

NEWS IN brief

Indian cops kill 20 wood smugglers

AFP, Hyderabad
At least 20 people were killed yesterday when police opened fire on loggers who attacked them with axes and stones in an area of southern India known for sandalwood smuggling. Police said officers had opened fire "in self-defence" after challenging a group of over 100 suspected smugglers in a remote forest in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh.

Tough anti-terror law passed in Malaysia

AFP, Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia was yesterday accused of waging an assault on civil rights as parliament passed a tough anti-terrorism law aimed at countering Islamic militancy. The new law allows authorities to detain terrorism suspects without charge for extended periods. Human Rights Watch's deputy Asia director Phil Robertson called the new legislation "a giant step backwards for human rights".

Rand Paul to run for US presidency

AFP, Louisville
Conservative US Senator Rand Paul yesterday announced he is running for the Republican Party's nomination for the 2016 presidential race. He follows Texas and fellow senator Ted Cruz, who launched his Republican candidacy two weeks ago with an appeal to the religious right.

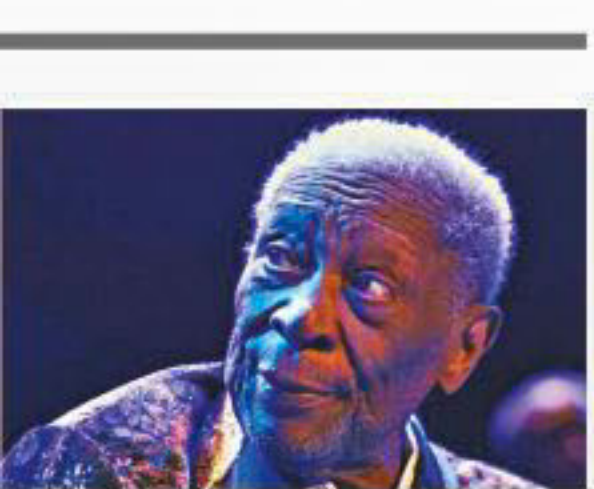


Blast at China chemical plant injures 19

AFP, Beijing
Nineteen people were injured in an explosion at a controversial chemical plant in the eastern Chinese city of Zhangzhou, reports said yesterday, the second accident at the site in two years. The blast occurred on Monday evening. Local residents had been evacuated, it added, and the fire had been contained. It was caused by an oil leak at the facility which then caught fire and set off explosions at three nearby oil tanks, the report said.

Rebels kill eight Iran troops on Pak border

AFP, Tehran
Eight Iranian border guards have been killed in a clash with Sunni rebels who had infiltrated from neighbouring Pakistan, Iran's official IRNA news agency reported yesterday. "Armed terrorists entered Iran from Pakistan and clashed with border guards, killing eight soldiers before fleeing back to Pakistan," Ali Asghar Mirshekari, deputy governor of Sistan-Baluchistan province, told the news agency.



Blues legend BB King hospitalised

AFP, Los Angeles
American blues legend BB King has been hospitalised. The Los Angeles Times reported Monday, citing representatives for the singer but giving no details about his condition. Nicknamed "King of the Blues", 89-year-old Riley B King is a member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and has been ranked among the greatest guitar players of all time. King, who has more than 50 albums under his belt, has lived with Type II diabetes for more than 20 years.



UNIVERSITY MASSACRE KENYANS MARCH FOR SECURITY

Kenyans take part in a march demanding greater national security yesterday, following last week's massacre by Somalia's Shebab Islamists, ahead of a candlelit vigil on the final day of mourning for the 148 people killed by the militants. Hundreds of demonstrators waving placards and chanting slogans marched on the streets of the capital Nairobi and the northeastern town of Garissa, where the massacre was carried out. Kenya's government says the university massacre was a "surprise" that could happen anywhere; but experts say decades of marginalisation coupled with government failings meant the attack was hardly unexpected.

PHOTO: AFP

Israel's recognition not part of Iran deal: Obama

US Senate planning vote as Israel proposes terms for better deal

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama has rejected a call by Israel for any nuclear agreement with Iran to be conditional on Tehran's recognition of the Jewish state's right to exist, branding it a "fundamental misjudgement".

"The notion that we would condition Iran not getting nuclear weapons in a verifiable deal on Iran recognising Israel, is really akin to saying that we won't sign a deal unless the nature of the Iranian regime completely transforms," he said to US radio network NPR Monday in a drive to sell the deal to a hostile Congress.

"And that is, I think, a fundamental misjudgement."

Israel's government reacted angrily to the historic framework agreement on Iran's nuclear programme announced last week, with a final accord due by

June 30.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu demanded Sunday that Iranian recognition of the Jewish state's right to exist be written into the agreement.

Meanwhile, Israel's Intelligence minister Yuval Steinitz proposed that the emerging deal between Iran and world powers should incorporate a total halt to research and development on a new generation of centrifuges, a cut in the number of existing centrifuges and closure of the Fordo facility for enrichment of uranium.

He also proposed that Tehran detail its past nuclear arms research and allow international inspectors to make spot checks "anywhere, anytime".

If such terms were accepted, Steinitz said, "it will not be a good agreement but it will be a more reasonable agreement".

Under the outline deal, US and EU are to lift all nuclear-related sanctions

on Iran in exchange for a 98-percent cut in Iran's stocks of highly enriched uranium for 15 years, while its unfinished Arak reactor will not produce weapons-grade plutonium. The deal will also see Iran reduce by roughly two-thirds -- to 6,104 from around 19,000 -- the number of uranium centrifuges.

Meanwhile, Republican US Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell on Monday criticized the deal, confirming that lawmakers opposed to the pact planned a formal response to the agreement. McConnell repeated his pledge to examine legislation proposed by Senators Bob Corker and Bob Menendez, which requires any deal on Iran's nuclear ambitions to be reviewed by Congress. The Corker-Menendez bill would oblige President Barack Obama to give lawmakers 60 days to examine, and possibly block, a nuclear deal.

Saudi seeks Pak planes, ships, troops in Yemen

Red Cross says situation in Aden 'catastrophic' as death toll soars

AGENCIES

Pakistan is "not in a hurry" to decide whether to join the Saudi-led coalition against rebels in Yemen, the prime minister said yesterday, before a round of shuttle diplomacy involving Iran and Turkey.

Saudi Arabia has asked its longstanding ally Pakistan to contribute planes, ships and ground troops to the operation against Shiite Huthi rebels in Yemen. Nawaz Sharif told a special parliamentary debate on Yemen he thought the diplomatic efforts planned for the coming days would yield results.

Meanwhile, the Red Cross yesterday warned of a "catastrophic" situation in Yemen's main southern city Aden, as loyalist forces battled rebels in the streets backed by shelling by Saudi-led warships. Spokeswoman for the International



Committee of the Red Cross in Yemen, Marie Claire Feghali, said that the humanitarian situation in all of Yemen is "very difficult". She described the situation in Aden as "catastrophic to say the least." "The war in Aden is on every street, in every corner... Many are unable to escape," she said.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said the situation was "worsening by the day," with wounded people unable to get to hospital because of the fighting.

At least 10 people were killed in fighting in Aden overnight, medical and security sources said. That was on top of at least 53 people killed over the previous 24 hours.

Nationwide, more than 540 people, including 74 children, have been killed and 1,700 wounded in fighting in Yemen since March 19, the WHO said yesterday.



'Modi tour' draws crowd

Indian pedestrians walk past the former 'tea stall' (L) of Damodardas Mulchand Modi, father of Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, where Modi assisted his father in his spare time at the railway station of Vadnagar town, some 110kms from Ahmedabad. Fans of Narendra Modi have been given a boost yesterday with plans to expand bus tours of the town where the Indian prime minister grew up. The weekly tour has become so popular since starting early this year that daily excursions are being planned to the tiny town in the western state of Gujarat. The tour, costing 600 rupees (\$9) per person, starts from the state's largest city Ahmedabad before travelling the 120 kilometres to Vadnagar. The 600 rupees (\$9) per person tour includes a visit to the house where Modi was born. Visitors can also chat to some of Modi's former school friends and others who knew him and his family.

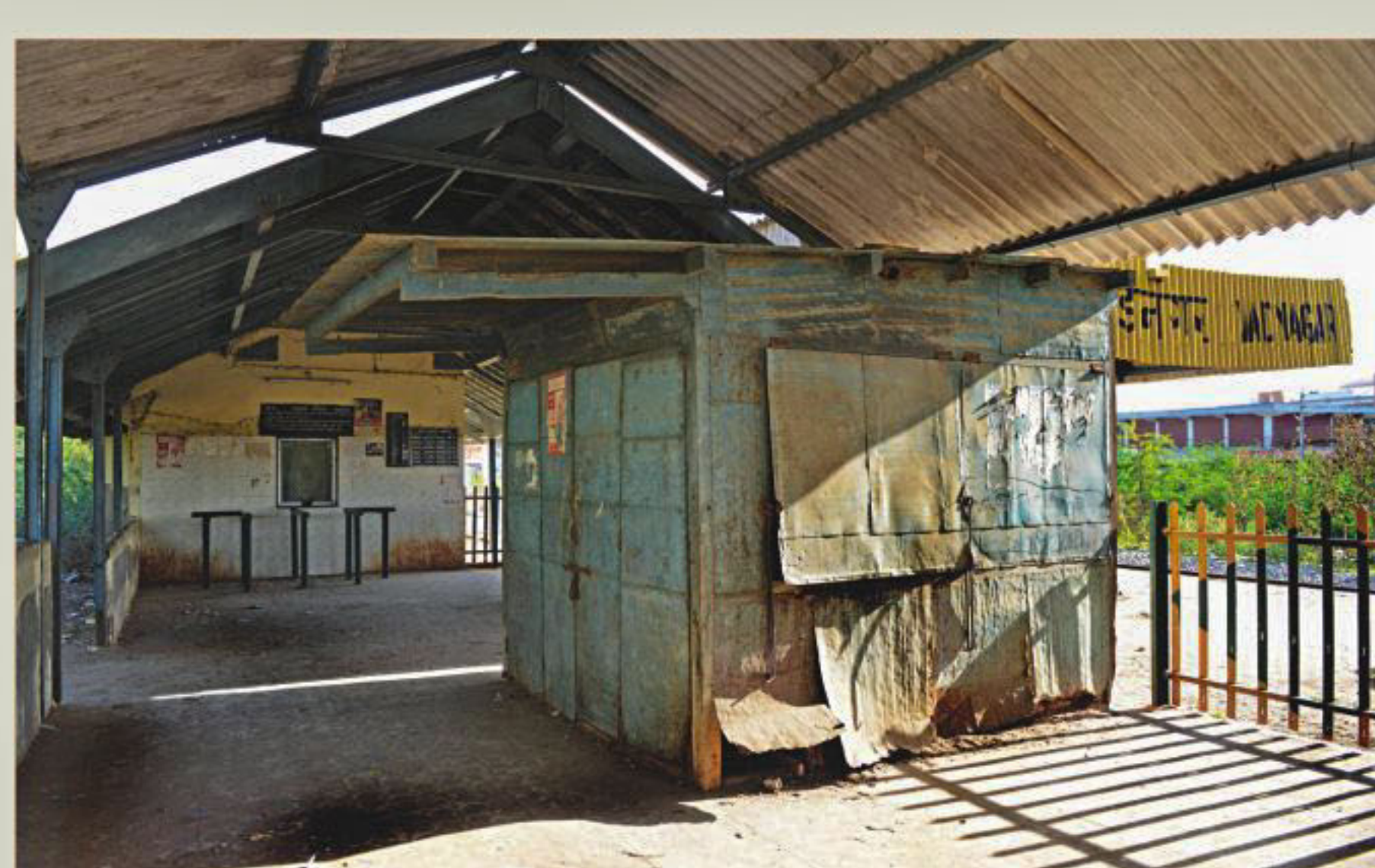


PHOTO: AFP



ISIS ATROCITIES

UNSC demands aid access to Yarmuk camp

AFP, Damascus

The UN Security Council has demanded humanitarian access to Syria's Yarmuk Palestinian refugee camp as residents described fleeing in terror after the arrival of Islamic State jihadists.

The advance by the extremists into the battered neighbourhood of south Damascus has alarmed the international community and Palestinian officials, with a delegation from the West Bank heading to Syria to discuss the situation. UNSC expressed deep concern about the situation on Monday, said Jordan's ambassador Dina Kawar.

It called "for the protection of civilians in the camp for ensuring a humanitarian access to the area including by providing life-saving assistance," Kawar said.

The call came after the council held a closed-door meeting on the crisis and heard from the head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees about the plight of the camp's 18,000 or so remaining residents.

UNRWA chief Pierre Krahenbuhl described the situation as "more desperate than ever."

ISIS jihadists began an assault on Yarmuk last Wednesday, and were initially repelled by Palestinian fighters but have since seized large swathes of the district.

Nearly 40 people have been killed in the fighting.

The ISIS attack is just the latest blow for Yarmuk, which was once a thriving, working-class residential district of the capital.

The camp, the largest of its kind in Syria, has suffered repeated bombardment and has been under a government siege for more than 18 months. The embargo was so tight at one point that there were reports of deaths from shortages of food and medicines. Residents said they survived on wild herbs and plants.

Lost autistic child survives 4 days in Australian forest

AFP, Sydney

An autistic boy who went missing four days ago at an Australian camping ground was found alive Tuesday, with police describing his survival in the dense forest as a "miracle".

Luke Shambrook, 11, was spotted by a police helicopter walking in rugged terrain three kilometres from the Lake Eildon National Park campsite where he was last seen on Friday.

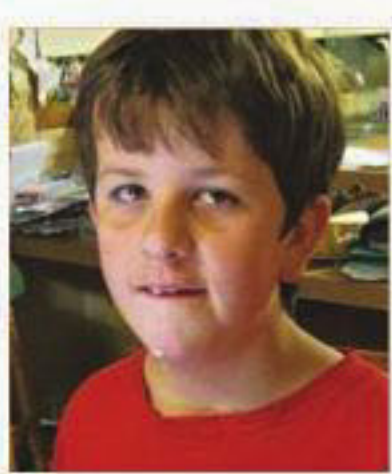
He was picked up by paramedics and taken to hospital suffering from hypothermia and dehydration.

"In some ways it's a miracle," Victoria Police Acting Commander Rick Nugent told reporters at the site.

"You will have all seen the terrain here, how thick it is, how cold it's been of a night. We've had rain most of this morning. To spot him now is an absolute relief. And the joy by all of us that he's been found is just hard to describe."

Rescuers were given new hope late on Monday when they discovered a cap worn by Luke, the only item of clothing found after days of searching. It also provided a focus for yesterday's efforts.

They had earlier been told that the 11-year-old liked to hide and had a fascination with water, prompting police divers to search the lake. His family had also said that Luke might not respond to searchers' calls and may not even have realised he was lost.



Nepal charter protests turn violent

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepalese police Tuesday fired tear gas and arrested more than 50 demonstrators for trying to enforce a nationwide Maoist-led strike in protest at the government's plan to push through a new constitution.

The opposition forced factories, schools and public transport to shut down across the country in protest at plans to hold a vote on disputed terms of the charter despite a failure to reach cross-party agreement.

Police said scores of security personnel had been deployed in Kathmandu as a 30-party opposition alliance headed by former Maoist rebels began a three-day strike.

Pakistan biggest concern to stability in South Asia: NYT

US, Saudi slap sanctions on Pak charity for financing terrorism

AGENCIES

Describing nuclear-armed Pakistan as "unquestionably the biggest concern" to stability in South Asia, a leading US daily yesterday said the world powers that worked on the Iran deal should now turn their attention to the "troubled region with growing nuclear risks of its own".

Meanwhile, the United States Treasury yesterday said it and Saudi Arabia were imposing sanctions on a charity fund alleged to provide financing "terrorist" groups including al-Qaeda, the Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba.

The sanctions aim to disrupt the financing and operations of Al-Furqan Foundation Welfare Trust, a charity group based in Peshawar, Pakistan.

The Treasury said Al-Furqan is the successor to the Pakistan branches of the Afghan Support Committee and Revival of Islamic Heritage Society. Both were designated as global terrorist entities and listed on the United Nations' al-Qaeda sanctions list in 2002.

The New York Times editorial titled 'Nu-

clear Fears in South Asia' said the situation in the region cannot be ignored by the major world powers, no matter how preoccupied they may be by the long negotiations with Iran as India, China and Pakistan are moving ahead with plans to deploy nuclear weapons in the Indian Ocean.

The editorial said Pakistan is "hardly alone in its potential to cause regional instability," with China continuing to build up its nuclear arsenal, now estimated at 250 weapons.

Calling Pakistan as "unquestionably the biggest concern" in the region, the editorial said continuous investments by the country in military arsenal capable of carrying nuclear warheads "reflect the Pakistani Army's continuing obsession with India as the enemy."

India has a nuclear arsenal of 110 weapons compared to Pakistan's 120, the editorial said.

The editorial said that "even more troubling" is the fact that the Pakistani Army has become increasingly dependent on the nuclear arsenal because Pakistan cannot match the size and sophistication of India's conventional forces.