

NEWS IN brief

Sonia Gandhi turns 66

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

President of India's ruling Congress party Sonia Gandhi yesterday turned 66 amidst outpouring of greetings from her party leaders and workers and holding of special prayers at a mobile temple for her healthy life outside her residence.

Scores of party workers, lawmakers and ministers thronged the official residence of Gandhi on Janpath here to celebrate her 66th birthday yesterday.

Gandhi had appealed to party workers not to take a spend money to come all the way to Delhi from far off places to greet her. Despite the appeal, party workers gathered at her residence since early morning beating drums and taking out processions.

Russia may boycott Nato summit

AFP, Moscow

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov yesterday said they may boycott Chicago summit with Nato if the two sides failed to bridge their differences over a US-backed missile defence system for Europe.

The final decision on attending the summit will be reached after March 4 presidential polls at which Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is expected to secure his return to the Kremlin.

The staging of such a high-level summit depends first and foremost on whether it is filled with meaning.

Indian Congress website hacked

AFP, New Delhi

Hackers broke into the official website of India's ruling Congress party yesterday and defaced the profile page of party president Sonia Gandhi with a pornographic message.

The attack came just days after the Indian government pledged a crackdown on "unacceptable" Internet content.

The pornographic text included a reference to a Pakistan-based email address, but did not otherwise identify the hackers. A congress leader told AFP that the party's computer department was investigating

Lokpal Bill tabled in parliament
Team Anna calls bill 'weak'

PTI, New Delhi

The Parliamentary panel examining the Lokpal Bill yesterday submitted its report on the legislation to set up an anti-corruption ombudsman to Parliament.

The report on the Lokpal Bill was tabled in the Rajya Sabha by Abhishek Manu Singhvi, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Law and Justice, Public Grievances and Personnel.

In the Lok Sabha, Committee member Pinaki Misra tabled the report and the evidence tendered before the panel during the deliberations.

As the parliamentary panel tabled its report on the Lokpal bill, Team Anna members termed the draft legislation weak and urged people to join the agitation against it.

Team Anna members said the parliamentary committee has not suggested many changes and the draft bill will only increase corruption.

"We urge the people to come to Jantar Mantar on 11th of this month to tell the government that this kind of betrayal will not take place again," Team Anna member Arvind Kejriwal said.

Speaking on similar lines, another key member of the team Prashant Bhushan said the Lokpal draft bill had no powers.

Social activist Anna Hazare, who has been fighting for an anti-graft legislation to create an ombudsman, will be sitting on a one-day token fast at Jantar Mantar in Delhi tomorrow to oppose the draft.



West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee (R) speaks with relatives of victims and fire fighters after a fire engulfed Amri hospital in the eastern Indian city of Kolkata yesterday. 89 people were killed in the disaster.

PHOTO: AFP

KOLKATA HOSPITAL FIRE
Rage against Mamata, media

IANS, Kolkata

The presence of Mamata Banerjee and the media only triggered further chaos and resentment at the fire-ravaged AMRI hospital yesterday, as police even resorted to batons to disperse the crowds.

Furious families of patients said the movement of ambulances had been hit after the West Bengal chief minister arrived.

Banerjee came to the narrow lane leading to the hospital - co-founded by private firms along with the West Bengal government - around 9.45am, and immediately a stream of people as also mediapersons rushed towards her.

But as the surging crowd became uncontrollable, leading to a near stampede, the lawkeepers wielding the baton, which worsened the situation.

Police personnel finally succeeded in clearing some area for the chief minister to address the relatives of victims.

"Because Mamata is here, the ambulances cannot go towards the annexe building. Please ask her to shift to another road," shouted a distraught relative of a victim.

Crestfallen and harassed at not receiving information for hours about patients, some relatives poured out their frustration.

A photojournalist was bashed up by residents and relatives of patients and a couple of cameras smashed.

PM to open Batexpo

FROM PAGE 1

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is set to inaugurate the event at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the morning.

Finance Minister AMA Muhiith, Textiles and Jute Minister Abdul Latif Siddique, LGRD Minister Syed Ashraful Islam, Commerce Minister GM Quader, Industries Minister Dilip Barua, Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Faruk Khan and Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan will address the inaugural session as special guests.

The organisers expect that this year's Batexpo would be different and it would be able to attract more foreign buyers than in 2010 with an increased volume in spot orders, which was \$65 million last year.

It will be a reunion for both foreign buyers and local manufacturers, and the fair would help expand global market for Bangladesh's readymade garments, they say.

Opposition BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will attend the closing session of the three-day show on Monday as the chief guest.

Former Industries and Commerce Minister MK

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Zardari vows to return soon
Says recovering well

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari is "fine" and will return home soon, a news anchor quoted him as saying yesterday, nearly a week after his rush to a Dubai hospital led to speculation the unpopular leader might resign and even of a possible coup.

"I'm fine and will return soon," Zardari reportedly told Hamid Mir, a popular news anchor, who repeated the comments on state television.

The issue of the president's health has gripped Islamabad, exacerbating a series of cascading crises, that he may resign.

Laden's wives can leave Pakistan

GUARDIAN ONLINE

Two wives of Osama bin Laden, held in Pakistan after the raid in May that killed their husband, are set to return to their homeland of Saudi Arabia, Pakistani officials have said.

A third wife will not travel back to her native land, Yemen, after authorities refused to accept her but may instead be offered a new home in Qatar, the Gulf emirate, a source in the Pakistani interior ministry told the Guardian.

All three women were detained by Pakistani military personnel after the American special forces raid on a house in the northern Pakistani city of Abbottabad during which Bin Laden was killed. Around a dozen children were also taken into Pakistani custody.

According to the officials and Saudi press reports, the two Saudi-born wives, Khairah Sabar and Siham Sabar, recently had their Saudi citizenship restored, a move which would allow their return, possibly as early as next week.

However, there been no official confirmation from Riyadh, and the Saudi ambassador in Pakistan has told local reporters he has no knowledge of any forthcoming transfer.

Western officials in the region urged caution.

"Let's wait and see. It's likely they will go back [to Saudi Arabia] at some stage but it may well not be imminent," said one.

Officials in Riyadh told the Guardian earlier this year that, at least theoretically, there was no objection to the women's return to Saudi Arabia.

Garos dance away

FROM PAGE 20

and Dhubauro of Mymensingh and Madhupur of Tangail district attended the celebration with their cultural teams.

Some 10 cultural teams with 300 artistes, donned in traditional multi-coloured clothing and beating traditional musical instruments, celebrated the concluding session.

The indigenous people all over the world celebrate such programmes in their own style and such celebrations have been continuing for centuries enriching the culture of regions and countries.

The festival was rounded up with a 'mandi chorus' -- Harereray, Harereray -- which means to offer thanks to the creator for a good harvest.

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