

Pak air strikes kill 40
militants

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's military yesterday said it killed 40 insurgents and destroyed five of their hideouts in fresh air attacks as part of a major offensive against the Taliban in the northwest. Pakistan began the long-awaited push to clear the bases from North Waziristan district, on the Afghan border, in June.

Uighur professor put
on trial for separatism

AFP, Urumqi

Chinese authorities put a prominent scholar from the mostly-Muslim Uighur minority on trial for separatism yesterday as critics warned the prosecution will worsen tensions in violence-wracked Xinjiang. Ilham Tohti, a former economics professor at a university in Beijing, denied the charges -- which carry a life sentence -- at a court in the regional capital Urumqi.

Air strikes kill dozens
in Syria rebel town

AFP, Beirut

Syrian air strikes on a besieged rebel town in the heart of the country have killed nearly 50

people over the past two days, a monitoring group said yesterday. Some 191,000 people have been killed since an uprising against President Bashar al-Assad's rule erupted in March 2011.

80 missing in CAR boat
sinking

AFP, Bangui

Around 80 people are missing in Central African Republic after their boat sank last week on the M'poko River south of the capital Bangui, the government said yesterday. "Only around 20 people have been saved. The boat had more than 100 onboard," the minister of transport, Silver Yabada, told AFP.

France detains six for
'recruiting jihadis'

AFP, Paris

Six people have been detained in France on suspicion of recruiting candidates for jihad, a judicial source said yesterday, as the number of French citizens travelling to Iraq and Syria increases. The suspects, two of whom are minors, were held in the suburbs of the eastern city of Lyon as part of an "anti-terrorism" probe launched in July.

Iran's uranium
enrichment 'not
acceptable': US

AFP, Washington

Iran cannot convince the world that its current ability to enrich uranium is acceptable, the top US negotiator said on Tuesday ahead of new nuclear talks with global powers. As Iran and world powers prepare for new talks starting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly this week in New York, Sherman said she expected the Islamic Republic "will try to convince the world" on its nuclear programme.

SCOTLAND

Current situation

Devolved government within the UK
Scottish parliament in Edinburgh:
129 seats



Capital	
Edinburgh	London
Population	
5.3 m	64.1m
Unemployment	
6.4%	6.4%
Growth (GDP)	
Q1 2014	0.8%
1.0%	

- 1603 James VI of Scotland becomes James I of England. The 2 kingdoms are ruled by one monarch

- 1707 Acts of Union. Creation of United Kingdom. Scottish parliament closes
- 1934 Scottish National Party (SNP) created
- 1998 Scotland Act, leading to establishment of Scottish Parliament
- 2011 SNP wins landslide victory in Scottish election
- Sept Referendum on 18, 2014 for Scotland

Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown hosts a rally in Glasgow, Scotland, yesterday ahead of the today's referendum on Scotland's independence. Inset, Pro-independence supporters chant slogans and hold "Yes" signs during a rally in central Glasgow, Scotland.

PHOTO: AFP

Jihadists threaten to
target White House

Obama rules out combat mission for US troops in Iraq

AGENCIES

Islamic State (IS) militants have threatened to target the White House and kill US troops in a new slickly made video response to Barack Obama's campaign to "degrade and destroy" the organisation.

The video, in the style of a blockbuster movie trailer for what is "coming soon", depicts a masked man apparently about to shoot kneeling prisoners in the head. Towards the end of the clip there is shaky footage of the White House filmed from a moving vehicle, suggesting the building is being scouted out for attack.

It was released on Tuesday after US defence chiefs suggested that American troops could join Iraqi forces fighting Isis, despite Obama's assurance that US soldiers would not be engaged in fighting on the ground.

The only words on the 52-second clip are those of Obama making that pledge. "American combat troops will not be returning to fight in Iraq," it quotes him saying. This comes directly after footage of US troops being shot at, injured and taken away in an armoured vehicle, threatening what will

happen if troops are redeployed to Iraq.

The video was released by the al-Hayat Media Centre, Isis's English-language propaganda arm. It purports to be a trailer for a film entitled *Flames of War* with the strapline "Fighting has just begun".

Meanwhile, elite Iraqi troops backed by US jets battled jihadists near Baghdad yesterday as President Barack Obama insisted that US troops will not have combat mission in Iraq.

His comments came after his top general suggested some US advisors could join Iraqi forces to fight the Islamic State group.

General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on Tuesday that US military advisers could "provide close-combat advising".

But the White House insisted the idea of US troops in battle was a "purely hypothetical scenario".

Obama made his speech after meeting General Lloyd Austin, who runs US Central Command, which stretches across the troubled belt of South and Central Asia and the Middle East. He also sat down in closed door talks with military representatives of 40 nations which are expected to take part in the anti-IS mission.

Fresh murder
charges against
Pak PM

AFP, Islamabad

Anti-government protesters in Pakistan have pressed fresh murder charges against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, police confirmed yesterday, as demonstrations that rocked the capital last month appear to lose steam.

The case relates to the deaths of three people in clashes with police that took place on the night of August 30 after the protesters attempted to storm the prime minister's official residence and used cranes to remove barricades.

Two victims died from rubber bullet injuries while a third had a heart attack. All were male.

A senior police official told AFP: "Yes, a case for murder, attempted murder, attack and abetment for attack has been registered against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif," adding the interior minister and several senior police were also named.

The charge sheet, filed late Tuesday, was ordered by a lower court last week following a petition by supporters of Tahir ul Qadri, a populist cleric who has led the protests along with opposition leader Imran Khan.

Both leaders allege massive systematic rigging in the 2013 poll that swept Sharif to office, the country's first peaceful transition of power from one civilian government to another in a country long dominated by the military.

Critics of the protesters have said they are being supported by elements of the country's security establishment, a theory that gained some traction after a senior member of Khan's party announced that his party had been taking directions from the army.



Scottish referendum today

AFP, Edinburgh

The campaign for Scotland's independence referendum went down to the wire yesterday ahead of a knife-edge vote that will either see Scotland break away from the United Kingdom or gain sweeping new powers.

The "Yes" and "No" camps mobilised thousands of volunteers to take to the streets across Scotland in a final push to win over undecided voters in a heated debate that has fired up Scots on both sides.

Three new opinion polls suggested a very narrow majority against independence but showed that the undecided could swing it either way with just hours to go before polls open on Thursday at 0600 GMT.

"I'm really optimistic that if we do have independence, we can start building a society that works for all of us," said 24-year-old Sam Hollick, a "Yes" activist from the Green Party who was campaigning at a stand in Edinburgh blaring a song by Scottish band The Proclaimers.

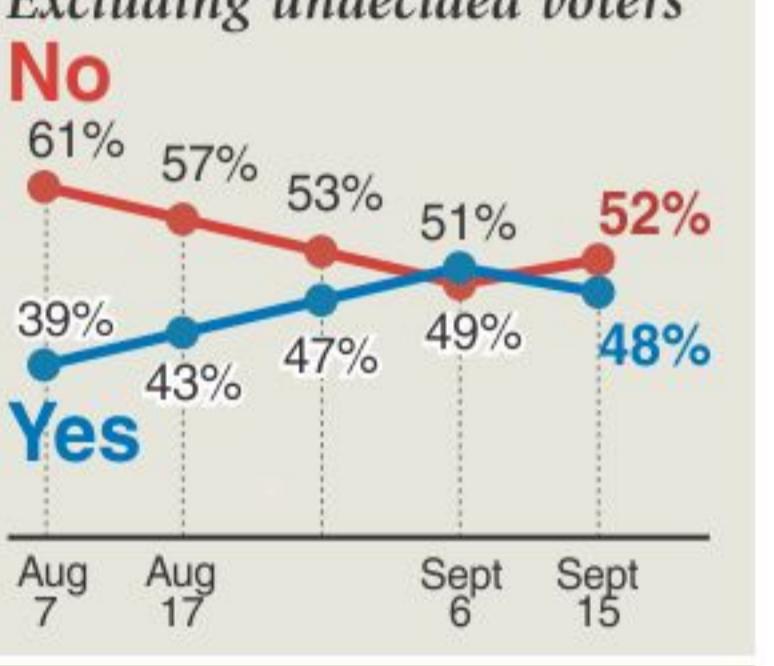
But at a "No" rally in Glasgow, former British prime minister Gordon Brown appealed to Scots' wartime patriotism and said voting against separation would still mean Scotland gaining much greater local power.

"We fought two world wars together," he told hundreds of supporters.

"There's not a cemetery in Europe that doesn't have a Scot, a Welshman, an Irish and an Englishman side by side," he said.

Differences over whether to support

LATEST YOUTGOV POLLS



"Yes" or "No" have divided families and lifelong friends and the Church of Scotland yesterday called for "a spirit of unity" and "cool heads and calm hearts".

The rise in support for the "Yes" campaign has also sent jitters through the financial markets, helping to bring down the value of the pound and dragging down the stocks of Scotland-based companies.

based companies.

In a letter to the people of Scotland, pro-independence First Minister Alex Salmond urged the electorate to seize its historic chance to end the 307-year-old union with England.

"Wake up on Friday morning to the first day of a better country. Wake up knowing you did this -- you made it happen," Salmond wrote.

A "Yes" victory would not mean independence overnight but would sound the starting gun on months and possibly years of complex negotiations on separating two deeply linked economic systems.

It could lead to Prime Minister David Cameron's resignation and would embolden other separatist movements around the world.

All three polls in yesterday's papers showed that going it alone would be rejected by 52 percent to 48 percent, with undecided voters excluded.

But the results were within margins of error and many commentators have said the final outcome is "too close to call" ahead of time.

Record numbers have registered for the referendum -- 97 percent of eligible voters -- and turnout is expected to be very high with officials saying it could be around 80 percent.



China's President Xi Jinping (2R), his wife Peng Liyuan (3R) and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (R) watch tribal dancers in Ahmedabad, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Deadly gunbattles
erupt in Ukraine

AFP, Donetsk

Fierce gunbattles erupted around the Ukrainian rebel stronghold of Donetsk yesterday, with two civilians killed just a day after lawmakers in Kiev held out an offer of self-government to the pro-Russian separatists.

Heavy shelling has been reported around the flashpoint eastern industrial hub almost daily despite the warring sides signing up to a ceasefire deal almost two weeks ago.

Almost 2,900 people have been killed and at least 600,000 forced from their homes across the war-battered east since the crisis erupted, according to UN figures.

Pro-Moscow rebels have so far given Kiev's apparent olive branch a cautious welcome but also defiantly insisted it would not stop their fight for full independence as part of "Novorossiya" ("New Russia").

Lawmakers unanimously approved the "special status" law just moments before they ratified a landmark EU pact that steers Ukraine decisively away from Russia's sphere of influence.

And Moscow, virulently opposed to Ukraine's pro-Western shift, signalled it had no intention of backing down in the most serious standoff with the West since the Cold War.

It announced plans Tuesday to send more troops to Crimea, which it invaded and swiftly annexed in March, in apparent retaliation for US-led war games under way in western Ukraine.

Protesters throw
Ukraine MP in trash

REUTERS, Kiev

Dozens of angry protesters near the Ukrainian parliament seized a prominent opposition deputy on Tuesday and dumped him in a trash container, accusing him of failing to back laws to end the turbulence in the country.

The incident involved Vitaly Zhuravsky, a former member of ousted President Viktor Yanukovich's party. It was unclear why Zhuravsky drew the ire of the protesters, but the incident occurred before a parliamentary session at which lawmakers ratified an agreement with the European Union and backed laws to provide separatist-held regions with a special status.

"We live in a country where blood flows because of you," shouted protesters surrounding the container with the 59-year-old deputy lying in it.

Unique tax protest

AFP, Grenoble

A disgruntled taxpayer in southern France paid her annual bill using 30 kilogrammes of small change in protest at the way taxes are collected.

The unemployed 28-year-old woman, who gave her name only as Audrey D., had to pay 1,107 euros in tax on her 2013 salary, which was on average 1,400 euros.

Income tax in France is levied once a year in September on the salary earned the previous year.

Initially, she went to the tax office to pay in a single cash lump sum. However, officials told her she could only pay 300 euros at a time. She paid the first three tranches and then decided to make a statement with the remaining 207 euros.

She marched into the tax office with a pink piggy bank and rolls of tiny one, two and five centimes coins. She smashed the piggy bank on the counter and handed over the small change.

At first, she received short shrift, but the ice was gradually broken and the tax officials lightened up as they counted out the payment. "I've nothing against paying taxes. But what I don't like is paying so much. We're not cash cows," she complained.

CHINA LEADER'S INDIA TOUR
Xi seeks to reset ties

AFP, Ahmedabad

India's new prime minister rolled out the red carpet for Xi Jinping in his hometown yesterday, as the Chinese president began a maiden visit with Asia's rival superpowers seeking to reset relations.

Narendra Modi pulled out all the stops for Xi, organising an intimate riverside dinner in Ahmedabad, the main city in his home state of Gujarat, where giant billboards in Chinese, Gujarati and English welcomed him.

With both sides eager to emphasise cooperation over competition, Xi said in an article published yesterday "the world's factory and the world's back office" made a winning combination, welcoming Indian businesses to China and pledging vital funding for infrastructure development.

Xi will hold official talks with Modi and India's President Pranab Mukherjee today when the two sides will sign a string of agreements expected to include nuclear cooperation.

China's consul-general in Mumbai Liu Youfa said Xi would "commit investments of over \$100 billion", noting this was triple the sum pledged by Japan during Modi's visit earlier this month.

Xi headed to India after visiting the Maldives and Sri Lanka as China asserts its influence in a region traditionally in India's sphere.

also escorted Xi through a photo exhibition on Gandhi's life.

After the private dinner with Modi, who celebrated his 64th birthday yesterday, Xi was headed for New Delhi.

Border issues are on the agenda for the visit of Xi, who is accompanied by his wife Peng Liyuan, that came amid reports in India of new Chinese incursions along the de-facto frontier.

Modi has made clear he will pursue a more muscular foreign policy than the previous centre-left Congress government. During his election