

NEWS IN  
brief

## US puts Abu Hamza in detention

AFP, New York

A US judge ordered that the radical Islamist preacher Abu Hamza be kept in detention, after a brief court hearing yesterday in New York where the terror suspect was told of the 11 charges he faces.

Hamza, who lacked his trademark hook on the stump of his right arm, did not speak at the hearing which followed his extradition from Britain and was a prelude to a formal arraignment due Tuesday where he will be formally charged.

Hamza, 54, will face terrorism charges over a kidnapping in 1998 in Yemen, the establishment of a terrorist training camp in the United States, and for "facilitating violent jihad in Afghanistan," the

## Somali president names new PM

AFP, Mogadishu

Somalia's president yesterday appointed a little known businessman as prime minister as his administration sought to rebuild stability after more than two decades of anarchy and war.

"We have named Abdi Farah Shirdon Said as country's new prime minister after long discussions," said President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who himself only took office last month after being chosen by parliament in a UN-backed process.

The appointment is one of the first key steps of the new administration, which brought to an end the eight years of transitional rule by the corruption riddled and Western-backed government.

## Tibetan self immolates in China

AFP, Beijing

A writer who spoke out against Chinese repression of Tibet has burned himself to death, a rights group said, the 53rd person to set themselves ablaze protesting Beijing's rule.

The International Campaign for Tibet said in a statement that Gudrub, 42, called for freedom for the region and the return of the exiled spiritual leader the Dalai Lama while flames engulfed him in Tibet's Nagchu county on Thursday.

China's Tibetan-inhabited areas have seen an explosion in such protests since February 2009, with at least 53 Tibetans setting themselves alight, mostly

## WB offers India \$500m edu loan

AFP, New Delhi

The World Bank on Friday offered India a \$500 million loan aimed at improving access to secondary education and enhancing its quality, a statement said.

The government plans to use the funds to construct 11,000 new secondary schools and repair 60,000 existing ones, while upgrading 44,000 pri-

## 37 militants killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Thirty-seven Taliban militants have been killed in fighting with the security forces in Afghanistan, the interior ministry said yesterday.

The deaths occurred during overnight joint operations by the Afghan police and army and Nato-led coalition forces.

The raids were conducted in Kabul, Faryab, Kandahar, Zabul, Wardak and Helmand provinces,



This picture shows missing five-year-old British girl April Jones. British police yesterday charged a family friend, Mark Bridger, with April's murder although her body had still not been found.

## Vest lets FB users hug from afar

AFP, San Francisco

A vest developed in Massachusetts Institute of Technology lets Facebook users hug one another no matter how far apart they are.

A police official confirmed that they have been gathering information in this regard but would not disclose any progress for the sake of investigation.

As law enforcers have information on the presence of some RSO leaders in Cox's Bazar immediately before the attack, suspicion fall on other Rohingya groups too, the official added.

The person close to the RSO told this correspondent that several hundred rioters who came to Ramu from Garzania and Naikhangchhari in

## Rohingya groups

Meanwhile, sources said a group of RSO leaders had been staying in a Cox's Bazar hotel for a few days before the Ramu attacks.

Some of these leaders belonged to Abdullah Mohammad Salamatullah's faction in the militant organisation, sources claimed.

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## SYRIA CIVIL WAR

## 50 killed as rebels take border town

AFP, Damascus

Nearly 50 soldiers and rebels were killed yesterday in clashes near Syria's northern border, as Turkey hit back against what it said was new mortar fire from inside Syria.

Damascus, for its part, said four Turks were among a convoy of "terrorists" killed in the heart of Aleppo, just hours after UN condemnation of deadly jihadist bombings in the country's commercial capital.

Forty government soldiers and nine rebels were killed when rebels took a town in the northwestern province of Idlib near the border, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The fighting lasted more than 12 hours, it added.

Turkish officials said they were sure a mortar round that struck yesterday morning was fired by pro-government forces in Syria, and not rebels who have been fighting for nearly 19 months to oust President Bashar al-Assad. No casualties were reported.

The Turkish army responded with four mortar rounds, the governor's office said, adding that the Syrian fire had come from loyalists who were firing at rebels near the border.

The cross-border exchanges came despite unanimous condemnation from the UN Security Council on Thursday of deadly shelling from the Syrian side further east in Sanliurfa province that killed five people.

Nationwide, at least 88 people were killed on Saturday -- 38 soldiers, 32 rebels and 18 civilians -- according to the Observatory, which gave a death toll of 133 for Friday.

Since the uprising against Assad's rule erupted in March last year, more than 31,000 people have been killed, according to the group.

## Turkey and Syria: Why neither side wants war

CNN ONLINE

Despite Turkey's shelling of Syria, Middle East expert Fawaz Gerges says neither side wants an escalation of a conflict that has the potential to spill over into a regional war that would be extremely difficult to end.

It is important to stress at the outset that we do not know if the shells that landed on Turkish border towns, killing at least five people, were ordered by Bashar al-Assad's government; all we know is the shelling came from the area where Syrian positions had been firing at rebels.

Syria has admitted its shelling killed Turkish civilians, has apologized, and has promised that the incident will not be repeated, Turkey's deputy prime minister says. Syria's information minister has pledged an investigation into how and why the shell came to be fired at Turkey.

The big point is that the Assad regime is desperately trying to prevent outside military intervention in its war-torn country, and does not want to provide a pretext for Turkey to do so, knowing that it would be disastrous.

Similarly, the Turkish government has no interest in military escalation against its neighbor. According to surveys, public opinion in

Turkey is strongly against all-out war with Syria.

Equally important is the fact that, although Nato and the United States have expressed solidarity with Turkey, a Nato member, they are urging restraint. Western powers, particularly the United States, do not have the desire or political will to intervene militarily in Syria. Without the full backing of Nato and the US, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan would be reluctant to embark on any large-scale military venture against Syria.

So while we have seen a lot of escalation in the last 48 hours we need to put it into context: Neither side has an interest in turning this low-intensity war into something more serious, a full-blown confrontation.

What the incident tells us is that Syria has now descended into all-out war. The spillover of the Syrian war has reached not just Turkey but also Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq, with frequent armed clashes and casualties. If these skirmishes intensify and escalate, the potential of a region-wide war cannot be overlooked.

This is why Western powers, particularly the United States, are reluctant to intervene militarily in the Syrian civil war, lest they exacerbate an already dangerous situation: They want the civil war to remain an internal conflict where it can be contained.



## Pope's butler gets 18 months in jail

AFP, Vatican City

A Vatican court yesterday sentenced Pope Benedict XVI's former butler Paolo Gabriele to 18 months in prison for stealing secret papal documents that revealed fraud scandals and intrigue.

Presiding judge Giuseppe Dalla Torre initially gave the ex-butler three years but immediately reduced the sentence on the grounds of his past service to the Catholic Church and his apology to the pope for betraying him.

The Vatican's spokesman Federico Lombardi told journalists after the verdict that the pope was "very likely" to pardon Gabriele, who is now under house arrest pending a decision on whether or not he will appeal the verdict.

Gabriele was immediately led away by Vatican gendarmes, passing under a large portrait of Pope Benedict hanging in the 19th-century courtroom.

"I am convinced that I acted solely out of love, I would say visceral love, for the Church of Christ and for its leader on Earth," Gabriele said in a final statement to a hushed court when asked for his plea by the presiding judge.

"I do not feel that I am a thief," the 46-year-old father of three said.

The former butler was found guilty of leaking hundreds of sensitive Vatican documents in a case that has been dubbed "Vatileaks" and included allegations by a former governor of the city state of massive fraud within its walls.



Pakistani cricketer turned politician Imran Khan waves to supporters at the start of a rally on the outskirts of Islamabad yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Imran Khan leads anti-drone march

AGENCIES

Pakistani cricketer turned politician Imran Khan led Western activists and thousands of supporters yesterday on a defiant march to the tribal belt to protest against US drone strikes.

Crowds lined the road to greet Khan, and scrums of media and well-wishers thronged his 4x4 as the convoy of more than 100 vehicles embarked on the 440-kilometre drive from Islamabad to South Waziristan.

Joining supporters of the Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf are foreign anti-war activists, including a largely female contingent from the US group Code Pink, and Clive Stafford Smith, the director of the British human rights group Reprieve.

But as time wore on yesterday, it appeared increasingly unlikely the protesters would be allowed to reach their destination, considered a Taliban and al-Qaeda stronghold, and often called the most dangerous place on earth.

The government says the Taliban plan to attack the rally, and it was not safe for Khan to enter the semi-autonomous tribal belt.

Meanwhile, Pak Taliban has rejected "baseless" reports that it would protect Khan, Guardian reports. Khan had claimed the militants had no problem with his planned march.

## Uproar as graft claims hit India's Gandhi clan

Sonia's son-in-law implicated in real estate scam

STAR REPORT

A new anti-corruption party accused the son-in-law of India's most powerful politician, Sonia Gandhi, of large-scale graft Friday at a news conference targeting the country's famed ruling dynasty triggering a political storm.

Social activist Arvind Kejriwal, who launched his as yet unnamed new party earlier in the week, accused Gandhi's businessman son-in-law Robert Vadra of benefiting from murky deals in real estate linked to property group DLF.

"We want to know how his wealth grew from five million rupees (\$90,000) to three billion in a span of three years?" he told the news conference in which he handed out papers he claimed were sourced from the registrar general's office.

However, a spokesman for real estate firm DLF said the business relationship with Vadra was "completely transparent and was conducted to highest standards of ethics".

And breaking his silence on the controversy, Robert Vadra, owner of Artex which specialises in jewellery and handicraft exports, yesterday appeared to dismiss the allegations.

"Thank you so much for your concern. I am fine and can handle all the negativity. I have lost people I loved, what can be worse," Vadra said in his post on a social networking site.

Furious Congress dubbed the charge as "baseless and utterly irresponsible", our New Delhi correspondent reports.

"There can be no case of corruption against Vadra," Manish Tewari, a spokesman for the ruling Congress party, said. "Members of the new party are indulging in petty politics and we are not interested in this kind of tactics."

However, the main opposition BJP



Priyanka Gandhi and Robert Vadra

demanded a probe.

Kejriwal and Bhushan provided details of the business relationship between the property giant and Vadra.

They alleged that the seed money for Vadra's property acquisitions came from "unsecured, interest-free" loans to the tune of Rs 65 crore given by DLF which, in turn, sold a bulk of these properties to Vadra at a price far below the market price.

Kejriwal and Bhushan alleged that the government of Haryana state, ruled by Congress, had given DLF 350 acres of land to build a housing project which Vadra has seven flats.

Vadra is married to Sonia's daughter Priyanka. Italian-born Sonia's 42-year-old son Rahul is widely seen as being the future prime minister of India.

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