

## Dozens killed as Somali Shebab attacks AU base

AFP, Mogadishu

Dozens of soldiers were killed yesterday when Somalia's Shebab insurgents overran an African Union base, witnesses said, describing intense fighting which left corpses strewn on the ground.

"The fighting was the heaviest ever around this area. The Shebab fighters took full control of the base and killed many soldiers," Alinur Mohamed, an elder in Lego village, 100 kilometres northwest of the capital Mogadishu, told AFP.

Witnesses said they had seen as many as 50 bodies but the reports were impossible to independently confirm. Some bodies had been reportedly beheaded.

The military outpost was manned by some 100 Burundian soldiers who are part of the 22,000 strong African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

Residents said the dawn raid started with a suicide bomber driving a car loaded with explosives into the entrance of the base, before dozens of militants armed with machine guns and rocket propelled grenades began their assault.

Another elder, Ahmed Bulle said the Shebab militants were later seen looting the base, loading supplies onto trucks.

Earlier on Friday AMISOM confirmed the attack but gave no further details as to possible casualties.

# TERROR ATTACKS ON THREE FRONTS



Picture 1. Special forces escort an unidentified woman and a child as they leave the building housing the apartment of a man suspected of carrying out an attack in Saint-Priest near Lyon, yesterday. A suspected Islamist launched a daylight raid on an industrial gas factory in France yesterday, pinning a severed head to the gates in what President Francois Hollande called a "terrorist" attack. Picture no 2, 3 and 4 depicts the horror after an ISIS suicide bomber killed 25 people as he blew himself up inside a Shia mosque in Kuwait. Picture 5. Armed police stand over the body of a victim shot dead on the beach by Islamist gunmen in Tunisia. The attack killed 28 people. Story on page 1.

PHOTO: AFP, AP

## China lead suspect in US cyber hack

Says US intel chief; Beijing protests

AFP, Washington

The head of US intelligence said Thursday that China is "the leading suspect" in a massive data breach of Washington's government personnel files, but that an investigation is ongoing.

The comments from James Clapper, the director of national intelligence, were the first on the record remarks by an official implicating Beijing in the hack affecting millions of US government employees and others.

Beijing yesterday denounced the allegation as "absurd logic".

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang responded: "We have noticed that the US is still investigating, but feels that China is responsible. This is absurd logic."

Clapper told a Washington intelligence conference that "China remains the leading suspect" but that "the US government continues to investigate" the hack, according to his office, which confirmed earlier media reports.

Since the breach was made public earlier this month, US officials have said privately they believe China was involved, and cybersecurity specialists have said the breach appeared to be part of an effort to build a database that could be used for espionage purposes.

The statement comes after three days of high-level talks in which China and the US agreed to a "code of conduct".

At the Washington talks where cyber security was a top priority, US Secretary of State John Kerry said there was a need to work with China to develop a "code of conduct" on state behaviour in cyberspace. Chinese representatives had agreed with these conclusions.



## Gay marriage legalized across US

BBC ONLINE

The US Supreme Court has ruled that same-sex marriage is a legal right across the United States.

It means the 14 states with bans on same-sex marriage will no longer be able to enforce them.

Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote that the plaintiffs asked "for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right."

It is unclear how soon marriage licences will be issued in states where gay unions were previously prohibited.

The ruling, which sparked celebrations outside the court in Washington DC, brings to an end more than a decade of bitter legal battles.

President Barack Obama said the ruling was a "victory for America".

"Sometimes there are days like this, when that slow, steady effort is rewarded with justice that arrives like a thunderbolt," he said.

## ISIS kills 145 in Kobane

REUTERS, Beirut

Islamic State fighters killed at least 145 civilians in an attack on the Syrian town of Kobane and a nearby village, in what a monitoring group described on Friday as the second worst massacre carried out by the hardline group in Syria.

Fighting between the Kurdish YPG militia and Islamic State fighters who infiltrated the town at the Turkish border on Thursday continued into a second day, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group and a Kurdish official said.

A separate Islamic State assault on government-held areas of the northeastern city of Hasaka was reported to have forced 60,000 people to flee their homes, the United Nations said, warning as many as 200,000 people may eventually try to flee.

Islamic State has a record of conducting large scale killings of civilians in territory it captures in both Iraq and Syria, where it has proclaimed a caliphate to rule over all Muslims according to an ultra-hardline vision of Islam.

The attack on the predominantly Kurdish town of Kobani and the nearby village of Brakh Bootan marked the biggest single massacre of civilians by Islamic State in Syria since it killed hundreds of members of the Sunni Sheitaa tribe last year, Rami Abdulrahman, who runs the Observatory, said.

He said 146 civilians had been killed. Kurdish officials said at least 145 had died.

The assault included at least three suicide car bombs. The dead included the elderly, women and children, he said.

The Islamic State fighters were reported to number in the dozens and entered the town in five cars disguised as members of the YPG and Syrian rebel groups.

In their other assault yesterday, Islamic State fighters clashed with Syrian government forces in the south of Hasaka for a second day and shells hit areas in the center,

the Observatory said.

It appeared that Islamic State was also fanning out toward the southeast of the city, which is divided into zones run separately by the Syrian government and a Kurdish administration that oversees the YPG.

The twin attacks which began on Thursday showed the fighters returning to the offensive after two weeks of defeats



A family mourns for the loss of their relative killed in the Syrian town of Kobani in the border town of Suruc in Sanliurfa province, Turkey, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

at the hands of Kurdish-led forces, supported by US-led air strikes. Earlier this week the Kurds advanced to within 50 km of Raqqa city, the de facto capital of Islamic State's self-declared caliphate.

In the latest battles, Islamic State has picked targets where it is difficult for the US-led alliance to provide air support to those fighting on the ground. In Kobane, also known as Ayn al-Arab, aerial bombardment risks civilian casualties in residential areas targeted in the attack.

## Lanka heads for snap polls

Parliament dissolved

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka President Maithripala Sirisena yesterday ordered the immediate dismissal of the parliament, a government spokesman said, clearing the way for a snap election 10 months ahead of schedule.

"The President signed a gazette notification a short while ago dissolving parliament with effect from midnight today," the government spokesman Rajitha Senarathne said.

The election will be held on August 17 and the new parliament convened on September 2, officials told AFP.

Sirisena inherited the outgoing parliament from his autocratic predecessor Rajapakse who still controlled a loyal band of lawmakers who repeatedly blocked reforms pushed by the new government.

Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera told reporters Wednesday that the UNP government favoured a snap election to increase its majority.



US Secretary of State John Kerry plays with his crutches as he talks to reporters before leaving for Vienna, Austria to join Iran nuclear talks, at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## 'Some major problems' threatening nuke deal

Says Iran after US hints at deadline extension

AFP, Vienna

Iran yesterday warned that "some major problems" need to be resolved before a historic nuclear deal can be agreed, as US Secretary of State John Kerry prepared to fly to Vienna for crunch weekend talks.

The United States, admitting for the first time that Tuesday's deadline may be missed by a few days, had said Thursday that "tough political decisions" still have to be made and that "some of the trickiest issues" remain under discussion.

With Kerry due late yesterday and other ministers from Iran and major powers expected this weekend, Iran's lead negotiator said: "Some major problems exist which are still blocking the work."

Abbas Araghchi, who is deputy foreign minister, told state television however that "in other areas we have made good prog-

ress... Overall, the work is moving ahead slowly and with difficulty".

Iran's IRNA news agency meanwhile quoted a source as saying that the remaining gaps "all involve issues of substantial and essential divergence".

The P5+1 -- the United States, China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany -- want Iran to curtail its nuclear activities in order to make any push to make nuclear weapons all but impossible.

The deal, it is hoped, would put an end to a standoff dating back to 2002 that has threatened to escalate into armed conflict and poisoned the Islamic republic's relations with the international community.

In return for downsizing its activities and allowing closer UN inspections, Iran, which denies wanting nuclear weapons, would see painful UN and Western sanctions that have choked its economy lifted.

## Sweden puts human rights before trade

House moves to curb arms exports to offenders

REUTERS, Stockholm

The Swedish parliament has recommended cutting arms exports to undemocratic countries, part of a push to prioritise human rights in its foreign policy that has already irked Israel and many Arab countries.

Sweden is the world's 12th biggest arms exporter, with arms companies like SAAB responsible for thousands of jobs. Sweden, though proud of its neutral status, exported arms worth 11.9 billion Swedish crowns (\$1.44 billion) to 55 countries in 2013.

Prime Minister Stefan Lofven's centre-left government has emphasised the promotion of human rights and feminism in its foreign policy, sparking criticism that Sweden is hurting its local industry while ignoring growing threats such as Russia.

"A country's democratic status will be a central condition for an export permit," committee chairman Hans Wallmark told a news conference while presenting a report that has been three years in the making.

Wallmark said Sweden would be the first country in the world to introduce specific democratic criteria when exporting weapons, judging each country on the basis of its democratic institutions and its civil and political rights.

Human rights are already a factor in Swedish arms sales policy but the committee said the current arrangements were too weak and that the country needed a law that was clearer and more systematically applied.

In March, Stockholm cancelled a defence agreement with Saudi Arabia worth billions of crowns to its industry after Swedish criticism of Riyadh's human rights record sparked a diplomatic row.

The Lofven government also made headlines last year by recognising Palestine as an independent state, sparking heavy criticism from Israel.

## EU to relocate 40,000 migrants

BBC ONLINE

EU leaders holding late-night talks in Brussels have agreed to relocate tens of thousands of migrants who have arrived in Italy and Greece.

Summit chairman Donald Tusk said 40,000 would be relocated to other EU states over the next two years. However, there will be no mandatory quotas for each country.

The Greek debt crisis was also on the summit's agenda. Greece and its international creditors remain deadlocked after talks on Thursday.

Earlier, Tusk called on EU member states to share the burden of the boat loads of illegal migrants who have crossed the Mediterranean.

New figures from the UN refugee agency UNHCR show that 63,000 migrants have arrived in Greece by sea this year and 62,000 in Italy.

"Leaders agreed that 40,000 persons in need will be relocated from Greece and Italy to other states over the next two years," Tusk told reporters. "Interior ministers will finalise the scheme by the end of July."

## Vatican signs historic accord with Palestine

AFP, Vatican City

The Vatican yesterday signed a historic first accord with Palestine, two years after officially recognising it as a state.

The accord, a treaty covering the activities of the Church in the parts of the Holy Land under Palestinian control, was the first since the Vatican recognised Palestine as a state in February 2013.

The product of 15 years of discussions, the agreement was finalised in principle last month and bitterly condemned then by Israel as a setback for the peace process.

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Al-Maliki, said at yesterday's signing ceremony that it would "not have been possible without the blessing of his Holiness Pope Francis for our efforts to reach it."

The minister said the "historic" accord enshrined Palestine's special status as the birthplace of Christianity and the cradle of the monotheistic religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism).

Paul Gallagher, the British archbishop who is the Vatican's de facto foreign minister, signed the accord on behalf of the Holy See in the presence of guests including Vera Baboun, the mayor of Bethlehem, the Palestinian town considered to be the birthplace of Jesus Christ.

The Vatican's recognition of the state of Palestine followed a November 2012 vote in favour of recognition by the UN General Assembly.

ICC gets 'evidence of Israeli war crimes'

The Palestinian Authority on Thursday submitted a first dossier of evidence to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in support of its campaign to have Israel investigated for alleged war crimes. ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda in January launched a preliminary probe to see whether there was enough evidence for a full-blown war crimes investigation into last year's conflict in the Gaza Strip between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas.