

NEWS IN  
brief48 militants killed  
Pakistan airstrikes

Air strikes targeting suspected Taliban hideouts in a restive tribal district of northwest Pakistan killed 48 militants yesterday, the military said, as six civilians died in a roadside bomb attack. The armed forces have since June been waging an assault to wipe out strongholds of the Pakistani Taliban and other militants in North Waziristan and other tribal areas, killing at least 600 insurgents according to the military.

India's death-row  
sisters seek last-ditch  
reprieve

AFP, Mumbai

Two Indian women on death row for murdering five children have lodged a last-ditch appeal after the president rejected their mercy plea, clearing the way for them to become the first women executed in post-independence India. Renuka Shinde and her step-sister Seema Gavit were convicted in 2001 of kidnapping 13 children, forcing them to join a gang of thieves and murdering at least five of them.

Australia, Indonesia  
agree to bury spy row

AFP, Sydney

Australia and Indonesia have agreed to put a damaging spy row behind them, officials said Tuesday, paving the way for the resumption of full cooperation on issues such as defence. Ties between the neighbours sank to their lowest point in years in November after reports that Australian spies tried to tap the phones of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and his inner circle.

Floods kill 20 more in  
UP, Bihar

TNN, Lucknow/patna

Rampaging rivers claimed 13 more lives in Uttar Pradesh and at least seven more in Bihar on Monday. Over 1,000 villages are marooned in UP's terai region as the Rapti, Ghaghra and Saryu continued to flow above the danger mark. According to reports, there have been eight flood-related deaths in Shravasti, two each in Bahraich and Balrampur, and one in Lakhimpur in the past 24 hours. So far, 41 people have died in floods in the state.

'Iron Lady of  
Manipur' freed

AFP, New Delhi

An Indian court yesterday ordered the release of a woman who has staged a 14-year-long hunger strike to protest human rights abuses in the country's remote northeast, her lawyer said.

Iron Sharmila, known as the Iron Lady of Manipur for her unwavering and non-violent protest, has spent years in judicial custody over her fast, intended to draw attention to abuses allegedly committed by the military.



Sharmila began her fast in November 2000 after witnessing the killing of 10 people by the army at a bus stop near her home in northeastern Manipur, which is subject to the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA).

Over the years, Sharmila has been released from custody, only to be rearrested a few days later from her home in Manipur.

The act, which covers large parts of northeastern India and the restive state of Kashmir, gives Indian forces sweeping powers to search, enter property and shoot on sight, and is seen by critics as cover for human rights abuses.

She said there was a "wealth of

## Iraq target IS bastions

US hails recapture of Mosul dam; UN announces emergency aid for 500,000

AFP, Kirkuk

Iraqi forces launched a string of attacks on Sunni militants yesterday, including at Saddam Hussein's hometown Tikrit, as US President Barack Obama declared his firmest commitment yet to targeting jihadists.

Meanwhile, the UN refugee agency yesterday said it was poised to mount a massive aid operation for 500,000 Iraqis driven from their homes by jihadist rebels.

"In response to the deteriorating situation in northern Iraq, UNHCR is this week launching one of its largest aid pushes aimed at helping close to half a million people who have been forced to leave their homes," spokesman Adrian Edwards told reporters.

Kurdish and federal forces, who wrested back control of the country's largest dam, battled jihadists in the country's north, buoyed by intensifying US air strikes and Western arms deliveries.

Other security forces backed by militiamen and tribesmen meanwhile launched strikes against the jihadists at numerous flashpoints north, west and south of Baghdad, officials said.

Obama on Monday hailed the recapture of the dam but warned Baghdad that "the wolf is at the door" and said it must move quickly to build an inclusive government.

The dam was the biggest prize yet clawed back from the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group since it launched a major offensive in northern Iraq in June, sweeping aside Iraqi security forces.

"This operation demonstrates that Iraqi and Kurdish forces are capable of working together and taking the fight to (IS)," he said.

"If they continue to do so, they will have the strong support of the United

## Qaeda, IS are Islam's 'enemy No 1'

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz al-Sheikh yesterday blasted al-Qaeda and Islamic State jihadists as "enemy number one" of Islam, in a statement issued in Riyadh.

"The ideas of extremism, radicalism and terrorism... have nothing to do with Islam and (their proponents) are the enemy number one of Islam," the kingdom's top cleric said.

He cited jihadists from the Islamic State, which has declared a "caliphate" straddling large parts of Iraq and Syria, and the global al-Qaeda terror network.

"Muslims are the main victims of this extremism, as shown by crimes committed by the so-called Islamic

States of America," he promised, in his clearest signal yet that the 10-day-old US air campaign was far from over.

Fighting erupted in the area surrounding the dam yesterday and US warplanes carried out fresh strikes targeting IS, a senior officer in the Kurdish peshmerga forces told AFP.

US experts had warned that a breach of the dam could result in a flood wave 20 metres tall at the city of Mosul to its south and cause flooding along the Tigris River all the way down to Baghdad.

As anti-jihadist forces tried to reclaim ground lost earlier this month in the north, the government launched an operation to recapture the city of Tikrit, further south.

Tikrit fell on June 11 and has since



State, al-Qaeda and groups linked to them," the mufti said, quoting a verse in the Quran urging the "killing" of people who do deeds harmful to Islam.

His stance reflects the Saudi clerical community's hostility towards IS jihadists, known for their brutality.

"In the circumstances the Islamic nation is living through, several countries have been destabilised by extremists, who "divide Muslims" in the name of religion, the mufti said.

He warned: "In Islam, after heresy, dividing Muslims is the greatest crime."

The mufti urged "tolerance, which was at the origin of Islam's growth and longevity."

been controlled mostly by Sunni militant groups, including former members of Saddam's ruling Baath party.

The government, whose forces folded when jihadist-led militants swept across five provinces more than two months ago, has made Tikrit a priority but has already failed twice to retake it.

The jihadists, who declared their "caliphate" over a vast region straddling the Iraq-Syria border, have also come under attack in their Syrian stronghold of Raqa by Syria's air force.

In London, Prime Minister David Cameron said Britain remained open to "supplying equipment" for the fight against IS but told a meeting of his government's emergency committee Cobra that "this is not about getting dragged into a war in Iraq".

## UKRAINE CRISIS

Poroshenko  
to meet Putin  
on Aug 26

Battle for key rebel  
bastion rages; aid  
delivery delayed

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Ukrainian counterpart Petro Poroshenko will meet with top EU officials in Belarus next week.

Poroshenko's office said leaders would use the August 26 meeting to discuss ways to stabilise the situation in eastern Ukraine, energy security and Kiev's new trade deal with the European Union, which Russia has opposed.

The news came as Ukraine yesterday said that fighting had erupted in the heart of the major rebel stronghold of Lugansk as government forces pressed on with a punishing offensive to win back the war-torn east.

If confirmed, any advance by Ukraine's army into Lugansk, which has endured brutal shelling and weeks without running water or electricity, would be a major breakthrough for Kiev after four months of fighting that has claimed over 2,100 lives.

Meanwhile, a controversial Russian aid convoy was still stuck waiting to be checked near Ukraine's restive border as haggling over whether it could cross dragged on.



Smoke belches as Israel yesterday resumed Gaza airstrikes.

West preventing ICC  
to open Gaza probe

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

The international criminal court has persistently avoided opening an investigation into alleged war crimes in Gaza as a result of US and other western pressure, former court officials and lawyers claim.

In recent days, a potential ICC investigation into the actions of both the Israel Defence Forces and Hamas in Gaza has become a fraught political battlefield and a key negotiating issue at ceasefire talks in Cairo. But the question of whether the ICC could or should mount an investigation has also divided the Hague-based court itself.

An ICC investigation could have a far-reaching impact. It would not just examine alleged war crimes by the Israeli military, Hamas and other Islamist militants in the course of recent fighting in Gaza that left about 2,000 people dead, including women and children. It could also address the issue of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories, for which the Israeli leadership would be responsible.

ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda is now insisting on a new Palestinian declaration, which would require achieving elusive consensus among political factions such as Hamas, who would face scrutinising themselves alongside the Israeli government, to launch the probe.

Some international lawyers argue that by trying to duck an investigation, the ICC is not living up to the ideals expressed in the Rome statute that "the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole must not go unpunished".

John Dugard, a professor of international law at the University of Leiden, in the Netherlands said Bensouda was under heavy pressure from the US and its European allies. "For her it's a hard choice and she's not prepared to make it," he said. "But this affects the credibility of the ICC," he added.

## EBOLA CRISIS

84 people  
died in last 3  
days: UN

AFP, Geneva

The Ebola virus killed 84 people in just three days, bringing the global death toll to 1,229, the World Health Organization said yesterday.

The death toll, which passed the 1,000-mark over a week ago, soared higher from last Thursday to Saturday.

The number of confirmed infections jumped by 113 over the three days, bringing the total number of cases to 2,240, the UN health agency said.

The epidemic, which has hit four west African nations since it broke out in Guinea at the start of the year, is by far the deadliest since Ebola was discovered four decades ago in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Missing patients' found

Meanwhile, seventeen suspected Ebola patients who went missing in Liberia after a health centre in the capital was attacked have been found, a minister has said.

"They were traced and finally they turned themselves in at a treatment centre," Lewis Brown told the BBC.

The government had previously denied they were missing.

The last days of an Ebola victim can be horrific, with agonising muscular pain, vomiting, diarrhoea and haemorrhaging as vital organs break down.

No cure or vaccine is currently available for the disease, which is spread by close contact with body fluids, meaning patients must be isolated.



Left, A protestor holds a sign during a protest in Ferguson, Missouri, yesterday. Right, Law enforcement officers point their guns at protesters during a protest on West Florissant Avenue in Ferguson, Missouri yesterday. Police fired tear gas in another night of unrest in the Missouri town where a white police officer shot and killed an unarmed black teenager, just hours after President Barack Obama called for calm. Overnight, protesters shot at police and threw rocks and firebombs. Thirty one protesters were arrested.

PHOTO: AFP

PROBE INTO ALLEGED WAR CRIMES  
Lanka to refuse entry  
to UN investigators

AFP, Colombo



information" outside the country.

The remarks prompted allegations from Sri Lanka's foreign ministry that her investigation was on a "preconceived trajectory" and that her "prejudice and lack of objectivity" were unfortunate.

Colombo maintains that its troops did not commit war crimes while crushing the Tamil Tiger rebel movement at the end of a conflict which lasted more than three decades and claimed more than 100,000 lives.

Pillay, who visited Sri Lanka last year, has previously accused Rajapakse's government of becoming authoritarian, and warned that rights defenders and journalists were at risk in the country even after the end of the war.

The government gave some ground last month when it asked a commission already looking into missing persons to expand its work and investigate the actions of both the army and Tamil rebels.

Rajapakse said Tuesday that he was naming two more foreign experts -- an Indian and a Pakistani -- to join three international legal experts already on a panel of advisers helping the presidential Commission of Inquiry.

In a government decree published last month, Rajapakse said the commission would investigate the military's "adherence to or neglect... of laws of armed conflict and international humanitarian law".

She said there was a "wealth of

Pakistan anti-govt protesters  
march on parliament

AFP, Islamabad

which houses key buildings including parliament, the prime minister's house and numerous Western embassies.

Khan and Qadri defied government warnings not to try to enter the area, both pledging to march peacefully to stage sit-in protests outside parliament. PTI activists used a crane to remove the containers blocking their path and live TV footage showed them on the move.

The decision to deploy military was taken at a meeting chaired by Sharif and attended by army chief General Raheela Sharif, suggesting the government has the support of the powerful military in the crisis.

Mass support for the protest movement beyond Khan and Qadri's core supporters appears to be lacking and other opposition parties have shunned Khan's call to unseat the government.

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Sonia Gandhi-led Congress party's demand for being given the status of Leader of the Opposition to its parliamentary group chief in the Lok Sabha was rejected by parliament Speaker Sumitra Mahajan yesterday.

"I have gone by rules and tradition," Mahajan told the media on her decision not to recognise the Congress leader in Lok Sabha as the Leader of the Opposition.

The Speaker's decision rejecting Congress' demand has been conveyed in a letter to the opposition party which suffered its worst defeat in parliamentary elections in April-May.

Congress bagged just 44 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha and is the



Sonia Gandhi  
second largest group after ruling BJP's 282.

Congress President Sonia Gandhi had written to Mahajan seeking the status of the Leader of the Opposition to Mallikarjun Kharge who is the party's group leader in the Lok Sabha, the lower House of parliament.

The Speaker had also taken the opinion of Attorney General Mukul Rohatgi who had said that Congress

does not have the numbers so that its floor leader can be granted the status of Leader of Opposition.

Citing rules, the Speaker has conveyed to Congress that she was not in a position to give the party Leader of Opposition status because it fell short of the minimum 55 seats required for staking claim to the post.

Mahajan is also believed to have cited the precedents in 1980 and 1984 when there was no recognised Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha.

The Leader of the Opposition in both the Houses of Parliament enjoys the status of a cabinet minister.

Reacting to the decision, Kharge said he would consult the Congress high command and the AICC legal cell before giving his opinion.