

NEWSIN brief

UK phone-hacking trial opens today

AFP, London

The first trial from the phone-hacking scandal that sank Rupert Murdoch's News of the World opens in Britain today with his key aide Rebekah Brooks and the prime minister's former media chief Andy Coulson among the defendants.

The charges range from illegally hacking the mobile phone voicemails of more than 600 victims.

UAE to give \$3.9b to Egypt in aid

AFP, Dubai

The United Arab Emirates agreed Saturday to give Egypt's military-installed government another \$3.9 billion in aid after transferring \$1 billion in July, the official WAM news agency said.

The UAE and other Gulf monarchies were staunch supporters of the July 3 overthrow of Egypt's first Islamist president, Mohamed Morsi, and have vowed to help the interim government address the economic devastation wrought by two years of political turmoil.

Britain braces for powerful storm

AFP, London

Britain was braced for its worst storm in a decade yesterday, with heavy rain and winds of more than 80 miles an hour set to batter the south of the country.

The Met Office national weather centre warned of falling trees, damage to buildings and disruption to power supplies and transport when the storm hits overnight to Monday. It also predicted localized flooding due to heavy rain fall.

Prison riot kills

7 in Mexico

CNN ONLINE

Seven inmates were killed during a prison riot Saturday in Mexico's Gulf Coast state of Tamaulipas, authorities said.

The riot began at 6:00pm when inmates wielding homemade knives went at each other during a fight. Saturday's incident took place in the same prison where 31 inmates died and another 13 were injured in January 2012. The situation reportedly was under control within an hour.

Thousands rally in Pak Kashmir

AFP, Muzaffarabad

Thousands of Kashmiri people observed a "black day" in Pakistani Kashmir yesterday, rallying at an event organised by Islamists against Indian "brutalities" and occupation of the Himalayan region.

The rally was set up by the United Jihad Council (UJC), which consists of 16 Islamist groups, militant outfits and political parties.



Smoke rises after a bomb exploded near a public ground where Narendra Modi was to address a rally in the eastern Indian city of Patna, yesterday. Inset, a wounded being carried out by security forces from the ground. At least six crude bombs exploded near the public ground in Patna yesterday killing 5 people. (Story on page 16)

PHOTO: REUTERS



End dynastic politics to earn respect

Modi tells Congress after it slammed the Gujarat CM for calling Rahul 'shehzade'

PTI, Patna

BJP leader Narendra Modi yesterday said he will stop calling Rahul Gandhi as 'shahzada' (prince) if the Congress, whose leaders are "uncomfortable" with this, decides to discontinue its "dynastic rule".

Five people were killed and 66 injured in six serial bomb blasts near the venue of the BJP prime ministerial candidate's rally in Patna minutes before he reached there to address a huge gathering.

"Congress leaders are troubled with Rahul being referred to as shehzade. They are unable to sleep well," an unfazed Modi said at the poll rally defying the blast impact.

Modi said people dislike dynastic rule as much as the Congress is feeling offended over this.

"I will stop calling shehzade if the Congress promises to do way with dynastic politics," Modi said.

Taking strong exception to Narendra Modi addressing Rahul Gandhi as "Shehzada", Congress on Saturday did some tough talking as it threatened that its workers were capable of stopping such "undignified" language but were restrained due to respect for laws and the Model Code.

The ruling party said its vice-president should be addressed in the same manner in which he addresses people with respect as use of words like "Shehzada" will not be tolerated.

The Congress was reacting to Modi's remarks made on Friday in Jhansi where he attacked Rahul for saying that ISI was in touch with Muslim youth of Uttar Pradesh's Muzaffarnagar and dared him to reveal the identity of such persons or apologise publicly for levelling "serious allegations" and "defaming" the entire community.

Obama aware of Merkel -spying since 2010

New report says US 'bugged' her phone since 2002

AFP, Berlin

US President Barack Obama was personally informed of mobile phone tapping against German Chancellor Angela Merkel, which may have begun as early as 2002, German media reported Sunday as a damaging espionage scandal widened.

Bild am Sonntag newspaper quoted US intelligence sources as saying that National Security Agency chief Keith Alexander had briefed Obama on the operation against Merkel in 2010.

"Obama did not halt the operation but rather let it continue," the newspaper quoted a high-ranking NSA official as saying.

News weekly Der Spiegel reported that leaked NSA documents showed that Merkel's phone had appeared on a list of spying targets since 2002, and was still under surveillance shortly before Obama visited Berlin in June.

Germany will send its own spy chiefs to Washington soon to demand answers.

The suspicion also prompted Berlin to summon the US ambassador -- a highly unusual move between the close allies.

The Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung reported that



Obama had told Merkel during their call that he had been unaware of any spying against her. It did not cite its sources.

Der Spiegel said he told her that if he had been informed of the operation he would have stopped it at once.

Bild am Sonntag said that

Obama wanted to be informed in detail about Merkel, who has played a decisive role in the eurozone debt crisis and is widely seen as Europe's most powerful leader.

As a result, the report said, the NSA stepped up its surveillance of her communications, targeting not only the mobile phone she uses to conduct business for her conservative Christian Democratic Union party but also her encrypted official device.

It said US intelligence specialists were then able to monitor the content of her conversations as well as text messages, which Merkel sends by the dozen each day to key associates.

Bild said only the specially secured land line in her office was out of the reach of US spies.

The intelligence gathered was forwarded straight to the White House, without bypassing the NSA headquarters in Fort Meade, Maryland, according to the report.

Syria meets arms deadline

Says OPCW; 19 rebel groups shun Geneva talks

AFP, The Hague

Syria handed over a detailed plan to destroy its chemical stockpile on time, international watchdog OPCW said yesterday, as 19 rebel groups reject Geneva talks terming the initiative as a treason against revolution.

"On 24 October 2013, the Syrian Arab Republic submitted to the OPCW its formal initial declaration covering its chemical weapons programme," the watchdog said in a statement, adding that Damascus had had until Sunday to do so.

Damascus was required to submit the destruction plan under a US-Russian deal agreed last month that headed off military strikes on Syria. The accord also gives Syria up to mid-2014 to destroy its chemical arsenal.

President Bashar al-Assad's regime has already handed over an inventory of its chemical weapons and facilities, and international inspectors are already busy inspecting and destroying them.

The OPCW said a first monthly report of the international inspectors, covering their work on the ground since October 1, is ready and will be sent to the UN Security Council by UN chief Ban Ki-moon.

Meanwhile, powerful armed groups in Syria said attending peace talks or negotiating with the regime would be an act of betrayal, as fighting raged yesterday near Iraq and in Homs.

The joint declaration by the 19 Islamist groups fighting to topple President Bashar al-Assad cast further doubt on whether the long-delayed peace talks dubbed "Geneva 2" will actually go ahead.

It also comes as the UN-Arab League peace envoy to Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, prepares to travel to Damascus today.

The statement comes weeks after dozens of major insurgent groups across Syria said the Western-backed opposition umbrella grouping, the National Coalition, had "failed".



Protesters march through downtown Washington DC during the "Stop Watching Us: A Rally Against Mass Surveillance" protesting surveillance by the US National Security Agency in front of the US Capitol building in Washington, DC, on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Japan warns China on use of force

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's premiere Shinjo Abe warned China yesterday against forcibly changing the regional balance of power, as reports said Tokyo had scrambled fighter jets in response to Chinese military aircraft flying near Okinawa.

Jiji Press and Kyodo News reported yesterday that Japan had deployed jets for two days running in response to four Chinese military aircraft flying over international waters near the Okinawa island chain.

Japan's military is on increased alert as Tokyo and Beijing pursue a war of words over the disputed islands in the East China Sea that lie between Okinawa and Taiwan.

On Saturday China responded angrily after a report said Japan had drafted plans to shoot down foreign drones that encroach on its airspace if warnings to leave are ignored.

Tokyo drew up the proposals after a Chinese military drone entered Japan's air defence identification zone near the disputed islands in the East China Sea last month, Kyodo said. "We will express our intention as a state not to tolerate a change in the status quo by force. We must conduct all sorts of activities such as surveillance and intelligence for that purpose," Shinjo said in an address to the military.

"If Japan takes enforcement measures such as shooting down aircraft, as it says it will, that would constitute a serious provocation, an act of war of sorts, and we would have to take firm countermeasures, and all consequences would be the responsibility of the side that caused the provocation," China's defence ministry spokesman Geng Yansheng said in comments posted on the ministry's website.

Anti-US signs removed from Tehran

CNN ONLINE

Anti-American sentiment is nothing new in Iran. But what about government officials ordering that billboards expressing such views be taken down?

That's what is happening in Tehran, where billboards bearing anti-US slogans were collected, according to the state-run Islamic Republic News Agency.

The move comes during a seeming thaw in US-Iran relations, amid ongoing talks over the latter's nuclear program. US President Barack Obama and Iranian Hassan Rohani have even exchanged letters, with both signaling openness to further improvement.

Still, like the stringent US-led sanctions imposed on Iran, the animosity and tension aren't entirely gone.

Spate of attacks kills 61 in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

Ten bombings mainly targeting Shia-majority areas of Baghdad province killed at least 41 people yesterday, while 20 died in bombings and shootings elsewhere in Iraq, officials said.

The attacks are the latest in a surge in violence that has killed over 650 people so far this month, and more than 5,350 this year.

Nine blasts hit different areas in and around Baghdad and also wounded more than 110 people, security and medical officials said.

One of the worst-hit neighbourhoods was Shaab in north Baghdad, where two car bombs exploded in a commercial area, killing at least eight people and wounding at least 18.

Blasts also struck the areas of Bayaa, Baladiyat, Mashtal, Hurriyah and Dura in Baghdad, and Saba al-Bur, Nahrawan and Tarmiyah near the capital.

Sunni militants often carry out attacks against members of Iraq's Shia majority, whom they consider apostates.

Violence in Iraq has reached a level not seen since 2008, when the country was just emerging from a brutal sectarian conflict. The surge in bloodshed this year, which has included sectarian attacks, has raised fears Iraq may relapse into the intense Sunni-Shia conflict that peaked in 2006-2007 and killed tens of thousands of people.

A study released this month by academics based in the United States, Canada and Iraq said nearly half a million people have died from war-related causes in Iraq since the US-led invasion of 2003.

Mom, 4 kids killed in NY mass stabbing

CNN ONLINE

A Brooklyn apartment turned into a grisly scene of carnage Saturday night when a mother and her four children were stabbed to death, New York police said.

The stabbings took place in the Sunset Park neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York Fire Department spokesman Jim Long said. It was not immediately clear what led to the stabbings. All of the victims lived at the Brooklyn home.

All five of the dead had stab wounds to their upper bodies, police said. Police identified the victims as Qiao Zhen Li, 37; Linda Zhuo, 9; Amy Zhuo, 7; Kevin Zhuo, 5; and William Zhuo, 1.

One man has been taken into custody, but no official charges have been filed.

ODDLY enough

All for computer games
Boy, 12, admits hacking major govt websites for Anonymous

MAIL ONLINE

A 12-year-old Canadian boy has pleaded guilty to three charges of hacking government websites under the affiliation of 'hacktivist' initiative Anonymous.

A court heard on Thursday how the fifth grader - from the Montreal suburb of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce - wreaked computer havoc during the Quebec student uprising in 2012, with some sites out of service for two days.

He has pleaded guilty to three charges related to hacking websites that included those of Montreal police, the Quebec Institute of Public Health, the Chilean government and some non-public sites.

A more detailed report will be handed over next month when the boy is sentenced, according to the Toronto Sun.

However, the boy's lawyers maintained he was not politically motivated. Instead they said he traded information obtained from website databases for video games.

