

# NEWS IN brief

## Putin wishes Obama a happy July 4

AFP, Moscow  
Russia's President Vladimir Putin yesterday congratulated US counterpart Barack Obama on America's Independence Day and expressed hope that bilateral relations would "successfully develop" despite their disagreements. Putin predicted that relations between Russia and the US "will successfully develop on a pragmatic and equal foundation despite the difficulties and differences," the Kremlin said.

## Taliban destroys Karzai's chopper

AFP, Kabul  
Taliban insurgents fired rockets into Kabul airport on Thursday, destroying the Afghan president's parked helicopter and damaging three other choppers, officials said, in an attack that underlined security fears in the capital. The two rockets caused no casualties at the airport, which includes a large Nato base as well as a terminal for civilian flights to cities such as Dubai,

## Sex predator Rolf Harris jailed

AFP, London  
Veteran entertainer Rolf Harris, a household name in Britain and Australia for decades, was jailed for five years and nine months yesterday by a judge in London for a string of sexual assaults against girls and young women. The Australian-born television star, artist and songwriter, 84, was found guilty earlier this week of indecent assault against four victims between 1968 and 1986, including the best friend of his daughter.

## Pakistan urged to pull 'repressive' terror law

AFP, Islamabad  
Pakistan's tough new anti-terror law gives a "green light for abusing suspects" and should be withdrawn, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said yesterday. The new law doubles the maximum sentence for terror offences to 20 years and allows security forces to hold suspects for up to 60 days without disclosing their whereabouts or allegations against them. HRW said the new law could be

## IS seizes more oil fields in Syria

AFP, Beirut  
The Islamic State (IS) now fully controls all of Syria's main oil and gas fields located in Deir Ezzor province, a monitoring group said. IS took control of Tanak oil field on Thursday after seizing the major Al-Omar



Firefighters and policemen work at the site where several vehicles were crushed by a viaduct that collapsed in Belo Horizonte, Brazil's southeastern World Cup city, on Thursday. The unfinished overpass collapsed on vehicles killing at least two people and injuring 19, officials said.

# REVENGE KILLING OF PALESTINIAN TEEN Fresh violence rocks Jerusalem

AFP, Jerusalem  
Thousands of Palestinians, some firing weapons into the air, yesterday took part in the emotionally-charged east Jerusalem funeral of a Palestinian teenager believed murdered by Israelis. Chanting "with our blood and our spirit we shall sacrifice for the martyr," mourners carried the shrouded body of Mohammed Abu Khder, 16, through his neighbourhood of Shuafat as flag-waving crowds thronged the narrow streets, before he was buried in a local cemetery. Before and after the funeral, Palestinians clashed with Israeli police near the procession and elsewhere in east Jerusalem, and thousands of officers were deployed in case of widespread unrest. It was the third straight day of violence since Abu Khder was kidnapped and found dead Wednesday in a suspected revenge attack for the abduction and murder of three Israeli teenagers last month. The teenager's funeral coincided with the first Friday prayers of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Hamas said efforts were under way with Egyptian mediation to reach a truce after a week of militant rocket fire into southern Israel and retaliatory air strikes against Gaza. "There are continuing Egyptian efforts to return calm to the Gaza Strip, but no agreement has been reached yet," a Hamas official told AFP, on condition of anonymity. The army reported that eight rockets and two mortar rounds were fired at Israel since Friday morning. Israel warned Hamas on Thursday to put a stop to rocket fire from its Gaza power base and sent army reinforcements to the border. But it also offered to de-escalate if the Islamist movement would do the same.

# Defiant Maliki eyes third term

## Indian nurses freed; US opposes Kurd's independence move

AFP, Baghdad  
Iraq's premier yesterday insisted he would "never give up" on a third term despite allegations at home and abroad of sectarianism and authoritarianism amid a sweeping jihadist-led offensive. Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's remarks came after a farcical parliament session in which Iraq's various factions -- many of which strongly oppose Maliki staying in power -- failed to unite and choose a speaker of parliament, sparking criticism from the international community and the country's top Shia religious leader. Meanwhile, in a rare piece of good news in the weeks since jihadist-led militants overran swathes of territory, 46 Indian nurses caught up in the conflict were freed and headed home. On the ground, Iraqi forces were struggling to break the stalemate. However, Iraqi forces drove Sunni insurgents out of late dictator Saddam Hussein's home village, state media and police said, part of a campaign to retake wide areas of northern and western Iraq overrun by the rebels. The al Qaeda splinter group leading the insurgency has declared a medieval-style Islamic caliphate erasing the borders of Iraq and Syria, and threatened to march on the Iraqi capital Baghdad to topple the Shia-led central govern-

ment. With parliament next due to meet Tuesday and facing widespread criticism, the premier insisted he would fight to retain his job. "I will never give up on my candidacy for the post of prime minister," Maliki said in a statement. The incumbent said that because his bloc won the most seats in April 30 elections, it retained the right to nominate the premier, and insisted rival groups had "no right" to impose conditions on the final selection. Iraq's most revered Shia cleric yesterday criticised the failure to pick a speaker, with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's spokesman saying during a prayer sermon that it marked a "regrettable failure." Octogenarian Sistani is revered by Iraq's Shia majority and his stature dwarfs that of any single politician. But in a sign of still-persistent divisions, Iraqi Kurdish leader Massud Barzani called Thursday on his autonomous region's lawmakers to speed up work on an independence referendum. Washington reacted coolly to that, with White House spokesman Josh Earnest saying the United States continues "to believe that Iraq is stronger if it is united." The cost of the conflict has been high for Iraq's forces. Nearly 900 security personnel were among 2,400 people

## IRAQ CRISIS

# Xi highlights Japan's militarist past in Seoul

AFP, Seoul  
Chinese President Xi Jinping stressed the joint suffering of China and South Korea under Japanese militarism during a speech in Seoul yesterday that came days after Tokyo announced a landmark shift in military policy. "In the first half of the 20th century, Japanese militarists carried out barbarous wars of aggression against China and Korea, swallowing up Korea and occupying half of the Chinese mainland," Xi said in an address at Seoul National University. "When the war against Japan was at its highest pitch, the Chinese and Korean people shared their suffering and helped each other with sweat and blood," he added. Xi's speech came on the second and last day of his state trip to South Korea which had been flagged as a snub to ally North Korea because of his decision to visit Seoul before Pyongyang. But the key issue of North Korea's nuclear weapons barely got a mention in his address. The hard-hitting language was saved for recalling Japan's repressive colonial rule and wartime aggression -- a message guaranteed to go down well in Seoul. Relations between Seoul and Tokyo are currently at their lowest ebb for years, mired in disputes related to Japan's 1910-45 rule over the peninsula. China is also embroiled in a territorial row with Japan and analysts say Xi's efforts to stake out common cause with South Korea reflect a wider diplomatic strategy.



# PHONE HACKING TRIAL Coulson jailed for 18 months

AFP, London  
Andy Coulson, a former top aide to British Prime Minister David Cameron, was jailed for 18 months yesterday for his role in the phone-hacking scandal that brought down Rupert Murdoch's News of the World tabloid. The sentence passed by a judge at the Old Bailey court in London caps a stunning fall from grace for Coulson, the ex-editor of the newspaper, who once enjoyed access to the heights of the British establishment. The sentence passed by a judge at the Old Bailey court in London caps a stunning fall from grace for Coulson, the ex-editor of the newspaper, who once enjoyed access to the heights of the British establishment. The sentence passed by a judge at the Old Bailey court in London caps a stunning fall from grace for Coulson, the ex-editor of the newspaper, who once enjoyed access to the heights of the British establishment.



Strong winds and heavy surf cover Hwy 64 at the Albemarle Sound caused by Hurricane Arthur on July 3, 2014 in Nags Head, North Carolina. Hurricane Arthur hit North Carolina's Outer Banks overnight causing wide spread power outages and minimal flooding and damage. It is now downgraded to a category one storm as it chugged northward on its mission to ruin Independence Day celebrations in the New England region of the US northeast.

# Modi pledges to win hearts in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar  
India's Narendra Modi yesterday pledged to "win the hearts" of the Kashmiri people as he faced a hostile reception during his first visit as prime minister to the tense Himalayan region. As schools and shops closed in the main city of Srinagar to protest the visit, Modi opened a railway line elsewhere in the restive Muslim-majority state, promising increased infrastructure and development. Modi, a hardline Hindu nationalist, inaugurated the line in Katra town, 270 kilometres from Srinagar, that links a popular Hindu shrine in the disputed region with India's vast and neglected railway network. "It is every Indian's dream to see happiness and prosperity in Jammu and Kashmir," he said. "My aim is to win the hearts of the people of the state". The trip by Modi, whose party secured a landslide win in polls in May on a pledge to revive the economy, has provoked a sharp reaction from influential separatist groups. Kashmir is divided between India and Pakistan, which both claim the region in full. Since 1989, an armed rebellion seeking independence for Kashmir or a merger of the territory with Pakistan has left tens of thousands dead. During election campaigning, Modi had argued for "a discussion" about Article 370 of the Indian constitution, which gives India's only Muslim-majority state a special status.

# Chinese fire therapy

AFP, Beijing  
A therapist pours alcohol over a patient and sets him alight -- for some in China, playing with fire is a treatment for illness. So-called "fire therapy", which proponents claim can cure stress, indigestion, infertility and even cancer, has been used for hundreds of years and recently garnered a blaze of attention in Chinese media. There is no orthodox medical evidence that it is effective, a fact that matters little to one of China's most prominent fire therapists. "Fire therapy is the fourth revolution in human history... it surpasses both Chinese and Western medicine," said Zhang Fenghao, who trains students at a dingy apartment in Beijing and charges around \$48 per hour for treatment. He applied a herbal paste to a patient's back, covered it with a towel and poured on water and a 95 percent rubbing alcohol, adding proudly: "Using this method, patients can avoid operations." Many in China cannot afford expensive treatment for chronic ailments, sparking demand for cheaper alternative therapies. However, several long-term studies of that supposed therapy have found little



# Tensions boil in riot-hit Myanmar city

## Buddhists threaten death to Muslims in Mandalay

REUTERS, Mandalay  
Hundreds of Buddhists threatened to kill Muslims as they rode on motorcycles through Myanmar's second-largest city of Mandalay yesterday, raising the prospect of further communal violence after two people died in unrest earlier in the week. Inter-religious violence has flared throughout the country over the past two years, threatening to undermine political reforms initiated by the quasi-civilian government of President Thein Sein, which took office in 2011 following 49 years of repressive military rule. At least 240 people have been killed and more than 140,000 displaced since June 2012. Most of the victims have been members of Myanmar's Muslim minority, estimated to be about 5 percent of the population. Around 300 Buddhists were riding around Mandalay yesterday, many of them wielding knives, clubs and bamboo poles. "We're going to kill all the Muslims," some shouted as they rode through the streets after attending the funeral of a Buddhist man stabbed to death on Wednesday night. A Muslim man was also killed, beaten to death early on Thursday on his way to morning prayers. Police said 19 people were hurt in the riots in the central Myanmar city of about a million people on Tuesday and Wednesday nights. A 9:00pm to 5:00am curfew backed up by a heavy police presence prevented further trouble on Thursday night and the same curfew was in force yesterday. The violence began late on Tuesday when a group of about 300 Buddhists converged on a tea shop owned by a Muslim man accused of raping a Buddhist woman. A police officer in the capital, Naypyitaw, told Reuters on Thursday that charges of rape had been filed against the tea shop owner and his brother. An imam at Mandalay's largest mosque told Reuters that five Muslims had been arrested on Friday after police searched homes nearby and found ceremonial knives.



Monks carry posters of "take action immediately against Jihad fundamentalists" while holding a prayer campaign at the fame Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Yangon, yesterday.

# 150 killed in Sudan clan battle

AFP, Khartoum  
A battle between rival Sudanese clans near an oil-drilling site killed 150 people and wounded 100 more, state-linked media reported on Thursday. The fighting in West Kordofan state between two sub-groups of the Misseriya tribe "continued all day because of a land dispute near the oil field," said Mohammed Omer Al-Ansari, a tribal leader. The report did not say on which day the battle occurred, but it comes about one month after the same groups, the Zurug and Awlad Amran clans of the Misseriya, clashed in that area. A tribal source said in early June that at least 41 people died when the two sides fought with Kalashnikov assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades.