

# NEWSIN brief

## China floods: 200 dead or missing

AFP, Beijing  
Torrential rain and landslides in China have left more than 200 people dead or missing in recent days, state media and the government said as the country braced for an approaching typhoon yesterday.

## Typhoon Soulik nears Taiwan

AFP, Taipei  
Hundreds of villagers were evacuated and schools and businesses shut down in Taiwan yesterday as it prepared for the arrival of Typhoon Soulik, expected to pound the island with powerful winds and heavy rain over the weekend.

Packing winds of up to 209 kilometres an hour (130 miles), Soulik is expected to make landfall on the north-east coast around 3:00am Saturday, the Central Weather Bureau said.

## Nepal flood death toll hits 60

AFP, Kathmandu  
The death toll from recent floods triggered by heavy monsoon downpours in Nepal has climbed to at least 60, police told AFP yesterday. Some 6,000 homes were damaged by the floods, which mainly hit southeastern Nepal over the past four days, Khatiwada said.

## Cambodian pardons opposition leader

AFP, Phnom Penh  
Cambodia's opposition leader in exile won a royal pardon yesterday, vowing to return to help his party fight strongman premier Hun Sen who is seeking to extend his nearly three decade grip on power. Sam Rainsy, who lives in France, had faced 11 years in jail after he was convicted in absentia for charges including publishing a false map of the border with Vietnam.

## Japan heatwave kills 12

AFP, Tokyo  
A severe heatwave that hit Japan a week ago has claimed at least a dozen lives, reports said yesterday. The mercury has topped 35 degrees celsius in areas right across the country for several days, with no immediate end to the misery in sight. Thousands of people have been taken to hospital suffering from heatstroke.



Egyptian supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood and deposed president Mohamed Morsi flash the sign of victory during a rally outside Cairo's Rabaa al-Adawiya mosque yesterday. Tens of thousands of supporters of ousted president Mohamed Morsi gathered yesterday vowing to keep fighting for his reinstatement, as rival rallies defending his overthrow underlined Egypt's bitter divisions.

PHOTO: AFP

# US warns China over sea disputes

AFP, Washington  
US President Barack Obama warned China on Thursday against using force or intimidation in its tense maritime disputes with its neighbors and urged a peaceful resolution. Obama, meeting Chinese officials who were in Washington for wide-ranging talks, "urged China to manage its maritime disputes with its neighbors peacefully, without the use of intimidation or coercion," a White House statement said.  
Tensions have steadily risen between China and Japan, which accuses its growing neighbor of sending an increasing number of ships to exert its claim over unpopulated islands managed by Tokyo in the East China Sea.  
The Philippines and Vietnam have also charged that China has used assertive means to exert claims in the conflict-riven South China Sea, although tensions have abated slightly with Hanoi in recent weeks.  
The United States since 2010 has repeatedly been outspoken over the South China Sea, saying that it has a national interest in ensuring freedom of navigation but does not take sides on individual claims.  
With an eye on the tensions, the United States has boosted military cooperation with Japan and the Philippines -- which are both treaty-bound allies -- as well as with former war adversary Vietnam.  
Meanwhile, the United States said Thursday it saw a "strong consensus" with China on demanding that close Beijing ally North Korea take clear steps to give up its nuclear program. A White House statement said both countries, "agreed on the fundamental importance of denuclearization of the Korean peninsula."

# Snowden reemerges in Moscow

## Meets rights activists, seeks temporary asylum in Russia

CNN Online

American intelligence leaker Edward Snowden met with human rights activists and lawyers yesterday in a transit zone of a Russian airport, in his first public appearance since he left Hong Kong last month.



He has asked rights groups to lobby the Russian government to grant him temporary asylum, Russian Human Rights Watch representative Tanya Lokshina said. Snowden also said he wants to move to Latin America once he is able to do so, she said.  
A photograph provided by a Russian Human Rights Watch staffer at the meeting shows him sitting behind a desk, looking much as he did when last photographed.  
The former National Security Agency contractor is believed to have been holed up in a transit area of Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport since leaving Hong Kong for Russia on June 23.  
The meeting with Snowden began at around 5:00pm local time.  
A CNN team at the airport saw about half a dozen people -- including Russia's human rights ombudsman and representatives of Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Russian human rights groups -- enter a door marked "Private" in Terminal E. Police and security officers then kept the media at a distance.  
Sergei Nikitin, head of Amnesty International's Moscow office, who was at the meeting, said he was pleased to voice the organization's support for Snowden in person.  
WikiLeaks said in a post on Twitter that it would release Snowden's statement to human rights groups later yesterday.  
Snowden's desire to be granted temporary asylum in Russia may represent something of a turnaround.

He last week reportedly withdrew his asylum request with Russian authorities after President Vladimir Putin said he would have to "stop his work aimed at harming our American partners" if he wanted to stay in the country.  
Snowden has been technically a free man while in Moscow but has been unable to travel after US authorities revoked his passport when he was charged with espionage.  
A letter purportedly e-mailed by Snowden that invited human rights groups and others to the meeting blasted the United States for "threatening behavior" and carrying out illegal actions against him.  
"Never before in history have states conspired to force to the ground a sovereign President's plane to effect a search for a political refugee," the letter says.

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# Qaeda front group kills Syria rebel chief: NGO

AFP, Beirut

An Al-Qaeda front group operating in Syria has killed a rebel chief in a firefight in the coastal province of Latakia, a monitoring group said yesterday.  
The killing comes amid soaring tensions between the mainstream rebel Free Syrian Army (FSA) and its supporters and groups affiliated to al-Qaeda, mostly made up of non-Syrian fighters.  
Better known as Abu Bassir al-Jablawi, rebel chief Kamal Hamami was shot dead Thursday by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), one of the main jihadist groups operating in Syria, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.  
He was killed when ISIS fighters tried to destroy an FSA checkpoint in the Jabal al-Turkman region, in the north of Latakia province.  
Late last week, dozens of FSA fighters were killed in a battle against ISIS in the northwestern province of Idlib. The FSA battalion chief there was beheaded by ISIS, said the Observatory.  
On Thursday, ISIS released another rebel chief after holding him for 25 days alongside nine other insurgents, the group added.  
ISIS is accused of holding dozens of prisoners in Raqa, the only provincial capital to have fallen out of the control of President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

# Did 'absolutely right thing' in 2002: Modi

PTI, Ahmedabad

Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi has said that he had done "absolutely right thing" in 2002 when the state was hit by riots and that an SIT set up by the Supreme Court had given him a "thoroughly clean chit".  
Narendra Modi also described himself as a "Hindu nationalist" because he was a born Hindu. "I am nationalist. I'm patriotic. Nothing is wrong. I am born Hindu. Nothing is wrong. So I'm a Hindu nationalist. So yes, you can say I'm a Hindu nationalist because I'm a born Hindu," he told the Reuters news agency.  
In an interview to Reuters news agency at his official residence in Gandhinagar, the first since he was appointed the chief of BJP's election campaign committee in June, Modi was asked if it was frustrating when many people define him by 2002.  
He responded by saying that he would feel guilty if he had done something wrong.  
Answering a question about being regarded as a polarising figure, Modi cited the example of Democrats and Republicans in the US to emphasise that polarisation was "democracy's basic nature".

# Congress will not declare Rahul as PM candidate

## Says senior party leader

PTI, New Delhi

The Congress will not declare Rahul Gandhi as its prime ministerial candidate in the Lok Sabha elections, senior party leader Digvijaya Singh hinted on Friday while dismissing suggestions that BJP's projection of Narendra Modi is a challenge to it.  
He also did not say whether Prime Minister Manmohan Singh could be a candidate for the top post once again if the party wins next year's elections.  
"We do not have a presidential form of government. Congress party does not declare PM or CM candidates before elections...Even in the Karnataka assembly elections, we had not declared any CM candidate," Singh told in an interview.  
He was replying to questions why Congress was diffident about projecting Rahul Gandhi, why it should not project him and who is the PM candidate of Congress.  
Singh also gave indications that the Congress was not averse to doing business with the Left after the next elections and apprehended that the advent of Modi could lead to communal polarisation in the polls.  
Asked about BJP's elevation of Modi as its election campaign chief, just a step short of announcing him the prime ministerial candidate, Singh said, "We are not concerned. It is not an issue with us."  
"It is not Modi. It is the ideology of the Sangh and the BJP which believes in divisive politics. Politics of hatred and violence based on religious lines, which is the challenge," he said.



# BHUTAN POLLS Postal ballots may prove decisive

PTI, Thimpu

Postal ballots may play a key role in deciding the fate of many candidates in Bhutan's second national elections today as victory margins in many constituencies are expected to be very narrow.  
A total of 47,964 postal ballots were issued in 47 constituencies and going by the past election in Bhutan, where postal ballots had played a role in deciding the winners, in this election too, votes coming in mails may play a pivotal role in constituencies.  
The polls will be contested by Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT), which is the ruling party in Bhutan and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the major opposition.  
In a small country like Bhutan where a vote difference is as low as two or six, postal ballots may come in handy for the losing candidates.  
There are 3,81,790 registered voters in Bhutan who will decide the fate of 94 candidates in 47 constituencies across the Himalayan nation.

# ODDLY enough

## Aussie invents new letter to replace 'the'

PTI, Melbourne  
An Australian businessman has invented a new letter of the English alphabet to replace the word 'the' because he thinks it is more efficient.  
"The word 'and' is only the fifth-most used word in English and it has its own symbol. Isn't it time we accorded the same respect to 'the'?" Paul Mathis said. Mathis from Melbourne has developed the replacement of the word 'the' -- an upper-case 'T' and a lower-case 'h' bunched together so they share the upright stem.



## 'Dead' man wins Mexico polls!

AFP, Oaxaca  
A man who was allegedly certified as dead almost three years ago has won a race for mayor in the southern state of Oaxaca.  
Lenin Carballido won the election last Sunday. However, police say Carballido's family produced a death certificate in his name in 2010, when he was under investigation for a gang rape.

# 'Less anxious' about Mandela's health

## Graca Machel says he is improving

AFP, Johannesburg

Graca Machel, the wife of ailing South African icon Nelson Mandela, said she was less anxious about his condition yesterday, five weeks after he was admitted to hospital.  
"He continues to respond positively to treatment. I would say that today I'm less anxious than I was a week ago," she told state-backed SABC television.  
It is the latest in a series of upbeat accounts, which seem to suggest that while the 94-year-old's condition remains "critical", it has improved somewhat.  
After visiting Mandela late Thursday, President Jacob Zuma said he was "responding to treatment."  
"He remains as much of a fighter now as he was 50 years ago," Zuma said, marking the anniversary of a police raid that led to Mandela's life sentence in prison.  
Earlier in the week Buyelekhaya Dalindyebo, who is one of Mandela's nephews and king of his Thembu tribe, said the former statesman was "conscious".  
"He could not talk, but he recognised me and made a few gestures of acknowledgement, like moving his eyes."  
Two weeks ago the prognosis appeared much bleaker, with family massing at his Pretoria hospital as Zuma abruptly cancelled a trip to Mozambique.  
Doctors are said to have ruled out switching off Mandela's life support machines unless there is serious organ failure. Mandela, who turns 95 next week, was rushed to a Pretoria hospital on June 8 with a recurring lung infection.



# Myanmar jails Buddhists over riots

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar has sentenced more than 20 Buddhists to prison for their roles in religious riots in March, including a deadly attack on a Muslim boarding school, sources said yesterday.  
The convictions follow earlier concerns among rights groups that Muslims were bearing the brunt of the legal crackdown on suspects involved in the unrest which shook the central town of Meiktila. 44 people were killed in the two days of bloodshed.  
The Buddhists were sentenced on charges including murder, assault, theft, arson and inciting unrest, said a police official who did not want to be named. According to state media the sentences ranged from two years for minor offences such as theft to 10 years for murder, with some defendants handed several terms to be served separately.

# The secrets of long life

## Family life, labour-based work, a plant-based diet and a little wine

AFP, Chengmai

The elderly residents of one Chinese county have endured invasion, civil war and famine, and many live in unheated concrete shacks on only a few dollars a day. But they are apparently among the longest-lived people on earth.  
Chengmai, a string of villages dotted with orange plantations in the tropical island province of Hainan, claims more than 200 residents aged over 100 out of a population of 560,000 -- one of the highest ratios in the world.  
They are said to include at least three "supercentenarians" -- the name given to those aged over 110 -- out of fewer than 400 thought to exist worldwide.  
Other clusters of longevity are said to include Cuba, islands off Greece and Japan, and a peninsula in Costa Rica, with researchers finding common characteristics including an emphasis on family, lifestyles requiring physical activity, and a plant-based diet.  
As China was swept by dramatic changes, most Chengmai residents carried on doing what they had always done, growing crops.  
"I've never done any exercise, except



hard farmwork," said 86-year-old Wang Kailu, who lives in a simple concrete shack with his wife Wu Aihe. The couple said they married the day after Japan's World War Two surrender, 68 years ago.  
Their one-storey dwelling is barely furnished and Wang draws water from a well to spread on his small vegetable plot.  
Experts on ageing who have travelled to the area say several factors could be involved in the phenomenon.  
Jennifer Holdaway, an American scientist, pointed out that its economy was centred around agriculture.  
"There is not a lot of industry, the climate is good, they can get exercise easily, and the diet is healthy; they have

plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, and the soil is also naturally high in selenium", an essential nutrient, she said.  
Locals, though, claimed a healthy reliance on alcohol was vital. Xu Yuhe, whose residency permit lists her as 104, told AFP that she takes daily shots of "Three Coconut Spring" a local grain spirit.  
Experts say an active social life is also a key to longevity, and each morning dozens of Chengmai's elderly pack out benches in a teahouse, with men at the back playing cards and women at the front, chatting and listening to clattering opera recordings.  
A study commissioned by Chengmai's Communist Party committee put its residents' lifespans down to their being "diligent, simple-minded and magnanimous, mainly taking a vegetarian diet, eating sensibly, early to bed early to rise."  
Experts say longevity zones around the world are rarely in rich areas.  
Li Aizhu, another supercentenarian, has a simpler explanation. "We asked her once," said the 113-year-old's great-granddaughter, Yi Mei. "She said it because she eats a lot of peanut oil, that's her secret."

# 5 killed in Indonesia jailbreak

AFP, Medan

Indonesian police yesterday hunted for around 100 inmates, including militants, who escaped from an overcrowded jail after setting the prison ablaze in riots that left five dead.  
The inmates began rampaging through the jail in Medan city on Sumatra island on Thursday afternoon, setting fires and hurling bottles at guards in anger over power cuts and water shortages at the facility.  
The Tanjung Gusta jail was engulfed in towering flames and scores of firefighters battled through the night to douse them.  
Some 150 prisoners initially escaped and police and soldiers were still desperately hunting for around 100 after recapturing several dozens overnight.