

NEWSIN brief

Sri Lanka cuts mudslide toll to 38

AFP, Koslinda
Sri Lanka yesterday reduced to 38 the number of dead and missing from a mudslide at a tea plantation after giving an initial toll of over 300. Police said they had discovered many of the people thought to be dead or missing were at work or school when their homes were swallowed by mud at the Meeriyabedda tea estate.

Clashes kill 7 troops, 20 militants in Pakistan

AP, Islamabad
At least seven soldiers and 20 militants were killed yesterday in separate incidents of violence in Pakistan's restive northwest tribal region where the military has launched a major offensive against the Taliban. Twenty Taliban militants were killed by the security forces during an operation in Khyber tribal district. Six soldiers were killed and five others injured in the clash. In a separate incident in Bajaur, one soldier was killed and another injured when a bomb went off.

Third victim of US school shooting dies

AFP, Washington
A 14-year-old US girl has died after being critically injured when a fellow high school student went on a shooting rampage last week, hospital officials said Friday. The gunman fatally shot one girl on the spot before turning the gun on himself. Another girl succumbed to her injuries in hospital last Sunday.

China completes first mission to moon

AFP, Beijing
China completed its first return mission to the moon early yesterday with the successful re-entry and landing of an unmanned probe, state media reported, in the latest step forward for Beijing's ambitious space programme. The probe landed safely in northern China's Inner Mongolia region, state news agency Xinhua said, citing the Beijing Aerospace Control Center.

Rocket fired from Gaza hits southern Israel

AFP, Jerusalem
A rocket fired from Gaza hit southern Israel on Friday, the Israeli army said, although there were no reports of casualties or damage. Hamas and Israel agreed a ceasefire on August 26, brokered by Egypt, ending 50 days of war which resulted in the deaths of 2,140 Palestinians and 73 Israelis.

Nepal bus crash kills 10

AFP, Kathmandu
Two passenger buses collided in central Nepal in the early hours of yesterday, killing at least 10 people, including a Russian woman, police said.

BURKINA FASO UNREST Power struggle after leader's ouster

AFP, Ouagadougou
Rival military factions laid claim to power in Burkina Faso yesterday after the west African nation's president fled following days of violent unrest over plans to extend his 27-year rule. The leader of a group of young army officers, Isaac Zida, declared himself in charge, dismissing as 'obsolete' an earlier such bid by the army chief and close ally of the ousted president. The tussle for power comes after days of violent demonstrations against president Blaise Compaore's longtime rule that saw parliament stormed and set ablaze, in protests closely watched across the continent where other veteran heads of state are also aiming to extend their rule.

Battle for Kobane rages

AFP, Suruc
Fighting raged in the Syrian border town of Kobane yesterday after jihadists launched a new assault on Kurdish militia bolstered by the arrival of heavily armed Iraqi peshmerga forces.

The roughly 150 Iraqi fighters, many of them chanting "Kobane", received a hero's welcome as they crossed the border from Turkey late Friday to join fellow Kurds trying to repel the Islamic State (ISIS) group.

The town has become a key battleground whose capture would be a major prize for the jihadists, giving them unbroken control of a long stretch of Syria's border with Turkey.

Fierce clashes in and around Kobane have killed about 100 ISIS fighters in the past three days, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported.

Fifteen Kurdish defenders also lost their lives on Friday, according to the Britain-based monitoring group, which relies on a wide network of sources inside Syria.

It said in total 958 people had been killed since ISIS launched an assault on Kobane in mid-September -- 576 IS jihadists, 361 Kurdish fighters and

WAR ON ISIS

Iraqi Kurds join fight
Kobane clashes
kill 100 jihadists in 3 days
US prepares to send military advisers to western Iraq

21 civilians. The United States, along with European and Arab allies, has conducted daily air raids against the group.

Kobane's defenders have been pleading for reinforcements and the peshmerga armed with machineguns, heavy artillery and rocket launchers travelled through Turkey to Syria from Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region.

They stood atop their pick-ups, waving to onlookers and brandishing their rifles in the air as they crossed the frontier into Kobane. Turkish police lined the road holding anti-riot shields.

Ankara also allowed dozens of lightly armed Free Syrian Army rebels to cross into Kobane this week. Turkish President Recep Tayyip

Erdogan took aim at West for focusing too much on the battle for Kobane.

"Why are coalition forces continually bombing this town of Kobane?" We talk about nothing other than Kobane which is on the Turkish border and where there is no one left any more except 2,000 people fighting," he said.

In Iraq, government forces Friday attacked the strategic jihadist-held town of Baiji, which has been out of Baghdad's control for months, regaining control of two areas, army officers said.

Baiji lies on the main highway to Iraq's IS-controlled second city Mosul, and its recapture would also help to further isolate militants in the city of Tikrit, to the south.

US officials meanwhile said Washington was drafting plans to deploy American military advisers to Iraq's troubled western province of Anbar and to help arm Sunni tribes to fight IS.

About 600 US military advisers are already based in Baghdad and in the northern city of Arbil. But as ISIS has steadily rolled back the Iraqi army in the west, US and coalition officials have grown increasingly convinced of the need to station advisers in Anbar to assist the Iraqi troops.

Boko Haram terms truce talks claims as 'lies'

Says kidnapped girls converted to Islam, married

AP, Maiduguri



The leader of Nigeria's Islamic extremist group Boko Haram has denied agreeing to any ceasefire with the government and said more than 200 kidnapped schoolgirls all have converted to Islam and been married off.

In a new video released late Friday night, the leader Abubakar Shekau dashed hopes for a prisoner exchange to get the girls released.

"The issue of the girls is long forgotten because I have long ago married them off," he said, laughing.

"In this war, there is no going back," he said in the video received by The Associated Press in the same way as previous messages.

Nigeria's chief of defense staff, Air Chief Marshal Alex Badeh, on Oct 17 announced that Boko Haram had agreed to an immediate ceasefire to end a 5-year-old insurgency that has killed thousands of people and driven hundreds of thousands from their homes in

northeast Nigeria. But attacks and abductions have continued with the extremists this week seizing Mubi, a town of more than 200,000 people. Fighting also continued Friday in Vimitin, the nearby village where Badeh was born.

Boko Haram in August announced that wanted to establish an Islamic caliphate, along the lines of the ISIS group in Syria and Iraq. Fleeing residents have reported that hundreds of people are being detained for infractions of the extremists' version of strict Shariah law in several towns and villages under their control.

Boko Haram's kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls taking exams at a boarding school in the remote northeastern town of Chibok in April prompted an international campaign for their release and criticism of Nigeria's government for not acting quickly to free them. Dozens of the girls escaped on their own in the first couple of days, but 219 remain missing.



From top, anti-clockwise, a file photo of WhiteKnightTwo, the twin-hulled airplane which carries the main vessel to 45,000ft before dropping it to make the sub-orbital space flight by itself; the Virgin Galactic SpaceShipTwo plane, left, is seen above moments after it detached from WhiteKnightTwo; a picture as the plane explodes; and a television images showing the wreckage of the space craft in Mojave desert of Los Angeles.

SPACECRAFT CRASH

VIRGIN GALACTIC'S SPACESHIP TWO WAS ON A TEST FLIGHT

- 35th test flight
- 2 pilots aboard, one of whom was killed
- 500 people have already booked a seat
- Ticket price: \$250,000

UNITED STATES
MOJAVE DESERT

CAPACITY
6 passengers
2 pilots

WHITEKNIGHT TWO, THE JET-POWERED LAUNCH AIRCRAFT

8m
42.7m

SOURCE: AFP

INDO-CHINA BORDER DISPUTE New Delhi to develop areas along border

PTI, New Delhi

Brushing aside China's reservations to its plans to develop infrastructure along the border, India yesterday said it has every right to undertake such projects in Indian territory and no one can stop it.

"We will do certain infrastructural activities which have not been done in the last 60 years. The Chinese should not have a problem with my statement.... They cannot stop me from doing my work," minister of state for home Kiren Rijiju told reporters on the sidelines of a function.

China had recently reacted sharply to a statement by Rijiju that India was planning to construct a road along the international boundary from Mago-Thingbu in Tangang in Vijaynagar in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh to match China's road infrastructure across the McMahon Line.

"There is a dispute about the eastern part of the China-India border. Before final settlement is reached, we hope that India will not take any action that may further complicate the situation," a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman had said.

Rijiju said he was only referring to the government's plans to improve border infrastructure within India's territory and not in Chinese territory.

Asked about China's plans to construct a railway line across the McMahon line, the Union minister said it was nothing new.

UKRAINE CRISIS Six soldiers killed ahead of rebel vote

AFP, Donetsk

Six Ukrainian soldiers were killed by pro-Russian rebels, officials said yesterday on the eve of separatist elections that Ukraine and its Western backers say will undermine an increasingly hollow truce accord.

Losses in the last 24 hours "as a result of fighting were six servicemen killed and 10 wounded," Volodymyr Polyov, spokesman for the National Security and Defence Council, said.

The bombardments formed a frightening backdrop to elections today in the self-declared, pro-Russian statelets known as the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic.

US nurse wins harsh Ebola 'quarantine rule' battle

AFP, New York

A US judge ruled Friday that a nurse quarantined by her home state after treating Ebola patients in Africa could leave home and frequent public places, saying she was not infectious.

The decision from a district judge in the northeastern state of Maine is the latest twist in a bitter row over enforced quarantine of American medics returning from relief work in west Africa.

It reversed a temporary order that prevented her from visiting cinemas and shopping centers, and demanded she keep three feet away from others while Judge Charles LaVerdiere examined the case.

Kaci Hickox insists that she is perfectly healthy, and since returning to the US has fought efforts by authorities to keep her in quarantine for 21 days, the incubation period for the deadly virus that has killed nearly 5,000 people, most of them in west Africa.

People infected with Ebola are contagious if showing symptoms, like a fever, and Hickox has argued that since she was not showing any symptoms, there was no need



Kaci Hickox

to keep her under quarantine. Maine went to court to force her to stay at home in the town of Fort Kent. On Thursday, she went out for a bike ride with her boyfriend, trailed by TV cameras and the police.

So far the US has treated nine Ebola victims, with one of them -- a man who contracted it in Liberia -- dying from the virus. Apart from two nurses, the rest of the Ebola victims became infected in Africa. Experts say quarantining medical professionals who have shown no symptoms of the disease is counter-productive and could deter US workers from helping contain west Africa's Ebola crisis.

Virgin crash sets back space tourism by years

AFP, Washington

The deadly crash of Virgin Galactic's spacecraft has dealt a devastating setback to the cause of space tourism, delaying the first commercial flights to the stars by years, experts said.

After several delays, Virgin Galactic had hoped to start ferrying passengers to the edge of space in 2015, ushering in a new era of tourism for those willing and wealthy enough to pay up to \$250,000 for the privilege.

But the pioneering dreams of British tycoon Richard Branson were left scattered across California's Mojave Desert on Friday after the disaster that claimed Virgin Galactic's SpaceShipTwo and the life of one of its pilots.

"Space is hard -- but worth it. We will persevere and move forward together," he vowed after the tragedy.

"You are not going to see any commercial space tourism flight next year or probably several years after that," said Marco Caceres, a senior space analyst and director of space studies for the Teal Group, a Washington-based defense and aerospace consultancy.

Virgin Galactic had already lined up 650 customers for its first flights on the craft, including a slew of celebrities.

The fact that the accident came just days after a private rocket destined to take supplies to the International Space Station exploded shortly after take-off in Virginia on Tuesday will also likely hurt the space tourism industry.

Experts said Virgin Galactic will now need to carry out a far greater number of tests before commercial flights could become a possibility.

Branson had vowed to be on the first flight next year along with his son.

Stars such as Leonardo DiCaprio and Ashton Kutcher had been among those reportedly planning to take Virgin Galactic's first wave of flights.

Why all the violence hitting ME?

Never mind ISIS -- it's all down to the West's desire to weaken Arab armies, a close adviser to Syria's Assad tells Robert Fisk

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Why such an epic explosion of violence throughout the Middle East? It feels strange to ask these questions of Dr Bouthaina Shaaban, one of President Bashar al-Assad's close advisers and former translator to his father, Hafez. But Shaaban finds it difficult to define what ISIS really is.

Not so with America and the war in Syria. "Right from the beginning of this crisis, I never truly felt that the issue was about President Assad," she says. "It was about the weakening and destruction of Syria. There has been so much destruction -- of hospitals, schools, factories, government institutions, you name it. I think the Americans take their battles against leaders and presidents -- but only as a pretext to destroy countries. Saddam was not the real target -- it was Iraq. And it's the same for Libya now -- America told everyone it was about Gaddafi. The real issue is about weakening the Arab armies, whoever they are. When the Americans invaded Iraq, what was the first thing they did? They dissolved the Iraqi army."



"Now all Arab armies are targeted -- and the purpose is to change the nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Arab-Israeli conflict is the crux of all that is going on in the Middle East. I am not saying these tactics will work. I am saying 'they' are targeting the Arab armies. The Egyptian army is very strong. It is a logical army that is defending its country. And then it received this huge attack in Sinai. It's my opinion that the target is to eliminate the threat that Arab armies represent for the liberation of Gaza and the West Bank and Golan and to make Israel's occupation easier and less costly. This is a major dimension of the cause of the 'Arab Spring'. In fact I call it an 'Israeli Spring'."

But why would the West be bombing ISIS if it wished to weaken the Syrian army?

"The Americans are the major power in the world and they are weighing this power. But what is 'Daesh'? How does it sell its oil and get its money? In Syria, we are under sanctions and we cannot transfer a penny through New York. Let me ask you something. When Mosul fell to 'Daesh', the Americans did nothing. The Americans intervened only when Kurdistan was threatened -- which means the US supports the partition of Iraq. So the US move against 'Daesh' is a political move for other objectives."

Shaaban, being an Arab nationalist, urged Arabs to solve their own crises: "I hope young Arabs will not cling to these borders. As Arabs, we should sit down and think how we can face these challenges together. There is a master-plan, a 'maestro' -- yes, I know people say that this is a 'conspiracy theory'. But what I'm saying is that the conspiracy is no longer a 'theory' -- it is a reality we must confront together."

SPANISH CIVIL WAR MYSTERY Experts to search for Lorca's grave

MAIL ONLINE

Archaeologists will start inspecting land in southern Spain where radical poet Federico Garcia Lorca is believed to have been executed and buried in 1936.

Lorca, one of Spain's most renowned 20th-century poets, was among tens of thousands of civilians killed by militias loyal to late dictator General Francisco Franco at the start of the Spanish Civil War.

The search for his grave remains one of the greatest mysteries of the 1936-1939 war, which was started when Franco rose up against Spain's elected leftist Republican government.

Luis Naranjo, an official with the southern regional government of Andalusia, said that the project is aimed at discovering the remains of Civil War victims, not specifically those of Lorca.

Lorca is best known for tragedies such as 'Blood Wedding' and his poetry collections 'Poet in New York' and 'Gypsy Ballads'. His work draws on universal themes like love, death, passion, cruelty and injustice. An earlier high-profile dig for his grave, which took place over two months in 2009, yielded no results.

