

NEWSIN brief

Afghan Taliban names new political head

AFP, Kandahar

The Afghan Taliban have named a new head for their political office in Qatar, with a militant source telling AFP yesterday he is a supporter of peace talks with Kabul. Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, a former anti-Soviet fighter, and his deputy Abdul Salam Hanafi were appointed by the insurgents' leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour, a member of the Quetta Shura ruling council said.

Pakistani jailed for Facebook 'hate speech'

AFP, Lahore

A Pakistani anti-terrorism court has jailed a Shia Muslim for 13 years after he posted what it deemed sectarian hate speech on Facebook, officials said yesterday. Saqlain Haidar, 32, who ran a small hotel in Chiniot district south of Islamabad, was also fined 250,000 rupees for "posting hateful material against companions of the Prophet of Islam on Facebook", an official of the Counter Terrorism Department told AFP.

Mali mourns hotel attack victims

AFP, Bamako

Mali began three days of national mourning yesterday for the victims of a jihadist siege at a luxury hotel that left at least 19 dead, with neighbouring Senegal, Mauritania and Guinea joining in solidarity. "The investigation is advancing," said prosecutor Boubacar Sidiki Samake, who is in charge of the anti-terrorist probe.

Four rebels killed in Indian Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Four suspected rebels and a soldier were killed in three separate clashes yesterday in Indian-administered Kashmir, authorities said. Government forces acting on a tip-off trapped three suspected insurgents in an alley and killed them near the town of Ashmuqam, 80 kilometres (50 miles) south of the main city of Srinagar.

Putin eases ban on nuke cooperation with Iran

AFP, Moscow

President Vladimir Putin yesterday eased restrictions on Russian companies working on Iranian enrichment sites as he travelled to Tehran for his first visit since 2007. A decree Putin signed yesterday enables Russian firms to help modify centrifuges at the Fordo enrichment site and help Tehran redesign its Arak heavy water reactor.

Syria war linked to climate change

Says Prince Charles

AFP, London

Britain's Prince Charles, who is to give a speech at the start of the UN climate summit in Paris next week, said in an interview on yesterday that the war in Syria could be linked to global warming.

"There's very good evidence indeed that one of the major reasons for this horror in Syria, funnily enough, was a drought that lasted for about five or six years," Charles told Sky News.

He said the drought meant that "huge numbers of people in the end had to leave the land".

"Some of us were saying 20 years ago that if we didn't tackle these issues, you would see ever greater conflict over scarce resources," he said.

Charles also said there was "a real possibility of nature's bank going bust" -- just as financial giants did in the 2008 crisis -- and warned a deal on cutting emissions would be "very difficult".

"Do we really have to face catastrophes and chaos before we understand that real action needs to be taken?" said the 67-year-old heir to the throne, a longtime staunch defender of the environment.

Charles referred back to the Copenhagen summit which he attended in 2009, the last time countries sought to craft a universal climate pact and failed.



Members of a police bomb disposal squad wearing blast protection equipments prepare to work near the site of Yasukuni shrine in Tokyo yesterday. A suspected explosive device damaged a bathroom of the shrine, but no one at the controversial war memorial was hurt. The incident came as Japanese authorities were beefing up security in the capital after the Paris attacks.

PHOTO: REUTERS

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Argentina elects pro-market Macri

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina, in a stinging repudiation of outgoing leftist President Cristina Kirchner, elected a pro-market government president to take the helm of Latin America's third-biggest economy.

Conservative president-elect Mauricio Macri, fresh from Sunday's run-off election win, promised a "marvelous" new era was starting for his country, beleaguered by years of economic instability.

A former football executive and favourite candidate of big businesses and foreign investors, Macri is expected to be Argentina's most economically liberal leader since the 1990s.

"This is a historic day, a change of era which is going to be marvelous," a beaming Macri told cheering supporters after his leftist rival Daniel Scioli conceded defeat.

"We cannot waste time on revenge or score-settling," he said late Sunday. Shortly afterwards he swung his hips, dancing Argentine "cumbia" to deafening music.

Macri and Scioli fought a tense battle for votes in a country largely weary after 12 years under leftist leader Cristina Kirchner and her predecessor and late husband Nestor Kirchner.

Breaking with 12 years of leftist rule, Macri has vowed to ease foreign trade and dollar restrictions.

Celebrating on Sunday, he said it was time "to build an Argentina with zero poverty, defeat drug-trafficking and strengthen democracy" in the country.



France, Britain to step up fight against IS

Hollande, Cameron agree to increase co-operation on sharing intel, airline records

AGENCIES

President Francois Hollande received strong backing from British Prime Minister David Cameron yesterday as global efforts to crush Islamic State gathered speed in the wake of the Paris attacks.

Speaking before he also meets the US, Russian and German leaders in the coming days, Hollande said Britain and France had a "joint obligation" to strike at the jihadist group.

Cameron had earlier laid a wreath at the Bataclan concert hall where 90 people were killed on November 13.

The two leaders agreed to step up co-operation on countering international terrorism, including increased data-sharing and sharing of airline records, reports BBC.

"I firmly support the action President Hollande has taken to strike ISIL in Syria," Cameron said after talks in Paris, using another acronym for IS.

"It's my firm conviction that Britain

should do so too," he added.

Cameron has said he will make his case to the British parliament in the coming days about joining air strikes on Syria, reports AFP.

While Britain has joined US-led coalition strikes on IS in Iraq, it has so far held back from hitting targets in Syria, where the jihadists also hold large swaths of territory.

The British leader also said he had offered France the use of a strategically located British airbase in Cyprus, RAF Akrotiri, to facilitate air strikes, and assistance with refuelling French jets.

Hollande, who has said France is in a "war" against the jihadists, is embarking on what could be a defining week of his three-year-old presidency.

The focus switches to Moscow on Thursday where he will meet President Vladimir Putin, who has pledged to work more closely with the West against IS following the Paris attacks and the downing of a Russian passenger jet over Egypt last month.

WAR ON TERROR

MYANMAR LANDSLIDE

Hope fades for 100 missing miners

REUTERS, Yangon

Hopes faded yesterday that any of 100 people still missing would be found alive two days after a landslide near a jade mine in northern Myanmar smashed into a makeshift settlement, burying mine workers as they slept.

Rescue workers had recovered 104 bodies when the search was suspended on Sunday night, state newspaper the Global New Light of Myanmar reported yesterday.

It is unclear what caused a mountain of mining debris to give way early on Saturday in Hpakant, a mountainous area in northern Kachin State that produces some of the world's highest-quality jade.

The mines and soil dump sites are hazardous and deaths among workers picking through the slag piles for jade are common. An estimated 100 people are still missing, according to officials in the region, and the death toll was expected to rise as the search resumed yesterday, said Tin Swe Myint, head of the Hpakant Township Administration Department.

"We just don't know how many people exactly were buried since we don't have any data on people living there," he told Reuters by telephone on Sunday.

Workers, many of them migrants from elsewhere in Myanmar, toil long hours in dangerous conditions searching for the precious stones.



Nepalese activists and hospital patients rally against the block on humanitarian supplies at the Nepal-India border, in Kathmandu yesterday. Nepal decided to clear key highways and border points blockaded by Indian-origin Madhesis for over two-months, affecting the supply of essential goods to the land-locked country.

PHOTO: AFP

Teen shot dead after Jerusalem stabbing

Israel bars Palestinians from settlement bloc after attack

AFP, Jerusalem

Two teenage Palestinian girls stabbed and lightly wounded an elderly man in Jerusalem yesterday before police opened fire killing one of them in the latest in almost two months of violence.

The attack was the first in Jerusalem in nearly two weeks after the majority of attacks targeting Israelis had shifted to the southern West Bank, where the army yesterday barred Palestinians from entering a large bloc of Jewish settlements.

The girls aged 14 and 16 used scissors to stab the 70-year-old man near the Mahane Yehuda market in the centre of Jerusalem, police said.

The victim was later identified as a Palestinian from the West Bank, possibly mistaken for an Israeli Jew.

He was admitted to hospital with minor injuries to the head and back, the Hadassah hospital said.

Police spokeswoman Luba Samri said "an officer who observed the event approached, fired accurately and neutralised the terrorists."

The 16-year-old was killed, the 14-year-old seriously wounded.

A 27-year-old Israeli security guard was also taken to hospital with an injury to his hand, apparently from shrapnel caused by the gunshots, a Hadassah spokeswoman said.

Mahane Yehuda is Jerusalem's best known market and a popular tourist attraction.

Meanwhile in the northern West Bank, a motorist hit an Israeli near the Shavei Shomron settlement in what may have been a deliberate attack, the army said.

"The civilian is lightly wounded and being evacuated to a hospital for further medical treatment. Forces are currently in pursuit of the driver who fled the scene," a statement said.

In the southern West Bank, the army prohibited Palestinians from entering 24 Jewish settlements after an Israeli woman was stabbed to death at a road junction in the area on Sunday.

Yesterday's restriction applied to the 22 settlements in the Gush Etzion settlement bloc, as well as the nearby settle-



Security forces remove the body of a Palestinian girl who was shot dead after she carried out a stabbing attack near Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

ment towns of Efrat and Beitar Illit, where an estimated 2,000 Palestinians work.

Gush Etzion, Efrat and Beitar Illit are home to some 92,000 Israelis.

Palestinians were being allowed to travel on the area's roads but not enter the settlements, which are gated and guarded, a military spokeswoman told AFP, without being able to say how long the measure would be in place.

16 injured in New Orleans park gunfight

AFP, Washington

Sixteen people were injured in New Orleans late Sunday when gunshots rang out during a melee at a city playground where hundreds had gathered to film a music video, police said.

The injuries in the city's Ninth Ward neighborhood were from gunshots as well as other unspecified causes, the city's mayor and police chief said during a press conference near the scene of the violence.

They said police had been on their way to disband the impromptu gathering, which was not permitted, when two or more suspects -- for unknown reasons -- began shooting in the crowd.

Police chief Michael Harrison, who told reporters that the wounded were taken to three area hospitals, issued an urgent appeal for witnesses to come forward.

"This is a classic case where we need citizens' help," Harrison said.

"People know who did this, people were out here. We need them to come forward and tell us who did this so that we can bring them to justice," the police chief said.

"Innocent people were shot tonight. We're not going to stand for it."

New Orleans' Mayor Mitch Landrieu expressed outrage over the disregard for life shown by the shooters.

"This is an infuriating circumstance... that people in this city continue to threaten the lives of innocent folks that are around," Landrieu said.

"It's just insane to put the lives of this many innocent people at risk," he said.

"It's completely unnecessary and it's got to stop."

ANTI-MUSLIM CRIME SOARS IN BRITAIN BY 300 PERCENT

AFP, London

Anti-Muslim hate crimes rose 300 percent in Britain in the week following the coordinated attacks in Paris, according to figures published yesterday.

A "vast and overwhelming majority" of the 115 attacks were against Muslim women and girls aged between 14 and 45 who were wearing traditional Islamic dress, according to the findings reported in The Independent newspaper.

The perpetrators were mainly white males aged between 15 and 35, according to the report, which noted that the true numbers of attacks were likely much larger than those reported.

The figures come from a report to a government working group on anti-Muslim hate compiled by Tell Mama, a helpline that records incidents of physical and verbal attacks on mosques and Muslims.

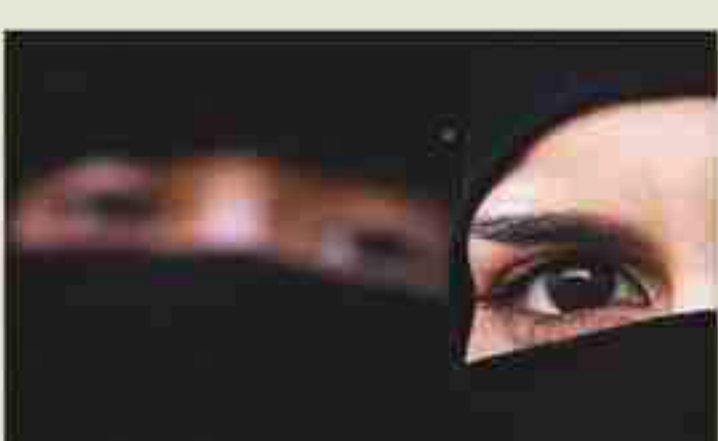
A large number of the attacks occurred in public places such as buses and trains.

"Many of the victims have suggested that no one came to their assistance or even consoled them, meaning that they felt victimised, embarrassed, alone and angry about what had taken place against them."

"Sixteen of the victims even mentioned that they would be fearful of going out in the future and that the experiences had affected their confidence."

The rise in attacks is in line with a similar increase that happened after the murder in south London of British soldier Lee Rigby by Muslim extremists in 2013, according to the report.

Islamophobic and anti-Semitic incidents had already risen sharply before the attacks in Paris, by 70.7 percent and 93.4 percent respectively in the year to July 2015 compared to the previous 12-month period, according to police figures.



ASEAN SUMMIT

UN urges Australia to rethink on asylum

BBC ONLINE

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has asked Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to rethink the country's border security policy.

Ban voiced his concerns about Operation Sovereign Borders on the sidelines of the Association of Southeast Nations (Asean) summit.

Australia sends asylum seekers to offshore detention centres and turns away boats carrying them.

A spokesperson for Turnbull declined to comment.

According to a UN statement, Ban and Turnbull discussed several topics, including climate change and Syria.

Ban addressed the topic of refugees using very direct language, expressing "concern" and asking that Turnbull "reconsider" the policy.

"Noting Australia's longstanding commitment to refugee resettlement, the Secretary General appealed to the prime minister to share responsibilities," the statement said.

The comments followed reports the Australian Navy intercepted a suspected asylum-seeker boat near Christmas Island last Friday. The immigration department did not comment on the incident.

The last documented asylum-seeker boat arrival to Australia was in 2014, when a group of 157 Tamil asylum seekers was intercepted north of Christmas Island.