

NEWS IN brief

ISIS seizes Yarmuk refugee camp

The Islamic State group stormed the Yarmuk refugee camp in southern Damascus yesterday, capturing large parts of the Palestinian haven and demonstrating for the first time its ability to attack Syria's capital.

Attackers killed at Turkey police HQ

One assailant was killed yesterday when Turkish security forces opened fire on two armed individuals who sought to attack the police headquarters in Istanbul, reports said.

World's oldest person dies

The world's oldest living person, Japan's Misao Okawa, has died from heart failure at the age of 117. She died in a nursing home in Osaka, the city she was born in on 5 March 1898.

Sarkozy's campaign scam charges dropped

French judges yesterday decided not to charge Nicolas Sarkozy over a campaign finance scandal but placed the former president under a special status that leaves the door open for further questioning.

More than 30 jihadist groups support ISIS

More than 20 jihadist groups have pledged their allegiance to the Islamic State movement and 10 others have voiced their support for the extremist organisation, according to US monitoring body IntelCenter.

Anwar Ibrahim's royal pardon plea rejected

Malaysia's king has rejected a royal pardon request for opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, who is currently serving five years in jail for sodomy.

Govt calls for ground troops

AGENCIES

Dozens of civilians were reported killed yesterday after a dairy plant was bombed in Yemen as the war-torn country's foreign minister called for a Saudi-led military coalition targeting Shia rebels in his country to send ground troops.



YEMEN CRISIS

Dozens killed as dairy plant bombed
Experts warn crisis may choke key shipping route
India evacuates first batch of citizens

began air strikes a week ago. Yassin said ground forces would cause "less civilian casualties" but added the main reason he proposes a land operation is to enable aid deliveries.

without specifying whether the factory was hit by an air strike or rebel shelling.

Part of the factory was destroyed and rescue teams were looking for survivors under the rubble, according to a medic at a Hodeida hospital that received the casualties.

The circumstances of the bombing were unclear, with some witnesses saying the dairy was hit by a coalition air strike and others blaming rebel forces loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Since Friday at least 93 civilians have been killed and 364 wounded in the conflict, the UN human rights office said on Tuesday.

The crisis is also becoming a threat to the Bab el-Mandeb shipping lane, which connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea.

Meanwhile, India on Tuesday night evacuated first batch of its stranded citizens. 344 Indians and 40 other nationals were rescued from Aden, around 450km from Yemen's capital Sana'a.

The vessel is sailing to Djibouti, in the Horn of Africa, where they will board a flight to India.

However, the exact number of those on board the vessel was not confirmed by authorities.

Palestine joins ICC

AFP, The Hague

Palestine formally joined the International Criminal Court yesterday, a move the Palestinians hope could open the door to the possible prosecution of Israelis for alleged war crimes.

The accession was marked at a closed-door ceremony at ICC headquarters in The Hague, exactly 90 days after Palestine joined the court's founding Rome Statute.

The Palestinians called on Israel to also join the global court, which was set up in 2002 to try crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide.

But Israel denounced the move as "hypocritical".

"The Palestinian decision to join the ICC to initiate judicial proceedings against Israel is political, cynical and hypocritical," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Exasperated after decades of failed negotiations with Israel and no prospect of achieving statehood anytime soon, Palestinians have been waging a campaign for recognition at international bodies including the ICC.

"Palestine seeks justice, not vengeance," foreign minister Riad Malki said after receiving a symbolic copy of the Rome Statute at the ceremony.

ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda in January launched a preliminary

investigation into possible war crimes during last year's Gaza war.

The Palestinians have already sent the court documents authorising the prosecutor to investigate alleged crimes in the Palestinian territories since June 2014.

About 2,200 Palestinians and 73 Israelis were killed during the 50-day conflict in July and August.

Any probe of alleged Israeli crimes in Gaza would also include an investigation of the firing of rockets and mortars by Hamas militants at civilian areas in Israel.

Despite Israel not being a signatory to the world's only permanent court for the most serious crimes, the tribunal could prosecute Israelis for alleged crimes committed on Palestinian territory.

The ICC would face challenges in arresting Israeli suspects however as it does not have its own police force and relies on the cooperation of member states.

The Palestinians could in theory now refer a specific situation to the court, such as Jewish settlement building on occupied Palestinian land in the West Bank.

The Palestinians won observer status at the United Nations in 2012 and according to the Palestinian Authority, around 135 countries have now recognised the state of Palestine.



Hundreds of Nigerians celebrate at an intersection in the flashpoint northern city of Kaduna on March 31, 2015 the victory of main opposition All Progressives Congress (APC) presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari.

Rohingyas stripped off all nationality docs

Myanmar begins collecting 'white cards'

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar authorities have begun collecting temporary identification cards from displaced Rohingya Muslims in unrest-torn Rakhine state, an official said yesterday, a move that the UN has warned could strip them of all documentation.

Officials, backed by security forces, visited almost a dozen camps for people displaced by violence between Buddhists and Muslims in the western state.

They asked people there to hand back the so-called "white cards", following a shock presidential declaration in February that they would expire on March 31.

"Immigration officers said yesterday that the situation was OK. They collected (the cards) from 11 camps, with security personnel," Rakhine government communications officer Hla Thein told AFP, adding that he did not know how many cards had been collected.

Hundreds of thousands of people, mainly from the Rohingya minority, are thought to hold white cards -- ostensibly as part of a process of applying for citizenship.

The issue became a flashpoint in February when President Thein Sein announced that the cards would become invalid.

He was responding to a row over a parliamentary bill that would have allowed holders of temporary identification papers to vote in a referendum on constitutional amendments.

The Rohingya, who are considered by the United Nations to be one of the world's most persecuted minorities, are referred to by the government as "Bengali".

It was not immediately clear whether those whose cards were taken were able to begin a citizenship application process.

COALGATE SCAM Indian top court stays summons to ex-PM

AFP, New Delhi

India's top court yesterday suspended a summons requiring former prime minister Manmohan Singh to appear as one of the accused in a corruption trial involving coal mining licences.



Singh, who was prime minister from 2004 until last year, was the highest-profile figure to be implicated in the case involving the government licence allocations, long dogged by suspicions of corruption.

He faces allegations of corruption-related offences, breach of trust and criminal conspiracy, which carries a possible life sentence.

The Supreme Court yesterday agreed to consider challenges by Singh and five other accused, including a former coal minister and a prominent industrialist.

It stayed the summons issued by the trial court.

The 82-year-old enjoyed a reputation for probity during his decade as head of the Congress-led government ousted in last year's general election. He has denied any wrongdoing.

Swine flu kills 20 more in India

PTI, New Delhi

Swine flu killed 20 more people in India as the toll due to the contagious disease climbed to 2,084 and over 34,000 people were infected by the H1N1 virus.

Four more persons succumbed to swine flu in Rajasthan, raising the death toll to 423 in the state since January this year, an official said.

Of the 6,606 people found positive for the H1N1 virus in the state, 423 have died till yesterday.

Meanwhile, the ministry said that the death toll has increased to 433 in Gujarat, which is the worst hit state in the country.

A total of 6,528 cases of swine flu have been reported there.

No deal yet despite 'progress'

AGENCIES

Major powers and Iran were closer to a preliminary accord on Tehran's nuclear program as marathon talks ran into late yesterday, but were stuck over key details such as lifting UN sanctions and Iran's future atomic research.

After missing a self-imposed March 31 deadline for a deal, the negotiators ended talks in the Swiss city of Lausanne in the early morning hours with an air of chaos, disunity and cacophony as delegations scrambled to get contradictory viewpoints across.

France's foreign minister, often seen as making the most stringent demands of Iran, returned to Paris because things had not advanced enough for an "immediate deal".

But German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier late yesterday said Fabius would return to Switzerland "once (the talks) enter a decisive stage".

Russia and Iran expressed optimism

an initial agreement was within reach. British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond sounded a note of caution. "I think we have a broad framework of understanding, but there are still some key issues that have to be worked through," he told the BBC.

Western diplomats said Iran had on Tuesday reaffirmed its "nuclear rights", suggesting the talks were again getting bogged down entering their seventh day.

IRAN NUKE TALKS

Officials cautioned that any agreement would probably be fragile and incomplete.

"We hope to wrap up the talks by Wednesday night... We insist on lifting of financial, oil and banking sanctions immediately... for other sanctions we need to find a framework," senior Iranian negotiator Abbas Araqchi told state television.

"We insist on keeping

research and development with advanced centrifuges," he said.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel told reporters in Berlin she hoped for a compromise ensuring Iran cannot get nuclear weapons.

All sides had made a lot of progress, she said, but "such negotiations only come to an end if there is agreement on all points."

Other diplomats close to the talks said any preliminary deal would include a document with some key figures - such as permitted numbers for centrifuges and uranium stockpiles - though it would remain confidential for the foreseeable future.

A preliminary deal would be a major milestone toward a final accord, with an end-June deadline, that could end a 12-year standoff between Iran and world powers and reduce the risk of another Middle East war.

But it would only be a first step and reaching agreement on details by June 30 will be difficult.

Thai junta lifts martial law

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's junta yesterday lifted martial law but replaced it with new orders retaining sweeping powers for the military under a section of the interim constitution that has been lambasted by rights groups.

Special security measures -- including a ban on political gatherings of more than five people -- will continue to blanket the kingdom, which has seen civil liberties eroded since the military declared martial law and seized power from an elected government last May.

The royal order comes a day after junta chief and premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha said he had asked the country's ailing 87-year-old King Bhumibol Adulyadej for permission to lift the controversial law.

The new measures have been imposed to "handle any actions that will destroy peace and order, and national security, also any violations against the NCPO (junta)", said the announcement late Wednesday.

Now, that is luck Couple win EuroMillions lottery for second time

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A British couple might just be the luckiest lottery winners in the world after taking home £1m in the EuroMillions draw for the second time in two years.

David and Kathleen Long, from Scunthorpe, beat odds of 283 billion-to-one to secure the winning sum - a feat bookmakers William Hill claimed was less likely than "seeing Elvis alive and well".

They won their first £1m in the same lottery in 2013.

A spokesman for lottery bosses Camelot said that they were "extremely shocked" and described the situation as "extraordinary".

very shocked," he said. "It must be even more shocking to win twice."

Long went back to work as an HGV lorry driver at C & C Transport in Scunthorpe on the



Monday morning as normal after the big news was revealed.

He said that he planned to treat himself to a season ticket for Liverpool FC, a cruise, maybe a luxury camper van, and a new car.

BEEF BAN IN INDIA Cops seek cow 'mugshots'

AFP, Mumbai

Police in a west Indian township have asked cattle owners to supply photographs of their animals to help enforce the state's tough new ban on beef, an officer said yesterday.

Nearly 100 farmers and other owners in Malegaon have so far complied with the request for mugshots along with a dossier on the cows, said Sunil Kadasne, additional superintendent of the city.

"After the new law, commercial slaughter has largely stopped but this program will help us to stop all killing by helping trace any animal thefts faster," Kadasne told AFP.

The Maharashtra state government introduced a tough ban in March on killing and selling cows, while even possession of beef could land you in jail for five



years. Cows in Hindu-majority India are considered sacred and several other states also ban their slaughter.