

NEWSIN brief

WHO: Ebola int'l health emergency is over

The World Health Organization said Tuesday that the Ebola outbreak in West Africa no longer constitutes an international emergency, voicing confidence that remaining isolated cases in the affected countries can be contained.

Seven dead in Canada small plane crash

A small private jet crashed on Canada's Magdalen Islands off its Atlantic coast on Tuesday killing all seven people on board, most of them reportedly en route to a family funeral.

Disasters cost \$92b in 2015: Swiss Re

Natural and man-made disasters cost \$92 billion (81.24 billion euros) in 2015, compared with \$113 billion in 2014, the Swiss reinsurer Swiss Re said in a report yesterday.

23 Morsi supporters get stiff jail terms

An Egyptian court sentenced 23 supporters of Mohamed Morsi to lengthy prison terms yesterday over a violent protest against the Islamist president's ouster in 2013.

Cyprus remands Egypt plane hijacker

The man accused of hijacking an Egyptian plane and diverting it to Cyprus has said he acted out of desperation to save his ex-wife and children, as he was remanded into custody yesterday.



(From left, clockwise) Myanmar's new President Htin Kyaw (L) receives the presidential seal from outgoing president Thein Sein during the handover ceremony at the presidential palace in Naypyitaw; NLD party leader Aung San Suu Kyi smiles with army members; and NLD members celebrate in front of the parliament building after the swearing in ceremony yesterday.



MYANMAR TRANSITION

Myanmar entered a new era yesterday as the first civilian-led president took charge, officially ending decades of military control.

1885: Centuries of rule by a Buddhist monarchy ends with the defeat and exile of Burma's last king by the British. Burma becomes a province of British India.

1941-1945: Japan occupies Burma during World War II. Nationalist hero Aung San fights with the Japanese, but swaps sides in the war's closing stages in the hope of achieving independence.

1948: Burma attains full independence from the British on January 4, a dream Aung San never lived to see following his assassination months earlier.

1962: After years of factional infighting, General Ne Win seizes power in a coup, turning the country from a multi-party federal union into an authoritarian one-party state ordered to follow his "Burmese Path to Socialism".

1988: Years of disastrous economic mismanagement and political repression see Burma erupt in protest. The military responds brutally, killing an estimated 3,000 people. Suu Kyi emerges as a key opposition leader.

1989: Junta changes the country's name to Myanmar.

1990: Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) wins a landslide victory in elections but the result is simply ignored by the military. Suu Kyi is placed under house arrest for much of the next 20 years.

1991: Suu Kyi wins the Nobel Peace Prize while under house arrest.

2010: Suu Kyi is released.

2011: In a surprise move, the junta cedes power to a quasi-civilian government. Many basic rights are restored, hundreds of political prisoners are freed.

2012: The NLD wins 43 out of 45 seats in April by-elections. Suu Kyi becomes an MP. Western powers lift most sanctions.

2015: Suu Kyi's NLD win a landslide November victory in the first free and fair elections in decades.

UN chief demands global action on Syrian refugees

Migrant arrivals to Greece rise sharply after EU-Turkey deal

UN chief Ban Ki-moon yesterday called for greater global efforts to tackle the Syrian refugee crisis, as he opened a conference on securing resettlement places for nearly half a million of those displaced by the five-year conflict.

"We are here to address the biggest refugee and displacement crisis of our time," Ban told the conference in Geneva. "This demands an exponential increase in global solidarity."



"Attempts to demonise people fleeing conflict are not only demeaning, offensive and counter-productive, they are factually wrong," Ban told journalists after his speech, in an apparent reference to rising anti-migrant rhetoric voiced by some political leaders across the developed world.

London in February where nations pledged \$11 billion (9.7 billion euros) to help manage one of the largest displacements of people since World War II.

Meanwhile, arrivals of refugees and migrants to Greece from Turkey rose sharply yesterday, just over a week since the European Union and Turkey struck a deal intended to cut off the flow.

Greek authorities recorded 766 new arrivals between Tuesday morning and yesterday morning, up from 192 the previous day. Most arrived on the northeastern Aegean island of Lesbos, reports Reuters.

Italy reported an even larger jump in arrivals on Tuesday, when officials there said 1,350 people - mostly from Africa - were rescued from small boats taking the longer migration route over the Mediterranean as the weather warmed up.

The EU Commission said on Tuesday that the flows in the last week had reduced, with only 1,000 people arriving from Turkey on Greek islands, compared to an average of 2,000 a day in the last couple of months.

France drops plans to change charter

Decides not to strip terror convicts of nationality

French President Francois Hollande yesterday scrapped contested constitutional reforms he proposed after the Paris attacks, in an embarrassing U-turn for his already beleaguered government.

The reforms included a plan to strip convicted terrorists of their French nationality which led to howls of protests from the left flank of Hollande's Socialist party and the resignation of his justice minister.

Hollande also wanted to enshrine in the constitution a state of emergency adopted after the November 13 attacks on the French capital, in which suicide bombers and gunmen from the Islamic State group killed 130 people.

But four months after both houses of parliament stood together to sing the "Marseillaise" national anthem, the lower house National Assembly and opposition-dominated Senate failed to agree on the text.

"A compromise appears out of reach on the stripping of terrorists' nationality," Hollande said.

"I also note that a section of the opposition is hostile to any constitutional revision. I deeply regret this attitude," the president said in a brief televised statement.

"I have decided to close the constitutional debate (but) I will not deviate from the commitments I have taken... to ensure the security of our country."

Hollande's move to drop the reform comes as authorities in Europe face increasing criticism over laxism and security failings in the face of the growing jihadist threat.

'Opposition' could join new Syria govt

Says Bashar al-Assad

Syria's president has said "opposition forces" could form part of a new government, the shape of which could be agreed at peace talks in Geneva.

Bashar al-Assad told a Russian news agency he would expect it to consist of "independent forces, opposition forces and forces loyal to the state".

Indirect talks between the government and opposition resumed this month. The opposition insist Assad must step down, though the government says his fate is not up for discussion.

The major powers backing rival sides in the war agree that there must be a political transition process, a new constitution and elections in Syria, but so far the talks in Geneva have not produced any signs of progress.

Assad did not spell out what he meant by "opposition forces". The Syrian government does not recognise rebel groups, which it commonly refers to as "terrorists", while there has long been a tolerated political opposition inside Syria.



Palestinian boy Mahmoud al-Sindawi, 15, sells balloons and footballs at the Seaport of Gaza City on March 17, 2016. Sindawi, whose father is unemployed, earns around 25 Shekels (\$6.4) per working day and he and his brother are the main breadwinners of their family.



Missiles, not talks, key to Iran's security

Says Khamenei

Iran's supreme leader said yesterday that missile power was key to the country's future security, slapping down moderates who say the focus should be on diplomacy.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final say in all matters of state in Iran, praised the powerful Revolutionary Guards for their "show of advanced and precise missiles" in recent tests that drew Western criticism.

"In this jungle-like world, if the Islamic republic seeks negotiations, trade and even technology and science, but has no defence power, won't even small countries dare threaten Iran?" Khamenei said in remarks published on his official website.

His comments appeared aimed at ex-president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who last week tweeted: "Tomorrow's world is the world of dialogue not missiles."

Marcos jewels used in graft fight

A "virtual exhibit" of jewellery once owned by former first lady Imelda Marcos is being used as an anti-corruption campaign in the Philippines.

The jewels were seized by US Customs in 1986 when she and her husband, Ferdinand Marcos, fled to Hawaii after the military leader was overthrown.

The government said the campaign would "remind the present generation of the excesses" of the Marcos era. The Marcoses, and Imelda in particular, were known for their love of luxury.



The family and associates are estimated to have amassed more than \$10bn in property, jewellery, cash and other assets during their time in power. But Imelda Marcos has long denied embezzlement.

Islamists end protest in Pak capital

Islamist protesters gathered in the Pakistani capital ended their days-long sit-in yesterday after claiming the government had agreed to a number of their demands including the hanging of a Christian woman convicted of blasphemy.

Pakistan's Interior Minister Chauhdry Nisar Ali Khan denied however that a deal had been struck, saying the demonstrators left "on their own accord".

The protesters -- who numbered some 25,000 at their peak -- had gathered Sunday in support of Mumtaz Qadri, who was hanged in late February five years after he assassinated a liberal Punjab governor over his calls to reform the country's blasphemous laws.

Trump refuses to back any GOP nominee but himself

US Republican front-runner Donald Trump has dropped his pledge to support the party candidate if he does not win the nomination for the November election.

Trump's rivals, Ted Cruz and John Kasich, refused to say outright whether they would unite behind a nominee. All the Republican candidates signed a loyalty pledge last November.

It is the latest sign of friction between Trump and Cruz, who have been embroiled in a dispute involving each other's wives.

A committee supporting Cruz published a nude photo of Trump's wife Melania from 2000. In retaliation, Trump tweeted an unflattering picture of Cruz's wife Heidi.

Asked by CNN about the dispute, Trump said: "He started it." CNN presenter Anderson Cooper said: "But, sir, with all due respect, that's the argument of a five-year-old."

