

NEWS IN
briefObama wraps up
historic Asia trip

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama on Friday wrapped up a historic trip to Asia, where he sought to deepen US involvement by boosting ties to former adversaries in the region. During the final part of the tour, Obama took part in a G7 summit in Japan. Obama arrived there from Vietnam, where he formally reset the relationship with Washington's former foe by lifting an arms embargo.

Pak PM to undergo
open heart surgery

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is to undergo open heart surgery in London on Tuesday, his second major cardiac medical procedure in five years, his daughter said. The 66-year-old premier is expected to stay in hospital for around a week after the procedure to recover before travelling home. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was among those who responded to the tweets, wishing Sharif a speedy recovery and good health.

Greece condemns
Russia sanctions

BBC ONLINE

The Greek prime minister has said sanctions imposed on Russia over its actions in Ukraine are not productive. Alexis Tsipras was speaking at a joint news conference in Athens with the Russian President Vladimir Putin who is there to reinforce ties with one of Russia's friends in Europe. The EU is expected to renew sanctions in a matter of weeks.

Malaysia accepts
68 Syrian refugees

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia yesterday received 68 Syrian refugees including 31 children out of a total of 3,000 it hopes to allow into the predominantly Muslim country with hundreds more expected soon. Last December, the Southeast Asian country accepted the first batch of 11 Syrian migrants who had relatives in Malaysia. Malaysia says it will take in 3,000 refugees.

Pak bans airing of
contraceptive ads

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan has banned advertisements for contraceptive products on television and radio over concern that they expose inquisitive children to the subject of sex, local media reported yesterday. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) said it was acting in response to complaints from parents and its ban covered all contraceptive, birth control and family planning products.



Pro-government forces fighters fire a rocket in the al-Sejar village, in Iraq's Anbar province, on Friday, as they take part in a major assault to retake the city of Fallujah, from the Islamic State (IS) group. Inset, Hundreds of people flee the Fallujah area with the help of Iraqi forces.

PHOTO: AFP

Concerns grow for
trapped civilians

IS chief of Falluja killed; 104 militants killed in Syria

AGENCIES

More than 50,000 people were trapped in Fallujah as an offensive to push the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (IS) group from the Iraqi city intensified.

Hundreds of people fled on Friday as humanitarian conditions rapidly deteriorated with Iraqi forces continuing to surround the city, determined to flush out the IS fighters inside.

The final battle to recapture the Islamic State stronghold near Baghdad will start in "days, not weeks", a Shia militia leader said on Friday.

The first phase of the offensive that started on Monday is nearly finished, with the complete encirclement of the city that lies 50 km (32 miles) west of the Iraqi capital, said Hadi al-Amiri, leader of the Iranian-backed Badr Organization.

The United Nations said nearly 800 people had escaped over the past week, but most of those from the outskirts of the city, where ISIL control was weaker.

Iraqi military officials insisted that safe corridors would be established to allow civilians to flee, but residents said IS check-

points along the city's main roads have made escape nearly impossible.

Fallujah, along with Mosul, is one of only two major Iraqi cities still controlled by IS. It became in January 2014 the first Iraqi city to be captured by the group, six months before it declared its caliphate.

Baghdad-based US Colonel Steve Warren said that over the last four days, 20 strikes in the city had destroyed IS fighting positions and gun emplacements.

"We've killed more than 70 enemy fighters, including Maher al-Bilawi, who is the commander of ISIL forces in Fallujah," Warren said.

Coalition officials estimated earlier this week that 500-700 IS fighters remain in the city, according to a US military estimate, hiding amongst the civilian population.

In Syria, Turkish and US-led coalition airstrikes killed 104 Islamic State militants in retaliation for the latest attack on a Turkish border province Kilis, Turkish media reported yesterday, citing military sources. Kilis has been hit by rockets from IS-controlled territory more than 70 times since January, killing 21 people including children.

WAR ON IS IN
IRAQ AND SYRIAClimate deal
is critical to
save planet

UN tells Trump

AFP, United Nations

The United Nations on Friday hit back at Donald Trump after he vowed to scrap the Paris climate deal if elected US president, saying the agreement was critical to saving the planet.

The presumptive Republican presidential nominee vowed in a speech on Thursday to "cancel" the hard-won agreement reached in Paris in December and signed by 175 countries at the United Nations last month.

"We're going to cancel the Paris climate agreement, and stop all payments of United States tax dollars to UN global warming programs," he said.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon considers the Paris deal as his proudest accomplishment during his 10-year tenure. The deal sets the goal of limiting global warming to "well below" 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit above pre-industrial levels, by moving to clean energy.

MIGRANT CRISIS

Dozens drown in
new Med tragedy

AFP, Rome

The Italian navy has recovered the bodies of 45 migrants who drowned Friday in the latest shipwreck, while dozens of others are still missing in the third major tragedy in the Mediterranean in as many days.

Italian coastguards sent in rescue ships after a call for help that spoke of 350 people in the water, just a day after another shipwreck had left up to 30 dead.

With search efforts continuing late into the day, the navy saved 130 people and was still searching for others, it said.

While the European Union has pushed hard to limit the influx of people fleeing war and poverty, a bout of good weather as summer arrives has kicked off a fresh stream of boats trying to make the perilous crossing from Libya to Italy.

The coastguard said about 1,900 people were saved on Friday from 16 vessels in distress, and an estimated 10,000 people already rescued near the Libyan coast in the past four days. About 40,000 migrants and refugees have arrived in Italy's southern ports so far this year.

In the single deadliest migrant boat sinking since the crisis began, some 700 people died in April last year, also off the coast of the chaos-ravaged north African country.

The flow into Europe via Greece and the Balkans route, which hundreds of thousands of people used in 2015, has slowed to a trickle after countries shut their borders. But more than 26,000 migrants have already landed on Italy's shores so far this year after setting off from Libya.

Last year, some 1.3 million refugees, mostly from conflict-ridden Syria and Iraq, asked for asylum in the European Union -- more than a third of them in Germany.



Protesters and supporters of Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump fight during a rally outside Trump's event in San Diego, California, on Friday. Thousands of pro- and anti-Donald Trump demonstrators faced off Friday outside a rally for the presumptive Republican presidential nominee in San Diego. Authorities said 35 people were arrested. PHOTO: AFP

Living the
American
dream!Report says N Korean
leader's aunt runs
dry-cleaner in US

AFP, Washington

The aunt of North Korea's supreme leader Kim Jong-Un lives anonymously in the United States, where she runs a dry-cleaning business after having defected in 1998, The Washington Post reported Friday.

Ko Yong-Suk -- who lives with her husband Ri Gang and their three children under assumed names -- was the sister of Ko Yong-Hui, one of former North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il's wives and mother of Kim Jong-Un.

Close to North Korea's communist regime, the couple was sent to Switzerland to look after members of the ruling family studying there, including the reclusive state's current leader.

Ko said Kim was born in 1984 not in 1982 or 1983 as previously believed -- meaning he was just 27 when he took over from his father Kim Jong-Il in 2011.

Kim knew from 1992 that he would become North Korea's leader, Ko said.

It remains unclear why Ko defected to the US, where she arrived with her husband after showing up at the US Embassy in the Swiss capital Bern. After months of questioning, the family was eventually resettled in the US a few hours drive from New York City where they started new lives under assumed names not revealed by The Washington Post.

They brought a house with financial help from the CIA. Ko's three children went to college and found jobs in the US, the Post reported.

OBAMA'S HIROSHIMA SPEECH

When rhetoric fails
to match action

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

"We stand here in the middle of this city and force ourselves to imagine the moment the bomb fell," US President Barack Obama declared after laying a wreath in Hiroshima's Memorial Peace Park on Friday.

"Death fell from the sky and the world was changed," he went on. "The flash of light and a wall of fire destroyed a city and demonstrated that mankind possessed the means to destroy itself."

He used the moment not explicitly to offer an apology but to reprise the call he first made in Prague in April 2009 at the start of his two terms in office, for the world to work towards ridding itself entirely of nuclear weapons.

"We have known the agony of war. Let us now find the courage, together, to spread peace, and pursue a world without nuclear weapons," he wrote in the park's guest book before meeting two survivors of the atomic blast that killed 140,000 people.

But you can argue over whether the country with the largest stockpile of nuclear weapons in the world is best or worst placed to make



such a call for the elimination of all nuclear weapons.

He was seen hugging and smiling with the two survivors but those with the keenest eyes might have spotted the military attache who is never far away when an American president travels. He is the one carrying the so-called "Nuclear Football", actually an armoured briefcase containing the codes for a president to authorise a nuclear launch.

Obama's record since Prague demands a mixed grade. He has convened regular nuclear security summits -- notably on keeping dirty bombs from terrorists -- as promised. In 2010 he signed a significant treaty with Russia obliging both countries to reduce their stockpiles to 1,550 strategic warheads each.

Yet, Obama has also not shied from approving programmes to upgrade America's nuclear capability at a likely cost of \$1 trillion over three decades. It will include the building of a new fleet of nuclear warhead-carrying submarines, 12 of them, while the Air Force is working towards a new nuclear stealth bomber.

Maybe this is merely necessary maintenance of a nuclear deterrence that has precisely spared the world another Hiroshima. Or perhaps it illustrates the raw reality of America's love affair with nukes exposing the emptiness of the president's fine rhetoric in Japan on Friday. If he had really meant it, he might have summoned that military attache, cut the cable attaching the "football" to his wrist, and tossed it into the eternal flame that burns in the Peace Park.

Gang-rape video shocks Brazil

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Brazilian police on Friday were investigating the gang-rape of a 16-year-old girl whose attackers boasted about it by posting an online video that has horrified the country.

Online social networks erupted with outrage over the video posted on Wednesday featuring the girl naked on a bed and the apparent rapists bragging that she had been raped by more than 30 men.

They are suspected of assaulting her on May 21 in Rio de Janeiro, a city stricken by violent crime and which will host the Olympic Games in August.

The authorities have promised to bring the men to justice.

"Those who committed this heinous crime will be found, will be imprisoned and condemned," Justice Minister Alexandre de Moraes told a news conference in Rio Friday night.

Police have identified four of the men suspected of taking a "direct or indirect" part in the rape or the posting of the video, Rio police chief Fernando Veloso told reporters.

Brazil's acting president Michel Temer

and other senior figures reacted with outrage. Top officials were meeting to discuss new measures to stop violence against women, Temer said.

The UN women's rights agency condemned the case along with another recent



alleged gang-rape of a 17-year-old girl in the northeastern state of Piaui.

Brazilian police recorded a sexual assault in the country every 11 minutes in 2014, the Brazilian non-governmental organization Public Safety Forum said in a study, estimating that half a million such assaults take place overall each year.

Iran-Saudi hajj
row escalates

AFP, Riyadh

An Iranian delegation has left Saudi Arabia without an agreement for its citizens to attend the Muslim hajj pilgrimage this year, Saudi media have reported, a second failure by the rival Middle East powers to strike a deal.

Relations between the two countries plummeted after hundreds of Iranians died in a crush during last year's hajj and after Riyadh broke diplomatic ties when its Tehran embassy was stormed in January over the Saudi execution of a Shia cleric.

The dispute has provided another arena for discord between the conservative Sunni Muslim monarchy of Saudi Arabia and the revolutionary Shia republic of Iran, which back opposing sides in Syria and other conflicts across the region.

After an earlier attempt to agree on hajj terms failed this month, Iran's leadership blamed Saudi Arabia for the delay, saying it was "very concerned" for the safety of Iranian pilgrims after last year's disaster.

Eight months after the last hajj, Saudi Arabia has still not published a report into the disaster, at which it said over 700 pilgrims were killed, the highest death toll at the annual pilgrimage since a crush in 1990.

Meanwhile, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei yesterday urged newly-elected lawmakers to resist "schemes" from the West as parliamentarians met in Tehran for the first time since elections finished in April.