5 killed in Myanmar military plane crash

AFP, Naypyidaw

All five crew died when a Myanmar air force plane crashed in the capital Naypyidaw yesterday, bursting into flames soon after take off and smashing into a nearby field, the military said. The Beechcraft passenger plane took off from the Naypyidaw airfield in the mid-morning on a routine patrol, but burst into flames soon after leaving the runway, according to an airport official.



French FM bows out

AFP, Paris

France's veteran Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius bowed out of government yesterday after a threedecade career. Fabius holds the distinction of being France's youngest ever prime minister, a post he took up at 37. As foreign minister, Fabius helped to negotiate a complex climate deal, the Iran nuclear deal, as well as dealing with the thorny dossiers of the Syria conflict. He is expected to take up a position as head of France's Constitutional Court.

Suicide attacks kill 6 in Cameroon

AFP, Yaoundé

At least six civilians were killed and over 30 injured yesterday in a double suicide attack in Cameroon's northern border region with Nigeria, which is regularly attacked by Boko Haram fighters, security sources said. The attackers, who were also killed, were both female, said a source.

Young Palestinian killed by Israeli fire

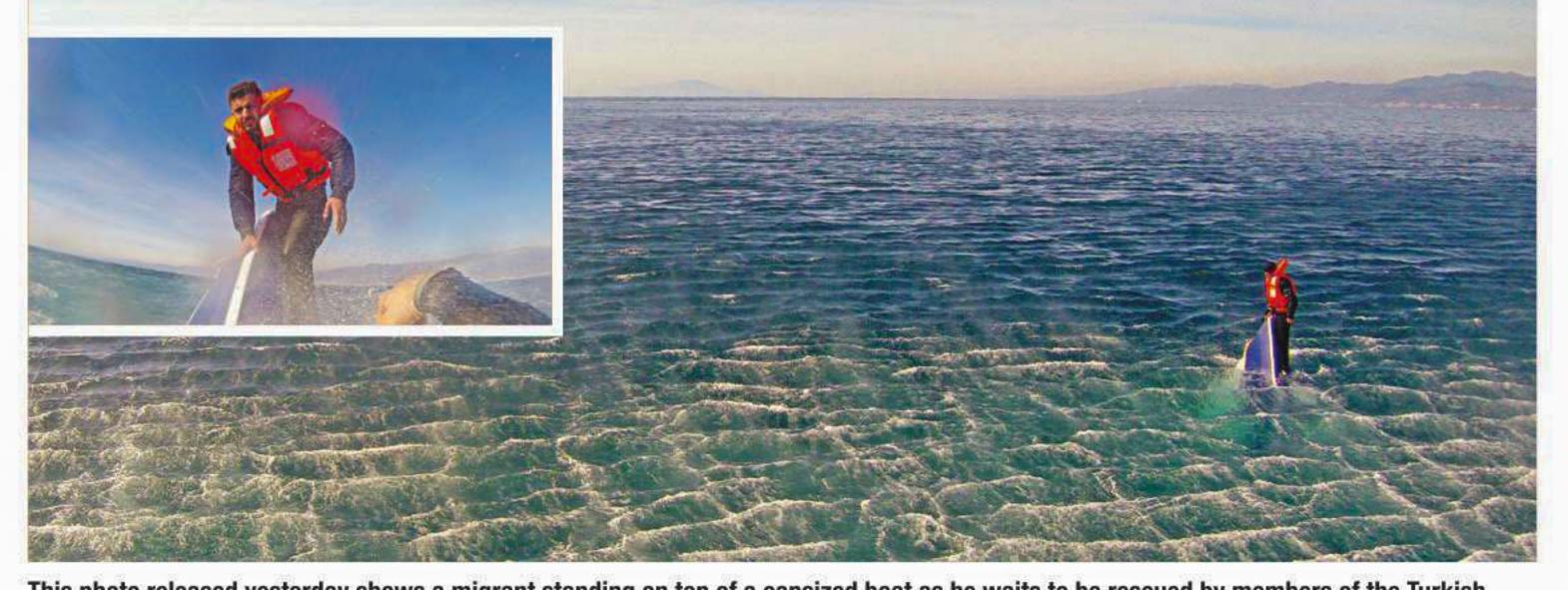
AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli fire killed a Palestinian youth during clashes near Hebron in the occupied West Bank yesterday, the Palestinian health ministry said. A wave of violence that erupted in October has claimed the lives of 166 Palestinians, 26 Israelis, a US national, an Eritrean and a Sudanese.

China confirms first imported Zika case

AFP, Beijing

China confirmed its first imported case of Zika late Tuesday, Xinhua reported, as fears mount over the fastspreading virus that has been linked to severe birth defects mostly in Latin America. Few cases of the mosquito-borne illness have been reported in Asia, but the World Health Organization has declared a global health emergency to combat Zika as cases spread elsewhere.



This photo released yesterday shows a migrant standing on top of a capsized boat as he waits to be rescued by members of the Turkish Coast Guard in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Edremit, northwestern Turkey, on Monday. Twenty-seven migrants, 11 of them children, drowned in that tragedy. The EU piled more pressure on Greece yesterday, telling Athens to improve conditions for refugees so that other overstretched member states can send migrants back there. PHOTO: AFP

No 'bullying' in South Korea shuts joint S China Sea: US industrial park with North

Japan imposes sanctions after satellite launch

AGENCIES

South Korea yesterday suspended operations at a jointly run factory park just inside North Korea following the North's longrange rocket launch over the weekend, cutting off an important source of revenue for the impoverished North.

Seoul said all operations at the complex would halt, to stop the North using its investment "to fund its nuclear and missile development".

Kaesong is one of the last points of cooperation between the two Koreas and a key source of revenue for Pyongyang.

It came as Japan imposed new sanctions against the North following the launch. They include a ban on North Korean vessels coming into port in Japan and on vessels from other countries that have visited the state.

The US warned on Tuesday that the North could soon have enough plutonium for nuclear weapons.

South Korea, the US, Japan and others see Sunday's rocket launch - ostensibly to put a satellite into space - as cover for a banned test of missile technology.

Tensions have risen over the past month since North Korea carried out a fourth nuclear test in early January.

ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF EXECUTED

The announcement came amid reports that the North's military chief, Ri Yong-gil, had been executed on corruption charges.

South Korea's state news agency Yonhap quoted unnamed sources saying the general, who was appointed

in 2013, had been deemed guilty of corruption and pursuing personal gains.

There was no confirmation of the report. South Korea's National Intelligence Service declined to comment and it was not



Kim Jong-Un with Ri Yong-gil

possible to independently verify the report.

A rare official confirmation of a high-profile execution came after Jang Song Thaek, leader Kim Jong Un's uncle and the man who was once considered the second most powerful figure in the country, was exe-

cuted for corruption in 2013. In May last year, the North executed its defence chief by anti-aircraft gun at a firing range, the South's spy agency said in a report to members of parliament.

End sieges to resume talks

Says opposition as regime gains ground across country

AGENCIES

ian targets in Syria and humanitarian measures should be implemented before the opponents of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad will join peace talks, the opposition negotiators said yesterday. On the ground, a Russian-backed regime onslaught in

World powers should force Russia to halt air strikes on civil-

northern Syria was reported yesterday to have killed more than 500 people this month, as Turkey faced mounting pressure to open its border to people fleeing the violence.

Riad Hijab, a former Syrian prime minister who heads an opposition council backed by Saudi Arabia, said talks could only take place if sieges were lifted, humanitarian assistance arrived and Russia halted air strikes.

He said Aleppo, where rebels are encircled by Syrian government forces, would never be occupied by Assad's forces.

SYRIA WAR: DEVELOPMENTS

'500 killed' in regime's Aleppo assault

Outgoing French FM raps US Syria role

Turkey summons US envoy over support for Syrian Kurds

Riad Hijab

Last week, UN envoy Staffan de Mistura suspended Syria peace talks amid opposition protests about the bombing.

The next round of talks in Geneva is planned on February 25. Tens of thousands of Syrians were still stranded yesterday at the frontier north of the second city of Aleppo, which remained closed despite an appeal by the United Nations to let civilians pass.

More than 260,000 people have been killed and half the population displaced since the conflict began in 2011 with anti-regime protests.

Turkey, already hosting 2.7 million Syrian refugees, has so far refused to let a new wave into the country, instead providing humanitarian assistance over the border in Syria. Only wounded people are being allowed to pass the border. Meanwhile, outgoing French Foreign Minister Laurent

Fabius yesterday criticised the US role in Syria, saying he did not see "a very strong commitment" from Washington. "There are ambiguities... You don't get the feeling that there is a very strong commitment," Fabius told reporters

shortly before announcing that he was stepping down after nearly four years as foreign minister. "There are words, but actions are something else," said Fabius. Turkey meanwhile has summoned the US ambassador

after a US State Department spokesman said Washington did not regard Syria's Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) as a terrorist organisation, a Turkish foreign ministry official said.

Rebels face a potential tipping point in the war following a string of victories by regime forces backed by Russian warplanes and fighters from Iran -- another key ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The UN has called for Russia to end its air strikes ahead of fresh peace efforts including a 17-nation meeting tomorrow in Munich aimed at getting the process back on track.

IS militants determined to strike US this year

Washington, Delhi mull joint

US President Barack Obama will deliver a tough message

to China during a summit with Southeast Asian coun-

tries next week that disputes in the South China Sea

must be resolved peacefully and not with a big nation

"bullying" smaller neighbours, the White House said on

Obama will also address North Korea's "provocations," a

nuclear test last month and a rocket launch over the week-

end, when he hosts the leaders of the Association of

Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) in California on Monday

reclamation, construction of new facilities and to carry out

no militarization of outposts in the South China Sea," Dan

conference call previewing the Asean talks.

Kritenbrink, Obama's top Asia adviser, told reporters on a

Meanwhile, the US and India have held talks about con-

ducting joint naval patrols that a US defence official said

could include the disputed South China Sea, a move that

The official said the two sides had discussed joint patrols,

adding that both were hopeful of launching them within

the year. The patrols would likely be in the Indian Ocean

where the Indian navy is a major player as well as the South

Washington wants its regional allies and other Asian

nations to take a more united stance against China over the

South China Sea, where tensions have spiked in the wake of

Beijing's construction of seven man-made islands in the

"The president will call on all claimants to halt land

naval drill

and Tuesday, aides said.

would likely anger Beijing.

REUTERS, Washington

Tuesday.

Intelligence officials tell Washington lawmakers

AP, Washington

China Sea.

Spratly archipelago.

Leaders of the Islamic State are determined to strike targets in the United States this year, senior US intelligence officials said Tuesday, telling lawmakers that a small group of

violent extremists will attempt to overcome the logistical challenges of mounting such an attack.

In testimony before congressional committees, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and other officials described the Islamic State as the "pre-eminent terrorist threat." The militant group can "direct and

inspire attacks against a wide range of targets around the world," Clapper said.

Marine Lt Gen Vincent Stewart, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said the Islamic State will probably conduct additional attacks in Europe and then attempt the same in the US. He said US intelligence

agencies believe IS leaders will be "increasingly involved in directing attacks rather than just encouraging lone attackers."

Clapper also said al-Qaeda, from which the Islamic State spun off, remains an enemy and the US will continue to see cyber

> threats from China, Russia and North Korea, which also is ramping up its nuclear program.

North Korea has expanded a uranium enrichment facility and restarted a plutonium reactor that could begin recovering material for nuclear weapons in weeks or months, Clapper said in delivering

James Clapper the annual assessment by intelligence agencies of the top dangers facing the country.

> On the cyber threat, Clapper said US information systems, controlled by the US government and American industry, are vulnerable to cyberattacks from Russia and China.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visits the construction site of a new military border fence between Israel and Jordan, on Tuesday. Netanyahu has vowed to build the 15ft fence to surround the whole of Israel, saying that the country must "protect itself from wild beasts". The Israeli PM appeared to use the extraordinary phrase – which has also been translated as "predators" – to describe both Palestinians and the people of neighbouring Arab states.

Mumbai or

Bombay? AFP, London

British newspaper The Independent will switch back to using Bombay rather than Mumbai when referring to India's financial capital, its editor said yesterday. Amol Rajan said the move was a stand against what he said was the closed-minded view of Hindu nationalists. Shiv Sena renamed the western Indian city in 1995 after the goddess Mumbadevi, the protector of fisherman who were the area's original inhabitants. Marathi speakers had always called the city "Mumbai, whereas "Bombay" was an anglicised take on the Portuguese colonial name "Bom Bahia", or "good bay".

'Yes, it is the end of Europe'

Trump raps Merkel over migrants, says US could have good ties with Putin

REUTERS, Paris

US Republican presidential contender Donald Trump said German Chancellor Angela Merkel was wrong to let in thousands of migrants into Germany and that the refugee crisis could trigger revolutions and even the end of Europe.

"I think Angela Merkel made a tragic mistake with the migrants," Trump told French conservative weekly Valeurs Actuelles, which said it was the billionaire's first in-depth campaign interview with European media.

"If you don't treat the situation competently and firmly, yes, it's the end of Europe. You could face real revolutions," Trump was quoted as saying, according to the French translation.

The 69-year-old property magnate also said Brussels had become a breeding ground for terrorists and some neighbourhoods in Paris and elsewhere in France had become no-go zones. He also said tight French gun laws were partly responsible for the killing of dozens of people at the Bataclan concert hall last November by Islamist militants.

"I always have a gun with me. Had I been at the Bataclan, I can tell you I would have opened fire, " he said.

Trump further said he thought the United States could have very good relations with Russia's Vladimir Putin. "He (Putin) said I was brilliant. That proves a certain smartness," said Trump.

EU MIGRANT CRISIS Thai cops bust fake passport making gang

AFP, Bangkok

Thai police have broken up a major fake passport ring led by an Iranian known as "The Doctor" which sent hundreds of passports to Middle Eastern customers trying to enter Europe, authorities said yesterday.

The kingdom has long been a hub for a forged document industry serving human traffickers and other criminals. Five years of investigation culminated in Monday's arrest of the alleged Iranian mastermind Hamid Reza Jafary who had learnt his skill from his late father, police said.

The 48-year-old had for many years been crafting sophisticated forgeries from his home in Chachoengsao province

the raids.

east of Bangkok, they said. Five Pakistani middlemen were also arrested in

Obama unveils cybersecurity action plan

US SC calls halt to climate initiative

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama unveiled a cybersecurity "national action plan" on Tuesday as his intelligence chief warned of growing risks from new technologies that open more doors to hackers.

"More and more, keeping America safe is not just about more tanks

or more airplanes," Obama told reporters at the White House. "We also have to bolster

our security online. As we've seen in the past few years, and just in the past few days, cyber threats pose a danger not only to our national security but our economic security."

US intelligence chief James Clapper underscored those risks at a Senate hearing, pointing out that wider adoption of connected devices and new systems that rely on

artificial intelligence can open up doors to hackers. Clapper named Russia, China, Iran and North Korea as "leading threat actors" which pose risks for US security, and said

these risks are growing as technology evolves and moves into new devices.

Meanwhile, the US Supreme Court on Tuesday put on hold a sweeping plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from coalfueled power plants, dealing a significant blow to President Barack Obama's efforts to rein in climate change.

by the year 2030.

A coalition of 27 US states -- most of them run by Obama's Republican adversaries -- is suing in a lower court to halt Obama's Clean Power Plan, and petitioned the

pend its implementation until the case is resolved. The White House said it was disappointed in the ruling, but convinced the ambitious plan to slash US emissions was based on a strong legal foundation, and would prevail.

Supreme Court to sus-

The ruling halts the rollout of rules

French MPs back stripping of citizenship

TERROR CHARGES

PHOTO: AFP

REUTERS, Paris

President Francois Hollande's plan to strip French citizenship from people convicted of terrorism passed a first hurdle on Tuesday when the lower house of parliament backed controversial proposals introduced after Islamic extremists killed 130 people in Paris last November. The National Assembly

voted by 162-148 late on Tuesday to write a passportstripping clause into the Constitution, despite misgivings by some lawmakers that it was too extreme. The vote appeared to

only partially defuse concerns of a broad rebellion scuttling a proposal that some, notably members of the ruling Socialist Party, consider an ineffective, that require the power sector's carbon dioxide emissions to be slashed by at symbolic measure in least 32 percent compared to 2005 levels France's battle against terrorism.