

NEWSIN brief

Libya's Ansar al-Sharia announces dissolution

AFP, Tripoli
The Libyan jihadist group Ansar al-Sharia, which is linked to Al-Qaeda and deemed a terrorist organisation by the UN and United States, announced its "dissolution" in a communique published online on Saturday. Washington accuses the group of being behind the September 11, 2012 attack on the US consulate in Benghazi in which ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans were killed.

Divorce ban in Palestinian!

AFP, Ramallah
The head of Palestinian Islamic courts yesterday told judges not to grant divorces over Ramadan, fearing the month-long fast could spark rash words that would be regretted later. The judge said he based his ruling on "the experience of previous years" when he found that the dawn-to-dusk fast and ban on cigarettes tended to lead to frayed tempers and sharp tongues.

Kim oversees 'new' weapon system test

AFP, Seoul
North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un has overseen a test of a new anti-aircraft weapon system, state media said yesterday. Pyongyang first tested the new weapon system in April last year when some defects had been discovered, but Kim said the latest test as a success, KCNA said.

Thousands of Israelis rally for Palestine state

AFP, Tel Aviv
Thousands of Israelis rallied Saturday in Tel Aviv in support of a Palestinian state ahead of the 50th anniversary of Israel's occupation of Palestinian land. Israeli opposition Labour party leader Isaac Herzog attended the rally and threw his support behind a two-state solution to the conflict.

TERROR FEARS US considers banning laptop on int'l flights

AFP, Washington
US Homeland Security John Kelly said yesterday that he was considering banning laptop computers on international flights into and out of the country, amid signs of "a real threat."

Kelly made his remarks during the Memorial Day weekend, one of the busiest travel periods in the US, and at a time when the bombing at a concert in Manchester, England has raised concerns that further attacks -- possibly involving explosives packed in electronic devices -- might be planned. "There's a real threat -- numerous threats against aviation," Kelly told the Fox New Sunday program, when asked about the likelihood that a wide-reaching ban on large electronics in airplane cabins could be imposed.

The US homeland security chief said terrorists are "obsessed" with the idea of "knocking down an airplane in flight -- particularly a US carrier, if it's full of mostly US folks."

A ban could seriously disrupt flights between Europe and the US. Some 3,250 a week are expected this summer between European Union countries and the US, according to aviation industry figures.

If the laptop ban Kelly discussed is put in place, it would greatly expand on a rule he announced March 21, banning electronic devices larger than a smartphone from the cabins of flights from 10 airports in the Middle East and North Africa.

Countries affected by that rule are Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco.



A woman sleeps on a luggage trolley at Heathrow Terminal 5 in London, Britain, yesterday. British Airways resumed some flights from Britain's two biggest airports yesterday after a global computer system failure created chaos, but hundreds of passengers were still waiting for hours at London Heathrow.

Trump to leave Paris climate deal: report

REUTERS, Washington
US President Donald Trump has told "confidants," including the head of the Environmental Protection Agency Scott Pruitt, that he plans to leave a landmark international agreement on climate change, Axios news outlet reported on Saturday, citing three sources with direct knowledge.
On Saturday, Trump said in a Twitter post he would make a decision on whether to support the Paris climate deal next week.
The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment.
A source who has been in contact with people involved in the decision told Reuters a couple of meetings were planned with chief executives of energy companies and big corporations and others about the climate agreement ahead of Trump's expected announcement later in the week. It was unclear whether those meetings would still take place.
"I will make my final decision on the Paris Accord next week!" he tweeted on the final day of a Group of Seven (G7) summit in Italy at which he refused to bow to pressure from allies to back the landmark 2015 agreement.
The summit of G7 wealthy nations pitted Trump against the leaders of Germany, France, Britain, Italy, Canada and Japan on several issues, with European diplomats frustrated at having to revisit questions they had hoped were long settled.
Trump came under concerted pressure from the other leaders to honor the 2015 Paris Agreement on curbing carbon emissions.
Although he tweeted that he would make a decision next week, his apparent reluctance to embrace the first legally binding global climate deal clearly annoyed German Chancellor Merkel.

EU MIGRANT CRISIS

54 dead, 10,000 rescued off Libya coast in 4 days

AFP, Rome
About 10,000 migrants were rescued off the coast of Libya over the previous four days but at least 54 others died, Libyan and Italian officials said Saturday.
On Saturday, the Tunisian army also rescued 126 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa hoping to reach Italian shores, officials said. They were aboard a flimsy inflatable boat off the coastal town of Ben Gardane, near the Libyan border.

On Friday, more than 1,200 migrants were rescued by Libyan ships and taken to Tripoli or Zawiya, about 50 kilometres (30 miles) west, while the Italian coastguard and commercial boats rescued 2,200 others and took them to Italy.

At least 10 bodies were also found by the Italian coastguard, officials said. Migrants were still disembarking in southern Italy on Saturday.

Another 6,400 were picked up between Tuesday and Thursday, but at least 44 people died, including 35 who drowned on Wednesday when a powerful wave struck their vessel, pitching them into the sea as a rescue ship was distributing life jackets.

Officials expressed fears that many more people were still missing at sea.

The unloading of passengers in Sicily was halted all week due to the G7 summit in the eastern hill-top town of Taormina, which lengthened rescue ships' journey by 24 hours and delayed their return to the seas.

In response, they called on commercial boats to help out. More than 50,000 migrants have reached the Italian coast since the start of the year, not counting those rescued in recent days, while more than 1,400 have drowned or are missing, according to UN figures.

Of the 181,000 migrants who entered Italy last year, some 90 percent arrived via Libya. The North African country has long been a stepping stone for migrants seeking a better life in Europe.



Desperate parents marry off their girls for cash

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Nasrine's husband was once a happy, optimistic man. He made good money from a restaurant and butcher's shop he owned. "With his hands, he could turn dust into gold," she said.

Then Yemen's civil war escalated, and as the country collapsed, so did he. He lost his businesses, the family became destitute, he began abusing Nasrine, and they divorced, she said.

Soon afterwards, she learned to her horror that her ex-husband had agreed to marry off their 10-year-old daughter to a man in his 60s for 1 million riyals, or about £3,000. Nasrine managed to block the wedding and went into hiding with their daughter.

Her case illustrates what human rights activists say is a dire situation for girls in Yemen: Child marriages are mounting dramatically in the Arab world's poorest country, fuelled by a war.

As the fighting grinds on into its third year, millions of families are unable to make ends meet, and more than 3 million people have been driven from their homes, ending up in camps. For families desperate for cash, unable to support their children or afraid they cannot protect their daughter's "virtue", marrying off a girl becomes the solution.

Unicef said in March that early marriage in Yemen has become "alarmingly widespread".

In a survey carried out in September in six provinces, 72 percent of female respondents said they got married before they were 18 -- compared with around 50 percent in surveys before the war -- and about 44 percent said they were wed before they turned 15, the organisation said.

In one case, a father ran out of cash while buying khat -- leaves habitually chewed as a stimulant in Yemen -- so he gave his daughter to the dealer in marriage.

WAR IN YEMEN



Saudis US's milking cow: Khamenei

AFP, Tehran

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei launched a fierce attack against regional rival Saudi Arabia, saying it was being pumped "like a milking cow" by "infidel" Americans.

"These people (the Saudis) appear to believe in the Koran... but in practice they act against its teachings," Khamenei said at a meeting on Saturday to mark the start of the holy month of Ramadan.

"They are close with the infidels and offer the enemy the money they should be using to improve the lives of their own people.

"But in reality there is no closeness and, as the Americans have said, they are just there to pump them for money like a milking cow, and later slaughter them," he added.

During a visit by President Donald Trump to Riyadh on May 21, Saudi Arabia agreed to buy \$110 billion of US weapons and signed investment deals worth billions more.

Sunni-led Saudi Arabia and Shia-majority Iran are on opposing sides in a number of regional conflicts, including in Syria and Yemen.

Trump sought to boost an anti-Iran alliance of Arab powers during his trip -- but the visit was dismissed as a "show with no practical or political value" by Iran's newly re-elected President Hassan Rouhani.

India bans sale of cows for slaughter

HINDUSTANTIMES ONLINE

The government has banned the sale of cows and buffaloes for slaughter through animal markets, rules that will hurt millions of poor farmers and squeeze supplies to the country's meat industry.

The new rules do not amount to a blanket ban on cattle trade or their slaughter, and license breeding remains legal. But the move will crimp supplies to the country's Rs 1-lakh crore meat and allied industries which sources about 90 percent of their requirements from animal markets.

The worst hit, however, will be the mostly Muslim meat and leather traders who face mounting violence by increasingly assertive cow vigilante groups. Farmers will also be hit because they will be deprived of a traditional source of income from selling non-milch and ageing cattle.

The central regulation for cattle business notified this week allows only farmland owners to trade at animal markets. The notification covers bulls, bullocks, cows, buffaloes, steers, heifers and calves, as well as the camel trade.

To be implemented in the next three months, the move introduces lots of paperwork for cow traders who are mostly poor and illiterate. For instance, before the trade, both seller and buyer will have to produce identity and farmland ownership documents.



Sri Lankan army soldiers carry food and water for landslide affected people during a rescue mission in Athwelthota village, in Kalutara, Sri Lanka, yesterday. Emergency teams yesterday rushed to distribute aid to half a million Sri Lankans displaced after the island's worst flooding in more than a decade claimed 126 lives and left scores more missing.

WAR ON IS IN PHILIPPINES

2,000 trapped in Marawi

Toll nears 100; Duterte vows to ignore SC on martial law

AFP, Marawi
Two thousand fearful civilians were yesterday trapped inside a southern Philippine city where troops are battling Islamist militants, authorities said, as the death toll from almost a week of fighting neared 100.

The military intensified a bombing campaign on parts of Marawi on Mindanao island, one of the biggest Muslim cities in the mainly Catholic nation, as it accused the gunmen of atrocities including murdering women and a child.

The initial fighting prompted President Rodrigo Duterte to declare martial law on Tuesday across the southern third of the Philippines to quell what he said was a fast-growing threat from terrorists linked to the Islamic State (IS) group.

Duterte has said he will ignore the Supreme Court and congress as he enforces martial law across the southern third of the country, even though the constitution gives them oversight.



"Until the police and the armed forces say the Philippines is safe, this martial law will continue. I will not listen to others. The Supreme Court, congress, they are not here," Duterte told soldiers on Saturday.

Most of Marawi's 200,000 residents have fled because of the fighting, but 2,000 remain trapped in areas controlled by the militants, according to Zia Alonto Adiong, spokesman for the provincial crisis management committee.

"They have been sending us text messages, calling our hotline, requesting us to send rescue teams but we cannot simply go to areas which are inaccessible to us," Adiong told AFP.

"They want to leave. They are afraid for their safety. Some are running out of food to eat. They fear they will be hit by bullets, by airstrikes," he said.

The military announced on Saturday, the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, that it would step up the bombing.

"In as much as we would like to avoid collateral damage, these rebels are forcing the hand of government by hiding and holding out inside private homes, government buildings and other facilities," said military spokesman Brigadier-General Restituto Padilla.

"Their refusal to surrender is holding the city captive. Hence, it is now increasingly becoming necessary to use more surgical airstrikes to clear the city and to bring this rebellion to a quicker end."

US, UK no longer reliable partners, warns Merkel

AFP, Frankfurt Am Main

Europe "must take its fate into its own hands" faced with a western alliance divided by Brexit and Donald Trump's presidency, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said yesterday.

"The times in which we could completely depend on others are on the way out. I've experienced that in the last few days," Merkel told a crowd at an election rally in Munich, southern Germany.

"We Europeans truly have to take our fate into our own hands," she added.

While Germany and Europe would strive to remain on good terms with America and Britain, "we have to fight for our own destiny," Merkel went on.

Special emphasis was needed on warm relations between Berlin and newly-elected French President Emmanuel Macron, she said.

The chancellor had just returned from a G7 summit which wound up Saturday without a deal between the US and the other six major advanced nations on upholding the

2015 Paris climate accords. Merkel on Saturday labelled the result of the "six against one" discussion "very difficult, not to say very unsatisfactory".

The US president tweeted that he would reveal whether or not the US would stick to the global emissions deal -- which he pledged to jettison on the campaign trail -- only next week.

On a previous leg of his first trip abroad as president, Trump had repeated past criticism of NATO allies for failing to meet the defensive alliance's military spending commitment of 2.0 percent of GDP.

Trump also reportedly described German trade practices as "bad, very bad," in Brussels talks last week, complaining that Europe's largest economy sells too many cars to the US.

Yesterday's event saw Merkel renew bonds with the Christian Social Union (CSU), Bavarian sister party to her own centre-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU), ahead of a parliamentary vote in September.

