AFP, Islamabad

Two days of torrential monsoon rains have killed nearly 70 people in Pakistan, officials said yesterday, as authorities ordered the evacuation of low-lying areas around a major river. The deaths have all come in the most populous province Punjab and in Pakistani-administered Kashmir, with most caused by roof collapses and electric shocks.

EU to send \$183m in aid for Ebola-hit Africa

AFP, Brussels

The European Union yesterday announced 140 million euros (\$183 million) in funds to fight the deadly Ebola virus in West Africa, a sharp increase over its previous pledge as the outbreak worsens. The World Health Organization put the official Ebola death toll at 1,841, out of a total of 3,685 cases in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

ICC seeks to postpone Kenyatta trial

AFP, The Hague

The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor yesterday asked judges to indefinitely postpone the start of Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta's crimes against humanity trial, saying Nairobi was refusing to cooperate. The trial of the Kenyan leader on five counts related to post-election violence dating back to 2007-2008 has been dogged by repeated delays.

Professional sorry sayers of Japan

STAR DESK

It's not easy to apologise, and most people would like to avoid it entirely if possible. Well, it turns out it is possible, if you happen to live in Japan. They have these 'apology agencies' through which you could simply pay someone to say sorry on your behalf. By hiring an expert, not only do you get to avoid the discomfort, you also make sure that the person gets a proper apology. These agencies train their employees to handle things based on the gravity of the situation. These people are professionals, and it looks like they can get you out of all sorts of sticky situations.

These businesses are doing pretty well for themselves. About 40 percent of their cus-

tomers base is believed to be female, between the ages of 20 and 40 years. Some of the most popular reasons for approaching apology agencies are problems with money or love.

Prices vary depending on the nature of apology required. The Shazaiya Aiga Pro Agency charges 25,000 yen (\$240) for a face-to-face apology, and 10,000 yen (\$96) for an email or phone apology. Nihon Shazai Daikokao, on the other hand, charges 3,500 yen (\$33) per hour.

A few agencies like Yokohama Benriya Natchan prefer not to reveal their prices – estimates are provided by phone consultation and they even offer 'apologies while crying' services for particularly angry people.



Nato leaders are pictured as they watch a flypast of military aircraft on the second day of the Nato 2014 Summit at the Celtic Manor Resort in Newport, South Wales, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

US forms 'core coalition'

AGENCIES

The US has announced it is forming a "core coalition" to battle Islamic State in Iraq, and has given the new bloc two weeks to finalise plans to help the Baghdad authorities and the Kurds in the north intensify the fight against the militants.

Speaking at the Nato summit in Wales, the US secretary of state, John Kerry, yesterday said that the 10-nation coalition would concentrate on shoring up those in Iraq who were fighting against Isis, but said intervention would not extend to western powers sending in troops.

"We need to attack them in ways that prevent them from taking over territory, to bolster the Iraqi security forces and others in the region who are prepared to take them on, without committing troops of our own," Kerry told a meeting of the 10 nations that will form the coalition. "Obviously I think that's a red line for everybody here: no boots on the ground."

He said the grouping should come up with firm plans by the time the UN general assembly meets for its annual session later this month.

The 10 nations are the US, Britain, France, Germany, Canada, Australia, Turkey, Italy, Poland and Denmark. Significantly, the group does not include any Arab nation and only one of Iraq's six neighbours.

The US has launched more than 100 air strikes on Isis positions in northern Iraq in the past month to try to check the progress of the militants, who have seized a vast swath of

Syria and Iraq this summer.

But Pentagon officials have said that this military engagement will only contain the IS advance, not defeat them, and that a broader strategy and alliance is needed.

The decision was made at a joint meeting of defence and foreign office ministers chaired by Kerry and his British counterpart, Philip Hammond.

Britain has not ruled out joining US military action, although the first step would likely be to arm Kurdish fighters who are already confronting IS. France also has not ruled out military action, while Germany announced last week it would send military equipment including anti-tank rocket launchers, rifles and hand grenades, to Iraqi Kurds.

Pressure to tackle IS rose this week after the release of a video showing the execution of a second US journalist, with a British hostage also being threatened.

British Prime Minister David Cameron used the leaders' dinner on Thursday night at Cardiff Castle to urge allies not to pay ransoms, amid reports that hostages from France and Italy have been released following the payment of large sums.

It is likely the core coalition will put together a UN resolution endorsing military and political support for the Iraqi forces trying to oust Isis. It remains unclear whether there will be any mention of Syria at this stage, an issue that is likely to cause difficulty for Russia, a permanent member of the UN security council.

FIGHT AGAINST ISLAMIC STATE

UN's tsunami drill next week

AFP, Paris

A decade after the strongest tsunami in living memory, 24 countries spanning from Australia to South Africa will take part in a UN-backed simulation exercise next week to test their capacity to forecast and tackle similar disasters.

The exercise, organised by UNESCO, will simulate a 9.1-magnitude earthquake south of the Indonesian island of Java beginning September 9.

A second 9.0-magnitude quake will be simulated at the Makran Trench south of Iran and Pakistan.

The test is designed to examine an Indian Ocean tsunami warning system put in place after the December 24, 2004 disaster which killed over 230,000 people.

Free prisoners who served half terms

Indian SC rules over trial delays

AFP, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court yesterday ordered the country's notoriously overcrowded jails to free all inmates who have served half their maximum term without trial, in a landmark ruling with potential implications for hundreds of thousands of prisoners.

More than two-thirds of India's nearly four million prison inmates are awaiting trial, according to Amnesty International, many having already spent years in prison.

India's criminal procedure code already states that prisoners in pre-trial detention must be released once they have served half the maximum sentence they would receive if found guilty, but the law is rarely implemented.

Chief Justice R.M. Lodha yesterday said prisons across the country must comply with the law, and ordered local judges and magistrates to oversee the process.

"Judicial officers shall identify prisoners who have completed half of the maximum period of imprisonment provided for offences they are charged with," he said.

"After completing the procedure they should pass appropriate orders in the jail itself for the release of undertrial prisoners."

It is not yet clear how many prisoners will be affected by the ruling. India's archaic and desperately under-resourced justice system is struggling to deal with a huge backlog of cases -- official figures show there were more than 30 million trials pending across India at the end of 2012. Inmates can wait years to have their cases heard in court, leading to massive overcrowding in jails.

'Qaeda wants to portray Modi as enemy of Islam'

US says new Indian faction not a serious threat

PTI, Washington

Al-Qaeda, which has announced the creation of a separate wing for India, wants to portray Prime Minister Narendra Modi as an enemy of Islam and as such India should take its threat "very seriously", a well-known American counter-terror expert said on Thursday even as the US tried to downplay the terrorist outfit's capabilities.

"This video, the first from Zawahiri this year, should be taken very seriously. Al-Qaeda wants to portray Prime Minister Modi as an enemy of Islam," ex-CIA analyst Bruce Riedel, who is considered to be one of the US's top experts on counter-terrorism, said.

"From its base in Pakistan and with its close links to Lashkar-e-Taiba, al-Qaeda is a dangerous menace to India," Riedel said when asked about the latest video of Zawahiri announcing al-Qaeda's creation of a new branch for the Indian subcontinent to wage jihad in India, including in Kashmir, Gujarat and Assam with the goal of estab-

LAND GRAB IN WEST BANK

Israel to build 283 new homes

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel yesterday said it published tenders for 283 new homes in a West Bank settlement, just days after announcing its biggest land grab on occupied Palestinian territory for three decades.

The expansion of the Elkana settlement, in the north-west of the West Bank, was approved in January and the tenders published Thursday, Israel's Land Authority said on its website.

The Jewish state in January said it would advance the construction of some 5,000 new settler homes in annexed east Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank, including in Elkana, Haaretz newspaper reported at the time.

Haaretz said that move was aimed at diffusing Israeli public anger over the release of Palestinian prisoners under US-brokered peace talks that later collapsed.

The process for those units had been put on hold over the summer during the Gaza war, housing ministry spokesman Ariel Rozenberg told AFP.

Israel announced Sunday its biggest land grab in the West Bank since the 1980s, saying it planned to expropriate 400 hectares (988 acres) of land in the south of the territory, between the cities of Bethlehem and Hebron.

That move drew international condemnation, even from ally the United States and some Israeli cabinet ministers.

lishing a caliphate and impose sharia ranging from Afghanistan to Myanmar.

Reiterating that the new Indian government should take the threat very seriously, Riedel said that New Delhi should increase its counter-terrorism co-operation with the US and Afghanistan.

At the same time, she reiterated that the US remains committed to dismantling al-Qaida anywhere that it poses a threat to the US and make sure that it doesn't renew its threat to America.

The announcement by al-Qaeda that it has formed a branch for operating in India is not an indication of the terrorist outfit gaining new capabilities, the US yesterday said, asserting that it is committed to dismantling the group.

"We do not regard the announcement as an indication of new capabilities by al-Qaeda, which has long been active throughout the region," Caitlin Hayden, spokesperson of the National Security Council at the White House, said.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (R) gestures while shaking hands with Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott in New Delhi yesterday. The leaders yesterday sealed a long-awaited nuclear energy deal, paving the way for Australia to sell uranium to energy-hungry India.

PHOTO: AFP

120m girls endure sexual abuse globally: UN

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A UN report showing the shocking levels of sexual abuse experienced by children across the globe has shown that 120 million girls have been raped or sexually assaulted by the time they reach the age of 20, amounting to just over one in 10.

The report draws on data from 190 countries and shows that the most common perpetrators of sexual violence against girls are current or former husbands or boyfriends.

The report, which uses Unicef data, stressed that boys experience sexual violence too, but to a lesser extent than girls. It is one of the most comprehensive reports of the global experiences of violence against children, and notes that while people are increasingly recognising the impact of these actions, the acts themselves mostly go under-reported and undocumented.

Unicef said that in addition to sexual violence, the use of physical violence is also widespread and that 95,000 children and adolescents aged between 0 and 19 were killed in 2012 alone.

It meant that one in five victims of murder and manslaughter worldwide were children under the age of 20.

The report also covered violence against children in care, finding that six in 10 children aged between two and 14 had been subjected to physical punishment by carers.



This data shows that violence "cuts across boundaries of age, geography, religion, ethnicity and income brackets," Unicef's executive director said.

"It occurs in places where children should be safe, their homes, schools and communities."

"Increasingly, it happens over the internet, and it's perpetrated by family members and teachers, neighbours and strangers and other children."