

NEWS IN
brief

Somali president survives killing bid

AFP, Mogadishu
Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud escaped unhurt yesterday from an ambush on his heavily armoured convoy claimed by al-Qaeda linked Islamists, the latest attack targeting the internationally backed leader.
Shebab gunmen claimed to have ambushed the convoy as it travelled to the port of Merka south of the capital and boasted of destroying vehicles with rocket-propelled grenades.

'Mandela's discharge shows progress'

BBC ONLINE
Nelson Mandela's discharge from hospital after nearly three months of treatment shows he has made "progress", South Africa's president said yesterday.
Jacob Zuma said South Africans were "very happy" that the anti-apartheid hero, 95, had returned home on Sunday. His home in Johannesburg's Houghton suburb has been "reconfigured" so that he continues to receive intensive care.

Argentina's Menem back on court

AFP, Buenos Aires
Argentina's ex-president Carlos Menem was back in court for a new trial Monday, this time for allegedly falsifying his personal tax returns, the Supreme Court announced.
Menem, 83, who was president from 1989-1999 and is still a senator, was in court with his daughter Zulema. Prosecutors maintain in this case that he was derelict in his duties as a public official and dishonest about his returns. On June 13 Menem was sentenced to seven years in prison for organizing contraband arms shipments to Croatia and Ecuador dur-

Top Chinese official sacked for graft

AFP, Beijing
Top Chinese economic official Jiang Jiemin has been sacked as head of the body overseeing state-owned companies for "suspected serious disciplinary violations", the official Xinhua news agency reported yesterday as the country's leaders step up a campaign against graft.
Jiang was the first member of the Communist Party's current 205-person Central Committee to face investigation, state-run



SYRIA CRISIS
US President Barack Obama delivers a statement on Syria during a meeting with members of Congress at the White House in Washington, DC, yesterday. Seen L-R: Assistant Majority Leader Senator Dick Durbin; National Security Advisor Susan Rice; Speaker of the House John Boehner; US President Barack Obama; House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi; Senate Minority leader Mitch McConnell and House Majority Leader Eric Cantor.

Obama plans aid to rebels

CNN ONLINE
US plans for strikes against Syria may be coupled with increased support for rebel forces in that country's civil war, two leading Republican senators said after meeting with President Barack Obama on Monday.
Obama met in the Oval Office with Sens John McCain, and Sen Lindsey Graham, both members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, the White House said. After the meeting, McCain and Graham said the United States needs to help the rebels reverse battlefield gains by troops loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.
The United States and several of its leading allies accuse al-Assad's forces of resorting to poison gas attacks against rebel forces and civilians, including an August 21 attack near Damascus the Obama administration says killed more than 1,400 people.
Administration officials will be conducting classified briefings on Syria for Congress nearly every day this week. The president will meet Tuesday morning with House Speaker John Boehner and Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, congressional aides said, and he'd already planned talks with the leaders of the key national security committees in the House and Senate.
No vote is expected until after lawmakers reconvene from recess on September 9. McCain, who has called for US intervention in Syria since early 2012, criticized Obama for seeking a vote before striking -- but said it would be "catastrophic" for Congress to reject Obama's call to authorize military force.
"It would undermine the credibility of the United States of America and the president of the United States," McCain said. "None of us want that."

Israel tests missiles Arch enemies find common ground fueling tension

REUTERS, Jerusalem/moscow
Israel tested a US-backed missile system in the Mediterranean yesterday but did not announce the launch in advance, prompting a disclosure by Russia that kept the world on edge as the United States weighed an attack on Syria.
The morning launch was first reported by Moscow media that quoted Russian defense officials as saying two ballistic "objects" had been fired eastward from the center of the sea - roughly in the direction of Syria.
The news ruffled financial markets until Israel's Defence Ministry said that it, along with a Pentagon team, had carried out a test-launch of a Sparrow missile. The Sparrow, which simulates the long-range missiles of Syria and Iran, is used for target practice by Israel's US-backed ballistic shield Arrow.
"Israel routinely fires missiles or drones off its shores to test its own ballistic defense capabilities," a US official said in

Washington.
Western naval forces have been gathering in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea since President Bashar al-Assad was accused of carrying out an August 21 gas attack in his more than two-year-old conflict with rebels trying to topple him.
Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Yaalon shrugged off a question from reporters on whether the launch might have been ill-timed. He said Israel had to work to maintain its military edge and "this necessitates field trials and, accordingly, a successful trial was conducted to test our systems. And we will continue to develop and to research and to equip the IDF (Israel Defence Forces) with the best systems in the world."
A Russian Defence Ministry spokesman quoted by the Interfax news agency said the launch was picked up by an early warning radar station at Armavir, near the Black Sea, which is designed to detect missiles from Europe and Iran.

REUTERS, Jerusalem/riyadh
If President Barack Obama has disappointed Syrian rebels by deferring to Congress before bombing Damascus, he has also dismayed the United States' two main allies in the Middle East.
Israel and Saudi Arabia have little love for each other but both are pressing their mutual friend in the White House to hit President Bashar al-Assad hard. And both do so with one eye fixed firmly not on Syria but on their common adversary - Iran.
Israel's response to Obama's surprise move to delay air strikes made clear that connection: looking soft on Assad after accusing him of killing hundreds of people with chemical weapons may embolden his backers in Tehran to develop nuclear arms, Israeli officials said. And if they do, Israel may strike Iran alone, unsure Washington can be trusted.
The Saudi monarchy, though lacking Israel's readiness to attack Iran, can share the Jewish state's concern that neither may now look with confidence

to Washington to curb what Riyadh sees as a drive by its Persian rival to dominate the Arab world.
Last year, Obama assured Israelis that he would "always have Israel's back". Now Netanyahu is reassuring them they can manage without uncertain US protection against Iran, which has called for Israel's destruction but denies developing nuclear weapons.
That may not reassure a US administration which has tried to steer Netanyahu away from unilateral action against Iran that could stir yet more chaos in the already explosive Middle East.
Israelis contrast the "red line" Netanyahu has set for how close Iran may come to nuclear weapons capability before Israel strikes with Obama's "red line" on Assad's use of chemical weapons - seemingly passed without US military action so far.
Saudi Arabia, like Israel heavily dependent on the United States for arms supplies, is engaged in a historic confrontation with Iran for regional influence - a contest shaped by their

leading roles in the rival Sunni and Shia branches of Islam.
Riyadh is a prime backer of Sunni rebels fighting Assad, whose Alawite minority is a Shia offshoot. It sees toppling Assad as checking Iran's ambition not just in Syria but in other Arab states including the Gulf, where it mistrusts Shias in Saudi Arabia itself and in neighboring Bahrain, Yemen and Iraq.
Saudi King Abdullah's wish for US action against Iran was memorably contained in leaked US diplomatic cables, including one in which a Saudi envoy said the monarch wanted Washington to "cut off the head of the snake" to end Tehran's nuclear threat.
Israel does not share the Saudi enthusiasm for the Syrian rebel cause, despite its concern about Assad's role as a link between Iran and Lebanese and Palestinian enemies. The presence in rebel ranks of Sunni Islamist militants, some linked to al-Qaeda, worries the Jewish state - though Riyadh, too, keen to curb al-Qaeda, which calls the royal family American stooges.

FUKUSHIMA CRISIS
Japan announces emergency fund

AFP, Tokyo
Tokyo yesterday unveiled a half-billion dollar plan to stem radioactive water leaks at Fukushima, creating a wall of ice underneath the stricken plant, as the government elbowed the operator aside.
Acknowledging global concerns over the "haphazard" management of the crisis by Tokyo Electric Power (TEPCO), Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said his administration will step in with public money to get the job done.
Thousands of tonnes of radioactive water are being stored in temporary tanks at the site, 220 kilometres north of the Japanese capital, much of it having been used to cool molten reactors wrecked by the tsunami of March 2011.
The discovery of leaks from some of these tanks or from pipes feeding them, as well as radiation hotspots on the ground even where no water is evident, has created a growing sense of crisis.
Some of the highly toxic water that has escaped may have made its way into the Pacific Ocean, TEPCO has admitted.

Never too old to chase dreams
At 64, woman swims for three days to make history

AFP, Miami
Diana Nyad swam into the history books on Monday, completing a marathon three-day crossing from Cuba to Florida to become the first person to do so without a protective shark cage.
The 64-year-old American, who left a Havana yacht club early Saturday, arrived on a Key West beach to realize her lifetime quest after four previous attempts failed amid stormy weather and jellyfish attacks. She did it in 52 hours, 54 minutes and 18.6 seconds, according to her Facebook page.
"I've got three messages," a visibly exhausted but clearly ecstatic Nyad told cheering crowds as she set foot on dry land.
"One is, we should never, ever give up. Two is, you never are too old to chase your dreams. Three is, it looks like a solitary sport but it's a team," Nyad added in a nod to the supporters.
Nyad's pursuit was followed closely by people around the globe, who took to social media to first encourage and then congratulate her.
Even the White House, preoccupied with the conflict in Syria, tweeted on behalf of President Barack Obama: "Congratulations to @diananyad. Never give up on your dreams."

Delhi gang-rape verdicts on Sept 10

AFP, New Delhi
The trial of four adult suspects accused of the fatal gang-rape of a student on a New Delhi bus in December will conclude on September 10, the presiding judge Yogesh Khanna said yesterday.
Dismissing pleas for more time by defence lawyers, the judge told the court: "You've delayed this trial far enough. My judgement will come on the 10th."
The first verdict in the case was delivered on Saturday in a juvenile court where a teenager, aged 17 at the time of the assault, was found guilty and sentenced to three years in a detention centre.
The four adult suspects face the death-penalty if convicted of the most serious charges against them which include murder, gang-rape and theft.

ODDLY enough



Pilot at the age of five!

IANAS, Beijing
A five-year-old boy from China has become the Guinness world record holder for the youngest person to pilot a plane.
He Yide, nicknamed Duoduo, made a 35-minute flight in an ultralight aircraft across the Beijing Wildlife Park Aug 31, Chinese media reported yesterday.
Zhang Yonghui, the person in charge of the aviation club where Duoduo learned flying, said the distance of the flight was 30 km.
He Liesheng, the boy's father, said he wanted his son to become braver by flying a plane and also develop his curiosity and desire to explore, according to the Global Times.
The boy has also sailed a yacht in an international competition and climbed the Fujiyama mountain in Japan during a rainstorm, the media

SNOWDEN LEAKS
Wary of Pakistan, US steps up surveillance

AFP, Washington
While US intelligence agencies spend billions monitoring enemies like al-Qaeda and Iran, they pay just as much attention to ally Pakistan, The Washington Post reported yesterday.
The United States has intensified surveillance of Pakistan's nuclear weapons, is concerned about biological and chemical arms sites there and tries to evaluate the loyalty of Pakistani counter-terrorism agents recruited by the CIA, the Post said.
It quoted a 178-page summary of what it called the US intelligence community's "black budget" and said the documents were provided by fugitive intelligence leaker Edward Snowden.
The paper said the documents reveal broad new levels of mistrust in an already fragile security partnership.
Pakistan's foreign ministry reacted by saying it is fully committed to "objectives of disarmament and non-proliferation" and follows International Atomic Energy Agency standards.
The Washington Post said US efforts to gather intelligence on Pakistan are more extensive than previously disclosed by US officials.
America has delivered nearly \$26 billion in aid to Pakistan over the past 12 years, with the money aimed at stabilizing the country and ensuring its cooperation in counterterrorism efforts, according to the paper.
But now that Osama bin Laden is dead and al-Qaeda is weaker, US spy agencies appear to be shifting their attention to dangers that have surfaced outside Pakistani areas patrolled by CIA drones.
"If the Americans are expanding their surveillance capabilities, it can only mean one thing," said Husain Haqqani, who served as Pakistan's ambassador to the US from 2008-11. "The mistrust now exceeds the trust."

SPYING CLAIMS
Brazil, Mexico summon US envoys

AFP, Brasilia
Brazil and Mexico demanded explanations from the United States on Monday over allegations that the National Security Agency spied on the communications of their presidents.
Brazil's Foreign Minister Luis Figueiredo said the interception of Internet data from President Dilma Rousseff reported by US journalist Glenn Greenwald, if proven, "represents an unacceptable and unallowable violation of Brazilian sovereignty."
In Mexico, the foreign ministry said it sent a diplomatic note to Washington calling for an "exhaustive investigation" into claims that the NSA spied on President Enrique Pena Nieto's emails before his election last year.
Mexico warned that, if true, the snooping would be a "violation of international rights" and that it "rejects and condemns any espionage work on Mexican citizens."

NAZI WAR CRIMES
Thirty Auschwitz guards to face criminal probes

AFP, Ludwigsburg
German office investigating Nazi war crimes yesterday said it would send files on 30 former Auschwitz death camp personnel to state prosecutors with a recommendation to pursue charges.
Chief investigator Kurt Schrimm told reporters that the suspects were former Auschwitz guards now aged up to 97 and would face possible charges of accessory to murder.
"The cases will be handed over to the respective public prosecutor's offices," Schrimm said.
Schrimm's Central Office for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes in the southwestern city of Ludwigsburg has carried out more than 7,000 probes but has no powers to charge suspects itself.
Instead it sends case files to regional prosecutors who then decide whether to pursue probes against suspects, who must also be judged fit to stand trial by the courts.
The investigative office, set up in 1958, said it had initially identified 49 former guards at the camp in what was Nazi-occupied Poland who were still alive but nine had since died.
Thirty live in Germany and will now be subject to criminal investigation.
Another seven live abroad and the investigation against them in Ludwigsburg is still ongoing. Two people could not be found, the office said, and one had already been under investigation in the southern city of Stuttgart.

Pak woman declares herself prophet

PTI, Lahore
Pakistani police have arrested a woman under the controversial blasphemy laws for declaring herself a 'Prophet'.
According to police, Salma Fatima, wife of Tanvir, who lived in the vicinity of Gulberg, a thickly-populated locality of Lahore, distributed 'blasphemous' pamphlets in the area on Monday morning.
In the pamphlets, police said not only she declared herself a 'Prophet of Muslims but also had committed blasphemy in the honour of Prophet Muhammad.'
According to an eyewitness, before the mob turned violent, the police arrested the woman and shifted her to women police station.