

NEWS IN
briefIraq clears massive
oil refinery of ISIS

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqi forces backed by US-led air strikes cleared the country's largest oil refinery of the Islamic State group, the international coalition helping Baghdad fight the jihadists said yesterday. ISIS has repeatedly attempted over the past 10 months to capture the Baiji refinery north of Baghdad, most recently seizing parts of the facility and holding out for

Japan records 15-year
low population

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Marking another chapter in the curious case of Japan's population, newly released government figures have revealed the country's numbers fell for the fourth straight year. The decline of 215,000 people between October 2013 and 2014 - which is 0.17 per cent - has brought the population down to 127.083 million, its lowest point in 15 years. Japan is witnessing an unprecedented aging of its population, and official projections foresee a further

Over 90,000 flee
clashes in Iraq's Anbar

AFP, Baghdad

More than 90,000 people have fled fighting between pro-government forces and the Islamic State jihadist group in the Ramadi area of Iraq's Anbar province, the United Nations said yesterday. At least 2.7 million people have been displaced in Iraq since the beginning of 2014, including almost half a million from the western province of Anbar, the

Protesters burn Indian
flag in Pak Kashmir

AFP, Muzaffarabad

Hundreds of people in Pakistani Kashmir burnt India's flag and an effigy of its prime minister yesterday in protest at a crackdown on separatists in the Indian part of the divided region. Police in Indian Kashmir shot dead a 16-year-old boy on Saturday as a strike shut down the Himalayan region on a second day of violent clashes over the

23 killed in Nigeria
communal clashes

AFP, Lagos

At least 23 villagers have died in clashes between two mainly fishing and farming communities in central Nigeria's Benue state, police said yesterday. 23 corpses have been recovered following the fighting between Ologba and Egba communities in Agatu local government area of the state over a dispute over fishing rights in the area, police said.



COLOUR MAYHEM IN PARIS

People participate in the "Colour Run 2015" in Paris yesterday. The Colour Run is a five kilometres paint race without winners or prizes. Participants are showered with colored powder at different stations along the run.

PHOTO:
AFP

Iran nuke is a US 'myth'

Khamenei urges military preparedness after US threat

AGENCIES

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei told military commanders yesterday the United States had created the "myth" of nuclear weapons to portray Iran as a threat, hardening his rhetoric before nuclear negotiations resume this week.

Khamenei, the highest authority in Iran, has supported the talks but continues to express deep mistrust of the United States.

"They created the myth of nuclear weapons so they could say the Islamic Republic is a source of threat. No, the source of threat is America itself, with its unrestrained, destabilising interventions," Khamenei said in a televised address to a hall of several hundred military commanders.

"The other side is methodically and shamelessly threatening us militarily ... even if they did not make these overt threats, we would have to be prepared," he said.

He also urged the country's armed forces

yesterday to increase their "defensive preparedness", hitting out at a US warning of possible military action.

He told commanders and troops in a speech that Iran "will never accept such stupid remarks", a jab at General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, though he did not name him.

Dempsey said Thursday that should ongoing diplomacy with Iran fail, "the military option... to ensure that Iran does not achieve a nuclear weapon is intact."

The United States has long said targeted bombing of Iran's nuclear sites and other key facilities may be needed if Tehran -- which denies seeking

the bomb -- does not rein in its atomic activities.

"All bodies from the ministry of defence to the army and the Sepah (Revolutionary Guards) should increase their military and defensive preparedness. This should be regarded as an official directive," Khamenei said.



Youths, with their mouths taped, take part in a sit-in at Beirut's Martyr's Square organised by Lebanon's principal Armenian political party, Tashnag, ahead of the 100th anniversary of the mass killings of Armenians under the Ottoman Empire in 1915. The protesters set up tents and will take part in a hunger strike to raise awareness about the plight of the Armenian people. Armenians around the world will mark on April 24, 2015 the centenary of the World War I-era mass killings of their kin by Ottoman Turks in what they insist was a genocide -- a term fiercely rejected by Turkey.

PHOTO: AFP

World breaks e-waste record

UN report says last year we produced 41.8 million tonnes of electronic garbage

AFP, Paris

A record amount of electrical and electronic waste hit the rubbish tips in 2014, with the biggest per-capita tallies in countries that pride themselves on environmental consciousness, a report said yesterday.

Last year, 41.8 million tonnes of so-called e-waste -- mostly fridges, washing machines and other domestic appliances at the end of their life -- was dumped, it said.

That's the equivalent of 1.15 million heavy trucks, forming a line 23,000 kilometres long, according to the report, compiled by the United Nations University, the UN's educational and research branch.

Less than one-sixth of all e-waste was properly recycled, it said.

In 2013, the e-waste total was 39.8 million tonnes -- and on present trends,

the 50-million-tonne mark could be reached in 2018.

Topping the list for per-capita waste last year was Norway, with 28.4 kilograms per inhabitant. It was followed by Switzerland (26.3 kg per capita), Iceland (26.1 kilos), Denmark (24.0 kilos), Britain (23.5 kilos), the Netherlands (23.4 kilos), Sweden (22.3 kilos), France (22.2 kilos) and the United States and Austria (22.1 kilos per person each).

The region with the lowest amount of e-waste per inhabitant was Africa, with 1.7 kilos per person. It generated a total of 1.9 million tonnes of waste.

In volume terms, the most waste was generated in the United States and China, which together accounted for 32 per cent of the world's total, followed by Japan, Germany and India.

2012 FOOTBALL RIOT
Egypt court
sentences
11 to death

AFP, Cairo

An Egyptian court yesterday sentenced 11 football fans to death after a riot over a 2012 stadium riot in the canal city of Port Said that left 74 people dead.

An appeals court had ordered the retrial of 73 defendants in February last year after rejecting a lower court verdict sentencing 21 people to death for being involved in the incident.

The riot erupted in February 2012 when fans of home team Al-Masry and Cairo's Al-Ahly clashed after a premier league match between the two clubs.

The death sentences against 11 football fans have been referred to Egypt's grand mufti. The final decision is due on May 30.

Rouhani-Ghani announce
security cooperation

AFP, Tehran

Afghanistan and Iran yesterday announced plans for enhanced security cooperation to combat threats from the Islamic State group, including possible joint military operations.

Standing alongside visiting Afghan leader Ashraf Ghani, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said the tumult hitting the region meant intelligence must be shared.

His comments came after ISIS, which holds swathes of Syria and Iraq, said it was responsible for a suicide bombing in Afghanistan's eastern city of Jalalabad which killed 33 people.

The attack on Saturday at a state-owned bank where government workers were drawing their salaries was the first in Afghanistan claimed by ISIS. More than 100 people were also wounded.

Ghani's two-day visit to Iran is his first since taking over from president Hamid Karzai in September, and he

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was accompanied on the trip by his foreign minister and minister for oil and mines.

The Afghan leader has repeatedly raised the prospect of ISIS making inroads in his country, though the jihadist group has never formally acknowledged having a presence in Afghanistan.

The two leaders did not specify further what they thought could be done to confront ISIS.

Iran has been central in the Baghdad government's fightback against ISIS,

coordinating Shia militias and providing military advisers from its powerful Revolutionary Guards Corps.

The largest such operation saw ISIS cleared early this month from Tikrit, a city north of Baghdad and the childhood home of executed Sunni dictator Saddam Hussein.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban have seen defections to ISIS in recent months, with some voicing their disaffection with their one-eyed supreme leader Mullah Omar who has not been seen in almost 14 years.

A person purporting to be an IS spokesman said in a call to AFP that the group was behind the Jalalabad bombing. An online post allegedly from IS made the same claim, but could not be verified.

Iran and Afghanistan have close ties. In 2001, Tehran took the rare step of cooperating with Washington in a US-led invasion that ousted the Taliban regime from power in Kabul.

XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS IN 'RAINBOW NATION'
S Africa vows crackdown,
assures immigrants

AFP, Pretoria

South Africa yesterday vowed to hunt down those behind a wave of attacks targeting immigrants, saying 307 people had been arrested over violence that has left at least seven people dead.

The government stepped up its response to unrest in Johannesburg and the eastern coastal city of Durban, with Home Minister Malusi Gigaba resolving to end "all acts that seek to plunge our country into anarchy".

Rioting and looting over the last two weeks have exposed tensions between South Africans and immigrants from across the continent, including Zimbabwe, Somalia, Ethiopia and Malawi.

President Jacob Zuma on Saturday cancelled a state visit to Indonesia to deal with surge in violence, and pleaded with foreigners to stay in South Africa.

Heightening public concern over the attacks, the Sunday Times published front-page pictures of a Mozambican man being stabbed to death in broad daylight in the

Johannesburg township of Alexandra.

The photographs showed Emmanuel Sithole being attacked early Saturday by a man in jeans wielding a knife.

Sithole was taken to hospital but died of his wounds, the paper reported.

"Perpetrators are being arrested, charged and prosecuted," Gigaba told a press conference in Pretoria. He said 307 suspects have been arrested so far.

"We want to issue a stern warning to those who lend themselves to acts of public violence. We will find you -- and you will be dealt with to the full might of the law."

The spate of attacks has revived memories of xenophobic bloodshed in 2008, when 62 people were killed in Johannesburg's townships, shaking South Africa's post-apartheid image as a "rainbow nation" of different ethnic groups.

Immigrants are often the focus for anger among South Africans hit by a chronic job shortage and the limited progress made by many poor blacks since white-minority rule ended in 1994.

Kim Jong-Un
scales pick to
inspire troops

AFP, Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un has scaled the country's highest mountain state-run media said yesterday, arriving at the summit to tell troops that the hike provides mental energy more powerful than nuclear weapons.

A photo of the leader of the isolated state showed a smiling and wind-swept Kim standing on a snow-covered mountaintop, the sun rising behind him.

"Climbing Mt Paektu provides precious mental pabulum more powerful than any kind of nuclear weapon," the Rodong newspaper quoted Kim as saying.

The story is the latest run by state media on the feats of the Kim dynasty, which has ruled for more than six decades with an iron fist and pervasive personality cult.

Just last week the regime insisted Kim could drive by the time he was three years old, while his late father Kim Jong-Il said he had scored an incredible 11 holes-in-one the first time he ever played golf.

The 2,750-metre peak of the volcanic mountain, lying on the border with China, is considered a sacred place in Korean folklore.

Pyongyang's state hagiography has it that Kim Jong-Il was born on the mountain -- although many historians say he was born in Russia -- and praises the family for their "Mt. Paektu bloodline".

Thousands of farmers rally
against Modi in New Delhi

AFP, New Delhi

India's beleaguered opposition leader Rahul Gandhi yesterday led thousands of angry farmers in a protest in the capital against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's controversial overhaul of laws on land-buying.

Congress leader Gandhi accused Modi of being beholden to big business at the expense of struggling farmers during the protest in New Delhi against the government's contentious land bill.

"The Modi government wants to weaken farmers to such an extent that they are rendered helpless and forced to sell their land," Rahul told the crowd.

Dressed in all white and waving Congress party flags, thousands of farmers poured into Delhi for the rally against the bill, which makes it easier for businesses to purchase farmland.

After sweeping to power at last year's elections promising to reform the economy, Modi says the bill is needed to improve the efficiency of land purchases for factories, industrial corridors and other development projects.

