

NEWS IN brief

Truck bomb attack foiled in Kabul

AFP, Kabul
Afghan police seized a lorry packed with explosives hidden under boxes of tomatoes in Kabul, officials said yesterday, averting a potentially deadly blast months after a massive truck bomb killed or wounded hundreds. Police shot and wounded the driver of the vehicle, carrying 30 plastic drums filled with explosive material and two bombs weighing 100 kilograms each, after he failed to stop at a security checkpoint late Saturday, the interior ministry said.

Rare hurricane heads for Ireland, UK

AFP, Lisbon
Britain and Ireland yesterday braced for a lashing from Ophelia, the largest hurricane ever recorded so far east in the Atlantic Ocean. Though the Category 3 storm, which means it packed winds of at least 178 kilometres (110 miles) per hour, will weaken as it churns toward Ireland and Britain, it still packs enough power to damage buildings and provoke "dangerous" sea conditions as well as potential flooding, authorities said.

Indian shelling kills child in Pak Kashmir

AFP, Muzaffarabad
At least one Pakistani child was killed and five civilians including four children were wounded after Indian troops fired into Pakistani Kashmir Saturday, officials said. The incident took place in Nikial sector on the Line of Control (LoC), the de facto border dividing Kashmir between nuclear-armed neighbours Pakistan and India.

Fire in Saudi kills 10

AFP, Riyadh
A fire at a carpentry workshop in the Saudi capital has left 10 people dead and three others injured, the kingdom's civil defence said yesterday. It said the victims' identities had not yet been determined. No information was given on the cause of the overnight fire.



A picture taken yesterday shows a general view of the scene of the explosion of a truck bomb in the centre of Mogadishu. A truck bomb exploded outside a hotel at a busy junction in Somalia's capital Mogadishu Saturday causing widespread devastation that left at least 137 people dead. Story on page 16. PHOTO: AFP

Iraq, Kurds in crisis talks

AGENCIES
The presidents of Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan held talks yesterday to defuse an escalating crisis, after a deadline for Kurdish forces to withdraw from disputed positions was extended by 24 hours.

Thousands of Iraqi troops are locked in an armed standoff with Kurdish peshmerga fighters in the oil-rich province of Kirkuk, amid spiralling tensions following last month's vote by the Iraqi Kurds for independence.

The crisis is raising fears of fresh chaos in Iraq just as the country's forces are on the verge of routing the Islamic State group from the last territory it controls in the country.

Meanwhile, Major General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of foreign operations for Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards, arrived in Iraq's Kurdistan region for talks on the growing crisis.

Kurdish forces, who were key allies in the US-backed offensive against IS, are refusing to surrender positions they took during the fightback against the jihadists over the past three years.

Iraq's central authorities had demanded the Kurds withdraw from disputed areas overnight but the dead-

line was extended by a day following talks.

Iraqi President Fuad Masum, himself a Kurd, was meeting yesterday with Iraqi Kurd leader Massud Barzani in Dukan in Sulaimaniyah province, officials said.

Reports said Kurdish leadership

KIRKUK STANDOFF

Kurdish leaders reject demand to cancel independence vote; demands talks without preconditions

Iran's Soleimani arrives in Kurdistan for talks

Mayor says armed residents will fight with Peshmerga

rejected what they described as "military threats" and pledged to defend Kurdish-held territory in case of an attack.

The peshmerga forces based in Kirkuk are mainly loyal to Masum's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) of party, a rival of Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party

(KDP). Representatives of both parties were taking part in the talks.

Iraqi and peshmerga forces could be seen early yesterday still facing off in positions on the outskirts of Kirkuk, though there were no signs of troop movements.

Armed Kurdish civilians were seen gathering in Kirkuk overnight and Kirkuk governor Najm Eddine Karim, a Kurd sacked by Baghdad but who refuses to quit his post, warned: "Residents will help the peshmerga... we will not allow any force to enter our city."

Polling during the September 25 referendum was held not only in the three provinces of the autonomous Kurdistan region but also in adjacent Kurdish-held areas, including Kirkuk, that are claimed by both Baghdad and Iraqi Kurdistan.

The referendum, which was non-binding and saw voters overwhelmingly back independence, was declared illegal by Baghdad and held despite international opposition.

Washington has military advisers deployed with both sides in the standoff and Defence Secretary Jim Mattis said on Friday the United States was working to reduce tensions.

Austria votes in watershed polls

31-yr-old conservative set to win

AFP, Vienna

Austrians were voting yesterday in a watershed election tipped to see conservative Sebastian Kurz, 31, become the EU's youngest leader and form an alliance with the far-right, in the bloc's latest populist test.

A rightward shift in the wealthy European Union member of 8.75 million people would be a fresh headache for Brussels as it struggles with Britain's decision to leave and the rise of nationalists in Germany, Hungary, Poland and elsewhere.

But all signs indicate that Austrians, fed up with a record influx of asylum-seekers, want to swap the gridlocked centrist rule for a more hardline government for the first time in a decade.

The People's Party (OeVP), rebranded by "whizz-kid" Kurz as a "movement", is forecast to reap more than 30 percent of the vote with pledges to go tough on migrants and easy on taxes.

The eurosceptic Freedom Party (FPÖ) is battling for second place with the beleaguered Social Democrats (SPO) of incumbent Chancellor Christian Kern.

Kurz -- who as new OeVP leader forced the snap vote in May by ending the coalition with Kern -- has yanked his party to the right and is expected to seek a coalition with the far-right.

Founded by ex-Nazis in the 1950s, the FPÖ almost won the presidency last year and topped opinion polls in the midst of Europe's migrant crisis.

Then Kurz came along and stole votes with his hardline OeVP makeover, prompting FPÖ chief Heinz-Christian Strache to call him an "imposter".

Trump speech violated nuke deal: Iran FM

AFP, Tehran

US President Donald Trump's speech outlining an aggressive new strategy against Iran violated Tehran's nuclear agreement with world powers, said Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

Trump's virulent speech contravened three articles of the 2015 deal, Zarif said in televised remarks broadcast late on Saturday.

They include the requirement to implement the accord "in good faith" and for the US to "refrain from re-introducing or re-imposing sanctions related to Iran's nuclear programme."

"I have already written nine letters (to EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini) listing the cases where the United States has failed to act on or delayed its commitments under the JCPOA," Zarif said, using the technical name for the nuclear deal.

Zarif said he would write a new letter regarding Trump's speech last Friday, and warned of a "reciprocal measure" if sanctions were reimposed.

In his speech, Trump



refused to "certify" the nuclear deal and warned he would "terminate" the deal unless Congress introduced tough new sanctions against Iran's missile and nuclear programmes, as well as its "destabilising" activities in the Middle East.

Zarif responded by saying: "Our achievements in the field of ballistics are in no way negotiable."

"We live in a region into which hundreds of billions of dollars of lethal American weapons have poured, turning it into a gunpowder storehouse... so we have the right to have defensive means," he said.

Meanwhile, Iran's Atomic Energy Organization chief Ali Akbar Salehi said the country would no longer abide by the Additional Protocol of the Non-Proliferation Treaty if the nuclear deal fell apart.

CORRUPTION PROBE AGAINST NETANYAHU

PM, cops face off in rare dispute

AFP, Jerusalem

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli police faced off in a rare public dispute yesterday over an intensifying graft probe that has led to speculation over whether he will eventually be forced from office.

Netanyahu late Saturday lashed out at the police on his Facebook page over leaks to the Israeli media related to the graft investigation.

That prompted a stern response from the police, who have been probing gifts Netanyahu allegedly received from wealthy supporters as well as suspicions he sought a secret deal with the publisher of a top-selling newspaper.

His wife Sara has faced a separate investigation into alleged misuse of public funds.

Netanyahu has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing and has accused members of the Israeli media of seeking to force him out of office.

Israel's Channel 2 television reported Saturday night that the long-serving prime minister is to soon be questioned again by police as part of the investigation, prompting Netanyahu's Facebook post.

Netanyahu wrote that there "is a transparent media campaign" against him, and accused police of leaking information to press.

The post prompted a rare response from the police, who denied any political motivation. "The police carry out their work in keeping with the law and will not be provoked by baseless attacks that disrupt their work and undermine the rule of law," a police spokeswoman said.



CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES

40 killed in one week

AFP, Santa Rosa

Authorities hope weaker winds will help more than 10,000 firefighters battle the deadliest blazes in California history, which have killed at least 40 people and destroyed thousands of structures in one of the state's worst natural disasters in years.

Fast-moving fires spread by shifting winds forced thousands more to evacuate their homes on Saturday as the death toll over the week rose to 40, with hundreds missing.

More than 10,000 firefighters supported by air tankers and helicopters battled 16 major wildfires in areas north of San Francisco that have consumed nearly 214,000 acres (86,000 hectares), or roughly 334 square miles (865 sq km) - an area larger than New York City.

With 235 people still missing on Saturday in Sonoma County alone and rubble from thousands of incinerated dwellings yet to be searched, authorities expect the death toll to climb. PHOTO ON PAGE 11



Refugee advocates hold placards as they participate in a protest in central Sydney, against the treatment of asylum-seekers in detention centres located in Nauru and on Manus Island, Australia, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Final Raqa push begins

Conflicting claims over IS fighters as civilians leave under evacuation deal

REUTERS, Ain Issa

US-backed militias said they had launched their final assault on Syria's Raqa yesterday after a convoy of Islamic State fighters left the city, leaving only a hardcore of jihadists to mount a last stand.

"The battle will continue until the whole city is clean," said a statement by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a US-backed alliance of Kurdish and Arab militias.

SDF spokesman Talal Selo told Reuters that 275 Syrian Islamic State fighters had withdrawn from the city along with civilian family members, leaving "no more than 200-300" foreign militants to fight on.

Under the terms of their withdrawal, all other civilians left in Raqa were to be allowed safe passage out of the city, Selo said, adding that he believed only a few remained.

Selo said 275 Syrian fighters left along with their family members. Laila Mostafa, head of the Raqa Civil Council, formed



under SDF auspices to oversee the city, said that figure included both the fighters and their family members. She said an earlier comment by another council member that some foreign fighters had left in the convoy was wrong.

The convoy would head to the remaining Islamic State territory in eastern Syria, Omar Alloush of the Raqa Civil Council said on Saturday.

It was still in territory held by the SDF on Sunday morning, Selo said. Bali described the civilians who left with Islamic State fighters in the convoy as human shields.

The jihadists had refused to release them once they left the city as agreed, wanting to take them as far as their destination to guarantee their own safety, he said.

Raqa's fall to the SDF now looks imminent after four months of battle. Raqa was the first big Syrian city to fall to Islamic State as it declared a "caliphate" and rampaged through Syria and Iraq in 2014, becoming an operations centre for attacks abroad and the stage for some of its darkest atrocities.

Catalan leader calls for calm as deadline looms

REUTERS, Madrid

Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont yesterday called for calm less than 24 hours ahead of a deadline from Spain's central government for him to clarify whether he has declared independence for Catalonia or not.

Puigdemont made a symbolic declaration of independence on Tuesday night, only to suspend it seconds later and call for negotiations with Madrid on the region's future.

Spain's Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy has given him until today to clarify his position - and then until Thursday to change his mind if he insists on a split - threatening to suspend Catalonia's autonomy if he chooses independence.

"The (Catalan) Government and I want to



reiterate our commitment to peace, civility and serenity, and also to (...) democracy as inspiring the decisions we have to make," Puigdemont said during a memorial event at Barcelona's Montjuic cemetery.

"In these difficult hours of hope in Catalonia, let's take a clear attitude against violence (...) in favour of civility, hope, serenity and respect."

Though Puigdemont did not indicate how he would reply to Madrid, public Catalan TV broadcaster TV-3 said he would not give a "yes" or "no" answer, but a more elaborate response.

Meditate Like A Zen Monk

DID YOU KNOW IT'S POSSIBLE TO FREE OUR MINDS RADICALLY WITH MEDITATION? DID YOU KNOW EXTENSIVE SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH SHOWS THAT A DAILY PRACTICE OF JUST 10 MINUTES MEDITATION CAN MAKE OUR BRAINS GROW NEW NEURONS AND FORGE NEW CONNECTIONS? EVER WONDER HOW YOUR EXPERIENCE OF LIFE AND RELATIONSHIPS MIGHT CHANGE IF YOUR BRAIN AND MIND WAS JUST 10% SHARPER? WHO YOU ARE IS A LIMITLESS BEING BECAUSE YOU ARE A CONSTANTLY CHANGING BEING.

THIS WEEKEND, LEARN TO DIVE DEEPLY INTO THE TREMENDOUS MYSTERY THAT YOU ARE. YOU WILL PROBABLY SURPRISE YOURSELF WITH WHAT YOU WILL FIND. LEARN THE ART OF "INSIGHT ONE" MEDITATION WITH INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED HYPNOTHERAPIST AND AUTHOR OF "REDEFINE YOUR REALITY": SHAFIN DE ZANE.

Registration: 018 4723 8454

Tuition: 12,900 Taka. Venue: BRAC Center, Mahakhali
Date: 19 - 21 October. Time: 5pm - 10pm
Info: RedefineYourReality.com