

# NEWS IN brief

## S Korea reports 15th MERS death

South Korea yesterday reported its 15th death from the MERS virus as the growing outbreak that has now infected 145 forced one of the nation's biggest hospitals to suspend most services. The health ministry yesterday also confirmed seven new cases of the virus, including four from the Samsung hospital, bringing the total number of infections nationwide to 145.

## Suu Kyi wraps up China visit

Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi wrapped up her first visit to China yesterday, a trip that saw her meet the country's President Xi Jinping ahead of Myanmar elections in November. Pictures of her trip posted online showed her meeting Xi and other Communist party officials, visiting the Great Wall of China and practicing calligraphy. Suu Kyi came to China at the invitation of the Communist Party, of which Xi is the general secretary.

## Hong Kong rallies ahead of key vote

Pro-democracy campaigners took to the streets of Hong Kong yesterday, but in far smaller numbers than expected, before a vote on a political reform package that has divided the city and sparked mass protests. The controversial electoral roadmap, which lays out how Hong Kong's next leader should be chosen, goes for debate at the legislature on Wednesday and will be voted on by the end of the week.

## Yemen talks to start today in Geneva: UN

UN-sponsored talks aimed at ending the conflict in Yemen by bringing representatives of the warring factions to Geneva are expected to begin today, a UN spokesman said. Fawzi said representatives of both sides in the Yemeni conflict were expected to be in the Swiss city yesterday night.

## 25 killed in Egypt road accidents

Twenty-five people were killed and 29 others injured yesterday in two separate road accidents in Egypt, where poor road and traffic regulations kill thousands each year, officials said. Traffic accidents are common in Egypt, where roads are often poorly maintained and traffic regulations little enforced. The World Health Organisation says they account for nearly 12,000 deaths annually.

# FLOODS IN GEORGIA 12 killed as tigers, lions roam capital

Lions, tigers and even a hippopotamus escaped from a zoo in the Georgian capital Tbilisi yesterday, adding to chaos caused by flooding that killed at least 12 people, officials said.

Police and soldiers were hunting down the animals, recapturing some and shooting others dead, while rescuers airlifted scores of people trapped by the floods.

Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili called on Tbilisi residents to stay indoors while the animals were still at large, describing the damage to the city's infrastructure as "substantial" after the River Vere burst its banks after hours of torrential rain.

The mayor's office said dozens of families had been left without shelter and thousands without water and electricity in the city.

Several main roads were completely destroyed and small houses and cars were swept away by the torrents, while half a dozen coffins in a city cemetery were washed out of the ground and lay on the mud.

Tbilisi Zoo spokeswoman Mzia Sharashidze told the InterPressNews agency that 20 wolves, eight lions and an unspecified number of tigers, jackals and jaguars had been shot dead by special forces or were missing.

Rustavi 2 television broadcast footage showing a hippo swimming in the flooded Heroes' Square in downtown Tbilisi as rescuers struggled to capture the animal.



A hippopotamus and a crocodile roam across flooded streets as men walk among debris at a flooded area in Tbilisi, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP



# Gaza war actions 'lawful'

Says Israeli probe; Netanyahu says UN probe 'waste of time'

AGENCIES

Israel yesterday issued a report arguing its 2014 Gaza offensive was lawful, a move aimed at pre-empting the release of findings of a UN war crimes investigation that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu scorned as a waste of time.

And it insisted its forces did not intentionally target civilians or civilian targets, drawing conclusions that were rejected out of hand by the Palestinians.

The 277-page report, which cited Israel's internal probes and statements from Western leaders backing its right to self-defence, suggested the Netanyahu government hoped to defuse criticism from the U.N. Human Rights Council (HRC) inquiry in advance.

Deeming the HRC biased, Israel boycotted its investigators as it did those from the council who looked into its 2008-09 Gaza offensive. That HRC inquiry accused Israel of war crimes.

Launched last July after a surge of cross-border rocket fire by Hamas and

other Palestinian armed groups, Israel's 50 days of shelling, air strikes and ground incursions in the congested enclave killed more than 2,256



Palestinians, including 1,563 civilians, a UN report said in March. Sixty-seven Israeli soldiers and six civilians in Israel also died in the conflict.

The new Israeli government report disputed the UN figures, saying confirmed non-combatants made up 36 percent of the Palestinian dead and many militants were misidentified as civilians.

"Harm to the civilian population also occurred as the result of unfortu-

nate -- yet lawful -- incidental effects of legitimate military action in the vicinity of civilians and their surroundings, and as a result of the inescapable constraint of commanders not being infallible, intelligence not being perfect and technological systems sometimes failing," the document said.

In public remarks to his cabinet, Netanyahu again accused Hamas of hiding behind civilians by deliberately operating in Gaza's crowded districts.

"Whoever wants to continue with baseless blaming of the State of Israel, let them waste time reading the report by the UN commission. We, for our part, will continue protecting our soldiers. They will continue protecting us," he said.

The HRC inquiry into possible war crimes by Israel and Hamas, an Islamist group that controls Gaza, is due to publish its findings this week, diplomats said, having postponed the release from March to consider further evidence.

But the Palestinians roundly rejected Israel's claims.

# ROW OVER 'HUMANITARIAN' HELP TO LALIT MODI Indian FM defends herself amid opposition's call to go

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Indian foreign minister Sushma Swaraj yesterday defended her decision to help corruption-hit former cricket boss Lalit Modi gain emergency travel papers in Britain, as the opposition demanded her resignation.

Swaraj said she had backed Modi's request last July for travel documents from the British government on "humanitarian" grounds so that he could accompany his wife who needed surgery for cancer in Portugal.

Indian authorities revoked Modi's Indian passport while he was in the UK in 2010 after he became embroiled in false accounting and other corruption allegations in the multi-million dollar Indian Premier League. Modi has consistently denied all accusations against him.

Swaraj said she told Britain's High Commissioner to India James Bevan along with Indian-origin Labour UK MP Keith Vaz that granting Modi the documents would



Sushma Swaraj

not harm the nations' bilateral relations.

"I genuinely believe that in a situation such as this, giving emergency travel documents to an Indian citizen cannot and should not spoil relations between the two countries," she said in a series of tweets.

India's opposition Congress Party demanded Swaraj resign on moral grounds.

"It is a serious matter and we think if there is any propriety, PM (Narendra) Modi himself will demand Swaraj's resignation," party spokesman Shakeel Ahmad told reporters.

Aam Admi Party, which rules New Delhi, also demanded her resignation for misusing her authority.

BJP president Amit Shah sought to stamp out a media storm over the controversy, saying the party was standing behind her.

"There is no need to make noise as the party doesn't look at this as a propriety issue but purely as a humanitarian one," Shah said.



A group of migrants protect themselves from the weather with emergency blankets as they huddle on the seawall at the Saint Ludovic border crossing on the Mediterranean Sea between Vintimille, Italy and Menton, France, yesterday. - Italy yesterday threatened to turn to a Plan B to deal with migrants which "would hurt Europe" if the country is not given greater help with the crisis, as Austria and France expelled asylum seekers back onto Italian soil. PHOTO: AFP

# Italy warns Europe over migrant crisis

AGENCIES

Italy yesterday threatened to turn to a Plan B to deal with migrants which "would hurt Europe" if the country is not given greater help with the crisis, as Austria and France expelled asylum seekers back onto Italian soil.

The country is struggling to accommodate an endless wave of boat migrants, and a crackdown on security at the French and Austrian borders over the past few days has exacerbated the situation, causing a bottleneck at Italy's train stations.

The crisis "should not be underestimated", Prime Minister Matteo Renzi said in an interview published in the Corriere della Sera daily.

"If the European Council chooses solidarity, then good. If it doesn't, we have a Plan B ready but that would be a wound inflicted on Europe," he said, without giving details.

He stepped up calls for a change to European asylum rules as neighbouring states tightened border controls, turning back African migrants and leaving hundreds stranded at the frontier in northern Italy.

In the interview, Renzi said that after toppling Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, the international community bore responsibility for chaos in Libya that has opened the way for hundreds of thousands of migrants to cross by boat to southern Italy.

He called for a change to the so-called Dublin regulations, which assign most asylum seekers to the EU country they first enter and said he would discuss the issue with French President Francois Hollande and British Prime Minister David Cameron when they visit Italy this week.

# Britain pulls spies after Snowden leaks

Report says Russia, China accessed files

AGENCIES

Britain has been forced to remove some of its spies after Russia and China accessed the top-secret raft of documents taken by former US intelligence contractor Edward Snowden, British media reported.

The BBC and the Sunday Times cited senior government and intelligence officials as saying agents had been pulled, with the newspaper saying the move came after Russia was able to decrypt more than one million files.

"It is the case that Russians and Chinese have information. It has meant agents have had to be moved and that knowledge of how we operate has stopped us getting vital information," a Downing Street source said, according to the newspaper.

The BBC said on its website, meanwhile, that a government source said the two countries "have information" that spurred intelligence agents being moved, but said there was "no evidence" any spies were harmed.

Snowden worked as a contractor at the CIA and National Security Agency, where he was able to download 1.7 million secret documents that showed how hundreds of millions of people had been under surveillance by the authorities.

He previously claimed that "no intelligence service" could crack the documents. The US administration has branded Snowden a hacker and a traitor who endangered lives by revealing the extent of the NSA spying program.

# Pakistan takes U-turn on Save the children

Imposes one-month moratorium on executions

BBC ONLINE

Pakistan yesterday suspended moves to close the national branch of the charity Save the Children.

The move by the interior ministry comes days after the charity's main office in the capital Islamabad was shut down by police. No formal reason was given for the action and there has been no official comment on the reversal.

Officials have previously accused the charity of involvement in "anti-state activities". The US State Department expressed concern over the closure.

Pakistan had linked the charity to a fake vaccination programme used by the CIA to track down Osama Bin Laden.

Save the Children has always denied being involved with the CIA or Pakistani doctor Shakil Afridi, who carried out the programme.

Meanwhile, Pakistan has imposed a one-month moratorium on executions during Ramadan, officials said yesterday.

The independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan says the country has hanged over 150 convicts since restarting executions in December following a Taliban school massacre -- more than Saudi Arabia over the same period.

A moratorium on the death penalty had been in force since 2008, and its end angered rights activists and alarmed some foreign countries.

Amnesty International estimates that Pakistan has more than 8,000 prisoners on death row, many of whom have exhausted all avenues of appeal.

# ICC'S ARREST WARRANT FOR WAR CRIMES Court blocks Sudan leader from leaving South Africa

AFP, Johannesburg

A South African judge yesterday banned Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir from leaving the country after the International Criminal Court called for him to be arrested at a summit in Johannesburg.

Bashir, who is wanted for alleged war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in the Darfur conflict, mostly travels to countries that have not joined the ICC, but South Africa is a signatory of the court's statutes.

The ruling was the first time any court has prevented a head of state from leaving a country following a request by the ICC, but Khartoum remained defiant, insisting Bashir would return home.

The Southern African Litigation Centre, a legal rights group, had launched an urgent application in the Pretoria High Court to force authorities to arrest Bashir on the opening day of the African Union summit.

"President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan is prohibited from leaving the Republic of South Africa until the final order is made in this application," Judge Hans Fabricius said in his ruling.

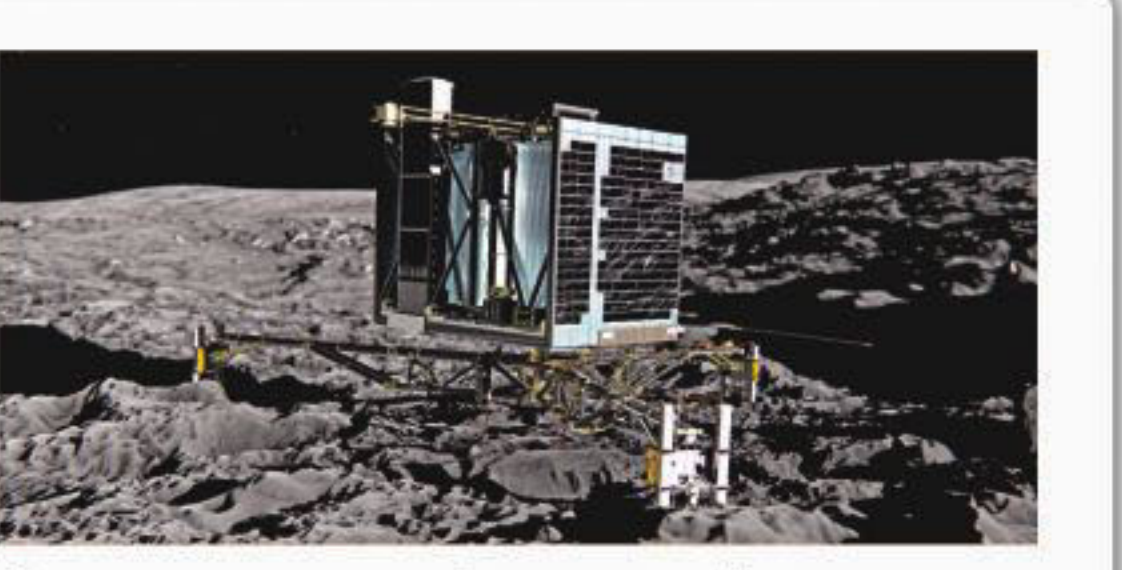
"The respondents are directed to all necessary steps to prevent him from doing so."

Despite the arrest calls, Bashir joined a group photograph of leaders at the summit.

In Khartoum, Sudan's State Minister for Foreign Affairs Kamal Ismail said Bashir would return home after the main session of the summit.

The ICC said in a statement from its headquarters in The Hague that it "calls on South Africa... to spare no effort in ensuring the execution of the arrest warrants" against Bashir.

It said South Africa diplomats had been pressed last month to arrest Bashir if he attended the summit, but that they replied they faced "competing obligations" over the issue.



# Comet probe wakes up

AFP, Paris

The European space probe Philae woke up overnight after a months-long sleep as it hurtled towards the Sun on the back of a comet, the French space chief said yesterday.

"We received new signals from (Philae) for a period of two minutes, as well as 40 seconds' worth of data," Jean-Yves Le Gall, president of the National Centre for Space Studies (CNES), told AFP.

"Hello Earth! Can you hear me?" the tiny robot lab tweeted under the hashtag #WakeUpPhilae.

The exploration aims at unveiling secrets of comets -- pristine bodies of ice and dust that are believed to explain how the Solar System was formed.

The 100-kilogramme (220-pound) robot lab touched down on "67P" on November 12 after a 10-year trek piggybacking on Rosetta. Comet 67 is currently 215 million kilometres from the Sun and 305 million kilometres from Earth, racing at 31.24 kilometres a second, according to ESA's website.