

NEWS IN brief

Taliban kills 9 Nato suppliers in Kabul

AFP, Kabul
A Taliban truck bomb and gun attack killed nine people in the Afghan capital Kabul yesterday, destroying the entrance to a Nato supply company's compound in the latest insurgent attack to shake peace efforts. Four Nepalese, one Briton, one Romanian and three Afghans have been

India launches navigation satellite

AFP, Bangalore
India launched the first of seven satellites for its domestic satellite navigation network yesterday, its space centre said, in the first step to creating a scaled down version of the US Global Positioning System. Once fully operational in 2015, the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) will provide accurate positioning services for civilian and military users across India and up to 1,500 kilometres beyond its borders. The remaining six satellites will be launched at every 36 months over the next 30-36 months, officials said.

Palestinian killed in clash with Israel army

AFP, Dura
A Palestinian teenager was knocked down and killed by an Israeli military jeep during overnight clashes in a town in the southern West Bank, Palestinian police and witnesses said yesterday. The youth, 19-year-old Moataz Sharawna, died after being hit by the vehicle after several hours of clashes between stone throwers and troops which began at midnight in Dura, which lies just southwest of the city of Hebron, a police spokesman told AFP.

Deputy of scandal-hit Vatican bank resigns

AFP, Vatican City
The director and deputy director of the Vatican bank have resigned amid a sweeping probe of the scandal-hit institution, the Vatican said on Monday. Paolo Cipriani and Massimo Tulli handed in their resignations "in the best interest of the institute and the Holy See", the Vatican said in a statement, three days after a senior Catholic cleric who held accounts at the bank was arrested in Italy for alleged corruption.

China floods kill 39

AFP, Beijing
Floods and landslides triggered by torrential rain in China have left at least 39 people dead since the weekend, state media reported yesterday, warning of more downpours to come. Another 13 people were still missing in nine affected areas, including the southwestern province of Sichuan and Inner Mongolia in the north, the China Daily said, citing the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

N Korean negotiator heads to Russia

AFP, Seoul
A high-ranking North Korean official with long experience in nuclear talks left for Russia yesterday, state media said, as the communist state steps up a diplomatic offensive after months of tension. First vice foreign minister Kim Kye-Gwan was leading a delegation en route to the Russian capital.



A damaged house perches on the mountainside alongside the Mandakini river at Silli, in the flood affected area of northern Uttarakhand state on Monday. Construction along river banks will be banned in a devastated north Indian state amid concerns unchecked development fuelled last month's flash floods and landslides that killed thousands, the state's top official said yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Kerry, Lavrov discuss Snowden impasse

AFP, Bandar Seri Begawan
US Secretary of State John Kerry said he raised the sensitive issue of secrets leaker Edward Snowden in talks with his counterpart from Russia, where the US fugitive is in diplomatic limbo. But Kerry told reporters after an Asia security summit in Brunei that his discussions with Sergei Lavrov failed to yield any progress on an impasse that has further strained testy US-Russian ties. Kerry said the issue was more a matter for justice officials. The talks were the highest-level contact between the two nations since Snowden, a former government contractor who leaked explosive details of US surveillance, fled from Hong Kong to Moscow over a week ago. He has asked 21 nations to consider asylum. President Vladimir Putin has said that Snowden is welcome to stay in Russia but that he must "stop his work aimed at inflicting damage on our American partners -- no matter how strange this may sound coming from me". Meanwhile, Kerry yesterday said that the United States and Russia were committed to holding a peace conference on Syria but that it would likely take place after August. Kerry, speaking after talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at a security meeting in Brunei, said "we both agree that the conference should happen sooner rather than later" to find a peaceful solution to the Syrian war. But he said that the conference, originally planned for June, could not happen this month due to US-Russian meetings and that "August is very difficult for Europeans and others," a likely reference to summer vacations.

Obama calls Morsi to express concern

Egypt court ups ante against embattled president
AFP, Dar Es Salaam

US President Barack Obama called President Mohamed Morsi to warn him that the voices of all Egyptians must be heard as a political crisis escalates, the White House said yesterday. Obama placed the call from Tanzania, on the final stop of his African tour and told him Washington was committed to "the democratic process in Egypt and does not support any single party or group," the official said. "President Obama encouraged President Morsi to take steps to show that he is responsive to their concerns, and underscored that the current crisis can only be resolved through a political process," the statement said. "President Obama reiterated that only Egyptians can make the decisions that will determine their future." Obama's call came after the army warned Islamist president Morsi it would intervene if he failed to meet the demands of the people within 48 hours. In a statement, the Egyptian presidency said the army declaration, which had not been cleared by the presidency, could cause confusion, and the presidency would continue on its own path towards national reconciliation. Meanwhile, an Egyptian court yesterday ordered the reinstatement of public prosecutor Abdel Meguid Mahmud, whose sacking in November sparked a bitter row between President Mohamed Morsi and the judiciary. The Court of Appeals "issued a final ruling ordering the return of Abdel Meguid Mahmud as public prosecutor," the official MENA news agency reported. Yesterday's ruling further isolates Morsi who is facing huge pressure to quit after millions took to the streets nationwide to demand his resignation.

Maoist rebels kill 5 cops in India

AFP, Patna

A group of more than 50 Maoist guerrillas ambushed a police patrol in eastern India yesterday, killing the district police chief and four others, officials said. The rebels opened fire on vehicles carrying police Superintendent Amarjeet Balihar in the Dumka district of Jharkhand. More than 50 Maoists were involved in the attack on the police convoy which was returning from a security meeting nearby. Last month about 100 of the leftwing guerrillas opened fire on a passenger train in the adjacent state of Bihar, killing one police officer and two passengers.

India defends US spying programmes

Turns down Snowden's asylum request
AFP, New Delhi

India's foreign minister yesterday defended the vast US surveillance programme of phone logs and Internet data as it refused an asylum request from fugitive US intelligence analyst Edward Snowden. "Some of the information they got out of their scrutiny, they were able to use it to prevent serious terrorist attacks in several countries," Salman Khurshid told reporters in Brunei in a broadcast interview. "This is not scrutiny and access to actual messages. It is only computer analysis of patterns of calls and emails that are being sent... it is not actually snooping on the content of anyone's messages or conversations," he added. The comments by Khurshid, who met US Secretary of State John Kerry in New Delhi last month, contrast with India's initial reaction when a foreign ministry spokesman warned that any privacy violation would be "unacceptable". He is attending an Asian security forum in Brunei, along with Kerry and regional foreign ministers. "Our embassy in Moscow did receive a communication dated 30 June from Mr Edward Snowden. That communication did contain a request for asylum," foreign ministry spokesman Syed Akbaruddin told AFP. "We have carefully examined the request. Following that examination we have concluded that we see no reason to accede to the request," he added. Transparency campaign group Wikileaks said Monday that Snowden had submitted asylum requests to 21 nations including India, Russia, China and Brazil as well as his preferred destinations Ecuador and Iceland. The Kremlin yesterday announced that he had abandoned his bid to stay in Russia after learning of demands from President Putin that he stop leaking intelligence reports.



Russia's President Vladimir Putin and his Venezuelan counterpart Nicolas Maduro shakes hands during a signing ceremony at the Kremlin in Moscow yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

POWER GRABBING PLOT UAE jails dozens of Islamists

AFP, Dubai

A UAE court yesterday sentenced 69 Islamists to jail for up to 15 years on charges of plotting to overthrow the government, at the conclusion of a mass trial criticised by rights groups. The Federal Supreme Court sentenced 56 of the 94 defendants to 10 years in prison each, according to the official WAM news agency. Among the 56 is Sheikh Sultan bin Kayed Al-Qassimi, a member of the ruling family of the emirate of Ras al-Khaimah, as well as prominent human rights lawyer Mohammed al-Roken, state-run Abu Dhabi television reported. Five defendants were jailed for seven years each while eight tried in absentia were sentenced to 15 years each, according to WAM. A total of 25 people were acquitted including all 13 women arrested in the crackdown and who have been on bail since the start of the trial. Prosecutors say the accused are linked to the Al-Islah group, which has ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. Political movements are banned in the UAE. Their trial was the largest in the history of the UAE, which has not seen any of the widespread pro-reform protests that have swept other Arab states, although authorities have cracked down on dissent and calls for democratic reform. The defendants, among them lawyers, university professors and students, were arrested between March and December 2012 for allegedly plotting to overthrow the government. Rights groups have alleged some of the detainees had been subjected to systematic mistreatment including torture. UAE attorney general Salem Kobaish in February said the defendants would be tried for "having created and led a movement aimed at opposing the basic foundations on which the state's political system is built and at seizing power".

WikiLeaks party registered for Australian election

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

The political arm of the global whistleblower organisation WikiLeaks has been formally registered by the Australian Electoral Commission in time for the federal election where the party plans to contest Senate seats in three Australian states.



said these would be key policy issues should there be a balance of power following the Senate elections. He added that the party was drawing closer to announcing who, along with Julian Assange, would contest seats for the party. He said there had been a "very high level" of interest from a number of people with a good record of "contribution to public life" asking to stand for the party.

The WikiLeaks party received formal registration yesterday and was registered under the name of Gail Malone, a member of the party's national council and described as a "peace activist" on their website. The registration lists an address in Fitzroy, Melbourne as the party's correspondence address. Greg Barns, the WikiLeaks party campaign manager, said news of the registration meant the party would now focus on setting out key policy positions in the coming weeks. He said the party would be focused initially on the areas of climate change, refugee policy and taxation. He

Barns said the party planned to put forward two candidates in Western Australia and two or three candidates in both Victoria and New South Wales. At present, Julian Assange is the only confirmed WikiLeaks party candidate. It is understood he will stand for election in Victoria. Assange remains at the Ecuadorian embassy in London where he is seeking refuge to avoid extradition to Sweden, where he is wanted for questioning over sexual assault allegations. Assange denies the allegations.

World bets on UK royal baby

AFP, London

Will it be a girl called Alexandra, or a boy called Wayne? No one outside Buckingham Palace knows but it has not stopped punters from around the world betting on Britain's royal baby.

punters seem convinced the royal baby will be a girl, after Kate reportedly nearly let it slip during a public appearance earlier this year. Odds are normally equal for both genders but in this case the odds are nearly twice as long on a male for most bookies.

Bookmakers say they expect that wagers on the arrival of Prince William and Catherine's first child will outstrip those for the couple's wedding in 2011, previously the biggest market for so-called novelty bets. There is a right royal choice of odds ranging from the future monarch's sex, weight and hair colour to even whether Kate will be "too posh to push" and have a caesarean. "It's a global market," Joe Crilly, a spokesman for British bookies William Hill, told AFP. "British people love the royal family and so do people around the world." The big money is on the baby's name, which Crilly said people had been betting on with "full gusto." Traditional names head the list, led by Alexandra and followed by Charlotte, Elizabeth, Diana and Victoria when it comes to girls' names, and George, James and Louis for boys. Alexandra is Queen Elizabeth II's middle name, Charlotte is the middle name of Kate's sister Pippa and the name of King George III's wife, while Victoria would honour Britain's longest-serving monarch. Girls' names dominate the odds because

The most volatile topic is the date of the birth, with several betting companies slashing the odds on the first week of July instead of the expected date of around July 13. Punters are however weighing into other apparently unpredictable matters. Overall the market is huge. Commonwealth countries and those with large numbers of British expatriates were particularly good for business, Crilly added. While the figures are smaller than for big sporting events such as the Grand National where a single bookmaker can take £50 million, the growing market reflects the fascination with the British royal family.



ODDLY enough

Talking cigarette packs!

YAHOO NEWS ONLINE

Smokers are used to written warnings about smoking on the sides of their cigarette packs. But what about a pack that talks?

A group of researchers from University of Stirling's Centre for Tobacco Control Research in Scotland are working on cigarette packs that attempt to dissuade would-be smokers from lighting up. The Scotsman reports. The group is currently testing the talking packs on young women. When the smoker opens the pack, a recorded message plays. One message states that smoking reduces fertility. Another message includes a phone number where smokers can get assistance in kicking the habit.

'World's largest building' opens in China

GNN-ONLINE

Located in Sichuan province in southwestern China, the New Century Global Center is the "largest freestanding building in the world," Chinese officials say. At 500 meters long, 400 meters wide and 100 meters high, the 1.7-million-square-meter mega-structure is capable of housing 20 Sydney Opera Houses and almost three times the size of the Pentagon in Washington, DC. The Global Center