

briefly

YEMEN

Suicide bombing kills at least 45

A suicide bombing Yemeni authorities blamed on al-Qaida killed at least 45 people in a southern town recently recaptured by the army from the jihadists, hospital and local government sources said on Sunday.

"Bodies were flying in all directions because the explosion was so powerful," a witness said.

In the east of the country, meanwhile, a suspected US drone strike late on Saturday killed five al-Qaida militants, a local official said.

The bomber struck on Saturday in Jaar, one of a string of towns in Abyan province that were retaken by government troops in June after being held by al-Qaida loyalists for more than a year.

JAMAICA

Tropical storm nears island

Tropical Storm Ernesto kept on a westerly course in the Caribbean Sea on Saturday and will soon bulk up into a hurricane that may soak Jamaica as it passes by the island, US forecasters said.

Officials in Jamaica issued a tropical storm warning as Ernesto moved in open waters at 30 kph on a predicted track that should keep it at sea until a forecast landfall in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula on Wednesday.

With maximum sustained winds of 95 kph, Ernesto on Saturday afternoon was 420 km south of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic and was expected to stay clear of Jamaica and Hispaniola, the mountainous island Haiti shares with the Dominican Republic.

EGYPT

Morsi praises military in speech

Egypt's President Mohamed Morsi on Saturday gave a lengthy speech to the army in praise of its role during the run-up to his election, proclaiming that he, his government and the powerful generals will cooperate for the future.

Speaking with the head of the armed forces, Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi by his side, and hundreds of troops including generals in the audience, Morsi stressed his legitimacy as Egypt's first popularly elected president, but also acknowledged that his ascension to the office would have been impossible without the military's support.

The words signaled an understanding between him and the army, after initial tensions during Egypt's transition period since the ouster of Hosni Mubarak, himself a former air force commander who led the country for three decades.

TURKEY

Attack on army post claims 22

Kurdish rebels stormed a Turkish army post on the Iraq border on Sunday, triggering fighting that killed 22 people in the latest clash since Ankara launched a major offensive against the outlawed PKK.

Six soldiers, two village guards and 14 Kurdish rebels were killed following the assault on an army post in a village in the southeastern province of Hakkari, the local governor told the Anatolia news agency.

Three of the slain rebels were women, said governor Orhan Alimoglu.

Chinese ships begin 4-day visit

Two Chinese warships, including a guided missile destroyer, started a four-day visit to Turkey on Sunday.

The Chinese warships and navy officers were greeted by the Chinese ambassador to Turkey, Gong Xiaosheng, Turkish navy officers and representatives from Chinese firms in Turkey.

This is the second time that the Chinese navy has paid an official visit to Turkey. The first time was in 2002.

The Chinese navy soldiers will meet with their Turkish counterparts and hold a series of programs to strengthen cooperation between the two countries' navy forces.

AFP-REUTERS-APXINHUA

Mars rover to find out if we're alone

By KERRY SHERIDAN

in Washington
Agence France-Presse

Are we alone? Or was there life on another planet? NASA's \$2.5 billion dream machine, the Mars Science Laboratory, aims to take the first steps toward finding out when it nears Mars' surface on Monday.

The planet is Earth's closest neighbor, and scientists have found signs of water there, hinting that some form of life was once likely, even though Mars is now a dry place with a thin atmosphere, extreme winters and dust storms.

NASA said it will find out if its Mars Science Laboratory and rover, Curiosity — designed to hunt for soil-based signatures of life and send back data to prepare for a future human mission — landed safely at 1:31 am local time on Monday.

That will be about 14 min-

utes after the touchdown actually happens due to the time it takes for spacecraft signals to travel from Mars to Earth.

As of late Saturday, the laboratory was approximately 420,039 kilometers from Mars, closing in at around 13,000 km per hour.

"Curiosity remains in good health with all systems operating as expected," NASA said in a statement.

The US space agency added that catalyst bed heaters were in the process of being turned on to prepare the eight Mars Lander Engines that are part of MSL's descent propulsion system.

The nuclear-powered rover is the biggest ever built for planetary exploration, weighing in at 1 ton, about the size of a small car, and carries a complex chemistry kit to zap rocks, drill soil and test for radiation.

The landing is a daring and unprecedented maneuver that involves penetrating the atmo-

sphere at a speed of 21,240 km per hour, slowing down with the help of a supersonic parachute and dropping down gently with tethers from a rocket-powered sky crane.

"This is the most challenging landing we have ever attempted," said Doug McCuiston, director of NASA's Mars Exploration Program.

Two NASA orbiters will be crossing overhead as the lander approaches the surface, and a third orbiter operated by the European Space Agency will also send data back to Earth.

The Mars Science Laboratory began its journey to the Red Planet more than eight months ago when it launched from the Florida coast in late November 2011.

"It gets scarier every day," said McCuiston, noting that only about 40 percent of past attempts by global space agencies to send spacecraft to Mars have succeeded.

"Can we do this? Yeah, I think we can do this. I am confident the team has done an amazing job. We have the A-plus team on this. They have done everything possible to ensure success," he said.

"But that risk still exists. It is going to be tough."

NASA has detailed the final minutes of the complex landing in an Internet video called *Seven Minutes of Terror*. A live broadcast from mission control in Pasadena, California will be on www.nasa.gov beginning at 3:30 am local time on Monday.

The landing site for the rover is a flat area known as Gale Crater, which lies near a mountain that scientists hope the rover will be able to climb in the search for sediment layers that could be up to one billion years old.

One potential factor of concern, the weather, appears to be cooperating after a nearby dust storm spotted days ago dissi-

pated, deputy project scientist Ashwin Vasavada told reporters.

"Mars is playing nice and we are going to get good conditions for Sunday," he said.

Vasavada said the dust storm near the landing site has evolved into a "fairly harmless cloud of dust" that probably will not reach Gale Crater by the time of the landing.

He said it was not "expected to affect entry, descent and landing in any meaningful way."

If the landing goes according to plan, NASA hopes to have some low-resolution black-and-white images taken from cameras on the rear of the rover shortly afterward.

More images will follow in the coming days. Then, engineers on Earth will spend most of August remotely checking out systems on the vehicle, according to deputy program manager Richard Cook.

The rover is carrying a chemistry kit that contains a rock-

zapping laser, 17 cameras, a drill, radiation detectors, water sensors and tools to scoop soil and check for carbon-based compounds that are the building blocks for life.

Curiosity may start to roll for its first drive in September, with its first scoop samples expected late in the month and its first drilling attempt in October or November.

If the landing fails, McCuiston vowed that NASA would continue its efforts to explore Mars.

"We will pick ourselves up and dust ourselves off. We will look at this and do something again. We will do it again, this will not be the end," he said.

"Human spirit gets driven by these kinds of challenges and these are the kinds of challenges that force us, drive us to explore."

"To explore our surroundings, to understand what is out there, and obviously look at 'Are we alone?'"



PROTESTERS BACK ASSAD

PHOTO BY GREG WOOD / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Demonstrators walk through city streets during a march in Sydney, Australia, on Sunday, held in support of the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad and against the intervention of foreign powers in Syria. Organized by a group calling itself "Hands off Syria", the noisy but peaceful demonstration involving hundreds marched to government offices in central Sydney.

Sudan, S. Sudan reach oil deal

By AARON MAASHO

in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Reuters

Sudan said on Saturday it had reached a deal with South Sudan on oil transit fees, a first step toward ending a dispute which had brought the hostile neighbors close to war, but also said it wanted a border security agreement before oil flows resumed.

The shareout of oil revenues was one of the biggest issues left unresolved when South Sudan became independent in July last year, under a 2005 agreement that ended decades of civil war, and fighting along the ill-defined border pushed them close to war in April.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the oil agreement showed a "new spirit of com-

promise on both sides", and US President Barack Obama said Sudan and South Sudan should build on the momentum to resolve their remaining border and security issues.

"This agreement opens the door to a future of greater prosperity for the people of both countries," Obama said in a statement released by the White House.

The two sides, deeply mistrustful of each other, have often not implemented previous agreements and still need to mark their 1,800-km border and resolve charges both have made of supporting rebels in the other's territory.

The UN Security Council had given the two states until Thursday to resolve all conflicts left over from South Sudan's secession, taking with

it the bulk of former Sudan's oil reserves.

Landlocked South Sudan threw both economies into turmoil when it shut down its output of 350,000 barrels a day in January after Sudan started seizing oil going through its pipelines to make up for what it called unpaid transit fees.

African Union mediator Thabo Mbeki said the neighbors would now start talks to get southern oil exports moving.

"It's an (oil) agreement about all of the matters. The issues that were outstanding were charges for transportation, for processing, transit," Mbeki, the former South African president, said. "Steps will be taken to get companies to begin the process of resuming oil exports from South Sudan."

Mbeki gave no financial details of the deal, but South Sudan's delegation said Juba would pay a weighted average of under \$10 per barrel. It has also offered a \$3.2 billion package to compensate Sudan for the loss of most of its oil reserves to the South. It had previously offered \$2.6 billion.

Sudan itself lowered its transit fee demand to around \$22 a barrel, from an initial \$36, according to a position paper published by the state news agency SUNA. It also wants compensation of \$3.02 billion, among other demands, SUNA added.

"The parties understand very well that it would be important that by the time this oil starts flowing again, the necessary security arrangements should be in place," Mbeki said.

Loughner to plead guilty in Arizona shooting rampage

By REUTERS in Phoenix, Arizona

Jared Loughner, the man accused of killing six people and wounding then-US Representative Gabrielle Giffords in 2011, is set to plead guilty in a Tucson court on Tuesday, a person familiar with the case said.

The source confirmed that the federal government believed Loughner was now competent to stand trial and will argue that in court on Tuesday. Loughner is willing to change his plea to guilty at the previously scheduled hearing, the source said.

Psychiatric experts who have examined Loughner were scheduled to testify in a mental competency hearing on Tuesday that he was competent to stand trial and understood the 49 charges against him, the Los Angeles Times reported earlier.

A spokesman for the US Attorney's office in Phoenix said he could "neither confirm nor deny" whether Loughner would plead guilty.

The team of four attorneys representing Loughner had not responded to emailed requests for comment.

Giffords, an Arizona Democrat seen as a rising star in the party, was holding one of her regular "Congress On Your Corner" events at a Tucson supermarket in January 2011 when she was shot through the head at close range by a gunman who killed six other people, including a federal judge and a 9-year-old girl.

Loughner, 23, is charged with 49 criminal offenses including

first-degree murder over the shooting rampage, which wounded 13 people. A not-guilty plea was entered on his behalf last year.

The Wall Street Journal, which also reported that Loughner would plead guilty, said Tuesday's mental status hearing had been

changed to a change-of-plea hearing, citing an official familiar with the case.

If US District Judge Larry Burns were to determine at Tuesday's hearing that he was fit for trial, Loughner — who is being forcibly medicated to treat his psychosis — could face the death penalty if

found guilty.

The Los Angeles Times said it was unclear on the details of the plea arrangement, or whether Loughner would plead guilty to all or just some of the charges in exchange for prison time rather than risk being sentenced to death at trial.

Tuesday's hearing was to be Loughner's fourth to determine if he is fit to stand trial. Burns ordered the hearing in June at the request of prosecutors and defense attorneys who wanted a status report after more than a year of treatment and legal wrangling over his mental competency.

The college dropout was determined unfit for trial in May 2011 after experts said he suffered from schizophrenia, disordered thinking and delusions.

Loughner has been held at a US Bureau of Prisons psychiatric hospital in Springfield, Missouri, where he is forcibly medicated against his will to treat psychosis and make him fit for trial.



Jared Loughner is charged with 49 criminal offenses.

Beijing Huiyuan Media Village Apartment

Beijing Huiyuan Media Village (Huiyuan Service Apartment) is located in the central area of the business district of the Olympic and Asian Games villages, about 500 meters away from the National Stadium (the Bird's Nest). As the media village of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, it was home to more than 1,000 Chinese and foreign journalists. It offers a number of different varieties of apartments. Spacious and well-lit, they have ample facilities and furnishings and are suitable for residential or business use. Businesses may be registered here and it is ideal for individual business or tourist customers.

Preferential rents are available. Contact us for details.

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