

German police yesterday said they had found the bodies of "probably seven" babies in an apartment in the southern state of Bavaria after being alerted by a local resident. Police are looking for a 45-year-old woman who lived there with her husband for 18 years, and that the couple had three children. But the woman also had four other children from other relationships, it said, adding that she had sought to hide her frequent pregnancies.

Lankan Tamils stage shutdown over prisoners

Sri Lanka's Tamil provinces staged a shutdown yesterday for the first time since the crushing of the Tamil Tiger rebels six years ago protesting at the government's failure to release prisoners jailed over separatist violence. Tamil political and civil society groups organised the shutdown in the island's northern and eastern regions after the government rejected their demands for a universal amnesty, instead releasing 30 prisoners on bail.

Global 'vasectomy-athon' held

Thousands of men around the world are to be sterilised Friday in what organisers dubbed a global "vasectomy-athon", to encourage men to take a bigger role in family planning and combat resistance to the procedure. Some 750 doctors in 25 countries are to perform the procedure on more than 3,000 volunteers to mark World Vasectomy Day, with many operations being provided for free or at discounted rates.



IS 'contained' in Syria, Iraq

Claims Obama; UK says Assad must go

The United States has halted the course of the Islamic State group, President Barack Obama said in remarks broadcast yesterday, calling for a stepped up drive to "completely decapitate" the militants' operations.

The ABC News interview was recorded Thursday at the White House, hours after the start of a major operation by Iraqi Kurdish forces, backed by US-led strikes, to drive IS out of the northern town of Sinjar.

"I don't think they're gaining strength," said Obama. "From the start, our goal has been first to contain, and we have contained them. They have not gained ground in Iraq."

"And in Syria -- they'll come in, they'll leave. But you don't see this systematic march by ISIL across the terrain," he said, using an alternate acronym for IS.

The president warned that regional strife will persist "until we get the Syria political situation resolved."

British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond yesterday said that President Bashar al-Assad "has to go" as part of a transition in Syria, on the eve of the Syrian talks in Vienna.

"Bashar al-Assad has to go as part of the transition in Syria, but we recognise that if there will be a transition he may play a part up to a point in that transition," Hammond said in Prague.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview released yesterday that Russia has no "right" to ask the Syrian president to leave power.

Rohingyas see glimmer of hope

REUTERS, Sittwe



Noor Bagum would have liked to have voted for Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) but, like the majority of Myanmar's persecuted Rohingya Muslim minority, she took no part in the historic election the Nobel laureate won by a landslide.

Stripped of their right to cast ballots by the current government, many Rohingya now hope that, with the NLD able to rule largely on its own, a Suu Kyi-led government will work to restore their lives and many of the rights they have lost.

"I hope that things will get a little bit better," said Noor Bagum, a 28-year-old mother-of-five, whose village was destroyed during violence between Buddhists and Muslims that swept through Myanmar's western Rakhine State in 2012.

Dealing with the Rohingya will be one of the most controversial - and unavoidable - of a long list of issues Suu Kyi will inherit from the current government.

Feted by many in the West for her role as champion of Myanmar's pro-democracy movement during long years of military rule, she has been

criticized overseas, and by some in Myanmar, for saying little about the abuses faced by the group.

When an NLD government takes power in March, she will come under mounting international pressure to take a definitive stance in their defence.

But speaking out for the Rohingya would carry a political cost at home. The group is widely disliked in Myanmar, where they are seen as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh - including by some in Suu Kyi's party. She risks hemorrhaging support by taking up

the cause of the beleaguered minority.

The NLD also faces a powerful local rival - the Arakan National Party (ANP) - that has been accused of stoking anti-Muslim sentiment and has called for the deportation of Rohingya. The ANP won most of the 29 national level seats in Rakhine and took decisive control of the state's regional assembly.

"We'll be damned if we do, and we'll be damned if we don't," said Win Htein, a senior NLD leader.

So far, the NLD has offered little in the way of concrete policy that would tackle

Suu Kyi: From prison to power

AFP, Yangon

After decades of defiance, Myanmar's indomitable democracy champion Aung San Suu Kyi now stands on the cusp of government, an international symbol of resistance in the face of brutal authoritarianism.

Long isolated by the military regime -- including 16 years under house arrest in her crumbling lakeside mansion -- "The Lady" has led her National League for Democracy to a crushing win in Myanmar's fairest-ever polls.

The daughter of independence hero General Aung San, Suu Kyi, 70, has headed non-violent opposition to the country's military rulers for three decades -- a role that has exacted a high personal cost.

Suu Kyi was born on June 19, 1945 in Japanese-occupied Rangoon, now called Yangon.

She spent most of her early years outside of Myanmar, first in India, where her mother was an ambassador, and later at Oxford University, where she met her British husband.

After General Ne Win seized full power in 1962, he forced his own brand of socialism on Myanmar,



turning it from Asia's rice bowl into one of the world's poorest and most isolated countries.

Suu Kyi's elevation into a democracy champion happened almost by accident when she returned in 1988 to nurse her dying mother.

Soon afterwards, at least 3,000 people were killed when the military crushed protests against its authoritarian rule. The bloodshed was the catalyst for Suu Kyi. A charismatic orator, she found herself in a leading role in the burgeoning pro-democracy movement, delivering speeches to crowds of hundreds of thousands as she led her NLD to a 1990 election victory.

But the generals were not prepared to give up power, ignoring the result and confining her to her home in Yangon, where she would live for 16 of the next 20 years.

The junta offered to end her imprisonment at any time if she left the country for good but Suu Kyi refused. That decision meant not seeing her husband before his death from cancer in 1999, and missing her two sons growing up.

The military eventually granted her freedom in 2010. She entered parliament two years later after the party swept a series of by-elections.

No greetings to Suu Kyi from China yet

AFP, Beijing

China on Thursday avoided congratulating Myanmar democracy champion Aung San Suu Kyi for her party's landslide election victory which has the potential to strain ties with Beijing.

Beijing has for decades been close to neighbouring Myanmar's authoritarian military leaders, who voters overwhelmingly rejected in historic polls.

US President Barack Obama was quick to offer congratulations to Suu Kyi, but a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman was circumspect.

"China will continue to extend its assistance and continue with its friendship and all-around mutually beneficial cooperation" with Myanmar, Hong Lei said following the victory.

Asked if Beijing had extended congratulations to Suu Kyi, Hong did not answer directly.

"We sincerely wish that Myanmar can have political stability and that it can achieve national development," he added at a regular briefing.

Myanmar is already seen as drifting away from its former dependence on Beijing and towards the US since launching moves towards civilian rule in 2011 which saw sanctions lifted.

China has taken a pragmatic approach to Suu Kyi since it became clear that the party she leads would likely take power.

The ruling Communist Party invited her for a China visit in June, where she met President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People, the traditional greeting place for foreign leaders.

Kurds snatch Sinjar from IS

Claims leader, says it is now part of Kurdistan; deadly blasts hit Baghdad

SINJAR, Iraq

Iraqi Kurdish leader Massud Barzani announced the "liberation" of Sinjar from the Islamic State group yesterday in an assault backed by US-led strikes that cut a key jihadist supply line with Syria.

The operation was led by the Iraqi autonomous Kurdish region's peshmerga forces and also involved fighters from the Yazidi minority, a local Kurdish-speaking community targeted in a brutal IS campaign of massacres, enslavement and rape.

The success of the Sinjar drive is the latest sign that IS, which won a series of victories in a stunningly rapid offensive in Iraq last year, is now on the defensive.

"I am here to announce the liberation of Sinjar," Barzani, the president of Iraqi Kurdistan, told a news conference near the northern town.

Barzani's remarks also made clear that political conflict over Sinjar would likely follow the military battle for the town.

"Sinjar was liberated by the blood of the peshmerga and became part of Kurdistan," Barzani said.

Baghdad, which has long opposed Kurdistan's desire to incorporate a swathe of disputed northern territory, is unlikely to welcome the idea of Sinjar becoming part of the Kurdish region.

Yesterday morning, hundreds of Kurdish fighters, dressed in camouflage uniforms and armed with assault rifles and machineguns, moved into the town on foot, an AFP journalist reported.



Massud Barzani

They entered carrying the autonomous Kurdish region's flag, firing in the air and shouting "Long live the peshmerga!" and "Long live Kurdistan!"

Inside Sinjar, many houses and shops, a petrol garage and the local government headquarters had been destroyed.

The huge task remains of clearing Sinjar of bombs planted by IS remains, and there is also the possibility of holdout jihadist fighters, who have kept up attacks even after other areas in Iraq were said to have been retaken.

On Thursday, Kurdish forces cut the key highway that links IS-held areas in Iraq and Syria.

IS overran Sinjar in August last year, forcing thousands of Yazidis to flee to the mountains overlooking the town, where they were trapped by the jihadists.

The United Nations has described the attack on the Yazidis as a possible genocide, and on Thursday the US Holocaust Memorial Museum echoed that assessment in a report detailing allegations of rape, torture and murder by IS against the minority.

Aiding the Yazidis, whose unique faith IS considers heretical, was one of Washington's main justifications for starting its air campaign against the jihadists last year.

Meanwhile, attacks targeting Shias in Baghdad, including a suicide bombing at a funeral in a mosque, killed at least 19 people yesterday, security and medical officials said.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attacks, but suicide bombings are a tactic used exclusively by Sunni extremists in Iraq, including the Islamic State jihadist group, who consider Shias to be heretics.

NARENDRA MODI'S UK VISIT Indian PM charms Wembley crowds

AGENCIES

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday received a rock-star welcome at Britain's biggest stadium, packed with some 60,000 people noisily celebrating British-Indian ties and India's growing international clout.

Members of Britain's large Indian diaspora waved India's tricolour flag, wore Modi masks and chanted Modi's name between blasts of Indian pop music that had the crowd dancing in the aisles of Wembley Stadium.

The event is designed to celebrate the Indian diaspora's contribution to the UK economy, and the Indian PM was introduced by PM David Cameron.

Earlier, Modi had lunch with the Queen, and the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge announced they would make their first visit to India.

His three-day visit is the first to the UK by an Indian PM in a decade.

Cameron said that the UK-India relationship was "about our potential", and said both countries were "united by the scale of our ambition". The crowds applauded when he said it would not be long before there was a British Indian prime minister in Downing Street.

The Indian prime minister's visit to the UK is seen as highly significant, coming three weeks after Chinese leader Xi Jinping also visited. Modi has described India's relationship with the UK as being of "immense importance", but his appearances have also attracted protest over allegations of religious persecution and a reduction in civil liberties since he came to power.

The move came a day after European Union President Donald Tusk warned that Schengen -- one of the bloc's most important achievements -- was on the brink of collapse as a result of fallout from the migration crisis.

Austria's decision is the latest in a series of tough measures taken by countries to tackle the continent's worst migration crisis since World War II.

Earlier this week, Sweden -- a preferred destination for migrants -- reinstated temporary border controls, while Slovenia rolled out razor wire along its frontier with non-Schengen member Croatia.

Fellow bloc member Hungary already sealed its southern border with razor wire last month, diverting the influx toward Slovenia.

Meanwhile, the UN yesterday said more than 800,000 migrants and refugees have crossed the Mediterranean to Europe this year.

Since January, 806,000 people have made the perilous sea journey to Europe, with some 660,700 of them arriving in Greece and 142,400 landing in Italy, new figures from the UN refugee agency showed.

Queen Elizabeth II meets India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Buckingham Palace in central London yesterday. Trade deals worth £9 billion (12.7 billion euros, \$13.7 billion) will be announced during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Britain, David Cameron said Thursday, as Modi indicated he wanted the UK to stay in the EU.



No, you can't distort history
Holocaust-denying 'Nazi grandma' jailed in Germany

AFP, Berlin

A German court has sentenced an 87-year-old grandmother to 10 months in jail for Holocaust denial after a trial in which she insisted that Auschwitz was "not historically proven" to be a death camp.

Haverbeck is a notorious extremist who was once chairwoman of a far-right training centre shut down in 2008 for spreading Nazi propaganda.

Haverbeck was dragged back into court after she went on television in April to declare that "the Holocaust is the biggest and most sustainable lie in history".

Unapologetic for her comment, she had told the court cheerfully, "yes I said that indeed", according to media reports.

Haverbeck went as far as to challenge the court to prove that Auschwitz was a death camp, prompting ruling magistrate Björn Joensson to say "it is pointless holding a debate with someone who can't accept any facts".

"She is a lost cause," he added.

Some 1.1 million people, most of them European Jews, perished between 1940 and 1945 in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp before it was liberated by Soviet forces.