

NEWS IN brief

Napolitano reelected as Italy president

REUTERS, Rome

The Italian parliament on Saturday re-elected 87-year-old President Giorgio Napolitano to serve a second term in an attempt to resolve the political stalemate left by February's inconclusive election.

As most of parliament cheered his re-election, demonstrators protested outside. By evening the crowd had swelled as thousands of people vented anger at an outcome that was widely seen as perpetuating the grip on the country of a discredited political class and favouring centre-right leader

Paraguay holds key presidential polls

BBC ONLINE

Voters in Paraguay went to the polls yesterday in a presidential election seen as key to restoring the country's democratic credentials.

Horacio Cartes, of the conservative Colorado Party, and the centre-right Liberal Party's Efraim Alegre are seen as front-runners among 10 candidates.

The country's standing dipped in the region after last year's disputed impeachment of President Fernando Lugo.

US academic gang-raped in PNG

AFP, Port Moresby

A US academic has been gang-raped by an armed mob in Papua New Guinea, barely a week after an Australian was killed and his friend sexually assaulted by a group of men.

The incidents come after a brutal spate of sorcery-related crimes that have sparked condemnation from the United Nations and undermined the poor Pacific country's standing as a destination for tourism and investment.

In the latest case, the white academic told AFP that she was attacked on Friday while conducting research on birds and the impact of climate change in a remote forest on Karkar Island in Madang province.

Drone kills 'Qaeda militants' in Yemen

AFP, Sanaa

An apparent US drone strike and ensuing ground clashes in Yemen killed three suspected al-Qaeda militants and two soldiers yesterday, a security official and witnesses said.

The strike targeted a house in Wadi Abida, in the eastern province of Marib, and killed two suspected militants, the official said, requesting anonymity.

Witnesses said the strike was carried out by an unmanned aircraft of the sort that Washington has increasingly deployed against al-Qaeda targets in Yemen which shelters what it regards as



AFTERMATH OF CHINA TREMOR

Pictures of destruction after a strong earth quake struck China's Sichuan Province. The earthquake has killed 186 people, sent nearly 11,200 to hospitals and created a dire dearth of drinking water, Chinese state-run Xinhua reported yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



US to double aid to Syria rebels; Khatib resigns

AFP, Istanbul



The United States said Sunday it would double its aid to Syria's opposition, including with new non-lethal military equipment, but paid no heed to calls for arms supplies or a direct intervention.

In a statement after talks among the pro-opposition "Friends of Syria" group in Istanbul, Secretary of State John Kerry said US assistance to the opposition would double to \$250 million (191 million euros).

Some of the money will be used to "provide an expanded range of support" to rebel fighters battling President Bashar al-Assad, beyond the current provisions of food rations and medical kits, "to include other types of non-lethal supplies," the statement said.

It did not elaborate, but US media had reported that Washington is preparing to provide the rebels with protective battle-

field equipment such as body armour, armoured vehicles and night-vision goggles, as well as communications gear.

But the pledge fell short of opposition demands for foreign backers to supply the rebels with arms, institute a no-fly zone and carry out airstrikes on positions used by the Assad regime to launch missiles.

Many in the West have raised concerns about arming the rebels, fearing weapons could end up in the hands of radical Islamist groups such as the Al-Nusra Front, which this month pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda.

Meanwhile, in a new development, opposition head Ahmad Moaz al-Khatib has refiled his resignation and an interim leader is being sought, a fellow member and a source close to the main opposition group said yesterday.

Boston arrest sparks debate over rights

AFP, Washington

The arrest of the Boston Marathon bombing suspect has ignited debate over a legal exception that allows police to interrogate individuals without reading them their rights.

The suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev remained in serious condition in a Boston hospital yesterday unable to answer questions on the devastating attack, officials said.

But rights advocates were quick to express concern over possible efforts by President Barack Obama's administration to use a provision waiving the need to inform Tsarnaev of his right to an attorney or to remain silent.

American Civil Liberties Union executive director Anthony Romero called for a narrow read of the "public safety" exception, which is only allowed in cases where there is a "continued threat" to public safety.

"We must not waver from our tried-and-true justice system, even in the most difficult of times," he said in a rejoinder to a US rights report.

"Denial of rights is un-American and will only make it harder to obtain fair convictions."

US Attorney Carmen Ortiz told reporters after Tsarnaev's arrest that the authorities had invoked the public safety exception and delayed reading him his rights, or Miranda warning.

23 Brazil cops sentenced for prison massacre

AFP, Sao Paulo

Twenty-three Brazilian police officers were sentenced to 156 years in jail each for their role in the killing of 111 inmates during Brazil's deadliest prison uprising in 1992.

The 23 were among 26 military officers on trial before the Sao Paulo state tribunal.

The officers, most of them now retired, were accused of killing 15 prisoners in Sao Paulo's Carandiru prison during the operation to quell the revolt on October 2, 1992, which came to be known as the "Carandiru massacre."

None of the officers involved in the operation were harmed. In addition to the 111 prisoners killed, some 87 others were wounded.

US-Israel strike key arms deal

AFP, Tel Aviv

A major US arms deal with Israel sends Iran a "very clear signal" that military action remains an option to stop it from going nuclear, US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel said in Tel Aviv yesterday.

Hagel's remarks were made shortly before his arrival in the Jewish state at the start of a six-day regional trip likely to be dominated by worries over Iran's nuclear programme and Syria's civil war.

Asked if a multi-billion dollar arms package with Israel was designed to convey a message that a military strike remains an option, he said: "I don't think there's any question that's another very clear signal to Iran".

The trip, his first since taking over the Pentagon nearly two months ago, was likely to see Hagel putting the finishing touches on plans to sell \$10 billion worth of advanced missiles and aircraft to Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia in a bid to counter the threat posed by Iran.

The deal, which was unveiled on the eve of Hagel's departure, will see Israel obtaining anti-radiation missiles designed to take out enemy air defences, radar for fighter jets, aerial refuelling tankers and Osprey V-22 tilt-rotor transport aircraft.

Egypt justice minister resigns

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's Justice Minister Ahmed Mekki resigned yesterday ahead of a cabinet reshuffle in which he was expected to be replaced, state media reported.

President Mohamed Morsi had said on Saturday he would order the reshuffle "soon," after months of pressure by opposition groups that demand an overhaul of the government before dropping a boycott of parliamentary elections.

Egyptian media had reported that Mekki would be one of the ministers replaced in the shake up, which a presidential aide told AFP would affect up to eight ministries, including "important ones."

'Mahatma Gandhi third most admired leader'

ANI, Sydney

India's independence hero Mahatma Gandhi is the third most admired leader by CEOs around the world.

The conclusion was drawn in a survey of some 1,300 business leaders, carried out by financial services giant PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC).

The survey found that wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill has topped the poll of leaders most admired by chief executives, edging out Steve Jobs and Nelson Mandela, who came fourth.

According to news.com.au, the survey



found Britain's 'Iron Lady' Margaret Thatcher as the only woman in the top 10, at seventh position.

Jobs came second on the list and fellow business tycoon Jack Welch, who led General Electric for 20 years, came fifth.

Former US presidents Abraham Lincoln, Ronald Reagan, John F. Kennedy and Bill Clinton occupied places six, eight, nine and 10th equal.

After Thatcher, who died April 8 following a stroke, the most mentioned women were German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Mother Theresa and author Ayn Rand, the report added.

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China quake toll hits 186

11,300 injured; 21 missing

AFP, Lushan

Thousands of rescue workers combed through flattened villages in southwest China yesterday in a race to find survivors from a powerful quake as the toll of dead and missing rose past 200.

Dressed in bright orange uniforms, rescuers battled their way up mountain paths strewn with wreckage to reach isolated parts of Sichuan province on the edge of the Tibetan Plateau.

Troops had worked through the night, searching villages where houses had been destroyed for survivors and treating those injured in the quake.

The death toll rose to at least 186, the official Xinhua news agency said, but reports of casualties slowed yesterday.

More than 11,300 people were injured and 21 remain missing, Xinhua said, citing local officials.

China's new Premier Li Keqiang rushed to the disaster zone to oversee rescue efforts in his first major public test since taking office in March, before returning to Beijing late Sunday, China Radio National reported.

RIGHTS VIOLATION
China hits back at US

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday accused the United States of human rights violations through its military operations abroad and failing to prevent its own citizens from gun violence, in a rejoinder to a US rights report.

The report, released by China's parliament, the State Council, said Washington has "turned a blind eye to its own woeful human rights situation", despite styling itself as "the world judge of human rights".

China -- which officially includes rising living standards in its definition of human rights -- released the report in response to a US report published Friday that said China's rights record has worsened over the past year.

The US report highlighted a Chinese crackdown on ethnic minorities, including Tibetans, the detention of political dissidents, as well as the widespread surveillance of citizens by a huge domestic security apparatus.



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