

NEWS IN brief

India, Turkmenistan back stronger energy ties

AFP, Ashgabat

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on a visit to Turkmenistan yesterday backed stronger energy ties with the gas-rich ex-Soviet state. Turkmenistan, which borders Iran, has the fourth largest reserves of natural gas in the world but suffers from a lack of pipeline infrastructure. The proposed 1,800-kilometre TAPI pipeline is set to cross Afghanistan and pump gas to Pakistan and India.

Regime bombs kill 28 in ISIS-held Syria town

AFP, Beirut

Syria's regime yesterday killed at least 28 people, mostly civilians, when its warplanes dropped massive makeshift bombs on a town held by the Islamic State group, a monitor said. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the bombs used in the attacks on Al-Bab, in the northern province of Aleppo, were three times more destructive than so-called barrel bombs, which have already drawn widespread international condemnation.

Drone kills 10 Qaeda suspects in Yemen

AFP, Aden

Two missile strikes by unmanned American drones in southeastern Yemen have killed 10 suspected members of al-Qaeda, including three local chiefs, an official said yesterday. The raids targeted a vehicle and a container loaded with weapons late Friday at the port of Mukalla, the provincial capital of Hadramawt, the local official said.

Attacks rock Thai south; seven killed

AFP, Bangkok

Three people were killed and a dozen injured in four separate bomb blasts in Thailand's war-torn deep south, police said yesterday, while another four died from shooting and arson attacks. More than 6,300 people have been killed in near-daily conflict pitting troops and police against rebels seeking greater autonomy for the three Muslim-majority provinces bordering Malaysia since 2004.

Donors pledge billions for Ebola recovery

AFP, United Nations

International donors pledged \$3.4 billion in new funds Friday to help Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone in their final push to stamp out Ebola and get on the road to recovery. The world's worst outbreak of Ebola has killed more than 11,200 people in West Africa, brought fragile health care systems to their knees, rolled back economic gains and sent investors fleeing.

'Give rebels self-rule' Merkel, Hollande urge Ukraine leader amid violence

AFP, Kiev

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande took the rare step Friday of pressing Ukraine's Western-backed leader to ensure partial self-rule for the pro-Russian separatist east.

The blunt message from two of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko's most important allies marked another sign of European impatience with fighting that still engulfs the ex-Soviet nation five months after the signing of a broad truce.

The 13-point agreement reached in the Belarusian capital Minsk controversially guarantees three years of autonomy to militia-run districts of Ukraine's industrial provinces of Lugansk and Donetsk.

The mostly Russian-speaking regions -- dotted with war-shattered steel mills and coal mines that once fuelled Ukraine's economy -- want their special status spelled out in constitutional amendments that would be enormously difficult to overturn.

But Poroshenko's draft changes so far only make passing reference to an existing piece of legislation that gives insurgency leaders

SREBRENICA MASSACRE ANNIVERSARY



(From left and clockwise) Bodyguards use an umbrella to protect Serbia's Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic during unrest at a ceremony marking the 20th anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre in Potocari, near Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, yesterday; women mourn among graves in Memorial Center Potocari, near Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina during a reburial ceremony of remains of 136 newly-identified victims.

PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP



Deadlock remains

Difficult issues remain: Kerry; talks may miss deadline: Iran

AFP, Vienna

World powers huddled again yesterday behind closed doors on the 15th day of negotiations seeking a deal to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions, with no sign of any end to the nail-biting deadlock.

Despite a warning from US Secretary of State John Kerry that he would not sit at the negotiating table forever, an Iranian official told AFP the talks, now entering their third week, could stretch on and on.

"We have no time-limit in order to reach a good deal," the senior Iranian official said, asked if the negotiations could be formally extended again in a bid to end the current deadlock.

Iran and the so-called P5+1 group -- Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States -- are seeking to curtail Tehran's ability to develop nuclear weapons in exchange for relief from painful sanctions.

After a very public blame game about the reasons behind the stalemate, Kerry Friday had offered a glimmer of hope that some progress may be being made saying some outstanding issues had been resolved.

FINAL IRAN NUKE DEAL

"Vienna, still working day and night on #IranTalks," she said in her Tweet.

Air strike kills ISIS leader in Afghanistan

REUTERS, Kabul

But the top US diplomat emerged from almost 90 minutes of fresh talks yesterday morning with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif and almost immediately tweeted that things remained tough.

"Met with @FedericaMog and @IZarif this AM. Still have difficult issues to resolve," he said in his Tweet.

Despite almost two years of negotiations, this round of talks in Vienna touted as the last push for a historic accord to end a 13-year standoff, has moved at a snail's pace in an indication of how difficult the remaining issues are.

France's Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius also arrived back in the Austrian capital Saturday to rejoin Germany's Frank-Walter Steinmeier, while their British counterpart was expected back too. It remained unclear when the Russian and Chinese foreign ministers would return to the city.

With many politicians on both sides of the Atlantic openly questioning whether it was time to walk away, Mogherini tweeted on Friday, the intelligence agency said. It did not give any further details about the air strike.

Hafez Saeed was the leader of Islamic State in the "so-called Khorasan state", according to Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security (NDS), referring to an old term to describe Afghanistan and Pakistan.

He was killed along with 30 other militants as they gathered in Achin district of Nangarhar province late on Friday, the intelligence agency said. It did not give any further details about the air strike.

SREBRENICA MEMORIAL SERVICE
Bosnian crowd chases away Serbia PM

AFP, Srebrenica

Serbian premier Aleksandar Vucic was forced to flee a Srebrenica memorial yesterday when an angry crowd hurled stones at him at the 20th anniversary commemoration of Europe's worst mass killing since WWII, AFP reporters said.

Vucic had just laid a flower at a monument for thousands of victims identified and buried there when the crowd started to chant 'Allahu Akbar' (God is Great) and hurled stones, forcing the prime minister to run for cover shielded by his bodyguards.

Serbia's Tanjug state-run news agency said Vucic was hit on the head by a stone and had his glasses broken.

Vucic, whose country backed Bosnian Serbs during and after the 1990s inter-ethnic war in Bosnia, was among numerous dignitaries, including former US president Bill Clinton, and tens of thousands of people attending the commemoration in the eastern Bosnian town.

Shortly before arriving, he condemned the "monstrous crime" in Srebrenica, where some 8,000 Muslim men and boys were murdered by Bosnian Serb forces who captured Srebrenica in July 1995, near the end of the war.

Serbian and Bosnian Serb politicians have long denied the extent of the killing, although two international tribunals have described the bloodshed as genocide. The slaughter was followed a few months later by the peace deal which ended Bosnia's 1992-1995 war. The conflict cost the lives of an estimated 100,000 people.



Egyptian security and citizens look at the destroyed facade of the Italian consulate building following a powerful bomb explosion, killing one person, in the capital, Cairo, on July 11, 2015. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility of the attack and warned Muslims to stay away from such places, SITE Intelligence Group reported.

PHOTO: AFP

Typhoon swipes eastern China

AFP, Shanghai

Typhoon Chan-hom swiped eastern China yesterday, paralysing transport links and devastating farmland as authorities evacuated more than a million people, the government and state media said.

The storm, which killed five people in the Philippines earlier in the week and injured more than 20 people in Japan on Friday, made landfall at around 4:40 pm (0840 GMT) on an island near the city of Ningbo, which is south of Shanghai, the National Meteorological Center (NMC) said.

Chan-hom was however expected to skirt the coast before heading back out to sea rather than going further inland.

There were no immediate reports of casualties from the storm, which forced the cancellation of hundreds of flights and bus and rail services.

Ningbo, in Zhejiang province, has a population of almost six million people while Zhujiajian town, which took the direct hit from the typhoon, is home to around 36,000.

The NMC maintained its highest red alert for the storm despite earlier downgrading it from "super" to "strong".



Suu Kyi's party to run in polls

REUTERS, Yangon

Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday said her party would contest a national election in November, ending months of uncertainty about its participation in a vote that will be crucial for the scope of the country's reforms.

Nobel laureate Suu Kyi has laid the groundwork for running in the Nov 8 parliamentary poll, but her National League for Democracy (NLD) had held out until now to commit to a ballot that is being billed as Myanmar's first legitimate election in 25 years.

"This decision to run in the election was made to continue the unfinished democratisation process for the country," Suu Kyi told a news conference in the capital Naypyitaw.

Suu Kyi's own presidential aspirations are curtailed by a clause in the constitution that bars individuals with children holding foreign citizenship from becoming head of state. She vowed that the party would amend the constitution if it wins.

The NLD won Myanmar's last free and fair election in 1990 in a landslide, but the result was ignored by the then ruling military, which ceded power in 2011.

The NLD boycotted a 2010 poll held under military rule.

Suu Kyi was under house arrest at the time of 2010 vote, but was released six days later. The NLD eventually agreed to join the quasi-civilian system in 2012, winning 42 house seats in a by-election. Suu Kyi will run in the constituency of Kawthu, a delta town outside the biggest city Yangon.



Indian children play on the floodwaters on a street in New Delhi yesterday, as the Indian capital experienced heavy monsoon rainfall.

TERROR ATTACKS

Blast hits Italian consulate in Egypt, killing 1

AFP, Cairo

A car bomb outside Italy's consulate in Cairo yesterday killed one person, the first attack on a foreign mission since jihadists began a campaign against Egypt's security forces two years ago. The early morning explosion was heard across the city and wrecked the facade of the building, part of a large complex that also includes a social club and a school. Islamic State Group claimed responsibility for the attack on the consulate, closed for the weekend and located near the prosecutor's office and supreme court in central Cairo.

Deadly 'Boko Haram attacks' target Chad, Nigeria

AFP, N'Djamena

At least 14 people were killed in a suicide bomb attack at a crowded market in Chad's capital yesterday just days after Boko Haram claimed a previous bombing in the city that left 38 people dead. The attack in N'Djamena by a man disguised as a woman in a full-face veil came after a botched bombing in the capital of Nigeria's Borno state, Maiduguri, which killed two pedestrians. Militant fighters on Friday night also raided the village of Ngamdu, some 100 kilometres from Maiduguri, killing 11, residents and a member of the civilian militia said.