

4 suicide bombers kill 15 in Nigeria

AFP, Maiduguri

At least 15 people were killed when four female suicide bombers detonated their explosives in the northeast Nigerian city of Maiduguri, police said yesterday. Borno state police commissioner Damian Chukwu told reporters the four attacked different areas in the suburb of Molai Kalemani on Tuesday night, "killing 19, including the bombers".

US laptop ban lifted in Egypt, Morocco

AFP, Cairo

Egypt and Morocco's airlines have said a ban against carrying laptops on US-bound flights has been lifted, leaving only two Saudi airports under the restrictions put in place in March. The ban remains in place for Saudi Arabia's two main international airports in Riyadh and Jeddah. The original ban affected airports in Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, as well as Turkey.



Liu Xiaobo suffers respiratory failure

AFP, Beijing

China's cancer-stricken Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo suffered respiratory failure as his condition worsened yesterday, his hospital said, as Germany offered to host him. The First Hospital of China Medical University in the northeastern city of Shenyang said Liu's family declined to have him put on artificial ventilation, which was necessary "to maintain life". Liu, who has been held since 2008 for "subversion", risks becoming the first Nobel Peace Prize laureate to die in custody since German pacifist Carl von Ossietzky, who passed away in a hospital under the Nazis in 1938.



Widodo signs decree to ban radical groups

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia has issued a decree allowing it to ban groups that oppose its official state ideology, in a move seen to target radical Islamists in the world's most populous Muslim-majority country.

The law, signed by President Joko Widodo on Monday, comes as concerns grow about the influence of hardliners in Indonesia, where a majority of the population practise a moderate form of Islam.

It empowers the government to disband without trial any group that challenges Pancasila, a set of founding national principles which promote pluralism and tolerance.

Pancasila is considered the unifying factor for a country home to significant Christian, Hindu and Buddhist minorities.

Security minister Wiranto, who goes by one name, said yesterday the move was taken because some groups were "threatening the nation's existence and creating conflict in the society".

Neither Wiranto nor the decree name specific organisations.

But activists said the move is aimed to disband Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), the local branch of a radical Islamist group that seeks to unify all Muslims into a caliphate.

The government said in May it wanted to take legal steps to dissolve the group.

"This decree is merely a shortcut to disband HTI because if they use the old NGO law, it's going to take a long time," legal expert Biviti Susanti told AFP.



(From left, clockwise) Relatives mourn during a funeral of a man who was killed in a gun battle with Indian security forces at the Radhug Village of Budgam District, in Srinagar, yesterday; and Kashmiris carry the body of a slain rebel. Three suspected rebels were killed yesterday in Kashmir ending an overnight encounter with security forces, police said.

China sends troops to Djibouti in Africa

Establishes first overseas base

REUTERS, Beijing

Ships carrying personnel for China's first overseas military base, in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, have set sail to begin setting up the facility, as China's rapidly modernising military extends its global reach.

Djibouti's position on the northwestern edge of the Indian Ocean has fuelled worry in India that it would become another of China's "string of pearls" of military alliances and assets ringing India, including Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

China began construction of a logistics base in Djibouti last year. It will be used to resupply navy ships taking part in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions off the coasts of Yemen and Somalia, in particular.

It will be China's first overseas naval base, though Beijing officially describes it as a logistics facility.

State news agency Xinhua said late on Tuesday the ships had departed from Zhanjiang in southern China "to set up a support base in Djibouti".

Navy commander Shen Jinlong "read an order on constructing the base in Djibouti", but the news agency did not say when the base would begin operations.

Xinhua said the establishment of the base was a decision made by the two countries after "friendly negotiations, and accords with the common interest of the people from both sides".

RUSSIA 'DIRT' EMAILS ROW

'Open, transparent, innocent'

Trump defends eldest son; FBI nominee pledges independence

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump yesterday defended his eldest son as "innocent" following emails that showed Donald Trump Jr welcomed Russian help against his father's rival in the 2016 presidential election, deepening the controversy over purported Russian meddling.

Trump Jr released a series of emails on Tuesday that revealed he had eagerly agreed to meet a woman he was told was a Russian government lawyer who might have damaging information about Democratic rival Hillary Clinton as part of Moscow's official support for his father.

Trump Jr, in a Fox News television interview later Tuesday, said: "In retrospect, I probably would have done things a little differently."

The president, after initially releasing a statement on Tuesday calling his son "high-quality" yesterday praised the TV appearance and repeated his condemnation of investigations and media coverage of the Russia investigations.

"He was open, transparent and innocent. This is the greatest Witch Hunt in political history. Sad!" Trump wrote on Twitter.

The emails offered the most concrete evidence to date that Trump campaign officials embraced Russian help to win



Trump Jr



Veselnitskaya

the election, a subject that has cast a cloud over Trump's presidency and spurred multiple investigations.

The Justice Department and Congress are both investigating alleged Russian interference in the November election and any possible collusion with Trump's campaign.

Moscow has denied meddling.

Yesterday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov again hit back against the accusations and questioned why Trump's son was being blamed over the meeting.

Trump Jr, on Fox, pledged to cooperate with investigators, and said he did not tell his father about the meeting.

Trump Jr told Fox News that Paul Manafort, Trump's campaign manager at the time, and son-in-law Jared Kushner, now a top White House adviser, also attended the meeting with Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya, who denied having Kremlin ties.

Meanwhile, Trump's nominee to lead the Federal Bureau of Investigation Christopher Wray told a Senate panel that he will "never allow the FBI's work to be driven by anything other than the facts."

Wray, a former Justice Department lawyer under George W Bush, was nominated by Trump to replace James Comey, who Trump fired in May amid a probe into potential ties between Trump's 2016 presidential campaign and Russia.

US to stay in Iraq after defeating IS

AFP, Washington

The United States and several coalition countries want to maintain a military footprint in Iraq after the eventual defeat of the Islamic State group, a top US general said Tuesday.

Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend said the Iraqi government had expressed an interest in having US and coalition troops stay in the country.

"Our government is equally interested in that, as are several coalition governments (who) have expressed an interest in joining in that effort," Townsend said in a video call from Baghdad.

Townsend, who heads the anti-IS coalition, added that discussions were in the final decision-making stages.

"I would anticipate that there will be a coalition presence here after the defeat of ISIS," he said.

Meanwhile, Iraqi forces clashed with Islamic State militants holding out in Mosul's Old City yesterday, more than 36 hours after Baghdad declared victory over the jihadists in what they had declared the de facto Iraqi capital of their "caliphate".

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's victory announcement signalled the biggest defeat for the hardline Sunni group since its lightning sweep through northern Iraq three years ago. But pockets of Mosul remain insecure and the city has been heavily damaged by nearly nine months of gruelling urban combat.



A displaced Syrian child, who fled the countryside surrounding the Islamic State (IS) group's Syrian stronghold of Raqa, cries as he lies in a crib at a temporary camp in the village of Ain Issa on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

Trillion-tonne iceberg breaks off Antarctica

AFP, Paris

An iceberg the size of Delaware, one of the largest on record, was set adrift after snapping off a West Antarctic ice shelf that is now at increased risk of collapse, scientists said yesterday.

A crack in the Larsen C ice shelf, a drifting extension of the land-based ice sheet, finally broke through after inching its way across the ice formation for years. The calving of ice shelves occurs naturally, though global warming is believed to have accelerated the process. Warmer ocean water erodes the underbelly of the ice shelves, while rising air temperatures weaken them from above.



Larsen C Ice Shelf reduced in area by more than twelve percent, and the landscape of the Antarctic Peninsula changed forever," the team added.

Separation occurred somewhere between Monday and yesterday, and was recorded by a Nasa satellite.

The calving created an iceberg about 5,800 square kilometres (2,200 square

miles) big, with a volume twice that of Lake Erie, one of the North American Great Lakes. It is about 350 metres (1,100 feet) thick.

The iceberg weighs more than a trillion tonnes, but it was already floating before it calved away so has no immediate impact on sea level," said a team of researchers from the MIDAS Antarctic research project.

It will likely be named A68. "The calving of this iceberg leaves the

RAKHINE STATE

Myanmar vows no restrictions to journalists

REUTERS, Sittwe

Myanmar yesterday pledged "no restrictions" on journalists visiting the troubled state of Rakhine this week, in the first official trip to include foreign reporters to mostly Rohingya Muslim villages affected by violence since October.

Eighteen Myanmar nationals and foreigners representing international media arrived in Sittwe yesterday ahead of a government-escorted visit to Buthidaung and Maungdaw, where most residents are stateless Rohingyas.

"There are no restrictions regarding the areas that you can report from," said Thet Swe, a director at the Ministry of Information's News and Periodicals Enterprise.

"When you're down to two hours of power

Gaza 'unlivable' 10 yrs into Israeli siege: UN

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

A report by the United Nations says living conditions in the Gaza Strip have worsened in the 10 years since the territory was blockaded by Israel.

The report, which was published on Tuesday and titled "Gaza - 10 years later", says that key indicators identified in an earlier 2012 UN report, such as declining incomes, healthcare, education and electricity have deteriorated yet further.

The UN said that real GDP per capita in Gaza has decreased while the provision of urgently-needed health services has continued to decline.

The report also finds that Gaza's only water source is predicted to be "irreversibly depleted" by 2020, unless immediate action is taken.

"Gaza has continued on its trajectory of development, in many cases even faster than we had originally projected," said Robert Piper, the UN Coordinator for Humanitarian Aid and Development Activities.

"When you're down to two hours of power

a day and you have 60 percent youth unemployment rates ... that unlivability threshold has been passed quite a long time ago."

Piper said that while continuous humanitarian assistance, particularly through UN services, are helping to slow this descent, the downward direction remains clear.

"I see this extraordinarily inhuman and unjust process of strangling gradually two million civilians in Gaza that really pose a threat to nobody," he added.

Robert Vallent, the spokesperson for the UN Development Program in Gaza, said that Gaza's residents should not be relegated to a humanitarian case.

"People are not necessarily in a condition of starvation but they are in a critical situation," he said. "This is a man-made political situation that requires political action."

Meanwhile, two Palestinians were shot dead during clashes with the Israeli army in the Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank yesterday. One of the two had been evacuated in serious condition and later succumbed to his wounds, medical sources said.