

NEWS IN brief

More than 170 migrants rescued off Tunisia

AFP, Zarzis

Tunisia's coastguard and navy yesterday rescued 174 migrants from two boats which broke down as they headed from Libya to Italy, the Red Crescent and an AFP correspondent said. The Red Crescent said the migrants -- 90 on one boat and 84 on the other -- sent out a distress call from off the coast of southeast Tunisia as they headed for the Italian island of Lampedusa. In Italy, coastguards said yesterday they recovered nine bodies from the sea after a boat carrying more than 150 migrants sank off the Libyan coast. Rescuers managed to save 144 people and were still searching for others after their vessel overturned 128 kilometres

Huge Siberia wildfires kill 17

AFP, Moscow

Seventeen people died and more than 460 sought medical treatment after wildfires blamed on adults who had "played with matches" swept through Siberia, authorities said yesterday. More than 5,000 rescue workers battled through the night to contain the blazes in the region of Khakassia in southeastern Siberia where 15 people died. Fires also raged in eastern Siberia claiming two lives, authorities said, citing only pre-

Iran halts Saudi pilgrimages over sex assault allegation

AFP, Tehran

Iran has suspended pilgrimages to the Muslim holy places in Saudi Arabia in protest at an alleged sexual assault attempt against two teenage Iranian boys, the culture minister said yesterday. According to Iranian media reports, two Saudi police are alleged to have attempted to assault the youngsters at Jeddah airport as they prepared to fly home from a pilgrimage to Mecca

China former energy chief on trial

BBC ONLINE

China's former energy chief Jiang Jiemin has gone on trial for corruption, a Chinese court said. Jiang Jiemin has been charged with bribery and abuse of power during his time at the China National Petroleum Corporation, according to Xinhua news agency. He was arrested in 2013, shortly after he left to head a government body overseeing

Iran to try WashPo editor as spy

CNN ONLINE

Jason Rezaian has sat in jail in Iran for nearly nine months. The Washington Post's bureau chief in Tehran was arrested in July on unspecified allegations. It took more than four months for a judge to hear charges against him. They remained publicly undisclosed until last week.

The Iranian-American will be tried soon on espionage, Tehran's Chief Justice told reporters. He is accused of economic spying, the Post reported, citing Iranian state media. The Washington Post did not mince words on the allegation. "Any charges of that sort would be absurd, the product of fertile and twisted imaginations," the paper said in a statement.

Since officers picked up Rezaian and his wife, Yeganeh Salehi, on July 22 at their home, the Post, the State Department and Rezaian's family have protested and called for his release. Salehi was released on bail in October. Rezaian was denied bail.



Municipality workers clean up the debris after a bomb exploded outside the Moroccan embassy, in the Libyan capital, Tripoli, yesterday. The bombing came hours after gunmen opened fire on South Korea's embassy compound from a passing car a day earlier, killing two Libyan guards and wounding a third person. The Islamic State jihadist group claimed responsibility for the South Korean attack on Twitter, according to SITE Intelligence Group.

PHOTO: AFP

Iraq PM to seek weapons on US visit

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said yesterday he will use a visit to the United States to seek increased air support and arms deliveries to aid Baghdad's battle against jihadists.

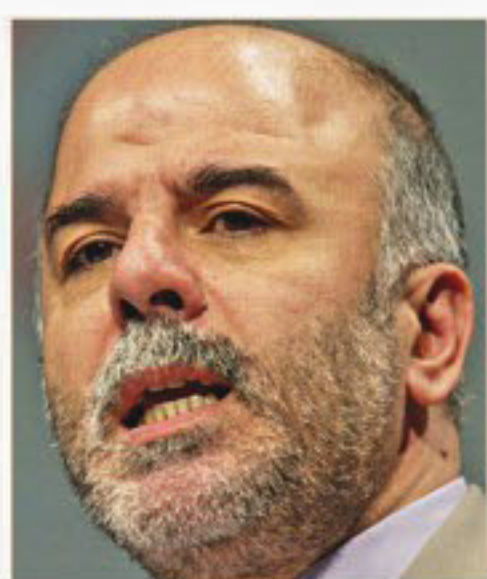
"Number one is a marked increase in the air campaign and the delivery of arms," Abadi told journalists when asked what he wants during a visit to Washington, where he is to meet President Barack Obama on Tuesday.

There has already been an increase, "but we want to see more", he said before boarding his plane.

Abadi also said that "we want strict measures to stop the flow of foreign terrorists to Iraq", and that international efforts are needed to curb oil and antiquities smuggling, by which the jihadists gain funding.

He is expected to ask that Iraq be allowed to defer payment for arms purchases, given its major shortage of funds because of a decline in oil prices and the cost of its war against the Islamic State jihadist group.

The United States is leading an international coalition



waging a campaign of air strikes against ISIS and also providing arms and training for Iraqi security forces.

The jihadist group led an offensive that overran large parts of Iraq last June.

Multiple Iraqi divisions collapsed in the early days of the militant onslaught, but Iraqi forces and allied paramilitaries have since succeeded in retaking significant territory from ISIS.

However, large parts of two provinces -- Nineveh in the north and Anbar in the west -- remain under ISIS control.

The latest victory came earlier this month when Iraqi security and allied paramilitary forces retook most of Tikrit from jihadists.

Some of the Shiite militias backed by Iran stressed that they did not want US-led coalition intervention in the battle, but Abadi's government eventually asked for it to break the military deadlock.

Washington was keen to claim its position as Iraq's top foreign partner and conditioned its air strikes on a greater role for the regular police and army forces in the battle.

Chinese hackers target India, Southeast Asia

REUTERS, New Delhi

Hackers, most likely from China, have been spying on governments and businesses in Southeast Asia and India uninterrupted for a decade, researchers at internet security company FireEye said.

In a report released yesterday, FireEye said the cyber-espionage operations dated back to at least 2005 and "focused on targets -- government and commercial -- who hold key political, economic and military information about the region."

Bryce Boland, chief technology officer for Asia Pacific at FireEye and co-author of the report, said the attack was still ongoing, noting that the servers the attackers used were still operational, and that FireEye continued to see attacks against its customers, who number among the targets.

Reuters couldn't independently confirm any of the assertions made in the report.

China has been accused before of targeting countries in South and Southeast Asia. In 2011, researchers from McAfee reported a campaign

dubbed Shady Rat which attacked Asian governments and institutions, among other targets.

Efforts by the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to build cyberdefences have been sporadic. While ASEAN has long acknowledged its importance, "very little has come of this discourse," said Miguel Gomez, a researcher at De La Salle University in the Philippines.

The problem is not new: Singapore has reported sophisticated cyber-espionage attacks on civil servants in several ministries dating back to 2004.

The attackers focused not only on governments, but on ASEAN itself, as well as corporations and journalists interested in China. Other targets included Indian or Southeast Asian-based companies in sectors such as construction, energy, transport, telecommunications and aviation, FireEye says.

Mostly they sought to gain access by sending so-called phishing emails to targets purported to come from colleagues or trusted sources, and containing documents relevant to their interests.

France's Le Pen pulls out of election

AFP, Paris

Jean-Marie Le Pen, the founder of France's National Front, said he was pulling out of regional elections yesterday after a fierce public spat with his daughter who now leads the far-right party.

Le Pen incurred the wrath of Marine Le Pen by repeating an assertion that the Nazi gas chambers were a "detail of history" and following that up with a defence of France's World War II leader Philippe Petain, who collaborated with the Nazis.

This appeared to be the last straw for Marine, who accused her father of committing "political suicide" and saying she would not support his candidacy in regional elections.

Le Pen senior appeared to fall on his sword yesterday after a week in which the family feud dominated headlines in France.

He told Figaro magazine he would not be standing in the southeast of France for the party even though "I think I was the best candidate for the National Front".

But in stepping down, the 86-year-old appeared to get in another dig at his daughter, who has been trying to clean up the party's racist and anti-Semitic image in a bid to make it more electable.

Asked by the Figaro who should stand in his place, he anointed his granddaughter Marion Marechal-Le Pen, 25, a rising star in the party with social views considered more conservative than Marine's.



UK ELECTION 'I'm ready' Says Miliband

AFP, Manchester

Opposition leader Ed Miliband insisted he was ready to be Britain's next prime minister as he launched a manifesto yesterday designed to boost his party's reputation on the economy before the May 7 election.

Miliband sought to reassure voters that his centre-left Labour Party would manage the economy responsibly while outlining "a plan to change our country" by handing more wealth to low and middle income families.

Labour has been virtually tied with Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservatives in opinion polls ahead of next month's general election which looks set to yield another coalition or minority government.

Sudan votes in controversial poll Bashir's rule set to be extended

AFP, Khartoum

Sudan was voting yesterday in elections boycotted by the mainstream opposition that are expected to extend the quarter-century rule of President Omar al-Bashir, who is wanted on war crimes charges.

With 15 little-known candidates running against him, 71-year-old Bashir faces no real competition in the vote, which has already been criticised by the international community.

Voters will also elect national and state lawmakers in the three-day poll, with Bashir's ruling National Congress Party expected to dominate.

There was a slow early turnout on the streets of the capital yesterday, after the government declared polling day a public holiday.

Bashir arrived at the St Francis School to vote around 11:00 am (0800 GMT), smiling and waving as he entered the polling station with one of his two wives amid heavy security. Journalists outnumbered voters. Bashir toppled a democratically elected

government in an Islamist-backed coup and is Sudan's longest-serving leader since independence.

He won a 2010 presidential election that was marred by an opposition boycott and criticised for failing to meet international standards.

Under his rule Sudan's economy has faltered, suffering badly from South Sudan's 2011 secession, which saw it lose nearly three-quarters of its oil resources.

Conflict has plagued South Kordofan and Blue Nile states since 2011, and the Darfur region since 2003.

Bashir was indicted by the International Criminal Court in 2009 for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur, and the following year for genocide.



An Indian student paints the bullet ridden wall at Jallianwalla Bagh memorial in Amritsar yesterday. The Jallianwalla Bagh massacre, also known as the Amritsar massacre, took place on April 13, 1919 when British Indian Army soldiers, on the direct orders of their British officers, opened fire on an unarmed gathering of people demanding freedom from the British, killing at least 379 people according to official records, although the actual toll is believed to be higher.

PHOTO: AFP

Brazilians aim to impeach president

CNN ONLINE

Thousands of protesters packed the streets of major Brazilian cities on Sunday, pushing for the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff.

Fueled by mounting anger over a corruption scandal that has implicated politicians in Rousseff's party, demonstrators chanted "Out with Dilma" and "Time for change."

Police estimated that 275,000 demonstrators marched in Sao Paulo. A sea of protesters dressed in the green and yellow of the Brazilian flag used decades-old rallying cries to fire up their ranks, singing rock songs that date back to protests of the country's one-time military dictatorship.

It's the second day of nationwide anti-government demonstrations in less than a month. And protesters vowed that it wouldn't be the last.

Nigerian opposition makes gains

AFP, Lagos

The party of Nigeria's president-elect Muhammadu Buhari has won governorship elections in a majority of Nigeria's 36 states, building its strength nationwide after a historic presidential win, official results showed yesterday.

The All Progressives Congress claimed at least 21 governor seats following Saturday's closely-fought regional polls but could add to that tally with results from a handful of states still pending.

President Goodluck Jonathan's People's Democratic Party had controlled the federal and most state governments since the end of military rule in 1999 but suffered major losses during Nigeria's gripping 2015 election cycle. Jonathan's loss to Buhari in the

presidential vote two weeks ago was the first ever democratic change of power at the federal level since Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960.

The Independent National Electoral Commission described the regional vote as "relatively peaceful" while lamenting the 66 separate incidents of violence surrounding the polls.

Governors are influential figures in Nigeria, with near-total control of their states and collective power at a national level to bolster or check the presidency.

The 72-year-old Buhari will be sworn in on May 29 and his administration will likely be helped by having a majority of loyalist governors, including in the economic capital Lagos, where the APC was re-elected after a tough PDP challenge.