

NEWS IN
briefHong Kong protesters
scrap key vote

BBC ONLINE

Protesters in Hong Kong have abandoned plans to hold a ballot over whether to accept several government concessions, just hours before it was meant to start. Protest leaders said they decided to "adjourn" the vote after disagreements over its format and apologised for a "lack of discussion" with protesters. Tens of thousands of protesters have joined a sit-in calling for full democracy in Hong Kong since September.

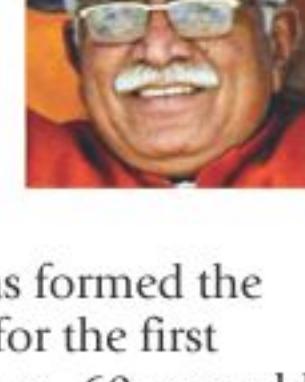
20 militants killed
in Pak airstrikes

PTI, Islamabad

At least 20 militants were killed and several others injured early yesterday when Pakistan's fighter jets pounded their positions in the country's tribal region. A security official said five militant hideouts were also destroyed.

Khattar sworn-in
as Haryana CM

THE HINDU ONLINE



Manohar Lal Khattar was sworn in yesterday as chief minister of Haryana, where BJP has formed the government for the first time on its own. 60-year-old Khattar, a first-time MLA from Karnal and known to be close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was administered the oath along with nine ministers by the state governor at a function attended by BJP leaders including the PM, party chief Amit Shah.

Pakistan puts 80 clerics
under surveillance

DAWN ONLINE

Vigilance has been mounted around 80 Ulema in the Pakistan capital considered a threat to peace during Muharram. The 80 ulema belonging to the Sunni and Shia sects have been asked to restrict their movements and public appearances. Undertakings have also been taken from them.

Uruguay votes for
new president

BBC ONLINE

Voting is under way in Uruguay to elect a new president to succeed Jose Mujica, who is barred by the constitution from running again. Former President Tabare Vazquez of the Broad Front, Mujica's left-leaning party, is ahead in opinion polls. But neither he nor his main challenger, Luis Lacalle Pou of the right-wing National Party, is expected to win outright without a second round.

Afghan mullah
jailed for rape
of 10-yr-old girl

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

An Afghan court has sentenced a mullah to 20 years in prison after finding the religious teacher guilty of raping a 10-year-old girl.

The sentence, passed by a Kabul judge on Saturday, has been welcomed by family as well as women's support groups as a rare victory in their fight for justice for female victims of sex crimes. Rape is often treated as adultery in Afghanistan, and victims can face prison themselves.

Hasina Sarwari, the head in Kunduz province of the Women for Afghan Women (WAW) non-government organisation, said the student was raped in May by Mohammad Aminullah Barez, a local mullah who taught the girl's religious studies at a mosque-school.

She first tried to hide what had happened to her but was later admitted to hospital for bleeding, where doctors discovered the rape. The mullah was arrested by police later.

She said that if the trial had not been transferred to Kabul the result would probably have been very different.

ISIS 'pushed back' in Iraq

AGENCIES

Iraqi government forces yesterday retook four villages near a mountain ridge overlooking jihadists supply lines, security officials said, in a campaign which has struggled to make advances against the Sunni Islamist insurgents.

Irqi security forces backed by Shia militias and US-led air strikes gained some momentum on Saturday in their bid to loosen the grip of Islamic State, which controls large swathes of territory in the north and west of the country.

After months of fighting they drove ISIS out of Jurf al-Sakhar, just south of Baghdad, while Kurdish fighters regained control over the town of Zumar in the north.

ISIS has seized large swathes of Iraq and Syria since June, prompting air strikes to help ground forces stem the advance.

A senior official in the Kurdish Peshmerga ministry in Iraq's Kurdish region, Lt Gen Jabbar Yawar, told the BBC's Newshour that recapturing Zumar was a significant development and would "facilitate Peshmerga plans to liberate Sinjar".

Islamic State, also known as ISIS, captured the town of Sinjar in August forcing thousands of residents, mainly

from the Yazidi sect, to flee.

In Syria, Kurdish forces in the Kobane thwarted a new attempt by fighters from the ISIS yesterday to cut off the border with Turkey before Iraqi Kurdish reinforcements can deploy.

The pre-dawn assault marked the fourth straight day that the jihadists had attacked the Syrian side of the border crossing as the Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga fighters prepare to head for Kobane, the Syrian Observatory for

DEVELOPMENTS

Kurds thwart new bid to cut off Kobane

Iraq PM heads to Jordan for security talks

Syria regime air strikes kill 13 children

Human Rights said.

However, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday accused the main Kurdish party in Syria of not wanting Kurdish peshmerga fighters from Iraq to help it fight the jihadists trying to overrun Kobane.

Erdogan said that the Syrian Kurdish party the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which has been leading the defence of Kobane, fears losing its influence in northern Syria when the peshmerga arrive in the coming days.

More than 800 people have been killed in ground fighting for Kobane since the ISIS offensive on the Syrian Kurdish enclave began on September 16, the Observatory said. The jihadists have lost 481 dead, while 313 Kurds have been killed fighting to defend the area. The figures do not include ISIS losses to US-led air strikes, which the Pentagon has said run to "several hundred." Civilians accounted for 21 of the dead.

The US-led military coalition fighting ISIS launched 22 air strikes in Iraq and one in Syria on Friday and Saturday, the Pentagon said.

Meanwhile, Syrian government air strikes on two besieged, rebel-held areas of the central province of Homs killed at least 31 people, 13 of them children, the Observatory said yesterday.

Sixteen members of the same family were among 24 people killed in raids late Saturday and yesterday on the town of Talbisseh, it said, updating an earlier toll.

Meanwhile, Iraqi premier Haider al-Abadi visited Jordan for talks on combatting the jihadists, continuing a diplomatic push after a trip to Iran, his office said. Abadi's visit to Jordan comes just days after a trip to Iran, Iraq's neighbour to the east, during which he also discussed the fight against ISIS.

Brazilians vote
in tight race

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

After a contentious campaign, Brazilian polls opened amid tight security yesterday as voters headed out to elect their next president.

Some 143 million people in the world's seventh-largest economy were choosing between leftist incumbent Dilma Rousseff, who final opinion polls showed had a narrow edge, and Social Democrat Aecio Neves, scion of a famous political family.

Polls gave Rousseff between a four- and six-percent lead over her rival, though the election remained too close to call.

Winning back front-runner status after trailing Neves after the first round has been a battle for

Rousseff, a former guerrilla once jailed and tortured for fighting the country's 1964-1985 military regime.

"We are voting for a more equal Brazil with more opportunities," said Rousseff, Brazil's first woman president, as she cast her vote in the southern city of Porto Alegre where she grew up, after polls opened at 1000 GMT.

The vote was widely seen as a referendum on 12 years of government under her Workers' Party (PT) -- eight under working-class hero Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and four under Rousseff, who has presided over four years of anemic growth culminating in recession.



Dilma Rousseff Aecio Neves

Britain's Afghan war ends

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The last UK base in Helmand Province was handed over to Afghan forces yesterday morning, bringing British combat operations to an end after 13 years.

During the handover at Camp Bastion, British and American soldiers stood side by side as the Union flag and the Stars and Stripes were lowered at the same time and the two countries' national anthems were played.

The ceremony marked the withdrawal of British forces from the frontline, although a few hundred military advisers will remain until the end of the year to advise the Afghan army.

British soldiers arrived in Afghanistan in October 2001, shortly after the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, as part of an international mission to oust the Taliban from power.

The Taliban was toppled within weeks, but western forces have faced a prolonged and often bloody insurrection, with 453 British soldiers killed and thousands injured during the conflict. Most died in the southern province of Helmand where UK troops have been based for the last eight years.

Ten thousand British personnel were stationed in Helmand at the height of the conflict, although the presence has been steadily scaled back as responsibility for security was handed to the Afghans.

Military vehicles and equipment has been sent



back to Britain for several months from Camp Bastion, which is due to be turned into a commercial airstrip.

The remaining British troops at the base are due to return home this week, which is slightly ahead of the original schedule.

Michael Fallon, the Defence Secretary, acknowledged there was "no guarantee" Afghanistan would be "stable and safe" following the departure of western fighting forces.

The Defence Secretary confirmed that Britain would not be sending combat forces back into Afghanistan "under any circumstances", including a large scale insurrection in Helmand or Kabul.

UKRAINE VOTE
Pro-Western parties,
nationalists win

AFP, Kiev

Pro-Western and nationalist parties swept Ukraine's parliamentary election yesterday, exit polls showed, in a boost for President Petro Poroshenko's anti-corruption reforms and attempts to end a war with pro-Russian rebels.

The results pointed to overwhelming consensus on Ukraine's bid to steer from Russia's orbit on a pro-Western path eventually targeting European Union membership.

The snap election came eight months after a street revolt overthrew Moscow-backed president Viktor Yanukovich, sparking conflict with Russia and a crisis in relations between the Kremlin and Ukraine's Western allies.

The polls were called to clear out



the last vestiges of Yanukovich's regime -- and to some extent this was achieved.

For the first time since the Soviet collapse the Communist Party, which used to support Yanukovich, failed to clear the minimum level of votes for entering parliament.

However, in a vivid sign of ongoing divisions, the Opposition Bloc, made up of Yanukovich associates, got into the legislature with 7.6 percent of the vote.

The People's Front group of Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, which was runner up with 21 percent.

Tunisia votes in
historic polls

AFP, Tunis

Tunisians yesterday voted in an election seen as pivotal to establishing democracy in the cradle of the Arab Spring uprisings, with security forces deployed heavily to avert extremist attacks.

Tunisia has been hailed as a beacon of hope compared with other chaos-hit countries like Libya and Egypt where regimes were also toppled. But transition in the North African country has been tested at times by militant attacks and social unrest, with the final turnout expected to indicate the level of public disaffection.

Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa hailed the vote as "historic". Jomaa had warned of possible jihadist attacks aimed at disrupting the country's first post-revolution parliamentary election.

Up to 80,000 troops and police were deployed on polling day to protect voters.

The birthplace of the 2011 Arab Spring protests has flirted with disaster, especially last year.

Many accuse the Islamist movement Ennahda -- Tunisia's largest party -- and its secular allies which have been running the country of failing to address people's needs as the economy remains weak and security incidents are on the rise.

Five million Tunisians were eligible to vote. Election officials are due to announce the results by Thursday.

ODDLY enough

Queen's song 'has
healing powers'

BBC ONLINE

Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody is a good song for people to listen to if they feel unwell or down, a poll suggests.

A survey for BBC local radio for Faith in the World Week, which is exploring the healing power of music, offered 1,000 people 10 choices.

Dancing Queen by Abba came second, with Happy by Pharrell Williams in third. Nearly nine-out-of-ten agreed that listening to music can make people feel better when they are sick or facing difficult times.

Faith in the World Week, which runs until 2 November, is examining how music can change and shape people's lives.

Ex-farmer crowned as
new Miss Uganda

AFP, Kampala

A former mushroom and poultry farmer has been crowned Miss Uganda following a major rebranding of the annual beauty pageant, which saw the glamour of the catwalk ditched for an army-sponsored boot camp on a farm.

Leah Kalangula, 23, beat off 19 other finalists after a competition that is now designed to promote agriculture.

Besides having to field questions on farming on stage, contestants also had to milk cows and work with goats and sheep.

After years of following the more traditional beauty pageant formula, organisers applied the theme of promoting agriculture entrepreneurship among the youth to the event and partnered with the Ugandan army -- which has major business interests in the farm sector.

MISSILE DEAL

India chooses

Israel over US

AFP, New Delhi

India has chosen to buy anti-tank guided missiles from Israel, rejecting a rival US offer, as the right-wing government clears projects worth \$13.1 billion to modernise its ageing military, official sources said yesterday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government will buy 8,356 Spike missiles and 321 launchers from Israel in a deal worth 32 billion rupees (\$525 million), defence ministry sources told AFP.

The government is moving to speed up long-delayed defence orders and bolster its military.

The procurement deals, worth 800 billion rupees (\$13.1 billion) in total, were cleared at a meeting of India's Defence Acquisition Council, headed by Defence Minister Arun Jaitley, on Saturday.

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After years of opposition, big businesses agree to carbon tax

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The world is on the brink of enlisting market forces in the fight against climate change on a truly global scale for the first time, United Nations officials have claimed.

After years of opposition, hundreds of the world's major companies and investment firms -- including several oil giants -- have agreed that there should be a charge for the damage done to the planet by greenhouse gases.

This means that an international carbon market -- in which companies buy and sell the right to produce harmful emissions -- is now close to becoming a reality.

Even China, the world's biggest polluter, plans to set up a carbon pricing system next year.

It is hoped that market forces will inevitably drive down the level of greenhouse gases as money flows from companies that produce emissions to those that reduce them, such as renewable energy firms.

Georg Kell, executive director of UN Global Compact, the body's initiative to get firms to adopt sustainable policies, said the recent conversion of much of the



business world was hugely significant.

"This is a breakthrough as usually business blocks climate action on a national level," he said yesterday. "For the first time, the private sector has argued in favour of pricing externalities. Polluters are making the case to be charged."

Speaking on the sidelines of a meeting of senior executives from pension funds, major banks and institutional and sovereign wealth funds in Copenhagen, Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary General, stressed the importance of a global system.

"The United Nations cannot do it

alone. No country can do it alone. We have to combine our resources and ambitions, particularly together with business communities," he said. And carbon pricing, he stressed, was "one of the most powerful tools available for reducing emissions and generating sustainable development and growth".

So far, 74 countries, including the EU, China and Russia,