

NEWS IN brief

Jihadists attack Iraqi forces in Anbar

AFP, Baghdad

Islamic State group fighters attacked Iraqi police and soldiers in an area considered a major staging ground for operations to reconquer Anbar province, security sources said.

ISIS fighters used suicide car bombs to attack government and allied forces in Khalidiyah, a town in the Euphrates valley that lies between Fallujah and Ramadi, Anbar's two main cities.

A police lieutenant colonel said ISIS fighters stormed the town's Al-Madiq neighbourhood following clashes that forced army and federal police to abandon their positions.

Chinese journo freed after detention

AFP, Beijing

A Chinese journalist detained for nine months after helping a German magazine report on democracy protests in Hong Kong has been released, she told AFP yesterday, though associates said her lawyer was being held.

Zhang Miao, detained in October amid a crackdown on mainland supporters of protests which shut down parts of Hong Kong, was held in Beijing days after returning from a reporting trip to the former British colony.



Former Saudi FM Prince Saud al-Faisal dies

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's Prince Saud al-Faisal, formerly the world's longest-serving foreign minister who oversaw four decades of turbulent diplomacy for the oil-rich kingdom, died on Thursday.

A statement from the Royal Court said Prince Saud, who was born in 1940, died in the United States without giving the cause of death.

US data breach hit 21.5 mn people

BBC ONLINE

Hackers that breached US government databases stole the personal information of at least 21.5 million people, officials said on Thursday.

Those affected include government job applicants, federal contractors, and over a million of their partners, the Office of Personnel Management said.

The figure is more than five times higher than the number of people that were feared to have been affected.



Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon, Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambayev, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Russian President Vladimir Putin, China's President Xi Jinping and Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov pose for a family photo at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Ufa, Russia yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

India, Pakistan to join security group led by Russia, China

AP, Ufa

President Vladimir Putin announced yesterday that India and Pakistan will join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a group dominated by Russia and China and also including former Soviet republics in Central Asia.

Russia sees the organization, expanding for the first time since its creation in 2001, as a counterweight to Western alliances.

Membership in the group potentially offers India greater access to the energy resources of Central Asia. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has combined his attendance at the summit in Russia with visits to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) members Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Putin opened the annual summit by announcing the acceptance of India and Pakistan as members. He said Belarus would obtain observer status, joining Afghanistan, Iran and

Mongolia, while Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia and Nepal would be welcomed as "dialogue partners."

The SCO leaders expressed hope that Iran also would soon become a member, but said Tehran first needed to reach an international agreement on curbing its nuclear program, Russian news agencies reported.

Putin said some of the greatest

SCO SUMMIT

security threats facing the region emanated from Afghanistan, noting the increased activity of the Islamic State group. He said the leaders agreed to strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation and to work together to fight drug trafficking from Afghanistan.

The Russian president also talked about plans to deepen economic and trade ties.

"It is obvious that together we can

more effectively resist crisis events in the world economy and finance, more easily overcome restrictions and barriers of various kinds," Putin said. "We think the development of cooperation in production of food, transport, energy and financial security is important."

Meanwhile, India and Pakistan yesterday decided to revive the stalled dialogue process and find ways to expedite trial of the Mumbai attack case as Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Nawaz Sharif agreed to cooperate to eliminate terrorism from South Asia.

Modi and Sharif met for nearly one hour in Ufa on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit and discussed entire gamut of issues between the two countries.

Foreign Secretaries S. Jaishankar and Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry held a joint press meet where they read out a joint statement on the outcome of the meeting between the two leaders.

"We cannot comment on their content yet," Seibert said.

"We will wait until the institutions exam-

New reform plan to stay in euro cheers France, Italy

Eurozone finance ministers meet today to discuss bailout plan

AFP, Athens

Fresh Greek reform proposals submitted to eurozone partners were cheered by France and Italy yesterday, raising hopes that a last-ditch compromise could be reached to prevent a dreaded "Grexit".

The plan handed to eurozone partners by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras's administration just two hours before a midnight deadline will be submitted to lawmakers in Greece for a vote.

Meanwhile, Germany yesterday poured cold

water on upbeat assessments from other European capitals on Greek proposals to resolve its crippling debt crisis, saying it was too soon to judge the package.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert told reporters that Berlin had "taken note of" the last-ditch Greek reform plans presented to creditors overnight.

"We cannot comment on their content yet," Seibert said.

"We will wait until the institutions exam-

GREECE DEBT CRISIS

ine them and express their opinion," he said, referring to the European Commission, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The heads of the EU, IMF and European Central Bank were also to discuss the package later yesterday before a critical meeting of eurozone finance minister today.

Tsipras has conceded ground on major sticking points including tax and pensions, drawing encouragement from France and Italy -- and a terse, neutral response from the normally hardline Germany.

A make-or-break summit bringing together leaders of all 28 EU nations, not just the 19 that use the euro, is scheduled for Sunday, but might not be needed if an agreement is reached beforehand.

Eurozone countries must decide whether to accept Greece's reform plan in exchange for another huge bailout -- its third in five years -- amounting to tens of billions of euros, or force a "Grexit" from the eurozone.

Yemen's warring parties endorse truce

Saudi official claims humanitarian pause 'useless'

AGENCIES

Yemen's main warring factions endorsed a UN-brokered humanitarian truce from yesterday midnight, although heavy fighting on the ground and Saudi air strikes carried on relentlessly.

The week-long truce will end at the same time as the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and aims to get aid to some 21 million Yemenis. All sides said they hoped a full ceasefire would follow.

Meanwhile, a Saudi official said yesterday a humanitarian pause in the war in Yemen will be "useless" because rebels and their allies have shown no readiness to abide by it, reports AFP.

A Saudi Arabia-led coalition of Arab states has been bombing the Iranian-allied Houthi rebel movement since late March in a bid to restore to power Yemen's President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who has fled to Riyadh.

The dominant Houthis shelled residential areas in the southern port of Aden overnight and pushed further into Yemen's eastern Hadramawt desert, the center of the country's modest oil resources, fighting tribal militiamen, a local official said.

The Saudi-led campaign of air strikes targeted the capital Sanaa yesterday and hit mainly central and southern cities overnight, reports Reuters.

The Arab coalition has pounded the Houthis and their army allies from the air since March 26 as part of a bid to restore exiled president Hadi to power. The air raids and fighting have killed more than 3,000 people since then.

"We hope this truce will be the beginning of the end of the Saudi aggression and the end of the violation of United Nations conventions that the war of aggression on Yemen has seen," a top Houthi leader, Mohammed al-Houthi said in a statement.



Kashmiri Muslim protesters clash with Indian police during a protest in Srinagar yesterday. Police fired tear smoke shells and rubber bullets to disperse hundreds of Kashmiris who gathered after Friday prayers during Ramadan to protest against Indian rule.

PHOTO: AFP

Pope apologises for Catholic crimes

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

On his first papal visit to his native Latin America, Pope Francis issued an historic apology to the native peoples of the Americas for sins committed by the Catholic Church during the conquest of the continents.

At a social justice summit in Bolivia, at which many indigenous groups and the country's first-ever indigenous president Evo Morales were in attendance, the first-ever Latin American pope "humbly" asked for forgiveness.

In his speech, Francis said that many Latin American Catholic leaders have previously addressed the "grave sins committed against the native peoples of America in the name of God".

He also recalled that, during a visit to the Dominican Republic in 1992, Pope John Paul II had apologised for the "pain and suffering" over the hundreds of years since the Church arrived at



American shores.

But Francis went further. He said: "I humbly ask forgiveness, not only for the offences of the church herself, but also for crimes committed against the native peoples during the so-called conquest of America."

Going off-script, he continued: "I also want for us to remember the thousands and thousands of priests who strongly opposed the logic of the sword with the power of the cross. There was sin, and it was plentiful."

"But we never apologised, so I now ask for forgiveness. But where there was sin, and there was plenty of sin, there was also an abundant grace increased by the men who defended indigenous peoples."

The indigenous groups burst into applause following his comments, with one leader, Adolfo Chavez, saying: "We accept the apologies. What more can we expect from a man like Pope Francis?"

Turkey PM to begin coalition talks next week

AFP, Ankara

Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said yesterday that he would begin coalition talks next week, over a month after legislative elections where his ruling party lost its overall majority for the first time since coming to power.

Turkey has been plunged into political uncertainty for the first time since the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, with the country either facing a coalition government or snap new elections.

The AKP has 258 seats in the new parliament, the Republican People's Party (CHP) 132, and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) hold 80 apiece.

UKRAINE CRISIS
Poroshenko warns of terror as 2 killed in clashes

AFP, Kiev

President Petro Poroshenko warned yesterday that the threat of terror was "significantly" rising across Ukraine as pro-Russian militias resumed attacks that killed two more federal servicemen.

The Western-backed leader said Ukraine's efforts to stamp out the 15-month eastern revolt had drained security resources and left peaceful cities open to attacks from criminals and those allied to rebel fighters.

"The terrorist threat level has significantly risen outside the zone where we are conducting our anti-terrorist operation," the 49-year-old former chocolate magnate said in a televised address.

Ukraine refers to the insurgents as "terrorists" -- a label that infuriates Russia.

Moscow denies backing the fighters and defends the uprising as an expression of free will in a mostly Russian-speaking region that looks sceptically at the pro-European stance adopted by the former Soviet nation in the past year.

The fighting itself resumed with renewed vigour yesterday after a one-day lull.

"The enemy is once again resorting to the use of heavy weapons, sabotage and reconnaissance groups," Ukrainian military spokesman Andriy Lysenko told reporters.

Ukrainian officials reported the death of two soldiers in separate incidents.

One of the servicemen died in a brief battle that broke out 15 kilometres (nine miles) northeast of Lugansk -- capital of the smaller of the two separatist regions.

Migrant crossings to Europe hit 150,000 Says IOM

AFP, Geneva

Some 150,000 migrants and refugees have so far this year made the perilous journey across the Mediterranean to Europe, and more than 1,900 of them have died, the International Organization for Migration said yesterday.

The IOM's announcement came just a month after the 100,000-mark was passed, and the United Nations warned the surge in arrivals was creating humanitarian crises that required a "collective and far-reaching" European response.

Nearly all of the people who have crossed the Mediterranean so far this year have landed in Italy, which has counted around 75,000 arrivals, and Greece, which has seen the numbers explode.

So far this year, more than 77,000 people have landed on Greek shores, compared to only 34,442 for all of 2014, according to the UN refugee agency, which yesterday warned the country was facing a "growing humanitarian crisis".

"On average, 1,000 arrive every day on the Greek islands," UNHCR spokesman William Spindler told reporters in Geneva, adding that most of them were fleeing from war-ravaged Syria.

IRAN NUKE PROGRAMME
Talks extended through Monday

CNN ONLINE

The negotiations over Iran's nuclear program have been extended through Monday, according to a senior US State Department official.

This is the third extension on the final round of talks to reach a deal curbing Iran's nuclear programme.

The State Department said the extension would allow for additional time to negotiate, and that the interim agreement known as the Joint Plan of Action would accordingly be extended through Monday.

The Council of Europe website noted that the freeze of E.U. sanctions specified in the plan will therefore continue through July 13.

Earlier yesterday, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also indicated the talks were likely to drag on.

"I doubt it will happen today," Zarif told reporters in Vienna about reaching a deal. But when asked if negotiators would all be there on Monday, Zarif responded from a balcony "I hope not."

Zarif made the comments after meeting with US Secretary of State John Kerry and the EU's foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini in Vienna.

"We had a constructive meeting this morning with Secretary Kerry and Mogherini," Zarif told reporters, saying "We are making progress."

Russian president Vladimir Putin said yesterday that all sanction from Iran need to be lifted and said he hopes the talks reach a resolution soon.