

## IVORY COAST ARRESTS TWO SOLDIERS FOR SUSPECTED LINKS TO AL QAEDA

**ABIDJAN:** Two soldiers have been arrested in Ivory Coast accused of failing to denounce suspected members of an al Qaeda cell that killed 19 people in a March attack on a beach resort town, military officials said on yesterday.

The raid on Grand Bassam, 40 km from the commercial capital, Abidjan, by al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the

jihadi group's North African affiliate, was the furthest yet from its traditional desert base. Authorities in Ivory Coast and neighboring Mali have arrested a number of suspects since the attack. Ivory Coast's military prosecutor Colonel Ange Kessi said the soldiers were not accused of participating directly in the Grand Bassam plot. "The two soldiers knew certain members

of the unit that attacked the beach in Grand Bassam and did not signal that to their hierarchy, which is a serious offence under the military code of justice," he said.

They are due to stand trial at the end of August, Kessi added. The attack in Grand Bassam, during which gunmen shot swimmers and sunbathers before storming into several hotels, also harmed French-speak-

ing West Africa's largest economy, a rising star on the continent.

AQIM has killed dozens of people in a series of attacks against high-profile civilian targets in Mali, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast since late last year. It says they are intended as revenge for a 2013 French-led intervention against Islamist groups in Mali. — Reuters

## UN ENVOY EYES RESUMPTION OF SYRIA TALKS IN AUGUST

**GENEVA:** UN mediator Staffan de Mistura yesterday called on Moscow and Washington to push for a resumption of Syrian peace talks, which he hoped could resume next month.

De Mistura told reporters in Geneva he wanted to "ensure that we have enough, sufficient, critical mass in order to give a sufficient chance for a concrete and effective beginning of the third round of the intra-Syrian talks."

The talks "have a target date of August," de Mistura said. "These talks ... are meant to be a credible beginning of a roadmap towards a political transition, so they need to be well-prepared," he said.

De Mistura, who had previously spoken about resuming the talks in July, made his comments as US Secretary of State John Kerry was on his way to Moscow for talks with President Vladimir Putin and test his commitment to the stalled Syrian peace process.

Washington and Moscow have backed a roadmap that calls for a nationwide ceasefire and Geneva-based talks on "political transition." But there has been little progress towards a hoped-for resumption of talks this month, and the prospects for a political transition beginning by August, as laid out in the road map, now appear slim.

De Mistura pointed to the partial ceasefire that Moscow and Washington brokered for Syria in February, saying that when the two "agree on something ... that helps a lot the political process and even the humanitarian process." De Mistura said he hoped Washington and Moscow could help reduce the "non-constructive ambiguity" surrounding the Al-Nusra Front.

Like the Islamic State group, the Al-Nusra Front is defined as a terrorist group by the UN Security Council, but is not party to the much-breached ceasefire. That ambiguity, he said, "has been one of the main problems for the sustainability of the cessation of hostilities." — AFP

## PREPARATION VITAL FOR SUCCESSFUL ARAB SUMMIT

**CAIRO:** The Arab League has stressed the importance of thorough preparation to hold a successful 27th Arab summit in Nouakchott on July 25.

The League's General Secretariat is exerting great efforts to prepare the summit's agenda of main issues facing the Arab World, said Assistant Secretary General for Financial and Administrative Affairs Adnan AlKhudair in a press statement on Thursday.

Preparative meetings will commence on July 20, said Al-Khudair, adding that the meetings will involve officials of the Economic and Social Council, permanent representatives and foreign ministers. — KUNA

## SAUDI KING LEAVES ON HOLIDAY, CROWN PRINCE TO MANAGE AFFAIRS

**DUBAI:** Saudi Arabia's King Salman left the country on holiday yesterday and appointed the crown prince to manage the kingdom's affairs in his absence, state news agency SPA reported.

The statement did not say where King Salman, 80, was travelling or how long he would be absent for. In April 2015 Salman appointed his 56-year-old nephew,

Mohammed bin Nayef, as crown prince and made his young son, Mohammed bin Salman, second in line to rule, a major shift in power towards two princes who have overseen a more assertive stance at a time of regional turmoil. — Reuters



**DAMASCUS:** Syrian official news agency SANA, Syrian President Bashar Assad, left, speaks during an interview with American network NBC News yesterday. — AP

## SYRIA'S ASSAD SAYS HE DOESN'T KNOW WHO KILLED MARIE COLVIN LAWSUIT PENDING

**BEIRUTL:** Syrian President Bashar Assad denied in comments aired yesterday that his forces targeted US-born journalist Marie Colvin, a veteran correspondent for The Times who was killed in Syria in 2012, adding that he does not know how she died.

In an interview with NBC News, Assad was asked to comment on a lawsuit filed by Colvin's relatives in US federal court claiming that Syrian government officials targeted and killed Colvin to silence her reporting on Syria and the besieged central city of Homs. "Nobody knows if she (was) killed by missile, or which missile, and where did the missile come from, or how. No one has any evidence," Assad said.

The Syrian president said Colvin entered Syria illegally and "worked with the terrorists," adding that the government cannot be responsible for those who enter the country illegally. Assad's government uses the term "terrorist" for all armed opposition fighters and militants battling his forces, whether they are Western-backed rebels or al-Qaida and other Islamic fighters.

The lawsuit filed last week said Syrian officials launched a rocket attack on a makeshift broadcast studio in a neighborhood of Homs on February 22, 2012,

killing Colvin, along with French photo-journalist Remi Ochlik.

Just hours before her death, the 56-year-old Colvin, a native of New York City, had filed another report on the Syrian government's crackdown and its impact on civilians.

The wrongful-death lawsuit filed Saturday in Washington by the Center for Justice and Accountability on behalf of Cathleen Colvin, Marie Colvin's sister,

and Justine Araya-Colvin, the reporter's niece, said the Assad government "hunted down journalists and media activists" who were trying to tell the story of the government's deadly crackdown on Syrian rebels. The Syrian government has contended that its attacks targeted "terrorists." "When you're caught in crossfire somewhere, you cannot tell who killed who ... these are all allegations," Assad said. — AP

## EMIRATI GETS 3-MONTH PRISON SENTENCE OVER INSTAGRAM INSULT

**DUBAI:** A state-owned newspaper in the United Arab Emirates is reporting that an Emirati man has received a three-month prison sentence and a fine after being convicted of insulting his brother on Instagram.

The Arabic-language newspaper Al Etihad reported on Thursday that the man's brother became upset after finding his photo on his brother's Instagram account with an expletive as the caption.

The newspaper says the unidenti-

fied defendant also must pay a 250,000-dirham (\$68,000) fine under the sentence from the Khor Fakkan Court of Misdemeanors. The newspaper says the defendant planned to appeal.

While liberal compared to much of the Middle East, the UAE has tough cybercrime and slander laws under which people can be arrested, imprisoned and deported for taking photographs without the consent of those shown or being insulting. — AP