

# NEWS IN brief

## UN concerned over Aussie asylum plan

AFP, Sydney  
The United Nations on Friday said it was "troubled" by Australia's decision to send asylum-seekers arriving by boat to Papua New Guinea given that conditions there failed to adequately protect refugees. In its first assessment of the hardline policy announced a week ago by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said it was concerned greater numbers of asylum-seekers could be sent to the poor



This picture shows Russian President Vladimir Putin holding a huge pike fish, after he caught it in the Tyva region on July 20, 2013 during his vacation there. PHOTO: AFP

## Ohio kidnapper pleads guilty

AFP, Chicago  
An American man who kidnapped three women and held them for a decade as sex slaves yesterday agreed to serve life in prison in a deal that allows him to escape the death penalty. The deal allows him to avoid the death penalty. Ariel Castro, a 53-year-old Ohio bus driver, told a court in Cleveland that he had agreed to serve a life sentence plus 1,000 years for a string of violent and

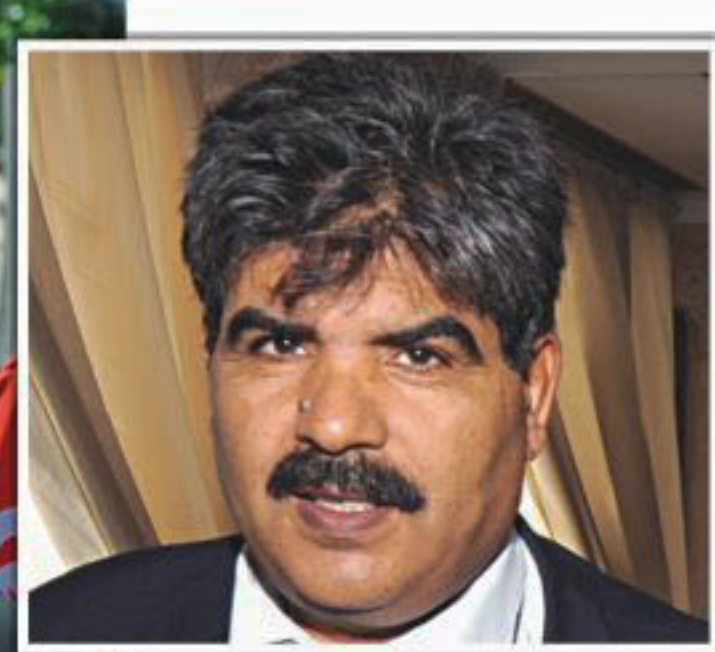
## Strauss-Kahn to face pimping trial

AFP, Lille  
Former IMF chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn will face trial on pimping charges along with 12 others over an alleged prostitution ring in the French city of Lille, prosecutors said yesterday. Strauss-Kahn was charged last year with "aggravated pimping as part of an organized gang" in the so-called "Carlton affair" -- one of a string of lurid cases that came to light after he resigned from the IMF over an alleged sexual assault on a



## TUNISIA IN TURMOIL AGAIN

Tunisians take part in an anti-government demonstration on the Habib Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis yesterday after the killing of the opposition politician Mohamed Brahmi. *Inset top, Mohamed Brahmi and Chokri Belaid, bottom, another Tunisian opposition leader who was killed six months earlier. "The gun used to kill Mohamed Brahmi is the same as that used to kill Chokri Belaid," Tunisian Interior Minister Lotfi Ben Jeddou told during a press briefing. Tunisia marked a day of mourning yesterday after the killing, sparking fresh political turmoil, protests and a general strike which took Tunis to near standstill.* PHOTO: AFP



## SYRIA CRISIS Rebels ask Kerry for US arms

AFP, United Nations  
Syrian opposition leaders on Thursday pressed US Secretary of State John Kerry to arm rebel groups and said there could be no peace talks while government forces kill civilians. Kerry held his first meeting with Syrian National Coalition president Ahmad Jarba at the US mission to the United Nations in New York. The coalition was set to meet UN Security Council envoys yesterday. After the talks, Jarba said the situation is now "desperate" in Syria as he justified his call for arms. Kerry instead stressed flagging efforts to hold an international peace conference. President Bashar al-Assad is "pursuing a military victory using indiscriminate weapons ranging from chemical weapons to cluster bombs," Jarba said in a statement on the talks. "To deny us the right to self-defense is to risk that the regime will survive: thousands will be executed, the repression will continue without end." Jarba then sought to reassure the US administration by saying the coalition "is 100% committed to an inclusive democracy for all Syrians, regardless of religion or ethnicity." The United States is currently providing humanitarian and non-lethal military aid to Syrian rebel groups but has said it will significantly expand its military assistance to vetted rebels.

## PPP boycotts Pak presidential vote

AFP, Islamabad  
Pakistan's main opposition party yesterday announced it would boycott next week's election for a ceremonial head of state to protest against the manner in which the vote was brought forward. The Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that the ballot would be held on July 30 instead of August 6 after the main ruling party complained that the original date clashed with the end of Ramadan. However, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, the second largest opposition party led by former cricket hero Imran Khan, said they would contest the election despite reservations over the change of schedule. Many lawmakers tasked with electing a successor to President Asif Ali Zardari will be on pilgrimage or offering special prayers at the tail end of the holy fasting month, the court said. Twenty-three candidates applied to contest the vote, but the election commission told AFP it had accepted the nomination papers of only three.

Mamnoon Hussain, the chief candidate for the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) party is considered a certain victor. "We have been left with no alternative, but to boycott the election," said Senator Raza Rabbani, the presidential candidate for the opposition Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Pakistan's new president will be elected by members of the upper and lower houses of parliament and of four regional assemblies. Rabbani said that the Supreme Court decision made it difficult for him and other opposition candidates to campaign in four provincial capitals and the federal capital Islamabad in just two days. The third candidate is a covering candidate for the PML-N, Zafar Iqbal Jhagra, a politician from the northwest. Zardari, hugely unpopular for alleged corruptions, was elected after the PPP won elections in 2008 following the assassination of his wife, former premier Benazir Bhutto. The PPP served a full five-year term in office, but lost heavily in May general elections won by a PML-N landslide.

## Twin blasts kill 41 in NW Pakistan

AFP, Peshawar  
Twin explosions rocked a busy marketplace in north-west Pakistan yesterday killing at least 41 people and injuring more than 150 others, officials said, in the deadliest attack to hit the country during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. The explosion at the bazaar in Parachinar, the main town of Kurram tribal district on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, sent handcarts flying as shoppers bought food to open their fasts at sunset. Doctors at the main public hospital said 41 people were killed, and 20 critically wounded among the more than 150 injured. Kurram is frequently the scene of sectarian violence between Pakistan's Sunni Muslim majority and Shia minority.

## Unease in West three weeks after Egypt coup ousts Morsi

AFP, Washington  
Western nations are watching the crisis in Egypt with growing unease, fearing the military's vow to return the nation to democracy may be little more than a fig leaf to mask a prolonged power grab. The United States has refused to term the army's July 3 overthrow of Egypt's elected president, Mohamed Morsi, a "coup," which would trigger an automatic freeze of some \$1.5 billion in aid. But it did finally send the interim leaders a veiled warning on Wednesday by suspending the delivery of four promised F-16 fighter jets. Britain also announced last week it was revoking export licenses for equipment used by the military and police, over concerns it could be turned on demonstrators, and has called for "actions and gestures from both sides that will assist in taking the political process forward." Egypt's interim leaders have laid out a roadmap for a new constitution ahead of fresh elections, but there are conflicting views about whether they will keep that pledge. Such concerns were further fueled when military chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi called for

rallies to give him a mandate to crack down on "terrorism and violence" -- a comment aimed at Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood, which has been organizing mass street demonstrations. And the military has now set a 48-hour deadline which expires late yesterday after which it will move to decisively deal with "violence and terrorism," according to a statement on a military-linked Facebook account. "The reality is that Egypt is moving back to a more authoritarian system, with a political class operating under a military umbrella with a fairly high degree of repression against anyone dissenting," David Butler, associate fellow at the British think-tank Chatham House, told AFP. There has also been palpable concern about the arrests of Muslim Brotherhood leaders and worries over Morsi, who has not been seen in public for more than three weeks. Furious at being stripped of office, the Islamist Brotherhood has ruled out any participation in talks to pave the way towards democracy. Many fear the group could now go underground again, waging a political battle from the shadows as it did when it was outlawed under long-time strongman Hosni Mubarak

## SPAIN TRAIN TRAGEDY Driver detained for recklessness

AFP, Santiago De Compostela  
Spanish police yesterday said they have detained the driver of a speeding train that crashed in the nation's deadliest rail disaster in decades, accusing him of criminal recklessness. The country was in mourning over Wednesday's horrific tragedy, which police said had killed 78 people including several foreigners and injured more than 100. The 52-year-old driver faces criminal accusations including "recklessness" over the crash near the pilgrimage city of Santiago de Compostela, said Jaime Iglesias, police chief in the northwestern Galicia region. The train was said to have been travelling at more than twice the speed limit when it hurtled off the rails. The grey-haired driver, who reportedly boasted of his love for speed online, was detained Thursday in hospital where he had been under police surveillance, Iglesias told a news conference.



This picture shows North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un, right, shaking hands with Chinese Vice President Li Yuanhao in Pyongyang on Thursday. The meeting comes at a time of strained relations between the two countries. PHOTO: AFP

## ODDLY enough France lifts ban on insulting president

AFP, Paris  
The French are now free to offend their president if they so choose after parliament lifted an age-old ban on insulting the head of state. Under the amended law, the president will now have to go to court if he or she feels offended and prove there was defamation, in a much more drawn-out and complicated process. France's upper house Senate on Thursday approved a move to strike the offence of "insulting the head of state" from the statute books, following a similar move by the lower house National Assembly two days earlier. The controversial offence was famously used in 2008 against a man who held up a banner to then-president Nicolas Sarkozy that read: "Get lost, asshole." He was immediately detained, convicted of causing offence and fined 30 euros (\$40) for insulting the French leader, in a move that the European Court of Human Rights later said violated freedom of expression. The offence was put in place in the 1881 law governing freedom of the press.

## Zimmerman 'got away with murder': Juror

AFP, Miami  
The only non-white juror on the six-woman panel that acquitted US neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman in the killing of unarmed black teenager Trayvon Martin says he "got away with murder." But in a "Good Morning America" exclusive interview, to air Thursday night and yesterday morning on US network ABC, the Puerto Rican woman said she could not find Zimmerman guilty of murder under the law as she understood it. "You can't put the man in jail even though in our hearts we felt he was guilty," the 36-year-old woman said. "We had to grab our hearts and put it aside and look at the evidence." The woman, identified only as Juror B-29 during the trial and as Maddy in the interview, has eight children and was selected for the trial five months after moving to Florida from Chicago. She said that after the controversial verdict, she feels she owes an apology to the parents of Martin, who was shot dead in a gated community in Sanford, Florida after buying candy and iced tea. But she stressed that, based on the instructions the jury got from Judge Deborah Nelson, she felt she couldn't convict. "I was the juror that was going to give them the hung jury. I fought to the end," she said. Zimmerman has admitted to shooting Martin, but insisted it was in self-defense after the teen wrestled him to the ground and pounded his head against the sidewalk. Zimmerman was following Martin on suspicion the teen was involved in robberies in the neighborhood, and the killing sparked outrage over racial profiling and lax US gun laws. "Zimmerman got away with murder, but you can't get away from God. And at the end of the day, he's going to have a lot of questions and answers he has to deal with," Maddy said.



## Anger at 'go home' message to illegal British migrants

GUARDIAN ONLINE  
A coalition row has erupted over an advertising campaign that targets racially mixed areas with billboards that warn illegal immigrants: "Go home or face arrest." Liberal Democrat ministers yesterday pressed the government to abandon the campaign, as the UK Independence party leader, Nigel Farage, surprised many by condemning the signs as "nasty". The split emerged after senior Lib Dem figures complained about the failure of their cabinet members to stop Tory ministers from launching the pilot scheme. Vans carrying the government's abrupt message have been driven around areas of high immigration since Monday. The campaign has been widely seen as a way for Conservative ministers to appear tough on immigration in the face of rising support for UKip. But after three days of disquiet among party activists and MPs, a senior Lib Dem source said the party's ministers would call for the posters to be withdrawn: "Ministers will be pushing for this to be stopped - it is not Lib Dem or coalition policy." A party spokesman added: "These poster vans were not cleared or agreed by Liberal Democrats in government. We are totally committed to tackling illegal immigration but this is a disproportionate, distasteful and ineffective way to do it." Vans have driven around the London boroughs of Hounslow, Barking and Dagenham, Ealing, Barnet, Brent and Redbridge carrying billboards as part of a week-long, £10,000 pilot that is meant to tackle illegal immigration. The billboards showed residents how many illegal migrants had recently been arrested in their local area and carried a text number for overstayers to use to arrange their return home. The posters read: "In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest. Text HOME to 78070 for free advice, and help with travel documents. We can help you to return home voluntarily without fear of arrest or detention." Officials said the campaign, which cost £10,000, would pay for itself if just one migrant returned home.



## Rahul, Modi not fit for PM's post: Hazare

PTI, Farrukhabad  
Social activist Anna Hazare yesterday said that both Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi and Congress vice president Rahul Gandhi are "unacceptable" as prime minister as both are "not fit" to acquire the dignified post. "Both Modi and Rahul Gandhi are unacceptable to me for prime ministership as both are not fit to take over the dignified and respected post," Hazare said responding to a question by reporters on different forces depicting the two as the prime minister's candidate. Hazare, who was Farrukhabad to participate in his 'Jantana Yatra', said that in the past ten years of his being the chief minister of Gujarat, Modi created hurdles in setting up Lokayukta which only goes on to stress his views that appointment of anti-graft ombudsman was not required to bring an end to corruption.

## Russian punk band convict defiant

REUTERS, Saransk  
A jailed member of Russian female punk group Pussy Riot lost a court battle to be released but remained unrepentant over last year's protest against President Vladimir Putin in a Moscow cathedral. Nadezhda Tolokonnikova watched from behind the black metal bars of a courtroom cage as a regional court yesterday upheld an earlier decision not to release her after nearly a year in prison so that she could look after her five-year-old daughter. The ruling by the Supreme Court of the Mordovia region was the second blow in three days for Pussy Riot. Maria Alyokhina, the other band member serving a two-year sentence, had a similar attempt quashed in court on Wednesday. "I will appeal my sentence to the last, including in the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation," Tolokonnikova said during Friday's hearing in the city of Saransk, about 500 km (312 miles) southeast of Moscow. Dressed in black, with the words "No Pasaran" (Spanish for "They shall not pass") written in white across her chest, she refused to plead guilty even though it might have won her favour in court. "I do not admit guilt and will not plead guilty. I have principles upon which I will stand," she said from the cage, often used for defendants or convicts in Russian courts.

