

NEWS IN brief

Pro-ISIS hackers take down TV5Monde

AFP, Paris
French television network TV5Monde was forced to broadcast only pre-recorded programmes yesterday after an "unprecedented" hack by self-proclaimed Islamic State militants, who also hijacked its websites and social networks. The Paris-based company, whose programmes are broadcast in more than 200 countries worldwide, was the target of a cyberattack that is "unprecedented for us and unprecedented in the history of television," TV5Monde boss

Mortar fire kills 11 civilians in Sinai

AFP, Cairo
Mortar fire has killed 11 civilians, all but one of them women and children, in Egypt's North Sinai, where the government is battling an Islamist insurgency, police and medics said yesterday. The mortar rounds, which hit two houses in a village southeast of the provincial capital El-Arish Wednesday night, also wounded six people, the officials said without specifying who was behind

Ebola Test in 15 minutes!

AFP, Tokyo
A Japanese research team said yesterday it had developed a field test for Ebola that gives results in just over 11 minutes -- down from the 90-minute test used now. The breakthrough by Nagasaki University's Institute of Tropical Medicine will allow medics to move much more quickly in treating people with the haemorrhagic fever, Professor Jiro Yasuda

UN launches aid appeal for N Korea

AFP, United Nations
The United Nations on Wednesday launched an appeal for \$111 million dollars to help 70 percent of North Korea's population now facing a food crisis. The funding will help five UN agencies working on the ground to continue providing North Koreans with food, clean water and

More chaos as French air strike continues

AFP, Paris
Hundreds of flights were cancelled and delays reported at airports around France yesterday as a strike by air traffic controllers entered its second day. The civil aviation authority asked airlines to scrap around half of their flights to avoid chaos. That was a little more than on Wednesday when the advance move proved successful as airports were not mobbed by angry passengers, who had been warned and made other plans. The strike has been called by the main air traffic union SNCTA, which wants to negotiate over the working conditions of its



Kurdish Peshmerga forces help people from Iraq's Yazidi minority as they arrive at a medical center in the town of Altun Kupri, some 20 kms northeast of the northern Iraqi oil capital of Kirkuk on Wednesday after the Islamic State (IS) group freed more than 200 Yazidis it held captive for months.

PHOTO: AFP

Iraq to free Anbar next

Sweden joins anti-jihadist coalition; Canada makes first strikes in Syria

AFP, Baghdad
Iraq's premier said that the country's "next battle" is to retake Anbar province from the Islamic State jihadist group, his most direct statement yet on Baghdad's target after Tikrit. "Our next stand and battle will be here in the land of Anbar to completely liberate it," Haider al-Abadi on Wednesday said from a base in the province west of Baghdad, according to his office. He was visiting Anbar to "check on preparations" for the upcoming military campaign. Abadi announced last week that Iraqi forces retook the city of Tikrit from ISIS, in Baghdad's biggest victory to date over militants who overran large parts of the country last June. It was unclear if the next target would be Nineveh, ISIS's main stronghold in Iraq and the first province to fall last year, or Anbar, a massive desert province stretching from the borders

with Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia to the western approach to Baghdad. While ISIS has gained further ground in Anbar since June, the government's loss of territory in the province predates the jihadist offensive by six months. Though Tikrit was a significant success for the government, it also highlighted problems facing Iraqi forces on other fronts, including Anbar. Tensions between Iranian-backed militias -- which are the largest and most effective -- and the US-led coalition are an issue. Washington made clear that it did not want Iranian-backed groups involved in Tikrit. It also took a month for Iraqi forces to retake Tikrit -- a relatively small city that ISIS seeded with bombs and defended with snipers and suicide

bombers. Recapturing the vastly larger area of Anbar, where militants have had even longer to prepare their defences, will be a major challenge. Meanwhile, Sweden foreign minister Margot Wallstrom yesterday said Thursday it will send up to 120 troops to northern Iraq to train Iraqi and Kurdish fighters as part of the US-led coalition against the Islamic State group. She added that the Swedish troops will provide "military advice and training... not combat units" and that they will focus on Kurdish peshmerga forces. And Canada on Wednesday carried out its first air strikes in Syria the military said, expanding Ottawa's contribution to the US-led coalition against Islamic State, after parliament approved a larger role in the conflict. Two F-18s using precision-guided munitions struck a ISIS position near the Syrian city of Raqqa, before safely returning to base, the military announced.

WAR ON ISIS

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SYRIA TALKS IN MOSCOW Little sign of progress

AFP, Moscow
Talks between the Syrian government and members of the tolerated opposition were set to end yesterday in Moscow with little sign of progress towards ending the spiralling conflict in the country. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was due to open a final meeting between the two sides but opposition activists said there was little chance of a breakthrough after holding two days of talks with the delegation of Bashar al-Assad's regime. Syria's ambassador to the United Nations, Bashar al-Jaafari, headed the government delegation for four days of meetings with Russian mediators and opposition figures from the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change. But the main Western-backed exiled Syrian opposition National Coalition stayed away, and another leading domestic opposition activist was stuck in Damascus due to a travel ban. "We will meet for two hours but I do not think this will be enough to make any advances," opposition figure Samir Aita said. "Yesterday Jaafari presented general points that include some that are not really acceptable to the opposition," Aita said, citing a condemnation of Jordanian but not Iranian involvement in Syria. Moscow's latest attempt to bring government and opposition together comes amid continuing strikes by the US-led coalition against the Islamic State, with Canada on Wednesday sending two F-18s to strike ISIS positions near the Syrian city of Raqqa.

Obama again backs India's UNSC bid

AGENCIES
President Barack Obama has reiterated United States' support for India's membership of a reformed United Nations Security Council as he considers it a foreign policy priority to continue to strengthen India-US relationship. "What the President said was that he said in the context of a reformed Security Council that the President would support the inclusion of India in that process," White House press secretary Josh Earnest told reporters Tuesday. "So that continues to be our policy and one that we are certainly aware of," he said when asked about Obama's declaration of US support for India's membership of the Security Council during his November 2010 visit to India. "And this is a relationship that continues to strengthen in a way that has both national security benefits for both countries, but also in a way that has important economic benefits for both countries," Earnest said. "And the President certainly considers it a foreign policy priority to continue to strengthen that relationship," he said. Meanwhile, India has been elected to four key subsidiary



bodies of the United Nations' agency on economic and social issues, continuing its impressive record of winning elections at the world body. Meanwhile, India was elected by acclamation, a form of election that does not use a ballot, to the subsidiary bodies of the UN Economic and Social Council during its coordination and management meeting on Wednesday. It was elected, along with 13 other nations, to the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund for a three-year term beginning January 2016.

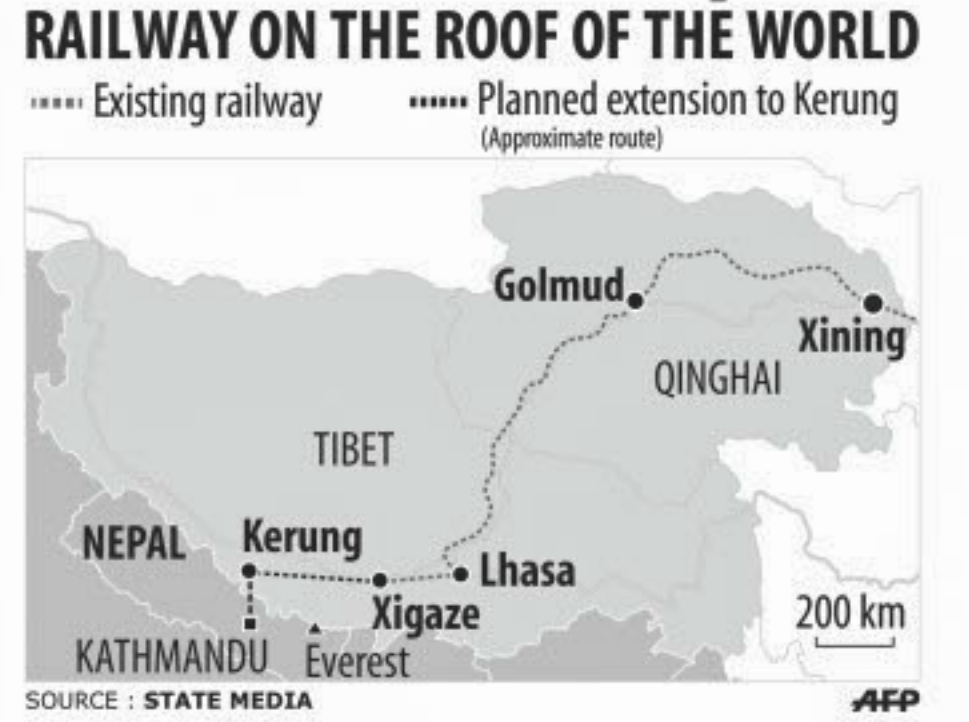


Relatives hold portraits of those killed, as they wait to retrieve their bodies, at the Chiroimo funeral parlor in Nairobi yesterday. 148 people, mainly students, were killed during a dawn raid by Islamist-gunmen in an attack claimed by Somalia-based al-Shabab a week ago on the northeastern Kenyan Garissa University campus. The Kenyan government has started to release the bodies to their families.

PHOTO: AFP

RAILWAY THROUGH MOUNT EVEREST China eyes to link Tibet-Nepal

AFP, Beijing
A railway between China and Nepal that could include a tunnel under Mount Everest is under consideration, Chinese state media said yesterday, as Beijing builds links with a country India regards as firmly within its sphere of influence. The Qinghai-Tibet railway already links the rest of China with the Tibetan capital Lhasa and beyond, and an extension running as far as the international border is already being planned "at Nepal's request", the China Daily newspaper reported, quoting an expert at the Chinese Academy of Engineering. This is expected to be completed by 2020, it cited a Tibetan official as saying. Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi visited Kathmandu in December and, according to Nepalese reports, said the line could eventually be extended to the Nepalese capital and further, potentially providing a crucial link between China and the huge markets of India. Such a plan could see a tunnel being built under Mount Everest, the China Daily said. "The line will probably have to go through Qomolangma so that workers may have to dig some very long tunnels," expert Wang Mengshu told the newspaper, referring to Everest by its Tibetan name. The proposal underscores China's influence in the impoverished Himalayan nation, where Beijing has for years been building roads and investing billions of dollars in hydropower and telecommunications. Beijing's increasing role has raised alarms in New Delhi that China, already closely allied to Pakistan, is forging closer economic ties with Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Nepal in a deliberate strategy to encircle India.



Row over Falklands heats up

Argentina threatens legal action as countries summon ambassadors

AFP, Buenos Aires
Britain and Argentina's longstanding dispute over the Falklands escalated yesterday as Buenos Aires took legal action against companies exploring for oil off the islands and the countries summoned each other's ambassadors for a dressing-down. The animosity between the two capitals, which fought a brief, bloody war over the South Atlantic islands in 1982, has intensified in recent years with the discovery of significant oil deposits offshore. Adding to the bad blood in recent weeks, Britain has announced plans to beef up its defenses on the islands because of "continuous intimidation" from Argentina, while Argentine media reports have denounced British spying aimed at blocking the South American country's efforts to win



sovereignty. In the latest showdown, the Argentine government said it had taken legal action in a local court against three British and two US companies for "carrying out exploration activities for fossil fuels on the Argentine continental shelf without obtaining the corresponding authorization." The companies listed in the complaint are British firms Rockhopper Exploration, Premier Oil and Falkland Oil and Gas Limited and US firms

Noble Energy and Edison International. The court case came after Britain summoned Argentine Ambassador Alicia Castro on Wednesday to say it "object(s) strongly" to her and President Cristina Kirchner's recent statements on the Falklands, which Argentina calls the Malvinas. Argentina responded by summoning British Ambassador John Freeman to deliver a tongue-lashing of its own. It said the ambassador was summoned over news portal TN's reports that documents leaked by fugitive US intelligence analyst Edward Snowden showed Britain's Joint Threat Research Intelligence Group carried out a "long-term, far-reaching" espionage program in Argentina. The 74-day Falklands War claimed the lives of 649 Argentine soldiers, 255 British soldiers and three islanders.

Pak court orders Lakhvi's release

PTI, Lahore
A Pakistan court yesterday suspended the Punjab government's detention order against 2008 Mumbai attack mastermind and LeT operations commander Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi under a public security act and ordered his immediate release. Justice Muhammad Anwarul Haq of Lahore High Court suspended the detention of 55-year-old Lakhvi under Maintenance of Public Order after the government failed to present sensitive records against him in the court. The judge ordered Lakhvi to submit two surety bonds worth Rs 1 million each for his release.

Taliban siege on Afghan court complex kills 10

AFP, Mazar-i-sharif
At least 10 people died yesterday when Taliban insurgents wearing military uniforms mounted a six-hour gun and grenade siege on a court complex in northern Afghanistan, in an assault highlighting the country's fragile security situation. The attack in the usually tranquil city of Mazar-i-Sharif occurred just before the start of the Taliban's traditional spring offensive, set to be the first fighting season when Afghan security forces battle insurgents without full Nato support. Explosions rang out as the assailants lobbed grenades and exchanged gunfire with Afghan security forces, setting ablaze one of the buildings in the compound, according to officials and an AFP reporter at the scene. Dozens of people were left wounded, with reports emerging of blood shortages in hospitals and urgent appeals for donors circulating on social media. "Around noon four assailants dressed in military uniforms breached the main gate of the Appeals Court in Mazar-i-Sharif and started firing gunshots and throwing hand grenades inside the complex," said Abdul Raziq Qaderi, the acting provincial police chief of Balkh province. "Five security personnel and five civilians were killed and 66 others were wounded," he added. The insurgents were holed up inside the complex for six hours, surrounded by a large number of Afghan security forces before they were taken down. Militant attacks are relatively rare in Mazar-i-Sharif, a city well-known as a melting pot of diverse cultures and religious influences where liberal attitudes coexist with conservative traditions.