



### TAX FRAUD CASE Berlusconi convicted

AFP, Rome

Italy's top court yesterday confirmed a prison sentence for former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi in his first ever definitive conviction, which could upset the country's fragile coalition government.

The court upheld a sentence for tax fraud of four years in prison of which three are covered by an amnesty, even though Berlusconi is certain to be granted community service or house arrest instead.

The Senate will have to vote to lift Berlusconi's immunity before the sentence can be implemented - a process that could take weeks or even months.

Berlusconi said earlier there should be no effect on the government even if he is convicted but diehard supporters are threatening to resign from parliament -- a move that could trigger fresh elections.

The government was installed this year following a two-month deadlock between Berlusconi's coalition and a leftist grouping led by the Democratic Party after February elections in which the two came neck-and-neck.

The court also sent back to the court of appeals another part of Berlusconi's sentence which would have condemned the 76-year-old three-time prime minister to a temporary ban from parliament.

The case revolved around Berlusconi's business empire Mediaset -- the starting point for his first foray into politics in the early 1990s.

# Violence feared as Egypt set to disperse protesters

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's interior ministry yesterday promised Mohamed Morsi's supporters "safe exit" if they quickly leave their Cairo protest camps, as police prepared to disperse them amid international appeals for restraint.

The call to disperse, which came after police commanders discussed how to carry out orders from the military-installed interim government to end the protests, was immediately rejected by the demonstrators.

Diplomatic efforts to avoid further bloodshed picked up pace, with EU Middle East envoy Bernardino Leon and German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle both arriving in Cairo to urge the rival camps to find common ground.

An interior ministry statement called "on those in Rabaa al-Adawiya and Nahda squares to let reason and the national interest prevail, and to quickly leave."

The ministry "pledges a safe exit and full protection to whoever responds to this appeal," the statement added.

Ministers had ordered police to end sit-ins and marches by Morsi's Islamist supporters, saying they amounted to a "national security threat."

The orders raised fears of new violence, less than a week after 82 people were killed in clashes at a pro-Morsi rally in Cairo.

The international community, which has expressed mounting concern over the violence since Morsi's July 3 ouster, warned against further bloodshed.

The German foreign minister, who arrived in Cairo on Wednesday, urged both sides to remain peaceful and seek an inclusive solution.

EU envoy Leon also landed in Cairo on Wednesday, to follow up on three days of intensive diplomacy by the bloc's foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton.

The US State Department called on

the interim authorities to "respect the right of peaceful assemblies."

"That obviously includes sit-ins," spokeswoman Marie Harf told reporters.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague called for "an urgent end to the current bloodshed" and the release of Morsi, in a phone call to interim vice president Mohamed ElBaradei, the Foreign Office said.

And Amnesty International condemned the cabinet order as a "recipe for further bloodshed."

Much of the Egyptian media expressed support for the government's decision, with some saying the interim administration had received "the people's mandate" in demonstrations last Friday backing Morsi's overthrow.

More than 250 people have been killed since the army ousted him following nationwide protests against his single year in power.

# Assad says sure he will defeat Syria rebels

REUTERS, Beirut

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad yesterday said he was confident of victory against rebels in a devastating 28-month-old civil war that has killed more than 100,000 people and sent nearly two million fleeing abroad.

Insurgents have seized large swathes of territory, but Assad's forces have staged a counter-offensive in recent weeks, pushing them back from around the capital Damascus and retaking several towns near the border with Lebanon.

"If we were not sure that we were going to win in Syria, we would not have the ability to resist and the ability to continue fighting for more than two years against the enemy," state news agency SANA quoted Assad as saying.

Assad has framed the revolt against four decades of his family's rule as a foreign-backed conspiracy fought by Islamist "terrorists." When pro-democracy protests started in March 2011, a military crackdown eventually led to an armed insurrection.

Addressing officers on the 68th anniversary

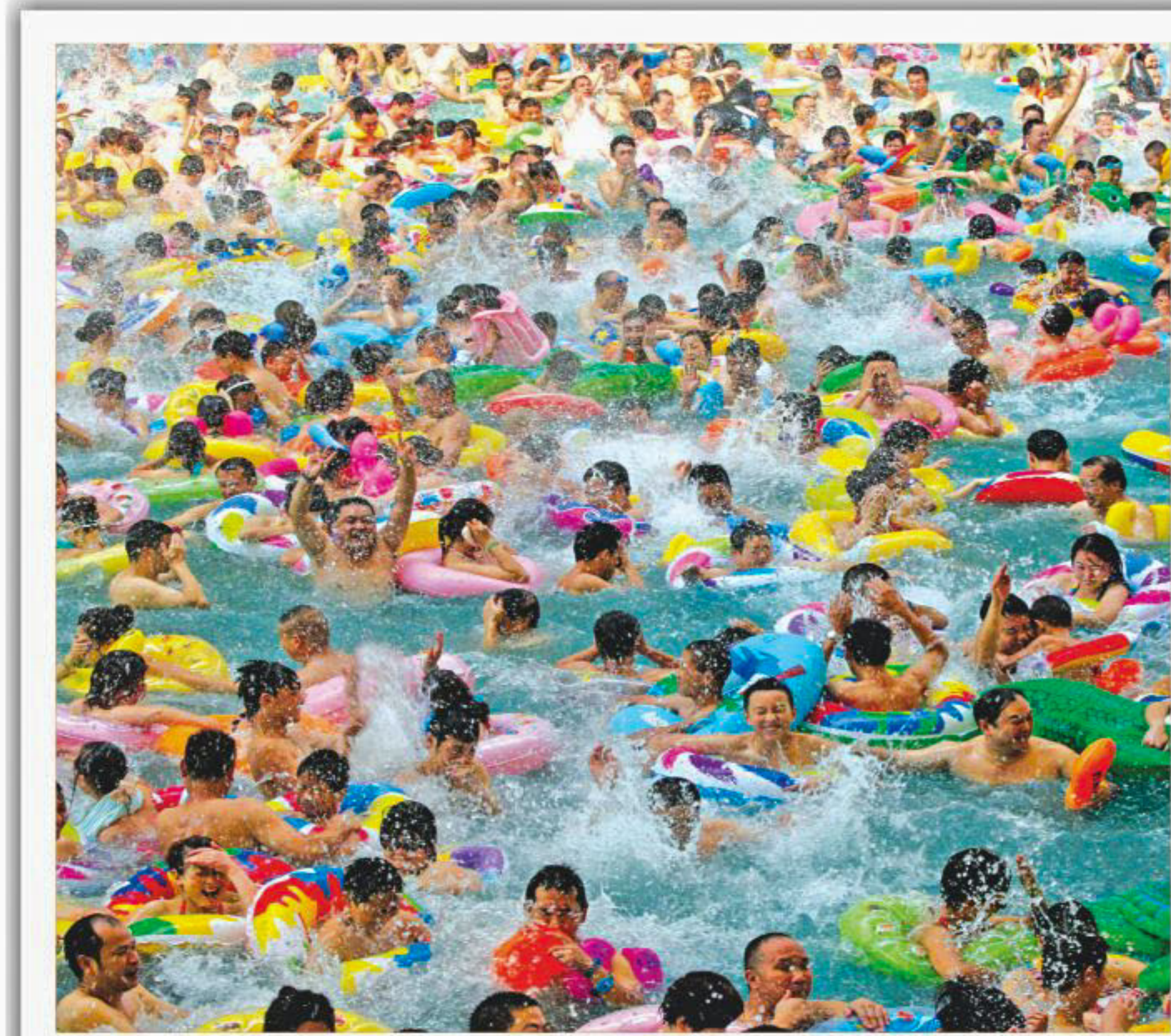


of the Syrian army's creation, Assad said soldiers had shown "courage in the face of terrorism ... and the fiercest barbaric war in modern history".

UN investigators say Assad's forces have carried out war crimes including unlawful killing, torture, sexual violence, indiscriminate attack and pillaging in what appears to be a state-directed policy. They say rebels have also committed war crimes, including executions, but on a lesser scale.

The struggle in Syria has become marked sectarian, broadly pitting majority Sunni Muslim rebels and against Assad's minority Alawite sect, which is an offshoot of Shia Islam.

He has also received solid support from Shia regional powerhouse Iran, Lebanon's Hezbollah movement and longtime ally Russia, while his fragmented foes have received little military aid from their Western backers wary of the growing presence of hardline Islamist rebel groups, some of them linked to al-Qaeda.



## Melting heat

This picture taken recently shows people trying to cool off at a water park in Suining, southwest China's Sichuan province, as a heatwave hit several provinces in China. Record-breaking temperatures have been searing large swathes of China, resulting in dozens of heat-related deaths and prompting authorities to issue a national alert.

PHOTO: AFP

## DECADE-LONG KIDNAPPING CASE US man caged for life

AFP, Chicago

A US judge yesterday jailed an unemployed bus driver for life plus more than 1,000 years for the decade-long kidnap, rape and torture of three women.

Ariel Castro's vain pleas that he was not a violent man fell on deaf ears, as Judge Michael Russo accepted a plea deal that saw him convicted on 977 criminal counts.

In a rambling quasi-apology to his three victims, one of whom sat stonily in the courtroom, Castro claimed he had acted on impulse as a result of sexual addiction.

Castro pleaded guilty last week after prosecutors agreed to take the death penalty off the table.

Michelle Knight, who was snatched off the street in 2002 at the age of 20, welcomed the sentence, arguing that death would have been "so much easier" for her tormenter.

"I spent 11 years in hell, and now your hell is just beginning," Knight said.

Castro said that he still couldn't understand what had driven him to hold the three women captive, but insisted "there was

harmony in that home."

"I am not a monster. I was sick," Castro said, insisting he was addicted to sex and pornography.

Russo had no interest in his excuses and sentenced Castro to 1,000 years in prison by imposing consecutive sentences on hundreds of charges.

The case came to light after Amanda Berry, 27, managed to escape with her six-year-old daughter by calling out to a neighbor for help through a locked front door on May 6.

More than 92 pounds (42 kilos) of chains were found in the filthy, darkened home where the women were kept in locked rooms with boarded up windows.

Even more horrifying were the stories the thin, pale and bruised women told upon their release.

"The damage that was done was a life sentence," psychiatrist Frank Ochberg testified.

Lured into the car of a man they knew as the father of a friend or classmate at the ages of 20, 16, and 14, the women suffered violent beatings and repeated rapes.

### ODDLY enough

#### US prison offers inmates 'Pay to Stay'

YAHOO NEWS ONLINE

Some prisoner's in Northern California are upgrading to better living spaces -- but only if they've got the cash to pay.

That's because a jail in Fremont is offering prisoners the chance to pay-as-they-go for a cell in the prison. And the rent isn't cheap, running \$155 a night, the same as a local three star hotel, according to local affiliate WTKR.

"You do get cable TV, but you don't get a warm cookie on your bed," Lt Mark Devine, of the Fremont Police Department told the station.

The \$10 million minimum security prison is far from luxurious with standard prison beds, shared bathroom and shower space. But it does come with various recreational options, including a

#### Russia proposes ban on online swearing

YAHOO NEWS ONLINE

They swear they're not joking. A group of Russian leaders wants to ban the use of foul language on all of the country's social media platforms and online discussion boards, saying that sites that do not comply with the new regulation would be added to a national "blacklist."

The existing "On the Protection of Children" law already is used to censor some forms of communica-

# Mugabe party claims Zimbabwe poll win

## Opposition, poll watchdogs cry foul

REUTERS, Harare

Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe's party yesterday claimed a landslide election victory that would secure another five years in power for Africa's oldest head of state, but its main rival said the vote was invalidated by "monumental fraud".

Wednesday's voting was peaceful across the southern African nation, but the conflicting claims heralded an acrimonious dispute over the outcome that increases the chances of a repeat of the violence that followed a contested vote in 2008.

Releasing unofficial results early in Zimbabwe is illegal, and police have said they will arrest anybody who makes premature claims. Election authorities are due to announce the official outcome by August 5.

But a senior source in 89-year-old

Mugabe's ZANU-PF party, who asked not to be named, said the result was already clear.

"We've taken this election. We've buried the MDC. We never had any doubt that we were going to win," the source told Reuters by phone.

But the claim was swiftly slapped down by Tsvangirai, bidding for a third time to end 89-year-old Mugabe's 33-year rule of the troubled southern African country.

Responding to the claim, a high-ranking source in Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party described the election as "a monumental fraud".

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), the leading domestic monitoring body, said the credibility of the vote was seriously compromised by large numbers of people being turned away from polling stations in MDC strongholds.



## Indian royal footman back to slum



DAILY MAIL ONLINE

The British Royal family's footman who enjoyed worldwide fame on the day of the birth Prince George has returned to the Kolkata slum.

Falling foul of new immigration laws, Badar Azim, a 25-year-old hospitality management graduate, has returned to his family in eastern India, where relatives beaming with pride have welcomed him home.

The young graduate accompanied the Queen's press secretary Ailsa Anderson in placing the announcement of Prince George's birth on an easel outside Buckingham Palace last week.

But just days later, his visa expired; he was unable to renegotiate his right to work in the country; and he quit his coveted post at the Royal Household. He has now arrived home - a world that perhaps couldn't be more different from the life he had lived last week.

## EX Gaddafi minister gets death sentence

REUTERS, Misrata

A former minister in the government of Muammar Gaddafi was sentenced to death on Wednesday for inciting violence against protesters during the uprising that led to the Libyan dictator's overthrow in 2011, a lawyer said.

In the first such ruling against a Gaddafi-era official, a court in Misrata found Ahmed Ibrahim guilty of undermining national security and plotting the killing of civilians, Salim Dans, a lawyer representing victims, told Reuters.

He said Libya's supreme court would have to confirm the ruling for the death penalty to be implemented.

Ibrahim held several senior positions including education and information minister. He was captured by Misratan rebel fighters in Gaddafi's hometown Sirte, the last bastion in the former leader's fight to hold onto power. Gaddafi was captured and killed in October 2011.

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