

NEWS IN brief

8 killed in Nepal landslides

AFP, Kathmandu
Landslides triggered by heavy monsoon rains in Nepal have engulfed scores of homes, killing eight people and leaving five missing, officials said yesterday.
The dead included three children aged between three months and 12 years, Surendra Bahadur Shah, a senior police official in western Nepal, told AFP.
The victims died when the landslides on Sunday and Monday hit their homes.

US consider \$1b in aid to Jordan

AFP, Washington
US lawmakers are mulling a \$1 billion aid package to Jordan, a third of which would defray costs of regional instability, including huge refugee flows from neighboring Syria.
A subpanel of the House Appropriations Committee will review the aid during a markup of a broader bill committing some \$34.1 billion in overall State Department and foreign operations for fiscal year 2014, which begins October 1.

19 killed in Thai bus accident

AFP, Bangkok
Nineteen people were killed and 20 hurt yesterday when a double decker coach collided with a truck in central Thailand and burst into flames, authorities said.
The inter-province bus, which was travelling from Bangkok to Roi Et in the northeast of the country, caught fire after the crash.
Images from Thai television news showed the extent of the damage to the vehicle, which appeared to have been completely incinerated and reduced to its metal shell.
Authorities said the crash was a head-on collision involving three vehicles.

Pakistan violates ceasefire: India

PTI, Jammu
Pakistani troops violated ceasefire and opened fire at Indian posts along the Line of Control (LoC) in Poonch district, the fourth violation this month.
The Pakistani troops opened small arms firing at Indian posts in forward area along LoC in Poonch district at 22:30 hours on Monday night, defence PRO Col R K Palta said.
The Pakistani troops also fired Pika rifle rounds. The firing continued for 20 minutes on Monday night, Col Palta said.

Pak foils plot to target its PM

PTI, Islamabad
Pakistani authorities claimed to have foiled a plot to target Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif by busting a terror network planning to launch a suicide attack on his residence in Raiwind on the outskirts of Lahore.
The plot was unearthed by a Joint Investigation Team of police and intelligence officials probing into the abduction of Ali Haider Gilani, son of former premier Yousuf Raza Gilani, who was kidnapped during election campaign in May.
The Express Tribune reported that officials while probing the case of Gilani traced a North Waziristan-based militant group operating in Lahore and plotting to target Sharif at his residence in Raiwind.
An operation conducted in Lahore to break the terror cell led officials to a terrorist group affiliated with Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan North Waziristan-based commanders Matior Rehman and Muhammad Yasin alias Aslam.



ROYAL BABY PRINCE BRINGS BLISS FOR BRITAIN



Clockwise, a close picture of the royal baby prince. Grandfather of the baby receives flowers from well wishers. Sailors on HMS Lancaster pose up in the shape of the word BOY. As is traditional, the news of the birth is announced via an easel outside Buckingham Palace. The Queen's Press Secretary Ailsa Anderson place the official document on the easel. Members of the artillery fire a 62-gun salute. Selections of British dailies with headlines about the birth of the baby prince.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS, DAILY MAIL

Kate, baby prince 'doing well'

AFP, London
Britain's Prince William and his wife Kate thanked hospital staff yesterday after the birth of their son, as Kensington Palace said the three royals were all "doing well".
"Mother, son and father are all doing well this morning," a Kensington Palace spokesman said in a statement.
In the first comments from Kate since the birth on Monday, she and William said: "We would like to thank the staff at the Lindo Wing and the whole hospital for the tremendous care the three of us have received."
"We know it has been a very busy period for the hospital and we would like to thank everyone -- staff, patients and visitors -- for their understanding during this time."

Global leaders congratulate

AFP, Paris
Warm words of congratulations poured in from around the world for Britain's Prince William and his wife Kate following the birth of their first baby, a boy destined to become king.
US President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle led tributes to the "joyous occasion", wishing the new parents "all the happiness and blessings parenthood brings."
Putin "congratulated Queen Elizabeth II on the birth of her great-grandson and wished strong health for the newborn, the Duchess of Cambridge and all the members of the Royal Family," the Kremlin said in a statement.
Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd called it "a happy day for our close friends in Britain and the Commonwealth", while New Zealand Prime Minister John Key said it was "wonderful news".
Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper meanwhile tweeted: "On behalf of all Canadians, I offer our heartfelt congratulations to the Royal Couple & the entire Royal Family."
Across the pond from Britain, French President Francois Hollande sent his "warmest wishes of joy and happiness" to Kate and William.
Israeli President Shimon Peres wished "a hearty Mazel Tov" to the royal family for a baby "born in the most democratic country on earth".
Japan added its voice to the chorus of global well-wishes, with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sending a congratulatory message to British Prime Minister David Cameron.

Nasa releases picture of Earth taken from Saturn

BBC ONLINE
Nasa has released photos of the Earth and Moon taken by a spacecraft orbiting Saturn - nearly a billion miles away, BBC reported yesterday.
Our planet and its only satellite appear only as dots in the picture, which was taken by the Cassini spacecraft on 19 July.
Scientists wanted to pay homage to the "Pale Blue Dot" image captured by the Voyager 1 probe in 1990.
This was the first time people knew in advance that their long distance picture was being taken.
As part of the event launched by Nasa, people were asked to wave in what Carolyn Porco, who leads Cassini's camera team, described as an "interplanetary cosmic photo session".
"It thrills me no end that people all over the world took a break from their normal activities to go outside and celebrate the interplanetary salute between robot and maker that these images represent," said Dr Porco, from the Space Science Institute in Boulder, Colorado.

Images show N Korea launch-pad halt



AP, Seoul, South Korea
An eight-month construction standstill at a North Korean site meant to launch bigger and better long-range rockets may signal Pyongyang is slowing or even stopping development of larger rockets, according to a new analysis of recent satellite imagery.
The sight of unfinished roads and grass growing from the foundation of a large new rocket assembly building could be welcome news for Washington and others who see Pyongyang's nuclear and missile work as a threat — though it is unknown if the work stoppage is only temporary.
Another unknown is why North Korea stopped construction on the launch pad, rocket assembly building and launch control center at what was intended to be a major new facility at the Tonghae Satellite Launching Ground on the northeast coast, according to analysis provided to The Associated Press by 38 North, the website for the US-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.
But the analysis of May 26 commercial satellite imagery from DigitalGlobe and Astrium provides some possible scenarios about what's happening.
Another analyst said North Korea's construction stoppage may be linked to a desire to ease tensions that spiked this year after weeks of North Korean war threats following UN sanctions over its nuclear test in February and rocket launch in December.

US general lays out military options in Syria

UN envoy still hopeful on peace plan
AFP, Washington
The top US general has informed Congress of options for military intervention in Syria, but stressed that the decision of whether to go to war was one for civilian leaders.
In a non-classified letter made public Monday, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey set out five options -- from nonlethal intelligence and weapons training to a boots-on-the-ground plan to "assault and secure" the Syrian regime's chemical weapons.
Saying he was mindful of ongoing deliberations over whether to intervene militarily against President Bashar al-Assad's regime, Dempsey wrote that such a decision is "a political one that our nation entrusts to its civilian leaders."
But his letter -- which was addressed to Senate Armed Services Committee chairman Carl Levin -- also detailed risks, such as the empowering of extremists and retaliatory strikes by the regime.
"Once we take action, we should be prepared for what comes next," he wrote. "Deeper involvement is hard to avoid."
The United States is currently providing humanitarian assistance and non-lethal aid to rebel groups battling to oust Assad.
Meanwhile, UN peace envoy to Syria Lakhdar Brahimi said Monday he was pressing on with plans for a conference aimed at ending the fighting, though no firm date is in sight.
"It is extremely difficult to bring people who have been killing one another for two years just by a magic wand to a conference like this. It will take time, but I hope it will happen," Brahimi told a handful of reporters on the sidelines of an event in Washington.
"There are still issues that have not been solved. We are hopeful. That's all we can say."
President Barack Obama's administration promised an expansion of military aid to Syria's rebel forces in June after accusing the regime of using chemical weapons, but such aid has yet to be disbursed.

Pressure mounts for Morsi release

Supporters, opponents clashes kill 10
AFP, Cairo
Pressure grew yesterday on Egypt's new leaders to release Mohamed Morsi from detention as clashes between supporters and opponents of the deposed Islamist president left 10 people dead.
The deadly clashes which also wounded dozens broke out on Monday, raged through the night and were continuing on Tuesday, a day after Morsi's family vowed to sue the military over his ouster.
At least six people were killed early Tuesday when opponents of Morsi attacked supporters of the deposed president who were staging a sit-in near Cairo University, state media reported.
Morsi's family told a news conference on Monday they will take legal action against the military for having "kidnapped" the elected president after he was deposed in a military-led coup on July 3.
Egypt's new leadership says Morsi is in a "safe" place for his own good.
Calls for Morsi to be released have also been issued by the United States, Germany, the United Nations and the European Union which, on Monday, again called for the Islamist leader to be freed.
"It is now of utmost importance that Egypt embarks on a transition, allowing a transfer of power to a civilian-led and democratically elected government," EU foreign ministers said in a statement.

Venezuela, Colombia repair ties

BBC ONLINE
The presidents of Colombia and Venezuela have agreed to work to improve relations, two months after a row erupted between the two neighbours, BBC reported.
Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia and Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro met for talks at a border town in Venezuela.
They agreed to set up high level groups to discuss security, energy and trade.
Relations had been strained since Santos agreed in May to meet Venezuelan opposition leader Henrique Capriles in Bogota.
Capriles had been seeking Colombian support for contesting his defeat by a narrow margin to Maduro at Venezuela's election in April.
Venezuela's Foreign Minister Elias Jaua said at the time that the meeting would "derail" good relations between the two countries.

US VICE PRESIDENT IN INDIA Afghanistan, investment dominate talks

AFP, New Delhi
US Vice President Joe Biden held talks with Indian leaders yesterday as he sought to calm fears over the exit of American troops from Afghanistan and capitalise on growing investment opportunities.
Biden met his counterpart Hamid Ansari at the start of a round of talks that will include sessions with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, President Pranab Mukherjee and a top opposition figure.
The vice president, the most senior US official to visit India since President Barack Obama in 2010, has said the world's two largest democracies share common goals on a range of regional security issues.
But there is widespread unease among Indian leaders over what will happen in Afghanistan once US troops have left in 2014, with many fearing that Pakistan has most to gain from the withdrawal.
India has spent more than two billion dollars of aid in Afghanistan since the Taliban, hardline Islamists who were strong allies of Pakistan, were toppled in the 2001 US-led invasion.
Even though planned talks between the US and Taliban collapsed last month, the possible return to power of the Taliban alarms many in India.
Writing in The Times of India on Tuesday, Washington-based commentator Seema Sirohi reflected a widespread feeling in New Delhi that the departure of US troops would be a major boost for Pakistan.
"Biden, as one of the original proponents of the pullback of US troops from Afghanistan, is well positioned to explain why the Americans have handed the keys to Kabul to Pakistani generals," she wrote.

ODDLY enough

10 cigarettes per day for a Chinese turtle!



STAR DESK
According to Chinese media reports, in a village on the outskirts of Changchun lives a nicotine-addicted alligator snapper turtle who smokes around 10 cigarettes a day.
The turtle's keeper says that whenever it feels the need for a smoke, the reptile becomes agitated and starts to hiss.
So how does a turtle become addicted to cigarettes? A local chef, surnamed Tang, who is helping his boss take care of it, says it all started about two months ago when he noticed the pet had lost interest in its daily fish diet.