

NEWS IN brief

Chinese demonstrate for Bo Xilai

REUTERS, Jinan, China
A handful of supporters of ousted Chinese politician Bo Xilai protested outside a courthouse in eastern China yesterday on the eve of his trial to denounce what they said was politically motivated persecution.

About 10 people held up signs outside the courthouse in the eastern city of Jinan in Shandong

Al Jazeera launches US TV news service

BBC ONLINE

Al Jazeera is launching a new TV news channel in the United States.

Al Jazeera America will be available in almost 48 million US households, offering 14 hours of news each day.

The new network replaces Current TV, the cable television network founded by former US Vice President Al Gore, which the Qatar-owned broadcaster acquired in January

Pak army officer killed at LoC

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's military accused India yesterday of killing an army officer and seriously wounding a soldier in the latest clash across the disputed border in Kashmir.

Skirmishes have erupted across the heavily militarised Line of Control (LoC), the de facto border in Kashmir, since five Indian soldiers were killed earlier this month in an ambush which Delhi has blamed

'INS Vikrant a threat to China'

PTI, Beijing

Describing the launch of India's indigenous aircraft carrier and Japan's biggest warship since World War II as a threat to China, a report in the state-run media yesterday alleged some countries are backing New Delhi to balance Beijing's power.

The launch of India's INS Vikrant and Japan's helicopter carrier serve as a warning for China, said an article on the state-run

Pak floods affect 1m

AFP, Islamabad

Heavy monsoon rains triggering floods have affected nearly one million people and killed 139 others across Pakistan in the last three weeks, disaster management officials said yesterday.

The rains had hit 3,826 villages and destroyed 13,262 houses all over the country.



A boy, affected by nerve gas, is treated at a hospital in the Duma neighbourhood of Damascus yesterday. Syrian activists accused President Bashar al-Assad's forces of launching a nerve gas attack on rebel-held districts near Damascus. Inset, Syrian volunteers helping victims in a field hospital in the eastern Ghouta suburb of Damascus. (Story on page 1)

PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP



US demands UN access to 'attack' site

AFP, Washington

The United States yesterday demanded "immediate access" for United Nations inspectors to the site of an alleged chemical weapons attack by government forces on civilians in Syria.

"We are working urgently to gather additional information," said White House spokesman Josh Earnest in a statement expressing deep concern over the reports.

"Today, we are formally requesting that the United Nations urgently investigate this new allegation," Earnest said, saying a UN team in the country was ready to move.

"For the UN's efforts to be credible, they must have immediate access to witnesses and affected individuals, and have the ability to examine and collect physical evidence without any interference or manipulation from the Syrian government."

EU reviews arms, aid to Egypt at emergency talks

AFP, Brussels

European Union foreign ministers roundly condemned the bloodshed in Egypt as they went into emergency talks yesterday to review military and economic assistance to the crisis-wracked country.

"We must very strongly condemn the violence. It is very important that Europe speaks up," Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said as he arrived for talks that were hastily called in Europe's summer break after the deaths of nearly 1,000 people in a week of unrestrained violence.

"We need to send a common, strong and clear signal for an end of the violence," said his German counterpart Guido Westerwelle. "Europe's influence is no doubt limited, but even this limited influence must be used."

Dubbing the levels of violence "extremely worrying", EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, who remains in close touch with Egyptian players across the spectrum, said the ministers would discuss how best to promote a political solution as a way out of the crisis.

Ashton, who twice travelled to Egypt to help facilitate a compromise and who last month was the first foreign official to meet ousted Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in his secret detention centre, said on the eve of the talks that she was ready to return "if they wish me to come back".

Among the options mulled by the ministers will be withholding part of the EU's massive aid package, or conditioning its future to progress towards political compromise and a return to civilian rule.

Japan raises Fukushima alert

AFP, Tokyo

Japan yesterday issued its highest-level warning over the crippled Fukushima plant since a tsunami triggered the nuclear crisis two years ago, saying there was "no time to lose" to seal a tank that has leaked 300 tonnes of radioactive water.

Nuclear regulators said the leak represented a level-three "serious incident" on the UN's seven-point International Nuclear Event Scale (INES), which measures radiation accidents.

"Something that we were very much concerned about has occurred," Nuclear Regulation Authority chairman Shunichi Tanaka told a meeting in Tokyo. "We are in a situation where there is no time to lose."

The alert, raised from level one which indicates an "anomaly", is the most serious declared at the ruined plant since March 2011, when a quake-generated tsunami knocked out reactor cooling systems and sparked meltdowns.

At its height, the Fukushima disaster was classified as level seven - one of only two events ever rated in that category along with the Chernobyl disaster in 1986.

The NRA said in a statement that the amount of

radiation leakage and the "fact that there is no safety protective layer remaining at the facility" meant the level-three warning needed to be declared.

It will now consult with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on the reassessment, it said.

Japan's top government spokesman, chief cabinet secretary Yoshihide Suga, said the incident was "extremely deplorable".

"The government as a whole will do its utmost to prevent the leakage of contaminated water as promptly as possible," he told a news conference. "We will make a proper assessment after consulting the IAEA."

Other incidents which have been ranked level three include a 2005 radioactive waste leak at the British nuclear reprocessing facility in Sellafield.

The evaluation came a day after plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) said some 300 tonnes of radioactive water was believed to have leaked from one of the tanks that hold water used to cool Fukushima's unstable reactors.

It said the water, which has formed puddles near the tank, is so toxic that anyone exposed to it would receive the same amount of radiation in an hour that a nuclear plant worker is allowed to receive in five years.

US reopens Yemen embassy

AFP, Washington

The United States has reopened its embassy in Yemen, the State Department said Tuesday, two weeks after it closed for fear of an al-Qaida attack.

A statement said that the embassy in Sanaa had "reopened to provide limited public services" on Sunday.

Sanaa was one of 19 US consulates and embassies in the Muslim world that were shut on August 4 amid what American officials said was a threat of an imminent attack.

The other missions had already re-opened, but Yemen -- the home base of the militant faction al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula was seen as the epicenter of the threat.



Protesters with the Bradley Manning Support Network hold placards yesterday outside the gate of Fort George G Meade, Maryland. Manning was convicted of wrongfully causing intelligence to be published on the internet, but found not guilty of aiding the enemy, for sending hundreds of thousands of classified Iraq and Afghanistan war logs as well as diplomatic cables to the website WikiLeaks during his service in 2009 and 2010 as an intelligence analyst in Baghdad. (Story on page 16)

PHOTO: AFP

Pak-trained terrorists to attack India

TNN, Mumbai

The Maharashtra police have received a terror alert from central intelligence agencies warning that eight militants are undergoing training in Pakistan-based camps to attack targets in south India from Sri Lanka.

Sent by the joint director of VIP Security (under the Union home ministry) in New Delhi in mid-August, the nine-page alert states that four of the terror trainees are "Punjabis and the remaining Kashmiris or Pathans". Their "drop-off point" is expected to be around 28km off Jaffna and their target could be Mayiladuthurai or Madurai in Tamil Nadu, according to the alert.

Bus accidents kill 49 in Malaysia, Indonesia

AGENCIES

Sixteen people were killed and dozens injured yesterday when a bus plunged into a river as it returned from a church outing on Indonesia's main island of Java, police said.

The bus was carrying 60 passengers from a Jakarta church back to the capital after a visit to a hill resort when the accident happened in Cisarua, West Java province, AFP reported.

It collided with a pick-up truck then crashed into a food stall before falling up to eight metres into the river.

Meanwhile, thirty-three people are believed to be dead after a passenger bus plunged into a deep ravine near a Malaysian highland resort, an official said yesterday.

The bus fell more than 30 meters into the ravine while travelling downhill, said an official from the Fire and Rescue Department in the central Genting Highlands district, AP reported.

Bentong town police chief Mohamad Mansor Nor said he had no immediate details about the identities of the passengers on the bus.

Genting Highlands features Malaysia's only legal casino, which attracts thousands of domestic visitors and foreign tourists from Singapore and China every week. Serious accidents are rare on the relatively well-maintained roads leading to the area's main resorts.

ODDLY enough



World's smallest restaurant

STAR DESK

If you're searching for the most private restaurant dining experience possible, look no further than Solo Per Due, a small ristorante in Vacone, Italy, that only features one table and two chairs.

Aptly named "Solo Per Due", Italian for "just for two", the world's smallest restaurant only accepts two people at a time.

'God told me' to resign

Says ex-pope Benedict

REUTERS, Vatican City

Former Pope Benedict has said he resigned after "God told me to" during what he called a "mystical experience", a Catholic news agency reported.

Benedict, whose formal title is now Pope Emeritus, announced his shock resignation on February 11 and on February 28 became the first pontiff to step down in 600 years.

"God told me to do it," the Zenith agency quoted Benedict as saying to a visitor to the convent in the Vatican gardens where he is living out his retirement in near isolation.

According to the agency, Benedict told his visitor, who asked to remain anonymous, that God did not speak to him in a vision but in what the former pope called "a mystical experience".

According to Italian media, Benedict's decision to step down was influenced by the various scandals that blighted his eight-year papacy, including the arrest of his personal butler for leaking private documents alleging corruption in the Vatican.

He was succeeded by Pope Francis, the former Cardinal Jorge



Mario Bergoglio of Argentina, who was elected as the first non-European pontiff in 1,300 years.

According to the Rome-based Zenith, Benedict told his visitor that the more he observes the way Francis carries out his papal duties, the more he realised the choice was "wanted by God".

Last Sunday, Benedict spent a day at the papal summer retreat at Castel Gandolfo, south of Rome, to escape the heat of the capital.

The visit indicated that the 86-year-old ex pope's health was good enough for him to travel. There had been media reports that since his resignation, Benedict's health had deteriorated dramatically.

Cameron was behind to halt Snowden reports

REUTERS, London

Two of British Prime Minister David Cameron's most senior aides pressed the Guardian newspaper to hand over or destroy intelligence secrets leaked by Edward Snowden, political sources said yesterday.

News that Cabinet Secretary Jeremy Heywood and National Security Adviser Kim Darroch were involved drags Cameron into a storm over Britain's response to coverage of leaks from the fugitive US intelligence contractor - a response that left even its US ally talking of the importance of media freedom.

Cameron, on holiday in Cornwall, made no immediate comment.

The Guardian, media freedom activists and human rights lawyers say pressure on the paper over the Snowden material and the separate detention of the partner of a Guardian journalist on Sunday have represented an assault on independent journalism.

The government says its intelligence agencies act within the law and the Snowden leaks, which revealed US and British surveillance of global communication networks, threaten national security. The United States has brought espionage charges against Snowden, who has found temporary asylum in Russia.

Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger said on Tuesday that he had been approached weeks ago by "a very senior official claiming to represent the views of the prime minister" and by "shadowy Whitehall figures", a reference to London's government district.

Rusbridger said he had been told the paper would face legal action if it refused to destroy or hand over data from Snowden.

Edward Snowden, a revolutionary icon?

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

What makes a radical icon? Edward Snowden may not look (in spite of this mockup) much like Che Guevara or exhibit the revolutionary hero's flair for posing with berets, cigars and golf clubs, but that has not discouraged entrepreneurs in Russia and China from bidding for the rights to put the elusive whistleblower's face on T-shirts and posters. They appear to think his bespectacled, serious visage can become the Guevaresque image of subversion for our time. Are they right?

Revolutionary heroes don't have to look like Che to make it as poster boys. Karl Marx was a bookish gent with a huge bushy beard but that has not stopped his image decorating many a student bedroom down the years. Even Arthur Scargill once had his admirers. Compared with them, Edward Snowden has many of the conventional properties of a pop-culture icon.

Snowden is no Che - but who was Che? A fantasy figure of guerrilla violence for an age that preferred its politics drugged up with romantic fantasy. Snowden is an icon for a less deluded era when the true dimensions of power are more apparent and the true risks of dissent more sombrely visible.

To fight the power today you need a laptop, not Che's gun, and the skills and intelligence to outwit a vast surveillance state. Snowden looks like that guy, because he is that guy. A T-shirt hero? Why not?

