

'Saudi plans tripling of Umrah visas'

Riyadh

Saudi Arabia is planning to triple the number of visas it issues for the umrah pilgrimage, newspapers reported yesterday, more than two weeks after a deadly Hajj stampede.

The Saudi Gazette and Okaz newspapers quoted Hajj Minister Bandar Al Hajjar as saying that as many as 1.25 million pilgrims are expected to arrive each month starting next year.

That compares with 400,000 a month now, the reports said.

The new system would allow full use of massive expansion projects at the kingdom's Holy sites, Hajjar was quoted as saying.

Umrah is a lesser pilgrimage carried out any time during the year.

The major Hajj pilgrimage, which all Muslims with the means are expected to complete at least once in their lives, this year, drew about two million faithful.

The number had declined, particularly because of a multi-

billion-dollar expansion, the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Islam's holiest site.

King rejects questioning of Saudi role as Hajj organiser

Riyadh

King Salman yesterday rejected any suggestions that Saudi Arabia should give up its role as the organiser of the Hajj following last month's deadly stampede in Mina. "The

irresponsible statements aiming for political exploitation of the incident... shall not affect the role of Saudi Arabia, its duty and responsibilities in serving the guests of God," said the Saudi monarch.



Thousands of Muslims gather at the Grand Mosque in Mecca (File photo)

Ankara bombings

'IS' prime suspect in deadliest attack: PM

Ankara

Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu yesterday said the Islamic State (IS) extremist group was the prime suspect in the double suicide bombings in Ankara that killed 97 and sparked anger over the authorities' failure to ensure security.

In his first interview since Turkey was scarred on Saturday by its deadliest ever attack, Davutoglu insisted that snap elections would go ahead as planned on November 1 despite the bloodshed.

The attack on a peace rally of leftist, labour and Kurdish activists ratcheted up tensions to new heights in Turkey as the government wages a relentless campaign against Kurdish militants and grapples with the presence of IS jihadists just inside the border with Syria.

"Looking at how the incident took place, we are probing Daesh as our first priority,"

Davutoglu told NTV television, using an alternative Arabic acronym for IS. He said that



Relatives mourn near the grave of a victim of the twin bombings in Ankara, during the funeral in Istanbul

the attacks were carried out by two suicide bombers.

"We are close to a name (for one bomber). That name points to an organisation," he said. Davutoglu however remained cautious, saying that authorities

were investigating three groups including Islamic State but also the outlawed Kurdistan

Workers' Party (PKK) and the far-left Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front (DHKP-C) as "potential suspects." Meanwhile, Turkey's leading writer has warned the country could collapse into

sectarian conflict and blamed President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for the climate of insecurity brutally illustrated by Sunday's deadly attacks in Ankara. Orhan Pamuk, the 2006 winner of the Nobel prize

for literature, told Italian daily *La Repubblica* that Turkey's increasing instability was linked to Erdogan's Justice and Development Party's failure to retain a parliamentary majority in June.

Germany's Angela Merkel to visit Turkey on Sunday

Berlin

Germany's Angela Merkel will visit Turkey on Sunday to discuss terrorism, the war in Syria and the refugee crisis, her spokesman said, after bombs killed 97 people in Ankara at the weekend.

The chancellor would meet President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu for talks on "the joint battle against terrorism, the situation

in Syria and managing the refugee crisis," said Steffen Seibert yesterday.

Merkel had reacted with "great dismay" to the double suicide bombing, the deadliest attack in modern Turkey's history, and had condemned it as "a particularly cowardly act aimed directly against civil rights, democracy and peace", Seibert said. She had sent a condolence letter to Davutoglu and telephoned Erdogan at the weekend.

Zimbabwe clears Cecil the lion killer

Harare

Zimbabwe yesterday abandoned its bid to press charges against a US dentist who killed Cecil the lion, saying his papers "were in order" and that he did not know he was committing any offence.

The black-maned lion was shot dead with a powerful bow and arrow in July by US trophy hunter Walter Palmer in a hunt that provoked worldwide outrage.

Palmer paid \$55,000 (50,000 euros) to shoot the lion on an expedition led by professional Zimbabwean hunter Theo Bronkhorst.

The hunt provoked a storm of criticism after it emerged that Cecil was a well-known attraction among visitors to the Hwange National Park and was wearing a tracking collar as part of an Oxford University research project.

But a Zimbabwean government minister yesterday said they would not pursue any legal proceedings against Palmer.

Environment Minister Oppah Muchinguri told reporters Palmer's "papers were in order" when he came to Zimbabwe.

Angus Deaton wins Nobel Prize in Economics

Stockholm

Angus Deaton of Britain and the United States won the Nobel Economics Prize yesterday for his work on consumption, poverty and welfare, the jury said.

"By emphasising the links between individual consumption decisions and outcomes for the whole economy, his work has helped transform modern microeconomics, macroeconomics and development economics," the

Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences said.

"To design economic policy that promotes welfare and reduces poverty, we must first understand individual consumption choices. More than anyone else, Angus Deaton has enhanced this understanding," it said.

Deaton was honoured for three related achievements: for developing with his colleague John Muellbauer around 1980 a system for estimating the demand for different goods;



Angus Deaton

studies of the link between consumption and income that

he conducted around 1990; and the work he carried out in later decades on measuring living standards and poverty in developing countries with the help of household surveys.

His research has shown how the clever use of household data can shed light on issues such as the relationship between income and calorie intake, and the extent of gender discrimination with the family.

"Deaton's focus on household surveys has helped transform development

economics from a theoretical field based on aggregate data to an empirical field based on detailed individual data," the Academy said.

Speaking to reporters at the Nobel press conference by video link, Deaton said he believed poverty would continue to decline. "I do foresee a decrease. I think we've had a remarkable decrease for the past 20-30 years. I do expect that to continue," he said, noting however that there were still 700 million extremely poor people according to the

World Bank "so we are not out of the woods yet." Deaton said poverty reduction would for example resolve the current refugee crisis.

Deaton, 69, was born in Edinburgh and has been a professor of economics and international affairs at Princeton University in the United States since 1983.

He wins the prize sum of eight million Swedish kronor (about 860,000 euros, \$950,000).

The economics prize caps this year's Nobel season.