

NEWSIN brief

5 soldiers killed in Libya clashes

AFP, Benghazi

Clashes between Libyan elite forces and gunmen yesterday killed five soldiers in Benghazi, the army said, in the latest bout of unrest.

Benghazi, the cradle of the uprising that ousted Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011, has become increasingly marred by clashes between militias made up of former rebels who fought the late dictator's forces and the still infant regular forces of the new authorities.

Italy rescues 159 boat migrants

AFP, Rome

The Italian coast guard has rescued 159 Syrian, Afghan and Egyptian migrants from a boat in the sea off Calabria, including a newborn baby and seven children, Italian media said yesterday.

The alarm was sounded just before midnight on Friday after a boat, which is believed to have set off from Turkey a few days ago, was reported to be in trouble off the coast near Roccella Jonica in southern Italy.

UN peacekeeper killed in Sudan

AFP, Khartoum

Shells hit a United Nations base in Sudan's troubled South Kordofan state on Friday killing one Ethiopian peacekeeper and wounding two others, officials said.

Residents suspect stray fire hit the base and that anti-government rebels had targeted a football stadium to be used for a regional tournament starting on Tuesday.



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II smiles during the Queen's Birthday Parade, 'Trooping the Colour,' at Horse Guards Parade in London yesterday. The ceremony of Trooping the Colour is believed to have first been performed during the reign of King Charles II. More than 600 guardsmen and cavalry make up the parade, a celebration of the Sovereign's official birthday, although the Queen's actual birthday is on 21 April.

PHOTO: AFP



Protesters blow whistles as they march to the US consulate during a protest in support of Edward Snowden in Hong Kong yesterday. *Inset*, a child holds a cut out of Snowden during the protest. Snowden, a former CIA technical assistant, is in hiding in Hong Kong after he arrived in the city on May 20 and blew the lid on a vast electronic surveillance operation by the US National Security Agency.

PHOTO: AFP

Facebook, Microsoft reveal details of US data requests

CNN ONLINE

Facebook and Microsoft disclosed that they received thousands of requests for user data from government agencies in the United States in the last half of 2012.

Facebook said it got between 9,000 and 10,000 requests targeting between 18,000 and 19,000 accounts during that period.

"With more than 1.1 billion monthly active users worldwide, this means that a tiny fraction of 1% of our user accounts were the subject of any kind of U.S. state, local, or federal U.S. government requests", Ted Ullyot, Facebook's general counsel, said in a post Friday night.

Google publishes a transparency report using requests from governments worldwide. It said grouping information is a "step back" for users.

In an effort to combat criticism, Microsoft also disclosed information on its data requests Friday night.

"For the six months ended December 31, 2012, Microsoft received between 6,000 and 7,000 criminal and national security warrants, subpoenas and orders affecting

between 31,000 and 32,000 consumer accounts from US governmental entities (including local, state and federal)," said John Frank, Microsoft's vice president.

However, both companies said the information they were allowed to publish falls short of what users need to better understand the issues.

Obama administration officials have pushed back against criticism on the domestic surveillance in the aftermath of the classified leaks last week that disclosed details of covert surveillance programs.

The US government has a sweeping system for monitoring emails, photos, search histories and other data from major American Internet companies, including Facebook, Microsoft, Google and Skype.

Edward Snowden, 29, has admitted leaking the classified documents about the covert programs. US has claimed the top-secret program is legal.

Civil liberties groups and legislators are among critics condemning the program as government overreach beyond the intention and limits of the Patriot Act originally passed in the aftermath of the 2001 attacks.

US sets bar higher for N Korea talks

AFP, Washington

The United States said that North Korea's recent actions have risen the bar for a resumption of dialogue as it called on Pyongyang to address concerns on weapons but also human rights.

Glyn Davies, the US pointman on North Korea policy, said the United States was exasperated with Pyongyang after it snubbed attempts by President Barack Obama's administration to reach out in 2009 and again in 2012.

However, North Korea yesterday made a fresh vow to build up its nuclear deterrent in the face of "threats of war" from the United States and a "policy of confrontation" from the South.

Pakistan founder's home bombed

CNN ONLINE

Assailants bombed the home of the Pakistani founding father early yesterday, killing a police officer who fought back and injuring an employee, authorities said.

The home of founding father Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah is in the country's militant-hit Balochistan province.

Four attackers entered the home in the dead of the night, planted the timed bombs and fled, said Tahir Nadeem, the local deputy commissioner.

All memorabilia in the home was destroyed by the fiery blaze that engulfed the wooden areas, Nadeem said.

The items included chairs, beds and historic photographs of the founder.

The attack occurred in Ziarat, one of the country's top tourist points. It is 150 km from the provincial capital of Quetta.

Jinnah spent the last days of his life at the home.

A separatist-group later claimed responsibility for the attack.

"We blew up the Ziarat Residency," Meerak Baluch, a spokesman for the Baluchistan Liberation Army told AFP in a phone call from undisclosed location. "We don't recognise any Pakistani monument."

No one has been arrested, officials said.

Prime Minister Sharif and several political leaders strongly condemned the attack while Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar promised arrest of the attackers.

Lost medieval city found in Cambodia

AFP, Sydney

A lost medieval city that thrived on a mist-shrouded Cambodian mountain 1,200 years ago has been discovered by archaeologists using revolutionary airborne laser technology, a report said yesterday.

In what it called a world exclusive, the Sydney Morning Herald said the city, Mahendraparvata, included temples hidden by jungle for centuries, many of which have not been looted.

A journalist and photographer from the newspaper accompanied the "Indiana Jones-style" expedition, led by a French-born archaeologist, through landmine-strewn jungle in the Siem Reap region where Angkor Wat, the largest Hindu temple complex in the world, is located.

The expedition used an instrument called Lidar -- light detection and ranging data -- which was strapped to a helicopter that criss-crossed a mountain north of Angkor Wat for seven days, providing data that matched years of ground research by archaeologists.

It helped reveal the city that reportedly founded the Angkor Empire in 802 AD, uncovering more than two dozen previously unrecorded temples and evidence of ancient canals, dykes and roads using satellite navigation coordinates gathered from the instrument's data.



A protestor sits beside his boat with an anti-fracking banner in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland yesterday. McIntyre will be taking part in the anti-fracking demonstration against the use of fracking to extract gas from shale rock in County Fermanagh ahead of the G8 summit.

PHOTO: AFP

No Syria 'no fly zone': US Analysts say arming rebels unlikely to tip balance

AFP, Washington

The White House on Friday all but ruled out the notion of mounting a no-fly zone in Syria, billing it as difficult, dangerous and costly, and unsuitable to halting close quarters ground battles.

A day after US officials pledged to stiffen military help to Syrian rebels, likely moving towards sending some form of arms for the first time, they made it clear that swift US mission creep in the country is not on the cards.

Deputy national security advisor Ben Rhodes said mounting a no-fly zone in Syria poses significant logistical and strategic challenges that are more acute than those faced by NATO and Arab League allies in Libya in 2011.

"It's dramatically more difficult and dangerous and costly in Syria, for a variety of reasons," Rhodes said.

"One is that in Libya, you already had a situation where the opposition controlled huge portions of the country and you could essentially protect those portions of the country from the air.

"You do not have the same types of air defense system that exist within Syria. So in that regard, it's more difficult."

"We don't at this point believe that the US has a national interest in pursu-



ing a very intense, open-ended military engagement through a no-fly zone in Syria at this juncture," he added.

US ambassador to the UN Susan Rice took a similar tack when asked about a possible no-fly zone in New York.

Domestic opponents of the White House have demanded that Obama set up a no-fly zone in Syria to protect refugees and rebels from air strikes.

Top White House officials on Friday refused to publicly provide a list of the kind of new aid Washington would provide in response to requests by Syria's opposition Supreme Military Council.

And while Obama plans to have in-depth discussions with allies at a G8

summit next week in Northern Ireland, US officials say they cannot divulge what military support will now go directly to the rebels' Supreme Military Council.

According to the Wall Street Journal, Obama has ordered the CIA to coordinate secretly and closely with Gulf allies already sending arms to the rebels.

Weapons would include small arms and ammunition, including anti-tank weapons but not anti-aircraft weapons, The New York Times reported, citing unnamed American officials.

But some analysts feared such weapons would not be enough against Assad's forces, who have been helped to victory in Qusayr, for example, by thousands of well-trained and armed Hezbollah militants.

Others argued that even providing heavy weapons would be unlikely to change the balance of power with Assad newly emboldened by his victories.

"What is needed, at a bare minimum, is a robust program of training and equipping the opposition, coupled with significant support in the areas of strategic planning, intelligence, and logistics," said Michael Doran, senior fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy.

Syria to dominate G8 talks

AFP, London

Thousands of protesters were due on the streets of Belfast yesterday to urge G8 leaders to act on global poverty at their upcoming summit, expected to be dominated by talks on Syria.

Police in the Northern Irish capital expect 5,000 people to join each of two demonstrations organised by trade unions and campaigners against global hunger ahead of the G8 summit in the province on Monday and Tuesday.

Northern Ireland, which still suffers from sporadic sectarian violence despite a peace deal in 1998, has organised its biggest-ever police operation for the talks, with 8,000 officers deployed.

They will be split between Belfast and the luxury lakeside Lough Erne Resort where the G8 leaders will be staying, including US President Barack Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

'Only a secular person can be Indian PM'

AGENCIES

Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar has asked the BJP to publicly declare that Narendra Modi, a divisive figure in Indian politics, will not be its prime ministerial candidate in the 2014 elections setting the stage for his party's split with BJP inevitable.

JD(U) has publicly proclaimed that only a "secular" person, who does not have rough edges in his personality and can pull everyone along, is fit to be the country's prime minister. It has also held that Modi does not fulfil the eligibility criteria.

Facing the barrier, the BJP yesterday threatened to withdraw its support to the Nitish Kumar government in Bihar. Reports said the party is going to hand over a letter to the Bihar governor informing him about the withdrawal of the BJP's support to the ruling coalition.

The letter will make a claim that the government has been reduced to a minority and therefore demand dismissal of chief minister Nitish Kumar.

The JD(U), which needs the support of 122 legislators in a house of 243 to remain in power in Bihar, has 119 lawmakers. They can maintain the government with the support of independents.

Nand Kishore Yadav, a BJP member and a minister of Bihar, said there was no point in meeting Nitish as the scope for negotiations had completely exhausted.

He said the top leaders of the party including L K Advani, Sushma Swaraj, Rajnath Singh talked to Nitish Kumar in the last three days and tried to convince him about remaining in the NDA, but he has become adamant on the Modi issue, which was never a part of the NDA agenda.



TURKEY UPRISING

Protesters refuse to leave park despite PM's pledge

AFP, Istanbul

Turkish protesters yesterday refused to budge from an Istanbul park at the centre of nationwide anti-government demonstrations after rejecting a government olive branch aimed at ending two weeks of deadly unrest.

The government said it would "make an evaluation" after protesters rebuffed Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's promise to halt the redevelopment of Gezi Park, saying their movement was bigger than a conservation struggle.

"We will continue our resistance in the face of any injustice and unfairness taking place in our country," the Taksim Solidarity group, seen as most representative of the protesters, said in a statement. "This is only the beginning."

The decision looked set to inflame tensions in a crisis that has posed the biggest challenge yet to the decade-long rule of Erdogan's Islamic-rooted government.

It also came as tens of thousands of supporters of Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) were readying to take to the streets of the capital Ankara for an election rally billed as a show of strength for the premier.

They were uniting under slogans saying: "Respect the national will" and "The game is over. It's time to write history".

A peaceful sit-in to save Gezi Park's 600 trees from being razed prompted a brutal police response on May 31, spiralling into nationwide demonstrations against Erdogan, seen as increasingly authoritarian.

ODDLY enough

\$560,000 for two parking spots!

AP, Boston

Parking is such a precious commodity in Boston that one woman was willing to pay \$560,000 for two off-street spaces near her home.

Lisa Blumenthal won the spots in the city's Back Bay neighborhood during an on-site auction Thursday. The IRS had seized the spots from a man who owed back taxes.

Blumenthal, who lives in a multimillion-dollar home near the parking spaces, tells The Boston Globe she didn't expect the bidding to go quite so high for the spots she says will come in handy for guests and workers.

Boy, 11, fathers child to woman, 36

AFP, Wellington

An 11-year-old New Zealand boy was reported to have fathered a child with the 36-year-old mother of a school friend, raising questions on why women cannot be charged with rape in the country.

Under New Zealand law, the crime of rape applies only to men and carries a maximum jail sentence of 20 years.

The incident happened last year, sources said. According to a local newspaper, the baby has been taken into government care about two months ago. The young father, who has now turned 12, was also understood to have been taken into care.