

NEWS IN brief

Myanmar adopts marriage bill

Myanmar's president has signed a law requiring Buddhist women to seek permission before marrying outside their faith. Parliament passed the bill in July despite criticism that it discriminates against religious minorities and encourages anti-Muslim sentiment. The bill is one of four in a legislative package proposed by the Buddhist nationalist group Ma Ba Tha, an acronym for the Association for Protection of Race and Religion. A highly criticized Population Control Law was the first of the four to be signed into law in May.

53 militants killed in Afghanistan

At least 53 Taliban militants have been killed in military operations in 15 provinces of Afghanistan, the defence ministry said yesterday. "The Afghan Army carried out military operations, killing 53 terrorists, injuring 43 and detaining 11 suspected militants over the past 24 hours," Xinhua news agency quoted the ministry as saying. Seven soldiers were also killed during this period, he said.

UK Labour split on Syria air strikes

Britain's new opposition Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, a veteran anti-war campaigner, faces a revolt over air strikes on Syria, nine days after the left-winger was elected on a platform that opposed military intervention in the region. Half of Corbyn's top team of ministers-in-waiting were prepared to back a call from Prime Minister David Cameron to sanction bombing against Islamic State (ISIS) militants in Syria, the Sunday Times said.



Syriza's supporters celebrate their party's victory after the general election in Athens yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Greece re-elects Tsipras

Greek Prime Minister-elect Alexis Tsipras claimed a solid victory in national elections yesterday, saying the result gave his Syriza party a new and clear four-year mandate. Speaking to cheering crowds in a central Athens square, a beaming Tsipras said he "felt vindicated" after quitting in August to start on a clean slate with voters after a revolt in his party against a multi-billion-euro bailout with international lenders.

agreed to join a coalition. The latest figures give Syriza 35% of the vote, compared with New Democracy's 28%.

The snap election was called after Syriza lost its majority in August. This followed the signing of an unpopular new financial bailout deal with inter-



national creditors. Turnout in this poll was just over 55%, down from 63% in January and low by Greek standards. Tsipras said his decision to call an early election was vindicated and that he had been given a clear, four-year mandate. He said he would form a government with the nationalist Independent Greeks.

"Together we will continue the struggle we began seven months ago," he said. New Democracy leader Vangelis Meimarakis earlier conceded defeat to Tsipras, saying: "I congratulate him and urge him to create the government which is needed."

Syriza supporters at the party's electoral headquarters in Athens earlier cheered and clapped as exit polls were announced.

The latest projection gives Syriza 144 seats in the 300-seat parliament, with New Democracy on 75. This is only five fewer than Tsipras's thumping victory in January's election, but again leaves him just short of an absolute majority.

The far-right Golden Dawn is set to be the third biggest party, with 7.1% of vote. The BBC's Richard Galpin says this appears to be a much bigger victory than expected, but Tsipras will still face tough choices on the big reforms required for the economy.

In interviews leading up to the election, Mr Tsipras said he had put his country above his party. He said that had he not agreed to the three-year bailout, Greece would probably have had to leave the eurozone.

IAEA chief visits Iran's Parchin nuke site

AFP, Tehran

The head of the UN atomic watchdog, Yukia Amano, yesterday visited Iran's controversial Parchin military site that has been suspected of being used for secret nuclear tests, an official said.

The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which Amano heads, confirmed the trip to Parchin, located east of the capital Tehran where Western intelligence officials allege Iran conducted illicit nuclear activity with possible military dimensions.

Iran has said the accusations -- including that it carried out explosive tests at Parchin -- are groundless and based on malicious information provided by its enemies.

Crises put EU dream at risk

AFP, Brussels

The EU's founding father Jean Monnet wrote in his memoirs that "Europe will be forged in crises" -- but a recent storm of troubles risks tearing the continent apart instead of bringing it together.

From a flood of refugees, to the near-collapse of the euro and the war in Ukraine, the continent's divided leaders have struggled to deal with wave after wave of problems that strike at the heart of the European dream.

If they fail to bridge their differences, officials and analysts warn that the principles forged in a bid to build a new Europe from the ashes of World War II are in jeopardy.

"This is now threatening the heart of Europe and the core of the European project," Guy Verhofstadt, the former prime minister of Belgium who now leads the Liberal group in the European Parliament, told AFP.

The refugee crisis is "deeper than the euro crisis. I think it's a real test -- it's also an opportunity to make a jump forward," he added.

The perfect storm of crises has in recent months brought to the surface divisions that have long been papered over in pursuit of a union of 28 nations and 500 million people, together the world's biggest economy.

A deep rift between eastern and western EU states on migrants has been added to the split between north and south on the eurozone debt crisis.

Instead of solidarity and humanity in dealing with thousands of migrants dying while trying to flee Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, the world has been treated to the unedifying spectacle of EU leaders bickering over asylum quotas amounting to 0.032 percent of the continent's population.

The result is that one of the EU's most cherished ideals -- the Schengen passport-free area, a continent without borders -- is now at risk as countries reintroduce border controls



and build razor-wire fences.

The migration crisis has come on top of a debt crisis in the eurozone that has left some of southern European members economically devastated -- piling misery on the same area that, incidentally, has received most refugees.

While debt-laden Greece finally got a huge bailout after months of bad-tempered negotiations, analysts say many of the single currency's underlying problems remain.

Whichever government emerges from Sunday's Greek elections, the country's colossal debt is probably unsustainable, while broader talks in Brussels on increasing banking union have largely stalled. Add the crisis in Ukraine that has plunged relations with Russia to their lowest point since the Cold War, and the looming threat of a possible British exit from the EU in a referendum due by 2017, and the problems mount.

Monnet -- the Frenchman who became the first head of the European Coal and Steel Community, the forerunner of the EU -- believed that Europe would be the "sum of the solutions adopted for those crises", but solutions are exactly what leaders are failing to provide.

US-trained rebels enter Syria

Regime says Russia a game changer in war on ISIS; ceasefire begins in 3 battlegrounds

AFP, Beirut

Seventy-five Syrian rebels trained to fight jihadists under a beleaguered US programme have crossed from Turkey into northern Syria, a US-backed rebel faction and a monitoring group said yesterday. "Seventy-five new fighters trained in a camp near the Turkish capital entered Aleppo province between Friday night and Saturday morning," Rami Abdel Rahman, director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, told AFP.

Hassan Mustafa, spokesman for the US-backed Division 30 unit to which some of the rebels were deployed, confirmed to AFP that the group had entered Syria.

"Their training in Turkey lasted two months and they went directly to the front lines with Daesh," Mustafa said via the Internet, using an Arabic acronym for the Islamic State group.

Before the fresh batch of fighters, the US-led train-and-equip programme had only managed to vet and train some 60 rebels to

fight ISIS jihadists on the ground. The \$500 million programme run out of Turkey has been fraught with problems.

Shortly after the 54 fighters embedded with Division 30 in July, more than a dozen of them were either killed or kidnapped by Al-Nusra. Report says there are only five or six US-trained fighters on the ground to fight ISIS now.

Meanwhile, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Mualllem yesterday predicted that Russia's increased involvement in his country would prove a game changer in the international campaign against ISIS.

Mualllem, quoted by Syrian media, said Russia's more prominent role would "wreck the plans of all those who have been plotting against Syria and also show up America's lack of a clear strategy" against the jihadists.

On the ground, a ceasefire went into effect yesterday between Syrian pro-government forces and Islamist rebels in three battleground districts, a local official and a monitoring group said.



'I love the Muslims'

Trump tells CNN

CNN, Iowa

Donald Trump on Saturday responded to a question from CNN about whether Muslims pose a danger to the country, saying: "I love the Muslims. I think they're great people."

The US Republican presidential front-runner made the comment after addressing high school students here at their homecoming Saturday night.

During a question-and-answer session with students, Trump was unable to avoid being asked about the latest political controversy dogging his campaign: his decision not to correct a supporter this week who called President Barack Obama a Muslim.

One student told Trump that she considered Muslim-Americans to be an important segment of the country. They asked whether the billionaire businessman would consider putting a Muslim in his Cabinet or on this ticket. "Oh, absolutely," Trump responded. "No problem with that."

At a New Hampshire town hall on Thursday, a supporter stated that Obama was a Muslim and not American -- which Trump did not correct -- and asked the candidate how he plans to "get rid of" Muslim "training camps" in the country. "We're going to be looking at a lot of different things," Trump responded. "You know, a lot of people are saying that and a lot of people are saying that bad things are happening."

Nepal adopts secular charter amid violent protests

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal Sunday adopted a new constitution aimed at bolstering its transformation from a Hindu monarchy to a secular democracy, as violent protests raged against some of the terms of the charter.

Firecrackers went off in celebration in Kathmandu as President Ram Baran Yadav announced the adoption of the constitution, the first to be drafted by elected representatives.

"I announce the presented constitution of Nepal, passed by the Constituent Assembly and authenticated by the chairman of the Constituent Assembly, effective from today, 20 September 2015, before the people of Nepal," he said. The document defines the majority Hindu nation as a secular republic divided into seven federal provinces.

Lawmakers approved the charter on Wednesday despite weeks of violent protests against plans to divide the Himalayan nation of 28 million people into seven provinces.

More than 40 people have been killed in clashes between protesters and police, among them two children and a police officer lynched as he was driven to hospital in an ambulance.

One protester was killed yesterday when police fired into a crowd of people who had defied a curfew in the southern district of Parsa to demonstrate against the charter.

The move to create a new federal structure that will devolve power from the centre has widespread support, but critics say the planned internal borders will leave some historically marginalised groups under-represented in parliament. They include the Madhesi and Tharu ethnic minorities, mainly from Nepal's southern plains along the border with India.

The new constitution is the final stage in a peace process that began when the Maoists laid down their arms in 2006 after a decade-long civil war with the state and turned to politics, winning parliamentary elections two years later and abolishing the monarchy.



Nepalese people light candles yesterday as they celebrate the country's new constitution.

PHOTO: AFP



Pope Francis arrives at Revolution Square in Havana to give his first mass of his visit to Cuba yesterday. Pope Francis greeted massive crowds of fans and Catholic faithful yesterday as he arrived in his popemobile to give mass on Havana's iconic Revolution Square, the highlight of his trip to Cuba. The pontiff's eight-day tour will also take him to the United States.

PHOTO: AFP

Anger as Saudi gets key UN rights post

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The United Nations is coming under fire for handing Saudi Arabia a key human rights role even though the Kingdom has "arguably the worst record in the world" on freedoms for women, minorities and dissidents.

UN Watch, an independent campaigning NGO, has discovered that Faisal bin Hassan Trad (Saudi Arabia's ambassador at the UN in Geneva) has been elected as chair of a panel of independent experts on the UN Human Rights Council.

As head of a five-strong group of diplomats, the influential role would give Trad the power to select applicants from around the world for scores of expert roles in countries where the UN has a mandate on human rights. Such experts are often described as the 'crown jewels' of the HRC, according to UN Watch.

'Scientists make human sperm in the lab'

Human sperm cells have been made in the laboratory for the first time by culturing immature cells taken from the testes of infertile men. The breakthrough promises to help young boys made sterile by cancer treatments and adult men who cannot make their own sperm, scientists have claimed.

The sperm cells made in an artificial "bioreactor" look identical to those produced naturally. The technology could be used in two to four years to help infertile men have their own biological children, according to researchers based at a French national research institute in Lyon.

Scientists have been trying for two decades to find a way of producing human sperm in the test tube (in vitro). But no one has been able to complete the complicated cycles of cell division and development that lead the immature "germ cells" in the male testes to become fully mature sperm cells capable of successfully fertilising eggs.

A collaborative team led by Philippe Durand, scientific director of a biotechnology start-up called Kallistem, now claims to have produced mature human sperm in vitro from immature germ cells taken from the testes of six men who are infertile.

"We have completed spermatogenesis -- the production of mature sperm cells -- in vitro using a bioreactor. We have done it in three different species, rat, monkey and human, which has never been done before," Dr Durand said.

However, other scientists expressed doubts, saying that until the research is published in a peer-reviewed journal it is impossible for the findings to be verified. A study published in 2009 also claimed to have made human sperm cells in the laboratory from tissue derived from the testes, but this had to be retracted and the claims left unverified, Professor Pacey said.