

NEWS IN brief

China, Russia in largest-ever naval drills

AP, Beijing

China will join Russia later this week for its largest-ever naval drills with a foreign partner, underscoring deepening ties between the former Cold War rivals along with Beijing's desire for closer links with regional militaries.

China's Defense Ministry said Tuesday that its navy will send four destroyers, two guided missile frigates, and a support ship for the "Joint Sea-2013" exercises, which start Friday in the Sea of Japan.

Sri Lanka to hold polls in ex-war zone

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka will hold provincial elections in the former northern war zone in September for the first time in 25 years, officials said on Friday, a move long demanded by the United Nations since the end of three decades of conflict in 2009.

The Northern Province, which includes the Jaffna peninsula, has been under military control since the

Xinjiang calm on riot anniversary

AFP, Beijing

Chinese authorities imposed tight control in the capital of Xinjiang yesterday, the fourth anniversary of ethnic rioting which killed around 200 people, said state media and exile groups.

Internet users posted pictures of baton-wielding security personnel in Urumqi, the scene of clashes in 2009 between mostly Muslim Uighurs and mem-

US adds 195,000 jobs in June

AFP, Washington

The United States added a robust 195,000 jobs in June, and job growth in prior months was revised higher, the Labor Department reported yesterday.

The June employment gain was well above the analyst consensus estimate of 166,000 jobs, and marked a steady pickup in job creation in the economy.

Delhi gang-rape verdict due next week

AFP, New Delhi

A juveniles' court in New Delhi is set to hand down the first verdict next week on July 11 over the gang-rape of a student in the capital which sparked mass protests, a lawyer said yesterday.

The court has been hearing the case of a teenager, aged 17 at the time of the crime, who was one of six suspects arrested after the brutal assault of the

Food security ordinance signed in India

ANI, New Delhi

India's President Pranab Mukherjee has signed the ordinance on food security, which seeks to give legal rights to 67 per cent of the population over subsidised grains every month.

According to TV reports, Mukherjee signed the ordinance and it will now be tabled before Parliament for approval.

The food security programme when implemented will be the biggest in the world with the government spending estimated at one lakh 25 thousand crore rupees annually.

Terming the ordinance as historic, Congress spokesman Ajay Maken had earlier said the government resorted to promulgation of ordinance, as there was no unanimity during the discussions with the opposition parties.



DIVIDED EGYPT

A secular Egyptian joins the celebrating crowds in Cairo's landmark Tahrir square on Thursday following the toppling of Mohamed Morsi, left, and an Egyptian supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood shouts religious and political slogans during a protest near Cairo University yesterday. Egypt remains divided like the pictures after the military ousted Morsi.

PHOTO: AFP



Ex-Russian spy offers marriage to Snowden

AFP, Moscow

Russian ex-spy Anna Chapman has proposed marriage to US intelligence leaker Edward Snowden, who is stuck without documents in a Moscow airport, in an increasingly bizarre turn of events that unleashed excitement in Russia.

"Snowden, will you marry me?" the undercover spy turned media celebrity asked the world's most famous



refugee on Twitter late Wednesday.

In a separate tongue-in-cheek tweet, she asked Snowden's former employer, the National Security Agency: "@nsa will you look after our children?"

Snowden arrived in Moscow from Hong Kong on June 23 and has spent nearly two weeks in legal limbo in an airport transit zone. Chapman was deported from the United States in 2010 along with nine other Russian spies in a major swap with Washington.

Her tweet unleashed a deluge of witty online remarks, with one commentator quipping that the prospective couple's children would all be "James Bonds and Mata Haris."

On a more serious note, the Interfax news agency, citing a source familiar with the situation, said Snowden's legal status would change if he tied the knot with the Russian.

But the consular service at Sheremetyevo Airport where Snowden has been marooned said it did not legalise marriages.

Ominous signs for Egypt, ME

STAR DESK

The ousting of Egypt's president Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood after just one year in power may have been greeted with euphoria by their opponents, but the celebrations are likely to be short-lived. This is a dangerous moment, not just for Egypt but for the wider Middle East.

Deposing a democratically elected Islamist leader and suspending the constitution will be interpreted by many political Islamists as sending a blunt message: It doesn't necessarily pay to choose the ballot over the bullet.

Morsi's overthrow will seriously erode the credibility of the moderate Islamists.

The moderates had been winning the intra-Islamist battle on the issue of whether Islam and democracy are compatible and, more importantly, whether Islamist parties that come to power will be allowed to govern without hindrance by domestic and external forces opposed to them.

The major lesson that Islamists in the Middle East are likely to learn from this episode is that they will not be allowed to exercise power no matter how many compromises they make in both the domestic and foreign policy arenas. This is likely to push a substantial portion of mainstream Islamists into the arms of the extremists who

reject democracy and ideological compromise.

There is a terrifying precedent here, in Algeria. In 1991 the Islamist party FIS won the first round of elections. Days later the president, under pressure from the secular military, dissolved parliament and annulled the elections.

Algeria's Islamist movement went underground and there followed a decade of insurgency in which more than 150,000 people lost their lives.

Remnants of that insurgency live on

The event erodes the credibility of the moderate Islamists and questions the compatibility of democracy and Islam.

in the Sahara today, smuggling, extorting ransoms, and kidnapping and killing hostages.

Egypt is the birthplace of political Islam, a movement which had its roots in anti-colonial nationalism in the early 20th century and which saw the intellectual godfather of the movement, Sayyid Qutb, tortured in prison by the military government of Colonel Nasser and eventually killed in 1966.

Ever since, there has been an ongoing debate in certain circles of political Islam over whether it is worth bothering

to bid for power legitimately through the ballot box, or whether opposing secular rulers through violence and seizing power - as advocated by jihadist groups - is the only practical option.

When the Arab Spring protest movement overthrew the corrupt and discredited government of Egypt's President Mubarak in 2011, and elections replaced it with the Muslim Brotherhood, this was a serious blow to al-Qaeda and the jihadists. It showed the world there was a future for political Islam through peaceful, democratic means.

Events in Cairo this week now risk undermining that logic, says Brotherhood sources.

Analysts at the US-based Stratfor Global Intelligence group agree.

While they doubt that Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood itself will abandon the path of democratic politics, they predict: "Morsi's ouster will lead elements from more ultraconservative Salafist groups to abandon mainstream politics in favour of armed conflict."

The current leader of al-Qaeda, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, is Egyptian, and it was he who "radicalised" Osama Bin Laden in the 1990s.

So if Egypt's more extreme proponents of an Islamic government do decide that violence is now their only option, then the events of this week could later come to be viewed as something of a trigger.



Bolivia's President Evo Morales, left, and his Venezuelan counterpart Nicolas Maduro in Bolivia on Thursday. Morales yesterday threatened to close the US embassy as leftist Latin American leaders joined him in blasting Europe and the United States after his plane was rerouted over suspicions US fugitive Edward Snowden was aboard.

Cino-Pak ties 'sweeter than honey': Sharif

AFP, Beijing

Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif yesterday told his Chinese counterpart Li Keqiang their countries' relationship was "sweeter than honey", during a visit to Beijing with economic ties at the top of the agenda.

Pakistan and China are close diplomatic and military allies and Sharif, who is on his first foreign trip since his May election, is looking to secure infrastructure projects to tackle a chronic energy crisis and economic malaise in his country.

At the Great Hall of the People in the Chinese capital, Sharif said his welcome "reminds me of the saying, our friendship is higher than the Himalayas and deeper than the deepest sea in the world, and sweeter than honey."

Li told him: "I greatly appreciate your great warmth and deep affection for the people of China."

The Chinese premier was the first foreign leader to visit Pakistan after Sharif's victory at the polls.

A series of agreements were signed by ministers of the two countries as Li and Sharif held talks. Among these was a "long term plan" over the economic corridor, and agreements on technology, polio prevention and solar housing.

The two countries also agreed a \$44 million project to erect a fibre optic cable from the China-Pakistan border to Rawalpindi, which aims to give Pakistan more connectivity to international networks.



ODDLY enough

69 hot dogs in 10 mins for a record!

AFP, New York

Joey "Jaws" Chestnut devoured 69 hot dogs, breaking his own record to win the traditional Fourth of July Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Contest at Coney Island for the seventh straight year.

With thousands of spectators cheering him on, Chestnut downed the 69 dogs - and their buns -- in 10 minutes, improving on his previous personal best of 68.

Nathan's Famous Hot Dogs says the Independence Day contest has been running since 1916 -- when the winner consumed 13 hot

John Paul II to be made saint

AFP, Vatican City

Pope Francis gave the go-ahead on Friday for John Paul II to be made saint and granted a rare exception for canonisation at the same time for John XXIII, who shares the current pontiff's reformist views and personal touch.

The announcement marked a historic day at the Vatican, which also issued an unprecedented text co-written by Francis and his living predecessor Benedict XVI in which the two popes said faith was a "common good" and called for dialogue with non-believers.

The Vatican said Francis gave his widely expected formal approval to a second miracle attributed to John Paul II (1978-2005) at a meeting with Cardinal Angelo Amato, head of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

The supposed miracle occurred to a woman in Costa Rica, the Vatican said, following media reports that she had been cured of a serious brain condition by praying for the late pope's intercession on the same day that he was beatified in 2011.

John Paul II was hugely popular through his 27-year papacy, and helped topple Communism although he alienated many Catholics with his conservative views and was blamed for hushing up multiple scandals over paedophile priests.

In the case of John XXIII (1958-1963), Francis "approved the favourable votes" from the Congregation for the canonisation even though no second miracle has been found, in a break with the usual procedure.



John Paul II

John XXIII

WHO convenes emergency talks on MERS virus

AFP, Geneva

The World Health Organization yesterday announced it had convened emergency talks on the deadly MERS virus, but said the move did not mean it was hiking its global alert level ahead of Muslim's Hajj pilgrimage.

WHO health security chief Keiji Fukuda said the meeting on the virus, which is striking hardest in Saudi Arabia, would take place Tuesday in the form of a telephone conference of officials from affected countries and experts around the world.

Since Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) first came to light in 2012, there have been 43 recorded deaths, 36 of them in Saudi Arabia.

Meanwhile, French scientists yesterday said the new virus does not yet have the ability to trigger a pandemic, but vigilance is needed in case it mutates.

'I have lived my life'

Mandela mulled death 15 years ago; govt denies he is in 'vegetative state'

AFP, Johannesburg

Nearly 15 years ago Nelson Mandela was unperurbed by his own death, telling a dying teenager that he had lived his life to the full.

The video dating from 1998, broadcast by American news channel CBS on Thursday as Mandela remained in critically ill in hospital, showed the towering South African statesman visiting a 15-year-old, also named Nelson.

"Understanding the fact that I'm near the end, I remain optimistic with my morale very high, because I'm saying I have lived my life," the statesman, then 80, told the teen, who was dying of brain cancer.

In the amateur video the boy, his head shaved, smiled shyly from his bed at the peace icon, who wore one of his colourful trademark shirts.

"If your spirit is not optimistic, your morale is not high, medicine is not very effective," the then president said.

The boy died under three months after



the visit. Broadcast as the 94-year-old nears one month in hospital, the words carry added poignancy.

According to court documents from Mandela family lawyers, filed nine days ago, doctors believed Mandela was in a "permanent vegetative state" and they advised his family to turn off his life support machine.

South Africa's presidency has since said his condition has improved and on Thursday denied he is in a vegetative state.

The June 26 court filing showed for the first time just how close the still critically ill 94-year-old came to death.

According to family lawyer Wesley Hayes, the document was part of an effort to have a court urgently hear a dispute over the final resting place of three of Mandela's children, who were reburied amid a fierce family dispute Thursday.

Meanwhile, South Africa's Nobel peace laureate Desmond Tutu pleaded with Nelson Mandela's family not to "besmirch" the former president's name.

OUSTER OF MORSI African Union suspends Egypt

AFP, Addis Ababa

The African Union yesterday suspended Egypt from the continental body after the ouster of president Mohamed Morsi, in line with its strict rules against unconstitutional changes of government.

The AU's Peace and Security Council decided to suspend the participation of Egypt in AU activities until the restitution of constitutional order," said an official statement.

The pan-African bloc met yesterday at AU headquarters in the Ethiopian capital to discuss the political crisis in Egypt, following Morsi's removal by the army on Wednesday.

"The council reiterates the AU's condemnation and rejection of any illegal seizure of power," the statement added.

Ahead of the meeting, AU Commission chief Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma stressed its "principled position" on such changes of government.

However, Mohamed Edrees, Egyptian ambassador to the AU, said ahead of the decision that "the voice and the call of tens of millions of Egyptians must be heard, understood and respected".

The bloc has previously suspended members which broke its rule of constitutional changes of government, most recently in March when it suspended the Central African Republic after rebels seized power.

Madagascar and Guinea-Bissau are also suspended.

Meanwhile, UN human rights chief Navii Pillay yesterday expressed alarm about reported mass arrests of key members of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood after the military ousted president Mohamed Morsi, and urged all sides to respect fundamental freedoms.

Fraud genius of China

AFP, Beijing

A man who crashed a car on average every three days for almost three years in a Chinese insurance scam has been arrested, media reported yesterday.

The 42-year-old made 334 insurance claims in the southern city of Shenzhen between 2010 and May this year, local television said.

He drove up behind other cars during rush hour, bumping into them slowly to avoid being injured, police told Shenzhen TV. He then bribed mechanics to overestimate the damage and claimed for the inflated invoices, which totalled \$58,000, the report said.