

NEWSIN brief

Iraqi launches Ramadi fightback

ISIS to get nuke weapon from Pakistan!

Forces move to Anbar frontline; UNSC vows to defeat ISIS, condemns Saudi mosque attack

Mexico shootout kills 43

Mexican federal forces killed at least 42 suspected cartel members Friday during a three-hour gun-fight on a ranch in a violence-torn western region, marking one of the drug war's bloodiest battles.

Jayalitha takes oath as Tamil Nadu CM

Jayalitha Jayaram was forced to stand down as chief minister of southern Tamil Nadu state, less than a fortnight after a court acquitted her of corruption.

Farc suspends truce

Colombia's Farc leftist rebel group has suspended a unilateral ceasefire after 26 of its fighters were killed in a government air and ground offensive.

Iraqi forces retook territory from the Islamic State group east of Ramadi yesterday, commanders said, in their first counterattack since the jihadists' capture of the Anbar provincial capital last week.

The UN Security Council, meanwhile, condemned the deadly suicide bombing of a Shia mosque claimed by ISIS and called for the group to be defeated.

The May 17 takeover of Ramadi was Baghdad's worst defeat in almost a year, while the capture three days later of the historic Syrian city of Palmyra has put its archaeological treasures in peril and positioned ISIS for a possible drive on Damascus.

Security officials said an operation was launched early yesterday to retake Husaybah, a town seven kilometres east of Ramadi in the Euphrates Valley, that ISIS had seized earlier in the week.

"The Husaybah area is now under full control and the forces are now advancing to liberate neighbouring Jweibah," a police colonel told AFP from the front.

Anbar's most prominent Sunni tribal leader, Sheikh Rafia Abdelkarim al-Fahdawi, deployed his forces, whose knowledge of the terrain is key, alongside fighters from the Hashed al-Shaabi, an umbrella for Shia militia and volunteers.

The police colonel said the Husaybah operation also involved local and federal police, the interior ministry's rapid intervention force as well as the army.

Swift action was seen as essential to prevent ISIS from laying booby traps across Ramadi, which would make any advance in the city more risky and complicated.

But government and allied forces were also keen to prevent further losses as ISIS used its momentum after seizing Ramadi to

However, the strategy of US-led coalition air strikes while the security apparatus gets revamped has failed to keep up with the pace of ISIS advances.

Washington tried to remain upbeat after the loss of Ramadi and Palmyra, playing down the ISIS advance as tactical setbacks.

and third city Homs.

The IS advance in both countries forced tens of thousands of civilians from their homes, sparking concern among humanitarian agencies.

ISIS on Friday also demonstrated its ability to strike beyond the heart of its "caliphate" when for the first time it claimed an attack in Saudi Arabia.

The suicide bombing, targeting Shia worshippers at the main weekly Muslim prayers in Qatif, in the east of the kingdom, killed 21 people and wounded 81, Saudi authorities said.

The UN Security Council reacted by stressing that ISIS "must be defeated and that the intolerance, violence and hatred it espouses must be stamped out".

"There has to be a common effort amongst governments and institutions, including those in the region most affected, to counter" the group, it said.

Meanwhile, Islamic State group fighters have entered the museum in the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra, placing guards at its doors, the country's antiquities director Mamoun Abdulkarim said yesterday.

Speaking at a press conference in Damascus, Abdulkarim said some modern plaster statues in the museum had been destroyed but he did not report any damage to antiquities in the building.

Most of the antiquities in the museum were removed and brought to Damascus before ISIS cemented its control of Palmyra on Thursday.

"There's almost nothing left in the museum, we had been progressively transferring the antiquities to Damascus," he told AFP after the press conference.



Iraqi families, who fled the city of Ramadi after it was seized by ISIS, wait to cross Bzeibez bridge, on the southwestern frontier of Baghdad.

PHOTO: AFP

take more land to the east of the city.

Some Iraqi forces were criticised for avoiding battle during the fall of Ramadi, which led Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to call in the Hashed al-Shaabi.

He and Washington had opposed the mass deployment in the Sunni province of Anbar of militia groups with direct ties to Iran and a dubious human rights record.

The jihadists, who now control roughly half of Syria, reinforced their self-declared transfrontier "caliphate" by seizing Syria's Al-Tanaf crossing on the Damascus-Baghdad highway late Thursday.

Fabrice Balanche, a French expert on Syria, said "IS now dominates central Syria, a crossroads of primary importance" that could allow it to advance towards the capital

UN nuclear arms talks fail 'over Israel row'

BBC ONLINE

A UN conference aimed at preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons has ended in failure after a row over a nuclear-free Middle East proposal.

The Egypt-backed plan had envisaged a regional forum which analysts say might have forced Israel to reveal whether or not it has nuclear weapons.

The proposal was blocked by the US, the UK and Canada. The next review is set for 2020.

Israel neither confirms nor denies it has a stockpile of nuclear weapons.

Speaking after four weeks of negotiations, US Under-Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller accused Egypt and other Arab countries of "not willing to let go of these unrealistic and unworkable conditions" for future talks.

She also said some participants tried to "cynically manipulate" the whole process.

But Egypt warned that the failure to reach a deal "will have consequences in front of the Arab world and public opinion", the Associated Press news agency reports.

Last month, Egypt had proposed to stage a regional conference - with or without Israel's participation and without an agreed agenda.

Some analysts suggested that this move might have forced Israel - which is not a party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) - to

publicly clarify its position on nuclear weapons.

Decisions at NPT review conferences - held every five years - are made by consensus.

The failure of the current talks means the next gathering could only be held in 2020 at the earliest.



US Senate blocks NSA bill

AFP, Washington

The US Senate rejected legislation early yesterday aimed at reforming NSA intelligence gathering, a blow to President Barack Obama and others who support ending the bulk collection of Americans' telephone records.

Senators also rejected efforts to extend the USA Patriot Act, increasing the prospects that the legal underpinnings of the domestic surveillance program will expire by June 1.

The House of Representatives passed the reform measure overwhelmingly last week, with Democrats and Republicans uniting in their desire to rein in the National Security Agency's highly controversial program that scoops up data from millions of Americans who have no connection to terrorism.

But it got hung up in the Senate, where it failed 57-42, shy of the 60 necessary to advance in the chamber.

Three provisions -- the telephone dragnet, roving wiretaps and lone-wolf tracking -- are set to expire at the end of

the month.

With no reforms in place, and a lapse in national security operations looming, Senate leaders sought to temporarily reauthorise the Patriot Act which governs such intelligence operations.

But several extensions offered by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell were rejected, triggering an



extraordinary scramble for an overnight solution on the Senate floor before lawmakers were to go on a scheduled one-week break.

McConnell said the Senate could come back into session a day early, Sunday, May 31, in order to prevent a lapse in crucial national security opera-

tions.

On Friday the White House drove home the very real prospect that vital intelligence elements could lapse on June 1.

"There is no plan B," White House spokesman Joshua Earnest told reporters. Kevin Bankston, policy director of New America's Open Technology Institute think tank, said blocking the measure was an "insult."

"It is a shocking insult to the democratic process, and to the American people who have been demanding reform for two years, that the Senate's leaders have ignored the White House, federal judges, and an overwhelming majority of the House of Representatives by blocking the USA Freedom Act," Bankston said.

Lawmakers and aides have noted that even if the Senate meets May 31 and approves an extension, the intelligence provisions would lapse, at least for a few hours, because the House would not come into session until later June 1 to vote on the Senate measure.

Iran puts my reputation on the line: Obama

CNN ONLINE

Seeking to reassure deeply skeptical Jewish-Americans of the deal he's attempting to strike over Iran's nuclear program, President Barack Obama on Friday strongly defended his intentions with Tehran, telling congre-

gants at the Adas Israel synagogue in Northwest Washington that his reputation is on the line if the country ends up securing a bomb.

"This will be my name on it," he told the largely receptive crowd, echoing comments he made earlier in the week in an interview with the Atlantic. "No one has a bigger personal stake in ensuring that it delivers on its promise."

Later in the day, the president signed a measure pushed by lawmakers giving Congress a say on a potential deal with Iran. Initially opposed to any congressional review, the White House eventually agreed to a version of

the measure that would bar Obama from lifting sanctions on Iran for a month while lawmakers review the final agreement

Obama on Friday did not avoid addressing his differences with the Israeli government, declaring specifically that Palestinians have "a right to be a free people on their land."

But he said those disputes doesn't reflect the "true measure" of the US-Israel friendship.

"When I hear some people say that disagreements over policy belie a general lack of support of Israel, I must object, and I object forcefully," he said.

Obama underscored the strength of the US-Israel bond, despite recent tensions, saying "no US president, no administration, has done more to ensure Israel can protect itself."

Obama was speaking at Adas Israel to mark Jewish American History Month, and drew ties between the American Civil Rights movement with the faith.



received by Clinton were released Friday and uploaded onto a State Department website, which promptly crashed under the volume of traffic.

None appeared to contain anything potentially damaging to Clinton as she pursues her White House bid, although some have been heavily redacted.

Some were long memos from a long-time Clinton family friend and advisor, Sidney Blumenthal, using information from "sensitive sources" with access to Libyan officials.

Initially, Blumenthal said then Libyan president Mohammed Megaryef had been told the attacks were "inspired by what many devout Libyans viewed as a sacrilegious Internet video."

But only hours later on September 12, he sent another long email marked "just in" from his mobile phone.

"Libyan security officials believe that the attack was carried out by forces of the Islamist militia group calling itself the Ansar al-Sharia brigade; working out of camps in the eastern suburbs of Benghazi," it stated.

"The emails we release today do not change the essential facts or our understanding of the events before, during, or after the attacks," State Department deputy spokeswoman Marie Harf insisted.

Hundreds of emails by former top US diplomat Hillary Clinton were released by the State Department Friday, seeking to quell a lingering political row about a deadly 2012 attack on a US mission in Libya.

The emails have stoked fresh controversy since Clinton -- who is now running for president -- admitted to using a private server and email address during her tenure as secretary of state from 2009 to early 2013.

She has also come under fire from Republicans for the Department's handling of a militant attack on the US mission in Benghazi in eastern Libya on September 11, 2012 amid allegations of a cover-up of the facts.

"I'm glad the emails are starting to come out. This is something that I've asked to be done as you know for a long time," Clinton said at a campaign event in New Hampshire.

And she insisted she had released all the emails that had any "government relationship."

Both issues are likely to stalk Clinton as she bids to become the first woman to occupy the Oval Office in the 2016 elections, hoping to slide into the seat once held by her husband, former president Bill Clinton.



Clinton emails on Benghazi released

AFP, Washington

Delhi slams Beijing's McMahon hypocrisy

TNN, New Delhi

Days after Indian PM Narendra Modi's China visit, national security advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval has raised objections to the manner in which China deals with the border dispute with India and hinted at his hypocrisy in the matter.

Speaking at a BSF function, Doval said China's claims on Tawang (in Arunachal Pradesh) were in contravention of accepted principles of border settlement. Calling it hypocrisy, Doval said China was ready to accept the McMahon Line on its border settlement with Myanmar but not with India.

He, however, stressed that any diplomatic relation with China was incumbent upon resolving the border issue. The statements are significant given that India has been trying to articulate a stance where it is willing to resolve the border dispute but also ready to push its own terms for the same.

Doval, however, cautioned that India could not ignore the dispute. "We have to settle this dispute. China is an important country for us. It is one of the world's largest economies. It has got a long border with us. It has a special relationship with Pakistan. Both these countries are nuclear and not the kind of democracies that we are," Doval said.

Heatwave kills more than 200 in India

TNN, Hyderabad

Searing heat intensified across India yesterday with the mercury maintaining its upward trend and heatwave sweeping across large parts of the country.

Heatwave in several parts of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh has claimed over 200 lives in last three days.

People continued to reel under intense heatwave conditions in both states yesterday, Met officials said.

More than 100 people were felled by a blazing heat wave on Friday alone in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh with the mercury hovering at 47 degrees Celsius at several places across the two states.

As the temperature soared past the 45 degrees the India Meteorological Department upgraded the heat wave warning to "severe", and forecast at least three more scorching days in several districts of Telangana.

In Odisha, government received reports of 23 deaths allegedly due to sun stroke on Friday. West Bengal continued to reel under intense heatwave as a cab driver died of a suspected heatstroke yesterday taking the toll to four since Friday.

In Punjab and Haryana, intense heatwave swept across the two states with mercury soaring sharply in many areas.



Supporters for same-sex marriage raise a cheer at Dublin Castle as they wait for the result of the referendum, yesterday. Ireland was expected to approve same-sex marriage in the vote. Same-sex marriage is currently legal in 19 countries worldwide.

PHOTO: AFP