

## Egypt fears sectarian violence Obama condemns attack

AFP, Cairo

Christians prayed yesterday at a church targeted by an apparent suicide bomber who killed 21 people as Egypt pointed the finger of blame at international "terrorism" and fears of sectarian violence mounted.

"With our soul and our blood we will redeem the Holy Cross," the grieving congregation chanted at the Coptic Al-Qiddissin church in Alexandria at Sunday mass a day after the bombing.

The attack sparked angry street protests in Alexandria.



PHOTO: AFP

An Egyptian Christian lights candles during Sunday mass yesterday at the Al-Qiddissine (The Saints) church in Alexandria which was targeted on New Year's Eve by a car bomb attack in which 21 people were killed. There was no immediate claim for the attack but Al-Qaeda has called for punishment of Egypt's Copts over claims that two priests' wives they say had converted to Islam were being held by the Church against their will.

## Qatar, United States sign security pact

AFP, Doha

US Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano and her Qatari counterpart Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa al-Thani yesterday signed a bilateral security accord to boost bilateral cooperation.

"Homeland security does not begin at America's borders -- it starts with our international partnerships to detect and deter terrorists and other individuals who pose a threat to citizens around the world," Napolitano said on inking the letter of intent, according to a statement from her department.

"This agreement will help us expand collaboration with Qatar in order to better protect the citizens of both nations against the evolving threats we face," she said.

The accord is aimed at bolstering information sharing about people with ties to terrorism and serious crime; tightening passenger screening at airports; and sharing methods of document screening, behavior detection and efforts to combat bulk cash smuggling and money laundering.

It also includes new efforts at increasing cooperation on international aviation security, cybersecurity, disaster response and emergency preparedness, US officials said.

Napolitano's visit to Doha followed stops in Ireland and Afghanistan, where she met with top Afghan officials including President Hamid Karzai.

There are currently 25 staff from the Department of Homeland Security working to help boost security in Afghanistan.

## Stoning of Iran woman could be quashed

AFP, Tehran

The sentence of death by stoning handed down by an Iranian court against a mother of two could be quashed, a senior judiciary official said yesterday, adding that some ambiguities remained in her case.

When asked by Fars news agency whether the stoning sentence against Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani who was found guilty of adultery by an Iranian court could be quashed, Malek Ajdar Sharifi, the head of East Azerbaijan judiciary, said that "anything is possible."

## Pak should discard posture of 'compulsive hostility': Krishna

PTI, New Delhi

In a forthright message to Pakistan, India yesterday said its posture of "compulsive hostility" will not help a "serious and sustained" dialogue between the two countries.

Noting that the country "walked the extra mile in reaching out" to its neighbours, External Affairs Minister S M Krishna said, "We earnestly hope that our neighbour would see the merit in constructive engagement and discard the posture of compulsive hostility."

During an exclusive interview to PTI, the minister said, "Our only expectation from Pakistan is to dismantle the terror infrastructure that operates from the territories under its control. A serious and sustained dialogue can thrive only in a peaceful and terror free climate."

He also said that terrorism, whether state-sponsored or not, has no place in today's world and needs to be rooted out through concerted efforts of each and every one.

## India's dirty old writer releases "last" book

AP, New Delhi

This book, he insists, will be his last. It's a novel about two old men, written by a 96-year-old who says he can't have much time left.

So after this one, the man who has been a force in India's literary world for more than 60 years, a famously grumpy writer known for everything from beautifully wrought novels to fart jokes, vows to go silent.

Khushwant Singh says it's time to try something different.

"I have to teach myself to do nothing. In the last phase of a man's life, according to the Hindu tradition, you're meant to be a forest dweller."

Then Singh, sitting beside a fire on a cold winter evening, in an elegant colonial-era apartment building built by his father and named for his grandfather, began to laugh. It was a low, gravelly, heartfelt laugh; the laugh of a man who enjoys his life.

Because he knows he can't really go



silent, let alone retreat into the forest. Old age is slowing him down, he acknowledges, with its medicines and hearing aids and constant doctors. His long flowing beard flows in every direction these days, and he talks to visitors with his gnarled fingers pressed against his forehead, as if he can barely stay awake. He lives much of his life in his blue chair by the fire, with his travels

largely limited to visits to the bathroom and the bedroom.

But there will still be his newspaper columns and the occasional interview. He knows there will still be a constant stream of visitors who dare to face his apartment door despite the sign beside it warning: "Please do not ring the bell unless you are expected."

"I am trying hardest to see no one, because I find it tiresome," he said. He sighed: "I have people descending on me and flattering me. I fall for flattery."

They come because Khushwant Singh has been a loud and very public presence in India for decades, coming onto the scene just after India got independence from Britain in 1947. A lawyer-turned-diplomat-turned-writer, Singh ran one of India's great magazines, wrote one of its great 20th-century novels and has opined about everything from masturbation to government incompetence.

## Iraq gun and bomb attacks kill four, wound 18

AFP, Baghdad

Bomb and gun attacks across Iraq claimed the lives of four people, including a soldier and a policeman, and wounded 18 others yesterday.

Two people, including an Iraqi soldier, were killed and three others wounded by a car bomb targeting an Iraqi army patrol in Al-Qayyara, 50 kilometres (31 miles) south of the northern Iraq city of Mosul, Iraqi army First Lieutenant Khattab Mohammed said.

One policeman was killed and four others were wounded when gunmen attacked a checkpoint in Al-Filahat area, 10 kilometres west of Fallujah, which is itself west of Baghdad, police said.

## NEWS IN brief

### Five Maoists killed in encounter in Orissa

PTI, Jajpur

Five Maoists, including four women, were killed in a fierce gunbattle with security forces in a forest in Orissa's Jajpur district yesterday.

The Maoists fired on a joint team of the Special Operations Group (SOG) and state police when they were combing the dense Raighati forest, about 95 km from here in the early hours, SP D S Kuttey said.

The SOG fired back, leading to a six-hour gunbattle in which the five Maoists were killed, he said.

Five bodies were found after the encounter, he said, adding, there was no casualty or injury among security men.

The slain Maoists, aged between 22 and 35 years, were dressed in fatigues, the SP said.

Altogether 12 rifles, including a SLR, ammunition, Maoist posters, leaflets and booklets were seized from the encounter site, he said.

### Hotmail e-mails 'missing' from accounts

BBC ONLINE

A number of people with Hotmail accounts have posted complaints on Microsoft forums complaining that their e-mails have been deleted.

Users around the world say e-mails are missing from their inbox and from other folders within their Hotmail accounts.

A spokeswoman for Microsoft said that the issue of missing e-mails was not a widespread problem.

The company said it is working to rectify the problem and apologised to customers for any inconvenience.

### Under fire Hungary media watchdog raises concerns

BBC ONLINE

Hungary's new media authority has begun investigating a radio station for playing a song by rapper Ice-T which it said "could influence the development of minors in a negative way".

The authority came into being on Saturday, at the same time as Hungary assumed the six-month EU presidency.

The new media law can also require journalists to reveal their sources on matters of national security.

## Quake hits Indonesia: US seismologists

AFP, Jakarta

A 5.7-magnitude earthquake struck off Indonesia's Sumatra island yesterday, the US Geological Survey said, but there was no tsunami warning.

The moderate quake struck at a shallow depth of 16 kilometres at 10:19 pm, 122 kilometres southwest of Bengkulu, on southern Sumatra.

Indonesia sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", where the meeting of continental plates causes high seismic activity, and Sumatra is particularly prone to earthquakes.

## Pakistan coalition party to leave govt: officials

AFP, Karachi

The Pakistan government's main coalition partner said yesterday that it would join the opposition following the resignation of two of its ministers last month.

"We have decided to sit on opposition benches, because the government has not done anything to address the issues we have been protesting about," Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) stalwart Faisal Sabzwari told AFP.



PHOTO: AFP

Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff (R) and former Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso shake hands during a meeting at the Planalto Palace in Brasilia yesterday. Rousseff was sworn in Saturday, becoming the first female president of Brazil.