

## US air strike kills Afghan IS chief

Says Pentagon

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The leader of IS' Afghanistan branch has been killed by a US air strike, according to the Pentagon, as the destruction of the jihadists continues across the Middle East and Asia.

Abu Sayed was killed in an air strike at the group's headquarters in Kunar province earlier this week, Pentagon spokeswoman Dana White said in a statement.

Tuesday's raid also killed other members of Isis and would "significantly disrupt the terror group's plans to expand its presence in Afghanistan", the statement added.

Sayed was the "emir" of IS-Khorasan (ISIS-K), the terror group's affiliate in Afghanistan, which has been active since 2015, fighting against the Taliban as well as Afghan and US forces.

His reported death makes him the third IS leader in Afghanistan to be killed by allied forces in the past twelve months.

"ISIS leaders chose Abu Sayed to lead the group after Afghan and US forces killed the previous Isis-K leaders - Hafiz Sayed Khan in late July 2016, and Abdul Hasib, in late April of this year," the Pentagon statement said.

April's raid also resulted in the deaths of several other high ranking IS leaders and 35 of their fighters. Two American soldiers were also killed, possibly through so-called "friendly fire", officials said at the time.

The announcement of the latest death comes as the fight against IS and other terrorist groups is being ramped up by the US, with its military reportedly preparing to send an additional 4,000 troops to the region.

General John Nicholson, the commander of US and NATO troops in Afghanistan, has pledged to drive the terror group out of Afghanistan by the end of this year.

The death of Sayed follows speculation that the leader of IS in Iraq, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, could also be dead - although his demise has been falsely reported on previous occasions.



A Palestinian man speaks with an Israeli border police standing guard outside Damascus Gate, a main entrance to Jerusalem's Old City, yesterday. Security forces locked down parts of Jerusalem's Old City yesterday and Al Aqsa mosque compound remained closed after an attack that killed two police officers and heightened Israeli-Palestinian tensions.

PHOTO: AFP

## Liu Xiaobo gets sea burial

AFP, Shenyang

The ashes of China's late Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo were scattered in the sea yesterday after a controversial funeral, as his friends worried about the fate of the democracy advocate's widow.

Officials showed a video in which his wife, Liu Xia, and others lowered a white circular urn into the water, two days after the democracy advocate died of liver cancer aged 61 while in custody.

The sea burial deprives family and supporters of a physical place to pay respects to a writer whose calls for political reform angered the Communist regime and led to his arrest in 2008.

His older brother, Liu Xiaoguang, paid tribute to the Communist Party and thanked officials for their "humanistic care" as he spoke at a news conference orchestrated by the authorities in the northeastern city of Shenyang, where Liu Xiaobo died on Thursday.

Liu Xiaobo's body was cremated "in accordance with the will of his family members and local customs", said Zhang Qingyang, an official from the Shenyang municipal office.

China's government faced a global backlash for denying Liu Xiaobo's wish to be treated abroad, and the United States and European Union have called on the government to release Liu Xia and let her leave China.



## Trump asks US SC to block travel ban ruling

REUTERS, Washington

The US Justice Department on Friday asked the Supreme Court to block a judge's ruling that prevented President Donald Trump's travel ban from being applied to grandparents of US citizens and refugees already being processed by resettlement agencies.

In a court filing, the administration asked the justices to overturn Thursday's decision by a US district judge in Hawaii, which limited the scope of the administration's temporary ban on refugees and travelers from six Muslim-majority countries.

The latest round in the fight over Trump's March 6 executive order, which he says is needed for national security reasons, came after the Supreme Court intervened last month to partially revive the two bans, which were blocked by lower courts.

The Supreme Court said then that the ban could take effect, but that people with a "bona fide relationship" to a US person or entity could not be barred.

The administration had narrowly interpreted that language, saying the ban would apply to grandparents and other family members, prompting the state of Hawaii to ask Hawaii-based US District Judge Derrick Watson to expand the definition of who could be admitted. He ruled for the state late on Thursday.

In the court filing, the Justice Department said the judge's ruling "empties the (Supreme) Court's decision of meaning, as it encompasses not just "close" family members but virtually all family members.

The conservative-leaning Supreme Court is not currently in session but the justices can handle emergency requests. The administration's application could be directed either to Justice Anthony Kennedy, who has responsibility for emergency requests from western states, or to the nine justices as a whole. If the court as a whole is asked to weigh in, five votes are needed to grant such a request.

In the court filing, the Justice Department said Watson's ruling on refugees would make the Supreme Court's decision on that part of the executive order "effectively meaningless."

The Supreme Court's decision last month revived parts of Trump's March 6 executive order banning travelers from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen for 90 days, as well as refugees for 120 days. The court also agreed to hear oral arguments in the fall over whether the ban violates the U.S. Constitution.

## Turkey celebrates 'epic of July 15'

Marks foiled anti-Erdogan coup anniversary with celebrations, new purge

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey yesterday marked one year since the defeat of the coup aimed at ousting President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, seeking to showcase national unity and his grip on power in an increasingly polarised society.

The authorities have declared July 15 an annual national holiday of "democracy and unity", billing the foiling of the putsch as a historic victory of Turkish democracy.

"It's one year since the darkest night was turned into an epic," Prime Minister Binali Yildirim told a special session of parliament that kicked off a day of celebrations set to last until dawn.

He said the night of July 15 was a "second War of Independence" after the war that led to the creation of the modern Turkish state in the ruins of the Ottoman Empire in 1923.

Two hundred and forty nine people, not including the plotters, were killed when a disgruntled faction in the army sent tanks into the streets and war planes into the sky in a bid to overthrow Erdogan after one-and-a-half decades in power.

But they were thwarted within hours as the authorities regrouped and people poured into the streets in support of Erdogan, who blamed followers of his ally turned nemesis, the US-based preacher Fethullah Gulen.

The authorities embarked on the biggest purge in



Turkey's history, arresting 50,000 people and sacking over 100,000 more. Erdogan also shored up his position by winning a referendum on enhancing his powers earlier this year.

In the latest dismissals ordered just hours before the commemorations were due to begin, another 7,563 police, soldiers and other state employees were fired under the state of emergency that has been in place since July 20 last year.

The scale of the purge has intensified political divisions in Turkey, with the opposition accusing the authorities of seeking to silence anyone who dares criticise Erdogan.

The coup bid also frayed ties between the United States and European Union with Nato member Turkey, which accused its allies of failing to show solidarity.

The scale of yesterday's nationwide commemorations is aimed at etching July 15, 2016 into the minds of Turks as a key date in the history of the modern state.

Giant posters designed by the presidency have sprung up across billboards in Istanbul showing gaudy paintings that portray the key events of the coup night, including the surrender of the putschist soldiers.

"The epic of July 15," says the slogan. However some have criticised the posters for belittling the Turkish army.

## Trump stance a 'setback' in US-Cuba relations: Castro

AFP, Havana

Cuba's president said Donald Trump's hardline stance towards the country was a "setback" in relations with the United States after ties were gradually restored in 2015.

Raul Castro criticised Trump's partial rollback of his predecessor Barack Obama's rapprochement with the communist island in comments ahead of the second anniversary of Havana embassy's reopening in Washington on July 20.

"The announcements made by the current president... mean a setback in bilateral relations," Castro said Friday in remarks broadcast on state television at the closing of the first session of Cuba's parliament.

The remarks came after Trump last month stood before a crowd of anti-Castro activists in Miami's Little Havana and announced tightened rules for Americans traveling to Cuba, banned ties with a military-run tourism firm and reaffirmed the existing US trade embargo.

He framed his measures as a move against a "cruel and brutal" regime, saying progress on bilateral relations would hinge on concessions related to human rights.

Castro called the new measures a toughening of the US embargo against the island, imposed since 1962, saying they evoked "an old and hostile rhetoric that characterized the Cold War".

He also denounced the manipulation of Cuba over human rights issues.

"Cuba has much to be proud of, and it does not have to receive lessons from the United States or anyone else," he said during the session, to which international press does not have access.

The original Cuban government response to Trump's declaration was restrained, expressing rejection of the tightened policy but emphasizing openness to continuing "respectful" negotiation.



## Place where woman can't go

AFP, Tokyo

Visitors will not be allowed to set foot on a men-only UNESCO World Heritage island in Japan from next year, an official said yesterday.

The tiny landmass of Okinoshima, where women are banned and male visitors must bathe naked in the sea before visiting its shrine, was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site last week.

Limited numbers are currently permitted to land on the island in the Sea of Japan (East Sea) -- this year it was 200 -- for a yearly festival that lasts just two hours, but they must adhere to strict rules.

But Munakata Taisha, the shrine which owns Okinoshima, has decided to ban travel for anyone apart from priests from next year to protect the island from being damaged, a spokesman told AFP.

"A strict preservation is required now that the island has got the UNESCO listing," he said.

"It will be risky if 200 visitors continue to come to the island," he said, adding that Okinoshima is "the island protected by Shinto priests".

The island is permanently manned by a Shinto priest who prays to the island's goddess, in a tradition that has been kept up for centuries.

However, academics will be allowed to land on the island for research and preservation purposes, he added.

The island, which sits off the northwest coast of Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands, was an important window for foreign trade in Japan since ancient times, forming part of a route that linked the archipelago to the Korean peninsula and China.



Babies compete in the 2017 "Diaper Derby" crawling race on Friday, a promotion event ahead of the New York City Triathlon in New York City, US.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Five killed as heavy rains lash Gujarat

AGENCIES

At least five persons have died in Gujarat following heavy rain. Thousands of people were rescued and shifted to safer location in different districts of the Indian state, officials said.

The report came as floods in India's northeast have killed at least 83 people and led to the death of three rare one-horned rhinoceros at a national park that has the world's largest concentration of the species.

The floods caused by torrential rains across the hilly states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur over the past two weeks, have also triggered landslides. In all more than 2 million people have been displaced, authorities say.

## India set to get head of state from lowest caste

AFP, New Delhi

India's next president will emerge from the Dalit caste -- a community so marginalised they were once known as "untouchables" -- with the victory of the ruling party candidate set to strengthen Prime Minister Narendra Modi's grip on power.

Ram Nath Kovind, 71, is hot favourite to be elected tomorrow by national and state lawmakers to become titular head-of-state as the candidate of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

It will be only the second time, after President K.R. Narayanan, who served from 1997 to 2002, that a member of the downtrodden caste has assumed the post.

The result will be announced Thursday. And for Modi, with one eye on re-election in 2019, it will send an important message to a key, long disdained electoral group.

Dalits, who number around 200 million, are among the poorest communities in India and have traditionally been relegated

to activities on the margins of society.

Despite legal protection, discrimination is rife and Dalits are routinely denied access to education and other opportunities for advancement.

Analysts say Modi can win political capital by helping BJP politician Kovind -- a former Supreme Court lawyer and ex-governor of the eastern state of Bihar -- to win the contest against opposition nominee Meira Kumar, also a Dalit.

Modi has used Twitter to hail the rise of Kovind, the son of a farmer, from "a humble background".

Kumar, the daughter of freedom fighter Babu Jagjivan Ram, was a diplomat before entering politics in 1985 and became India's first woman speaker in 2009, but the electoral college numbers are heavily tilted against her.

Her nomination, which followed Kovind's, was seen by many as the opposition's attempt to counter Modi's move to woo Dalits.

Dalit support is even more important for the BJP as it has mostly been shunned by Muslims, who make up about 14 percent of the 1.3 billion population.



## NEWSIN brief

### Tibetan student self-immolates in India

AFP, New Delhi

A Tibetan student has self-immolated in India after shouting "freedom", police said yesterday, injuring himself critically. The student set himself on fire on Friday at the Central University for Tibetan Studies in Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh state. Self-immolation has regularly been used as a protest against China's actions in Tibet. But Indian police said they are also investigating the 20-year-old's recent exam failures as being a possible cause for his actions.

### Tough Brexit talks to resume tomorrow

AFP, London

The second round of Brexit negotiations will take place in Brussels tomorrow, the British government said Friday. British Prime Minister Theresa May's government published a draft law Thursday to formally end Britain's membership of the EU. The new bill would repeal the 1972 European Communities Act, convert an estimated 12,000 existing European regulations into British law and end the supremacy of EU legislation.

### Two German women killed in Egypt attack

AFP, Berlin

Berlin yesterday said two women who were killed after being stabbed in an Egyptian beach resort were German nationals, confirming earlier reports. Friday's attack in the Red Sea resort left four others wounded. The attacker, who had swum ashore, was arrested and questioned. The motive of the attack is still not clear, police said.