

NEWSIN brief

6 civilians killed in fighting in Ukraine's Donetsk

AFP, Donetsk

Six civilians were killed in fighting in the rebel stronghold of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine on Sunday, the bloodiest day since a ceasefire was signed 10 days ago. "Six civilians perished during the hostilities over the past 24 hours," Donetsk deputy mayor Kostyantyn Savinov said yesterday, while the town hall said another 15 civilians had been injured.

France begins reconnaissance flights over Iraq

AFP, Al-dhufra

French planes carried out their first reconnaissance flights over Iraq yesterday in support of the US-led campaign against Islamic State jihadists. An AFP correspondent saw two French Rafale fighter jets equipped with high-precision cameras take off from the Al-Dhufra base in the United Arab Emirates during a visit by French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian.

Germany tries first 'Islamic State jihadist'

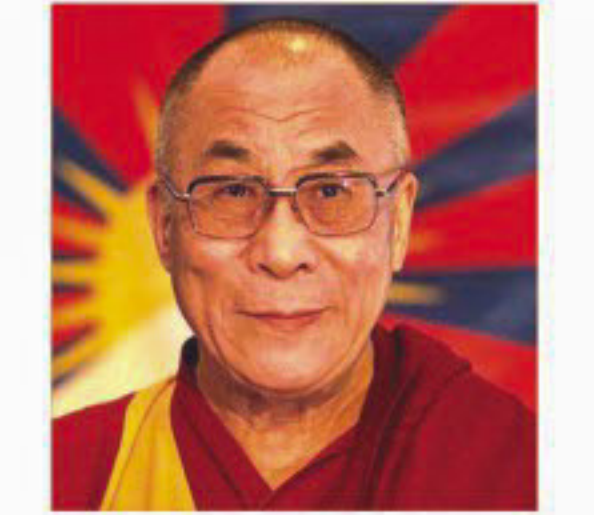
AFP, Frankfurt

An alleged German jihadist was on trial yesterday accused of fighting for Islamic State in Syria, amid calls for tougher action to prevent attacks in Europe by the extremist group. In the first German criminal proceedings involving IS, Kreshnik Berisha, a 20-year-old born in the business capital Frankfurt to a family from Kosovo, has been charged with membership of a foreign terrorist organisation. He could face 10 years in prison if convicted by the city's superior regional court.

IS suspects in Indonesia are China's Uighurs

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesian police yesterday said the four foreigners arrested over the weekend suspected of being linked to the Islamic State jihadist group were from China's ethnic Uighur minority. A day after identifying the four men as Turks, police said they had investigated and found that they had entered Indonesia using forged Turkish passports.



Nobel Laureates urge Zuma for Dalai Lama's visa

AFP, Johannesburg

Fourteen Nobel Peace Laureates have asked President Jacob Zuma to guarantee the Dalai Lama a visa to South Africa, after the Tibetan spiritual leader was forced to abandon a trip to the country. The Dalai Lama was to attend a summit of Nobel peace prize winners in Cape Town next month, the first-ever meeting of its kind in Africa.

But, according to an aide, he cancelled after Pretoria denied him a visa for a third time in the last five years in a bid to avoid angering China, which regards the Buddhist monk as a campaigner for Tibetan independence. "We are deeply concerned about the damage that will be done to South Africa's international image by a refusal -- or failure -- to grant him a visa yet again," the group said in a letter to Zuma. Signatories include Poland's Lech Walesa, Bangladeshi entrepreneur Muhammad Yunus, Iranian lawyer Shirin Ebadi, Liberian activist Leymah Gbowee and Northern Irish peace-makers David Trimble and John Hume.



A woman walks past a burnt car yesterday near the railway station in Donetsk, eastern Ukraine. Six civilians were killed in fighting in the rebel stronghold of Donetsk the day before, the bloodiest day since a ceasefire was signed 10 days ago. Sustained shelling and artillery fire was reported throughout around Donetsk and its airport, with huge clouds of black smoke billowing into the sky above the city. PHOTO: AFP

World leaders vow to help Iraq

Iran rejects cooperation

AFP, Paris

The world's top diplomats pledged yesterday to support Iraq in its fight against Islamic State militants by "any means necessary", including "appropriate military assistance", as leaders stressed the urgency of the crisis. Representatives from around 30 countries and international organisations, including the United States, Russia and China, gathered in Paris as the savage beheading over the weekend of a third Western hostage raised the stakes in the fight against the marauding jihadists. In a joint statement after the talks, diplomats vowed to support Baghdad "by any means necessary, including appropriate military assistance, in line with the needs expressed by the Iraqi authorities, in accordance with international law and without jeopardising civilian security." They stressed that IS extremists were "a threat not only to Iraq but also to the entire international community" and underscored the "urgent need" to remove them from Iraq, where they control some 40 percent

of the territory.

However, the final statement made no mention of Syria, where extremists hold a quarter of the country and where Bashar al-Assad's regime still had friends around the Paris conference table, including Russia.

The meeting was the latest in a series of frantic diplomatic efforts to build a broad coalition against the jihadists and German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said meetings would come "thick and fast" in the

FIGHT AGAINST IS

coming days ahead of a UN general assembly next week. US Secretary of State John Kerry, who has been criss-crossing the region to drum up support, said over the weekend that "all bases were covered" in terms of implementing US President Barack Obama's strategy to destroy the jihadists. Ten Arab states including Saudi Arabia are also among the countries backing the coalition, and Australia has pledged to deploy 600 troops to

the United Arab Emirates, a regional Washington ally.

The goal of the conference was "to agree on a strong political message to the new Iraqi government, to get ourselves ready for the fight," said one French diplomat who declined to be named.

However, Iran, which was not invited to the conference, said it had rejected US overtures to help in the fight against the militants.

"Right from the start, the United States asked through its ambassador in Iraq whether we could cooperate," supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a statement on his official website.

"I said no, because they have dirty hands," said Khamenei, who has the final say on all matters of state in Iran.

He accused Washington of seeking a "pretext to do in Iraq and Syria what it already does in Pakistan -- bomb anywhere without authorisation."

The United States insisted yesterday that it was opposed to military cooperation with Iran but was open to further talks.

Scottish referendum raises Serbs' independence hopes

Cameron heads to Scotland hoping to boost 'No' vote

AFP, Sarajevo, Aberdeen

Bosnian Serbs are closely watching Scotland's independence referendum, hoping if Scots vote to break away from Britain it would set a precedent that could boost their own chances of proclaiming a separate state.

After Crimea split from Ukraine and joined Russia following a disputed referendum in March, and with Scotland eyeing independence in Thursday's referendum, the president of Bosnia's Serb-run entity Republika Srpska has not hesitated to evoke the spectre of separation.

"We are following what is going on in Italy (South Tyrol), in Scotland and even in Catalonia. These are crucial experiences for the RS," Milorad Dodik said recently.

In multi-ethnic Bosnia, however, with the bloody legacy of its 1992-1995 war during the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, observers say talk of independence also raises the danger of a new armed conflict.

The Dayton peace accord that ended Bosnia's inter-ethnic war created two almost equal and highly autonomous entities, Republika Srpska and the Muslim-Croat Federation, linked by a loose central government in charge of foreign matters, finance and defence.

Rebels offered three years of 'self-rule'

Russia's ruling party tops Crimea polls

AFP, Kiev, Moscow

Ukraine's president yesterday offered parts of the separatist east of his country limited self-rule for three years under the terms of a peace plan reached with Russia.

Petro Poroshenko's official website said the pro-Western leader told top lawmakers the proposal would be part of a broader deal with the pro-Moscow rebels. He intended to formally submit it to parliament today.

The bill further permits the regions to "strengthen good neighbourly relations" between local authorities and their counterparts in Russia. Poroshenko had promised to offer parts of the war-torn industrial east broader autonomy under the terms of a

Kremlin and two September 5. He urged parliament to quickly back his months of fighting that have killed more than 2,700 people and forced more than half a million from their homes.

Poroshenko said his proposals guaranteed "the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of our state".

Russia's ruling party, meanwhile, headed to a convincing victory in Crimea polls yesterday, with a preliminary count showing it won more than 70 percent in the first local elections since the peninsula's annexation from Ukraine in March.

Crimea's residents joined Russians across the country in voting in local elections on Sunday which saw President Vladimir Putin cement his grip on power.

While the vote will not add legitimacy to Crimea in the eyes of the West or Ukraine, Kremlin-friendly analysts said it shows that Crimea's residents conclusively backed joining Russia.

UKRAINE CRISIS



PHOTO: AFP

A well-wisher holds a large medal carrying a portrait of Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej as people wait for him to drive by in a motorcade as he leaves the Siriraj hospital in Bangkok yesterday. Thailand's revered but elderly King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Bangkok hospital after a near six-week stay.

Kashmir militants suspend jihad to help flood efforts

AFP, Muzaffarabad

An alliance of pro-Pakistani militant groups fighting in Indian Kashmir announced yesterday it was suspending jihadist activities to carry out rescue and relief work for flood victims.

The umbrella United Jihad Council was formed in 1994 and is widely believed to have close links to Pakistan's military establishment.

Talking to AFP, Syed Salahuddin, the group's supreme commander accused the Indian government of not doing enough for ordinary flood victims in Kashmir.

"The Indian government is rescuing only tourists and their troops and the news about relief for the people of Kashmir by the Indian media is a pack of lies," he said.

He also blasted the Pakistani government for not caring about the flood victims in

Kashmir and termed it "criminal negligence".

He said: "We have suspend all operations against Indian troops in Kashmir because we are working for the flood victims."

"I appeal to the UN, International Red Cross and OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) to help the flood victims in Kashmir, our fighters will volunteer for them."

The UJC includes Al-Qaeda and Taliban affiliated Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad militant groups, which are on US and UN lists of terror organisations.

India and Pakistan claim Kashmir in full and have fought two of their three wars over its control.

Floods and landslides from heavy monsoon rains that began in early September have now claimed almost 500 lives in Pakistan and India.



Queen of Scots, but for how long?

AFP, London

Scottish separatists say they will keep Queen Elizabeth II if the country votes Thursday to leave the United Kingdom, but some question how secure the monarchy would be post-independence.

Members of First Minister Alex Salmond's separatist Scottish National Party government have said that if independence wins it should be up to the people to decide whether to keep the queen. The independence campaign's chairman Dennis Canavan has even called for an early referendum on dumping the royals, calling hereditary monarchy an "affront to democracy and a complete anachronism".

The queen's 15 realms outside Britain -- Australia, Canada and New Zealand included -- have a viceroy and some experts suggest Scotland would likewise need a governor-general for permanent in-country representation and to avoid the queen directly receiving conflicting advice from her governments.

Queen Elizabeth was reported to tell a well-wisher on Sunday "I hope people will think very carefully about the future" after attending a church service near her Balmoral estate in Scotland.

Some newspapers suggest the 88-year-old monarch is "horrified" at the prospect of her kingdom breaking in two. Buckingham Palace has only spoken officially to stress her constitutional impartiality and view that it is a matter for the people of Scotland.

Israel sees mass Hezbollah incursion in future fight

AFP, Jerusalem

A future war with Lebanon's Hezbollah could see the Shiite militant group cross the border in strength and seize Israeli territory, a senior officer said in comments widely reported by Israeli media yesterday.

The Jerusalem Post quoted the unidentified officer as saying that Hezbollah had learnt much about ground tactics from Syria, where it has fought alongside President Bashar al-Assad's forces in the three-and-a-half-year-old civil war.

"Hezbollah's confidence is growing, along with its combat experience in Syria," it quoted the officer as saying.

"The battlegrounds of Syria have enabled Hezbollah to upgrade its capabilities. Hezbollah plans to send many combatants into Israeli territory near the border and seize it."

Israel and Hezbollah fought a devastating war in 2006, which killed more than 1,200 people in Lebanon, mostly civilians, and some 160 Israelis, mostly soldiers.

Since then the border has remained largely quiet, but in February Israeli warplanes attacked targets inside Lebanon for the first reported time since the 2006 conflict and Hezbollah vowed revenge.

Yesterday's reports, based on a briefing to

Israeli defence correspondents, said that although another confrontation did not appear imminent, it was inevitable sooner or later.

Army spokesman Major Arye Shalicher told AFP that the military was prepared for any threat from Hezbollah.

"We are ready for any challenge. We are observing... what's going on," he said. "We are ready and it's not worth it for them, it's not worth them even trying it."

Shalicher said that since 2006 the Shiite movement had reestablished itself in the frontier region.

"In more than 200 villages in south Lebanon, they've built up a lot of strength, with all kinds of weapons, all kinds of missiles of varying range," he said.

"All of their money is flowing in various directions to an offensive capability which, among other things, includes about 100,000 rockets of various types, most of them from Iran and Syria."

"You don't get yourself 100,000 rockets for nothing. It would seem there's a reason behind it and it's certainly not for the good of the people."

The military spokesman's office yesterday distributed photos that it said showed Hezbollah fighters walking in plain sight near the border with Israel.

Typhoon Kalmaegi leaves Philippines

AFP, Manila

Typhoon Kalmaegi swept out of the Philippines yesterday after causing chest-deep floods in some rural areas but largely leaving the storm-prone country unscathed, authorities said.

The storm, with winds of 160 kilometres an hour, struck the northeast of the main Philippine island of Luzon on Sunday evening, then moved west across land before heading into the South China Sea yesterday.

Six people were killed after a passenger ferry sank in the central Philippines on Saturday evening amid rough weather as the storm approached, a navy spokeswoman said.

But officials said this was not directly linked to the typhoon, and said there had been no reports of other casualties related to the weather.

MH370 was the sixth 'suicide flight'

Claims Kiwi Airlines boss in new book

MAIL ONLINE

The pilot of the missing MH370 flight killed himself and his passengers by switching off the oxygen supply in what is the sixth example of such a suicide, according to an aviation expert.

Ewan Wilson, head of Kiwi Airlines, believes Zaharie Ahmad Shah planned mass murder - locking his co-pilot out of the cockpit, depressurising the cabin and shutting down all communication links before turning the plane around.

Having examined all other possibilities, Wilson insists that Shah, 53, is responsible for the deaths of the 227 passengers and 12 crew members on board the doomed Malaysian Airlines flight, which disappeared on March 8.

He said: "There is a fundamental desire to ignore the mental health issue in the aviation industry."

"Our research indicates there have been five previous incidents of murder/suicide in commercial flights over the last three decades or so, accounting for 422 lives."

The sad addition of MH370 would bring that number to 661. The remarkable claims are made in the book 'Goodnight Malaysian 370', the culmination of a four-month study into the incident, which Wilson co-wrote with the New Zealand broadsheet journalist, Geoff Taylor.

