

NEWS IN brief

IS chief 'may have fled' Philippine city

AFP, Marawi
One of America's most wanted terrorists may have escaped a five-week battle with Islamist militants in a southern Philippine city, which began with a raid to capture him, the military said yesterday. Isnilon Hapilon, a veteran Filipino militant said to be the leader of the IS group in Southeast Asia, has not been seen in the battle zone in Marawi, it said.

Colombia's rebels free Dutch journos

AFP, Bogota
Rebels with Colombia's National Liberation Army (ELN) group have freed two Dutch journalists snatched days ago in the country's northeast, officials said yesterday. The rebel group freed reporter Derk Johannes Bolt, 62, and his cameraman Eugenio Ernest Marie Follender, 58, in a rural area of Norte de Santander state, reports said.

Coal mine blast kills 8 in Colombia

AFP, Bogota
An explosion at an illegal coal mine in central Colombia killed at least eight people, as rescuers scrambled to find five others still missing. The blast Friday occurred at a coal mine in the town of Cucunuba in Cundinamarca state, some 90 kilometers north of Bogota, at about 2130 GMT.

WB receives UN award for girls' edu scheme

PTI, The Hague
The UN has awarded a scheme by the West Bengal government aimed at promoting girls' education with its highest Public Service Award. 'Kanyashree Prakalpa' scheme was chosen among 552 projects from 62 countries which were nominated for the award, the Indian embassy in The Hague said in a statement.



Venezuelan opposition activists set a lorry on fire to block the road during an anti-government protest in Caracas on Saturday. Near-daily protests against President Nicolas Maduro, blamed for an economic crisis that has caused desperate shortages of food, medicine and other basic goods, began on April 1, with demonstrators demanding his removal and the holding of new elections. 75 people have been killed in the violence.

London towers evacuated over fire fears

Dozens refuse to leave
AFP, London
Residents of 650 London flats were evacuated yesterday due to fire safety fears in the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, but 83 people refused to leave their homes, according to local officials.

Four of the five Chalco Estate towers in Camden, north London, were deemed unsafe after they were found to use cladding similar to that on Grenfell, widely blamed for the rapid spread of the massive blaze last week that is presumed to have killed 79 people. "Following extensive joint visits and inspections the brigade advised that there were a number of fire safety issues in the buildings and recommended that residents should not remain," said a London Fire Brigade spokesman.

The dramatic decision follows urgent testing of the towers' exteriors, which were installed by the same contractor as the Grenfell Tower. Residents from all five Chalco towers were initially evacuated, but one of the five - Blashford - was deemed safe and residents allowed to return.

Other residents faced chaos, with temporary accommodation offered in a local leisure centre and hotels, but some refused to move.

On Friday, police said that manslaughter charges could be brought over the Grenfell inferno, after finding that the fire started with a faulty fridge and the building's cladding had failed safety tests.

The cladding was installed on the 24-storey council-owned Grenfell Tower, which was built in 1974, as part of a refurbishment completed last year.

It has prompted a wider review of social housing which has identified at least 600 towers in England with similar cladding.

Prime Minister Theresa May stressed on Thursday that all Grenfell victims, regardless of their immigration status, would be able to access whatever help they need.

Demands 'unreasonable'

Says Qatar, accuses neighbours of limiting its sovereignty by ultimatum

AFP, Doha
Qatar yesterday denounced a sweeping list of demands from Saudi Arabia and its allies in an escalating Gulf diplomatic crisis as unreasonable and an impingement on the emirate's sovereignty. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt want Qatar to meet the 13-point ultimatum in return for an end to a nearly three-week-old diplomatic and trade "blockade" of the emirate.

Qatar has been given 10 days to meet the demands, which apparently include a call to close down broadcaster Al-Jazeera, but Doha said the requests were unrealistic.

"This list of demands confirms what Qatar has said from the beginning -- the illegal blockade has nothing to do with combating terrorism, it is about limiting Qatar's sovereignty, and outsourcing our foreign policy," said Sheikh Saif bin Ahmed Al-Thani, head of Qatar's government communications office, in a statement.

The four Arab governments delivered the demands to Qatar through mediator Kuwait yesterday, more than two weeks after severing all ties with

the emirate and imposing an embargo. The document has not been published but has been widely leaked and the demands are sweeping in their scope.

They include the closure of Al-Jazeera television, a long-standing source of conflict between Doha and neighbouring countries which accuse it of fomenting regional strife.

The ultimatum also include calls for

CRISIS IN GULF

US dubs Gulf crisis 'a family issue'

UN offers to help resolve row after 10-day ultimatum

UAE warns Doha to accept demands or face 'divorce'

Doha to cut ties to groups including the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic State organisation, Al-Qaeda and Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah movement.

Qatar has also been asked to hand over opposition figures wanted by its three neighbours and Egypt and to downgrade diplomatic ties with Iran. Notably, it has also been told to shut a Turkish military base in the emirate.

Qatar's foreign affair ministry said it was "studying" the list, "in order to prepare an appropriate response".

Qatar was warned by one of its most hawkish critics in the region that unless it meets the list of demands, Doha faces "divorce" from its Gulf neighbours.

Anwar Gargash, the UAE's state minister for foreign affairs, said Qatar should yield to the demands.

"It would be wiser that (Qatar) deal seriously with the demands and concerns of the neighbours or a divorce will take place," he wrote on Twitter.

Qatar is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council with Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has sought to mediate but the White House has been more hands-off, describing the diplomatic crisis as a "family issue" on Friday.

The United Nations on Friday offered to step in to help resolve the crisis in the Gulf.

"We hope that the countries involved resolve the situation through dialogue," said UN spokeswoman Eri Kaneko. "We are ready to assist if requested by the parties."

Death toll from Pak attacks rises to 57

AFP, Peshawar

The death toll from multiple attacks in Pakistan rose to 57, officials said yesterday, a day after the bomb and gun assaults in three cities shook the country as it prepared to mark the end of Ramadan, Islam's holiest month.

Officials in Quetta said the number of dead had risen by one to 14 after a blast in the southwestern city which targeted police. Ten policemen were among those killed.

The attack was claimed by both the local affiliate of the Islamic State group and by Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), an offshoot of the Pakistani Taliban, according to the SITE monitoring group, though there was no immediate explanation for the dual claims.

Later Friday twin blasts in the northwestern city of Parachinar then ripped through crowds in a market before sunset. Officials confirmed Saturday that the attack had killed 39 people and injured more than 200.

Parachinar is the capital of Kurram, one of Pakistan's seven semi-autonomous tribal districts, which has a history of sectarian clashes between Sunnis and Shiites.

Officials in Kurram said dozens of people were still undergoing treatment in hospital.

"A total of 216 people were injured in the twin blasts. Some 106 are still under treatment in a local hospital," Nasrullah Khan, an administration official in Kurram told AFP.

"62 other seriously wounded people have been shifted to Peshawar," he added.

A spokesman from a Sunni militant group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Al-Alami sent a message to AFP on Saturday claiming responsibility for the Parachinar attack.

OFFENSIVE TO LIBERATE MOSUL FROM IS

Death toll mounts

Forces free hundreds of civilians from Old City

REUTERS, Mosul

Iraqi forces opened exit routes for hundreds of civilians to flee the Old City of Mosul yesterday as they battled to retake the ancient quarter from Islamic State militants mounting a last stand in what was the de facto capital of their "caliphate".

US-trained urban warfare units were channeling their onslaught along two perpendicular streets that converge in the heart of the Old City, aiming to isolate the jihadist insurgents in four pockets.

The United Nations yesterday voiced alarm at the rising death toll among civilians in the heavily populated Old City, saying as many as 12 were killed and hundreds injured on Friday.

Iraqi authorities are hoping to declare victory in the northern Iraqi city in the Muslim Eid holiday, which marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, during the next few days. Helicopter gunships were assisting the

ground thrust, firing at insurgent emplacements in the Old City, a Reuters correspondent reported from a location near the front lines.

The government advance was carving out escape corridors for civilians marooned behind Islamic State lines.

There was a steady trickle of fleeing families yesterday, some with injured and malnourished children.

At least 100 civilians reached the safety of a government-held area west of the Old City in one 20-minute period, tired, scared and hungry. Soldiers gave them food and water.

More than 100,000 civilians, of whom half are believed to be children, remain trapped in the crumbling old houses of the Old City, with little food, water or medical treatment.

Military analysts said Baghdad's campaign to recover Mosul gathered pace after Islamic State blew up the 850-year-old al-Nuri mosque with its famous leaning minaret on Wednesday.

US-TRAINED UNITS AIM TO ISOLATE IS IN OLD CITY POCKETS

BAGHDAD HOPES TO DECLARE VICTORY DURING EID HOLIDAY



Displaced women and children who fled from clashes walk in the Old City of Mosul, Iraq, yesterday. Inset, A wounded Iraqi girl.

UK parliament hit by cyber attack

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Hackers have targeted Parliament's email system in an attempt to access the accounts of hundreds of MPs, Lords, aides and staff.

Security services to shut down access for anyone not in Westminster as part of efforts to secure the network. "The Houses of Parliament have discovered unauthorised attempts to access parliamentary user accounts," a parliamentary spokesperson told The Independent.

"We are continuing to investigate this incident and take further measures to secure the computer network, liaising with the National Cyber Security Centre.

"We have systems in place to protect member and staff accounts and are taking the necessary steps to protect our systems."

Members of the House of Commons and Lords were told of the cyber attack on Friday night and said they were unable to access their emails the following morning.

It came days after reports that Russian hackers had put passwords belonging to senior ministers, ambassadors and senior police officers up for sale online.

Two lists of stolen data included the log-in details of 1,000 British MPs and parliamentary staff, 7,000 police employees and more than 1,000 Foreign Office officials, The Times reported.

NATIONAL CURRICULUM REVAMP

Turkey to stop teaching evolution in schools

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Evolution will no longer be taught in Turkish secondary schools after being described as a "controversial subject" by the government.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has personally approved the change, which will be part of a new national curriculum being published later this month.

The head of the education ministry's curriculum board, Alpaslan Durmus, said a section on Darwinism would be cut from biology classes from 2019.

"We have excluded controversial subjects for students at an age unable yet to understand the issues' scientific background," he told a seminar in Ankara, according to Hurriyet Daily News.

"As the students at ninth grade are not endowed with antecedents to discuss the 'Origin of Life and Evolution' section in biology classes, this section will be delayed until undergraduate study."

Durmus said pupils at elementary

schools would still be given an "evolutionary point of view" and learn evolutionary biology from year five.

Claiming the curriculum was being "simplified", he said the government was attempting to educate children in line with "local and national values".

Academics from Turkey's most prestigious universities have reportedly criticised the proposals, pointing out the only other country to exclude evolutionary theory from schools was Saudi Arabia.

Other changes included a decrease in the amount of homework and allowing more time for children to play, and the life of Turkey's secularist founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk being given less focus.

The latest move is part of a wider struggle between secularists and right-wing religious groups in Turkey, which is undergoing constitutional reforms to grant the President dramatically increased powers following a referendum held in April.



Corbyn will 'try to force early polls'

AFP, London

British opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn has vowed to "try to force an early general election" after Prime Minister Theresa May lost her parliamentary majority, in an interview published yesterday.

Corbyn's Labour Party outperformed expectations in this month's election, turning what was predicted to be a procession for May into a disaster, severely weakening her authority as Britain ticks off crucial Brexit talks.

Corbyn told the left-wing newspaper the Daily Mirror that it was "ludicrous" to believe the Conservatives' minority government could survive, and that his party "will challenge this government at every step and try to force an early general election."

A poll for the paper asking the public who would make the best prime minister has put Corbyn ahead for the first time, although other surveys have revealed little appetite for another vote after two tumultuous years for British voters.

May's party is currently in negotiations with Northern Ireland's DUP to secure an informal parliamentary deal that would give it an effective majority.

MPs will vote on May's legislative agenda next week, and opposition parties have vowed to block her programme in what is traditionally seen as a test of confidence in the government.

Members of May's own party are reportedly lined up to dump their leader if it looks like her government will lose the vote.

BEEF ROW

India mob kills Muslim teen

AFP, New Delhi

Indian police yesterday said one person has been arrested after a mob stabbed a Muslim teenager to death on suspicion of carrying beef, an offence in many parts of the Hindu-majority country.

Junaid Khan, 15, was travelling from New Delhi on Friday with three of his brothers when a fight erupted over seats.

Between 15 and 20 men pulled out knives and set upon the brothers while making anti-Muslim comments and insisting one of the packets they were carrying contained beef.

While Khan was stabbed to death, his brother Shakir sustained injuries on the throat, chest and hands, police said.

Khan's brother Hassem told reporters the mob ignored their repeated pleas that they were not carrying any beef.