

Armenian massacres 'genocide': Germany

Lawmakers pass resolution defying Turkey; Ankara recalls Berlin's envoy, says resolution to 'seriously' hit ties

AFP, Berlin
Turkey yesterday recalled its envoy to Germany and threatened consequences, in a furious reaction over the Bundestag's decision to adopt a resolution recognising the World War I massacre of Armenians by Ottoman forces as genocide.

Only one MP voted against and another abstained, as the German parliament approved overwhelmingly by a show of hands the resolution titled "Remembrance and commemoration of the genocide of Armenians and other Christian minorities in 1915 and 1916".

In the public gallery of the Bundestag, onlookers including members of the Armenian community held up banners saying "thank you" as the parliamentary speaker announced the result of the vote to applause.

Armenia Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian praised the decision as "Germany's valuable contribution not only to the international recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide, but also to the universal fight for the prevention of genocides, crimes against humanity."

But Turkey swiftly condemned the resolution, and recalled its ambassador to Germany for consultations. Ankara also summoned the German charge d'affaires to the Turkish foreign ministry later yesterday.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also warned "the resolution adopted by the German parliament will seriously affect relations between Germany and Turkey."

The resolution, put forward by the ruling left-right coalition and the opposition Greens, carries the contentious word throughout and also puts partial blame on the German Empire, then allied with the Ottomans and which failed to prevent the



A boy, whose brother was killed, reacts at a site hit by airstrikes in the rebel-controlled area of Maaret al-Numan town in Idlib province, Syria, yesterday. Inset, A civil defence member carries an injured girl at the site. PHOTO: REUTERS

Britain, France pressure UN over Syria aid drops

US-backed forces make progress in Manbij against IS

AGENCIES

Humanitarian aid drops to besieged areas in Syria are not imminent and need regime approval, the United Nations said yesterday, despite urgent calls from Britain and France for deliveries to start.

In northern Syria, meanwhile, a US-backed Kurdish-Arab alliance yesterday pressed its advance towards the town of Manbij held by the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group.

And in the regime's coastal stronghold of Latakia, a suicide bombing killed several people and wounded many near a mosque, sources said. It follows bombings last month claimed by IS in the nearby cities of Jableh and Tartus that killed at least 170 people.

Humanitarian access in Syria has been a key sticking point in stalled UN-backed peace talks aimed at ending the five-year war that has killed at least 280,000 people and displaced millions.

According to the United Nations, a total of 592,000 people live under siege in Syria -- the majority surrounded by government forces -- and another four million in hard-to-reach areas.

Britain has called for an emergency UN Security Council meeting today to discuss

humanitarian access and to press ahead with air drops.

In north Syria, fighters from a Kurdish-Arab alliance on Thursday were 10 kilometres (six miles) outside the IS-held town of Manbij, a monitor said.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) alliance had seized 20 villages outside the town, the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

"The clashes are very violent and IS is putting up fierce resistance," Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said.

The US-backed SDF last week launched an offensive north of the jihadists' Syrian stronghold of Raqa city.

This week the alliance opened a new front towards Manbij, which lies on a key supply route between the IS-held town of Jarabulus on the Turkish border and Raqa.

Syria's main opposition group on Wednesday called on the UN to implement a truce in all of Syria except areas under IS control during the holy month of Ramadan which begins next week.

In the second city of Aleppo, at least five people were killed on Thursday in regime rocket fire on a rebel-held district, the civil defence said.

EU REFERENDUM Celebrities sign 'love letter' to Britain

AFP, London

ABBA star Bjorn Ulvaeus and Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger were among 140 European celebrities who signed a "love letter to the British people" on Thursday, hoping they will stay in the EU.

The letter, also signed by Dutch film director Paul Verhoeven, French former Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier and French-American actress Julie Delpy, comes with exactly three weeks to go until the June 23 referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union.

"It is not just treaties that join us to your country but bonds of admiration and affection. All of us hope that you will vote to renew them," said the letter published in the Times Literary Supplement magazine.

French "Highlander" star Christopher Lambert, model and actress Isabella Rossellini and restaurateur Raymond Blanc were also among the signatories.

"It is your decision, and we will all accept it. Nevertheless, if it will help the undecided to make up their minds, we would like to express how very much we value having the United Kingdom in the European Union," the letter said.

Opinion polls estimate that up to a fifth of British voters have yet to make up their minds.

Excluding the undecideds, the "Remain" camp is at 51 percent against 49 percent for "Leave" according to the WhatUKThinks poll of polls average yesterday.

NEWS IN brief

India PM to visit Afghanistan

AFP, New Delhi
Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will travel to Afghanistan for the second time in six months this weekend, on a one-day visit to inaugurate a dam with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. The dam, in western Herat district close to the Iran border, is one of two large projects carried out under India's development partnership with Afghanistan, worth more than \$2 billion.

Palestinian knife attacker shot dead

AFP, Jerusalem
A female Palestinian yesterday tried to stab an Israeli soldier near the West Bank city of Tulkarem and was shot dead, the army said. Violence since October has killed 206 Palestinians, 28 Israelis, two Americans, an Eritrean and a Sudanese national.

Tajikistan jails 13 Islamist leaders

AFP, Dushanbe
Tajikistan yesterday jailed 13 leading members of a banned moderate Islamist opposition party for up to life, officials told AFP. The Central Asian country gave life sentences to two leading figures in the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan while 11 others received up to 28 years.

Somalia hotel attack over; 10 killed

AFP, Mogadishu
Gunmen holed up in a central Mogadishu hotel for more than 12 hours killed at least 10 people in the latest attack in Somalia by the al-Qaeda group, the Shabaab. A huge car bomb that tore the front off the six-storey Ambassador Hotel in the heart of the capital signalled the start of the assault on Wednesday evening, with shooting continuing until yesterday morning when Somalia's security minister declared the attack over.

atrocities.

The "genocide" recognition comes at a particularly awkward time as Germany and the European Union are relying on Turkey to help stem a record influx of migrants even as tensions are rising between both sides over human rights and other issues.

Armenians say up to 1.5 million of their kin were killed between 1915 and 1917 as the Ottoman Empire was falling apart. But modern Turkey, the successor state to the Ottoman empire, says that 300,000 to 500,000 Armenians and as many Turks died in civil strife when Armenians rose up against their Ottoman rulers and sided with invading Russian troops.

More than 20 nations, including France and Russia, have recognised the Armenian genocide.

"We are not looking to put Turkey in the dock. Instead, this is about making clear that taking responsibility for the past is indispensable for reconciliation," said Franz Josef Jung, speaking for Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats.

Turkish leaders heaped on the pressure ahead of the vote, with Prime Minister Binali Yildirim saying earlier Thursday that it would "amount to a real test of the friendship" between the two nations.

IS attack foiled in Germany

3 Syrians arrested

AFP, Berlin

Three Syrian men have been arrested in Germany over an alleged plan to launch a suicide attack there for the Islamic State jihadist group, federal prosecutors said yesterday.

According to the suspects' plan, two attackers were to detonate suicide vests while the others were to kill passersby with guns and explosives in the western city of Duesseldorf, prosecutors said in a statement.

The suspects were identified as 27-year-old Hamza C., 25-year-old Mahood B., and Abd Arahman A K, 31, who were arrested in the states of Brandenburg near Berlin, North Rhine-Westphalia and Baden-Wuerttemberg.

A fourth Syrian man, Saleh A., 25, had been in custody in France since turning himself in in February, they said, and Germany had now requested his extradition.

"According to current investigations, the four accused were planning to commit an attack in Germany for the foreign terrorist organisation Islamic State," said the prosecutors.

Saleh A. and Hamza C. had joined IS in early 2014 in Syria, where "they were ordered by the group's leadership to carry out an attack in the old town of Duesseldorf".

"Two suicide attackers were to set off their explosives vests at the Heinrich-Heine-Allee, a major street in Duesseldorf," the prosecutors said in the statement.

"After that, other attackers were to kill as many passersby as possible with guns and other explosives."

Saleh A. and Hamza C. had crossed from Syria to Turkey in May 2014. From there they travelled separately in March and July last year via Greece to Germany.

Germany last year saw a major influx of 1.1 million migrants and refugees.



Destroyed cars stand submerged in water following floods in the Bavarian village of Simbach am Inn east of Munich, Germany, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

GUJARAT RIOT 2002 Indian court convicts 24

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

A special court in western Indian state of Gujarat yesterday convicted 24 people in a case relating to the killing of 69 people, including former Congress party lawmaker Ehsan Jafri, during the communal riots in the state in 2002.

Twenty four of the 66 accused in the case have been convicted by Judge PB Desai. Of the 24, 11 have been found guilty of murder and 13 others for lesser crimes.

The verdict came 14 years after a mob attacked bungalows and 10 apartment buildings housing mostly Muslims of Gulbarg Housing Society in Ahmedabad, a key city of Gujarat, killing 69 people, including Jafri, on February 28, a day after coaches of a passenger train were burnt at Godhra station leaving 59 Hindus dead.

The court, however, acquitted Bipin Patel, a corporator of ruling Bharatiya Janata Party from Asarwa area, who was charged with murder and rioting.

Ehsan Jafri's wife, Zakiya Jafri, now 77, has pursued the case for the last 14 years. The riots in Gujarat in 2002 left more than 1,000 people dead.

The trial in the Gulbarg Housing riots case began in 2009, seven years after the massacre, and concluded on September 22 last year. The Indian Supreme Court, which is monitoring the case, had directed the special court to give its verdict by May 31.

There were 66 accused named by a special investigation team (SIT) appointed by the Supreme Court to probe the case, of whom nine are behind bars for the last 14 years while others are out on bail.

During the trial, the riot victim's lawyer had argued that the massacre was a pre-planned criminal conspiracy hatched by the accused to kill minority community members residing in Gulbarg Society.

The defence had refuted the conspiracy theory of prosecution and claimed that the mob resorted to violence only after Ehsan Jafri had fired several rounds on them.

The Gulbarg Society case is one of the nine cases of the 2002 Gujarat riots probed by the Supreme Court-appointed SIT.

The riots had taken place when Narendra Modi was the chief minister of Gujarat.

Trump 'trying to scam America'

Says Clinton as damning new 'Trump University' documents unsealed

AFP, Washington

Newly unsealed court documents in a case against White House hopeful Donald Trump's "university" reveal allegations that the now-defunct business preyed on the uneducated and misled consumers with aggressive marketing that amounted to fraud.

Democratic presidential frontrunner Hillary Clinton pounced on the news to argue that Trump is a fraud who is "trying to scam America."

The most damning revelations came from former staffers of the profit-driven operation that launched in 2004 and closed in 2010, triggering lawsuits that may well see the presumptive Republican presidential nominee dragged into court.

"While Trump University claimed it wanted to help consumers make money in real estate, in fact Trump University was only interested in selling every person the most expensive seminars they possibly could," former Trump University staffer Ronald Schnackenberg wrote in a statement unsealed Tuesday.

The business offered several courses in entrepreneurship, under the famous Trump brand.

Another former employee, Jason Nicholas, acknowledged that the seminars were taught by "unqualified people posing as Donald Trump's 'right-hand men.'"

Nicholas said those staff "were teaching methods that were unethical, and they had had little to no experience flipping properties or doing real estate deals."

"It was a facade, a total lie," he testified.

The court also unsealed internal company manuals, called "playbooks," detailing sales techniques for steering prospective students to the most expensive courses and programs, which ran as high as \$35,000 for supposedly revealing Trump's wealth-generating secrets.

A Trump spokeswoman told AFP that the newly released documents have "no bearing on the merits of Trump University's case."

The class action suit and fresh release of documents come as the 2016 presidential race shapes up to be a contest between Trump and his likely Democratic opponent, Clinton.

The two have already pivoted toward their election matchup, and the former secretary of state wasted no time Wednesday laying into Trump over the revelations.



Tutankhamun's knife was 'made from meteorite iron'

BBC ONLINE

A dagger entombed alongside the mummy of Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun was made with iron that came from a meteorite, researchers say.

The weapon was one of a pair of daggers discovered by British archaeologist Howard Carter in 1925 within the burial wrappings of the teenaged king.

The origin of its untrusted iron blade has baffled scientists because such metal-work was rare in ancient Egypt.

Tutankhamun was mummified more than 3,300 years ago.

Italian and Egyptian researchers used "a non-invasive X-ray technique" to confirm the composition of the iron without damaging it, according to a study published in the journal of Meteoritics and Planetary Science.

"Meteoritic iron is clearly indicated by the presence of a high percentage of nickel," the study's main author, Daniela Comelli, said.

along with levels of nickel and cobalt - "strongly suggests an extraterrestrial origin".

They compared the composition of the dagger to known meteorites within 2,000km around the Red Sea coast of Egypt, and found that one in particular - which landed 150 miles west of Alexandria - contained similar levels of nickel and cobalt.

Ancient Egyptians attached great significance to meteoritic iron for the production of fine ornamental or ceremonial objects, the researchers say.

"They were aware that these rare chunks of iron fell from the sky already in the 13th [Century] BCE, anticipating Western culture by more than two millennia," they write in their findings.

The dagger - which features a decorated gold handle and a gold sheath with a floral lily motif on one side and a feather pattern on the other - is now on display at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

