

Voice for Muslims around world

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Students showed what the country stands for on National Day, by helping poor children in Zanzibar

The day football came second

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Iraq forces move into Ramadi for final push

Counter-terror troops and allies advance to within 1km of city centre and expect to liberate it from ISIL within three days

BAGHDAD // Iraqi security forces have moved into the centre of Ramadi for a final push to retake the city from ISIL, and say it should be fully liberated within three days.

"We went into the centre of Ramadi from several fronts and we began purging residential areas," said Sabah Al Noman, spokesman for the Iraqi elite counter-terrorism service.

"The city will be cleared in the coming 72 hours. We did not face strong resistance, only snipers and suicide bombers, and this is a tactic we expected."

The push on Ramadi, the capital of Iraq's western province of Anbar, was launched overnight. Soldiers yesterday drove down deserted streets of the bombed-out city, entering homes to look for booby traps and retrieve shells and rockets from abandoned ISIL posts.

The fighting in Ramadi is led by the counter-terrorism force, backed by US-led coalition air strikes and supported by fighters from the police, army and Sunni tribes opposed to the extremists.

ISIL has lost several key towns since Baghdad and the autonomous Kurdish region started fighting back after a devastating offensive 18 months ago.

The mainly Shiite Hashed Al Shaabi paramilitaries were heavily involved in recapturing towns including Tikrit and Baiji, but have stayed on the fringes in the fight for Ramadi.

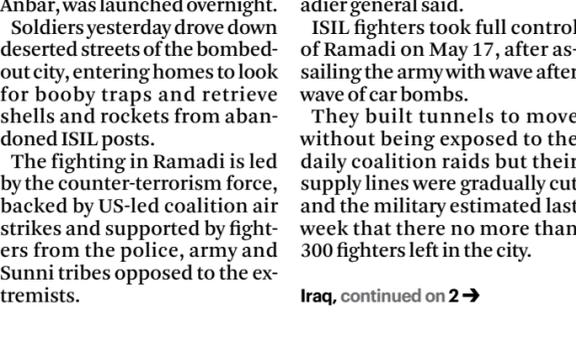
Retaking the ISIL bastion would be the Iraqi federal forces' most significant win so far.

"We built temporary bridges on the Euphrates and our forces were able to cross the river to enter residential areas and gain access to the city centre," a brigadier general said.

ISIL fighters took full control of Ramadi on May 17, after assailing the army with wave after wave of car bombs.

They built tunnels to move without being exposed to the daily coalition raids but their supply lines were gradually cut and the military estimated last week that there no more than 300 fighters left in the city.

Iraq, continued on 2 →



Iraqi soldiers in northern Ramadi yesterday prepare for their final assault to drive ISIL from the city. AP Photo

Ferrari World bears up



An animatronic polar bear and his 'handler' steal the show at Ferrari World's Winterfest yesterday. The month-long event on Yas Island ends on January 9. Ravindranath K / The National

Study on new tax to send money

Government looks at levying fee for remittances

Haneen Dajani

ABU DHABI // Expatriates may be asked to pay a government tax on money they send back home.

The Minister of Finance, Obaid Al Tayer, said yesterday a study was under way on whether to levy a charge on remittances.

"It is in its first stages," Mr Al Tayer said. "No decision has been made with regards to this."

He said further studies would be needed on factors including social and economic effects, and that a draft law had yet to be considered.

The UAE is also looking at doubling the tax on tobacco by 2017, in line with the GCC, and reviewing corporate tax laws.

And a Gulf-wide value-added tax could be in place within three years after the six countries adopted a draft framework in May.

But Mr Al Tayer ruled out introducing income tax.

"There is not any intention or study regarding placing taxes on the incomes of individuals at all. There is not any draft law or decision regarding this matter," he said.

"As per the constitution, no tax will be imposed without a law. This is a clear clause."

Mr Al Tayer yesterday appeared before the Federal National Council, which passed the federal budget for next year.

Forecast revenues for the year will reach Dh48.57bn, as will expenditure.

The FNC also discussed the tobacco tax, which member Abdul Aziz Al Zaabi said would generate Dh6 billion a year after it was increased. Levied on importers, it will double to 200 per cent of import duty by the start of 2017. The extra revenue will go into the federal budget, not the emirates' budgets as it does now.

FNC, continued on 2 →

→ Pension changes, a2

Girls 'more honest and ethical'

Boys less likely to back hard penalties for cheating

Roberta Pennington

ABU DHABI // Girls are more honest and more ethical than boys, a new study suggests.

They are less likely than boys to cheat in exams and more likely than boys to support tough punishment for those who do cheat.

As part of the study, a group

of schoolchildren were given a written quiz and told not to turn the paper over because the answers were on the other side.

Only 12 per cent of girls cheated, but 82 per cent of boys did.

"For me the sheer size of the gender differences was most surprising," said Dr Calvert Jones, an assistant professor of government and politics at the University of Maryland, College Park, and author of the study.

"In many scenarios, girls judged ethical lapses more harshly than boys. This is a difference that also appears in studies in

other countries, although not usually as large."

Dr Jones also surveyed 172 pupils at two public high schools, one for boys and one for girls. Of those, 62.8 per cent were Emirati and the rest expatriate Arabs.

They were asked about their attitudes to issues such as copying homework, bribes and nepotism. The study found girls more likely to deal honestly with ethical dilemmas and "tended towards harsher punishments for unethical acts".

Cheating, continued on 3 →

Houthis driven from land near stronghold

Mohammed Al Qalisi
Foreign Correspondent

ADEN // Pro-government forces yesterday seized key ground in Yemen's Hajjah province, close to the Houthi rebels' stronghold of Saada.

And Saudi Arabia shot down another ballistic missile fired from Yemen.

The missile, fired late on Monday night, was intercepted on its way to the Saudi city of Jizan. The Houthis said it was aimed at oil installations in the south of the kingdom.

Highly trained Yemeni troops who re-entered the country from Saudi Arabia last week liberated Shibh Al Himrayah and Shibh Al Hosia areas in Hajjah.

A Saudi Arabia-led coalition of countries, including the UAE, has backed the internationally recognised government of president Abdrabu Mansour Hadi against the Houthis, who are aligned with former president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

"There are many loyalists to Saleh and the Houthis in Hajjah, and for this reason the pro-government forces could not advance easily," said

Ahmed Qatran, a journalist in Hajjah.

"But this advance made the Houthi supporters fear the pro-government forces, as they believe they could take over the whole province."

Meanwhile, the rebels continued to block humanitarian aid from entering Tazeh city, where they have imposed a harsh siege.

Resumption of aid to Tazeh was agreed to by government and rebel negotiators at last week's peace talks in Switzerland.

"I am calling for the UN to break the siege on Tazeh city, before the liberation of Sanaa," said Ayman Abduljabar, a resident of the city. "We cannot live any longer under the siege of the Houthis but Sanaa can wait for liberation."

Yemeni security forces said the coalition launched more than a dozen air strikes on the rebels in Tazeh province yesterday, killing at least 20.

The UN-sponsored talks are set to resume on January 14.

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