

# NEWSIN brief

## China quake death toll nears 600

AFP, Longtoushan

The death toll from an earthquake that devastated a remote region of China jumped to 589 people yesterday, authorities said. The ministry added that 2,401 people were injured and 230,000 had been evacuated, while more than 80,000 homes had fully or partially collapsed in the 6.1 quake that struck Sunday.

## Nepal ends landslide search; 156 killed

AFP, Lamosanghu

Nepal rescuers yesterday said 156 people were presumed killed in a landslide that struck on the weekend, as they called off their search for remaining bodies buried in the debris. Thirty-four bodies, including those of seven children, have been pulled from the rubble since Nepal's worst landslide in more than a decade on Saturday.



## Johnson takes first step for PM's bid

AFP, London

London Mayor Boris Johnson yesterday indicated that he would stand for election to the House of Commons next year, a move that could eventually position him as a successor to British PM David Cameron. Some in UK's Conservative Party see Johnson as a popular figure with a high profile who could be a successful future leader if he were to win a seat at next May's general election.



## History made at space

AFP, Paris

The space probe Rosetta yesterday made a historic rendezvous with a comet, climaxing a 10-year, six-billion-kilometre chase through the Solar System, the European Space Agency (ESA) said. "We're at the comet," Rosetta's flight operations manager, Sylvain Lodiot, declared in a webcast from mission control in Darmstadt, Germany. It marks the first time a spacecraft has been sent into orbit around a comet, a wanderer of the Solar System whose primeval dust and ice may hold insights into how the planets formed. In November, a robot scientific lab called Philae will be sent down to the surface to make the first-ever landing on a comet.

## Damascus shelling kills 16, wounds dozens

AFP, Beirut

At least 16 people, including two children, were killed when rebels shelled many districts of the Syrian capital overnight, a monitoring group said yesterday. 79 people were wounded in the bombardment by an Islamist rebel brigade.

## Ebola death toll reaches 932: WHO

AFP, Geneva

The death toll in West Africa's Ebola outbreak has hit 932, with the number of cases surpassing 1,700, the World Health Organization said yesterday. In a statement, the UN health agency said that its latest updated figures took account of 108 new cases and 45 deaths reported by Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone between last Saturday and Monday. The total number of laboratory-confirmed, probable or suspected cases of Ebola has now reached 1,711 since the outbreak in west Africa began in January. Sierra Leone reported 45 new cases, taking its total to 691, with 286 deaths. Liberia reported 48 new cases, lifting its total to 282. Of those, 282 have been fatal. Although Guinea recorded just 10 new cases, it still has the highest death toll. In total, Guinea has seen 363 fatalities and 495 cases and since the outbreak began.



Palestinian man looks out over destruction in part of Gaza City's al-Tufah neighbourhood yesterday. Top, from left to right, A Palestinian man and children fill containers with water from a broken pipe line; Palestinian electricity company workers inspect power lines destroyed by Israeli attacks; and a Palestinian boy writes on a shrapnel riddled blackboard at a school in Gaza City yesterday. Story on page 1.

PHOTO: AFP

## End Israeli restrictions on Palestinian land, demand UK MPs

AFP, London

Excessive Israeli restrictions on Palestinian territories cannot be justified on the grounds they protect the Jewish state, a British parliamentary committee said yesterday. "We challenge the assertion that restrictions which curtail economic development in the OPTs [Occupied Palestinian Territories] are based on Israel's security needs and can be justified on security grounds," the report by the International Development Committee said. The group, which monitors the British government's ministry of international development, called for London and Europe to speak out against restrictions that prevent economic development "as a matter of urgency".

## UK paper runs ad on dead Gaza children

AFP, London

Save the Children yesterday placed full-page adverts in British newspapers listing the names of 373 Palestinian children killed in Israel's offensive on Gaza, as part of the charity's campaign for a permanent ceasefire. The black-and-white advert in broadsheet newspapers carries the names of the children that the Palestinian Ministry of Health and United Nations (OCHA) have reported to have died between July 8 and August 3. Readers are invited to send text messages as part of the campaign to force a permanent ceasefire "for the children of Gaza and Israel".

# Russia poised for invasion

## Warns Nato as govt forces close in on rebel bastion

REUTERS, Brussels

Russia has amassed around 20,000 combat-ready troops on Ukraine's eastern border and could use the pretext of a humanitarian or peace-keeping mission to invade, Nato said yesterday. Stating the conflict in Ukraine was fueled by Russia, Nato said in a statement that the troop build-up had further escalated "a dangerous situation".

"We're not going to guess what's on Russia's mind, but we can see what Russia is doing on the ground – and that is of great concern. Russia has amassed around 20,000 combat-ready troops on Ukraine's eastern border," Nato spokeswoman Oana Lungescu said in an emailed statement. Nato was concerned that Moscow could use "the pretext of a humanitarian or peace-keeping mission as an excuse to send troops into Eastern Ukraine", she said. Moscow announced new military exercises to take place all this week, involving bombers and warplanes on Monday in a show of strength near the border with Ukraine. The roughly 20,000-strong troop presence included tanks, infantry, artillery, air defence systems, as well as logistics troops, special forces, and various aircraft, the officer said. Previously, Russia has used military exercises as cover for intervention as it did it when it annexed Crimea on March, military

analysts say. Meanwhile, an air strike hit the main rebel stronghold of Donetsk yesterday, as government forces preparing to retake the city said 18 soldiers were killed in clashes with rebels. Kiev denied that it was behind the strike which caused no civilian casualties. Ukrainian forces have been making advances over the past months and have been tightening their grip around Donetsk, where pro-Russian fighters have pledged to fight to the death. The conflict in east Ukraine – which the Red Cross has already labelled a civil war – has claimed over 1,300 lives since April, according to the United Nations. UN refugee agency (UNHCR) has warned of "a massive exodus" if fighting intensifies. More than 285,000 civilians have already fled the fightings from the restive East Ukraine. The European Union and the United States last week agreed tough new sanctions against Russia over its actions in Ukraine, marking a new phase in the biggest confrontation between Moscow and the West since the Cold War. The conflict worsened dramatically after the downing of Malaysian flight MH17 over rebel-held territory on July 17 by what Western countries say was a Russian-supplied missile.

## UKRAINE CRISIS



Paper lanterns float in the Motoyasu River in front of the Atomic Bomb Dome (background) in Hiroshima, yesterday. Inset, A women in India writes anti-war slogan as the world marked the 69th anniversary of the world's first atomic attack.

PHOTO: AFP



# UN pledges to rebuild Gaza for the 'last time'

## Egypt presses parties to extend 72-hour truce

AFP, United Nations

The United Nations is ready to help rebuild Gaza but for the last time, UN chief Ban Ki-moon warned yesterday as Egyptian mediators engaged in shuttle diplomacy on extending a 72-hour truce. Ban opened a special meeting of the United Nations General Assembly with an appeal for a lasting peace. "The senseless cycle of suffering in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as in Israel must end," he told the 193-nation assembly. After three wars in Gaza in six years, the UN secretary general warned that the world's patience with the Israelis and the Palestinians was being tested. "Do we have to continue like this -- build, destroy, and build and destroy?" Ban asked. "We will build again but this must be the last time -- to rebuild. This must stop now."

Four weeks of fighting in the Gaza Strip has killed 1,875 Palestinians and 67 Israelis, with nearly half of Gaza's 1.8 million people driven from their homes. The UN General Assembly was convened at the request of Arab countries, who have criticized the Security Council for failing to adopt a strongly-worded resolution to press Israel and Hamas to stop. Meanwhile, Egyptian officials mediating talks for a durable truce in Gaza met a Palestinian delegation yesterday to relay terms laid down by an Israeli team. The Egyptian intelligence mediators had met with the Israeli delegation in Cairo during the night, the officials said. Palestinian officials in Cairo said they would respond to the Israeli terms through the Egyptian officials, although a senior Hamas official has already rejected an Israeli demand that militants in Gaza disarm.

## Rahul Gandhi slams 'partial' LS speaker

PTI, New Delhi

Congress vice president Rahul Gandhi yesterday mounted an attack apparently directed at Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan, alleging the Opposition members were not being allowed to speak in Parliament. Talking to reporters outside parliament, the Congress leader, without naming anyone, said "there is a mood in Parliament that only one man's voice comes before anything else in the country", an apparent reference to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Rahul, the 44-year-old scion of Nehru-Gandhi family, hit out at the BJP-led NDA government, accusing it of running away from discussion. "There is a mentality in the government that no discussion should be allowed." Earlier, Rahul joined Congress lawmakers who trooped into the Well of the House protesting against recent incidents of communal violence in Uttar Pradesh and demanded the tabling of the Communal Violence Bill in parliament. "We are raising a point, we are asking for discussion... The speaker, I mean... It is completely one-sided, partiality," Gandhi said. Speaker Sumitra Mahajan turned down the Congress request.

## Commuters tilt train to save trapped man

AFP, Perth

Dozens of Australians yesterday tilted a train to free a commuter whose leg was trapped between a carriage and a platform, with authorities praising their efforts as an example of "people power". The man was boarding in the Western Australia city of Perth when he slipped and became jammed in the five-centimetre (two-inch) gap between the carriage and the station, operator Transperth said in a statement. Passengers were initially told to move to the opposite side of the train in the hope their weight would shift it away from his leg, a passenger who gave his name as Nic told The West Australian newspaper. But when that failed, staff told commuters to get off the train and about 50 of them lined up in a row along the platform to tilt the carriage away from the man so he could be lifted out. "It is the first time we've seen something like this happen," Transperth spokeswoman Claire Krol told AFP. "We were really fortunate that the staff were there straight away... and all of the passengers not only listened to the instructions from staff, but pitched in and helped. "This is a real case of passengers of working together... and people power are the perfect words to describe it." Transperth said the man was treated by paramedics but was able to catch a later train. "The end result here is: really lucky for the man involved, but really nice as well to see that everyone came together as a community," Krol added.



# Iraq Kurds unite against IS

## Saudi Arabia gives \$1b in aid to Lebanon

AFP, Arbil

Kurdish fighters from Iraq, Syria and Turkey were coordinating operations in northern Iraq yesterday to reclaim areas lost to jihadists. In a series of raids west and north of their main Iraqi hub of Mosul in recent days, IS fighters took over the towns of Sinjar and Zumar, further secured the border with Syria by seizing Rabia and bagged several oilfields in the process. A senior official from Iraq's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) party said Kurdish fighting units from the homegrown peshmerga, the Syrian-based PYD and the Turkish PKK had agreed to share responsibility for the ongoing counter-offensive. On Tuesday, the UN Security Council

condemned the latest IS attack and said it "may constitute a crime against humanity." The shortcoming of Iraq's army and mounting concern that the IS would seek to consolidate and expand its self-proclaimed "caliphate" straddling Syria and Iraq have led to the unprecedented Kurdish coordination. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has given Lebanon's military \$1 billion to help its fight against IS jihadists on the Syrian border, as the army's chief urged France to speed up promised weapons supplies. Sunni-dominated regional heavyweight Saudi Arabia is already financing a \$3 billion package of French military equipment and arms for Lebanon's army. France said it would respond "quickly" to Lebanon's request to expedite weaponry.