

MIGRANT CRISIS

Deaths in Med top 10,000 since 2014: UN

AFP, Geneva

More than 10,000 people have died attempting the perilous journey across the Mediterranean to Europe since 2014, the United Nations said yesterday.

"You've now had since the start of 2014 -- when this phenomenon of rising numbers across the Mediterranean happened -- 10,000 deaths. That threshold has been crossed just in the last few days," UN refugee agency spokesman Adrian Edwards told reporters.

UNHCR said the number of Mediterranean deaths had risen sharply in 2016, with 2,814 people dying since the start of the year, following a total of 3,771 in 2015 and 3,500 the year earlier.

That amounts to 10,085 deaths in less than two and a half years.

"This is clearly an appalling number of deaths that have occurred in the Mediterranean, just on Europe's borders just in the past couple of years," Edwards told AFP.

"It's an extremely worrying dynamic," he said, reiterating the agency's call for the world to find "viable alternative and regular means of dealing with these movements".

"They're happening, they're not stopping, they need a solution to prevent further lives being lost," he said.

The International Organization for Migration meanwhile said the death toll so far this year was already nearly a thousand above the 1,838 deaths registered in the Mediterranean during the first half of 2015.

As of Monday, a total of 206,400 refugees and migrants had arrived in Europe since the start of the year.

The EU's top court meanwhile ruled that countries cannot imprison illegal migrants just for crossing borders in the Schengen passport-free area, in a new blow to efforts to crack down on the crisis.



US President Barack Obama (R) shakes hands with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi after their remarks to reporters following a meeting in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington, US, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Why India's PM is in US... again

CNN ONLINE

When India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi concludes his three-day visit to Washington on Wednesday, he will likely reflect on how the relationship between the world's two biggest democracies is becoming ever closer, a step towards fulfilling US President Barack Obama's prophecy that India and the United States would form "one of the defining partnerships" of the 21st century.

At the very least, Modi deserves credit for generating an impressive amount of air miles. This week marks his fourth US visit since assuming office in 2014. It is also the seventh time he has met Obama.

But there is an important first this week too: Wednesday will mark the first time Modi has been invited to address Joint Meeting of Congress in the House Chamber -- an honor bestowed on just a few world leaders every year.

The meet is largely a win-win visit for both leaders. For Obama, India could be seen as a foreign policy success, far away from the crises of Syria and Libya, the unease with Russia, or the competition with China. New Delhi has emerged as a partner in the Indian Ocean and a hedge against China's ambitions. US-India ties in defense, intelligence sharing, trade, and investment have gotten stronger.

A steady stream of US CEOs make their way to India every month, looking to cash in on a country that is increasingly seen as a rare growth spot in a bleak global economy.

Inviting Modi to Washington is Obama's way of sealing one part of his foreign policy legacy.

As India's Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar put it to reporters at a briefing in New Delhi last week, there are very few world leaders Obama wants to see in his remaining months in office. Modi is clearly one of them.

For Modi, the benefits of a strong American friendship are clear: being aligned closer to Washington means he can



Assad vows to fight on

Says Aleppo to be Erdogan's graveyard; residents flee Manbij offensive

REUTERS, Beirut

President Bashar al-Assad vowed on Tuesday to fight on in what he called Syria's war against terrorism, showing no sign of compromise in his first major address since peace talks broke down in April.

Assad said he would win back "every inch" of Syria and said Aleppo would be a graveyard for the hopes and dreams of Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, a major sponsor of the insurgents battling to topple him.

"Our war against terrorism is continuing," Assad said in a speech to parliament broadcast by state TV. "As we liberated Tadmur (Palmyra) and before it many areas, we will liberate every inch of Syria from their hands. Our only option is victory, otherwise Syria will not continue."

The Syrian army and allied militia, aided by Russian air strikes, recovered control of Palmyra from Islamic State insurgents in March. In addition to the war with Islamic State, Assad is fighting rebels who include groups that have received support from his foreign enemies, Turkey included.

Aleppo, Syria's largest city and pre-war commercial hub, and the surrounding

area at the border with Turkey have comprised a major theatre in the war, divided between areas of government and rebel control. Escalating fighting there helped ruin the cessation of hostilities agreement agreed in February.

Assad accused Erdogan of recently sending thousands of militants to Aleppo. Russia, which has been bombing in sup-



port of Assad since September, said on Saturday more than 2,000 militants had mobilised in the Aleppo area.

Russia said on Monday its air forces would provide "the most active" support to Syrian government troops so as not to let Aleppo and the surrounding area fall into the hands of fighters it called terrorists.

Meanwhile, thousands of civilians

yesterday fled along the Islamic State group's supply lifeline in northern Syria as US-backed fighters closed in from three sides.

The offensive is one of two major assaults on the jihadist supply line from the Syrian-Turkish border to IS's bastion of Raqqa.

The Syrian Democratic Forces alliance began its offensive against Manbij just over a week ago, crossing the Euphrates River and pushing west towards the town.

"We have surrounded Manbij from three sides and operations are progressing well," said Sherfan Darwish, who is leading the SDF offensive.

"Daesh has begun allowing civilians to flee towards the west, whereas before they had banned anyone from leaving," Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said, using an Arabic acronym for IS.

He said some were in cars but many were carrying their belongings and walking along unpaved roads as IS fighters remained in the town.

The "Manbij pocket" was the only remaining section of territory used by IS to smuggle recruits or funds from Turkey across the border.

India to join key missile control group

REUTERS, New Delhi

The members of the Missile Technology Control Regime, a key anti-proliferation grouping, have agreed to admit India, diplomats said, in a win for Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he meets President Barack Obama in Washington yesterday.

Diplomats with direct knowledge of the matter said a deadline for the members of the 34-nation group to object to India's admission had expired on Monday without any of them raising objections.

Admission to the MTCR would open the way for India to buy high-end missile technology, also making more realistic its aspiration to buy state-of-the-art surveillance drones such as the US Predator.

attract more business and trade, which has always been his top priority. As the Brookings Institution's Tanvi Madan points out, US-India trade has jumped from \$60 billion in 2009 to \$107 billion in 2015; sales of US defense equipment to India now reach \$14 billion, up some 50-fold from a decade ago. The US is also expected to help India join the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), a club of countries trading materials for nuclear energy.

for India, which has in the past flirted more with the Soviet Union than the United States, New Delhi's friendship with Washington hasn't cost it its own independent views. While cozying up to the White House, India has continued to forge ahead with investments in Iran, for example, such as its recent development of the Iranian port, Chabahar.

It is significant that Modi will be arriving in the US from Switzerland, and traveling onwards to Mexico -- both are countries that are members of the NSG, and crucial to rallying support for India's bid to join the group.

America's support will be vital too. In return, Obama may push Modi to advance his climate change agenda following the Paris Agreement signed in 2015.

HILLARY CLINTON PRESUMPTIVE DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE

US delegate counts released Monday showed Clinton has secured the party nomination



THE PERSON

68 years old
From Chicago, born Hillary Rodham
Former secretary of state, former first lady, and the first female partner of her Arkansas law firm

POLITICS

Started her own formal political career as a Democratic senator in 2000, after working on health care reform plans as first lady
Strong support from women Democrats and minorities

PROMISES

Gradual reform of Wall Street
Tighten gun laws
Immigration reform to simplify citizenship for illegal migrants
Expand university scholarships
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REPUTATION

Torchbearer of American women
Has talked of the need to address racism and economic disparities
Pushes for tackling radicalism through military, economic, diplomatic and cultural means



Forensic experts and firefighters stand beside a Turkish police bus which was targeted in a bomb attack in a central Istanbul district, Turkey, yesterday. A car bomb ripped through a police bus in central Istanbul during the morning rush hour yesterday, killing 11 people and wounding 36 near the main tourist district, a major university and the mayor's office.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Obama poised to endorse Hillary Clinton

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama edged closer to a formal endorsement of Hillary Clinton as the Democratic presidential nominee Monday, with his White House suggesting the next 48 hours would be pivotal.

With a series of key primary votes on Tuesday that could see Clinton all but seal the party nomination, the White House would not rule out an endorsement by Wednesday.

"Once the voters in New Jersey and California have an opportunity to express their preference," said White House spokesman Josh Earnest, "then we may be in a position where we have a much greater sense of what the outcome is likely to be."

It is an open secret in Washington that President Barack Obama intends to endorse Clinton.

But he wants to avoid alienating millions of young voters who have flocked to Bernie Sanders's energetic campaign. Sanders has won 10 million votes during the primaries, three million fewer than Clinton.

Obama's recent high poll ratings all but secure him a central role in the effort to secure a third White House term for Democrats.

According to Gallup, his approval is now 51 percent, almost double George W Bush's approval at the same point in his presidency.

Polls show Obama remains hugely popular among college educated women, who could prove vital in states like Virginia and Pennsylvania. He is also popular among black, Hispanic and Asian voters.

Sri Lanka to recognise war missing as dead

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka yesterday announced a landmark law to recognise as dead an estimated 65,000 people still missing seven years after the end of a bitter civil war, allowing relatives to claim inheritances.

Ministers approved a draft bill to issue "certificates of absence" to the families of those who went missing during a 37-year war with Tamil separatists and a Marxist uprising.

"This measure will help tens of thousands of Sri Lankans whose family members and loved ones are missing and who are unable to address practical issues relating to their disappearance," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Under the current law, families cannot access the property, bank accounts or inheritances left by missing relatives unless they can conclusively prove they are dead -- an often impossible task.

Huge numbers of minority Tamils went missing during almost four decades of war after being arrested by security services, while thousands more died in military bombardments.

Several mass graves containing skeletal remains have been found in the past two decades, but only a handful have ever been identified.

Thousands of people also went missing during a crackdown by security forces and pro-government vigilante groups on Marxist rebels between 1987 and 1990.

Brexit camp 'resorting to untruths to con people'

Says British PM as 'leave' campaign gains momentum

AFP, London

Prime Minister David Cameron warned voters Tuesday against believing "untruths" peddled by the Brexit campaign, seeking to regain momentum in the referendum race ahead of a crucial TV grilling.

As hundreds of thousands of people rushed to register for the June 23 referendum ahead of a midnight deadline, Cameron urged the public: "Don't make this choice on the basis of false information."

Opinion polls on Monday gave the campaign for Britain to leave the European Union a slender lead, sending the pound temporarily tumbling as concerns grow over the global market turmoil that could follow a Brexit.

The polls increased pressure on Cameron ahead of a television grilling by a live studio audience at 2000 GMT, when he will appear alongside -- but not debate -- UK Independence Party (UKIP) leader Nigel

Farage.

In a hastily-arranged press conference ahead of the ITV show, Cameron said: "It's time the 'Leave' campaign was called out on the nonsense they are peddling."

He rejected claims that non-eurozone Britain could be forced to contribute to future eurozone bailouts, that its EU budget rebate was at risk, or that the economic benefits of leaving outweighed the potential costs.

Meanwhile WTO Director General Roberto Azevedo warned that British exporters could face an extra £5.6 billion of annual customs duties if Britain left the EU.

His comments follow other warnings by the IMF and the governor of the Bank of England about the economic risks.

"Listen to the experts, don't stand on the sidelines -- this matters for you," Cameron urged voters.

He accused his rivals of "resorting to total untruths to con people into taking a leap in the dark. It is irresponsible. It is wrong."



Nato launches massive war games in Poland

AFP, Torun

Thousands of Nato troops hit the ground in Poland in a massive show of force as the alliance launched its biggest war games in eastern Europe since the Cold War.

The 10-day Anaconda manoeuvres are intended to shore up regional security in the face of the West's standoff with an increasingly assertive Russia.

But the Kremlin reacted angrily. "The exercises... do not contribute to an atmosphere of trust and security," said President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov. "Unfortunately we are still witnessing a deficit in mutual trust."

The exercises come a month ahead of a NATO summit in Warsaw set to seal its largest revamp since the Cold War by deploying more troop rotations to eastern European members spooked by Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.

Moscow fiercely opposes the Nato moves, billed by the US-led alliance as part of its "deterrence and dialogue" strategy.

Anaconda, the latest in a string of Nato manoeuvres in the region, involves 31,000 soldiers from 24 states, including 14,000 from the US, 12,000 Poles and 1,000 from Britain, as well from former Soviet "Partnership for Peace" states like Ukraine.

The exercises are Nato's biggest since the Trident drills last year involving 36,000 troops in Italy, Spain and Portugal.