

NEWS IN brief

Past decade hottest on record: UN

AFP, Geneva

The first decade of the 21st century was the hottest on record, marked by unprecedented climate and weather extremes that killed more than 370,000 people, the United Nations weather agency said yesterday. The period from 2001 to 2010 was the warmest decade for both hemispheres since records began in 1850, was the second-wettest since 1901 and saw the most tropical cyclones since 1855, the organization

Britain to charge migrants for healthcare

AFP, London

Britain yesterday announced plans to charge migrants hundreds of pounds a year to access its state-run National Health Service (NHS), in a bid to clamp down on so-called health tourism. However, access to accident and emergency care will not be affected by the changes and

North Korea restores hotline with South

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday restored its official hotline with South Korea and announced it would let the South's businessmen visit a shuttered joint industrial zone, Seoul officials said.

The move came hours after dozens of South Korean firms threatened to withdraw from the zone at Kaesong in the North, complaining they had fallen victim to political bickering

Indonesia quake toll hits 24

AFP, Blang Mancung

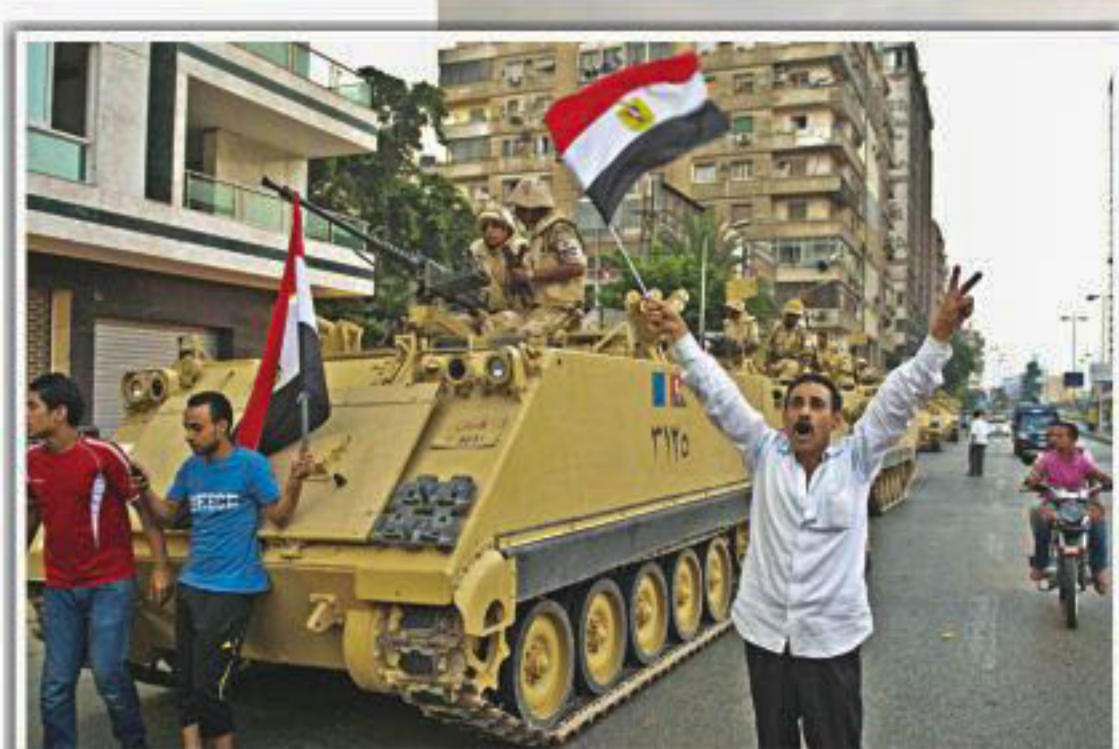
Rescuers battled through landslides and blocked roads yesterday to reach survivors from an earthquake in Indonesia's Aceh province that killed at least 24 people, including several children who died when a mosque collapsed.

Almost 250 people were also injured in Aceh's remote, mountainous interior when the strong 6.1-magnitude quake struck the north of Sumatra island on Tuesday.

US blacklists Myanmar general

AFP, Washington

The United States placed a Myanmar general on its sanctions blacklist Tuesday for arms deals with North Korea that violated the UN Security Council embargo on buying weapons from Pyongyang despite his government's support for



An Egyptian army helicopter flies over protesters calling for the ouster of President Mohamed Morsi in Cairo's landmark Tahrir Square yesterday. Inset, Egyptians salute Army tanks upon their deployment on a street leading to Cairo University.

PHOTO: AFP

Egypt shows the failure of 'political Islam': Assad

AFP, Damascus

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad yesterday said the massive protests against his Islamist Egyptian counterpart brought the fall of "political Islam," in statements posted on his official Facebook page.

The Egyptian army toppled Islamist President Mohamed Morsi yesterday after a week of bloodshed that killed nearly 50 people as millions took to the streets to demand an end to his turbulent single year of rule.

The announcement, made on state television by Morsi's own defence minister, armed forces chief General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, drew a rapturous welcome from the protesters who have camped out on the streets of Cairo for days.

Sisi also announced a freezing of the Islamist-drafted constitution and early presidential elections.

"What is happening in Egypt is the fall of what is known as political Islam," Assad said in an interview with Syrian state newspaper Ath-Thawra, excerpts of which were posted on the Internet.

"Anywhere in the world, whoever uses religion for political aims, or to benefit some and not others, will fall," Assad said.

"You can't fool all the people all the time, let alone the



General Abdel al-Sisi

Egyptian people who have a civilisation that is thousands of years old, and who espouse clear, Arab nationalist thought," he added.

"After a whole year, reality has become clear to the Egyptian people. The Muslim Brotherhood's performance has helped them see the lies the (movement) used at the start of the popular revolution in Egypt."

The full, pre-recorded interview is due to be published today, a day after massive street protests in Egypt ended with the ouster of the Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi.

There is long-standing animosity between the Damascus regime and the Muslim Brotherhood, and membership in the group has been punishable by death in Syria since the 1980s.

The Syrian branch of the Brotherhood today plays a key role in the exiled opposition National Coalition, which is recognised by more than 100 states and organisations as legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

Syria's conflict broke out after Assad's regime unleashed a brutal crackdown on a popular movement for regime change that broke out in March 2011.

Egypt coup puts US in awkward position

BBC ONLINE

What appears to be a military coup in Egypt puts the Obama administration in an awkward position.

The Egyptian army toppled Islamist President Mohamed Morsi yesterday after a week of bloodshed that killed nearly 50 people.

The state department is clear that Mohammed Morsi has not done enough to meet the concerns of his people, and that democracy is not just about being elected but about responding to their voices.

They say he did not do this in last night's speech. The state department spokesperson repeated time and again that the US was not backing one side or the other.

But they are funding one side - there are plans to give the military aid worth \$1.3bn (£852m) next year, and many senior Egyptian officers are trained in the US. Clearly there are lots of contacts, and the US has a lot of clout.

President Obama's administration never wants to be seen as hectoring or picking rulers in the Arab world. But the dilemma is an old one - a choice between a democratically elected leader who has ideas they don't like, or the military who are not elected but may be more pro-Western.

While the US claims it is not making choices, it could pull the plug on funding if it really didn't like what was happening.



Bolivian President Evo Morales talks to journalists yesterday at the airport of Schwechat, near Vienna.

PHOTO: AFP

Bolivia presidential jet searched for Snowden

LatAm fumes over Morales humiliation

AFP, La Paz

Bolivia's President Evo Morales was heading home yesterday after his plane was searched in Vienna on suspicion of harboring fugitive US intelligence leaker Edward Snowden, prompting outrage from his government and other Latin American leaders.

As he prepared to depart Vienna, Morales lashed out at European countries for denying his jet entry into their airspace overnight, dragging his country into the escalating US spying scandal.

The ordeal "was like a near 13-hour kidnapping," he said, adding "I am not a delinquent."

La Paz meanwhile announced it had lodged a complaint with the United Nations and planned another to the UN Human Rights Commission against the countries that closed their airspace to Morales's plane.

Bolivian officials accused France, Portugal, Italy and Spain of denying entry to the jet late Tuesday over "unfounded rumors" Snowden was traveling on board.

The resulting forced landing in Vienna came just hours after Morales said his country would consider giving political asylum to Snowden if he submitted a request.

Morales's plane eventually left Vienna Wednesday around 0945 GMT after Spain opened its airspace.

Not only Bolivia but its regional allies Venezuela, Ecuador, Uruguay, Cuba and Nicaragua reacted angrily to the jet incident.

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Elias Jaua said, "this is an attack against President Morales's life." Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa added on Twitter: "We express our solidarity with Evo and the brave Bolivian people. Our America cannot tolerate so much abuse."

India vows to free CBI from political meddling

IANS, New Delhi

The appointment of the CBI director by a collegium that includes the Prime Minister is among the steps the government intends to take to insulate the agency from political interference, the Supreme Court was informed on Wednesday.

The collegium would include the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India or a judge to be nominated by him, the government said in a 41-page affidavit.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) director would have a term of not less than two years.

The affidavit came in response to the apex court asking what steps the government intended to take to uphold the CBI's autonomy and to insulate it from political interference.

Everybody spies on everybody

Ex-intel officers bare it all

AFP, Washington

Europeans may express outrage over revelations of US spying but they know perfectly well how the espionage "game" is played -- everybody spies on everybody, former intelligence officials say.

President Barack Obama seemed to suggest as much even as he tried to defuse the uproar over the National Security Agency's alleged eavesdropping on the European Union mission in Washington as well as embassies of other allies.

"I guarantee you that in European capitals, there are people who are interested in, if not what I had for breakfast, at least what my talking points might be should I end up meeting with their leaders," Obama said during a visit to Tanzania Monday.

"That's how intelligence services operate." The former head of the NSA, Michael Hayden, dismissed the outcry across the Atlantic, suggesting America was not alone in snooping on its friends.

"Any European who wants to go out and rend their garments with regard to international espionage should look first and find out what their own governments are doing," Hayden told CBS television on Sunday.

"The French spy on us, the French spy on England. The Israelis, the Russians, the UK, the US, the Chinese, all large countries with

serious intelligence services are always spying on the governments of other countries," the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told AFP.

But one European source, who asked not to be named, said anger among Western allies was understandable given the "mass" scale of the US electronic surveillance, revealed in recent weeks by intelligence leaker Edward Snowden, a former NSA contractor.

For James Lewis, a former senior US official and an expert on cyber security, some of the criticisms "ring a little hollow" because "the big European countries do things that are very similar to this."

Saying one thing publicly about spying and approving something else in secret is a longstanding tradition, as "hypocrisy is part of the game," said John Scheuer, a former CIA officer now at Georgetown University.

Scheuer was involved in a program running secret prisons for terror suspects after the September 11 attacks, and he said the CIA regularly shared information with "European partners" that was gathered from harsh interrogations of detainees.

"But whenever it became public, they were shocked and appalled and they condemned us for doing it," Scheuer told AFP. "And that's the way the game works."

Iraq attacks on Shias kill 119 in 3 days

AFP, Baghdad

Attacks in Iraq killed 10 people yesterday, the latest in a wave of bloodshed mostly targeting Shia Muslims that has left 119 dead in the past three days amid fears the country is slipping back into all-out war.

The surge in violence has also wounded more than 300 others, and comes as the country grapples with a protracted political stand-off and months of anti-government protests, with analysts warning the deadlock is unlikely to be resolved at least until general elections due next year.

In the latest attack, a bomb went off in southeast Baghdad yesterday morning, killing seven people and wounding at least 14 others. The violence came after a wave of bombings and shootings across Iraq a day earlier killed 57, with 49 others having died in unrest on Monday.

MANDELA FAMILY FEUD

Burial place row laid bare in court

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

The bitter feud in Nelson Mandela's family over the unauthorised removal of the remains of three of his children from the family graveyard was laid bare in open court on Tuesday while the anti-apartheid hero lay critically ill in hospital.

A judge yesterday ordered Mandela's grandson to exhume the bodies and return them to their original graves.

Judge Lusindiso Pakade, sitting in the regional court in Mthatha, 700 km (450 miles) south of Johannesburg, told 39-year-old Mandla Mandela, the chief of the clan and Mandela's official heir, to comply with the order by 3:00pm.

With 94-year-old Mandela critically ill in a Pretoria hospital, 16 of his family members applied last week for a court order to force Mandla to return the bodies, which were moved two years ago from the village of Qunu, where Mandela grew up.

The remains were secretly exhumed in 2011 by his grandson Mandla Mandela and moved to the nearby village of Mvezo, where Mandela was born.

The case has gripped South Africa in the midst of its grief over Mandela's failing health. The family has traded recriminations with Mandla, an ANC MP, amid calls for him to be stripped of his status as a local tribal chief. A lawyer for Mandla told reporters he would contest the ruling.



'Pakistan can end Afghan war in weeks'

Says Afghan army chief; drone kills 17 in Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

Kabul and Islamabad yesterday traded insults over the war with the Taliban, plunging their frosty relations to a new low at a key juncture in efforts to search for peace before Nato withdraws.

It was the most explosive in a series of rows that have marred Western efforts to build trust between the two governments, considered integral to forging any lasting peace with the Taliban who have been fighting in Afghanistan for nearly 12 years.

It came as a US drone strike targeting the al-Qaeda-linked Haqqani network killed 17 militants in Pakistan, officials said.

Afghan army chief of staff General Sher Mohammad told the BBC in an interview that Pakistan could end the Afghan war "in weeks" if it were serious about peace.

"Madrasas have been closed and all the Taliban have been unleashed to Afghanistan," he said. He also said "the Taliban are under their control" and Pakistan could do far more to promote a nascent peace process.

The West believes Pakistani support is vital to securing any workable peace deal in Afghanistan and officials have recently praised Islamabad for helping to support peace efforts.

Islamabad yesterday "categorically rejected" Karimi's remarks, which laid bare the mistrust between Kabul and Islamabad despite a February summit hosted by Britain in an effort to ignite peace efforts.

It called on Afghan officials to "refrain from levelling baseless allegations and work towards creating a conducive environment that helps advance the shared objectives of peace, stability and prosperity".

ODDLY enough

CONTAMINATION FEARS

Teacher puts tape on girl's, 7, mouth

AFP, Tokyo

A Japanese school-teacher put duct tape over the mouth of a seven-year-old girl to stop her spreading germs to other pupils, a report said yesterday.

The male teacher taped up the girl's mouth as she readied to serve lunch to others in her class in Tochigi, north of Tokyo, because she had forgotten to bring her own face mask, the Sankei Shimbun reported.

Japanese schoolchildren serve and eat their school lunches in their own classrooms. Most schools require them to cover their mouth and

Unusual gifts for UK royal baby

AFP, London

Finland has given a special baby box to Prince William and his wife Catherine ahead of the birth of their first child, with the contents ranging from infant clothing to bra pads and even condoms, officials said yesterday.

It also contains bedding and childcare products, while the colourful box doubles up as a cot.

The Finnish embassy in London confirmed that the box contained condoms.

Finland has been giving out the baby boxes to its citizens for 75 years. Two-thirds of all new mothers take it instead of a 140-euro