

NEWSIN brief

Search ends for Philippine ferry victims

AFP, Ormoc

Anguished families wept over the bodies of dead relatives yesterday as the search for survivors from the Philippines' latest ferry disaster ended with 45 confirmed deaths, officials said. All 187 people on board the cap-sized Kim Nirvana were accounted for with 142 confirmed to have survived, Philippine Coast Guard spokesman Commander Armand Balilo told AFP.

PA arrest 100 Hamas members in W Bank

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian forces have arrested around 100 Hamas members in the West Bank, a security official said yesterday, raising tension between the Islamist movement and its Ramallah-based rivals. The people, arrested overnight, "intended to carry out attacks against the Palestinian Authority (PA)," the official said, without elaborating.

Drone kills 4 Qaeda suspects in Yemen

AFP, Riyadh

A Saudi and a Kuwaiti are among four suspected al-Qaeda members killed by an American drone strike in southeastern Yemen, a local official said yesterday. Their deaths bring to 13 the number of suspected Al-Qaeda militants killed by similar strikes in Yemen over the past 10 days, and follows the death of the second-in-command of Al-Qaeda's global network.



Kejriwal's June power bill Rs 1.35 lakh!

TNN, New Delhi

Delhi's aam aadmi chief minister, Arvind Kejriwal, has run up an electricity bill of about Rs 1.35 lakh from two meters for June at his official residence - 6, Flag Staff Road, Civil Lines. Sources said the CM's residence has over 30 air-conditioners though it is unclear how many are in his private quarters.

While it is unclear how much power was consumed on account of official government work and how much was consumed at the CM's private residential quarters, the staggering amount raises questions about the issue of energy conservation propagated by the AAP government.

Bollywood star injured in deadly car crash

AFP, New Delhi

A car accident involving popular Bollywood actress and Indian lawmaker Hema Malini killed a four-year-old girl late Thursday and injured several others including the politician, reports and an official said. The 66-year-old BJP MP was rushed to a local hospital with minor injuries after her Mercedes reportedly collided with a small hatchback in the western desert state of Rajasthan.

Pak train accident toll hits 17

AFP, Islamabad

The death toll from a Pakistan rail accident has risen to 17, the army said yesterday, the day after a special military train fell into a canal when a bridge partially collapsed. A senior officer was among those killed when four of the train's carriages carrying troops and military equipment derailed and fell from Chawan Bridge in the eastern province of Punjab.



GREECE FINANCIAL CRISIS

(From bottom, clockwise) A woman passes by the headquarters of Bank of Greece daubed with the word "NO" and a poster with a portrait of German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble that reads "Now tell him NO" ahead of a referendum in Athens, yesterday. The next three photos show the plight of an elderly man who came to collect his pension. The unidentified man, whose image has been widely shared across social media, appears to have been attempting to collect his pension at the branch in Thessaloniki, northern Greece, but failed. Greece's top administrative court ruled Friday that a weekend referendum can go ahead asking voters whether or not they support bailout conditions, rejecting a challenge by two individuals. Story on page 16.

PHOTO: AFP



Iran nuke talks in endgame

Negotiation on for a deal before July 7 deadline; no breakthrough in bomb probe

REUTERS, Vienna

A year and half of nuclear talks between Iran and major powers were creeping towards the finish line yesterday as negotiators wrestled with sticking points including questions about Tehran's past atomic research.

Iran is in talks with the United States and five other powers - Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia - on an agreement to curtail its nuclear programme in exchange for relief from economic sanctions.

"We are coming to the end," said a senior Western diplomat, who added there was no plan to carry on for long past next Tuesday. "Either we get an agreement or we don't," he said, adding that the process "remains quite difficult".

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif told Iranian state television that "a lot of progress has been made, but still various technical issues remain that need the other party's political will".

Still, all sides say a deal is within reach. US, European and Iranian officials, including US Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and Iranian deputy foreign ministers Abbas Arauchi and Majid Takhteravanchi, held a six-hour negotiating session that ended at 3 a.m. on Friday, a senior US official said.

US Secretary of State John Kerry and Zarif were due to hold a bilateral session later yesterday, though that meeting was delayed several times.

Russia's chief negotiator Sergei Ryabkov said the text of the agreement was more than 90 percent complete. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi voiced confidence that the parties would reach a mutually acceptable accord.

The negotiators missed a June 30 deadline for a final agreement, but have given themselves until July 7, and foreign ministers not already in Vienna are due to return on Sunday for a final push.

A deal, if agreed, would require Iran

to severely curtail uranium enrichment work for more than a decade to ensure it would need at least one year's "breakout time" to produce enough highly enriched uranium for a single weapon, compared with current estimates of two to three months.

Western and Iranian officials said there were signs of a compromise emerging on one of the major sticking points: access to Iranian sites to monitor compliance with a future agreement.

A senior Iranian official in Vienna said on Thursday that Iran would sign up to an IAEA inspection regime called the Additional Protocol, which would be provisionally implemented at the start of a deal and later ratified by Iran's parliament.

The Protocol allows IAEA inspectors increased access to sites where they suspect nuclear activity is taking place, but US officials say it is insufficient because Iran has in the past stalled by dragging out negotiations over access requests.

Clashes, strikes kill 21 in Yemen's Aden

AFP, Aden

Saudi-led air strikes and clashes in Yemen's second city of Aden killed 13 Shia Huthi rebels and eight pro-government fighters yesterday, military sources said.

War planes struck Huthi positions in the north of the port city, killing six fighters, after fighting killed seven rebels and eight soldiers loyal to exiled President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, the sources said.

The clashes followed Huthi advances in west Aden, backed by renegade troops, that saw the rebels take control of a military base late Thursday.

Rebel shelling of several residential neighbourhoods overnight killed at least five people, including a child, city health chief Al-Khader Laswar told AFP. Another 89 civilians were wounded.

In neighbouring Abyan province, five rebels were killed in an ambush and a further eight were killed in a similar incident in Taz, Yemen's third city, according to witnesses.

A Saudi-led coalition launched air strikes against rebels in Yemen in March, after the Huthis seized control of much of the country and encroached on Aden, where Hadi had taken refuge before fleeing to Riyadh.

6.4 quake kills 3 in China's Xinjiang

AFP, Beijing

A shallow 6.4-magnitude earthquake struck China's far western region of Xinjiang yesterday, the US Geological Survey said, with three people killed according to Chinese officials.

The epicentre was in Pishan county, 164 kilometres northwest of the city of Hotan and 131 kilometres southeast of Shache, known as Yarkand in Uighur, the language of the local mainly Muslim minority.

It was 20 kilometres deep according to USGS, which initially gave the magnitude as 6.1 while Chinese seismologists recorded it at 6.5.

A series of aftershocks followed with the strongest measuring 4.8, it said.

The area is on the edge of the vast Taklamakan desert, but the civil affairs ministry said late yesterday just three people had died, revising down its earlier toll of six.

The state news agency Xinhua said 43 people had been injured and cited officials saying an airport in Hotan had been closed.



GUJARAT RIOTS Congress demands apology from Modi

PTI, New Delhi

The Congress yesterday raked up the post-Godhra riots issue against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, latching onto the claims by former RAW chief AS Dulat to demand that Modi apologise for the communal violence in 2002 when he was the chief minister of Gujarat.

The party also questioned BJP's commitment to fighting terrorism and alleged it was wearing a "mask of nationalism".

Citing certain claims by Dulat including on the "goof up" in the IC-814 hijack in 1999, he accused the ruling party of always compromising with terrorists and terrorism.

Party spokesman Ajoy Kumar launched a scathing attack on Modi, saying: "Dulat says that former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee believed that he lost the 2004 elections in view of the Gujarat riots... Bharat Ratna Vajpayee has clearly condemned... the shameful incidents of 2002."

He said it was Vajpayee who had reminded "Chief Minister Modi to follow raj dharma".

"Will Narendra Modi respect the words of the Bharat Ratna and apologise to the country for 2002?" Kumar asked, talking to reporters.



Tourists take part in a minute of silence yesterday, in memory of those killed the previous week by a jihadist gunman on the beach in front of the Riu Imperial Marhaba Hotel in Port el Kantaoui, on the outskirts of Sousse south of the capital Tunis. Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and Prime Minister David Cameron led a nationwide minute's silence yesterday, a week after a jihadist gun massacre in Tunisia in which 30 out of the 38 victims were Britons.

PHOTO: AFP

ISIS 'emir of suicide bombers' killed: US Syria rebels launch Aleppo offensive

CNN ONLINE

Senior ISIS leader Tariq al-Harzi -- a man known as the "emir of suicide bombers" -- was killed by a coalition airstrike in Syria last month, a US official said Thursday.

Al-Harzi played a key logistical role for ISIS, overseeing efforts to get jihadists and weapons into Iraq and Syria to fuel the militant organization's war machine, according to US authorities.

The Tunisian, believed to be one of the first foreign fighters to join ISIS, also helped organize the Sunni extremist group's devastating use of suicide and vehicle-borne bombs in Iraq, the US Department of Defense said.

The ISIS leader had been on the US Designated Terrorist List since last year and the State Department had offered a \$3 million reward for information on him.

Meanwhile, a new Islamist rebel alliance, including al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, was locked in a fierce battle yesterday to seize government-held areas of Aleppo, the divided former economic capital.

According to the British-based monitor, the 13 groups in the alliance announced the launch of the "Ansar al-Sharia operations room" on Thursday.

"There were at least 35 dead among insurgent ranks and dozens of killed and wounded on the regime side," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights told AFP.

Assange seeks asylum in France; Hollande says no

AFP, Paris

The French government rejected an asylum request from WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange yesterday, saying he did not face "immediate danger".

"France cannot act on his request," said the office of President Francois Hollande in a statement, after Assange wrote an open letter to the government requesting asylum.

"The situation of Mr Assange does not present an immediate danger. Furthermore, he is subject to a European arrest warrant," Hollande's office said.

In his letter to the president, published earlier yesterday in Le Monde newspaper, Assange described himself as a "journalist pursued and threatened with death by the United States' authorities as a result of my professional activities".

"I have never been formally charged with an offence or a common crime, anywhere in the world, including Sweden and the UK," wrote the Australian activist, who turned 44 yesterday.

He also raised the issue of US spying on French leaders, which caused controversy last week when WikiLeaks released documents indicating that the United States had wiretapped Hollande and his two predecessors.

"The scale of the scandal and the reactions that followed our latest revelations confirmed the legitimacy of our approach," he wrote.

"These revelations were made at the risk of our lives."

Assange has spent over three years holed up in the Ecuador embassy in London to avoid extradition to Sweden, where he faces allegations by two women, one of rape and one of sexual assault, which he denies.

The former computer hacker fears extradition to Sweden could lead to him being transferred to the United States to face trial over WikiLeaks' publication of classified US military and diplomatic documents.

In his letter to Hollande, Assange said he had not seen his youngest child or the child's mother -- both French -- for five years.



Palestinian teen killed in West Bank

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli soldiers shot dead a Palestinian teenager in the West Bank yesterday after he threw stones at their patrol, Palestinian medical and security sources said.

Mohammad Kosba, 17, was killed by two bullets after launching the stones at an Israeli military vehicle close to the Qalandia checkpoint, sources said.

An Israeli army spokeswoman said the soldiers had opened fire after their vehicle was damaged.

The killing was the latest in a series of violent altercations since the start of Ramadan.

Israel has responded to the violence by revoking permits for Palestinians living in the West Bank to visit relatives in the Gaza Strip and has limited Palestinian access to Al-Aqsa mosque compound.



Record-breaking solar plane nears Hawaii

AFP, Los Angeles

A solar-powered plane on the riskiest leg of a round-the-globe bid is closing in on Hawaii after a record-breaking flight which has tested its exhausted pilot to the limit in "difficult" conditions.

Veteran Swiss aviator Andre Borschberg, who has spent more than four days flying from Japan in the Solar Impulse 2, was expected to land on the Pacific US island state yesterday if all goes well.

"After the longest and most tiring night of this flight, bringing the pilot and aircraft to the limits, Andre is now back under the oceanic sunlight," the mission organizers said in the latest update.

By 0200 GMT the plane had traveled 91 percent of the way to the tropical US state, having flown 7,471 kilometers (4,642

miles), with just 700 kilometers to go -- barely 12 hours of flying time, in theory.

More importantly, it had crossed a last cold weather front before Hawaii, which organizers described as "jumping over the wall" before the final stretch towards the Pacific archipelago.

The organizers' latest estimate for arrival is 1600 GMT, although that could change depending on conditions.

So far Borschberg has flown more than 104 hours -- easily beating the previous longest solo endurance flight by Steve Fossett, who flew for 76 hours and 45 minutes in 2006.

The whole trip from Japan to Hawaii was expected to take 120 hours.

The Swiss aviator is napping for only 20 minutes at a time to maintain control of the pioneering plane. He is equipped with a parachute and life raft, in case he needs to ditch in the Pacific.