

THE FIGHT AGAINST IS

Kerry seeks Cairo's support for 'war' on jihadists

AFP, Cairo

US Secretary of State John Kerry said Saturday Egypt was on the frontline against "terrorism" after he met its leadership to garner support to fight Islamic State jihadists in Iraq and Syria. Egypt's formidable army is unlikely to take part in a military coalition against IS, but has closely cooperated with the United States on counter-terrorism.

US will not coordinate air strikes with Syria: Kerry

AFP, Washington

The United States will not coordinate air attacks on Islamic State militants with Syria but will seek to ensure their forces do not come into conflict, US Secretary of State John Kerry said in an interview aired yesterday.

Paris conference aims to divide up tasks in IS fight

AFP, Paris

The international conference in Paris today that gathers some 20 countries from the anti-Islamic State coalition will seek to divide up the roles between nations with often diverging interests. However, any decisions taken at the conference, jointly hosted by French President Francois Hollande and Iraqi President Fuad Masum, will not necessarily be made public, a French diplomatic source stressed.

Iran says Paris anti-jihadist meeting just for show

AFP, Tehran

Iran said Saturday it has no wish to attend an international conference in Paris on fighting the jihadist Islamic State group, dismissing the meeting as just for show. "What would interest Iran is a real fight against terrorism in the region and around the world, not this selective one," deputy foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian told state television.

Australia commits 600 troops to anti-IS campaign

AFP, Sydney

Prime Minister Tony Abbott said yesterday Australia would deploy 600 troops to the United Arab Emirates to join the US-led international coalition gearing up for war against Islamic State jihadists. Abbott said the deployment of about 400 air personnel and about 200 military personnel followed a formal request from Washington for Australia to contribute to the international coalition against the rampaging Islamist group.

Germany sending 40 soldiers to Iraqi Kurdistan

AFP, Berlin

Berlin is preparing to send around 40 soldiers to northern Iraq to train Kurdish fighters battling against militants from the Islamic State, the German army said on Saturday. Following a decision last month by the German government to provide Kurdish peshmerga forces with weapons, Berlin's defence ministry said it had sent six soldiers to its consulate in Arbil, northern Iraq, to "coordinate" joint training exercises.

Indonesia arrests four Turks over Islamic State link

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia's anti-terrorism police have arrested four Turks suspected of being linked to the Islamic State jihadist group, a spokesman said yesterday. The elite Detachment 88 police squad arrested the men, along with three Indonesians, after tailing their car on Saturday in central Sulawesi district of Poso, a known hotbed for militant activity, Boy Rafli Amar told AFP.

NEWS IN brief

Pilot turns Malaysia Airlines flight around after defect

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

A Malaysia Airlines flight was forced to turn around due to an auto-pilot defect, landing safely early yesterday, said the carrier already reeling from the loss of two planes this year. Flight MH198 from Kuala Lumpur to Hyderabad in India departed late Saturday, but the Boeing 737-800 turned back due to an auto-pilot defect. It landed back in Malaysia's capital almost four hours later after circling to burn fuel in the air.

Pak flood rescue boat capsizes; at least 11 dead

AFP, Multan

At least eleven people including a bridegroom and two children drowned yesterday when a rescue boat carrying a wedding party capsized in flood-hit central Pakistan, officials said, with the death toll feared to rise. The boat, which was carrying at least 35 people, went down in rough waters in the Muzaffargarh district of central Punjab province, they said.

Fresh rain hampers rescue bid in flood-ravaged Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Fresh rain hampered rescue operations in Indian Kashmir yesterday, a week after deadly floods swamped the Himalayan region, with medics and survivors describing nightmarish conditions in the devastated city of Srinagar. The floods and landslides have now claimed at least 490 lives in India and neighbouring Pakistan, and rescuers are struggling to cope with the scale of the disaster.



Armed pro-Russian militants patrol a road near a front line where shelling continues between pro-Russian forces and the Ukrainian army in the village of Olenivka some 30 kms south of Donetsk on the way to Mariupol, eastern Ukraine. The Ukrainian government accused pro-Russian separatists of threatening a tenuous push for peace as booming rounds of heavy artillery fire echoed across the insurgent stronghold of Donetsk.

Israel intel hits back over refuseniks' letter

AFP, Jerusalem

Scores of veterans of elite Israeli intelligence unit 8200 rallied to its defence yesterday after 43 comrades said they would no longer take part in its "injustices" against millions of Palestinians.

In a letter of reply yesterday, 200 veterans of the unit denounced their former comrades' refusal to serve.

"Political refusal to serve has no place anywhere, and particularly so in Unit 8200. The moment we, as soldiers in the reserves, are called to the flag, we set aside our political inclinations and opinions, and come to serve the state," they wrote in the letter, excerpts of which were published in the top-selling Yediot Aharonot newspaper.

Commentators said that the fact that the refuseniks were members of one of Israel's most prestigious military units made their conscientious objection all the more remarkable.

Russia, Ukraine trade blame as fighting tests truce

AFP, Kiev

Tensions over Ukraine festered after Kiev accused the Kremlin of seeking to "eliminate" the pro-Western former Soviet nation while Moscow charged Washington with orchestrating the entire crisis.

The bitter exchange on Saturday in the wake of the toughest Western sanctions yet on Russia came with a fragile nine-day truce once again tested by an hours-long battle for control of a strategic eastern Ukrainian airport.

Russia further stoked tensions by sending a 220-truck convoy into rebel-held territory which it said carried aid but which was never checked by European monitors or Ukrainian soldiers at the border.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk called on world leaders not to trust Russian President Vladimir Putin despite his decision to sign Moscow up to a truce aimed at ending a five-month war that has claimed more than 2,700 lives.

Yatsenyuk accused the increasingly isolated Kremlin chief of deliberately keeping Ukraine in a state of war to create a "frozen conflict" in Russia's backyard.

"His goal is to take the entire Ukraine... He wants to eliminate Ukraine as an independent country," Yatsenyuk told an inter-

national forum in Kiev.

"He wants to restore the Soviet Union." The European-mediated peace deal that Kiev signed with Moscow and two rebel leaders has helped calm fighting across the economically vital but devastated industrial rustbelt that hugs Russia's border in eastern Ukraine.

But both the United States and Europe remain deeply suspicious of Putin's intentions and are still waiting for him to pull back 1,000 paratroopers they claim have helped insurgents claw back territory in the days preceding the truce.

Moscow not only denies backing the fighters but also accuses Washington of fomenting the February protests that ousted a pro-Kremlin leader and brought in a new team that struck an historic EU alliance and is now seeking NATO membership.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov took particular exception with measures that tighten existing US sanctions and for the first time target two private oil companies as well as the natural gas giant Gazprom.

Lavrov accused Washington of "trying to use the crisis in Ukraine to break economic ties between the EU and Russia and force Europe to buy US gas at much higher prices."

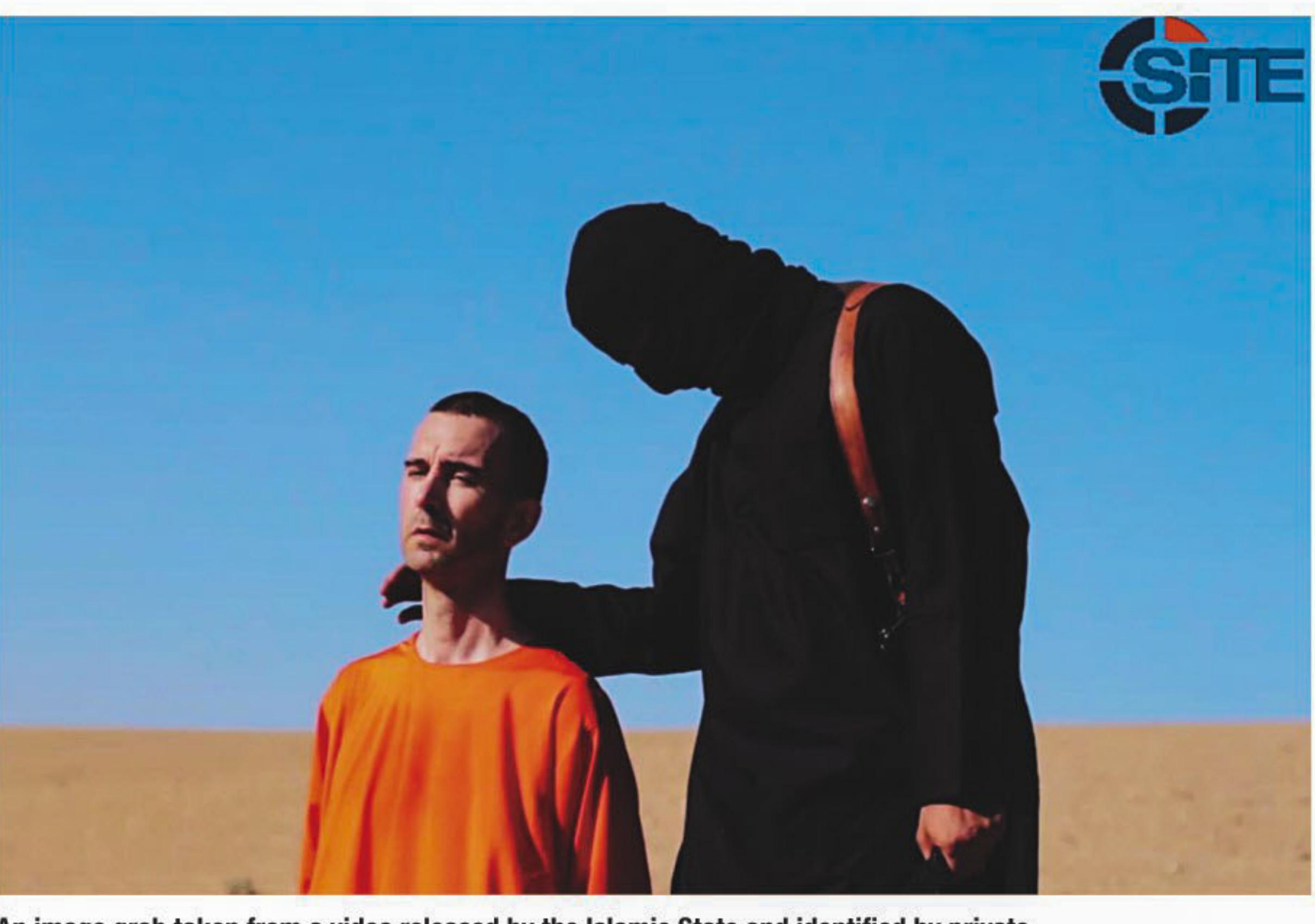
Ex-Indian MPs left without power, water

AFP, New Delhi

New Delhi authorities cut power and water supplies to homes of former ministers and lawmakers, including India's last federal civil aviation minister, after they ignored repeated eviction warnings, reports said yesterday.

Congress Party ally and former civil aviation minister Ajit Singh, along with ex-Congress lawmakers like Mohammad Azharuddin, refused to leave despite a crushing election defeat at the hands of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party in May.

An anonymous official was quoted by the Times of India as saying that power and water supplies were disconnected from 30 houses, still occupied by the ex-MPs and former ministers, despite notices to vacate the premises.



An image grab taken from a video released by the Islamic State and identified by private terrorism monitor SITE Intelligence Group on Friday purportedly shows British aid worker David Haines dressed in orange and on his knees in a desert landscape speaking to the camera before being beheaded by a masked militant. This would be the third such execution in recent weeks, after two US journalists taken hostage in Syria were shown murdered.

PHOTO: AFP

WORLD REACTIONS

Haines Beheading

Scottish-born Haines, 44, was taken hostage in Syria in March 2013 and was threatened in a video released this month depicting the beheading by IS militants of the US journalist Steven Sotloff.

Haines had been working for the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), an international relief charity, and was previously involved in humanitarian work in the Balkans, parts of Africa and elsewhere in the Middle East.

US 'shoulder to shoulder' with Britain

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama expressed solidarity Saturday with ally Britain, after British captive David Haines was murdered by Islamic State militants claiming revenge for the countries' campaign against them. "The United States stands shoulder to shoulder tonight with our close friend and ally (Britain) in grief and resolve," Obama said in a statement.

Berlin condemns beheading as 'barbaric violence'

AFP, Berlin

Germany yesterday condemned the execution of British aid worker David Haines by an Islamic State militant as a "heinous act of barbaric violence". Expressing her horror to British Prime Minister David Cameron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel added that "the unjustifiable act by terrorists must be punished", according to a statement from her office.

Execution of British hostage 'heinous': France

AFP, Paris

France yesterday condemned the Islamic State's "heinous murder" of British hostage David Haines, urging international action against the jihadist group. "The heinous killing of David Haines is yet another demonstration of why the international community must mobilise against (the Islamic State), a cowardly and abject organisation," the French presidency said in a statement. President Francois Hollande's office also expressed France's solidarity with Haines' family and Britain.

'KNIFE-EDGE' SCOTLAND REFERENDUM

Rivals bid for votes

AFP, Glasgow

Campaigners for and against Scottish independence scrambled for votes yesterday ahead of a historic referendum, as a religious leader prayed for harmony after polls showed Scots were almost evenly split.

The Church of Scotland's moderator John Chalmers called for Scots to "live in harmony with one another" whatever the result and hailed the feverish run-up to Thursday's vote as "a wonderful democratic concerto".

"All of those who will vote 'Yes' and all of those who will vote 'No' need to remember that we belong together in the same Scotland," he told worshippers at St Mary's Episcopal Church in Edinburgh in a sermon broadcast on BBC radio nationwide.

"We cannot afford to lose the momentum and interest in civic life which this campaign has generated," said Chalmers, moderator of the general assembly of the Church, the largest religious group in Scotland.

The pro-union camp has been far ahead in the polls for many months, but the difference has narrowed in recent weeks and a raft of surveys over the weekend indicated that Thursday's vote could go either way.

A Survation poll on Saturday showed the "No" camp at 47 percent and the "Yes" at 40.8 percent, with 9.0 percent undecided and 3.2 percent unwilling to say.

An Opinium survey for yesterday's Observer newspaper put "No" at 47.7 percent and "Yes" at 42.3 percent, with 10 percent not voting or not sure if they would.

An ICM online poll for the Sunday Telegraph placed the pro-independence campaign at 49 percent and the pro-UK at 42 percent with 9.0 percent undecided, but a senior pollster warned the sample size was too small.

"The polls show that the referendum is on a knife-edge. There is everything to play for," said Blair Jenkins, chief executive of the "Yes Scotland" campaign.



Remembering Amy

Statue unveiled to remember singer's struggle

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

A life-size statue of Amy Winehouse has been unveiled in London on what would have been the singer's 31st birthday.

Fans and relatives attended the unveiling in Camden, north London, where Winehouse lived before her death in July 2011 after a public struggle with addiction.

The 175cm bronze statue in Stables Market portrays Winehouse in high heels and with her trademark beehive hairstyle. It was sculpted by the London-based artist Scott Eaton after he was introduced to Winehouse's father, Mitch.

Eaton said: "The pose had to capture Amy's attitude and strength, but also give subtle hints of insecurity. The hand on the hip, the turn of the head, the grabbing of the skirt, the turned in foot - these are all small elements that contribute to the personality of the piece."

Mitch Winehouse said seeing the statue was "incredibly emotional", and Eaton had done an amazing job in capturing his daughter's likeness.

"It is like stopping her in a beautiful moment in time. We really hope Amy's fans love the statue," he said.

Following her death, the family set up the Amy Winehouse Foundation to help tackle the impact of drugs and alcohol misuse on young people.