



Displaced Iraqi women, who fled their homes during a battle between Iraqi forces and Islamic State militants, carry their children in Mosul, Iraq, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

# WikiLeaks to share CIA secret files

Assange accuses CIA of 'devastating incompetence', says hacked tools will be shared with tech giants to fix errors

AFP, London

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange yesterday accused the CIA of "devastating incompetence" for keeping hacking secrets in one place and said he would work with tech giants to develop fixes after he leaked them.

"This is a historic act of devastating incompetence, to have created such an arsenal and then stored it all in one place," Assange told a press conference streamed live from Ecuador's embassy in London, where he has been living as a fugitive from justice since 2012.

"It is impossible to keep effective control of cyber weapons... If you build them, eventually you will lose them, Assange said.

He said his anti-secrecy website had "a lot more information" about the Central Intelligence Agency's hacking operation but would hold off on publishing it until WikiLeaks had spoken to tech manufacturers about fixes.

"We have decided to work with them to give them some exclusive access to the additional technical details we have so fixes can be developed and then pushed out.

"Once this material is effectively disarmed by us we will publish additional details about what has been occurring," he added.

On Tuesday, WikiLeaks published nearly 9,000 documents it said were part of a huge trove leaked from the CIA, describing it as the largest ever publication of secret intelligence materials.

"This extraordinary collection, which amounts to more than several hundred million lines of code, gives its possessor the entire hacking capacity of the CIA," it said.

The documents showed that CIA hackers can turn a TV into a listening device, bypass popular encryption apps, and possibly control one's car.

CIA on Wednesday accused WikiLeaks of endangering Americans, helping US rivals and hampering the fight against terror threats by releasing the alleged CIA hacking tools.

A CIA spokeswoman would not confirm the authenticity of the materials published by WikiLeaks, which said they were leaked from the spy agency's hacking operations.

Most experts believe the materials to be genuine, and US media said Wednesday that the Federal Bureau of Investigation is opening a criminal probe into the leak.

The source of the materials remained unclear. The investigation could focus on whether the CIA was sloppy in its controls, or, as The Washington Post reported, it could be "a major mole hunt" for a malicious leaker or turncoat inside the agency.

WikiLeaks itself said the documents, hacking tools and code came from an archive that had circulated among US government hackers and private contractors.

An investigation would come as the CIA is already enmeshed in a politically-charged probe into Russia's alleged interference in the US election last year in support of President Donald Trump's campaign.

WikiLeaks, which has stunned the US government with a series of publications of top secret political, diplomatic and intelligence materials in recent years, said Tuesday's leak was only the first of a series of releases of CIA hacking materials.

Meanwhile, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said China expressed concern about the reports and reiterated its opposition to all forms of hacking.



# Hawaii issues first challenge

REUTERS, Hawaii

The state of Hawaii requested emergency court intervention on Wednesday to halt a revised executive order from President Donald Trump placing US entry restrictions on refugees and travelers from six Muslim-majority countries.

Arguing that the new travel ban violates the US Constitution, the state asked a Hawaii federal court to grant a temporary restraining order that should apply nationally.

U.S. District Court Judge Derrick Watson ruled earlier in the day that the state could sue over Trump's new order, which was signed by the president on Monday.

It is the first legal challenge to the revised order.

Watson said the state could revise its initial lawsuit, which had challenged Trump's original ban signed in January. A hearing is set for March 15, a day before the new ban is to go

into effect.

The government has said the president has wide authority to implement immigration policy and that the travel rules are necessary to protect against terrorist attacks.

Some legal experts have said court

and was challenged in more than two dozen lawsuits around the country. A federal judge in Seattle put the first order on hold, in a decision upheld by an appeals court in San Francisco.

The new order is much more narrowly tailored. It keeps a 90-day ban on travel to the United States by citizens of Iran, Libya, Syria, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen, but excludes Iraq and applies the restriction only to new visa applicants. It also removed an indefinite ban on all refugees from Syria.

The order no longer covers legal residents or existing visa holders, and makes waivers possible for some business, diplomatic and other travelers.

Immigration advocates have said the new ban, like the original one, discriminates against Muslims.

But the first hurdle in a lawsuit is proving "standing" to sue, which means finding someone who has been harmed by the policy. With so many exemptions, legal experts

## TRUMP'S NEW TRAVEL BAN



PHOTO: AP/WIDEWORLD

# Blasts kill 26 at Iraqi wedding

SAMARRA

Two suicide bombers attacked a celebration being held the night before a wedding north of Baghdad, killing 26 people, a police officer and a doctor said yesterday.

The bombings in the Al-Hajaj area, north of the city of Tikrit, also wounded 25 people, the sources said.

"The first blew himself up at 8:30 pm (1730 GMT on Wednesday) amid men who were dancing during the celebration," while the second attacked a few minutes later, a police lieutenant colonel said.

The bombers detonated explosive belts, the officer said. A doctor at a local hospital confirmed the toll.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack, but the Islamic State jihadist group carries out frequent suicide bombings targeting both civilians and members of the security forces in Iraq.

IS overran large areas north and west of Baghdad, including swathes of Salaheddin province, where Wednesday's attack occurred, but Iraqi forces backed by US-led air strikes and other support have since regained most of the territory they lost.

Iraqi forces are now fighting to retake west Mosul, the largest urban bastion still held by the jihadists in Iraq.

Troops battled the ultra-hardline Sunni Muslim fighters, who hid among the remaining civilian population and deployed snipers and suicide car bombs to defend their last major Iraq stronghold.



Students of Rabindra Bharati University blow colour powder during Holi, the Festival of Colours, celebrations inside the university campus in Kolkata, India, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

# 8,000 evacuated in German city over WWII bomb

AFP, Berlin

Some 8,000 people were evacuated yesterday from homes, shops and offices in the western German city of Duesseldorf after an unexploded World War II bomb was uncovered, local authorities said.

The 250-kilogramme (550-pound) dud explosive was found on Wednesday evening during construction works in the northern district of the city. A one-kilometre radius was sealed off. The bomb expected to be defused in the early afternoon.

More than 70 years after the end of the war, unexploded bombs are regularly found buried in German soil, a legacy of the Allies' intense bombing campaigns against Nazi Germany.

Authorities estimate that some 3,000 unexploded bombs remain underground in Berlin alone.

"World's heaviest woman" loses 100 kgs in surgery

AFP, Mumbai

Indian doctors yesterday said that an Egyptian who is believed to be the world's heaviest woman had successfully undergone weight-loss surgery after losing over 100 kilograms (220 pounds). Eman Ahmed Abd El Aty, who previously weighed around 500 kilos, had not left her house in Egypt in over two decades until arriving in Mumbai last month for bariatric surgery. The Egyptian is still believed to be the world's heaviest woman ahead of American Pauline Potter who the Guinness Book of World Records recorded at 293 kilos in July last year.

# Stop Nazi references

Merkel tells Turkey; Ankara repeats comparison

REUTERS, Berlin

German Chancellor Angela Merkel told Turkey to stop using Nazi references in an escalating row between the Nato allies over the cancellation of Turkish ministers' rallies in Germany, only for the Turkish foreign minister to repeat the same comparison.

Turkey is fuming that some German authorities, citing security concerns, have stopped its ministers from campaigning among Germany's large Turkish community for President Tayyip Erdogan's bid to boost his powers in a referendum on April 16.

Berlin, meanwhile, is angry about the arrest of a Turkish-German journalist in Istanbul held on terrorism charges and has repeatedly called for his release.

Merkel spoke unusually bluntly in the Bundestag lower house of parliament, saying she was saddened by the deep differences which were dividing the allies despite common causes, such as fighting Islamist terrorism.

"These comparisons of Germany with



PHOTO: AP/WIDEWORLD

Nazism must stop. They are unworthy of the close ties between Germany and Turkey and of our peoples," the centre-right chancellor said.

However, Turkey's Foreign Minister effectively repeated the comparison within hours, saying that he was not calling the current German government Nazis but that their actions were reminiscent of that era.

On Sunday, Erdogan described the cancellations as "fascist actions" reminiscent of the Nazi era.

# Israel MPs nod to bills quieting mosques

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's parliament gave preliminary approval Wednesday to two controversial measures that would limit calls to prayers from mosques, including one prohibiting the use of loudspeakers at all hours, after shouting matches between lawmakers.

The bills -- the second of which would ban loudspeakers in urban areas between 11:00 pm and 7:00 am -- will eventually have to be reconciled, with three more readings required before they can become law.

While the bills in theory would apply to any religious place of worship, Muslims say it is clearly meant to silence the traditional call to prayer at mosques.

# 23 killed in air strikes

US confirms Marines deployed in anti-IS ops

AGENCIES

The toll in air strikes thought to have been conducted by a US-led coalition on a jihadist-held northern Syrian village yesterday has risen to 23 civilians killed, a monitor said.

"The raids hit the village of Al-Matab after midnight and were likely carried out by the coalition," said Rami Abdel Rahman of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The Observatory earlier reported a toll of 14 people killed. At least eight children and six women were among the dead in Al-Matab, held by the Islamic State group.

The village lies near a key road linking Raqa -- IS's de facto capital -- to Deir Ezzor city, the capital of the adjacent oil-rich province.

On Monday, fighters from the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces cut off that route in a bid to encircle the jihadists in Raqa.

The US-led coalition has been backing the SDF's drive for Raqa with air power and hundreds of special operations forces as

## WAR IN SYRIA

advisers.

Abdel Rahman said SDF fighters advancing on IS jihadists in Al-Matab, which lies about 55 kilometres (35 miles) southeast of Raqa, reported AFP.

Meanwhile, a US Marines artillery unit has been deployed to Syria in recent days to help local forces speed up efforts to defeat Islamic State at Raqa and the campaign to isolate the city is going "very, very well", the US-led coalition said yesterday.

Coalition spokesman US Air Force Colonel John Dorrian said the additional US forces would be working with local partners in Syria - the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Syrian Arab Coalition - and would not have a front line role, reported Reuters.

The artillery will help "expedite the defeat of ISIS in Raqa", he said, using another acronym for Islamic State.

The additional deployment comprises a total of 400 US forces - both Marines and Army Rangers. It adds to around 500 US military personnel already in Syria, Dorrian said.