

Typhoon kills 38 in Philippines

Millions of people in the Philippines endured a second sweltering day without power yesterday after a ferocious typhoon paralysed the capital and wrecked flimsy rural homes, claiming at least 38 lives. Rammasun, a Thai word for "Thunder God", swept in off the Pacific Ocean on Tuesday night, then brought wind gusts of up to 160 kilometres an hour (100 miles) across land to Manila and other heavily populated

Australia abolishes divisive carbon tax

Australia yesterday axed a divisive carbon tax after years of vexed political debate, in a move criticised as regressive and out of step with the rest of the world. Under the carbon tax, the country's biggest polluters, including mining, energy and aviation companies, paid for the emissions they produced, giving them an

Floods, landslides kill dozens in China

Dozens of people have died in the past week as torrential rain batters swathes of China, with at least six killed by lightning, thousands of homes destroyed and more than 300,000 evacuated, state media said. Meanwhile, Typhoon Rammasun is expected to make landfall in China's southern province of Hainan today, forecasters said,

Chopper crash kills 5 in S Korea

A helicopter that had been searching for victims of South Korea's ferry disaster crashed yesterday in a residential district of Gwangju city, killing all five people on board, officials said. There were no reported fatalities on the ground, but one high school student was injured by flying debris when the helicopter crashed shortly before 11:00am, narrowly missing nearby

Actress gets 18 years for Obama ricin plot

A US actress who tried to blame her husband for sending ricin-laced letters to President Barack Obama, then-New York mayor Michael Bloomberg and a gun control activist got 18 years in prison Wednesday. US District Judge Michael Schneider sentenced Shannon Guess Richardson to 216 months in federal prison on a biological weapons charge and ordered her to pay \$367,222.29 in restitution.

Nasa to find alien life in 20 years!

One hundred million worlds in our galaxy are able to host alien life, according to a 'conservative' prediction by Nasa. And the space agency claims that we will be able to find that life within the next 20 years, with a high chance it will be outside our solar system. During a public talk in Washington, the space agency outlined a roadmap to search for life in the universe using a number of current and future telescopes. The Nasa scientists on the panel spoke exclusively about looking for signs of life on planets around other stars outside our solar system. And they are very optimistic. 'Just imagine the moment, when we find potential signatures of life,' Professor Mountain said.



Clockwise from left: Palestinian relatives of the four boys killed in Israeli bombardment, all from a family, react at the family house during the funerals in Gaza City, on Wednesday; members of the Students' Islamic Organisation hold placards during a protest against the bombing of Gaza by Israel in Bangalore yesterday; A member of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society carries an injured child at a hospital in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, following an Israeli air strike before a five-hour truce went into effect yesterday. The UN in a statement has said that 80% of the Palestinian population killed so far were civilians and a major portion of the casualties were children.



Israel launches ground operation

Humanitarian ceasefire expires as fighting rages on; death toll hits 240

Israel launched a ground operation in Gaza late yesterday on the 10th day of an offensive to stamp out rocket attacks from the Palestinian enclave, the army said. "Following 10 days of Hamas attacks by land, air and sea, and after repeated rejections of offers to deescalate the situation, the Israel Defence Forces (army) has initiated a ground operation within the Gaza Strip," it said in a statement. The army said the aim of the operation is to protect Israeli lives and crush Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip. "The IDF's objective as defined by the Israeli government is to establish a reality in which Israeli residents can live in safety and security without continuous indiscriminate terror, while striking a significant blow to Hamas's terror infrastructure," the statement said. Israel launched Operation Protective Edge on July 8 to stamp out rocket attacks from Gaza and the army said the new operation will include ground and air assaults. "This stage of operation 'Protective Edge',

led by the IDF's Southern Command, will include close coordination between IDF units including infantry, armoured corps, engineer corps, artillery, and intelligence combined with aerial and naval support," it said. "This effort will also be supported by the Israeli Security Agency (ISA) and other intelligence organisations," the army added. "In the face of Hamas' tactics to leverage civilian casualties in pursuit of its terrorist goals, the IDF will continue in its unprecedented efforts to limit civilian harm," it said. At least 240 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli air strikes since July 8, many of them children, medics in Gaza said, with a NGO based in the coastal enclave saying 80 percent of the deaths are civilians. Earlier, fighting between Israel and Hamas resumed in deadly earnest yesterday, after a brief humanitarian ceasefire allowed Gaza residents to restock and hunker down, and as efforts towards a lasting truce intensified. With regional efforts to broker a lasting

ceasefire gathering pace in Cairo, an Israeli official said the Jewish state had agreed a truce with Hamas to begin at 0300 GMT today. However Hamas, the Islamist movement which is the main power in Gaza, denied any deal had been struck. Meanwhile, the United States yesterday urged Israel to do more to protect civilians caught in the crossfire between the Jewish state and Hamas. "We ask (Israel) to redouble their efforts to prevent civilian casualties. We believe there is more that can be done," State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters. Cairo has once again become a diplomatic hub to end the fighting in Gaza after Egypt initially proposed a failed truce without consulting Hamas. As part of the peace drive, Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas met Egyptian president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in the Egyptian capital yesterday but no details were immediately released of their discussions.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused the Jewish state of seeking a "systematic genocide" of the Palestinians. Violence flared before and even during the temporary cessation, but resumed with a ferocity afterwards, with three hours of fresh air strikes on Gaza, including one which killed three children in the middle of Gaza City, Gaza's emergency services spokesman said. Another strike shortly afterwards in the southern city of Khan Yunis killed four-year-old girl Rahaf al-Jubur, and a 29-year-old man, Hamza al-Abadleh. The Rafah deaths came after another seven Palestinians were killed overnight. In addition, 1,690 people had been injured during the conflict. Since the latest violence began before dawn on July 8, at least 1,048 rockets fired from Gaza have struck Israel, and another 282 have been shot down by the Iron Dome air defence system, army figures show. In its air war aimed at halting the rocket fire, Israel has struck more than 1,750 "terror targets" across the coastal enclave,

GAZA CRISIS

Putin calls obama

Biden offers help to Ukraine on probe



AGENCIES Russian President Vladimir Putin in a telephone conversation told US President Barack Obama that a Malaysian airplane crashed on Ukrainian territory, the Kremlin said yesterday. The two leaders held a pre-planned call on the situation in Ukraine during which information became available from air traffic controllers about the crash. But Kremlin did not disclose what the two leaders discussed. Meanwhile, US Vice President Joe Biden yesterday told Ukrainian

President Petro Poroshenko the United States was ready to help probe the crash of a Malaysian Airlines, which was flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur. Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 disappeared from radar contact around 1415 GMT as it was flying over eastern Ukraine. Biden called Poroshenko, a US official said, as the Kiev government and separatist rebels accused each other of bringing down the plane, carrying 295 people. "On the call, the vice president offered US assistance to help to determine what happened and



why," the official said. President Barack Obama, who was also on the road, in Delaware, earlier said the crash looked like a "terrible tragedy". There was no sign of survivors at the crash site near the rebel-held town of Shaktarsk in the Donetsk region, where an AFP reporter saw dozens of severely mutilated corpses strewn through the smouldering wreck of the decimated airliner. Meanwhile, distraught relatives of passengers on the Malaysian airliner were shielded from the media at Amsterdam's Schiphol airport as news of the disaster spread. An AFP journalist saw several family members -- many in tears -- led into a restaurant on the upper deck of the airport, from where the ill-fated jet had taken off hours earlier. Meanwhile, European flight safety body Eurocontrol yesterday said that Ukrainian authorities have closed the airspace over the east of the country following the crash. "Since the crash, the Ukrainian authorities have informed Eurocontrol of the closure of routes from the ground to unlimited (altitude) in Eastern Ukraine," a Eurocontrol statement said.

Hawking backs assisted dying

Says he tried suicide once

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK Professor Stephen Hawking admitted that he "briefly tried to commit suicide" in the 1980s when his worsening neurological disease left him unable to breathe or speak without assistance. The Cambridge professor was discussing his own experiences of being diagnosed with a terminal illness in an interview with the BBC about assisted dying. Hawking, now aged 72 and largely regarded as one of the most influential theoretical physicist since Einstein, defied medical experts who predicted he had just months to live in 1963 after he was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease. Asked by the BBC whether he thought there was a danger, based on his own experience, that the assisted dying bill might lead to people choosing death who may have gone on to lead a long and productive life, he said: "That is a decision the individual has to make, it is wrong for the law to take away that option." "I admit that when I had my tracheostomy operation, I briefly tried to commit suicide by not breathing. However, the reflex to breathe was too strong." "We don't let animals suffer, so why should your pain be



'Knock on roof'

CNN ONLINE It's become another military euphemism, along with "collateral damage" and "friendly fire." The "knock on the roof" is the Israeli military's warning for civilians before it fires on a building and is being used extensively as Israeli airstrikes target Hamas sites in Operation Protective Edge. The Israeli Air Force developed the technique in 2009 as a way to warn civilians in Gaza to leave buildings it has identified as locations where Hamas keeps ammunition, a rocket stash or command post. But it is a controversial policy that has been criticised by human rights groups. The procedure generally begins with a phone call to the occupants to leave a building, according to Relik Shafir, a retired brigadier general in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and a former fighter pilot. Such places, he says, are often under constant surveillance, and the IDF has a sense of how many people live there, and how many leave. If it is still unclear whether a building is occupied, a missile that carries little or no explosive load is aimed at the roof of a building. The

impact is felt, but it rarely causes casualties. "It's meant to get people to take us seriously," says Shafir. There is no standard gap between the delivery of the "dummy" missile and fully armed missiles, says Shafir. It can be minutes or even hours. It depends on how important the target is. The Israeli military also uses telephone messages and leaflets to warn people in Gaza to leave neighborhoods where their forces intend to target alleged Hamas facilities. But human rights groups have condemned the technique -- despite the precautions. "In some but not all cases, families receive telephone calls from the Israeli military in advance," said Philip Luther, Middle East and North Africa Director at Amnesty International. "There is no way that firing a missile at a civilian home can constitute an effective 'warning.' Amnesty International has documented cases of civilians killed or injured by such missiles in previous Israeli military operations on the Gaza Strip," he said. Human rights groups in Gaza agree. "The sending of a missile cannot be considered a warning. It is the targeting of civilians with a

Human right bodies criticise the deadly warning system that the Israeli forces developed to avoid human casualties



weapon, regardless of how small, and it is a violation of the Geneva conventions," said Mahmoud Abu Rahma of the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights. But even in an era of precision targeting, the impact of missiles can't be restricted to one house in such a densely-populated area. The United Nations says some 80% of those killed in the current conflict have been civilians. It was also criticised by the United Nations-appointed Goldstone Commission that investigated the conduct of both sides in 2009 fighting.