

# NEWS IN brief



## BB King death probed as homicide: report

Las Vegas police have launched a homicide investigation into the death of BB King, a coroner's office said Monday, after the daughters of the blues guitar legend reportedly accused his aides of poisoning him. King died aged 89 on May 14 in Las Vegas, where he lived while he kept up a gruelling schedule of tours that ended only last year. King suffered from Type II diabetes for the

## Nepal moves to protect children from traffickers

Nepal banned children from traveling without parents or approved guardians yesterday in an unprecedented move to deter human traffickers who authorities fear are targeting vulnerable families after last month's devastating earthquake.

Hundreds of thousands of families lost their homes in Nepal after two large earthquakes struck on April 25 and May 12, killing more than 8,600 people and raising concerns among rights groups that trafficking rings in the region are taking advantage of the chaos.

Children under 16 would not be permitted to travel outside their home district without a parent or another adult approved by the

## Saudi executes 88th person this year

Saudi Arabia yesterday carried out its 88th execution so far this year, surpassing the total for all of 2014 despite activists' concerns that trials are not conducted fairly. The conservative Islamic kingdom executed 87 people in 2014, according to an AFP tally. Saudi Arabia ranked among the world's top five executioners in 2014, according to rights group

## Austria tries 14-year-old 'terror' suspect

A 14-year-old Austrian schoolboy with alleged ties to Islamist extremists and accused of intending to bomb a Vienna train station went on trial yesterday facing up to five years in prison. According to the charge sheet, the teenager, who emigrated from Turkey in 2007, wanted to carry out the attack before travelling to join "holy war" in Syria and was in contact with ISIS



**Iraqi Sunni fighters battling Islamic State (ISIS) group jihadists alongside government forces fire their weapons on the outskirts of Iraq's Baiji oil refinery. Inset, A displaced Iraqi child looks out from a tent at a makeshift camp in Fallujah.**



# BATTLE FOR RAMADI

## Iraq forces tighten noose around ISIS

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq forces closed in on Ramadi yesterday and launched an operation aimed at cutting off the jihadists in Anbar province before a major offensive to retake the city.

Ten days after the Islamic State group's shock capture of the capital of Iraq's largest province, a spokesman said the latest operation was only a preparatory move before an assault on Ramadi.

The operation will see a mix of security forces and paramilitaries move south towards the city from Salaheddin province, said Hashed al-Shaabi spokesman Ahmed al-Assadi.

The Hashed al-Shaabi ("popular mobilisation" in Arabic) is an umbrella group for mostly Shia militia and volunteers, which the government called in after the Islamic State group captured Ramadi on May 17.

He said it had been dubbed "Operation Labaik ya Hussein" which roughly translates as "We are at your service, Hussein" and refers to one of the most revered imams in Shia Islam. The Hashed said 4,000 men were heading to the northern edge of Ramadi.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and his US allies had been reluctant to deploy Iran-backed Shia militia in Anbar, a predominantly Sunni province.

Meanwhile, Washington on Monday moved to appease Baghdad after Iraq's leadership reacted angrily to comments by the Pentagon chief accusing Iraqi forces of "lacking the will to fight".

Ashton Carter's remarks to the CNN news channel were widely perceived as unfair in Iraq, where some forces have put up valiant resistance to IS assaults.

# South China Sea row heats up

## China flexes muscle as Japan joins US, Australia war games

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday said it would project its military power further beyond its sea borders and more assertively in the air, defending the construction of artificial islands which sparked concern in Washington.

The People's Liberation Army navy will put greater emphasis on "open seas protection" rather than "offshore waters defence" alone, the State Council or cabinet said in a white paper.

At the same time the air force will shift focus "from territorial air defence to both defence and offence", it said.

The army will increase its global mobility and artillery forces will strengthen capabilities for "medium and long-range precision strikes", it added.

The announcement came as Japan yesterday said it will join a major US-Australian military exercise for the first time in a sign of growing security links between the three countries amid the

tensions in the disputed region.

While only 40 Japanese officers and soldiers will take part in drills involving 30,000 US and Australian troops in early July, experts said the move showed how Washington wanted to foster cooperation among its security allies in Asia.

The paper was released with China and the US at loggerheads over Beijing's rapid island-building in contested parts of the South China Sea, which the country claims almost in its entirety.

China on Friday declared that its military "drove away" a US surveillance aircraft flying near the artificial islands, after US media witnessed a tense radio exchange.

A CNN television crew aboard a P-8 Poseidon plane heard the Chinese navy issuing eight warnings and American pilots replying in each case that they were flying through "international airspace".

China has protested to Washington

over the flight, calling it "highly irresponsible and dangerous" and warning that such actions could cause "unwanted incidents".

Official media also yesterday said that China would build two 50-metre-tall lighthouses on reefs in the Spratly islands, which are also claimed by Vietnam and the Philippines.

Beijing has increased annual spending on its military -- the world's largest by personnel -- by double-digit annual percentages for several decades as it seeks to modernise its forces.

Several of its Asian neighbours, some also with claims in the South China Sea, have been alarmed by the military build-up, though Beijing insists that its investment is purely defensive.

The white paper singled out the US's announced "rebalancing" towards Asia, and Japan's revision of some of its defence policies as objects of "concern".

The increasing military presence in the area has raised fears of standoffs

# US journo goes on trial in Iran on spying charges

REUTERS, Dubai

Washington Post reporter Jason Rezaian went on trial on espionage charges behind closed doors in Tehran yesterday, 10 months after he was arrested at his home and imprisoned, Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency reported.

His wife Yeganeh Salehi and a woman described as a photojournalist, who were detained with him in July but later released, also went on trial, the official IRNA news agency said without giving any details on their charges.

The three, all US-Iranian, were in court for around two hours before the session was adjourned, IRNA added.

Iranian authorities have not released details of any charges and pressed on with the case in the face of calls from US President Barack Obama, family members and rights groups for Rezaian's release and more information on the charges.

The case has put pressure on US-Iranian relations, while Tehran, Washington and five other world powers have been trying to hammer out a deal to end a decade-old standoff over Iran's nuclear program.

Rezaian's brother Ali told Reuters Television on Monday that family members had been barred from attending the Revolutionary Court session.

Douglas Jehl, the Post's foreign editor, called the charges baseless. "What Jason did was act as a journalist, which involves gathering information, verifying information, and ultimately publishing it," he told Reuters Television.

Obama has called the charges against Rezaian "vague" and pressed Iran to release all American detainees.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists has called on Iranian authorities to ensure a "fair and transparent trial".



# Taliban-ISIS turf war kills 27 in Afghanistan

Militant attacks on court, forces kill dozens

AGENCIES

Ongoing clashes between Taliban and Islamic State jihadists in western Afghanistan have left at least 27 insurgents dead and 20 other people injured, officials told Efe news agency.

Afghan military spokesman Mohamad Hanif Rezaey specified that 15 ISIS jihadists and 12 from the Taliban were killed in fighting on Sunday afternoon in three areas within Farah province's Khak-e-Safid district. Among the injured were 13 ISIS members and seven from Taliban ranks.

"Taliban fighters captured alive 12 alleged ISIS members, including four women of foreign nationalities, however, their nationalities are still uncertain," the spokesperson explained, adding that Afghan security forces would not intervene unless civilians become involved.

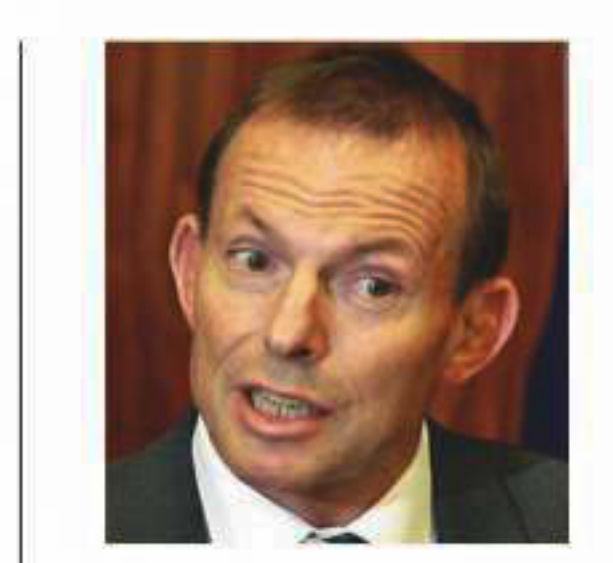
Meanwhile, Taliban suicide bombers attacked a court in Wardak province yesterday, killing two police officers before being shot dead as they entered the compound, the police chief said. The police officers were killed when one of the bombers detonated his vest at the first entrance.

Separately, at least 26 Afghan police or soldiers have been killed in multiple Taliban attacks in the volatile south, including a 16-hour siege of a college dormitory, officials said yesterday.

Taliban militants raided several police outposts in Naw Zad district in the restive opium-rich province of Helmand late Monday killing 16 security forces.



**A resident cries as policemen and demolition team advance during the demolition of the informal settler community where she lives in Manila yesterday, to redevelop the area into a business district in a joint venture with a private firm. Some 500 families were affected by the demolition.**



## Australia to strip citizenship for terror links: PM

AFP, Sydney

Australia announced it will amend the law to strip dual nationals linked to terrorism of their citizenship for "betraying the country", but insisted no one would be left stateless.

Prime minister Tony Abbott said the new powers would apply to dual nationals who fight with or support jihadists such as Islamic State group or so-called lone wolves who pose a threat on home soil.

But the government backed away from removing citizenship from second-generation Australians.

# Pope hasn't watched TV since 1990

ANI, London

Pope Francis recently revealed that he has not watched television since July 15, 1990, ever since he promised the Virgin of Carmen that he would eschew it.

The Pope's refusal to watch television, however, does not prevent him from keeping up to date with the results of his beloved San Lorenzo de Almagro football team, as there's a Swiss guard who gives him the update on the team every week, reported The Independent.

The pope doesn't surf the internet and spends only ten minutes a day reading the newspaper.

He also confessed that he misses the freedom of going for a walk and being able to pop out for a pizza from his

# Gone in 5 years

Poachers kill half of Mozambique elephants

AFP, Maputo

Poachers have killed nearly half of Mozambique's elephants for their ivory in the past five years, the US based Wildlife Conservation Society said yesterday.

A Mozambique government-backed survey showed a dramatic 48 percent decline in elephant numbers from just over 20,000 to an estimated 10,300, the WCS said in a statement.

Remote northern Mozambique, which includes the Niassa national Reserve, was the hardest hit, accounting for 95 percent of elephant deaths, reducing the population from an estimated 15,400 to an estimated 6,100.

The aerial survey found that in some parts of the country nearly half the elephants seen were already dead.

Across Africa, up to 30,000 elephants are estimated to be killed illegally each year to fuel the ivory trade,

# Fire at China nursing home kills 38

REUTERS, Beijing

A fire at an aged care home in China's central Henan province killed 38 people, state media said, the latest disaster in a country with a poor record on work safety.

The fire broke out late on Monday at a private nursing home in Lushan county, the official Xinhua news agency said on Tuesday, citing local authorities.

The cause of the fire, which injured six people, was unclear, Xinhua said. Authorities had taken 12 people into custody and were searching for another three, the news agency said, adding that rescue efforts were ongoing.

Underscoring the gravity of the incident, Chinese President Xi Jinping urged officials to "identify the cause of the accident and pursue culpability in accordance with the law", Xinhua said.

# Hillary snaps at Merkel heels in 'powerful women' list

AFP, New York

German Chancellor Angela Merkel tops the Forbes list of the world's most powerful women for the fifth straight year but Hillary Clinton is snapping at her heels, the magazine said yesterday.

Behind them came Melinda Gates, who co-chairs the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation with her billionaire philanthropist husband, US federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen and General Motors CEO Mary Barra.

IMF chief Christine Lagarde was in sixth place and Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff came in seventh. The top 10 were rounded out by Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg (No. 8), Susan Wojcicki, CEO of YouTube (No. 9) and US First Lady Michelle Obama.

Newcomers include US pop star Taylor Swift, in at number 64 and the youngest of the bunch at 25.

The annual list of the world's 100 most powerful women includes leaders in eight

categories -- technology, politics, business, finance, media, entertainment, philanthropy and billionaires.

Clinton, who in April announced her second run for the White House, was listed at number six last year but as US secretary of state she also ranked number two to Merkel in 2011 and 2012.

"Come next year's US elections, she (Merkel) could lose her title for the first time since 2010 to the one person with a credible and mathematical chance of 'leading' the world," wrote Forbes.

Even if Clinton wins the Democratic nomination for the White House, she has no chance of being elected US president until November 2016 -- after Forbes publishes its 2016 most-powerful women list.

Forbes has put the German chancellor on the list 10 times in the past 12 years, nine of them as most powerful woman. Merkel was first elected in 2005 and won a historic third term in 2013.



# Europe must do more on migrants: UN chief

AFP, Dublin

Europe must do more to help migrants crossing the Mediterranean, UN chief Ban Ki-moon said on Tuesday ahead of a visit to Brussels, as a planned EU naval operation awaits UN Security Council approval.

Europe "can provide more help," Ban said at a joint press conference in Dublin with Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny, calling for search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean to be "further strengthened".

"I'm urging European leaders to address this issue in a more comprehensive way and a collective way," he said, adding that any approach should also look at the "roots" of the problem in countries of origin.