

Iraq police in armed clash with pro-Iran militia in Baghdad

AFP | Baghdad

Iraqi police surrounded the headquarters of an Iran-backed militia and detained one of its members after an armed clash Wednesday left three people wounded in Baghdad, a security official said.

The powerful Hezbollah Brigades militia is part of the Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary units. A shootout erupted after a police patrol in the Iraqi capital stopped a car, only for a convoy of Hezbollah Brigades members to arrive, an interior ministry official said.

Hungary adopts law penalising migrant aid groups

AFP | Budapest

Hungary's parliament adopted yesterday a controversial package of laws penalising NGOs that help migrants, a key proposal of the firebrand nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

Dubbed the "Stop Soros" laws after liberal US billionaire George Soros, accused by the government of orchestrating migration to Europe, the package of legislation was voted through by 160 votes to 18. The laws will bring in a punishment of up to a year in prison.

Loss of Earth's intact forests speeds up

AFP | Paris

Earth's intact forests shrank annually by nearly 90,000 square kilometres from 2014 to 2016, 20 percent faster than during the previous 13 years, according to findings presented at a conference in Oxford this week.

Despite UN-led efforts to halt deforestation, nearly ten percent of undisturbed forests have been fragmented, degraded or simply chopped down since 2000, according to the analysis of satellite imagery.

At least 60 dead after migrant boat sinks

Rome | Italy

At least 60 migrants died in the Mediterranean sea when their rubber dinghy sank last week, according to survivor testimonies gathered by a rights group in Sicily.

The Diciotti, an Italian coastguard ship carrying more than 500 migrants, docked Tuesday night at the Sicilian port of Pozzallo.

Among those on board were around 40 survivors of an accident last Tuesday which saw a US Navy boat come to the aid of drowning migrants,

Divers, underwater drone join search for 192 missing

An overcrowded wooden ferry sank in one of the world's deepest volcanic lakes in Sumatra

● Desperate relatives gather at port on lake

● Team of 25 divers and underwater vehicle to aid search

Reuters | Tigaras

Divers and an underwater drone yesterday joined a fleet of rescue vessels in Indonesia's search for at least 192 passengers missing two days after an overcrowded wooden ferry sank in one of the world's deepest volcanic lakes in Sumatra. Authorities are unable to confirm how many were aboard when the vessel sank on Monday in bad weather, since it did not have a manifest. Four were confirmed dead and 18 survivors



Rescue team members preparing diving equipment during operation to find missing passengers from a ferry accident

picked up, but officials fear the death toll could be much higher.

Tearful relatives waiting for news gathered at the small port of Tigaras on Lake Toba. Search teams expect to find many more

trapped victims once they know where the vessel came to rest in the lake, which is 450 m (1,500 feet) deep.

"We have the coordinates from when it sank, but we need

to verify them," said Budiawan, a search and rescue official.

A team of 25 divers, including marines, was searching for the vessel, along with a remotely operated underwater vehicle (ROV) that can operate up to a depth of 380 m (1,247 ft), he added.

The first team of divers encountered poor visibility and freezing cold when it got to a depth of 50 metres (164 ft), said Muhammad Syaugi, head of the national search and rescue agency. Rescue teams in boats carrying GPS devices, binoculars, life jackets and oxygen tanks for survivors, have found little on the lake's surface.

Santika, 28, was in tears as she awaited news of her cousin and the latter's fiance who were on the ferry, returning from a holiday before the couple's wedding, planned for next week.

"Everything was ready (for

their wedding)," said Santika. "We're disappointed because there were too many passengers for the (ship's) capacity. The ferry should have been supervised, and checked if it was seaworthy or not."



Lake Toba is a volcanic lake with a length of 100 kilometers and 30 kilometers wide along the furthest depths of approximately 450 meters

Nigeria could borrow back its plundered art



Benin Bronzes

Reuters | Benin City

Nigeria could be open to borrowing its plundered Benin Bronzes back from Western museums rather than demanding a full return, officials said, a compromise that might provide a template for settling other bitter disputes over colonial-era loot.

British soldiers seized thousands of metal castings from the then separate Kingdom of

Benin in 1897, one of a series of acts of plunder that have long tainted relations between London and the territories where its agents held sway in the 19th century. London has resisted campaigns for the full return of Nigeria's bronzes, Ethiopia's Magdala treasures, Greece's "Elgin Marbles" and other relics, often citing legislation that bans its museums from permanently disposing of their collections.

30 Afghan security forces killed in attacks

● Taliban claimed responsibility for the attacks

AFP | Heart

Taliban fighters killed around 30 Afghan security forces in multiple attacks in western Afghanistan, officials said yesterday, in the deadliest clashes since the militant group ended its ceasefire.

Militants stormed at least two bases belonging to government forces in Badghis province overnight and ambushed a convoy of reinforcements. Officials said the group may have used the three-day truce, that ended Sunday, to plan the attacks.

"More than half of the fatalities came from the ambush and



The other soldiers and police were killed when militants raided their bases

roadside bomb blasts that hit a reinforcement convoy," provincial governor Abdul Qhafoor Malikzai said.

The other soldiers and police were killed when militants raided their bases, Qhafoor added. The Taliban claimed

responsibility for the attacks in a WhatsApp message to journalists. Provincial council chief Abdul Aziz Bek confirmed the death toll and accused the Taliban of taking advantage of the suspension in fighting to do reconnaissance in the area.



This bizarre optical illusion appears to show two birds conjoined at the head as they paddle along. Brazilian Photographer Aisse Gaertner, from Rio de Janeiro, snapped the remarkable photo in Brazil's Reserva Ecologica de Guapiaco (REGUA) last October. It shows the two white-faced whistling ducks appearing to blend into one as they glide past one another on the surface of the water. The ducks' distinctive markings make their faces stand out while the backs of their heads, covered in black feathers morph them together (Pic courtesy: Mailonline)

Ivanka urged Trump to end family separation

AFP | Washington

US President Donald Trump's daughter and advisor Ivanka Trump urged her father to end family separations on the US-Mexico border, US media reported.

Ivanka has made no public comment on the issue, but Trump told lawmakers during a meeting Tuesday evening that she had broached the issue with him, CNN and the Washington Post reported.

Congressman Chris Collins said Trump mentioned his daughter had "seen the images" and said they should deal with the crisis "for a lot of reasons," according to CNN.

"He mentioned that his



Ivanka Trump

daughter Ivanka had encouraged him to end this and he said he does recognize that it needs to end and the images are painful and he's looking for a legislative solution," CNN reported Florida congressman Carlos Curbelo as saying.