



Smoke rises from burning oil wells near the town of Qayyarah, south of Mosul, during the operation to recapture the city from the Islamic State group, on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

Indonesia ratifies Paris climate pact

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia, one of the world's biggest greenhouse gas emitters, yesterday ratified the landmark climate pact but environmentalists expressed scepticism about the government's plans to limit global warming. In its plan Indonesia pledged to cut emissions by at least 29 percent by 2030 by stepping up protection of forests and expanding the renewable energy sector.

Millions in Philippines on typhoon alert

AFP, Manila

Millions of people in the Philippines were on high alert yesterday for one of the strongest typhoons to ever hit the disaster-battered country. Super Typhoon Haima was forecast to hit remote communities in the far north of the country about 11:00pm (1500 GMT) yesterday, bringing winds of 225 kilometres an hour and gusts of 315 kilometres an hour.

One more Palestinian 'attacker' shot dead

AFP, Jerusalem

A 19-year-old Palestinian woman approached Israeli border police with a knife in a tense area of the West Bank yesterday and was shot dead by officers, police said. Violence since October 2015 has killed 234 Palestinians, 36 Israelis, two Americans, one Jordanian, an Eritrean and a Sudanese national, according to an AFP count.

Malala urges Muslims to unite for peace

AFP, Sharjah



Russian, US astronauts blast off to ISS

AFP, Baikunur

Two Russian cosmonauts and a Nasa astronaut soared into orbit in a Soyuz spacecraft yesterday at the start of a two-day journey to the International Space Station. The trio's mission is expected to last just over four months with docking at the orbital laboratory taking place on Friday.

IS leaders fleeing Mosul

Claims US as Iraq forces poised for multiple assaults

AFP, Qayyarah

Jihadist leaders are fleeing Mosul, a top US general in the coalition battling the Islamic State group said yesterday as Iraqi forces closed in on the northern city.

Mosul was where IS supremo Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared his "caliphate" two years ago but is now the group's last major stronghold in Iraq.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who announced the launch of a broad offensive to retake the city on Monday, visited the front line yesterday.

In the biggest Iraqi military operation in years, forces have retaken dozens of villages, mostly south and east of Mosul, and are planning multiple assaults today.

"We are telling Daesh (IS) that their leaders are abandoning them. We've seen a movement out of Mosul," said Major General Gary Volesky, who heads the anti-IS coalition's land component.

He told reporters in a video briefing that the many foreigners among the 3,000 to 4,500 IS fighters would likely end up forming the core of the holdout jihadist force.

Volesky noted that the Iraqis would screen anyone leaving Mosul, and attempts by foreign fighters to blend in to an expected exodus of displaced people would be thwarted.

Hundreds of thousands of civilians were still trapped in the city with dwindling supplies, many sheltering in basements as air strikes intensified on IS targets.

East of Mosul, forces were poised for an assault on Qaraqosh, which lies about 15 kilometres (10 miles) away and was once Iraq's largest Christian town.

News of the move to recapture

DEVELOPMENT

Thousands of civilians flee ahead of battle

Russia opposes 'safe passage' for any jihadists

Qaraqosh sparked jubilation among Christians who had fled the town, with many dancing and singing in the Iraqi Kurdish city of Arbil on Tuesday night.

Units from Iraq's elite counter-terrorism service, which has done the heavy lifting in most recent operations against IS, were poised to flush jihadists out of the town, officers said.

Kurdish peshmerga forces prepared to attack IS positions on several fronts north of Mosul while federal forces

worked their way up the Tigris Valley. The "caliphate" Baghdadi proclaimed in Mosul's Great Mosque in June 2014 once covered more than a third of Iraq and parts of Syria.

But it has been shrinking steadily for more than a year and retaking Mosul would be a major setback for IS, all but ending its experiment in statehood.

World leaders and military commanders warned that -- despite signs that early progress in the Mosul offensive was faster than predicted -- the battle could be long and difficult.

After clearing towns and villages on the outskirts of Mosul with air support from the US-led coalition, Iraqi forces are expected to besiege the city before entering it.

Iraqi forces may allow fleeing IS fighters an exit to the west in a bid to minimise human and material losses.

But the chief of Russia's general staff, Valery Gerasimov, argued it was "necessary not to drive terrorists from one country to the other but to destroy them on the spot".

Russia, he said, was focusing on "possible attempts by fighters to break out of Mosul" and "freely leave the city in the direction of Syria".

FIVE-YEAR-LONG WAR IN SYRIA

Pause in Aleppo bombing holds

AFP, Beirut

A pause in Russian and Syrian strikes on Aleppo held into a second day yesterday, ahead of a brief ceasefire aimed at allowing civilians and rebels to quit the devastated city.

The halt came ahead of talks in Berlin between the Russian, French, and German leaders on Syria's five-year conflict.

Moscow is backing President Bashar al-Assad's regime in its war with a wide range of rebel groups, including with air strikes in the divided northern city of Aleppo.

Under growing international pressure over the devastation and civilian deaths caused by strikes, Moscow announced early Tuesday that Russian and Syrian warplanes would stop bombing rebel-held parts of the city to pave the way for a "humanitarian pause".

That window, starting at 0500 GMT today and due to last eight hours, is expected to see all fighting stop to allow civilians and rebels to exit opposition-held districts via six corridors.

Moscow yesterday extended the truce to another 11 hours as the UN said the window is too small to allow any aid operations.

Moscow's offer was initially met with scepticism, but the bombing halt held for its first 24 hours, reported several groups on the ground.

Meanwhile, French President Francois Hollande and German Chancellor Angela Merkel were to meet with Russian leader Vladimir Putin in Berlin later yesterday to discuss the ceasefire plans.

Speaking of the "disastrous" situation in Aleppo, Merkel said she and Hollande would speak to Putin but that "we cannot expect miracles".



Duterte says 'goodbye' to US in China

AFP, Beijing

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said it was "time to say goodbye" to the US during a visit to China yesterday, as the combative leader reconfigures his country's diplomatic alliances.

Duterte is in China for a four-day trip that is expected to confirm his tilt away from Washington and towards Beijing's sphere of influence.

During a speech addressing the Filipino community in Beijing, the firebrand president said the Philippines had gained little from its long alliance with the US, its former colonial ruler.

"Your stay in my country was for your own benefit. So time to say goodbye, my friend," he said, as if addressing the US.

"I will not go to America anymore. I will just be insulted there," he added, before once again referring to US President Barack Obama as a "son of a whore".

Duterte, who took office in late June, said he was fed up with the Philippines' foreign policy being dictated by a Western agenda.

"What kept us from China was not our own making. I will charter a new course," he said.

Foreign policy under Duterte has dramatically shifted from that pursued under predecessor Benigno Aquino, who took Beijing to an international tribunal over its extensive territorial claims in the South China Sea and won a resounding victory. But Duterte, who took office in June shortly before the tribunal ruling, has made a point of not flaunting the outcome.

He has also suspended joint US-Philippine patrols in the South China Sea, and has threatened an end to joint military exercises.

Tensions have risen between the US and China over Washington's so-called "pivot" to the Asia-Pacific, a move that Beijing says is intended to contain it.

Duterte will meet top leaders including President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang during his stay.

Deadly clashes before latest Yemen truce

AFP, Aden

Heavy fighting rocked Yemen hours before a UN-brokered ceasefire was due to begin yesterday, as warring parties come under mounting pressure to end a conflict that has raged for more than two years.

The truce will be the sixth attempt to end the bloodshed since a Saudi-led Arab coalition intervened in March 2015 to support the government of President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi after rebels overran much of Yemen.

Almost 6,900 have been killed -- more than half of them civilians -- while another three million are displaced and millions more need food aid.

A United Nations report said air strikes by the coalition were suspected of causing around half of all civilian deaths, while rebel-affiliated groups were responsible for about a quarter.

The UN special envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, on Sunday announced the truce from 23:59 (2059 GMT) for an initial three days, subject to renewal.

Hadi's government said it would agree to the truce if rebels also adhered to it, and also called for the insurgents to monitor the ceasefire and end their siege of Yemen's third city, Ta'ez.

The rebels, in a statement on Tuesday night, expressed readiness for a "lasting ceasefire, comprehensive and without conditions".

Military sources however said rebel positions in the northern Saada province were struck by coalition raids yesterday. At least two loyalists were killed and 15 wounded in fighting near the Red Sea, in Hajja province, the sources said. Air strikes and fighting were also reported in Ta'ez.



Protesters lie on the ground after being hit by a police van during a rally in front of the US embassy in Manila, yesterday. A Philippine police van on October 19 rammed and ran over baton-wielding protesters outside the US embassy in Manila, with the driver of the vehicle saying he panicked because he feared being mobbed.

PHOTO: AFP

Ecuador admits curbing on Assange internet

AFP, Quito

Ecuador said Tuesday it had cut the internet access of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who is holed up at its London embassy, due to leaks by the anti-secrecy website that could impact the US election.

WikiLeaks has in recent weeks published a damaging trove of hacked emails from Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, which accuses it of trying to sway the election in favor of Republican Donald Trump.

"The government of Ecuador respects the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states. It does not interfere in external electoral processes, nor does it favor any particular candidate," the Ecuadoran foreign ministry said in a statement.

In consequence, the ministry said, it decided to "temporarily restrict" communications at the embassy.

US officials have formally blamed state-sponsored Russian hackers for the hacking of internal emails from the Democratic Party and other institutions.

On Monday WikiLeaks accused Ecuador of cutting off Assange's internet communications at the behest of US Secretary of State John Kerry, citing "multiple US sources." The United States denied the allegation.

Myanmar struggling to establish democracy

Says Suu Kyi in India, hopes better days will come

AFP, New Delhi

Myanmar is struggling to establish full democracy after 50 years of military rule, de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi said yesterday following a deadly military lockdown in restive Rakhine state.

State media say security forces have killed at least 29 people in a military crackdown after raids on guard posts along the Bangladesh border which the government blamed on Islamist insurgents.

The area is home to many Rohingyas, a persecuted Muslim minority in the overwhelmingly Buddhist country.

"We as a nation are struggling to make the democratic culture take root," Suu Kyi told reporters after meeting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on her first official visit to New Delhi.

"We too have many challenges to face, but we are confident that these challenges can be overcome because our people are determined to overcome them."

Suu Kyi won a historic election victory last year and her administration is managing a difficult transition from a military-run pariah nation to full-fledged democracy. After spending much of the last few decades under arrest, she is now officially foreign minister and self-appointed state councillor -- a role akin to prime minister. But her country remains riven with ethnic and religious violence and she has disappointed some of her supporters by refusing publicly to recognise the Rohingyas as legal citizens.

Tens of thousands of stateless Rohingyas have spent the past four years trapped in bleak displacement camps with limited access to health care and other basic services.

Suu Kyi said her country had suffered from a lack of peace and stability for many decades and looked to neighbouring India for help in developing as a democracy. Modi said India, which strongly supported Suu Kyi during her time in opposition, stood "shoulder to shoulder" with Myanmar.

Study: Humans eating wild mammals into extinction

Some 300 wild mammal species in Asia, Africa and Latin America are being driven to extinction by humanity's voracious appetite for bushmeat, according to a world-first assessment released yesterday.

The species at risk range from rats to rhinoceros, and include docile, ant-eating pangolins as well as flesh-ripping big cats.

The findings, published in the journal Royal Society Open Science, are evidence of a "global crisis" for warm-blooded land animals, 15 top conservation scientists concluded.

This decline, the study said, was part of a larger trend known as a "mass extinction event," only the sixth time in half a billion years that Earth's species are dying out at more than 1,000 times the usual rate.

Besides eating them, humans are robbing mammals of their natural habitats.

According to the Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of endangered species, a quarter of 4,556 land mammals assessed are on the road to annihilation.

The likelihood of extinction, the team found, depends on body size: the bigger the animals, the greater the danger. All 301 species identified are found exclusively in developing countries, with the highest concentration in southeast Asia (113), followed by Africa (91), the rest of Asia (61) and Latin America (38).

The scale of the problem is daunting: some 89,000 tonnes of wild meat -- with a market value of about \$200 million (180 million euros) -- is butchered every year from the Brazilian Amazon alone, the study found.

SOURCE: AFP