

# NEWSIN brief

## Pakistan appoints new spy chief

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan yesterday named a new head of its main intelligence agency, considered the second most powerful official in the military after the army chief. The naming of Rizwan Akhtar as director general of the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) agency comes as a protest movement to topple the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif enters its second month. He is expected to formally take the role on November 8.

## Syria air strikes kill 42

AFP, Beirut

Syrian government air strikes killed at least 42 people, including 16 children, in Idlib province in the northwest, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said yesterday. The air raids on Sunday afternoon and evening killed 19 people, including six children, outside the city of Saraqeb, and another 23 people, among them 10 children, in the town of Ehsim, the monitoring group said.

## Tibetan man self-immolates in China

AFP, Beijing

A Tibetan man has burned himself to death in northwest China, overseas media and a campaign group reported on Monday, the latest in a string of self-immolation protests in recent years against Beijing's control. At least 130 Tibetans have set themselves alight in China since 2009, according to tallies by campaign groups. The last such reported self-immolation was in April.

## Bainimarama sworn in as Fiji's PM

AFP, Suva

Coup leader Voreqe Bainimarama was sworn in as Fiji's new prime minister yesterday, five days after the South Pacific nation held its first general election since 2006. Official results showed Bainimarama swept the election with almost 60 percent of the vote.

## Nasa's spacecraft enters Mars orbit

AFP, Washington

Nasa's MAVEN spacecraft began orbiting Mars on Sunday, on a mission to study how the Red Planet's climate changed over time from warm and wet to cold and dry. The unmanned orbiter has traveled more than 10 months and 711 million kilometers to reach Mars for a first-of-its-kind look at the planet's upper atmosphere. How Mars lost its atmosphere is one of science's biggest mysteries. The answers could shed light on the planet's potential to support life -- even if that was just microbial life -- long ago.

## BUFFER ZONE DEAL Ukraine to pull back troops

AFP, Kiev

A fragile truce between pro-Russian insurgents and Ukrainian forces appeared to consolidate yesterday as clashes subsided and attention focused on the unresolved status of the separatist east. Ukraine said it lost two soldiers in sporadic overnight raids by "armed gangs" on small towns surrounding the main rebel stronghold of Donetsk, but that nevertheless the military was preparing to pull back, as agreed under a new ceasefire deal. The toll brings to 39 the number of Ukrainian troops and civilians killed since the warring sides signed a September 5 truce that Nato's top military commander warned at the weekend was holding "in name only".

Syrian Kurds wait at the Turkish police check point near the southeastern town of Suruc in Sanliurfa province, on Sunday. Inset, A Syrian Kurdish girl looks at the Turkish police (unseen) as she crosses the border. Turkey yesterday said that some 130,000 people had flooded across its border from Syria as Kurdish fighters battled Islamic State group jihadists trying to capture a strategic town.

PHOTO: AFP



# We will drag you to war

IS mocks US, urges Muslims to kill citizens of anti-jihadist coalition

AGENCIES

The Islamic State group called on Muslims to kill citizens of all countries taking part in the US-led anti-jihadist coalition by any available means, in a statement posted online.

"If you can kill a disbelieving American or European -- especially the spiteful and filthy French -- or an Australian, or a Canadian or any other disbeliever... including the citizens of the countries that entered into a coalition against the Islamic State, then rely upon Allah, and kill him," said Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, the group's spokesman.

"Kill the disbeliever whether he is civilian or military," he said in the message, which was released in multiple languages.

He also mocked the US air campaign, saying that "the battle cannot be decided from the air".

"Are America and all its allies from amongst the crusaders and atheists unable to come down to the ground?"

Addressing US President Barack Obama, Adnani said: "You

claimed... that America would not be drawn to a war on the ground. No, it will be drawn and dragged. It will come down to the ground and it will be led to its death, grave, and destruction."

The United States and France are carrying out air strikes against IS targets across Iraq and seeking to build an international coalition against a group increasingly perceived as a global threat.

US Secretary of State John Kerry said that more than 50 countries have come forward with commitments as part of the coalition, including Egypt and other Arab states.

"We are in a new era, an era where the (Islamic) State, its soldiers, and its sons are leaders, not slaves," Adnani said.

"We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women, by the permission of Allah, the Exalted."

The jihadist group, which has declared a "caliphate" straddling Iraq and Syria, controls swathes of territory in both countries. IS has executed hundreds of Iraqis

and Syrians, as well as foreign hostages, and its brutal campaign has forced more than a million people from their homes.

Adnani's message -- which was released in an Arabic audio recording and transcripts in other languages including English -- gave instructions on how the killings could be carried out without military equipment, using rocks or knives, or by running people over.

Meanwhile, Syrian Kurdish fighters yesterday claimed that they have halted an advance by Islamic State fighters to the east of a predominantly Kurdish town near the border with Turkey, a spokesman for the main armed Kurdish group said.

Meanwhile, Turkey's PKK Kurdish rebel group on Monday urged fellow Kurds to cross into Syria and combat IS insurgents besieging a town near the border, the pro-Kurdish agency Firat reported.

More than 130,000 Syrian Kurds have fled across the border into Turkey, escaping the advance by jihadists, Turkey said yesterday.

# Scotland could still declare independence: Salmond

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Alex Salmond has claimed that Scotland could declare itself independent without a referendum in the future.

The Scottish first minister, who has said he is standing down after voters failed to back independence last week, said a referendum was the "best route" to statehood, but added that there were others.

He said if the Scottish Parliament was given more powers until "you have a situation where you're independent in all but name ... then presumably, you declare yourself to be independent."

"Many countries have proceeded through that route," he said in an interview with Sky News' Murnaghan programme.

Salmond has previously said that he would accept the referendum result and that it was a "once in a generation" event.

However, he said on Sunday that "there are always things can change circumstances", saying if the UK

voted to leave the European Union then Scotland or if the main UK parties failed to honour a pledge to devolve more power to Edinburgh then having another vote would be justified.

Salmond also said that demographics would see support for independence rising in the coming years.

"I mean when you have a situation where the majority of a country up to the age of 55 is already voting for independence then I think the writing's on the wall for Westminster," he said.

"I think the destination is pretty certain, we are only now debating the timescale and the method."

"I think Scots of my generation and above should really be looking at themselves in the mirror and wonder if we by majority, as a result of our decision, have actually impeded progress for the next generation which is something no generation should do."



# Blasts hit China's Xinjiang again

Two killed, many injured

AFP, Beijing

Two people were killed and "many" injured as explosions erupted in multiple locations in China's Xinjiang yesterday, according to authorities in the ethnically divided region that is on edge after a series of violent incidents this year.

The blasts struck at least three locations in Luntai County in the region's south, including a shopping area, the Xinjiang government's Tianshan web portal said Monday.

The report did not say what caused the explosions or give a precise number of injured.

Clashes between locals and security forces in Xinjiang -- located in China's far west and home to the mostly-Muslim Uighur minority -- as well as attacks targeting civilians have killed more than 200 people in the past year.

Beijing blames the violence on "terrorist" groups seeking independence for the region, while rights groups say that cultural and religious oppression of Uighurs has fuelled resentment.

The attacks have grown in scale and sophistication over the last year and have spread outside the region.

# 'Pakistan developing sea-based nuke-arms'

PTI, Islamabad/washington

Pakistan is developing sea-based missiles and expanding its interest in tactical nuclear warheads to give it a "second-strike" capability if a catastrophic nuclear attack destroyed all its land-based weapons, according to a media report yesterday.

The next step of Pakistan's strategy includes an effort to develop nuclear warheads suitable for deployment from the Indian Ocean, either from warships or from one of the country's five diesel-powered navy submarines. The Washington Post reported quoting Pakistani and Western analysts.

In a sign of that ambition, Pakistan in 2012 created the Naval Strategic Force command, which is similar to the air force and army commands that oversee nuclear weapons. "We are on our way, and my own hunch is within a year or so, we should be developing our second-strike capability," the paper quoted Shireen M. Mazari, a nuclear expert and the former director of the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, a Pakistani government-funded thinktank.

Instead of working to enhance the range of its missiles, Pakistan is developing shorter-range cruise missiles that fly lower to the ground and can evade ballistic missile defences, analysts said.

Pakistan's nuclear push comes amid heightened tension with US intelligence and congressional officials over the security of the country's nuclear weapons and materials, the Post said. The paper reported in September 2013 that US intelligence officials had increased surveillance of Pakistan in part because of concerns that nuclear materials could fall into the hands of terrorists.

# EBOLA OUTBREAK Sierra Leone lockdown a 'success'

BBC ONLINE

A three-day curfew aimed at containing the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone has been declared a success by authorities.

The wide-ranging curfew ended at midnight on Sunday and will not be extended, authorities said. Sierra Leone has been one of the countries worst affected by the outbreak, with more than 550 of the 2,800 deaths so far recorded.

Some health groups have criticised the lockdown, saying it would destroy trust between patients and doctors.

Nearly all of the deaths in the world's worst Ebola outbreak have been recorded in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The deadly virus is transmitted through sweat, blood and saliva, and there is no proven cure.

# Boko Haram engaged in talks over abducted girls

CNN ONLINE

Nigerian government officials and the International Committee of the Red Cross have had talks with Boko Haram about swapping imprisoned members of the Islamist terrorist group for the more than 200 Chibok school girls kidnapped in April, a source involved in the negotiations told CNN.

The officials met four times in mid-August with two senior members of Boko Haram in Nigeria's capital, Abuja.

The swap would involve the release of 30 Boko Haram commanders in the custody of the Nigerian government, according to the source, who asked not to be named due to the sensitivity of the issue.

"The two Boko Haram negotiators assured the ICRC and government negotiators that the girls were never raped, were

never used as sex slaves and were never sexually assaulted," said the source, who attended the discussions.

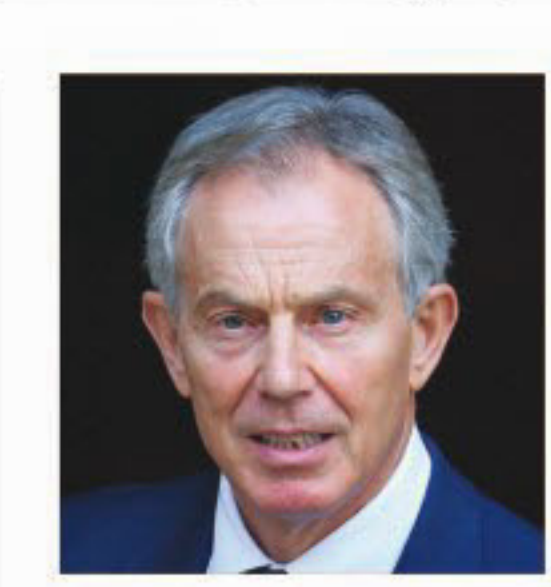
The terrorist group abducted an estimated 276 girls in April from a boarding school in Chibok in northeastern Nigeria. Dozens escaped, but more than 200 are still missing.

Boko Haram has expressed a willingness for a swap with the ICRC at an undisclosed location, according to the source. But there was disagreement on some terms, including the number of girls involved in the swap.

Boko Haram had insisted on an even swap -- 30 girls for the 30 commanders -- but the government

refused, according to the source.

The name "Boko Haram" translates to "Western education is sin" in the local Hausa language. The militant group is trying to impose strict Sharia law across Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa.



# Blair urges ground troops to fight IS

AFP, London

Britain's former prime minister and Middle East peace envoy Tony Blair yesterday said that sending ground troops to fight the Islamic State (IS) group should not be ruled out.

Blair, who sent British forces to fight wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, said he knew "as well as anyone" the difficulties of any such move but insisted it should not be discounted.

IS jihadists control large areas of Iraq and Syria and calls for tougher action against them have grown after the beheading of two US journalists and a British aid worker in Syria, captured on graphic videos.

"I accept fully there is no appetite for ground engagement in the West," Blair wrote in an essay on the website of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation.

"But we should not rule it out in the future if it is absolutely necessary. Provided that there is the consent of the population directly threatened and with the broadest achievable alliance, we have, on occasion, to play our part."

He added that air power alone "will not suffice" in the fight against the IS group.

"They can be hemmed in, harried and to a degree contained by air power. But they can't be defeated by it," Blair added.

"You cannot uproot this extremism unless you go to where it originates and fight it."

Blair sees the conflict in Iraq and Syria as part of a wider global problem with radical Islam which also spans unrest in Pakistan, Nigeria, Mali and China's Xinjiang province.

# AFGHAN UNITY DEAL

## Taliban reject new govt as US 'sham'

REUTERS, Kabul

Afghanistan's Taliban militants yesterday decried a pact by rival election candidates to form a government of national unity as a "sham" orchestrated by the United States and they vowed to press on with their war.

Former finance minister Ashraf Ghani was named president-elect on Sunday after he signed a deal to share power with his opponent, former foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah, ending months of turmoil that has destabilised the country as most foreign troops prepare to leave.

Ghani's administration must now not only forge an effective government after so much acrimony, amid doubts about how long the pact will last, but must also deal with an emboldened Taliban insurgency.

Ghani was scheduled to hold his first news briefing as president-elect late yesterday.

The Taliban have been fighting to oust US-led foreign forces and their spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, rejected the national unity government pact as an unacceptable ploy orchestrated by their enemy.

"Installing Ashraf Ghani and forming a bogus administration will never be acceptable to the Afghans," Mujahid said in a statement emailed to journalists.

"The Americans must understand that our soil and land belong to us and all decisions and agreements are made by Afghans, not by the US foreign secretary or ambassador," he said.

"We reject this American process and vow to continue our jihad until we free our nation from occupation and until we pave the way for a pure Islamic government."