

NEWS IN brief

Mandela 'still critical' but stable

BBC ONLINE

Nelson Mandela remains critical but stable in a South African hospital, the presidency has said in its latest health update. The country's first black president, 94, was admitted to hospital with a recurring lung infection on 8 June. People who have seen him

5,500 may have died in India floods

AFP, Dehradun

Authorities have raised to 5,500 the estimated number of people who perished in devastating floods that swept the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand last month.

At least 1,000 residents, Hindu pilgrims and tourists have been confirmed killed by the surging waters caused by heavier than normal monsoon rains that washed away homes,

UK bans Nigeria's Boko Haram

AFP, London

The Nigerian-based Islamist extremist group Boko Haram is to be banned in Britain under anti-terror laws, the British interior ministry announced on Monday.

Some 3,600 people have been killed during Boko Haram's four-year insurgency in north and central Nigeria, according to

Obama urged to review Gitmo policy

AFP, Washington

A US judge Monday rejected a legal bid by a Guantanamo detainee to have his force-feeding blocked, but urged President Barack Obama to review the issue to see if the controversial practice should end.

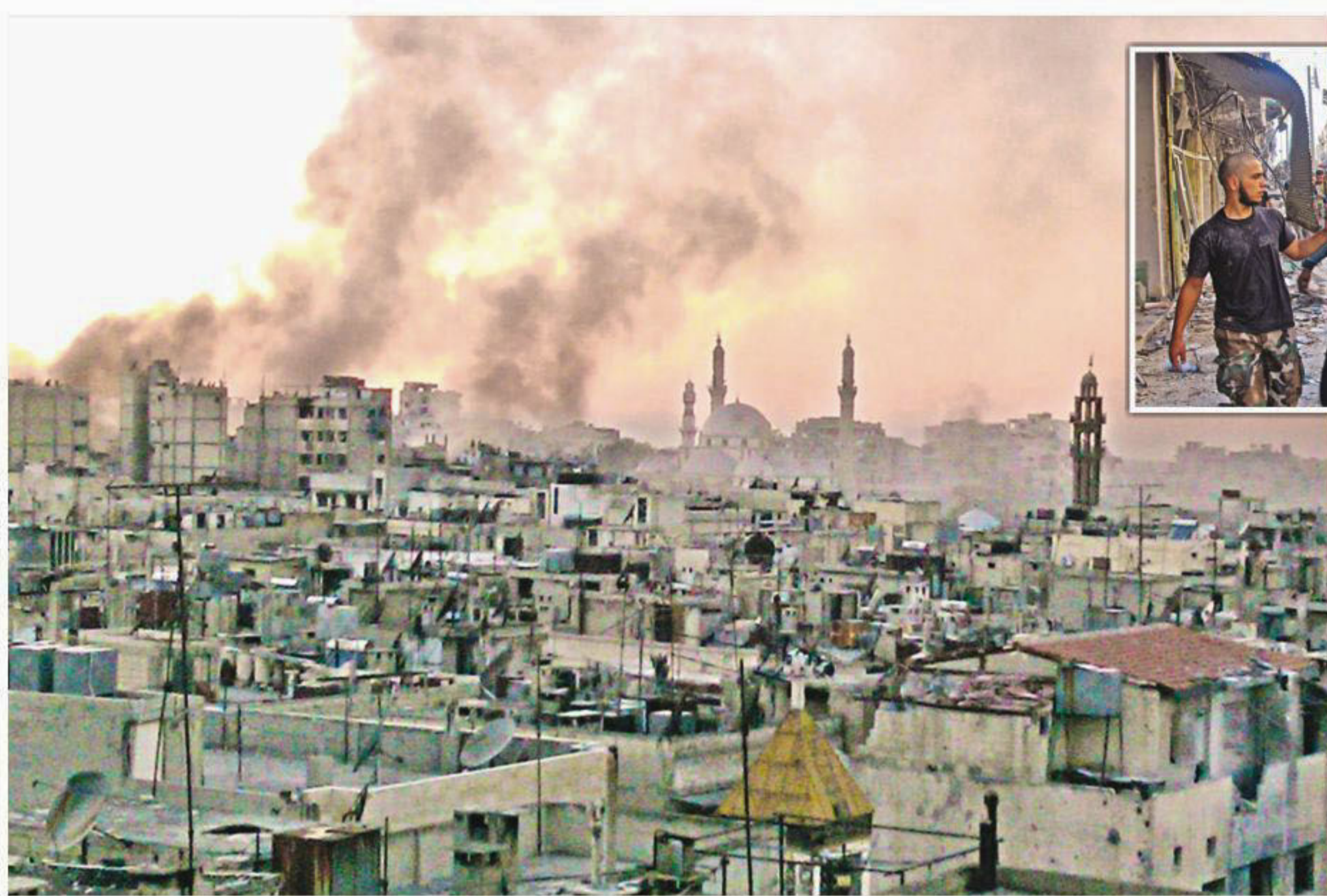
Authorities at the military prison at the US naval base in southeastern Cuba say they are force-feeding 44 inmates out of an estimated 120 prisoners who are on hunger strike.

China police fire on Tibetans

AFP, Beijing

Chinese police opened fire on Tibetans marking the Dalai Lama's 78th birthday, shooting at least one monk in the head and seriously wounding several other people, two overseas groups said yesterday.

Regional authorities



A handout image released by the Syrian opposition's Shaam News Network yesterday, allegedly shows smoke rising from buildings in Syria's central city of Homs following airstrikes by government forces. Inset, rebel fighters carry an injured fellow fighter in the besieged city.

PHOTO: AFP

Brazil to probe reports of US surveillance

AFP, Brasilia

Brazil is to investigate reports of US electronic spying on its citizens, with President Dilma Rousseff saying Monday that, if proven, such action would constitute a violation of sovereignty.

Her comments came after the daily O Globo reported Sunday that the US National Security Agency spied on Brazilian residents and companies as well as people traveling in the country. The newspaper cited documents leaked by the fugitive former NSA contractor Edward Snowden.

Rousseff confirmed that the National Telecommunications Agency and federal police have been ordered to probe the reports.

"This would be a violation of sovereignty and human rights," she told reporters. "But we have to see without haste... The position of Brazil on this matter is very clear and firm. We do not agree, under any circumstances, with such meddling, not just in Brazil but in any other country."

Earlier documents leaked by Snowden had alleged that the United States maintained a vast surveillance system across its borders, as well as EU offices in Washington and New York and some European nations, such as Germany.

Foreign Minister Antonio Patriota welcomed Washington's readiness to discuss the issue describing the spying allegations as "extremely serious."

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki confirmed the US had "spoken with Brazilian officials regarding these allegations."

But she refused to deny or confirm any details, saying simply "we plan to continue our dialogue with the Brazilians through normal diplomatic channels, but those are conversations that of course we would keep private."

Syria ruling party replaces leadership; rebel PM quits

UN calls for Ramadan truce as violence rages

AFP, Damascus

Syria's ruling Baath party has replaced its top leadership in a surprise move, while UN head Ban Ki-Moon called on all parties in the war to observe a truce during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Meanwhile in Turkey, interim Syrian rebel prime minister Ghassan Hitto announced his resignation Monday on a day of political manoeuvring.

The developments came as troops loyal to President Bashar al-Assad advanced into the rebel-held Khaldiyeh district of Homs on the 10th day of an assault there.

The Baath party's central committee published the names of 16 members of the new leadership, which included none of the party's old chiefs with the exception of Assad, who will remain secretary general.

The ruling party reshuffle was its first since 2005 and Assad urged the party to "develop" and work more closely with the people to help end the country's 27-month war, state media said.

Among the incoming party leaders are parliament chief Jihad al-Laham and Prime Minister Wael al-Halqi.

"The party must develop in step with

reality on the ground, and promote a culture of dialogue and voluntary action by the people," Assad said, cited by state news agency SANA.

He added that the party needed "to put in place new... criteria for the selection of party representatives, in order for them to be able to achieve (society's) objectives".

In New York UN chief Ban was more concerned with the continued bloodshed, calling on all Syrian parties to observe a truce during Ramadan.

"I am calling for every military unit of the regular army and the Free Syrian Army, for every person holding a gun, to stop fighting and offer this month of peace as a collective present to their people," he said in a statement.

He added in his "Ramadan appeal" a call for the release of detainees.

Bassam Abu Abdullah, director of the Damascus Centre for Strategic Studies, said the Baath party overhaul was the result of deep-seated party discontent.

A second analyst noted the changes presaged a younger leadership that would be "more open to the international community".

The Baath party has been in power since March 8, 1963.



Egyptian supporters of deposed president Mohamed Morsi hold a copy of the Quran, Islam's holy book, and wave their national flag as they shout slogans during a rally in support of the former Islamist leader outside Cairo's Rabaa al-Adawiya mosque yesterday. (Story on page 20)

PHOTO: AFP

India SC slams govt on acid attacks

AFP, New Delhi

India's top court yesterday criticised the government for failing to formulate a policy to reduce the number of acid attacks on women, which are often carried out by jilted boy-friends or their relatives.

The Supreme Court rebuked the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for failing to consider regulating the sale of acid used in the assaults, which leave the victims permanently disfigured.

"Girls are dying every day and the central government and state governments are not serious," a two-judge bench comprising justices RM Lodha and SJ Mukhopadhaya said in a statement.

One in four people paid bribe last year

TI study warns of rising corruption

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

One in four people paid a bribe in dealing with public services and institutions in the past 12 months, according to a global corruption survey.

In the world's largest assessment of public opinion on the subject, Transparency International found that political parties are considered the most corrupt institutions, followed by the police, the judiciary, parliament and public officials. Religious institutions are seen as the least corrupt.

Transparency International says its annual survey shows a crisis of trust in politics and real concern about the capacity of institutions responsible for bringing criminals to justice.

"It is the actors that are supposed to be running countries and upholding the rule of law that are seen as the most corrupt, judged to be abusing their positions of power and acting in their own interests rather than for citizens they are there to represent and serve," said the global corruption barometer, a survey of 114,000 people in 107 countries.

Politicians could lead by example by publishing asset declarations for themselves and their immediate family, suggested Transparency International. Political parties and individual candidates should disclose where they get their money from to make clear who funds them and reveal potential conflicts of interest.

According to the survey, many people regard corruption as a very serious problem for their societies. On a scale of one to five, where one means "corruption is not a problem at all" and five means "corruption is a very serious problem", the average score across the countries surveyed was 4.1. Concern was highest in Liberia and Mongolia, which both scored 4.8. More optimistic were people in Denmark, Finland, Rwanda, Sudan and Switzerland, all of which recorded scores below three.

Of the 107 countries surveyed, only 11, including Azerbaijan, Rwanda and South Sudan, thought corruption had decreased.

The survey reported that 27% of respondents had paid a bribe - the most direct experience of corruption for a person - with police the most often bribed institution. Police bribery rates were highest in the Democratic of the Republic of the Congo (75%), Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Corruption in the land sector can be particularly critical. One in five people report having paid a bribe for services such as registration or land transfer. Those who cannot make illegal payments are left with little or no protection under law, making them vulnerable to eviction and abuse.



Visit the pope, pray & say sins goodbye

AFP, Vatican City

Pilgrims who flock to see Pope Francis in Rio de Janeiro will be forgiven from penance for their sins -- if they spend their time praying in the party-loving city, the Vatican has said.

Rome issued the "plenary indulgence", an archaic tradition dating back to the Middle Ages, ahead of the Pontiff's trip to South America later this month.

The decree does not mean sins will be automatically forgiven but any punishment is lifted from believers who follow the rules.

The Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary, a Vatican court for the forgiveness of sins, said in a statement yesterday that believers attending would first have to confess, go to mass and be "truly penitent and contrite".

The indulgence would also apply to anyone who follows the "rites and pious exercises" on television, radio and even through social media as long as Internet prayer is done with "requisite devotion".

Pope Francis is flying to Brazil to attend Catholic World Youth Day, where millions are expected.



Late nights drain kid's brain power

BBC ONLINE

Late nights and lax bedtime routines can blunt young children's minds, research suggests.

The findings on sleep patterns and brain power come from a UK study of more than 11,000 seven-year-olds. Youngsters who had no regular bedtime or who went to bed later than 21:00 had lower scores for reading and maths.

Lack of sleep may disrupt natural body rhythms and impair how well the brain learns new information say the study authors.

They gathered data on the children at the ages of three, five and then seven to find out how well they were doing with their learning and whether this might be related to their sleeping habits.

Overall, children who had never had regular bedtimes tended to fare worse than their peers in terms of test scores for reading, maths and spatial awareness.

The impact was more obvious throughout early childhood in girls than in boys and appeared to be cumulative.

The researchers, led by Prof Amanda Sacker from University College London, said it was possible that inconsistent bedtimes were a reflection of chaotic family settings and it was this, rather than disrupted sleep, that had an impact on cognitive performance in children.

The children with late and erratic bedtimes came from more socially disadvantaged backgrounds and were less likely to be read to each night and, generally, watched more TV - often on a set in their own bedroom.

After controlling for such factors, the link between poorer mental performance and lax bedtimes remained.

The findings are published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health.

Bin Laden wore cowboy hat 'to avoid detection'

New report lambasts Pakistan for failures to catch him

AFP, Islamabad

Osama bin Laden lived undetected in Pakistan for nearly a decade due to failures and gross negligence by the authorities, according to a new report detailing how he was once stopped for speeding and wore a cowboy hat.

The leaked report from a Pakistani government-appointed commission reveals fascinating details about his life on the run and the US Navy SEALs raid that killed him on May 2, 2011.

The raid near a military academy in the town of Abbottabad was one of the most humiliating episodes in Pakistan's history, exposing the country to allegations of collusion with al-Qaeda.

The government appointed a judicial commission to investigate how bin Laden hid for so long and how the US raid unfolded to fend off fears that a military investigation would not be independent.

The panel interviewed more than 200 people, including government ministers, intelligence chiefs and members of bin Laden's family before they were deported to Saudi Arabia.

But its findings were kept secret until the Al-Jazeera news network published a leaked copy of the report on Monday.

"Culpable negligence and incompetence at almost all levels of government can more or less be



conclusively established by the testimonies of witnesses," the report said.

The commission said it had found nothing to support allegations of complicity but neither could it rule out the possibility of "plausibly deniable" support from current or former officials.

It said bin Laden arrived in Pakistan in the spring or summer of 2002 after the 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan. He stayed in Afghan border areas, spent six to eight months in the northwestern district of Swat, lived in a spacious home in Haripur and then settled in Abbottabad in August 2005.

Maryam, the widow of one of two Pakistani couriers who provided his core support network said they -- including bin Laden -- were once all stopped for speeding on a visit to a market in Swat.

Her husband "very quickly settled the matter with the policeman and they drove on", the report said. In Abbottabad, he was nicknamed Miskeen Kaka, or "poor uncle" by other children in the house after they were told the reason he never went to the market was because he was too poor to buy anything.

The report also blasted the intelligence society as for nearly six years, abnormalities at his villa, such as no television or telephone lines, no rubbish collection and 18-foot (5.5 metre) walls, failed to attract attention from Pakistani officials.

US-Pakistan signed secret deal on drones

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan reached an understanding with the US on drone strikes targeting Islamist militants and the attacks can be useful, according to leaked remarks from a former intelligence chief.

Pakistan publicly condemns US missile attacks on Taliban and al-Qaeda operatives as a violation of its sovereignty, but the new revelations are the latest sign of double-dealing in private.

Ahmed Shuja Pasha, who headed Pakistan's premier Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency at the time of bin Laden's killing in 2011, told investigators that drone strikes had their uses.

"The DG (director general) said there were no written agreements. There was a political understanding," the report said.

ODDLY enough

Europe's new craze bubble football



STAR DESK

Bubble football, a new almost-sport that combines the popular game of football/soccer with zorbing.

Bubble football is the brainchild of Henrik Elvestad and Johan Golden, two wacky Norwegians who thought football would be even more entertaining if players were encased in clear plastic zorbing balls.

The first ever match was broadcast on Norwegian TV show "Golden Goal" at the end of 2011 as a gag, but after being posted on YouTube, the craze spread throughout Europe like wildfire.

In the last few years, bubble football matches have been held everywhere from Italy to Latvia, and there are now even online store selling and renting equipment to anyone willing to try it.