

IS executes dozens

US says 800-900 fighters killed so far in Mosul offensive

AGENCIES
Islamic State militants have in recent days executed dozens of prisoners taken from villages the group has been forced to abandon by an Iraqi army advance on the city of Mosul, as camps around the city yesterday filled with fleeing civilians.

Meanwhile, the United States yesterday said that up to 900 Islamic State group jihadists have been killed in the offensive so far.

Most of those executed were former members of the Iraqi police and army who had lived in areas under Islamic State control south of Mosul, Abdul Rahman al-Waggaa, a member of the Nineveh provincial council, told Reuters.

The militants forced them to leave their homes with their families, and took them to the town of Hammam Al-Alil, 15 km south of Mosul, where the executions took place, he said in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdish region, east of Mosul.

The executions were meant "to terrorise the others, those who are in Mosul in particular", and also to get rid of the prisoners, he said.

Separately, Hoshiyar Zebari, an influential Kurdish politician, told Reuters in Erbil that at least 65 people had been executed by Islamic State south of Mosul three days ago.

UN human rights spokesman Rupert Colville on Tuesday said Islamic State fighters had reportedly killed scores of people around Mosul in the last week. Colville said security forces discovered the bodies of 70 civilians in houses in Tuloul Naser village south of Mosul last Thursday.

Islamic State also reportedly killed 50 former police officers outside Mosul on Sunday, he said.

Iraqi army and Kurdish Peshmerga forces on Oct 17 launched an offensive on Mosul, Islamic State's last major city stronghold in Iraq.

There are between 3,500 and 5,000 IS jihadists in Mosul and up to another 2,000 in the broader area, according to US estimates.

The offensive has so far been concentrated in towns and villages around Mosul, with Iraqi forces later expected to breach city limits and engage the jihadists in street-to-street fighting.

Aid workers have warned of a major humanitarian crisis when fighting begins in earnest for Mosul, which is home to more than a million people, but thousands have already been fleeing surrounding areas. Iraq's ministry of displacement and migration yesterday said that more than 11,700 people had been displaced since the operation began.



An Iraqi soldier stands next to a detained man accused of being an Islamic State fighter, at a check point in Qayyara, south of Mosul, Iraq, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

'Settlements in WB not illegal'

AFP, Jerusalem

Donald Trump's adviser on Israel said Wednesday that Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank were not illegal and he believed the candidate agreed with him, putting them at odds with much of the world. Speaking to AFP in Jerusalem, David Friedman also said the US presidential candidate was "tremendously sceptical" about the prospects for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Asked whether Trump viewed the West Bank as part of Israel, as many far-right Israelis do, Friedman did not answer directly. "I don't think he believes that the settlements are illegal," Friedman said.



'Ab ki baar Trump sarkar'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Donald Trump has released a campaign video in which he speaks Hindi in an attempt to appeal to Indian-American voters. "The Indian and Hindu community will have a true friend in the White House," Trump said during a Republican Hindu Coalition charity event. The video, produced by Trump's Indian-American Advisory Committee, also features Trump using a variation of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaign slogan. "Ab ki baar Trump sarkar," Trump says in Hindi, which translates to "This time Trump Government".

US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION



Women chant slogans during a protest in front of Trump Tower in New York, on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Trump defiant as Clinton surges

Pledges to spend own money as poll gives double-digit lead to his rival; more Republicans expect Democrats to win US election

AGENCIES

Donald Trump pledged to pour millions of his own dollars into his presidential bid on Wednesday, in defiance of the seemingly unstoppable momentum building behind Hillary Clinton.

With less than two weeks before polling day, and with early voting under way in several states, the Democratic nominee remains comfortably on course to become America's first female president.

The latest rolling poll average compiled by tracker RealClearPolitics showed Clinton extending her national lead in a four-way race against Trump and two outsiders to 5.9 percentage points -- pointing to a clear electoral college victory.

A separate poll conducted for the Associated Press gave her a commanding double-digit lead over Trump.

The AP-GfK poll found that likely voters support Clinton over Trump, 51 to 37 -- a whopping margin that would all but shut the window on the prospect of a Trump victory.

But the former secretary of state's rival, a 70-year-old Manhattan real estate mogul, took heart from a separate new survey that shows him with a two-point lead in early-voting Florida, a state

where races are often won and lost.

"We are going to have, I think, a tremendous victory," Trump told CNN.

Despite his claim, polls continue to reflect a reality alternate to what Trump puts forth.

More Republicans now think Clinton, rather than him, will win the presidency, as their party's candidate struggles with difficulties including allegations of sexual misconduct and his suggestion he may not honour the outcome of the election.

A Reuters/Ipsos poll found that 41



percent of Republicans expected Clinton to win the Nov 8 election, versus 40 percent who picked Trump.

Trump, a businessman and former reality television star, has alarmed mainstream Republicans throughout his campaign by routinely bashing the political establishment and making a series of provocative statements.

He aroused criticism for belittling the parents of a US soldier killed in the Iraq war, calling for a ban on admitting Muslims to the country and accusing a judge of bias because of his Hispanic

Trump's Hollywood star smashed

AFP, Los Angeles

A man with an axe destroyed Donald Trump's star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on Wednesday in a video protest over sexual misconduct allegations dogging the Republican presidential candidate.

The protester, dressed in city construction worker overalls, can be seen on footage posted to YouTube and several other websites hacking away the gold lettering and camera logo from the tribute.

Giving his name as James Otis, he calmly explains he is "terribly upset" with 70-year-old Trump, who vigorously denies claims by almost a dozen women that he groped or was sexually aggressive toward them.

The man told a local news agency he had originally intended to remove the entire star from the sidewalk on Hollywood Boulevard, but failed to do so. He was arrested yesterday.

This is not the first time Trump's Walk of Fame star has been targeted.

In July, a Los Angeles street artist built a tiny wall of wooden planks topped with barbed wire around it, in protest at Trump's campaign vow to build a wall on the Mexican border.

Last year, excrement was left on the star and someone drew a large yellow X over it. A swastika and a mute symbol were also drawn on the red tile earlier this year.

Liliana Preciado, a spokeswoman for the Los Angeles Police Department, told AFP the vandal had used both a pickaxe and sledgehammer on the star.

Walk of Fame stars are worth around \$30,000, meaning anyone found to have destroyed one may find themselves facing a felony charge.



MILITARY BUILD-UP IN EASTERN EUROPE TO COUNTER RUSSIA

Britain, EU powers join US

Putin says US 'hysteria' over Moscow's intervention is election ploy

REUTERS, Brussels

Britain said on Wednesday it will send fighter jets to Romania next year and the United States promised troops, tanks and artillery to Poland in Nato's biggest military build-up on Russia's borders since the Cold War.

Germany, Canada and other Nato allies also pledged forces at a defence ministers meeting in Brussels on the same day two Russian warships armed with cruise missiles entered the Baltic Sea between Sweden and Denmark, underscoring East-West tensions.

Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the troop contributions to a new 4,000-strong force in the Baltics and eastern Europe were a measured response to what the alliance believes are some 330,000 Russian troops stationed on Russia's western flank near Moscow.

Nato says Russia has deployed this month nuclear-capable Iskander missiles to Kaliningrad, Moscow's European enclave, and suspended a weapons-grade plutonium agreement with the United States.

Those ballistic missiles can hit targets across Poland and the Baltics, although Nato officials declined to say if Russia had moved nuclear warheads to Kaliningrad.

US Secretary of Defense Ash Carter announced a "battle-ready battalion task force" of about 900 soldiers would be sent to eastern Poland, as well as another, separate force equipped with tanks and other heavy equipment to move across eastern Europe.

Britain's Defence Secretary Michael Fallon said Britain would send an 800-strong battalion to Estonia, supported by French and Danish troops, starting from May. The United States wants its



troops in position by June.

London is also sending Typhoon fighter aircraft to Romania to patrol around the Black Sea, partly in support of Turkey.

Meanwhile, President Vladimir Putin yesterday accused American politicians of whipping up hysteria about a mythical Russian threat as a ploy to distract voters from their own failings in the run-up to the US presidential election.

Putin, addressing an audience of foreign policy experts gathered in southern Russia, repeatedly lashed out at the Obama administration, saying it did not keep its word on Syria, did not honour deals, and had falsely accused Moscow of all manner of sins.

The US government has formally accused Russia of a campaign of cyber attacks against Democratic Party organisations.

Putin said he found it hard to believe that anyone seriously thought Moscow was capable of influencing the Nov 8 election.

"It's much simpler to distract people with so-called Russian hackers, spies, and agents of influence. Does anyone really think that Russia could influence the American people's choice in any way? Is America a banana republic or what? America is a great power."

Humanity killing off Earth's wildlife

Nearly three-fifths of all animals with a backbone -- fish, birds, amphibians, reptiles and mammals -- have been wiped out since 1970 by human appetites and activity, according to a grim study released yesterday.

On current trends, that plunge in stocks of global wildlife could extend to two-thirds by 2020, an annual decline of two percent, conservation group WWF and the Zoological Society of London warned in their joint biennial Living Planet report.

There is no mystery as to why: our own ever-expanding species -- which has more than doubled in number since 1960 to 7.4 billion -- is simply eating, crowding and poisoning its planetary cohabitants out of existence.

Victims include gorillas and orangutans, rhinos and elephants, tigers and snow leopards but also faceless species such as corals, a crucial cornerstone not only of marine life but also coastal human communities.

Swaths of coral reef around the globe have already turned white, killed by warming waters, pollution and disease.

The findings are based on long-term

monitoring of some 3,700 vertebrate species spread across more than 14,000 distinct populations.

Scientists have tracked changes in the size of those populations, not how many species are threatened with extinction.

But the news on that front is not good either: experts now agree that Earth has entered only the sixth "mass extinction event" -- when species vanish at least 1,000 faster than usual -- in the last half-billion years.

Freshwater environments such as lakes, rivers and wetlands have fared the worst, with an 81 percent decline in average population size between 1970 and 2012 for 881 species monitored. Marine and land vertebrates populations dropped 36 and 38 percent respectively over the same period.

Factory fishing has emptied the seas of 40 percent of sea life, and nine out of 10 fisheries in the world are either over- or full-fished today.

On land, the big threats are loss of land to agriculture and cities, followed by rampant hunting, mostly for food but also for commerce -- much of it in endangered species.

SOURCE: AFP

IS slaves get Sakharov Prize

AFP, Brussels

The European Parliament yesterday awarded its Sakharov Prize to Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bashar, two Iraqi Yazidi women who were held as sex slaves by Islamic State militants and have campaigned for human rights since escaping.

Murad and Bashar were among thousands of women and girls abducted, tortured and sexually abused by Islamic State fighters after the militants rounded up Yazidis in the village of Kocho, near Sinjar in northwest Iraq, in 2014.

The Yazidi are a religious sect whose beliefs combine elements of several ancient Middle Eastern religions. Islamic State considers them devil-worshippers.

Islamic State insurgents overran Sinjar in August 2014, systematically killing, capturing and enslaving thousands of Yazidi inhabitants.

Murad, now aged 23, was held by IS in Mosul but escaped her captors in November 2014, reached a refugee camp and eventually made her way to Germany. She has since become active as an advo-

cate for the Yazidis, and refugee and women's rights in general, as well as campaigning against human trafficking.

Bashar, 18, was captured in the same raid as Murad and also kept as a sex slave by IS. She escaped in March but was badly disfigured and blinded in one eye when a landmine went off as she fled. Two companions were killed. She now lives in Germany and works as an advocate for the Yazidis.

Kurdish forces retook Sinjar town in November 2014 in a two-day offensive backed by airstrikes from a US-led coalition.

UN investigators said in a report in June that Islamic State is committing genocide against the Yazidis in Syria and Iraq to the religious community of 400,000 people through killings, sexual slavery and other crimes.

The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, named after the late Russian dissident and scientist Andrei Sakharov is awarded each year by the European Parliament. Set up in 1988, it honours individuals and organisations defending human rights and basic freedoms.



(From left, clockwise) A woman makes a phone call in Ussita region; a painting is seen in a collapsed church in Borgo Sant'Antonio near Visso; and an officer stands in front of a collapsed church in Campi di Norcia, central Italy, yesterday. Daylight revealed widespread damage in central Italy yesterday after strong earthquakes overnight that caused panic and fear among residents just two months after a quake nearby killed hundreds. No one was killed this time, but several buildings were damaged. PHOTO: REUTERS