

NEWSIN brief

Coal mine fire in China kills 21

AFP, Shanghai

At least 21 people died in a fire at a mine operated by northeast China's biggest state-owned coal company, state media reported yesterday, the latest accident in the country's trouble-plagued resources sector. The fire broke out late Friday evening at a mine operated by state giant Longmay Mining Holding Group in Heilongjiang province's Jixi city, said the Xinhua news agency, which earlier reported 22 miners were trapped.

Lost Holocaust trove found in Budapest

AFP, Budapest

A vast and historically valuable trove of Holocaust-era documents, long thought destroyed during World War II, has been found hidden in a wall cavity by a couple renovating their Budapest apartment. The haul of 6,300 documents are from a 1944 census that was a precursor to the intended liquidation of the Hungarian capital's 200,000 Jews in Nazi death camps.

Zuckerberg to take time off from FB

AFP, San Francisco

Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg announced on Friday that he will take two months paternity leave after his wife gives birth to their first child. "This is a very personal decision, and I've decided to take two months of paternity leave when our daughter arrives," Zuckerberg said in a post on his Facebook page.

N Zealand chopper crash kills seven

AFP, Wellington

Two Australian and four British tourists, along with their pilot, were killed when their helicopter crashed into a heavily crevassed glacier in New Zealand during bad weather on Saturday, police said. The sightseeing helicopter plunged into the Fox Glacier, a popular tourist site on the west coast of the South Island, with weather conditions reported to be heavily overcast and raining at the time.

4 Israelis stabbed in 'terror' attack

AFP, Jerusalem

Four Israelis were stabbed and wounded, one seriously, in the southern city of Kiryat Gat yesterday in what police described as a terrorist attack. Security forces were searching for at least one attacker who had fled the scene. A wave of violence has left 86 Palestinians dead -- many of them alleged assailants -- as well as 15 Israelis, an American and an Eritrean.

US polls settled by 'drawing straws'

BBC ONLINE

A Democrat has won a Mississippi House race by drawing a longer straw, an official way to break a tie in a legislative election for the state. Democrat Bo Eaton met Republican Mark Tullos to draw straws and Tullos drew the shorter one. Eaton's fateful grasp of the longer straw gave him the victory, keeping Republicans from having a supermajority in the state house. Each candidate had received 4,589 votes in the legislative election for the House seat. Tullos, not admitting defeat, filed an appeal on Friday. Eaton, a farmer, was excited about his win. Tullos apparently left the room quickly and did not show emotion. Eaton, a 20-year incumbent, had said he did not approve of the straw-drawing, but he would accept the results. Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant presided over the short straw-drawing ceremony. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 24 states legally decide the outcome of tied legislative elections by drawing straws or flipping coins. Similar cases have happened in New Mexico and Alaska, using a coin toss. Connecticut decided in 2007 to eliminate chance games for breaking ties, a year after a coin toss determined a state house election.



(From left, clockwise) Belgian soldiers and a police officer check documents of a woman in a shopping street in central Brussels; a journalist interviews a man as soldier patrols a street; a person walks near a closed entrance of the Shuman Station Railways in Brussels yesterday. Belgium yesterday raised the alert status for its capital Brussels to the highest level, shutting the metro and warning the public to avoid crowds because of a "serious and imminent" threat of an attack.

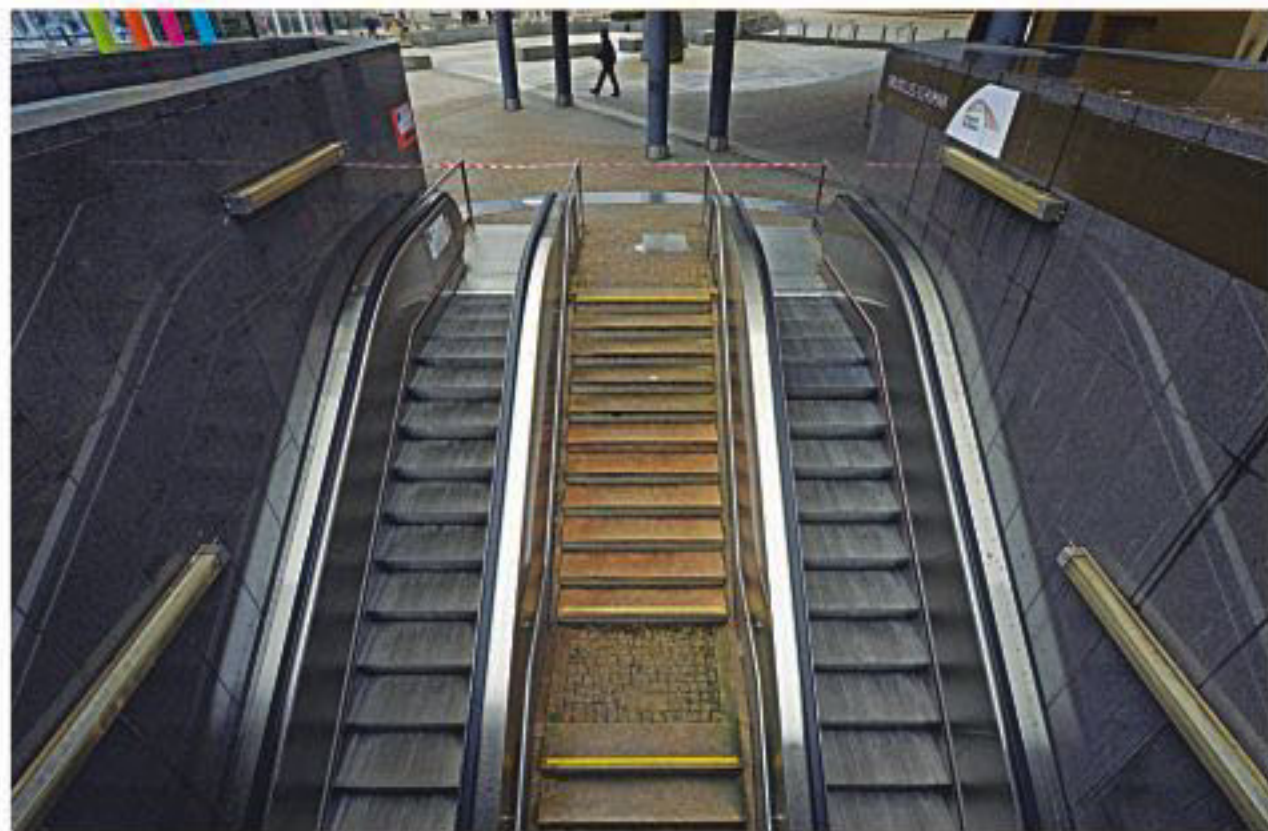


PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

Mali hunts suspects after hotel siege

World leaders condemn attack

AFP, Bamako

Investigators in Mali were yesterday hunting at least three people suspected of links to the jihadist siege at a luxury hotel in the capital that left at least 19 people dead.

The government has declared a state of emergency after the bloody nine-hour hostage-taking at the Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako on Friday, exactly a week after the Paris massacre.

The Al-Murabitoun group, an al-Qaeda affiliate led by notorious one-eyed Algerian militant Mokhtar Belmokhtar, nicknamed the "Uncatchable" or "Mr Marlboro", claimed the attack.

Gunmen went on the rampage through the hotel from the early morning, shooting in the corridors and taking 170 guests and staff hostage, many of them foreigners. The assault, which ended when Malian and international troops stormed the hotel, left 19 people dead as well as two attackers, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita said.

The victims included several Russians, three Chinese, two Belgians, an American and a Senegalese.

A Malian military source had said earlier there were at least 27 dead, while at least "three terrorists had been killed or blown themselves up."

US President Barack Obama and his Russian and Chinese counterparts Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping all condemned the attack.

Russia pounds IS in Syria

Beirut re-routes flights as air strikes, missiles rain down on militants

AGENCIES

Russia has bombed the Islamic State group in the heaviest strikes in eastern Syria since the war began, as Moscow's military manoeuvres in the Mediterranean forced Lebanon to reroute flights.

Russian and Syrian warplanes carried out at least 70 strikes in eastern Deir Ezzor province on Friday, killing at least 36 people, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The Britain-based group said the raids hit several cities and towns in the province, as well as three oilfields, and were the heaviest bombardment of the region since the conflict began in March 2011.

The Russian military said it fired 18 cruise missiles on Friday, destroying seven "Islamist" targets in Raqqa, Idlib and Aleppo provinces. The long-range missiles were launched from Caspian Sea warships.

In four days of heavy bombing against IS, Russia's defence ministry said, more than 100 cruise missiles

were launched and more than 800 "terrorist" targets destroyed in Syria.

In a Russian defence ministry video, soldiers can be seen writing messages on bombs, which would be used against IS militants, before loading them onto the aircraft - phrases like: "This is revenge for our dead" and "This is for Paris".

WAR ON TERROR

According to the Observatory, Russia's strikes have killed more than 1,300 people since they began, a third of them civilians.

But President Vladimir Putin said the current level of attacks was not enough to defeat so-called Islamic State.

Putin yesterday said global cooperation was needed to confront terrorism in the wake of an Islamist militant attack targeting foreigners in a luxury hotel in Mali that killed 19 people.

Putin sent a telegram of condolences to Mali President Keita and said "the widest international cooperation" was

needed to confront global terrorism, according to a statement by the Kremlin.

On Tuesday, Putin promised to hunt down Islamist militants responsible for blowing up a Russian airliner over Egypt on Oct. 31 as well as intensified air strikes against militants in Syria, after the Kremlin concluded a bomb had destroyed the plane, killing 224 people.

Russia's military involvement in Syria has stirred tensions with Turkey, which backs the uprising against Assad.

And yesterday, flights in and out of Lebanon were being forced to take longer routes, with some airlines cancelling services, after Moscow requested flights avoid a portion of airspace over the Mediterranean, a Lebanese minister said. There was no confirmation from Moscow of the request, but a Lebanese airport official later said that departing flights would be directed to first fly south over Sidon and Sarafand to "keep them away from the perimeter of the manoeuvres."

Asean leaders meet with fight on terror in focus

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Asia-Pacific leaders meeting in Malaysia yesterday condemned the string of Islamic extremist attacks from Paris to Mali, urging an international effort to fight the scourge.

Prime Minister Najib Razak of Muslim-majority Malaysia opened a fresh round of summitry by railing against the ideological mantle claimed by Islamic militants.

"The perpetrators of these cowardly and barbaric acts do not represent any race, religion or creed," he told fellow Southeast Asian leaders. "They are terrorists."

US President Barack Obama and his counterparts are meeting in the Malaysian capital for round two in a week of back-to-back regional meetings.

Obama, America's self-styled "Pacific president", has been frustrated to see his Asia tour -- aimed at highlighting growing trade and investment ties -- overshadowed by the jihadist attacks on the other side of the world.

But his new 12-country Trans Pacific Partnership trade pact is on the agenda this

weekend, with hopes high of prodding signatory countries to ratify the deal at home.

Obama sought to reassure US allies who are concerned the deal may not become law before he leaves office in early 2017.

Unease over China's push to expand tiny atolls into fully-fledged islands to press its disputed maritime claims also looms over the talks.

China insists on sovereignty over virtually all the strategic and resource-endowed South China Sea, which also is claimed in part by a handful of other countries.

Southeast Asian foreign ministers who met Friday in Kuala Lumpur issued a joint statement saying they were "seriously concerned" over the situation.

In Kuala Lumpur, Southeast Asia leaders will declare the establishment on Sunday of an "ASEAN Economic Community" (AEC), inspired by Europe.

Asean leaders yesterday signed a new convention against human trafficking, reaffirming past pledges to fight a scourge that activists say thrives due to corruption and inaction.



PHOTO: AFP

Macedonian policemen help a migrant on a wheelchair to cross a railway track after crossing the Greek-Macedonian border near Gevgelija yesterday. Other migrants are seen protesting on the background. Serbia and Macedonia, which lie on the main migrant route to northern Europe, have said they would only accept war refugees barring all others.

Israel shuts second Hebron radio station

AFP, Hebron

Israeli forces Saturday raided and shut down a Palestinian radio station accused of incitement in the West Bank city of Hebron, the army said, in the second such case this month.

Also in the flashpoint city, Israeli police said a woman acting suspiciously and allegedly in possession of a knife was arrested.

Soldiers entered the offices of Al-Khalil radio overnight and handed the station a six-month order to close, said Ezz Haddad, its head of programming.

Earlier this month, Israeli forces raided the offices of Al-Hurria radio station, also in Hebron, forcing it to close for six months.

The wave of violence, much of which has been focused in and around Hebron, has left 86 dead on the Palestinian side including an Arab Israeli, as well as 15 Israelis, an American and an Eritrean.

Rights groups have accused Israel of using inappropriate force on protesters.

Earlier this week, Spain issued an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over a deadly 2010 Gaza flotilla raid. He now can be arrested in Spain if he steps foot in the country.

In the 2010 incident, a group of human rights activists boarded several aid ships to try and break an Israeli naval blockade of the Gaza Strip, the Jerusalem Post reports. Israel's navy was able to stop several of the ships without incident, but its commandos were attacked when boarding the Mavi Marmara, leaving 10 activists dead in an ensuing gun battle, said the Israeli outlet.

COMMENT ON REGISTRATION FOR MUSLIMS IN US Trump angers friends and foes

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump's support for registering US Muslims in a database drew criticism Friday from rival Republicans and Democratic presidential frontrunner Hillary Clinton, amid bursts of controversial rhetoric from GOP candidates.

Trump, leading the polls for the Republican nomination, has made several belligerent remarks about Muslims and Syrian refugees in the wake of last week's attacks in Paris claimed by the Islamic State extremist group.

Trump was asked by NBC News on Thursday whether he would support creating a database system to track Muslims.

"I would certainly implement that. Absolutely," Trump told the network at a campaign stop in Iowa.

Trump was later asked whether there was a difference between requiring Muslims to register today and Jews registering with Germany's Nazis in the 1930s.

"You tell me," Trump responded.

Clinton slammed Trump's remarks as "shocking rhetoric."

"It should be denounced by all seeking to lead this country," she wrote on Twitter.

Republican candidate Jeb Bush, who has suggested Christian refugees should be prioritised over Muslims, laid into Trump,

IS 'aggressively pursuing for chem weapons'

say Iraqi, US officials

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

IS is "aggressively pursuing the development of chemical weapons", creating a team dedicated to research and experiments, according to Iraqi and US intelligence officials.

Iraqi officials have raised concerns that a large area controlled by extremists, since the group overran parts of Iraq and Syria last year, has left authorities largely in the dark about IS activities.

Hakim al-Zamili, the head of the Iraqi parliament's security and defence committee said: "Daesh [IS] is working very seriously to reach production of chemical weapons, particularly nerve gas. That would threaten not just Iraq but the whole world."

It also believed the group are working in conjunction with scientists in Iraq and Syria to create more sophisticated weapons.

US intelligence officials, however, told AP they do not believe IS is capable of creating more developed weapons such as nerve gas, most suited for terrorist attacks on civilian targets.

So far the group are only known to have used mustard gas during violence in Iraq and Syria, which is usually not lethal.

A European official with knowledge of the militant group added that, at present, even IS's production of mustard gas was in small quantities and of low quality.

Despite this, Iraq's military distributed gas masks to troops deployed west and north of Baghdad over the Summer, amidst fears Isis may expand their weapons use, a general told AP.

On Thursday, the French prime minister warned IS could arm itself with biological and chemical weapons in future terror attacks on Europe.



"I didn't suggest a database -- a reporter did," Trump tweeted to his five million followers.

Ben Carson, a top Republican presidential contender, pushed back against Trump.

"If we're just going to pick out a particular group of people based on their religion, based on their race... that's setting a dangerous precedent," he told reporters in New Hampshire.

Carson made his own controversial comments after the Paris attacks, including Thursday when he equated the threat of extremists slipping into the country as refugees with the threat of a "rabid dog."