

NEWS IN brief

EU keeps Hamas on terror list
 AFP, Brussels

The European Union kept Hamas on its terrorism blacklist Friday despite a controversial court decision ordering Brussels to remove the Palestinian Islamist group from the register.

Brussels has lodged an appeal against a December ruling by the bloc's second highest court that Hamas should be delisted for the first time since 2001.

"Hamas stays on list during Council's appeal to December judgement," Susanne Kiefer, a spokeswoman for the European Council said on Twitter.

S Leone in new Ebola lockdown
 AFP, Freetown

Sierra Leone imposed a three-day nationwide lockdown yesterday for the second time in six months in a bid to prevent a resurgence of the deadly Ebola virus.

The country's six million people, with the exception of health workers, were to remain indoors from 0600 GMT Friday to 1800 GMT tomorrow on orders from President Ernest Bai Koroma.

Turkey okays tough anti-protest law
 AFP, Ankara

The Turkish parliament yesterday passed a stripped down version of its controversial homeland security bill that has enraged the opposition, after a 16-hour debate that lasted all night.

Critics fear the draconian legislation, which in the last weeks caused several fist-fights in parliament, will encourage the arbitrary arrest of protesters and turn the country into a police state under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Japan PM to make US Congress address
 AFP, Washington

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will bring his message of deepening economic and security ties with Washington when he makes a landmark address to US lawmakers on April 29.

"Prime Minister Abe will become the first Japanese leader to address a joint meeting of the United States Congress and we are proud to host this historic event," House Speaker John Boehner said Thursday.

Blast kills 2 Pak cops
 AFP, Karachi

A Taliban bomb blast hit a police van in Karachi yesterday, killing at least two policemen and wounding 14 other people, officials said.

Karachi, Pakistan's economic heart and home to some 18 million people, is rife with criminal, ethnic, political and sectarian killings, which claim hundreds of lives each year.



A stele in memory of the victims of the Germanwings Airbus A320 crash is pictured in the small village of Le Vernet, French Alps, yesterday, near the site where a Airbus A320 crashed on March 24. Inset, French gendarmes and investigators work in the scattered debris on the crash site. The Germanwings co-pilot who flew his Airbus into the French Alps, killing all 150 aboard, hid a serious illness from the airline, prosecutors said yesterday amid reports he was severely depressed.



Poet Tomas Transtroemer dies at 83

Swedish poet Tomas Transtroemer, who won the 2011 Nobel Prize for Literature, has died at the age of 83, his publishing house Bonniers said yesterday.

Transtroemer, who suffered a stroke in 1990 which affected his ability to speak, wrote poems full of imagery that addressed nature, history and death.

He has been called a master of mysticism, who often presented a dream-like consciousness in which time slows to allow for dissection of the relationship between the inner self and the surrounding world.

"Most of Transtroemer's poetry collections are characterised by economy, concreteness and poignant metaphors. In his latest collections... Transtroemer has shifted towards an even smaller format and a higher degree of concentration," the Nobel jury said when it honoured him.

His books of poetry include "The Great Enigma: New Collected Poems" (New Directions, 2006), "The Half-Finished Heaven" (2001); "New Collected Poems" (1997); "For the Living and the Dead" (1995); "Baltics" (1975); "Windows and Stones" (1972), an International Poetry Forum Selection and a runner-up for the National Book Award for translation; and "The Half-Finished Heaven" (2001).

The poet, who was also a trained psychologist, died on Thursday, according to the Nobel Foundation.

PRECEDENTS OF PILOTS DOWNING THEIR PLANES

Investigators believe the co-pilot of a German airliner deliberately crashed the plane into the French Alps earlier this week, killing all 150 people aboard. While rare, there have been previous such incidents in which a pilot or co-pilot have brought down an aircraft.

- MOZAMBIQUE AIRLINES - NOVEMBER 29, 2013**
 Mozambique Airlines (LAM) flight TM 470 flying from Maputo to Luanda goes down in northeastern Namibia killing 33. Investigators said the captain had a "clear intention" to crash the plane. They said flight recorders showed the Embraer 190 went down while Captain Herminio dos Santos Fernandes manipulated its autopilot in a way which "denotes a clear intention" to bring the plane down.
- EGYPTAIR - OCTOBER 31, 1999**
 EgyptAir flight 990, a Boeing 767 en route from New York to Cairo crashes into the Atlantic Ocean shortly after take off, killing all 217 on board. An analysis of the black boxes showed that the pilot caused the accident and declared shortly before the crash: "I have just taken my decision. I put my faith in God's hands".
- EGYPTIAN AUTHORITIES**, however, rejected the explanation of pilot suicide, disputing among other things the interpretation of what he said in the black box recording.
- SILKAIR - DECEMBER 19, 1997**
 A Singaporean SilkAir Boeing 737 plunges into a river in Indonesia on route from Jakarta to Singapore. All 104 passengers and crew aboard were killed. US investigators say the captain probably crashed the plane on purpose, while the main investigation led by Indonesia was incon-

clusive, though it did say pilot suicide was a "plausible hypothesis".

ROYAL AIR MAROC - AUGUST 21, 1994
 The pilot of a Royal Air Maroc jet crashes the plane into the Atlas mountains shortly after taking off from Agadir for Casablanca. All 44 aboard are killed. The probe, based on the last words of the co-pilot, quickly concluded it was suicide.



JAPAN AIRLINES - FEBRUARY 9, 1982
 A Japan Airlines DC-8 crashes into Tokyo Bay on approach to Haneda Airport. Twenty four people are killed. A probe concluded that the pilot, who survived, was mentally unstable. Pilot suicide is also among the various hypotheses considered in last year's disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 with 239 people aboard. The communications system was deliberately deactivated and the flight changed course.

DELIBERATE PLANE CRASH REPORT Shock, anger simmer

The co-pilot of the doomed Germanwings flight appears to have deliberately crashed the plane after locking his captain out of the cockpit, French officials said, with the "unimaginable" development sparking global shock and anger among victims' loved ones.

In a chilling account of the final minutes of Germanwings Flight 4U 9525, lead prosecutor Brice Robin said Thursday that 28-year-old German Andreas Lubitz initiated the plane's descent into the French Alps while alone at the controls.

Lubitz appeared to "show a desire to want to destroy" the plane, Robin told reporters after his team analysed the Airbus A320's cockpit voice recorder.

The first officer, who was described by neighbours and fellow flying club members as a "friendly" guy-next-door type who enjoyed jogging with his girlfriend, was not however believed to be part of a terrorist plot, officials said.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the revelation added an "absolutely unimaginable dimension" to

Tuesday's tragedy, in which 150 people were killed, mostly German and Spanish nationals.

It prompted airlines to review their cockpit policies, many announcing they will now require two crew members in the cockpit at all times.

Robin said the passengers were killed "instantly" by the crash and were probably unaware of the impending disaster until the "very last moment."

The pilot, believed to have gone to the toilet, made increasingly furious attempts to re-enter the cockpit, banging on the door, the recordings appear to show.

In the northwestern German town of Haltern, which lost 16 students and two teachers killed while returning from a school exchange, the revelations caused shock and anger.

"Personally, I'm stunned, angry, speechless and deeply shocked," Haltern's mayor Bodo Klimpel told a news conference.

The shaken principal of the stricken school, Ulrich Wessel, said "what makes all of us so angry (is) that a suicide can lead to the deaths of 149 other people ... It leaves us angry, perplexed, stunned."

Shabab siege hotel in Somalia, kill 10

At least 10 people have died in an attack by Somalia's al-Qaeda-affiliated Shebab militants on a hotel in the capital Mogadishu, Somali security officials said yesterday.

A car bomb explosion went off outside the Maka al Mukarama hotel, considered a high security facility and frequented by politicians, diplomats and businessmen, before around five heavily-armed gunmen stormed inside. Somalia's ambassador to Switzerland was among the dead, officials said.

"There are at least 10 people killed," a security source told AFP. He said Somali government special forces had entered the city centre hotel and were in the process of securing it after three hours of fierce fighting.

"All the attackers were killed and the situation is under control. The government's special forces have managed to penetrate the building and are now in full control," said another official, Mohamed Hassan.

He said at least nine bodies had been counted -- mostly members of hotel security and civilian guests -- but said security forces were still in the process of confirming the overall toll.

The Shebab's spokesman, Abdulaziz Abu Musab, confirmed that the militants were behind the attack and said they had managed to quickly seize control of the hotel.

A car bombing followed by an armed raid has become a trademark tactic of the hardline Islamists, who are fighting to overthrow the Mogadishu government and eject African Union forces supporting it.



Firefighters continue to hose down the site of a fire incident that caused the collapse of two buildings and damage to two other buildings a day after the blaze took place in New York City. At least two people are missing and over a dozen injured in the accident.

Nigeria captures Boko Haram 'HQ'

Nigeria yesterday announced the capture of Boko Haram's headquarters, on the eve of a knife-edge vote at which President Goodluck Jonathan is eyeing re-election against a stiff opposition challenge.

The military hailed the claimed victory in Gwoza as a crushing defeat for the rebels, whose six-year insurgency has left more than 13,000 dead and which Jonathan had seemingly been unable to stop.

Chad's President Idriss Deby meanwhile launched an outspoken attack on the Nigerian Army, slamming its past failures and accusing it of not cooperating with coalition partners from neighbouring countries in the fight against Boko Haram.

Boko Haram has dominated the election campaign, with Jonathan's record on security repeatedly attacked by the APC candidate, former military ruler Muhammadu Buhari.

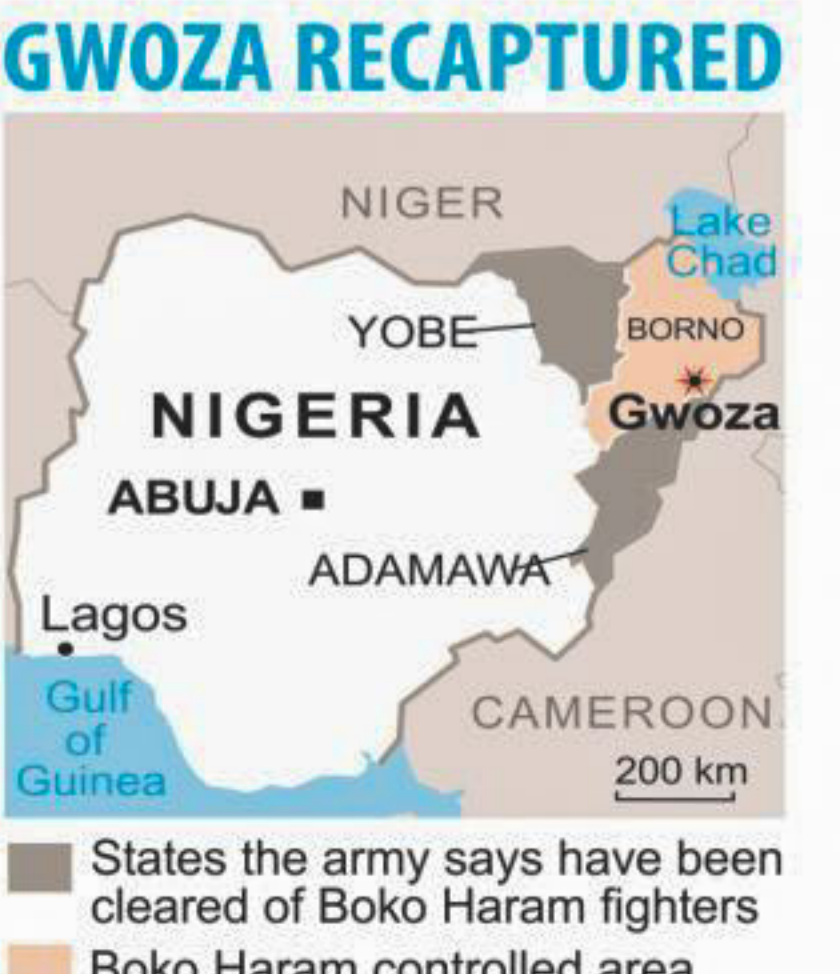
Buhari said as campaigning wrapped up on Thursday that he would make rebuilding the army and security agencies a "top priority" of his administration.

"I will ensure that never again will terrorists find a safe haven in Nigeria,"

he added, vowing also to reunite the 219 schoolgirls held hostage by the group since last April with their families.

Reports have suggested that the teenagers, whose abduction from the remote town of Chibok in Borno state caused global outrage, were being held in Gwoza.

But two locals told AFP that there was no sign of the girls in the town, which Boko Haram declared part of a caliphate last August and renamed



"Darul Hikma" in Arabic, meaning "House of Wisdom".

One man who was forcibly conscripted into the militant ranks claimed that Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau personally ordered his fighters to kill women in Gwoza before they retreated.

"They gathered the women who were in large number and opened fire on them," said Usman Ali, a 35-year-old farmer who later managed to escape, in an account supported by another local man.

The account mirrors similar testimony from the town of Bama, which was recaptured earlier this month.

Nigeria's defence spokesman Chris Olukolade said a number of dead bodies had been found in a deep well in Gwoza but did not elaborate.

The recapture of Gwoza leaves just a handful of places in the northeast under rebel control, according to Abuja, which has talked of the "final onslaught" against the militants.

Deby indicated in an interview with French magazine Le Point that the insurgency should have been crushed sooner and claimed there had been no direct talks with the Nigerians for two months.

All Iran-backed militia out of Tikrit op: US

Iraqi Shia militia units under Iran's influence have withdrawn from a battle in the city of Tikrit, but other Shiite militias who answer to the Baghdad government remain in the fight, the Pentagon said Friday.

A precondition for US-led air strikes in support of an Iraqi offensive in Tikrit was that forces linked to Iran move aside to make way for regular army, police and militia under the Iraqi government's command, officials said.

"What remains on the battlefield now are forces that are under direct control of the ministry of defense," Pentagon spokesman Colonel Steven Warren told reporters.

Those forces staying in the fight included members of Popular Mobilisation units, which have both Shia and Sunni fighters.

Under pressure, Israel releases Palestinian tax funds

France to launch new UN push for peace resolution

Israel yesterday said it would be releasing to the Palestinian Authority tax funds it had been withholding as punishment, as diplomatic pressures on the Jewish state were coming to a head.

The move could help to preempt imminent Palestinian diplomatic measures against the Jewish state, as well as disarm tensions with the United States and international community after a polarising Israeli election campaign.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said revenues accumulated over three months, frozen by Israel since January in retaliation for a Palestinian move to join the International Criminal Court (ICC), would be transferred after normal deductions for services.

But it did not say whether Israel would resume the normal monthly payment of around \$127 million in customs duties levied on goods destined for Palestinian markets that transit through Israeli ports.

The Israeli decision will help to sustain the Palestinian Authority, facing financial collapse without tax revenues that constitute some two-thirds of its annual budget, excluding foreign aid.

On Wednesday, the Palestinians will formally become members of the ICC and can proceed with legal action there against Israeli officials.

The White House recently said it may withdraw crucial diplomatic cover for Israel at the UN Security Council as it reevaluates its position. Such a move could prove problematic for Israel if the Palestinians resubmit a draft resolution setting an end date for the Israeli occupation.

Meanwhile, Israel is facing a new French-sponsored draft resolution that would seek to revive peace talks with the Palestinians.

Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said Friday that discussions on a text would start "in the coming days."

In December, the Security Council rejected a resolution that would have set a deadline for reaching a final peace deal and pave the way to the creation of a Palestinian state.

Fabius told reporters that "obviously the two parties must discuss, but the discussion must be backed by an international effort."