

NEWSIN brief

Musharraf murder charges adjourned

Pakistan's ex-military ruler Pervez Musharraf yesterday failed to appear in court to be indicted over the murder of former premier Benazir Bhutto due to what police said were security concerns. The judge adjourned the indictment until August 20 and ordered Musharraf to appear then.

Tibetan self-immolates in Nepal

A Tibetan exile died after setting himself ablaze at a Buddhist monument in Nepal Tuesday in an apparent protest against Chinese rule over Tibet, a police official said. Around 120 Tibetans have set fire to themselves since February 2009, mostly in China.

George W Bush gets heart stent

Former US President George W Bush yesterday underwent a surgery to clear a blocked artery in his heart but plans to resume his normal schedule this week, his office said. Doctors detected the problem during a routine check up on Monday on the 67-year-old ex-president and successfully implanted a device called a stent to unblock his artery in an operation carried out in Texas, the office said.

Japan unveils biggest warship since WWII

Japan unveiled its biggest warship, Izumo, since World War II yesterday, a \$1.2 billion helicopter carrier aimed at defending territorial claims, drawing criticism from regional rival China which accused its neighbour of "constant" military expansion. The ceremony to showcase the 248-metre (810-foot) vessel came as Shinzo Abe's conservative government, which took office last December, considers ditching the nation's pacifist constitution and beefing up the military.

Ex-UK MP becomes Pak governor

Britain's first Muslim MP Mohammad Sarwar was on Monday sworn in as governor of Pakistan's most important province, an official report said. Sarwar, who served as a member of the British parliament from 1997-2010, has become the new governor of Punjab and is considered a close confidante of Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Yemen on 'high alert' over al-Qaeda threat

All US, British citizens, staff told to leave Yemen

Yemeni security forces have been put on high alert amid warnings of an imminent attack by al-Qaeda in Sana'a, as the US and Britain withdrew embassy staff and urged their citizens to leave the country.

BBC Arabic quoted a Yemeni security source as saying that "extraordinary and unprecedented" security measures had been put in place, with armoured vehicles deployed at the presidential palace and other sensitive government and foreign installations in Yemen's capital.

Dozens of al-Qaeda operatives were said to have streamed into Sana'a in the last few days, apparently to take part in a terrorist attack, the BBC said. The Yemeni claim could not be independently confirmed.

Hours earlier, Yemeni tribal sources and unnamed officials reported two US drone strikes that killed four al-Qaeda operatives in Marib province north-east of Sana'a, including a senior commander who was named by al-Jazeera as Salah al-Jumati. Last month, the second in com-

mand of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Said al-Shehri, was also killed in a US drone strike.

The New York Times reported that US intelligence services had intercepted communications between Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's overall leader, and the Yemeni head of al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Nasser al-Wuhayshi.

In London the Foreign Office said all UK embassy staff had been temporarily withdrawn. The FCO also advised against all travel to the whole country.

A US defence department spokesman said the American air force transported state department personnel out of Sana'a early yesterday. "The US department of defence continues to have personnel on the ground in Yemen to support the US state department and monitor the security situation," said George Little.

A global travel alert issued yesterday said: "The US department of state warns US citizens of the high security threat level in Yemen due to terrorist activities and civil unrest."

Egypt gov offers Islamists ministerial posts: Report

Diplomatic drive to defuse crisis continues

AGENCIES

Egypt's military leaders are understood to have offered to include the Muslim Brotherhood in a political process that gives the vanquished movement three ministerial posts in a unity government and frees some members from prison.

A security source close to the discussions confirmed the substance of the discussions. However, the Egyptian military and the presidency later denied that talks had taken place, or that any offers had been made to the Brotherhood, which has remained sidelined since its leader, Mohamed Morsi, was ousted as president on 3 July.

"Within the framework of national reconciliation there have been promises made by the government to the Brotherhood, but only after they clear the sit-ins and end the protests," the security source told the Guardian.

"These promises include three ministerial posts in the new govern-



John McCain Lindsey Graham

ment; unfreezing the assets of the senior Muslim Brotherhood and only letting out of prison those who have not incited violence against the state," he said. He said other Brotherhood members who had incited violence against security officials would face trial. However, charges against those accused of insulting the military or the judiciary would be lifted.

Meanwhile, two high-profile US senators were to hold talks in Cairo yesterday, the latest push in a growing diplomatic flurry to defuse a crisis sparked by the military's overthrow of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi.

Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham arrived on Monday evening for talks with main players in the stand-off between Morsi's supporters and Egypt's army-appointed new authorities.

In recent days, US Deputy Secretary of State William Burns, EU foreign policy supreme Catherine Ashton, EU envoy Bernardino Leon, Arab diplomats, an African delegation and German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle have all travelled to Cairo in a bid to defuse the crisis.

Morsi loyalists, mostly members of the Muslim Brotherhood, say the removal of the country's first freely elected president is a violation of democratic principles and nothing short of his reinstatement would end their sit-ins.

The interim leadership says there is no turning back on the army-drafted roadmap that provides for new elections in 2014.

More than 250 people have been killed since Morsi's ouster.



PHOTO :AFP

HIROSHIMA DAY MARKED

Doves are released into the air beside the Atomic Bomb Dome at the Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima yesterday as ceremonies are held to mark the 68th anniversary of the US atomic bombing on the Japanese city. Left, A woman floats paper lanterns in remembrance of victims of the tragedy. Tens of thousands, including ageing survivors, relatives, government officials and foreign delegates, observed a moment of silence at 8:15am local time, the time of the detonation which turned the city into a nuclear inferno in 1945.



SRI LANKA PROTEST DEATHS Opposition seeks foreign probe

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's opposition Tuesday demanded an international investigation into a deadly army crackdown on villagers who were demonstrating against contaminated water supplies.

The United National Party (UNP) criticised the army's plans for an internal military probe into the death of three civilians and wounding of 50 others during a protest at Weliveriya village near Colombo last week.

"We cannot accept the government getting one of its henchmen to probe the killings," UNP general secretary Tissa Attanayake told reporters in Colombo. "Innocent civilians have been massacred."

The military opened fire Thursday on thousands of unarmed residents who were protesting against the contamination of their ground water supply, allegedly by chemical waste from a rubber glove factory.

Attanayake said the attack was a direct assault on democracy and people's right to peaceful protest. He said the opposition was pressing for an "independent international inquiry" into the incident, a demand echoed by London-based Amnesty International.

The shootings came ahead of a visit to the island by United Nations rights chief Navii Pillay later this month.

Pillay is due in Colombo on August 25 on a five-day visit in connection with allegations that Sri Lankan troops killed up to 40,000 civilians in the final stages of an ethnic war against Tamil rebels in 2009.

Escaped python kills two boys in Canada

AFP, Montreal

A python strangled two children in their sleep in eastern Canada after escaping from a reptile shop and slithering through a ventilation shaft, police said Monday.

The two young boys, aged five and seven, were at a sleepover at a friend's apartment late Sunday in the small town of Campbellton.

The snake apparently escaped from a pet store specialising in exotic animals located on the floor below the apartment.

The CTV network said a "15-foot African rock python" crawled through the ventilation shaft, made its way upstairs and then fell through the ceiling, landing on top of the two boys and smothering them.

Authorities late Monday said they were still waiting for the results of the autopsies -- to be carried out Tuesday -- to determine the cause of death.

Polls are 'waste of time' Says Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Omar

AFP, Kabul

Taliban leader Mullah Omar yesterday dismissed elections due in Afghanistan next year as "a waste of time", posing a challenge to international efforts to ensure a credible poll.

The participation of the Pashtun ethnic group -- from whom the Taliban get most of their support -- is seen as essential to the success of the presidential election, scheduled for April 5.

The vote will be an important test of Afghanistan's progress since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. The United States and other foreign donors say the poll is crucial for the country's future after Nato-led combat troops withdraw next year.

"As to the deceiving drama under the name of elections 2014, our pious people will not tire themselves out, nor will they participate in it," Omar said.

"Selection, de facto, takes place in Washington... participation in such elections is only a waste of time, nothing more."

In previous elections, the Taliban called on Afghans to boycott voting, sent fighters to block roads to polling stations and tar-

geted candidates and activists.

The reclusive one-eyed supremo issued a lengthy statement on the Internet ahead of Eid celebrations due to begin in Afghanistan tomorrow to mark the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

Omar offered glimmers of hope for peace after 12 years of fighting, saying that the Taliban -- who sheltered al-Qaeda during their harsh rule of Afghanistan from 1996-2001 -- did not seek a return to absolute power.

"(The Taliban) does not think of monopolising power," he said. "Rather we believe in reaching understanding with the Afghans regarding an Afghan-inclusive government based on Islamic principles."

During their rule, the Taliban banned girls from going to school, outlawed television, music and the cinema, and forced women wear the all-covering burqa.

But Omar, who presided over the Islamist regime, signalled a partial change to their extreme interpretation of sharia law.

"To protect ourselves from scarcity and hardships, our young generations should arm themselves with religious and modern educations because modern education is a fundamental need of every society," he said.



Don't promote Hillary Republicans threaten TV networks

AFP, Washington

The US Republican Party on Monday threatened to prevent two US television networks from carrying party primary debates if they don't abandon planned documentaries on Hillary Clinton.

NBC Entertainment is planning a miniseries and CNN is working on a documentary about the Democratic former secretary of state as she mulls a potential run for the White House in 2016.

"As an American company, you have every right to air programming of your choice," Republican National Committee chairman Reince Priebus wrote to CNN president Jeff Zucker and NBC Entertainment chairman Robert Greenblatt.

"But as American citizens, certainly you recognise why many are astounded at your actions, which appear to be a major network's thinly veiled attempt at putting a thumb on the scales of the 2016 presidential election."

She has made no announcement of her political plans but the RNC letters -- more than three years ahead of the 2016 election -- show the party's nervousness about a run by Hillary, who narrowly lost the Democratic nomination to Barack Obama in 2008.

Should CNN and NBC not agree to pull the productions before the RNC holds its summer meeting beginning August 14, Priebus told the networks he will seek a binding RNC vote "stating that the committee will neither partner with you in 2016 primary debates nor sanction primary debates which you sponsor."

Gunman kills three at US town meeting

AFP, Washington

A gunman opened fire at a small town meeting Monday in the US state of Pennsylvania, killing at least three people, police said.

Three others were wounded in the attack, and the gunman was also injured and receiving medical care, according to the local NBC affiliate.

The meeting of town supervisors in Ross Township, in the eastern US state's Monroe County, was slated to begin at 7:00 pm local time.

The Pocono Record local paper reported that an official had tackled the shooter and shot him with his own weapon. The shooter was reportedly conscious when he was taken away on a stretcher.

Monroe County police declined to comment on a possible motive for the attack.

Assange upbeat on poll chances

AFP, Sydney

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange yesterday said he had a good chance of winning election to Australia's upper house next month and pledged to give lawmakers a whistle-blowing tool to report corruption.

Assange, who is standing along with six other WikiLeaks Party candidates in the September 7 national poll, said his numbers were strong.

"We have polling over many polls now including the (ruling) ALP's own polling company UMR showing that I have 25 to 28 percent of the voting intention -- 40 percent of the voting intention for people under the age of 30," Assange told Australia's SBS television.

"That's a really very significant result," he added in an interview at the Ecuadoran embassy in London, where he has been holed up for more than a year.

Assange's WikiLeaks Party has vowed to be an "independent scrutineer of government activity" on a range of issues including tax reform, asylum-seekers and climate change policy.



Assange said one of the party's early priorities would be distributing secure WikiLeaks drives to fellow lawmakers to leak information about corruption.

Were his Australian political experiment to work Assange said he planned to export the WikiLeaks Party model to the United States, Ireland and elsewhere.

Separatist rebels kill 14 in Baluchistan

AFP, Quetta

Separatist rebels killed 14 people including three security personnel after stopping vehicles at a fake checkpoint in Pakistan's volatile southwest yesterday, officials said.

The attack appears to have mainly targeted people from the central province of Punjab who were working in Baluchistan province, one of the Pakistan's most deprived areas.

They were heading home to Punjab to celebrate the Eid al-Fitr holiday that marks the end of Ramadan.

The rebels have been fighting in Baluchistan since 2004 for political autonomy and a greater share of profits from the region's natural oil, gas and mineral resources.

Meerak Baloch, a spokesman for the Baluch Liberation Army, claimed responsibility for the killings.

ODDLY enough

First test-tube burger



AFP, London

Scientists unveiled the world's first lab-grown beef burger in London on Monday, frying it in a little oil and butter and serving it to volunteers in what they hope is the start of a food revolution.

The tasters pronounced the 140-gram (five-ounce) patty, developed at a cost of more than 250,000 euros (\$330,000) with backing from Google co-founder Sergey Brin, as "close to meat" in flavour and texture but not as juicy.

The so-called "cultured beef" -- dubbed the "Frankenburger" -- was made using strands of meat grown from muscle cells taken from a living cow, mixed with salt, egg powder and breadcrumbs and coloured with beetroot juice and saffron.

Scientists, who led the research, claimed it could eventually replace ordinary beef in the diets of millions of people and in so doing reduce the huge environmental pressure caused by raising livestock.