

NEWSIN

brief

Morocco arrests seven 'jihadist recruiters'

AFP, Rabat

Morocco's interior ministry said yesterday that seven jihadists have been arrested for recruiting fighters to join the ranks of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. The suspects were active in the central cities of Fez and Outat El Haj and in Zayou in the north and also planned attacks against Morocco itself, a statement said.

Ukraine, rebels swap dozens of prisoners

AFP, Donetsk

Ukrainian forces and pro-Kremlin insurgents said yesterday they have swapped dozens of prisoners under the terms of a fragile truce aimed at ending the five-month eastern revolt. Separatist leader Andrei Purgin said 31 guerrillas were swapped overnight for 36 Ukrainian soldiers in a town north of the rebel stronghold of Donetsk.

Poland resumes gas deliveries to Ukraine

AFP, Warsaw

Poland yesterday resumed gas deliveries to war-torn Ukraine, its state-owned pipeline operator said, following a brief interruption brought on by slashed supplies. Poland stopped sending the daily four million cubic metres of gas to Ukraine on Wednesday, accusing Russian's Gazprom of only delivering 45 percent of its gas order that day.

Thai PM to visit Myanmar on first official trip

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's coup leader and premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha will visit Myanmar on his first official overseas trip, an official said yesterday, as the junta seeks to strengthen ties with its former military-ruled neighbour. Prayut will travel to Myanmar "as soon as possible", deputy foreign minister Don Pramudwinai told AFP, saying the trip could take place by the end of this month or early October.

Three condemned to die for 'China's 9/11' mass stabbing

AFP, Beijing

Three men were condemned to death yesterday and a pregnant woman given life in prison for a mass stabbing that killed 31 people in China, a court said, an attack authorities blamed on separatists from largely Muslim Xinjiang. The three men were convicted of "leading a terrorist group" which planned and carried out the attack, the Intermediate People's Court in Kunming said in a statement. The March 1 carnage at a train station in Kunming, in the southwestern province of Yunnan, also saw more than 140 people wounded and was dubbed "China's 9/11" by state-run media.

EU says Ukraine truce 'insufficient' for peace

AFP, Kiev

European Commission head Jose Manuel Barroso warned yesterday that the Ukrainian ceasefire was not enough to achieve long-term peace and chided Russia over its "unacceptable behaviour" in its western neighbour. Meanwhile, President Petro Poroshenko said yesterday that the Ukrainian and European parliaments would meet on September 16 to jointly ratify an historic agreement pulling his country further out of Russia's reach. Poroshenko also told an international conference in Kiev he hoped to secure a "special status" for Ukraine with the US during his visit to Washington next week when he will meet President Barack Obama and deliver a keynote address in Congress. Barroso said after talks in Kiev with Poroshenko that the week-old truce the government signed with rebel leaders and Russia in the Belarussian capital Minsk "is certainly a positive step which needs to be upheld and respected". "However, it is still insufficient to guarantee sustainable peace," he told reporters. Barroso spoke shortly after the European Union applied its toughest sanctions to date against Russia over its alleged involvement in the pro-Kremlin uprising that has been convulsing Ukraine's industrial east for the past five months. "While we are committed to reaching out and seeking a negotiated solution, we also do not hesitate in responding decisively to Russia's unacceptable behaviour," he said.



A Palestinian protester, near burning tyres, uses a slingshot to target Israeli security forces during clashes, against the expansion of Israeli settlements, in the village of Kfar Qaddum near the northern city of Nablus, in the occupied West Bank yesterday. Israel published tenders for 283 new homes in a West Bank settlement on October 5, just days after announcing its biggest land grab on occupied Palestinian territory for three decades.

PHOTO: AFP

MODEL FOR IS DESTRUCTION

US eyes Somalia strategy

Hollande backs Iraq; Germany, eyeing threat, bans aiding IS

AFP, Nairobi, Baghdad, Berlin

US President Barack Obama has ordered a "relentless" war against the Islamic State, and has cited the ongoing intervention in Somalia as a model for intervention in Syria and Iraq.

So drawing on the experience of US operations against Somalia's Al-Qaeda-linked Shebab rebels, what can the Islamic State expect to face in the coming months and years?

The first challenge is likely to be intense eavesdropping, surveillance and attempts at infiltration aimed at building up a "who's who" of the group and a picture of their power structure. In Somalia, Shebab's leadership have been forced to operate without satellite or cell phones, fearful that their voices be identified and their location triangulated -- and to some extent have been successful in evading the electronic spies.

Meanwhile, President Francois Hollande said during a visit to Baghdad yesterday that France is ready to step up military assistance for Iraq, as global efforts intensified to defeat IS jihadists.

It was the highest-profile visit to Iraq since IS-led militants overran large parts of the country in June and sparked international concern over an expanding

jihadist threat.

Hollande touched down hours after Washington secured commitments from 10 Arab states to help stamp out IS, which the Central Intelligence Agency has said has as many as 30,000 fighters in Syria and Iraq.

Germany yesterday outlawed active support for the IS, warning the "terrorist" group operating in Iraq and Syria also posed a threat to Europe.

Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere said the immediate ban covered the recruitment, including on the Internet, of jihadist fighters, the use of IS symbols and social media propaganda.

"Germany is a well-fortified democracy, there's no place here for a terrorist organisation which opposes the constitutional order as well as the notion of international understanding," he said in a statement.

The radical Islamist group, which has committed horrifying atrocities in the wide swathes of Iraq and Syria it controls, is also a public security threat in Germany, De Maiziere warned, adding: "We are resolutely confronting this threat today."

The move, which was welcomed by conservative and centre-left MPs, covers all participation in the group on German soil, including via social media, at demonstrations, by trying to gather fighters or funding or displaying the black IS flag.

Syria allies condemn air strikes plan

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

The Syrian government and its close allies in Moscow and Tehran warned Barack Obama that an offensive against Islamic State within Syria would violate international law on Thursday, hours after the US president announced that he was authorising an open-ended campaign of air strikes against militants on both sides of the border with Iraq.

Long-standing international divisions over Syria were starkly highlighted in the hours after the speech. Iran's foreign ministry said that "the so-called international coalition to fight the Isil [Islamic State] group ... is shrouded in serious ambiguities and there are severe misgivings about its determination to sincerely fight the root causes of terrorism."

Russia said it would not support any military action without a UN resolution authorising it. "The US president has spoken directly about the possibility of strikes by the US armed forces against Isil positions in Syria without the consent of the legitimate government," said a spokesman. "This step, in the absence of a UN security council decision, would be an act of aggression, a gross violation of international law." China said that the world should fight terror but that national sovereignty must be respected.

In Damascus, the Assad government warned against US raids. "Any action of any kind without the consent of the Syrian government would be an attack on Syria," said the national reconciliation minister, Ali Haidar. Analysts believe, however, that Assad would be likely to ignore strikes on Isis targets -- and even seek to quietly cooperate with western efforts.



Pakistani soldiers load relief supplies into a helicopter for flood victims in Multan yesterday. Pakistani authorities moved to protect two major cities from raging floodwaters, readying explosives to divert swollen rivers, in a crisis which has hit nearly two million people. The floods and landslides from days of heavy monsoon rains have now claimed more than 450 lives in Pakistan and India, with hospitals struggling to cope with the disaster.

Thai PM warns against insulting the monarchy

AFP, Bangkok

Thai junta leader Prayut Chan-O-Cha yesterday said his regime would use legal, psychological and technological measures to protect the monarchy against defamation in his first official policy speech as premier.

The warning came as Amnesty International said an "unprecedented" number of people have been charged with insulting the royals since the coup, with 14 Thais indicted under the controversial lese majeste law in less than four months.

Revered King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 86, is already protected by one of the world's toughest royal defamation laws -- anyone convicted of insulting the king, queen, heir or regent faces up to 15 years in prison on each count.

"We will use appropriate legal measures, psychological measures and communication technology against ill-intentioned people," Prayut said in a televised speech to members of the National Legislative Assembly, without elaborating on the exact methods of scrutiny.

Since seizing power on May 22, the army and junta chief -- who was also appointed as prime minister last month -- has emphasised his commitment to protecting the monarchy.

The king has no official political role but is seen as a unifying figure in a country that has been frequently riven by political violence, particularly since a military coup in 2006.

43 Israeli soldiers protest 'abuses' of Palestinians

AFP, Jerusalem

Forty-three reservists and former members of an elite Israeli army intelligence unit condemned alleged "abuses" of Palestinians in the occupied territories, in an open letter published yesterday.

The letter, addressed to Israel's prime minister, armed forces chief and head of military intelligence and distributed to media, said information gathered by Unit 8200 was used by civilian intelligence agencies to coerce Palestinians involved in militant activity.

The signatories of the letter said they would refuse to be party to such acts in future.

"There's no distinction between Palestinians who are, and are not, involved in violence," an English language copy of the letter says.

"Information that is collected and stored harms innocent people. It is used for political persecution and to create divisions within Palestinian society by recruiting collaborators and driving parts of Palestinian society against itself."

"We cannot continue to serve this system in good conscience, denying the rights of millions of people," the 43 soldiers and officers wrote.

The signatories gave just their ranks and first names or first initials.

"Those among us who are reservists, refuse to take part in the state's actions against Palestinians," the letter, seen by AFP said.

"We call for all soldiers serving in the Intelligence Corps, present and future, along with all the citizens of Israel, to speak out against these injustices and to take action to bring them to an end."

The letter, published less than three weeks after the Israeli military's fierce military offensive against Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip, slammed the "collective punishment of inhabitants" of the coastal territory.



SWEDISH RULING

Assange's lawyers lodge appeal

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Swedish lawyers for Julian Assange have argued that prosecutors are in "gross breach of Swedish law", as they lodged an appeal in a fresh attempt to break the deadlock that has seen the WikiLeaks founder begin his third year living in the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

"Julian Assange has been kept under house arrest for two years with no medical treatment, no sunshine, no family, no nothing, and this harm should be taken into account when applying Swedish law," Per Samuelsson, a lawyer for Assange in Stockholm, told the Guardian.

In July, a Stockholm judge ruled that Sweden's prosecutor had sufficient cause to continue to pursue the arrest of Assange in order to question him about the crimes of which he is suspected. His lawyers lodged their anticipated appeal against this ruling yesterday.

No charges have yet been brought against Assange in Sweden, because he has not been interrogated by police regarding the allegations brought by the second of the two women. The prosecutor insists Assange come to Sweden for questioning over the allegations of sexual molestation and rape involving the women whom he met during a visit to the country in 2010.

The lawyers argue that there is a "collision of norms" between Ecuador's decision to grant Assange asylum and Sweden's move to issue an arrest warrant. Neither can be implemented, creating a deadlock.

Russia slams West over sanctions

AFP, Moscow

New EU sanctions yesterday sank the ruble to a new low as Moscow accused the West of undermining the fragile truce in Ukraine and turning the heat on its Cold War-era foe.

The new EU punitive measures came in lockstep with fresh sanctions from the United States, and targeted major state firms as well as one of President Vladimir Putin's closest allies, Sergei Chemezov, head of Russian Technologies holding.

The ruble slumped to a new record for a second day, retreating to 37,93 against the dollar, as of 1225 GMT, while Moscow stock markets fell.

Putin, participating yesterday in a security summit in Tajikistan alongside Chinese President Xi Jinping, remained notably silent on the subject of the sanctions.

His foreign minister, however, said they hurt chances of creating lasting peace in war-torn Ukraine.

"We believe that adopting such decisions at the very moment when the peace process in Ukraine is gaining strength -- we are hoping, ... -

this means choosing a path towards undermining the peace process," said Sergei Lavrov.

"We will react in a calm and adequate manner, first and foremost proceeding from the need to protect our interests," Lavrov said on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the Tajik capital Dushanbe.

A ceasefire signed last Friday between Kiev and separatist rebels in Ukraine's industrial heartland has so far held, despite accusations of violations on both sides.

In Moscow the speaker of parliament's lower house charged that the crisis served as an excuse for US President Barack Obama to drum up tensions with its Cold War-era foe.

Obama said on Thursday that Washington's sanctions would target the defence, finance and energy sectors in response to Russia's "illegal actions" in Ukraine.

The parliamentary speaker also warned the sanctions could hamper Ukraine's ceasefire.

Obama said Washington would detail its new sanctions soon. The EU measures that entered force earlier yesterday focussed on major Russian oil firms including Rosneft, defence companies and state-owned banks.

IMF warns over Scottish yes vote

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

The International Monetary Fund has warned that a yes vote in next week's Scottish independence referendum could result in financial market turmoil.

A vote for independence would create "uncertainty" while a number of "complicated issues" were being thrashed out, in particular over which currency an independent Scotland would use, the Washington-based organisation said.

The long-term impact on the economy would be determined by the outcome of the detailed negotiations carried out in the aftermath of the referendum, which is less than a week away.

The IMF deputy spokesman, William Murray, said at a press briefing on Thursday evening: "While this uncertainty could lead to negative market reactions in the short-term, longer-term effects would depend on the decisions being made during the transition. And I would not want to speculate on this."

The warning came as a new YouGov poll showed support for separation weakening by three percentage points.

