

NEWS IN brief

UK votes today in 'tightest race'

Cuba's Castro starts Russia visit

Cuban President Raul Castro yesterday began a series of meetings with Russian leaders during a symbolic visit to Havana's Cold War ally for a World War II victory parade at a time of thawing ties with Washington. Castro's presence in Moscow makes him one of a dwindling list of dignitaries and foreign leaders set to attend the grandiose Red Square parade on May 9 to mark 70 years since the WWII victory.

Ukraine Crisis: 5 soldiers killed

Ukraine yesterday said that five Ukrainian soldiers were killed as fresh clashes rumbled on despite the resumption of talks between the government and rebels over a battered truce deal. The latest casualties come as Ukrainian and separatist representatives met in Minsk for the first time since the two sides inked a shaky

ISIS kills 16 Kurdish fighters in Syria

At least 16 members of the Syrian Kurdish security forces were killed yesterday in an Islamic State group attack on a base in the northeastern province of Hasakeh, a monitor said. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said ISIS militants opened fire on Kurdish forces after the blast, prompting fierce clashes.

Road mishaps kill 200,000 in China: WHO

More than 200,000 people are killed on China's notoriously dangerous roads every year, the World Health Organisation said yesterday-- at least four times official government statistics. Government data for road deaths in China are shrouded in secrecy, like many statistics in the country, and the WHO figures are strikingly higher than official pro-

German dismantles far-right 'terror' group

German police yesterday arrested four people accused of belonging to a far-right "terror" organisation that acquired explosives for attacks on Muslims and refugee homes, federal prosecutors said. The early-morning swoops in five states occurred with the country already on edge after authorities last week said they foiled a planned Islamist attack by a German-Turkish couple armed with a pipe bomb

Britain's political leaders entered the final hours of campaigning yesterday in the most unpredictable election in living memory which could yield no clear winner and weeks of haggling over the next government.

A win for Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservatives today would raise the risk of Britain exiting the European Union because he has promised a referendum on leaving the EU by 2017.

But some business leaders and investors have warned that the main opposition Labour party, led by Ed Miliband, could be bad for the economy, which is weighed down by a budget deficit of nearly £90 billion (120 billion euros, \$140 billion).

With neither expected to win outright and smaller parties on the rise, the election is also likely to underline the decline of traditional two-party politics in Britain and rise of a more multi-lateral European style.

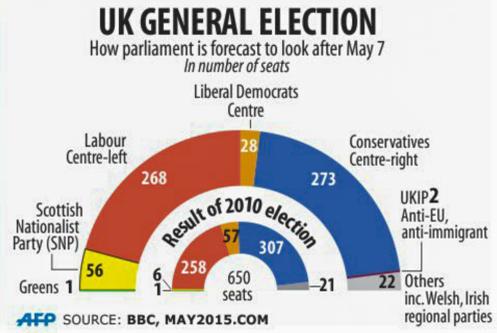
"This has been a remarkable election," Professor Tony Travers of the London School of Economics said, predicting that it would lead to some form of multi-party government "probably less stable than the one that formed in 2010."

The Conservatives have been in power in a coalition government with the centrist Liberal Democrats since 2010.

But it is thought that a minority government supported on an informal basis



by a smaller party or parties is more likely than a formal coalition, under which the Liberal Democrats have seen their support plummet in the last five years. Cameron and Miliband, whose parties are virtually tied in opinion polls, were approaching the end of exhaustive tours of the country in a last-minute bid to attract undecided voters. Both insist they are still fighting for a clear majority in the 650-seat House of



Commons which would let them govern alone but attention is increasingly turning to the alliances they could make with smaller parties. Cameron's Conservatives look well placed to team up again with Clegg's Liberal Democrats, assuming the Liberal Democrat leader can hold on to his own seat in Sheffield, northern England. While Miliband has ruled out a formal deal with the pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP), it is thought they could still prop up a minority Labour government on a vote by vote basis. He told the BBC he was "not countenancing defeat" in the election. "I'm optimistic but it will be in the hands of the people come tomorrow," he added. The Liberal Democrats have left open the possibility of backing either the Conservatives or Labour while the SNP will back the Conservatives, and the anti-EU UK Independence Party is

MOB KILLING OF AFGHAN WOMAN Court sentences four to death

AFP, Kabul

Four Afghan men were sentenced to death yesterday for the savage lynching of a woman falsely accused of blasphemy, a landmark judgement in a nation where female victims often have little legal recourse.

The Kabul primary court also sentenced eight people to 16 years in prison while 18 others were found not guilty after a three-day trial broadcast live on national television.

A furious mob turned on 27-year-old Farkhunda on March 19, beating her in broad daylight and setting her body ablaze on the banks of the Kabul River.

The attack came after an amulet seller, whom she had reportedly castigated for peddling superstition, falsely accused her of burning the Quran.

Her killing triggered protests around Afghanistan and drew global attention to the treatment of Afghan women.

Forty-nine people were arrested, including 19 police officers, some of whom were shown standing by and doing nothing to stop the mob in cellphone videos recorded by bystanders.

Germanwings co-pilot 'practiced descent' before fatal plunge

AFP, Le Bourget

The co-pilot of the doomed Germanwings flight deliberately crashed the plane into the French Alps after "rehearsing" the descent on an earlier flight, French investigators said yesterday.

The BEA civil aviation investigators said the co-pilot, 27-year-old Andreas Lubitz, had practiced the manoeuvre on the outbound trip from Duesseldorf to Barcelona just hours before his suicidal actions on the return flight.

"Several altitude selections towards 100 ft were recorded during descent on the flight that preceded the accident flight, while the co-pilot was alone in the cockpit," read the report. Data from the earlier flight was found in one of two black boxes from the aircraft.

Remi Jouty, the director of the BEA, told journalists there had been no "noticeable

effect" as the plane had already begun its descent into Barcelona while he was carrying out the practice manipulations.

The Germanwings Airbus 320 crashed in the French Alps on March 24, killing all 150 people on board.

The probe into the crash confirmed initial suspicions that Lubitz deliberately brought the plane down.

During the descent, air traffic controllers in the city of Marseille tried to call the plane 11 times on three different frequencies with no response.

The air force also tried to contact the plane three times to no avail.

The cockpit recorder showed the pilot's frantic efforts to re-enter the cockpit.

German prosecutors have said Lubitz was diagnosed as suicidal "several years ago", before he became a pilot, but had appeared more stable of late.



Conflicts displace record 38m people

AFP, Geneva

Conflicts and violence in places like Syria and Ukraine have displaced a record 38 million people inside their own countries, equivalent to the total populations of New York, London and Beijing, a watchdog group said yesterday.

Nearly one third of them -- a full 11 million people -- were displaced last year alone, with an average of 30,000 people fleeing their homes every day, the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) said in a report.

"These are the worst figures for forced displacement in a generation, signalling our complete failure to protect innocent civilians," said Jan Egeland, head of the Norwegian Refugee Council which is behind the IDMC.

Internally displaced people (IDPs) is a label given to people who remain in their homeland, as opposed to refugees, who flee across borders.

According to the latest available UN statistics, there were some 16.7 million refugees in the world at the end of 2013, meaning the total number of displaced people is well above 50 million.

The number of internally displaced people is thus today around twice that of refugees -- a dramatic shift from a few decades ago when the two categories stood on equal footing, Egeland said.

"One of the main reasons why the number of IDPs is growing so much are all the closed borders," he told AFP, adding that the international community was "not willing or able to do as we promise: to protect the vulnerable and the innocent."

The trend is clear: 2014 marked the third year in a row with record numbers of IDPs, with last year's figures dwarfing those seen at the peak of the Darfur crisis in 2004, the spiralling violence in Iraq in the mid-2000s, or during the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011, IDMC said.

"This report should be a tremendous wake-up call," Egeland said.



A villager walking on the roof of his destroyed house in Barpak village in north central Nepal, days after a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck the Himalayan nation on April 25. PHOTO: AFP

YEMEN CRISIS Coalition raids near border kill 43 civilians

REUTERS, Cairo

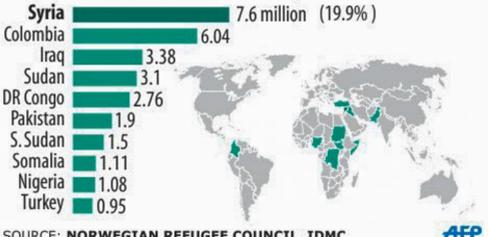
Warplanes from a Saudi-led coalition struck Yemeni provinces near the Saudi border overnight, killing at least 43 civilians, Houthi sources said, as aid agencies warned that fuel shortages could halt their efforts to tackle Yemen's humanitarian crisis.

Houthi fighters fired mortar bombs and Katyusha rockets at the Saudi border town of Najran on Tuesday, their first cross-border attack on Saudi Arabia since the coalition's military campaign against them began on March 26.

The conflict has disrupted imports to Yemen, where about 20 million people or 80 percent of the population are estimated to be going hungry, a statement by the United Nations and the Yemen International NGO Forum said.

UN said on Tuesday at least 646 civilians had been killed since coalition air strikes began, including 131 children, with over 1,364 civilians wounded.

IDPS: THE WORST HIT COUNTRIES



Cambodia royal cows predict poor harvest



AFP, Phnom Penh

Cambodia's royal oxen refused to eat any rice grain yesterday during an ancient ritual to predict the country's agricultural fortunes, raising fears of a poor rice harvest among superstitious citizens.

The rice, corn, beans and sesame represent the harvest -- the more the oxen eat the better. If they go for the grass, it predicts illness, while drinking water signals floods and sipping alcohol warns of war.

On Wednesday the oxen ate only beans and corn, prompting the palace's chief astrologer Kang Ken to declare a shortage of rice production.

Campaigners warn of rise in trafficking after Nepal quake

AFP, Kathmandu

Human traffickers could try to target vulnerable women and children displaced by a devastating earthquake in Nepal, campaigners warned yesterday.

The deadly earthquake that struck on April 25 killed thousands of people and made many more homeless. One non-government organisation working to prevent child trafficking said it had seen an increase in suspicious cases at the porous border with India which has in the past been used to traffic women and children from Nepal into slavery and prostitution.

"Girls are at high risk of trafficking and sexual abuse, they have to be protected," Anuradha Koirala, the founder of Maithi Nepal, an anti-trafficking organisation, told AFP.

Koirala said her organisation had increased its monitoring operations on the border with India.

A cycle of unemployment, poverty, gender discrimination and impact of 10-year Maoist insurgency has made Nepalese women and children in the country easy targets for traffickers.

A 2013 report by the country's human rights commission recorded 29,000 incidences of trafficking or attempted trafficking in the country.

"We have special teams inspecting camps and shelters to ensure that women and children live in a safe environment," said deputy spokesman for Nepal Police, Sarbendra Khanal.

"We understand that there is a threat, and we are working to put in preventive measures."

Relief agencies working in quake-hit areas are seeking to raise awareness of the dangers to vulnerable people.

But Kamal Thapa Chettri from the trafficking office at Nepal's Human Rights Commission said agents could also be posing as aid workers.

"This (quake) gives them an opportunity to see who is desperate and find potential targets. The quake-hit areas definitely face an increased risk," he said.

Meanwhile, health workers are rushing to vaccinate more than half a million children in Nepal as fears grow that last month's massive earthquake has made youngsters more susceptible to disease.

Advertisement for Bangladesh Armi ইউনিভার্সিটি অব সায়েন্স এন্ড টেকনোলজি (বিএইউএসটি), সৈয়দপুর. Includes logo, name, address, and contact information.