

Swiss say 'no thanks' to basic income for all

AFP, Geneva

Swiss voters were yesterday on course to flatly reject a radical proposal to provide the entire population with a basic income, no work required, initial results and projections showed. National projections showed 78 percent of voters had opposed the initiative, according to numbers provided by the gfs.bern polling institute to public broadcaster RTS an hour after polls closed at noon. Most Swiss vote in advance by post, so a large majority of ballots had already been counted, and gfs.bern put the margin of error at just plus/minus three percent. In a global first, the Swiss were asked whether they wanted all citizens, along with foreigners who have been legal residents for at least five years, to receive an unconditional basic income, or UBI. Supporters say providing such an income would help fight poverty and inequality in a world where good jobs with steady salaries are increasingly hard to come by. The group behind the initiative has suggested paying 2,500 Swiss francs (\$2,500/2,300 euros) a month to each adult -- considerably less than most workers earn -- and 625 francs for each child. But the idea was controversial from the start, with the government and nearly all political parties urging voters to reject the scheme. Andreas Ladner, a political scientist at Lausanne University, told RTS the Swiss were "realistic" in their assessment of the UBI plan. Accepting that people can "be paid without having to work would have been a very big step" for the industrious Swiss, he said. Critics have slammed the initiative as "a Marxist dream", warning of sky-high costs and people quitting their jobs in droves, causing economic chaos.



Syrian civil defence volunteers, known as the White Helmets, dig a body from the rubble of a building following a reported air strike by Syrian government forces in the rebel-held neighbourhood of Qatirji yesterday.

EU REFERENDUM EX-PM Major attacks Vote Leave 'deceit'

AFP, London

Former British prime minister John Major yesterday launched a blistering attack on fellow Conservatives campaigning for a Brexit, as rivals traded economic claims in an increasingly tight race for the June 23 vote. Major condemned the "deceitful" campaign by Vote Leave, the Conservative-led group pressing for Britain to leave the European Union, saying it was making "fundamentally dishonest" claims about the potential economic consequences. His intervention followed an accusation by Boris Johnson, the former Conservative mayor of London, that voters "cannot trust" government promises that Britain would not be forced to contribute to any future eurozone bailouts. There are less than three weeks left in a race that opinion polls show is on a knife edge, raising the prospect of Britain becoming the first country to leave the 28-nation bloc. The average of the last six polls calculated by the What UK Thinks research project yesterday put both sides at 50 percent, excluding undecided voters. The "Remain" camp previously had a slight lead. The economic consequences of staying in or leaving the EU is one of the key battlegrounds of the campaign, which is being fought between two main groups, both dominated by members of Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservatives.



Syria, Russia step up bombing of Aleppo

20 civilians killed; US-backed rebels advance on Manbij

AGENCIES

Nearly 50 strikes hit rebel-held areas in and around the Syrian city of Aleppo yesterday in some of the heaviest raids recently by Russian and Syrian government aircraft, residents and a monitor said. For their part, rebels also hit government-held areas of Aleppo in what Syrian media said was an escalation in mortar attacks on the western districts of what was the country's largest city before the war. State media said missiles fired on Hamadaniyah, Midan and other neighbourhoods by insurgents left at least twenty dead, mostly civilians, in the second day of intense shelling of government-held areas, which had left at least 24 dead on Saturday. In the rebel-held eastern sector of the city, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said dozens of barrel bombs - oil drums or cylinders packed with explosives and shrapnel - were dropped by military helicopters on several densely populated districts, reports Reuters. A civil defence worker said at least 32 people were killed in the rebel-held parts of the city, with eighteen bodies alone pulled out of the rubble of flattened buildings in the Qatirji neighbourhood, the worst hit. The aerial raids yesterday came in the wake of Friday's strikes on civilian areas that residents said were the most intense in over a month. Meanwhile, US-backed Syrian fighters advancing on the Islamic State group in the strategic northern town of Manbij have progressed to within five kilometres of the jihadist bastion, a monitor said yesterday. Supported by air strikes by the US-led coalition battling IS in Syria and Iraq, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) alliance of Kurdish and Arab militias launched an assault last week on Manbij, reports AFP. "The Syrian Democratic Forces are now within about five kilometres of the strategic city of Manbij," said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitoring group. Manbij is located along a route connecting Raqa - the IS group's de facto capital in Syria -- to the Turkish border, a vital conduit for supplies and foreign fighters. At least 74 people have died in the fighting since the start of the offensive last Monday, including 32 civilians mainly killed as a result of coalition air strikes, said the Observatory, which relies on a

WAR AGAIN

SHOW OF SOLIDARITY WITH VENEZUELA Cuba will never rejoin OAS: Raul Castro

BBC ONLINE

Cuban President Raul Castro says the country will not return to the Organization of American States (OAS) in a show of solidarity with Venezuela. OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro has called for sanctions against Venezuela. At a summit of Caribbean countries in Havana, Castro called the OAS "an instrument of imperialist domination". Meanwhile, former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero has met jailed Venezuelan opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez. It was Leopoldo Lopez's first visit from anyone other than family members or lawyers since the 45-year-old was sentenced to 14 years in prison last year after being found guilty of inciting violence. His supporters insist he is innocent and say he was jailed on trumped-up, politically-motivated charges. The meeting at Ramo Verde military prison outside Caracas lasted about 90 minutes, according to Adriana Lopez, the opposition leader's sister. Zapatero is trying to negotiate between the opposition and the government in Venezuela's worsening political crisis. Cuba was expelled from the OAS in 1962 but following a recent thaw in relations with the US it was suggested that the island might return. But Castro appeared to rule out the possibility, offering "our most firm solidarity to our brothers the Venezuelan people, to the legitimate government of President Nicolas Maduro". Maduro is locked in a dispute with the OAS over opposition demands in Venezuela for a recall referendum. Almagro said earlier this week that "the institutional crisis in Venezuela demands immediate changes in the actions of the executive branch".



NEWS IN brief

Have 'at least three kids': Erdogan

AFP, Istanbul

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday urged Turkish women to have at least three children, saying a woman's life was "incomplete" if she failed to have offspring. The president emphasised he was a strong supporter of women having careers but emphasised that this

Iran says Saudi the real 'terrorism sponsor'

AFP, Tehran

Tehran yesterday dismissed its renewed blacklisting by Washington as a state sponsor of terrorism charging that it was US allies including Riyadh that were the real culprits. The Iranian foreign ministry noted its role in neighbouring Iraq supporting the government against the IS group independently of a US-led coalition as well as its backing for the Syrian

Libya PM rules out int'l military intervention

AFP, Paris

The prime minister of Libya's UN-backed unity government has ruled out an international military intervention to fight the Islamic State group. Some 25 nations including the United States and Russia agreed last month to help Libya arm itself against the jihadists, but PM Fayed al-Sarraj told French newspaper Journal du Dimanche

Duterte urges public to kill criminals

AFP, Manila

The Philippines' president elect Rodrigo Duterte urged the public to join his anti-crime crackdown, offering people huge bounties for killing drug dealers. His announcement late Saturday came as other officials began paying bounties for slain suspected criminals in an apparent attempt to ride on Duterte's success. Duterte

Norway banning fossil fuel cars by 2025

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Norway will ban the sale of all fossil fuel-based cars in the next decade, continuing its trend towards becoming one of the most ecologically progressive countries on the planet, according to reports. Politicians from both sides of the political spectrum have reportedly reached some concrete conclusions about 100 percent of Norwegian cars

China hits back at US

Declares it does not fear trouble in contested waters

AFP, Singapore

An Asian security summit ended in discord yesterday after China denounced US "provocations" in the South China Sea and declared it does not fear trouble in the contested waters. "The South China Sea issue has become overheated because of the provocations of certain countries for their own selfish interests," Admiral Sun Jianguo told an annual forum in Singapore. Sun, who stressed China's desire for a peaceful solution, spoke one day after US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said any Chinese construction on an islet near the Philippines would prompt unspecified "actions" by the United States and other nations. On a visit to Mongolia yesterday, US Secretary of State John Kerry also warned Beijing against setting up an air defence identification zone over the disputed waters. "We would consider an ADIZ, an ADIZ zone, over portions of the South China Sea as a provocative and destabilising act, which would automatically raise tensions and call into serious question China's commitment to diplomatically manage the territorial disputes of the South China Sea," Kerry said. "We believe that it is critical that no country move unilaterally to militarise the region," he added. His remarks came on the eve of a US-China dialogue in Beijing and after Hong Kong's South China Morning Post (SCMP) newspaper cited Chinese army sources as saying Beijing was mulling such a zone. China claims nearly all of the sea despite competing claims by several Southeast Asian neighbours, and has pressed its claims by rapidly building artificial islands suitable for military use. Washington has responded by sending warships close to Chinese-claimed reefs, angering Beijing. Rhetoric has escalated ahead of a decision at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague on a case brought by the Philippines.

SOUTH CHINA SEA ROW



Nepalese youth activists take part in a World Environment Day event to highlight air pollution in Kathmandu yesterday. According to an environment performance index by Yale University, Nepal ranks 177 among 180 countries in terms of air quality.

PHOTO: AFP

POPULATION CENSUS IN QATAR Nearly 60pc people live in 'labour camps'

AFP, Doha

Almost 60 percent of Qatar's 2.4 million population live in what the government calls "labour camps", figures from an April 2015 census showed yesterday, highlighting the issue of the emirate's huge migrant workforce. The figures from the Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics (MDPS) revealed that 1.4 million people live in what the department officially designates as "labour camps". At the time of the survey, the official population was 2.4 million. That works out at just over 58 percent of the country's population. The overwhelming majority -- 1.34 million -- were male, the statistics found. Since the census, Qatar's population has grown further to just over 2.5 million. The accommodation of migrant labourers working on Qatar's numerous infrastructure projects has long been a contentious issue. Qatar, which will host the football World Cup in 2022, has been condemned by human rights groups, including Amnesty International, for providing "squalid and cramped accommodation" for its large migrant workforce.



Blasts rock Sri Lanka military ammo depot

AFP, Colombo

Explosions ripped through a key military ammunition depot just outside Sri Lanka's capital yesterday leading police to evacuate residents and seal off roads in the area, police said. There were no immediate reports of casualties at the Salawa military camp where security forces are known to store some of their heavy weaponry and ammunition, including rockets, police said. Residents in Salawa, 36 kilometres east of Colombo, were seen leaving their homes as police reported shrapnel hitting the main highway. The night sky was lit with an orange glow and the area shook at regular intervals. Flying debris could be seen from three kilometres away. "We have closed the road and asked all residents to leave out of consideration for their safety," a police officer at the scene told AFP. Firefighters were stopped from reaching the camp as it was unsafe for them to get close to the source of the explosions. The cause of the blasts was not yet known, said the police officer.

Trump sparks political backlash with Ali tribute

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Donald Trump has been accused of "hypocrisy" for his tributes to Muhammad Ali, as Democrat rival Bernie Sanders criticised those who praise the boxing legend while being "prejudiced against Muslims in this country". After publicly calling for all Muslims to be banned from entering the US, the presumptive Republican presidential candidate sparked a political row by tweeting: "Muhammad Ali is dead at 74! A truly great champion and a wonderful guy. He will be missed by all!". Trump and Ali had a relationship going back at least 35 years, with Ali attending the businessman's second wedding in 2005. But last year, Ali issued a statement entitled "Presidential Candidates Proposing to Ban Muslim Immigration to the United States", in which he said: "We as Muslims have to stand up to those who use Islam to advance their own personal agenda." Asked about the statement on Saturday, Trump said he did not "believe that was about me". "He never mentioned the name or anything like that," he said, adding that if it were about him, Ali "would have mentioned the name". Sanders, who still entertains hopes of being the presidential rival opposite Trump, explicitly called out those who praise Ali while condemning Muslims. He said in an LA press conference: "I've been all over this country and I'm talking to Muslim people who say, 'You know, Bernie, our kids are now afraid.' ... Don't tell me how much you love Muhammad Ali and yet you're going to be prejudiced against Muslims in this country."

