

NEWSIN brief

Maldivian president ends re-election bid

AFP, Male

Maldivian President Mohamed Waheed has withdrawn his candidature for fresh elections which were ordered by the Supreme Court after a previous round of voting was annulled, an official said yesterday.

Waheed quit the re-election bid after getting just over five percent of the popular vote at the September 7 elections which were controversially cancelled by the country's highest court earlier this week.

N Korea warns of 'all-out war'

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday issued a fresh warning of an "all-out war", urging the United States to stop military drills and what it described as "nuclear blackmail".

The comments come after a two-day joint naval drill between Japan, South Korea and the US, which included an American nuclear aircraft carrier, sparked a series of angry responses and threats from Pyongyang.

Factory blast kills in Vietnam

AFP, Hanoi

At least 21 people have died and scores more have been injured in an explosion at a fireworks factory in a military complex in Vietnam, an army official said yesterday.

Plumes of black smoke billowed from the Z121 military facility, around 120 kilometres north of Hanoi, as fireworks exploded uncontrollably for several hours, witnesses said. Some 2,000 local residents were also evacuated. The cause of the explosion was not known immediately.

US ship detained by Venezuela

BBC ONLINE

Guyana yesterday said the Venezuelan navy has entered its territorial waters and detained a US-operated ship which was granted a contract to look for oil in the area.

The government said the Venezuelan actions in the disputed Essequibo region constituted "a serious threat to peace in the region".

Quake hits southwest Pakistan

AFP, Quetta

A 5.1 magnitude earthquake struck southwest Pakistan yesterday, meteorological officials said, with tremors felt in some of the areas ravaged by a deadly quake last month.

The earthquake struck at a depth of 10 kilometres, and its epicentre was 80 kilometres southwest of Khuzdar in Baluchistan province, senior meteorologist Tauseef Alam said.

No loss of life or property was immediately reported.



CYCLONE PHAILIN

Indian evacuees travel in an auto rickshaw as they leave their village towards a safe place in Sanabandha Village near Gopalpur, about 195 south from eastern city Bhubaneswar, yesterday. *Top right*, waves crash onto the shore in Visakhapatnam district and *bottom right*, evacuated villagers eat their midday meal at a relief camp in Andhra Pradesh. Rain and wind lashed India's east coast yesterday, forcing more than half a million people to flee to shelters as one of the country's largest cyclones closed in, threatening to cut a swathe of devastation in the region.

PHOTO:
AFP, REUTERS

African leaders urge ICC to halt Kenya cases

AFP, Addis Ababa

African nations yesterday urged the International Criminal Court to defer the crimes against humanity trials of Kenya's leadership as they convened a special summit on their worsening relations with the tribunal.

The meeting at the African Union headquarters comes amid mounting tensions with the ICC, which has been accused of acting like a neo-colonialist institution that has singled out Africans since being set up as the world's first permanent court to try genocide and war crimes.

In his opening speech, Ethiopian Prime Minister and AU chairperson Hailemariam Desalegn alleged that the Hague-based tribunal "has continued to operate in complete disregard" of African governments.

"I wish to note that 34 member states of our union joined the ICC perhaps fully convinced that the organisation would promote the cause of justice with a sense of impartiality and fairness. The practice so far however leaves so much to be desired," he said.

"The unfair treatment that we have been subjected to is completely unacceptable," he added, accusing the court of ignoring

efforts in Kenya and Sudan -- whose leaders have been indicted by the ICC -- to resolve their problems internally.

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta and his deputy William Ruto have been charged with crimes against humanity for allegedly masterminding a vicious campaign of ethnic violence that left at least 1,100 dead and more than 600,000 homeless after disputed 2007 elections.

Now allies and elected this year on a platform of national reconciliation, they argue the case is violating Kenyan sovereignty, undoing efforts at national reconciliation and hampering their running of the country.

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, who along with Kenyatta was among the heads of state attending the summit, is wanted by the court in The Hague on 10 counts of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in Sudan's Darfur conflict.

The ICC so far has issued indictments linked to conflicts in nine countries, all of them in Africa. Diplomats with the 54-member AU say there was a sentiment the court -- which is an independent body and not part of the United Nations system -- was turning a blind eye to other parts of the world.

Typhoon Nari hits Philippines

13 killed; 2m remain without power

AFP, Manila

Typhoon Nari pounded the northern Philippines early yesterday, killing 13 people, ripping roofs off thousands of buildings, and leaving more than two million without power.

Nari tore into the country's northeast coast around midnight (1600 GMT Friday), toppling trees and pylons as it cut a westward swathe through the farming regions of the main island of Luzon, officials said.

"While there were relatively few casualties, a lot of areas are still flooded," said head of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

Military and police rescuers trucked residents out of flooded villages as the weather improved after the typhoon's 120 kilometres per hour winds swept out to the South China Sea yesterday morning.

Kidnap was 'attempted coup': Libya PM

BBC ONLINE

Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeidan has said his brief kidnap this week was an "attempted coup", blaming his political opponents for the attack.

In a TV address to the nation, he said an unnamed political party in the congress was behind the abduction.

Ali Zeidan was seized from a Tripoli hotel on Thursday and held for several hours by armed militiamen. He praised the armed groups that came to rescue him and later called for calm in the increasingly lawless country.

In the TV address with members of his cabinet standing staunchly around him, Zeidan said that his kidnap "bears the hallmarks of an attempted coup d'etat against legitimacy".

Referring to his political opponents as a "dangerous minority", the prime minister said they had tried to secure enough votes in the congress to have him dismissed.

"When they failed to bring down the government through democratic means, they resorted to the use of force," he added.

Zeidan's speech shed light on an internal political struggle that has long been seen as the source of Libya's lack of progress since the end of 2011, when Muammar Gaddafi was ousted, the BBC's Rana Jawad in Tripoli says.

The US, UK and France, along with the UN, have condemned the abduction and pledged their support for Libya's transition to democracy.



This official White House photo shows President Barack Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama, and their daughter Malia meet with Malala Yousafzai, the young Pakistani schoolgirl who was shot in the head by the Taliban a year ago, in the Oval Office, October 11, 2013. The Obamas hailed Malala, 16, for her "inspiring and passionate" work on behalf of girls in Pakistan.

PHOTO: AFP

Mediterranean turning to refugee 'cemetery'

BBC ONLINE

Malta's Prime Minister Joseph Muscat said European waters close to Africa are turning into a cemetery and that Malta felt "abandoned" by rest of Europe, after another boat laden with migrants capsized.

Malta and Italy launched a rescue operation after a boat carrying 200 migrants capsized just before sunset on Friday, killing at least 50 people.

It happened 120km off Lampedusa, the Italian island where at least 300 migrants drowned last week.

Mr. Muscat said prompt action between Malta and Italy had saved lives, but he complained that the rest of Europe had supplied only "empty talk".

"I don't know how many more people need to die at sea before something gets done," he said.

"Rules need to change, whether they are tighter or looser is not the issue, the fact is that this thing is broken and it needs to be fixed.

"As things stand we are building a cemetery within our Mediterranean Sea."

The prime minister said the dead included three small children.

Earlier on Friday, at least 500 other migrants travelling in separate boats were rescued in coastguard operations near the Italian island of Sicily.

Also on Friday, a separate boat accident off the Egyptian port of Alexandria claimed the lives of at least 12 migrants.

After last week's tragedy off Lampedusa the European Commission called for the EU to launch Mediterranean-wide search and rescue patrols to intercept migrant boats.

The EU's Frontex border agency, set up in 2004, has seen its budget cut from 118m euros (£100m; \$160m) in 2011 to 85m euros in 2013.

The BBC says European leaders face a quandary as they struggle to balance political pressures to restrict migrant numbers with the need to assist those desperate enough to risk such a perilous journey.

Pak army chief backs talks with Taliban

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's powerful army chief General Ashfaq Kayani yesterday said the army supports the government's policy of dialogue with the Taliban to end the insurgency wracking the country.

The main Pakistani political parties last month backed a government proposal to seek negotiations with the militants, who have been waging a bloody insurgency against the state since 2007.

But the umbrella Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) faction, a loose coalition of militant groups led by Hakimullah Mehsud since 2009, responded with a list of preconditions.

These included a government ceasefire and the withdrawal of troops from the tribal areas along the Afghan border where the militants have hideouts.

During the televised address at Pakistan Military Academy, the general said it was essential to find a solution to terrorism which he described as negating the basic ideology of the nation and the teachings of Islam.

"The military will be more than happy if a solution to the problem is found through dialogue," he said, adding that the use of force would be the last option.

Kayani, who is retiring from his post next month at the end of a second tenure as army chief, dismissed speculations that the failure of counter-insurgency operations forced the military to go for dialogue.

Secret US court okays more phone tracking

AFP, Washington

The secret federal court overseeing US wiretapping programs has extended the government's authority to collect US telephone records, the office of the Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said late Friday.

Clapper "has decided to declassify and disclose publicly that the government filed an application with the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court seeking renewal of the authority to collect telephony metadata in bulk, and that the court renewed that authority," the statement read.

This disclosure is "consistent with his prior declassification decision and in light of the significant and continuing public interest in the telephony metadata collection program," the statement read.

Hillary backs debate after NSA leaks

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Hillary Clinton has called for a "sensible adult conversation", to be held in a transparent way, about the boundaries of state surveillance highlighted by the leaking of secret NSA files by the whistleblower Edward Snowden.

In a boost to Nick Clegg, the British deputy prime minister, who is planning to start conversations within government about the oversight of Britain's intelligence agencies, the former US secretary of state said it would be wrong to shut down a debate.

Hillary, who is seen as a frontrunner for the 2016 US presidential election, said at Chatham House in London: "This is a very important question. On the intelligence issue, we are democracies: thank goodness, both the US and the UK."

"We need to have a sensible adult conversation about what is necessary to be done, and how to do it, in a way that is as transparent as it can be, with as much oversight and citizens' understanding as there can be."

UK's leading daily The Guardian has been facing a government backlash over publishing articles based on the leaked documents.

In her remarks, Hillary did not comment on the UK's oversight arrangements. But she indicated she was wholly supportive of the approach adopted by Barack Obama who – in contrast to Downing Street – has said he welcomes a debate on surveillance in the wake of the NSA leaks.

Answering a question from the Guardian at Chatham House, she said the discussion had to take place within a framework that addressed issues of privacy and protection of citizens because some surveillance programmes remained a "really critical ingredient in our homeland security."

"So how do we sort all of this out? This is a problem that is well over a decade old, where these capacities have corresponded with increasing outreach to consumers on the business side and increasing concern about security on the government side. People need to be better informed," she added.



MAIL ONLINE

It might look a little bit like a novelty static caravan, but Belgian architects have managed to squeeze essential components of a normal home into a giant egg.

The pod, which measures only 215 square feet, contains a kitchen, bathroom and bedroom space in a polyester and plywood shell.

The design was originally conceived as a solution for an Italian design firm that was struggling to get planning permission for an office extension.

The Blob VB3 micro-house came about as the local planning authority refused to give permission for any permanent structures.

The firm says its egg is easily transportable and can be used as an office, guestroom or garden house as the space is so flexible.

KERRY-KARZAI TALKS

Progress made on US-Afghan deal

AFP, Kabul

President Hamid Karzai and US Secretary of State John Kerry held a second day of talks in Kabul yesterday after making progress over a long-delayed deal on the future of US forces in Afghanistan.

Karzai said this week that he was prepared to walk away from negotiations on the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) that would allow some US troops to stay in the country after 2014.

But the United States has pressed for the pact to be signed within weeks so that the US-led Nato military coalition can schedule its withdrawal of 87,000 combat troops by December 2014.

"The tone was constructive throughout the entire conversation," a US official told reporters after meetings late Friday. "It is fair to say that the differences that exist were narrowed on the vast of majority of the outstanding issues."

Karzai's spokesman also said negotiations had advanced.

The Afghan leader has previously said the sticking points were US demands for the right to conduct unilateral military operations against militants, and on how the US would pledge to protect Afghanistan.

The talks between Kerry and Karzai came as the US said it had captured a senior leader of the Pakistani Taliban, Latif Mehsud, who is being held in Afghanistan according to the Pentagon.

The Washington Post reported Mehsud was seen by Afghanistan as a possible go-between in the struggling peace efforts between Kabul and the Afghan Taliban.

Karzai has said he refuses to be rushed into signing any BSA deal, and would first seek approval from a traditional grand assembly of tribal leaders to be convened in about month's time.