

# Regime raids near Damascus kill 82

AFP, Beirut

At least 82 people were killed in Syrian regime air raids yesterday on a town outside Damascus, a monitor said, as the UN's top humanitarian chief held talks with government officials.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitoring group, said at least 200 people were also injured in a string of 10 strikes on the rebel-held town of Douma.

Civilians accounted for most of those killed, it said, and the death toll was expected to rise further because many of the wounded were in serious condition.

Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman said locals had gathered after a first strike hit a market in the town to help evacuate the wounded when the additional raids hit.

At least six raids hit the market, with the others striking nearby in the centre of town, Abdel Rahman said. A video posted online by activists of the aftermath of the attacks showed an intersection strewn with rubble and twisted metal.

The fronts of several buildings nearby appeared to have been sheared off by the force of the blasts, and many cars lay overturned and crumpled.

Yesterday's strikes on Douma came as new United Nations humanitarian chief Stephen O'Brien held talks with government officials in Damascus on his first trip to Syria since being appointed.

O'Brien, who succeeded Valerie Amos in May, met with Foreign Minister Walid Muallem, state media reported.



A Syrian young man holds drips next to injured people at a make-shift hospital in the rebel-held area of Douma, east of the capital Damascus, following air strikes by Syrian government forces on a marketplace yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## NEWS IN brief

### Nepal cops arrest 112 protesters

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepalese police arrested more than a hundred protesters yesterday for trying to enforce a nationwide strike, the latest in a string of protests against the new constitution. Nepal's bickering parties struck a breakthrough deal earlier this month to redraw the country's internal borders in the draft new constitution. But several lawmakers and their supporters called the strike, saying the proposed borders discriminated against historically marginalised communities.

### Pak ex-spy master Hamid Gul dies

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's former spymaster Hamid Gul, who trained Afghan resistance fighters against the Soviets and helped create the Taliban, has died at the age of 79. Gul headed Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency between 1987-89 during the final years of the Soviet occupation of neighbouring Afghanistan. Gul died late Saturday at the Combined Military Hospital in the scenic hill resort of Murree north of Islamabad after suffering a brain haemorrhage, relatives said.



### Pak air strikes kill 40 militants

AFP, Islamabad

Air strikes killed 40 suspected militants in northwest Pakistan near the Afghan border yesterday as part of a major operation against the Taliban and other insurgents, the military said. The attacks took place in the Shawal area of the North Waziristan tribal region.

## HUGE EXPLOSIONS AT CHINA PORT Nearly 100 people still missing

BBC ONLINE

Ninety-five people, 85 of them firefighters, are still missing four days after multiple blasts in the north-eastern port of Tianjin, Chinese authorities said yesterday.

At least 112 people died in the blasts and hundreds have been hospitalised.

The explosions, in a warehouse containing hazardous chemicals, were so powerful that few of the recovered bodies have been identified.

Dozens of websites have been shut down for allegedly spreading rumours. The state news agency Xinhua said 50 sites were accused of creating panic by publishing unverified information about the blasts, the Xinhua news agency reported.

Hundreds of social media accounts have also been closed down since the explosions on Wednesday.

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang arrived at the scene of the blast yesterday, Xinhua news agency reported.

Also yesterday a senior military officer, Gen Shi Luze, became the first named official to confirm the presence of the toxic chemical sodium cyanide at the site, saying that "several hundred tons" had been identified at two locations in the blast zone.

Residents within a 3km radius of the blast site were evacuated on Saturday, amid fears of chemical contamination.

## Sri Lanka votes today in parliamentary election

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka deployed thousands of police yesterday in stepped up security on the eve of a general election after the campaign was hit by sporadic violence that claimed four lives.

Police Inspector General N K Illangakoon said 63,000 officers were fanning out across the country to guard polling booths and counting centres for today's election, while paramilitary commandos were on alert in case of trouble.

"We have taken additional measures to ensure that the election is conducted peacefully and there are no incidents in the post-election period too," Illangakoon said in a statement.

Some 15 million people are eligible to vote when polls open at 7:00am, and results are expected by late tomorrow.



Two party workers were killed and a dozen others wounded when unknown gunmen opened fire at a ruling United National Party (UNP) rally in the capital Colombo two weeks ago.

Illangakoon said several arrests have been made. Another two people were killed in two separate shooting incidents elsewhere during the month-long campaign.

Despite the deaths, private election monitors said there had been fewer incidents of violence compared to previous elections over the past two decades.

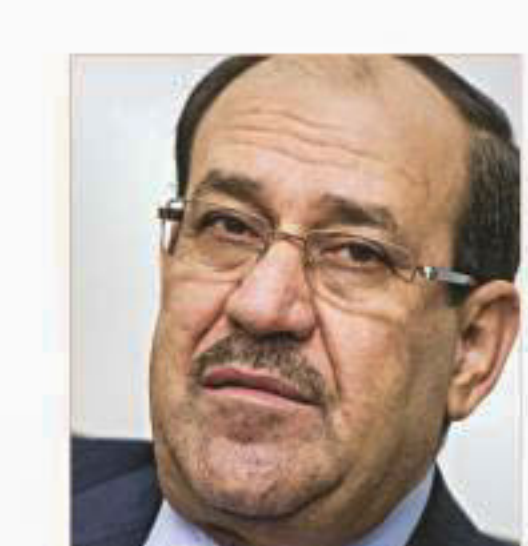
Former strongman Mahinda Rajapakse is seeking an unlikely comeback as prime minister at the election after his loss at the presidential poll in January to his one-time protégé Maithripala Sirisena.

Many observers were stunned by Sirisena's victory over Rajapakse, who had been in power for nearly a decade and oversaw the crushing of the Tamil Tiger separatist rebels in 2009.

Although Rajapakse is reviled by large sectors of the minority Tamil community, he retains widespread support among ethnic Sinhalese voters and his rallies have drawn big crowds.

Sirisena has vowed to veto any attempt by Rajapakse to become premier if their United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) wins today's poll.

Sirisena is the official leader of the UPFA and only reluctantly agreed to allow Rajapakse to stand for the party



## Iraqi ex-PM responsible for Mosul's fall to ISIS: report

AFP, Baghdad

An Iraqi parliamentary investigation found ex-premier Nuri al-Maliki and 35 others responsible for jihadists overrunning second city Mosul, in a report being sent for possible legal action, lawmakers said yesterday.

While various top commanders and political leaders have long been viewed as responsible for the Islamic State jihadist group's disastrous takeover of the city, the report is the first time they have been named officially.

Investigative committee member MP Abdulrahim al-Shammari said that Maliki, who was prime minister from 2006 until last year, was among those named, as was another member who declined to be identified.

The report detailing findings of the investigation, which has yet to be publicly released, has been presented to parliament speaker Salim al-Juburi, who said it will be sent to the prosecutor general for legal action.

"No one is above the law and the questioning of the people, and the judiciary will punish those" responsible, Juburi said in a statement.

ISIS launched a devastating offensive on June 9 last year, overrunning Mosul the next day and then sweeping through large areas north and west of Baghdad.



A family member of a missing firefighter from the recent explosions at a chemical warehouse protests outside a hotel where authorities are holding a press conference in Tianjin, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Can Earth survive humanity's all devouring hunger?

Report says we have consumed planet's resources for a year in 8 months

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Humanity has already used up 100 per cent of the resources produced by the Earth this year, meaning that any consumption from now on represents an unsustainable burden on the planet.

Known as Earth Overshoot Day, the moment when humanity exceeds nature's budget for the year was reached on 13 August - six days earlier than in 2014.

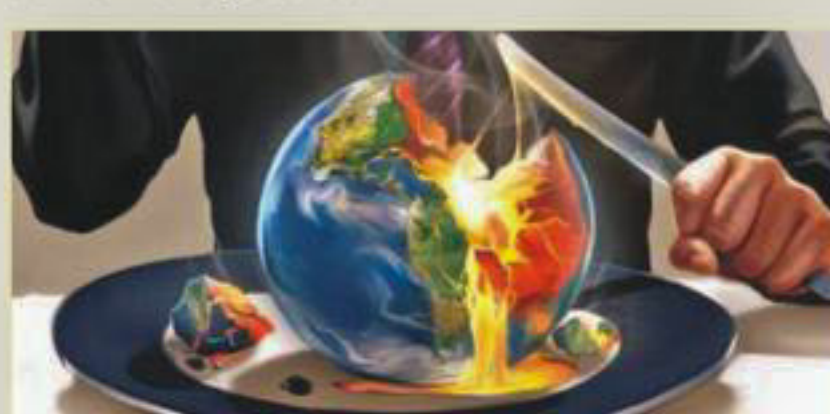
Calculated by the Global Footprint Network (GFN) sustainability think-tank, the landmark is a relatively recent concept. Humanity lived within the Earth's means up until 1970 but, driven largely by carbon emissions, it has been

in steadily increasing debt ever since.

It means humanity is on course to consume the equivalent of 1.6 Earths this year and, if the current course is maintained, we will be using the resources of two Earths per year by 2030.

The only way to reverse the trajectory of Earth Overshoot Day and push it back later in the year, GFN's president Mathis Wackernagel said, is to drastically cut carbon emissions.

Looking forward to the COP 2015 UN climate summit in Paris later this year, Wackernagel said that meeting the global commitment to reduce emissions 30 per cent by 2030 would see Earth Overshoot Day pushed back to 16 September.



## Trump to deport illegal immigrants if elected

REUTERS, Washington

Republican presidential contender Donald Trump would deport all undocumented immigrants and rescind US President Barack Obama's executive orders on immigration if he is elected to the White House, he said in an interview with NBC News that will air yesterday.

"We're going to keep the families together, but they have to go," Trump told NBC's "Meet the Press," according to an excerpt released on Saturday.

Asked by host Chuck Todd about illegal immigrants who might have nowhere else to go, Trump said:

"We will work with them.

"They have to go ... we either have a country, or we don't have a country," he added.

Trump, 69, also said in the interview he would need to rescind Obama's executive orders on immigration, including one that protects from deportation the children of parents who came to the country illegally.

The real estate mogul and television personality, who has rocketed to the top of opinion polls among the 17 Republican contenders, has aroused controversy with his provocative comments on illegal immigration, including describing some undocumented migrants from Mexico as criminals and rapists.

There are an estimated 11 million illegal immigrants in the United States.

## Doomed to die at home or sea

MSF doctor tells the horror tale of rape, torture of fortune seekers in Europe

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Migrants are being raped, shot and tortured during their desperate journeys to Europe even before they risk their lives crossing the Mediterranean, a doctor has revealed.

Anna Crepet, who works for medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF), said treating the thousands of men, women and children arriving in Italy feels "like working in a warzone".

Speaking in the Sicilian port of Pozzallo, where MSF medics work at boat landings and in reception centres, she told The Independent most migrants go untreated for potentially fatal injuries until they reach safety.

"Sometimes it feels like we're working in a warzone but here I think it's even worse, because we see injuries that haven't been treated for weeks," Dr Crepet said.

"We see lots of fractures through beating, lots of gunshot wounds. We find bullets in muscles and under the skin."

She recounted how one man arrived in Sicily with a hole through one thigh where a bullet had passed through and become embedded in his other leg.

Middle East are raped along the way, often arriving several months pregnant.

"They tend to say very little about what they've been through but sometimes we see scars and wounds from rape," she said.



Dr Crepet likened some of the stories she had heard to torture, telling of migrants being gang-raped in front of their loved ones by their captors in Libya.

"Men or women, it doesn't matter," she said. "We've seen 13-year-olds who have been raped."

Many migrants tell doctors similar stories of being kidnapped, held hostage and beaten in Libya by gangs demanding money.

But even before they get to the lawless

country, where most smugglers' boats are launched towards Italy, people coming from sub-Saharan Africa or the Middle East are driven for weeks through the desert in overcrowded pick-up trucks.

Dr Crepet said the Sahara was "one of the deadliest parts of the journey", with many migrants being murdered or dying in car accidents or of dehydration.

A 17-year-old Palestinian boy who journeyed to Italy from Gaza earlier this year told Save the Children workers how three people thrown off the truck he was in were left behind to die in the desert.

"The people we see are survivors but many wouldn't survive because you need to be really robust and strong to be able to get through the desert, get through Libya and then get on a boat and be at sea with no leg or a bad injury, stuck for days on a boat," she added.

"I'm always amazed to see how they survived but we don't know how many have died along the way."

Dr Crepet is one of dozens of MSF doctors stationed in Sicily checking people as they arrive in ports, then at reception centres and clinics, as well as educating them about infection control and hygiene.

## CEASEFIRE VIOLATIONS India summons Pakistan envoy

AFP, New Delhi

India summoned Pakistan's envoy in New Delhi Sunday to protest against the weekend killing of at least half a dozen civilians in border firings, hiking tensions ahead of talks between the nuclear-armed rivals.

Six civilians died on the weekend in troubled Indian Kashmir after firing and shelling by Pakistani troops from across the border, according to Indian police.

Another two civilians were killed in shelling by Indian soldiers into the Pakistani side of the disputed Himalayan region, according to a Pakistani official on Saturday.

India and Pakistan often accuse each other of violating a 2003 ceasefire agreement along their de facto border known as the Line of Control that divides Kashmir.

Firing and shelling between troops has occurred on an almost daily basis for the past week along the border, after an uptick in such incidents in recent months.

Top security officials of the two countries are scheduled to meet in the Indian capital from August 23 in what Pakistan last week described as "ice breaking" talks.