

briefly

ZIMBABWE
1.6m need food aid, says WFP

The number of people needing food aid in Zimbabwe will rise by 60 percent this year to 1.6 million, the World Food Programme said on Friday, citing an annual assessment carried out by the United Nations and the Zimbabwean government.

A poor farming season this year is blamed on erratic rainfall and limited access to seeds and fertilizers, which prompted Finance Minister Tendai Biti to cut the 2012 growth forecast to 5.6 percent from 9.4 percent.

Zimbabwe harvested 1.077 million tons of cereals in the 2011-12 season, down by one-third from the previous season and the lowest since 2009 when a unity government formed by President Robert Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai helped revive a sinking economy.

INDIA
6 children killed in roof collapse

Six children were killed on Friday when the roof of their school collapsed in a village in northern India, police said.

The victims of the accident at the privately run school in Bijnor district were around 10 years of age, police said.

"There were 27 students in the school and six of them were brought out dead from the rubble," Bijnor police chief Nitin Tiwary told AFP.

Rescuers freed the remaining students who suffered cuts and bruises from the falling roof, Tiwary said.

RUSSIA
Security sweep claims 6 lives

The Russian Interior Ministry said six suspected rebels, including three women, have been killed in a security sweep in Russia's restive North Caucasus.

The ministry's spokesman in the Caspian Sea province of Dagestan, Vyacheslav Gasanov, said special forces cornered the suspects in a private house in the regional capital, Makhachkala. He said they refused to surrender and five of them were killed in a skirmish on Friday.

Gasanov said that another one approached police and blew herself up with a hand grenade. He said no police officers were hurt.

Dagestan and other Caucasus provinces have been rocked by an Islamic insurgency that has spread across the region following two separatist wars in Chechnya.

ISRAEL
Court delays settlement

Israel's Supreme Court on Friday granted a government request to delay the eviction of the largest illegal settler outpost in the occupied West Bank.

The court had previously ruled the outpost, Migron, was built on privately owned Palestinian land and had ordered the government to remove it by Aug 1. Friday's ruling extended the deadline to Aug 21.

The government told the court on Sunday that the temporary site set up for Migron's 50 families to move to would not be ready in time.

REUTERS—AFP—AP

Romney's comments mocked in London

By Agencies in London

By the end of Mitt Romney's first full day in London on Thursday, he had been the target of a verbal jab from the British prime minister and mocked by the city's mayor, who spoke before a cheering crowd.

The US Republican presidential candidate's trip — carefully choreographed to boost his image on an international stage — has not gone exactly as planned.

He ruffled British feathers by appearing to suggest in a US television interview on Wednesday that London was not ready for the Games.

"It's hard to know just how well it will turn out," Romney, who led the Salt Lake City Winter Games in 2002, told NBC News, referring to London's Olympic preparations. "There are a few things that were disconcerting," he said, including the threat of a strike by immigration and customs officials.

The comments provoked an uproar in the feisty British media and drew a biting response from Prime Minister David Cameron, one of the government officials Romney met briefly on Thursday.

Cameron, who was forced

to deploy extra troops to bolster security at the Olympics to cover a shortfall left by a private contractor, defended Britain's handling of the Games and seemed to suggest that the challenge was significantly greater than what Romney faced at Salt Lake City's much smaller Games a decade ago.

"We are holding an Olympic Games in one of the busiest, most active, bustling cities anywhere in the world," the Conservative prime minister said during a news conference at the Olympic Park in London. "Of course, it is easier if you hold an Olympic Games in the middle of nowhere."

London Mayor Boris Johnson cast aside diplomatic niceties when addressing a cheering crowd in Hyde Park, an Olympic venue in central London.

"I hear there's a guy called Mitt Romney who wants to know whether we're ready," Johnson said, in a moment that could have been scripted as a commercial for Romney's opponent in the Nov 6 election, US President Barack Obama.

"He wants to know whether we're ready," Johnson called out to the crowd. "Are we ready? Are we ready? Yes, we are."

The scene, and Cameron's remarks, put Romney in dam-



CARL COURT / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Mitt Romney, US Republican presidential candidate, arrives at Downing Street in London on Thursday.

age control mode at the start of a foray to Britain, Israel and Poland that is scheduled to be light on policy pronouncements and heavy on photo opportunities and fundraising.

Romney, who has made much of his record in helping to save the failing Salt Lake Games, later backtracked and predicted that the London Games will be highly successful.

"We talked about the great progress that has been made in organizing the Games," Romney said after meeting Cameron in a Downing Street parlor where the arena for Olympic beach volleyball could be seen out the back window.

The Olympic appearance carries special significance for Romney. His political career was born out of his leading role at the Salt Lake City Games,

which were plagued by scandal before he was tapped to take over.

The negative attention distracted from his push to highlight the US-British bond and bolster his foreign policy credentials.

And his comments about the London Games followed what already had been an inauspicious start to his week-long overseas trip.

Romney had to disavow comments by an unidentified adviser who told the Daily Telegraph that Obama, the first African-American president of the United States, had mishandled US-British ties and that Romney better understood the "Anglo-Saxon heritage" between the two countries.

REUTERS—AP

Chinese official shows support for Games

By Zhang Chunyan in London
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The London Olympic Games will be distinctive and wonderful, the Chinese government representative to the event said on Friday.

State Councilor Dai Bingguo made the remarks during a meeting in London with British Foreign Secretary William Hague.

"I am attending the London Olympics opening ceremony on behalf of the Chinese government, visiting members of the Chinese sports delegation and showing great support for the Olympics," Dai said.

He wished the London Olympic Games great success.

The London Olympics began on Friday and will run through Aug 12 after seven years of preparations.

The Sino-British relationship is very important, and there is huge space for potential development and cooperation, Dai said.

China and the UK should overcome problems that exist between the two countries, create a better atmosphere and conditions for future development, bring out the potential of Sino-British relations and benefit the people of both countries, Dai said.

Hague welcomed Dai to the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games as the Chinese government representative and thanked him for China's support.

Hague said the UK attaches great importance to its relations with China, and is willing to strengthen dialogue, communication and mutual understanding with China to expand cooperation and promote the positive development of Sino-UK relations.

Dai visited members of the Chinese sports delegation in London's Olympic Village on

Thursday, sending his best wishes and encouraging them to compete for victory.

On behalf of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, Dai extended cordial greetings to Chinese athletes, coaches and staff, and urged them to pursue the Olympic spirit "higher, faster and stronger" and strive for success.

"As a member of the Olympic family and the previous host country, China has participated actively and shown great support for the London Olympics. We have sent a big delegation of 621 members, which attracted worldwide attention," Dai said.

"You are both athletes and envoys of friendship," he said.

Dai told Chinese athletes to behave in a modest and unassuming way.

"We are considered a big sporting country, but we are still not a sporting giant. There are still gaps between China and global sports giants in many aspects," Dai said.

"We must be modest and unassuming in learning from other countries and continue to improve our athletic abilities," Dai added.

China's London Olympic delegation is the second-largest delegation in the history of China's participation in the Games and the biggest ever for an overseas Olympics.

The team includes 621 members, 396 of whom will compete in 23 sports.

Dai also visited China's media representatives, including China Daily, and asked them to deliver timely, accurate and comprehensive reports about the Games.

More than 1,000 journalists went to London from China to cover the Olympics. "This also reflects China's prosperous development," Dai said.



FUNERAL FOR LIN JUN

PHOTO BY CHRISTINNE MUSCHI / REUTERS

Lin Dirang, father of slain student Lin Jun, holds the ashes at his son's gravesite during funeral services in Montreal on Thursday. Lin, 32, was killed in Canada in May. He "was a loving son, a good young man who was hardworking and true" and "his family's pride and joy," Father Henry Rodriguez said during the Christian funeral service, which had Buddhist elements.

UN fears over Syria expressed

By Agencies in Geneva and Istanbul

The UN's human rights office warned on Friday of an "imminent" showdown between government troops and opposition forces in Syria's second-largest city, Aleppo.

The rebels have been locked in fierce fighting with government troops in Aleppo for six days and are bracing for an attack amid reports that the regime is amassing reinforcements to retake the city of 3 million.

Expressing her "deep alarm" at the situation, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said the reports coming out of Damascus, "along with the reported build-up of forces in and around Aleppo, bodes ill for the people of that city."

Part of the reason for that, she said in a statement read aloud to reporters on Friday in Geneva by her spokesman Rupert Colville, are the "as yet unconfirmed reports of atrocities, including extra-judicial killings and shooting of civilians by snipers" during fighting in the suburbs of Damascus.

"And it goes without saying, that the increasing use of heavy weapons, tanks, attack helicopters and — reportedly — even jet fighters in urban areas has already caused many civilian casualties and is putting many more at grave risk," the statement said.

A senior UN diplomat close to the mediation effort of international envoy Kofi Annan said they are "watching the situation in Aleppo with great concern".

AP—AFP

Japan threatens military action over Diaoyu Islands

By ZHANG YUNBI and ZHOU WA

Tokyo announced twice in the past two days the possibility of dispatching troops to the Diaoyu Islands, a move Beijing on Friday slammed as "extremely irresponsible."

Analysts said Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda and his cabinet have taken one of the most hawkish positions in recent years over the islands, and the move will leave Noda less room to improve bilateral ties.

Japanese Defense Minister Satoshi Morimoto on Friday indicated the possibility of mobilizing the country's Self-Defense Forces when commenting on Chinese vessels

sailing near the islands in the East China Sea.

Morimoto said that the dispatch of troops is "secured by law", Tokyo Broadcasting System reported.

Morimoto's remark came a day after Noda announced a similar stance on Thursday.

Noda said that the Japanese government, if necessary, should take "resolute actions" against any "illegal" incursion of neighboring countries into Japan's "territorial waters."

Beijing on Friday expressed serious concern and strong objections over the "extremely irresponsible remarks" by Japan.

"Nothing can change China's strong will and determination to safeguard its territorial sov-

ereignty," Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said.

Zhou Yongsheng, an expert on Japanese studies at China Foreign Affairs University, said Noda and Morimoto's recent remarks show that Tokyo's stance on the Diaoyu Islands issue is becoming tougher with less room for diplomatic maneuverability.

As the Japanese election draws near, some politicians such as Noda care little about China-Japan relations and "place priority on winning the election," said Zhou.

Shen Shishun, an expert on Asia-Pacific studies at Haikou College of Economics in Hainan province, said there is little chance that Tokyo will send its troops to the islands.

"In spite of the strong remarks from Japanese politicians, the government has not yet made up its mind to really send in troops," said Shen.

Hong said some politicians in Japan have expressed a willingness for a diplomatic resolution.

Japanese Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura, the government's top spokesman, on Friday said the prime minister merely responded to a hypothetical question and was "referring to a theoretical possibility" of military action.

"(Noda's remark) was not specifically directed at containing China," Mainichi Daily Newspaper reported Osamu as saying.

Analysts said Tokyo's mixed responses reflect its desire to

not rule out diplomacy.

"Some politicians, such as Noda and Morimoto, use strong rhetoric as a political tool for votes," Shen said.

Zhou warned that Japan may continue to take a hard line approach on the issue.

Bilateral ties deteriorated after Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara initiated a plan in April to "purchase" the islands from a so-called "private owner" and Noda announced a plan to "nationalize" the islands in early July.

"A small group of individuals in Japan have deliberately created friction with China over the Diaoyu Islands and inflamed tension between the people of both countries. It is extremely wrong and hazardous," the Chinese embassy in

Japan said on Thursday.

In another development, the International Olympic Committee appointed Japanese Olympic Committee President Tsunekazu Takeda a member of the IOC.

According to Kyodo News Agency, Ishihara's remarks have triggered dissatisfaction from some IOC members from Asia. Ishihara "should shut his mouth," Kyodo quoted an Asian veteran member as saying.

Support from Asian countries for Tokyo's bid to host future Olympic Games is indispensable, Kyodo said.

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