

Malaysia to build island
in waters near S'pore

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday he wants to develop an island on a cluster of rocks previously disputed with Singapore, a move that could anger its neighbour. The strategically located area has long been a flashpoint between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, and they previously took a territorial dispute to the United Nations top court.

Saudi Arabia outlaws
sexual harassment

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia has passed a new law to criminalise sexual harassment, state media said yesterday, less than a month before the conservative kingdom lifts its decades-long ban on women driving. The kingdom's Shura Council passed a draft law on Monday which would introduce a prison term of up to five years and a maximum penalty of 300,000 riyals.

Yemen forces plan
siege of key port

AFP, Moha

Pro-government forces in Yemen are preparing to surround a key Red Sea port in a bid to force Huthi rebels to surrender it without a fight, military sources said yesterday. At least 60 fighters were killed in the latest clashes and air strikes, according to medical sources.

UN chief ask donors to
back G5 Sahel force

REUTERS, Bamako

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appealed to donors on Tuesday to provide more predictable support to the G5 Sahel force fighting to contain West African jihadists. He spoke while on a visit to Mali, the country worst affected by Islamist militants.



Afghan policemen arrive at the site of militant attack in Kabul, Afghanistan yesterday. IS militants launched a gun and bomb attack on the interior ministry, killing one policeman and wounding at least five people. Inset, a wounded Afghan girl receives treatment as her relatives weep at Wazir Akbar Khan hospital. PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

IS attacks Afghan
interior ministry
Policeman killed, 5 people hurt

AFP, Kabul

Militants launched a gun and bomb attack on the interior ministry in Kabul yesterday, killing a policeman in the latest chilling demonstration of their ability to strike at the heart of the Afghan capital.

Five people were injured in the attack, which took place during the holy month of Ramadan and was claimed by the Islamic State (IS) group.

The Taliban are also stepping up their assaults on the capital, making the heavily fortified city the deadliest place in the country for civilians.

Special forces rushed to the scene after the attackers detonated what police said was a car bomb at the first checkpoint leading to the ministry, then tried to battle their way inside.

"The fighting is over, the attackers have all been killed by security forces between the first and second security perimeter," said Kabul police chief Daud Amin.

A security source told AFP a clearing operation was continuing.

"The attackers used two vehicles to reach near interior ministry compound. There were eight attackers involved, one detonated his explosives, seven others were killed," interior ministry spokesman Najib Danish told reporters.

Danish said one police officer had been killed and five civilians wounded.

Policeman Mujibullah Nabizada was injured in the first blast. "I dragged myself to the road and a car picked up and brought me to the hospital," he told AFP from his hospital bed, where he was being treated for broken bones.

N Korea, Russia envoys
manoeuvre for talks

AFP, Washington

A senior figure in the North Korean regime was en route to the US yesterday, and Russia's top diplomat was preparing to visit Pyongyang as diplomatic preparations for a historic nuclear summit between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un gathered pace.

General Kim Yong Chol, right-hand man to the North Korean leader, will meet US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in New York, officials said.

Trump confirmed the general was on his way in a tweet and boasted that Washington would have a "great team" for the talks aimed at resolving the nuclear standoff.

The US president still hopes the summit will take place on June 12 in Singapore.

"Meetings are currently taking place concerning Summit, and more. Kim Young (sic) Chol, the Vice Chairman of North Korea, heading now to New York. Solid response to my letter, thank you!" Trump wrote.

Moscow said Russian Foreign Minister

Sergei Lavrov would travel to North Korea today to discuss Pyongyang's nuclear programme.

Last month the North's foreign minister Ri Yong Ho held rare talks with Lavrov in Moscow, part of a quickening effort to improve strained ties with global powers.

Russia was a member of six-nation talks held between 2003-8 aimed at persuading the North to scrap its nuclear programme.

Japan is also keenly watching summit preparations. Trump will meet its Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Washington on June 7, White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said.

"Since the president's May 24 letter to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, the North Koreans have been engaging," she said.

"The United States continues to actively prepare for President Trump's expected summit with leader Kim in Singapore."

Kim Yong Chol was at Beijing airport yesterday for his flight to New York. He used the restricted VIP entrance, according to AFP journalists.

TRUMP-KIM SUMMIT PREP

Lavrov travels to North to
discuss nuke programme

Trump will meet Japanese
PM in Washington on June 7

He is alive!
Ukraine admits faking death
of anti-Kremlin journalist

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine yesterday admitted it had staged the murder of anti-Kremlin journalist Arkady Babchenko in order to foil an attempt on his life by Russia, a stunning development in a case that had attracted global headlines.

Less than 24 hours after it was reported that Babchenko had died from three gunshots to the back in the stairwell of his apartment building in an apparent contract-style killing, he appeared alive and well at a press conference in Kiev.

The head of Ukraine's security service Vasyl Grytsak told reporters that his death was faked as part of a "special operation" to pre-empt a real plot to kill him.

"Thanks to this operation we were able to foil a cynical plot and document how the Russian security service was planning for this crime," Grytsak added.

News of the "death" of the prominent Russian war correspondent and former soldier set off a series of recriminations between Kiev and Moscow, and pictures and flowers had been laid by mourners at the Russian embassy in Kiev.

Ukrainian officials led by Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman had accused Russia of being behind the killing of the Kremlin critic, a charge that Moscow batted back.

"The Ukrainian prime minister is already talking about how it was done by Russian secret services," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told reporters. "This fashion of conducting international affairs is very sad."

Babchenko, 41, fought in Russia's two Chechen campaigns in the 1990s and early 2000s before becoming a war correspondent and author. He repeatedly said he faced death threats.



BELGIUM SHOOTING

IS-style attack an
'act of terrorism'

AFP, Liege

Belgian investigators yesterday said an Islamic State-style attack that killed three people in the eastern city of Liege was being treated as an act of terrorism.

The bloodshed shocked the eastern industrial city of Liege on Tuesday when the attacker armed with a knife repeatedly stabbed two policewomen before using their own firearms to kill them, a method investigators said was encouraged in online videos by the Islamic State extremist group.

Police were scrambling to unpick the motives of the attacker identified as Benjamin Herman, a 31-year-old drifter with a decade spent in and out of prison for acts of violence and petty crimes, who was out of jail on leave when he attacked.

"The facts are qualified as terrorist murder and attempted terrorist murder," prosecutors' spokesman Eric Van Der Sypt told a news briefing in Brussels.

Van Der Sypt said the assessment was based on several "first elements" from the probe, including "the fact the perpetrator shouted several times shouted 'Allahu akbar' ... and information from state security according to which the perpetrator was in touch with radicalised persons."

But he cautioned that the information dated "from late 2016, early 2017" and had not been confirmed since.

Prosecutors also underlined that the attacker's method -- attacking armed police officers and using their weapon against them -- was a known "modus operandi" of the IS terror group, which claimed deadly attacks in Brussels in 2016.

Israel-Gaza border falls
quiet after ceasefire

AGENCIES

The Israel-Gaza border fell quiet yesterday under an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire after the most intense flareup of hostilities between Palestinian militants and Israel since a 2014 war.

Militants from Hamas, the dominant group in Gaza, and Islamic Jihad fired dozens of rockets and mortar bombs at Israel throughout Tuesday and overnight, to which Israel responded with tank and air strikes on more than 50 targets in the enclave.

There were no reports of further fighting after Palestinian and Israeli attacks in the early hours yesterday, and both sides appeared to back away from a slide towards a new war after weeks of violence along the border.

Schools opened as usual in Israeli towns near the frontier where rocket warning sirens sounded frequently on Tuesday. Gaza's streets were filled with morning shoppers and children went to class,

reported Reuters.

A Palestinian official said Egyptian mediation led to a ceasefire, but the terms of the "understanding" did not go beyond "a restoration of calm by both sides".

"After the resistance succeeded in confronting the (Israeli) aggression ... there was a lot of mediation in the past hours," Hamas' deputy chief in Gaza, Khalil al-Hayya, said, in a nod to Egypt's efforts.

"An agreement was reached to return to the (2014) ceasefire understandings in the Gaza Strip. The resistance factions will abide by it as long as the Occupation does the same," Hayya said in a statement, using militant groups' term for Israel.

Meanwhile, Israel yesterday approved construction of 2,070 new settler homes in the occupied West Bank, Israeli settlement watchdog Peace Now told AFP.

It was slightly fewer than the 2,500 for which Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman said last week he intended to seek approval.

Israel approves 2,000
new WB settler
homes



Queen Maxima of the Netherlands holds a tiffin box as she poses with Dabbawalas, also known as tiffin carriers, during their meeting in Mumbai, India yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

School shooter game
removed from sale

AFP, Washington

A US video game company has withdrawn a game that simulated a school shooting amid fierce criticism from parents of shooting victims and from politicians.

The game, "Active Shooter," was to be released by Valve Corp. of Bellevue, Washington, on June 6 on its digital distribution platform Steam.

But Valve said in a statement to several media outlets that it was cancelling the release of the game created by developer Revived Games and publisher ACID.

"This developer and publisher is, in fact, a person calling himself Ata Berdiyev, who had previously been removed last fall," Valve said.

"Ata is a troll, with a history of customer abuse, publishing copyrighted material, and user review manipulation," Valve said.

"We are not going to do business with people who act like this towards our customers or Valve."

"The broader conversation about Steam's content policies is one that we'll be addressing soon," the company added.

Fred Guttenberg, whose daughter, Jaime, 14, was killed in the February 14 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, welcomed the removal of the game as "amazing news."

Police clear Paris camp
as migrant debate flares

AFP, Paris

Security forces cleared more than 1,000 people from a sprawling migrant camp in the French capital yesterday, the latest in a series of episodes that have thrust the issue of illegal immigration back into the spotlight.

About 1,700 people, mainly from Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea, were living in the "Millenaire", or Millennium, camp underneath the main Paris ring road near the Porte de la Villette in the north-east of the capital.

But regional prefect Michel Cadot later said that just 1,016 migrants had been removed, since many residents had fled after learning the dawn operation was imminent.

They will be housed temporarily at more

than 20 sites across the Paris region while the authorities check their identities, Interior Minister Gerard Collomb said in a statement.

The operation came just days after a young Malian was honoured with fast-track citizenship following his daring rescue of a child hanging from a balcony.

It also coincided with the trial of a 72-year-old woman in the Mediterranean city of Nice for helping two Guinean teenagers cross into the country from Italy.

Three other people will face trial today for helping migrants enter France illegally, even as Grenoble this week honoured a farmer convicted of guiding migrants across the Alps by bestowing him with the city's official medal.



GRAFT CONVICTIONS AGAINST MPS

Spanish PM vows
not to resign

AFP, Madrid

Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy yesterday vowed not to resign ahead of a no-confidence vote in parliament Friday over graft convictions against members of his conservative Popular Party and the court casting doubt on his testimony.

Asked in parliament by an opposition lawmaker if he would step down, Rajoy said his "intention" was to "carry out the mandate granted by Spaniards" and serve out his four-year term which ends in 2020.

He recalled that his Popular Party (PP) won "over 50 more seats" in the last general election in June 2016 than the second most voted party, the Socialists, who last week filed a no-confidence motion against Rajoy. The vote on the motion will take place on Friday.

All major opposition parties are calling for Rajoy to step down after Spain's National Court last week said it had uncovered a vast system of bribes given to former officials or lawmakers of his Popular Party in exchange for juicy contracts between 1999 and 2005.

The court sentenced 29 people to jail for a total of 351 years for corruption, embezzlement and money laundering in the so-called Gurtel trial.

MH17 DOWNING

Russia comes
under fire at
UNSC meet

AFP, United Nations

Russia on Tuesday rejected calls at the United Nations to accept responsibility for the downing of Flight MH17 over Ukraine after an investigation found that a Russian army missile was used in the attack.

At a Security Council meeting on Ukraine, Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok called on Moscow to accept the findings that the airliner was shot down by a Russian-made BUK missile provided by a brigade based in the Russian city of Kursk.

"The language of ultimatums is not something that anyone will be allowed to use when speaking to Russia," Ambassador Vasily Nebenzia told the council meeting.

"We cannot accept the unfounded conclusion of the JIT", the Dutch-led joint investigation Team, he added.

All 298 people on the Malaysia Airlines flight en route from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur were killed when the missile slammed into the plane as it flew over territory held by pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine in July 2014.

Responding to Nebenzia, the Dutch foreign minister said his arguments were "nothing new" and again urged Russia to work with the Netherlands and Australia to identify the perpetrators.

US Ambassador Nikki Haley voiced strong support for the Dutch and Australian call on Russia to acknowledge its role in the tragedy and help bring to account those responsible for the shooting down.

"Despite its transparent denials, there is no doubt Russia is driving the Ukrainian conflict," said Haley.