

NEWS IN
briefISIS claims beheading
of Croatian hostage

AFP, Cairo

The Islamic State group yesterday claimed to have beheaded a Croatian hostage abducted in Egypt, posting a purported picture of the victim's body on IS-affiliated Twitter accounts. The Croat, Tomislav Salopek, was abducted last month west of the capital Cairo. The jihadists had issued a 48-hour deadline that ended last Friday threatening to kill him if Muslim women prisoners were not released from Egyptian jails.

Pakistan foils I-Day
bomb plot

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani security forces yesterday said they had foiled a plot to bomb Independence Day celebrations in Karachi after arresting a Taliban gang in the city. Militants had been planning to detonate a van loaded with explosives in the country's largest city during tomorrow's celebrations marking independence from Britain in 1947, a statement from the military said.

Clinton to surrender
email server to FBI

AFP, Washington

A thumb drive and a server containing copies of emails Hillary Clinton sent and received while US secretary of state will be handed over to the FBI, media reports said Tuesday. Clinton has been criticized for her decision to use a personal email server while secretary of state, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation has recently begun looking into the possibility that Clinton sent and received classified information from the server.

Thai PM's brother could
be new army chief

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's junta leader Prayut Chan-O-Cha has said he may appoint his brother as next army chief, one of the most powerful jobs in the coup-prone kingdom. Prayut, who is now prime minister, was the army chief in May last year when he seized power from an elected government which opponents had decried as corrupt and nepotistic.

Africa celebrates one
year without polio: UN

AFP, Mogadishu

Africa has marked one year since the last case of recorded polio yesterday, with the United Nations celebrating a key step towards eradicating the disease. The last recorded case on the continent was in Somalia on August 11, 2014, although health officials must wait two more years before declaring the continent free from the highly infectious, crippling virus.

The elite Indian

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Pichai, who started at Google in 2004, joins an illustrious club of Indian-origin business leaders who have made it to prestigious chief executive positions overseas, including Indra Nooyi at PepsiCo and Ajay Banga at MasterCard.

The 43-year-old also follows a well trodden path of Indians -- including Microsoft boss Satya Nadella and Nokia head Rajeev Suri -- who have trained at the prestigious engineering institutes, where competition for limited places is fierce.

"Congrats @sundarpichai well deserved," Nadella posted on Twitter.

"I am sure all IITs are celebrating today. Proud of you @sundarpichai," tweeted Padmasree Warrior, Cisco's outgoing chief technology officer who studied chemical engineering at the



Rescue workers remove people from the site after a landslide hit a mining factory in Shanyang county, Shaanxi province, yesterday. According to Xinhua News Agency, rescuers have dug out four people from their dormitories and houses buried in the landslide. Around 40 people are still missing.

PHOTO: REUTERS

N Korea's vice PM
executed: report

AFP, Seoul

North Korea's vice premier Choe Yong-Gon has been executed for voicing frustration at the policies of leader Kim Jong-Un, South Korea's Yonhap news agency said yesterday, citing an anonymous source.

Choe, who took the job in June 2014, was executed by firing squad in May after voicing opposition to forestry policies promoted by Kim, Yonhap said, citing the source "with knowledge of the North".

Choe was last seen in the North's state media last December at the death anniversary of the late leader Kim Jong-Il, South Korea's unification ministry said yesterday.

Seoul was "closely monitoring the possibility of any changes in Choe's circumstances", said the ministry, which is in charge of cross-border affairs.

Choe's death, if confirmed, would be the second reported this year. Defence minister Hyon Yong-Chol was said to have been executed in April by anti-aircraft fire for insubordination and dozing off during formal military rallies.

Such a violent method of execution has been cited in various unconfirmed reports as being reserved for senior officials who the leadership wished to make examples of.

The North has not officially confirmed Hyon's execution -- reported in May by Seoul's intelligence agency -- but announced his replacement, Pak Yong Sik, in July.

Libya chaos deepens
PM Abdullah al-Thani says he will resign

AFP, Tripoli

The future of Libya's internationally recognised government was uncertain yesterday after Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thani said he would resign, as fraught peace talks entered a second day.

It was unclear whether Thani planned to follow through on his vow, and a government spokesman said the premier had not stepped down.

Thani made the resignation promise during an emotional live television appearance in which he faced a barrage of angry questions from citizens.

The move added to the political chaos in Libya, as the country's rival factions met for a second day of UN-sponsored peace talks in Geneva.

Thani faced questions in Tuesday's programme from Libyans blaming his government for the lack of basic services such as electricity and poor security in areas it controls.

"If my exit is the solution, then I announce it here," Thani said during the talk show. "My resignation will be submitted to the parliament on Sunday."

Adding to the confusion, government spokesman Hatem el-Ouraybi said Thani's promise had been conditional.



The prime minister said during the interview that he would resign if people wanted him to, that's it," Ouraybi told AFP. He said no resignation letter had yet been submitted to parliament. "I don't now have an answer to the question of whether it will be submitted on Sunday."

Libya, which plunged into chaos after the ouster and killing of its leader Moamer Kadhafi in a 2011 revolution, has two rival governments and parliaments vying for power, as well as several militia groups battling for control of its oil wealth.

The country is gripped by unrest with Benghazi, the main city in the east, caught in a daily war between pro- and anti-government forces.

Thani's government has been working out of a small eastern city near the border with Egypt since an Islamist militia alliance captured the capital Tripoli last year.

The international community recognises the parliament that sits in the eastern port of Tobruk.

A partial peace deal aimed at restoring stability was reached last month, but leaders of the Islamist-backed General National Congress (GNC) parliament that sits in Tripoli boycotted the pact, calling it "unsatisfactory".

Boko Haram
has a 'new
leader': Chad
BBC ONLINE

The Nigerian-based Islamist militant group Boko Haram has a new leader, Chad's President Idriss Deby said yesterday.

He did not say what had happened to Abubakar Shekau, but said he had been replaced by Mahamat Daoud - who has not been heard of before.

Shekau has not featured in the group's recent videos, leading to speculation that he has been killed.

Deby, whose troops have been involved in battling Boko Haram, said Daoud was open to dialogue.

Shekau took over as the group's leader after its founder, Muhammad Yusuf, died in Nigerian police custody in July 2009.

Under his leadership the group has become more radical and carried out more killings. Previous reports about his death proved to be untrue.

Huge explosion in
China's Tianjin port

BBC ONLINE

Massive explosions have hit China's northern port city of Tianjin, reportedly injuring many people.

According to Chinese state media, the blasts occurred when a shipment of explosives blew up at about 23:30 (16:30 GMT).

Pictures and video shared on social media showed flames lighting up the sky and damage to nearby buildings.

Latest reports in state media suggest that hundreds of people have been taken to hospital.

The first explosion was followed by another 30 seconds later. Further blasts were subsequently triggered nearby, Xinhua state news agency said.

Shockwaves could apparently be felt several kilometres away from Tianjin.

The Editor of the BBC's Chinese Service, Raymond Li, says all indications are that it is an industrial accident.

Ms Yang, an eyewitness, told local media she was out shopping when "suddenly from behind there was a big fireball and explosion".

"At the time of the explosion the ground was shaking fiercely, nearby cars and buildings were shaking, a few buildings' glass all broke and everyone started to run," she said. "Now all the residents are gathered in the street."

China National Radio said cracks were visible in buildings near the site of the blast. Several tower blocks near the port area are without power, reported the Chinese state broadcaster CCTV.

The blasts took place in a warehouse area storing dangerous goods in Tianjin's Binhai development zone, Xinhua said.

Malaysia PM
sued over polls
rules violation

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

A Malaysian opposition party yesterday filed a civil suit against Prime Minister Najib Razak and indebted state fund 1 Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), saying they had violated electoral rules and a new election should be held.

1MDB, whose advisory board is chaired by Najib, and which has debts of more than \$11 billion, is under investigation for graft and financial mismanagement.

The affair has triggered a political crisis for Najib.

Najib has denied taking any money for personal gain, saying the allegations are part of a malicious campaign to force him from office. 1MDB has denied transferring funds to Najib and an interim government report found nothing suspicious.

Last week, the national anti-graft agency said the funds in Najib's account were donations from the Middle East, and not from 1MDB.

Jailed opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim's People Justice Party (PKR) said the donation of 2.6 billion ringgit (\$645 million), the movement of funds and dealings involving 1MDB and its affiliates were linked to an election campaign in 2013.

The PKR said the \$645 million amount was more than 26 times the permissible amount allowed under the electoral law.

The party, according to a copy of its suit seen by Reuters, wants the judiciary to declare that Najib and 1MDB had acted illegally and the ruling National Front coalition should be de-registered and a fresh election called.



A wounded Syrian girl cries at a make-shift hospital in the rebel-held area of Douma, east of the capital Damascus, following reported air strikes by regime forces yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Air raids, rebel fire
on Damascus kill 50

48-hr ceasefire begins in rebel border bastion

AFP, Beirut

At least 37 civilians were killed yesterday in Syrian government air strikes near Damascus, while at least 13 people died as rebels fired a barrage of rockets into the capital, a monitor said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least four children were among the dead in regime strikes on the rebel-held Eastern Ghouta region, where some 120 people were also injured.

The death toll was likely to rise further, it said. The air raids hit the towns of Douma, Saqba, Kafr Batna and Hammouriyeh in the rebel stronghold region outside the capital.

Meanwhile, a 48-hour ceasefire came into effect yesterday in the last rebel stronghold along Syria's border with Lebanon, a resident and monitoring group said.

"We really noticed that it was relatively calm this morning," Mohammad, a resident of the flashpoint town of Zabadani, told AFP.

Pro-regime forces, including Lebanon's Shia militia Hezbollah, had been fighting rebel groups in a bid to seize the town since early July.

An AFP photographer in Douma saw more than a dozen bodies in makeshift plastic shrouds in a field hospital where medical workers struggled to aid the wounded.

Bush, Clinton trade barbs

AFP, Washington

A decade of anger over the Iraq war resurfaced in the 2016 US election race Tuesday, with Jeb Bush and Hillary Clinton's campaigns trading blame about that country's continued instability.

Twelve years after president George W Bush led the United States into an unpopular and troubled conflict, his brother, now a Republican presidential hopeful, accused Democrats of abandoning Iraq before the job was done.

Jeb Bush blamed his Democratic White House rival, former Secretary of State Clinton, for allowing the brutal emergence of the Islamic State group by withdrawing troops from Iraq too fast.

Taking a political risk, Bush even suggested it might be necessary to send more troops back to Iraq.

A wildly successful invasion of Baghdad was followed by a ham-fisted occupation that fuelled brutal sectarian violence and left the central government debilitated.

In addition to being a point of contention

IRAQ WAR



PHOTO: AFP

PHOTO: AFP

between Republicans and Democrats, the conflict may have also cost Clinton the 2008 Democratic nomination to anti-war candidate Barack Obama.

In 2002, Clinton voted in favor of authorizing Bush's invasion as a Senator for New York, a vote she later said was a mistake.

But on Tuesday her campaign defended her later record.

Long-time foreign policy aide Jake Sullivan -- a frontrunner to become Clinton's National Security Advisor if she is elected -- accused Jeb Bush of a "pretty bold attempt to rewrite history and reassign responsibility."

"They cannot be allowed to escape responsibility for the real mistake here," he said, saying Islamic State emerged from al-Qaeda in Iraq, which flourished amid the occupation.

"It didn't exist before the invasion. It emerged in no small part as a result of president Bush's failed strategy. And it gained strength by signing up former Sunni military officers - officers from the army that the Bush administration disbanded," he said.