

# NEWS IN brief

## Taliban bomb kills 9 in Afghanistan

AFP, Kandahar  
A roadside bomb blamed on the Taliban tore through a police vehicle in southern Afghanistan at the weekend, killing nine people and wounding 15, officials said yesterday.

The bombing took place late Sunday in the Shahjoi district of Zabul province, on the main Kabul-Kandahar road which is a hotspot of the Taliban insurgency.

The attack killed three police including a commander and six civilians, Mohammad Jan Rasoulyar, the Zabul deputy governor, told AFP.

## Mexican navy admiral killed in ambush

BBC ONLINE

Gunmen killed one of Mexico's highest ranking navy officials in the western state of Michoacan, where the military is trying to regain control of areas dominated by warring drug gangs, BBC reported yesterday.

Vice Adm Carlos Salazar was ambushed on an unpaved road near the town of Churintzio.

His car had been diverted from the main road by protesters believed to have been hired by the gunmen.

## 'Simpsons' co-creator donates fortune

PTI, Los Angeles

Sam Simon, the terminally ill co-creator of iconic animated series 'The Simpsons', is giving away most of his fortune to various causes.

Simon, 58, is battling colon cancer and is currently undergoing chemotherapy.

The nine-time Emmy-winning writer-producer confirmed during a May 16 'WTF with Marc Maron' podcast that he will donate nearly all of his royalties from the series to charity.

## US drone kills 6 in Pakistan

AFP, Miranshah

A US drone attack on Sunday killed at least six militants and wounded three others in the north-western tribal area of Pakistan, officials said.

The attack took place in the Shawal area, some 50 kilometres (30 miles) west of Miranshah, the main town of North Waziristan which is a stronghold of Taliban and Al-Qaeda-linked militants along the Afghan border.

Four unmanned aircraft hovered above a village in Shawal before one fired two missiles at a compound just before sunset.

## Tunisian protesters tell Islamists to go

AFP, Tunis

Tunisia's Islamist-led government gathered in emergency meeting yesterday as protesters demanding its ouster dug in outside parliament after another night of protests.

Tensions have spiralled in Tunisia since the murder on Thursday of opposition MP Mohamed Brahmi, the second anti-Islamist figure gunned down in six months.

Many Tunisians blame the government for the two killings, particularly for failing to rein in radical Islamists accused of a wave of attacks since strongman Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was toppled in a popular uprising in 2011.

In the afternoon, the powerful General Union of Tunisian Labour (UGTT) was to convene "to decide the fate" of the country, its secretary general Sami Tahri said.



## Syria army retakes key rebel city

AFP, Damascus

The Syrian army has recaptured the key rebel district of Khaldiye in the central city of Homs, the state broadcaster reported yesterday.

"The armed forces have restored security and stability across the neighbourhood of Khaldiye," one of the largest bastions of rebels in Syria's third city, state television said.

The army, backed by fighters from Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah militant group, had launched an assault on Khaldiye a month ago as they press efforts to retake all of Homs, activists said.

The full recapture of Homs, dubbed by rebels "the capital of the revolution," would be a major coup for President Bashar al-Assad's regime as the city straddles a key route linking Damascus to the Mediterranean coast and the Alawite hinterland of Assad's minority community.

Several neighbourhoods in the Old City also remain in rebel hands, but troops, who have a foothold in that part of town too, appear determined to dislodge them.

The offensive in the city follows the army's recapture of the Homs province town of Qusayr in June, also with help from Hezbollah.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said fierce battles early Monday preceded the recapture of Khaldiye, calling the fighting "the most violent since the offensive was launched."

Meanwhile, Syrian warplanes raided the Bab Hud neighbourhood of the Old City just south of Khaldiye, said the Britain-based Observatory.

Syrian government forces patrol in the central city of Homs. Government forces bolstered by Lebanese Shia militiamen were poised to retake the largest rebel-held district of Syria's third city Homs, a watchdog and state media said.

PHOTO: AFP

## Morsi supporters call new Egypt protests

### EU envoy meets govt, opposition as crisis deepens

AFP, Cairo

Supporters of Egypt's ousted president called for new protests yesterday, threatening to deepen the country's crisis as the EU foreign policy chief met both the government and the opposition.

The Anti-Coup Alliance of Islamist groups organising protests against the ouster of president Mohamed Morsi urged demonstrators to march on security buildings on Monday night and called a million-man march for Tuesday.

Their statement came after the National Defence Council warned on Sunday that it would take "decisive and firm action" against demonstrators if they went beyond their right to peaceful protest.

Tensions were running high after the deaths of 72 people at a pro-Morsi rally in Cairo on Saturday.

"We... call for a million person march under the banner of 'Martyrs of the Coup' on Tuesday," the Anti-Coup Alliance said in a statement.

The group urged Egyptians "to go out into the streets and squares, to regain their freedom and dignity -- that are being usurped by the bloody coup -- and for the rights of the martyrs assassinated by its bullets."

It also called for protesters to march on security buildings across Egypt on Monday night "to condemn the criminal acts and the firing of live ammunition by the interior ministry at peaceful demonstrators."

## Bus accident kills 39 in Italy

AFP, Avellino

A coach carrying pilgrims plunged off a motorway flyover near Naples in southern Italy, killing at least 39 people in one of the worst such accidents in Europe in recent years.

Local prosecutors yesterday launched an investigation into possible manslaughter over Sunday evening's accident close to the town of Avellino, according to Italian media reports.

Rescuers were still battling to extract people from the mangled wreckage of the coach.

The vehicle, carrying 48 people, had been travelling at high speed when it crashed on a busy dual carriageway between Naples and Bari in an area Italian media described as an accident blackspot.

It rammed several cars before plunging through a crash barrier and down a steep slope before coming to a stop on its side off the road about 50 kilometres from Naples.

The driver was among the dead and about a dozen people were injured, including children. There were reports that some people in the dozen or so cars caught up in the chaos had also been hurt.

## JFK was 'shot' by secret service agent

### Claims new docudrama

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Just months ahead of the 50th anniversary of President John F Kennedy's assassination a new docudrama is set to spark a fresh debate over who carried out the killing by reviving the theory that JFK was shot accidentally by a secret service agent.

The new film, which will be aired in Australia, the US and Canada this Autumn, is based on the work of investigative writer Colin McLaren and author Bonar Menninger.

It suggests that a Secret Service agent, George Hickey, fired one of the bullets that killed Kennedy after a night partying with colleagues.

Hickey, who is now dead, was riding in the car behind Kennedy's limo that day. "What we're saying is that we believe it was a tragic accident in the heat of that moment," McLaren told the Television Critics Association on Sunday, Associated Press reported.

According to the film makers, whose work is based on that of Howard Donahue, who spent 20 years studying the assassination, when Lee Harvey Oswald fired his first shot, Hickey responded by trying to fire back on Oswald's position using his Secret Service-issued rifle.



Kashmiri government employees are sprayed with purple-dye water cannon by riot police during a demonstration in Srinagar yesterday. Dozens of government employees were arrested as they tried to stage a protest march in Srinagar demanding a regularisation of contractual jobs and an increase in salary.

## ODDLY enough



### World's most kissable plant!

STAR DESK

Here's a dumb question: if (the young) Mick Jagger was a plant, what would he be? Probably Psychotria Elata, commonly known as Hooker Lips or the Hot Lips Plant for the shape of its bright red bracts that resemble two luscious lips.

This weird plant might look like the work of a photo editing software, but I can assure you those kissable lips are all natural. Found in the tropical rain forests of Central and South American countries like Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama and Ecuador.



### The floating forest

STAR DESK

There are a lot of shipwrecks in Sydney's Homebush Bay, near the Olympic village, but none quite like the SS Ayrfield, also known as The Floating Forest for the lush mangrove vegetation that now covers its rusty hull.

The SS Ayrfield (originally launched as SS Corrimal), was a collier ship built in England in 1911 and used by the Commonwealth Government during World War II.

## ISRAEL, PALESTINE TALKS PLO faction rejects new peace talks

AFP, Ramallah

A major faction of the Palestine Liberation Organisation rejected new peace talks with Israel just hours before their scheduled resumption in Washington yesterday after a three-year break.

The leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine said that talks' resumption was a unilateral move by Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas which did not have the backing of the PLO as a whole.

"The PFLP is against a return to negotiations," said one of the party's leaders, Khaleida Jarar.

"It is an individual move," she said, in allusion to Abbas.

"These talks will be presided over by the United States, just like Oslo 20 years ago," she said of the negotiations that led up to the 1993 accords for limited self-rule.

"We went to the UN precisely to take our case out of US hands."

The last was a reference to the Palestinians successful bid for upgraded status at the United Nations last November, which was strongly opposed by both Israel and the United States.

Washington was to host preliminary talks later on Monday between Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erakat and his Israeli counterpart, Justice Minister Tzipi Livni.

## PAK PRESIDENTIAL POLLS TODAY Govt's nominee Mamnoon Husain set to win

### Main opposition boycotts election

DAWN ONLINE

Mamnoon Husain, the government's presidential nominee, appears to virtually have won today poll even before the first vote has been cast.

But with the main opposition party, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), having boycotted the process, it would almost be a cliché to say that this could well be the country's most controversial presidential election in recent years.

The ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has assured itself of a walkover by first succeeding in changing the schedule of the elections to a date of its own choosing and then by getting "unconditional" support from the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM).

But it has also managed to throw into sharp relief the extremely disturbing divides within the polity.

By moving the Supreme Court to get the date of the election changed,

something which is the exclusive constitutional domain of the Election Commission of Pakistan, the party has revived controversial arguments that the powerful institutions of the state (read, the superior judiciary under the present circumstances) always favour politics of a certain ideological hue, one that stands for a strong centrist national ideology with heavy input from religion.

The parties that stand for any other brand of politics may easily claim that they have never been given a level playing field in national politics.

Whether this claim has any merit or is just a ruse by these parties to hide their failures elsewhere in politics, and most specifically in governance, is of little consequence in the larger argument about which way the state and society in Pakistan must move in order to get out of the troubled times they are in.



Mother of Palestinian Fares Baroud, who has been held in an Israeli prison for 22 years, cries as she holds his picture after hearing news of the possible release of her son at her house in Shati refugee camp in Gaza City on Sunday. Baroud is expected to be among the 104 Arab prisoners to be released by Israeli authorities in a step to renew stalled peace talks with the Palestinians. The 22-member cabinet approved Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's proposal to free prisoners by a vote of 13 in favour, seven against and two abstentions.