

NEWSIN brief

Iraq bomb attacks kill at least 30

AFP, Baghdad

Car bomb attacks in Baghdad and the Iraqi province of Diyala, mostly claimed by the Islamic State jihadist group, have killed at least 30 people, police and medical sources said yesterday. The deadliest of the attacks was in the Iraqi capital's eastern Shia district of Baghdad al-Jadida where a car bomb killed at least 19

Yemen's Aden airport reopens with Saudi jet

AFP, Aden

A Saudi military plane landed in Aden yesterday as the airport reopened in Yemen's second city after four months of fighting, the transport minister said. "This is the beginning of operations at the airport," Badr Basalma told reporters at the airport, which Saudi-backed loyalists recaptured last week following fierce fighting with Shia rebels and their allies.

Sushma Swaraj cuts 'foreign minister' from Twitter bio

TNN, New Delhi

Till over a week ago, Sushma Swaraj's bio said "Foreign Minister, Government of India". Now it is blank. The external affairs minister has recently been embroiled in a controversy for helping disgraced cricket tycoon Lalit Modi with travel documents in the UK when his passport had been cancelled by the Indian government. The development came as the opposition has demanded resignation of Swaraj and other 'tainted' BJP leaders over the issue.

More rain expected for flood-hit Pakistan

BBC ONLINE

More rain is forecast in north Pakistan after flash floods inundated several villages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces. At least three people have died, Pakistani media reported, and hundreds of thousands have been displaced. Every year, monsoon rains trigger floods in Pakistan killing scores of people.

China returns Weiwei's passport

AFP, Beijing

Police yesterday handed Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei his passport four years after it was confiscated, he told AFP, hailing the move with a smiley emoticon. Ai is China's best known contemporary artist abroad. The bearded conceptualist was detained for 81 days in 2011 amid a nationwide crackdown on dissent.

Check Iranian meddling in ME

Saudi Arabia tells US; Iran rejects sanctions extension beyond 10 years

AFP, Jeddah

Saudi Arabia's leaders yesterday sought assurances that the United States stands firmly against Iranian "interference" in the Middle East, during a visit by Defence Secretary Ashton Carter.

Carter arrived as part of a regional tour trying to allay the concerns of US allies that Iran could still be able to develop an atomic weapon despite an agreement reached this month between Tehran and six major powers led by Washington.

Meanwhile, an Iranian official yesterday said that Iran would not accept any extension of sanctions beyond 10 years, in the latest attempt by its pragmatist government to sell a nuclear deal with world powers to skeptical hardliners.

Abbas Araqchi, one of several deputy foreign ministers, also told a news conference Iran would do 'anything' to help allies in the Middle East, underlining Tehran's message that despite the deal Iran will not change its anti-Western foreign policy.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State John Kerry said in remarks published yesterday he will seek to reassure Gulf Arab officials at a meeting in Qatar in the next two weeks that Washington will work with them to push back against Iranian

influence in the region.

In Riyadh, the US defence secretary met King Salman, then held talks with the king's powerful son Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who is defence minister and second-in-line to the throne.

Sunni-ruled Gulf states are wary of the



PHOTO: AFP

US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter (L) meets with Saudi King Salman in Jeddah, yesterday.

overtures to Tehran by Washington, their traditional defence partner.

Riyadh and its neighbours believe the deal will only embolden their Shia regional rival, whom they accuse of meddling in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon

and Yemen.

The nuclear agreement, which ended a 13-year standoff, requires Iran to curb its nuclear capabilities including the number of uranium centrifuges.

International monitors will supervise the process, which in exchange will reduce sanctions that have crippled Iran's economy.

Saudi Arabia and Israel are "on the same page" with their concerns about the agreement, a Western diplomatic source said.

The deal would see Iran's oil exports gradually resume and billions of dollars in frozen assets unblocked.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who Carter met on Tuesday, has voiced fears the nuclear deal will help fund Iranian "aggression."

The Saudis also "think it's a mistake," although "they don't say it as loud and as publicly as the Israelis," said the source.

There are worries the Iran deal could spark a nuclear race in the Middle East.

Riyadh is building alliances beyond its ties with Washington in order to counter Tehran, under a more assertive foreign policy adopted since King Salman acceded to the throne in January.

Maldives sacks vice-president for 'treason'

AFP, Colombo

The Maldives parliament has sacked the country's vice-president and accused him of treason, as international concern mounts over the state of democracy on the honeymoon islands.

Lawmakers voted overwhelmingly on Tuesday evening to oust Mohamed Jameel, who was the running mate of President Abdulla Yameen in a controversial 2013 election but has now fallen out with him.

The 45-year-old, who was abroad at the time of the vote, was also accused of colluding with the opposition, although the precise nature of the charge remains unclear.

The former vice-president, who was not allowed to defend himself in parliament, accused Yameen of undermining the rule of law.

Yameen's defence minister has also been jailed on charges of trying to topple the government.

Yameen already faces international criticism for the jailing of the country's main opposition leader and former president Mohamed Nasheed for 13 years on charges of terrorism.

UN said the trial of Nasheed, the country's first democratically elected leader, was "vastly unfair", while US warned that democracy was under threat in the country.



Mohamed Jameel

Suicide bomber kills 19 in Afghan market

AFP, Mazar-i-sharif

A suicide bomber killed 19 people including women and children yesterday when he blew himself up in a northern Afghan market, as militants intensify their annual summer offensive despite nascent peace talks.

The attack in Almar district of Faryab province, bordering Turkmenistan, highlights the heavy toll of such attacks on civilians after 13 years of war.

No group claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing, which comes just before another round of peace negotiations between the government and Taliban militants are due to start.

The suicide attacker detonated his explosives-laden vest in the main market of the volatile district of Almar, killing at least 19 people, according to Faryab police chief Subhan Quli Ebrahimi and the United Nations.

"Women, children and at least one Afghan army soldier were among those killed," Faryab governor Abdul Sattar Barez told AFP, adding that around three dozen others were wounded.

Almar district chief Saleh Mohammad Saleh said that some of the wounded were in a critical condition and had been taken to the provincial capital Maimanah.

"We had received intelligence reports that a suicide attacker has entered the market in Almar, so we set up a police check point to search for him," local police commander Saif, who goes by one name, told AFP.

"We were looking for him when he blew himself up near an armoured military vehicle," Saif said, adding that the attacker was aged between 20 and 25.

Almar has been tense for weeks after the Taliban launched a major offensive and took control of several villages.

Government forces launched a counter offensive earlier this week but have struggled to regain territory, with skirmishes frequently reported between both sides.



PHOTO: AFP

France signals 'breakthrough'

AFP, Paris

France signalled a "breakthrough" at 46-nation talks in Paris tasked with paving the way for a highly-anticipated climate rescue pact to be inked in December.

Ministers and top officials at an informal gathering reached consensus on several issues that have stymied the official negotiations for years, France's top climate negotiator Laurence Tubiana told journalists.

Crucially, they concurred there should be a regular, five-yearly review, once the agreement kicks in, of the collective effort to curb planet-warming greenhouse gases.

"This is a breakthrough," said Tubiana. "That was not obvious to get."

The political signal emerging from the Paris talks will now filter down and hopefully ease the job of rank-and-file negotiators for the 195 countries crafting a historic global agreement.

The Paris talks were not part of the official negotiations, and fewer than a quarter of countries were directly

represented.

But all the world's top greenhouse gas emitters, apart from Russia, were represented, as were all recognised

PARIS SUMMIT OF CONSCIENCE FOR THE CLIMATE



negotiating blocs.

The pact to be finalised at a November 30-December 11 UN conference in the French capital will have as its goal to limit average global warming to two degrees Celsius (3.6

degrees Fahrenheit) over pre-Industrial Revolution levels.

It will be supported by a roster of voluntary national pledges. But scientists say that those already submitted indicate the world will badly miss the 2 C target which is considered the threshold for disastrous impacts.

Tubiana said consensus also emerged at the ministerial meeting on the need for regular reporting on national action.

Convergence around issues like these mean the global agreement, due to take effect from 2020, will be "durable" and not need to be renegotiated 10 years later, the minister said.

Meanwhile, mayors from around the world have signed a declaration with Pope Francis stating that man-made climate change is real and humanity has a moral imperative to take action.

At a two-day summit in the Vatican aimed at spurring efforts to fight global warming following the pope's environment encyclical denouncing the exploitation of the poor and the earth's resources, over 60 mayors pledged to do their part.

JIBE AT PRESIDENT Myanmar fines journos for defamation

AFP, Yangon

A Myanmar court has fined two journalists one million kyat (\$850) each for defaming the president, a newspaper editor said yesterday, as concerns mount over press freedoms in the nation ahead of landmark elections.

Both the editor-in-chief and the editor of the Myanmar Herald Journal -- a publication renowned for its criticism of the government -- were found guilty of defamation at Popathiri court in the capital Naypyidaw on Tuesday, the paper's deputy editor-in-chief told AFP.

Last year the newspaper ran an interview with an opposition National League for Democracy party member who criticised President Thein Sein as "absurd and insane".

Monstrous atrocities

HRW says S Sudan troops 'crushed civilians with tanks', burned people alive

AFP, Nairobi

South Sudanese government troops crushed fleeing civilians with tanks, then reversed to check they had killed them, carried out public gang rapes and burned people alive, a rights group said yesterday.

The report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) has shocking allegations of atrocities committed by government forces in the ongoing 19-month-old war, documenting "deliberate attacks on civilians" that it said constitute war crimes.

"They were running with the tanks after the people, and then after they hit them they would roll back over them, to confirm that they were dead," one woman told HRW.

The attacks were allegedly carried out by government troops and an allied militia from the Bul Nuer tribe.

Civilians fled into swamps to escape, but troops chased them down using amphibious armoured vehicles, raking hiding places with machine guns. Other victims recount soldiers castrating a man and a 15-year old boy, all part of a deliberate tactic to drive people out of the villages, HRW said.

HRW documented murders "of civilian women and men, including children and the elderly, some by hanging, others by shooting, or being burned alive."

South Sudan's civil war began in December 2013 when President Salva Kiir accused his former deputy Riek Machar of planning a coup, setting off a cycle of retaliatory killings that has split the poverty-stricken, landlocked country along ethnic lines.



Bionic eye helps UK man see

AFP, London

A partially sighted British pensioner has had most of his vision restored thanks to a "bionic eye" -- a device that converts video images from a miniature camera installed in his glasses to his brain. The University of Manchester announced the success of the operation on retired engineer Ray Flynn in a statement yesterday, saying it was a world first for the 80-year-old's particular condition. Flynn has age-related macular degeneration (AMD), a condition which affects over 500,000 people in Britain and is the most common cause of blindness in people aged over 50 in developing countries. The condition means that his vision is impaired and he cannot see things directly in front of him. This prevents him from reading or driving and makes it difficult for him to recognise faces. Retinal degenerative diseases like AMD affect more than 30 million people around the world, according to the US-based Foundation Fighting Blindness (FFB).



Hackers take control of moving car

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Hackers have remotely carjacked a Jeep, took control of it and crash it into a ditch. Two men used a laptop and a mobile phone to seize control of the Cherokee model as it drove at 70mph along the motorway -- and turned off its engine, slammed on the brakes and ramped its wind-screen wipers to maximum speed. They were also able to take over its steering -- albeit only when it was in reverse -- its brakes and its locks. A video posted by WIRED journalist Andy Greenberg on the technology magazine's website shows him cede control of the vehicle while driving through St Louis, Missouri. Security experts say the hackers accessed the Jeep's on-board controls via its wireless internet connection, called Uconnect, used by Fiat Chrysler, SUVs and trucks. They say that Uconnect -- which controls the vehicle's entertainment and navigation, enables phone calls, and even offers a Wi-Fi hot spot -- needs to make urgent security upgrade.



Norway opens massacre exhibition

AFP, Oslo

Four years after the attacks by Anders Behring Breivik, Norway yesterday opened an exhibition dedicated to the tragedy that some fear could become a "hall of fame" for the mass murderer. The exhibition has triggered controversy as several objects used by Breivik in his July 2011 rampage, such as the remains of the van where he hid his bomb and the fake ID and insignia he used to impersonate a police officer, are on display. The right-wing extremist killed 77 people in the worst peacetime atrocity in Norway, claiming he was fighting against multiculturalism and a "Muslim invasion". The temporary exhibition is housed on the ground floor of the government complex in Oslo that the killer, now 36, unsuccessfully tried to blow up with a massive car bomb. "The information centre should spread knowledge in order to prevent hatred, violence and terrorism," Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg said at the opening, in a speech that brought her close to tears.

