

## UK to end financial aid to India

AFP, London

Britain will stop all aid to India in 2015 and the assistance budget will be reduced by around £200 million (\$320 million) until then, the international development minister said yesterday.

Justine Greening, who visited Britain's former colony for talks earlier this week, said the move recognises India's "changing place in the world".

The UK's financial support to India, one of the world's fastest-growing economies, has been a cause of concern among Conservative MPs amid suggestions that funding had ended up supporting prestige projects such as India's space programme.

## Congress patience wears thin in India

## Sonia accuses opposition of trying to grab power

PTI, Haryana

Asking partymen to gear up for the next Lok Sabha polls, Congress president Sonia Gandhi accused its opponents of attempting to grab power at any cost and called for an aggressive response to their "false propaganda".

Congress has been facing a barrage of attacks from the opposition over corruption targeting the top brass which includes Sonia Gandhi, her son Rahul Gandhi, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and top ministers.

Noting that about 18 months were left for the next parliamentary polls, Gandhi told a "dialogue meeting" of top party leaders including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh here that the party should strive hard to meet



the challenge.

Gandhi, who is also the UPA chairperson, said that though "we are facing very difficult challenges", it is a fact that "we have a record of excellent achievements in the past eight years and we are proud of our commitment to the interest of the common man. This commitment is our dharma."

She said that the party-led govern-

ment has changed the face of India through "unparalleled programmes and laws".

"Our detractors and the opposition are bent upon spreading disinformation on political, moral and policy issues," she said.

"We have to respond aggressively to their false propaganda. We know that in reality their intention is to grab power at any cost, notwithstanding the fact that their greed could weaken democracy, equality, sovereignty and secular values," she said.

Gandhi was addressing the day-long meeting of Congress top brass, including cabinet ministers, ministers of state with independent charge, congress working committee (CWC) members and permanent invitees to CWC.

## India will not backtrack on reforms

AFP, New Delhi

India will abide by a controversial decision to open retail and other sectors to wider foreign investment, the country's trade minister promised delegates at an international financial conference Thursday.

"What we have done is irreversible -- what is cast in stone cannot be set aside," trade minister Anand Sharma told the World Economic Forum.

Since September, the government has approved rules inviting more foreign investment in the retail, broadcasting and aviation sectors. The government has also proposed higher overseas ownership levels in the under-capitalised insurance and pension industries.

STATEHOOD BID AT UN  
Palestinians unveil resolution

AFP, United Nations

Palestinian envoys on Thursday unveiled the resolution they hope will give them observer membership of the United Nations but held back from setting a date for a vote.

With the United States firmly against the move, and President Barack Obama's new administration still considering its next move in Middle East peace efforts, Arab League foreign ministers are to discuss the resolution next week, diplomats said.

The Palestine mission to the United Nations sent a letter to UN members with its proposed resolution saying it would be put to the 193 member UN General Assembly "at a date to be announced in the near future."

The resolution would call on the assembly to accord observer membership and urge the 15-nation UN Security Council to "consider favorably" an application for full membership made last year by President Mahmud Abbas.

The United States has blocked the full membership bid, threatening to use a veto at the Security Council, which must approve any full application. It cannot hold up any bid for observer membership at the General Assembly.

NEWS IN  
brief

## Australia to sign up for Kyoto 2

AFP, Sydney

Key greenhouse gas emitter Australia yesterday said it will sign up for a second round of the Kyoto Protocol environmental protection treaty, but New Zealand opted out.

Climate Minister Greg Combet made the announcement in a speech to a carbon expo, saying: "Australia is ready to join a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol."

So far, only the European Union and several smaller economies have signalled a willingness to agree to a second round of pledges.

## WikiLeaks suspect offers guilty plea

AFP, Washington

A US soldier accused of leaking a trove of secret files to WikiLeaks has offered to plead guilty to some but not all of the charges he faces in a pending court-martial, his defense lawyer said.

Bradley Manning, 24, "is not pleading guilty to the specifications as charged by the Government," his attorney, David Coombs wrote on his blog on Wednesday.

By making the offer, Manning indicated he was ready to plead guilty to passing government information to WikiLeaks, though it was unclear if he would admit to passing all the files cited by prosecutors.

## Israel enemy No 1: Sudan

AFP, Khartoum

A tired but healthy-looking Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir appeared on television Thursday after a minor operation, calling Israel "enemy number one" in a return to his typical fiery rhetoric.

"Israel is our enemy, our number one enemy, and we will continue calling Israel our enemy," he said in a voice which sounded normal.

## Rafsanjani's son accused of spying

AFP, Tehran

The jailed son of Iran's former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani has been accused of spying, the Fars news agency reported on Thursday.

Quoting an unnamed informed source, the agency said that Mehdi Hashemi has been accused "of spying and of having provided sensitive information to foreigners."

His sister, Faezeh Hashemi, was also detained and jailed for "propaganda against the regime" in line with a court decision earlier this year.

## Putin replaces Russia army chief

AFP, Moscow

President Vladimir Putin yesterday replaced Russia's army chief of staff with a veteran commander from the second Chechnya war, in a shake-up of the military after the sacking of the defence minister.

Army chief of staff Nikolai Makarov has been replaced by General Valery Gerasimov, a commander from the second Chechnya war, Putin announced days after the sacking of defence minister Anatoly Serdyukov in a graft scandal.

## US senator shooter gets life

CNN ONLINE

Gabrielle "Gabby" Giffords stood next to her husband in court Thursday as he spoke directly to Jared Loughner, the Arizona man who tried to assassinate the then-congresswoman in a January 2011 shooting.

Giffords was seriously wounded when Loughner walked up and shot her in the head during her meet-and-greet event with constituents outside a Tucson grocery store on January 8, 2011. A federal judge, a congressional aide and

## 'Asean declaration falls short on human rights'

STAR DESK

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, yesterday said drafts of the Asean Declaration of Human Rights may not meet international human rights standards.

Pillay said the Declaration should be postponed, because of the inadequate involvement of civil society and other stakeholders in the drafting of the Declaration.

She said the document places restrictions in the name of "regional and national particularities", and creates requirements such as the balancing of rights and duties.

"They have to adhere to the universal standards adopted by all states under the UN charter," Pillay told Radio Australia's Asia Pacific at the close of the Bali Democracy Forum.

Pillay also said she met with Burma's Deputy Foreign Minister at the Forum to discuss the human rights situation in Rakhine state.

"[I] urged that Myanmar should show more concern for the suffering and loss of life in the communities impacted by the violence there," she said.

"If the communal violence is not resolved it can undermine the reform process in Myanmar.

"One of the underlying causes of the violence since June between communities in Rakhine state is the endemic discrimination against the 800,000 Rohingya."

## Obama warns taxes must rise on

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama yesterday claimed a mandate to raise taxes on the rich to pay for deficit reductions, firing his first post-election shot in a year-end budget showdown with Republicans.

"We can't just cut our way to prosperity. If we are serious about reducing the deficit, we have to combine spending cuts with revenue, and that means asking the wealthiest Americans to pay a little more in taxes," he said.

The president also announced in a punchy, televised White House statement, his first public appearance since his election night address, that he would call top Republican and Democratic leaders to the White House next week.

The talks will focus on averting the so-called "fiscal cliff" -- a catastrophic blend of automatic tax rises and harsh spending

cuts due to come into force on January 1, which could cause a new recession.

Obama signalled a willingness to compromise on the details of a deficit reduction plan, but he made clear that his bottom line principle involved rejecting the Republicans' flat refusal to raise any taxes.

"This was a central question during the election, it was debated over and over again. On Tuesday night, we found that the majority of Americans agree with my approach."

"I want to be clear. I'm not wedded to every detail of my plan. I'm open to compromise. I'm open to new ideas. I refuse to accept any approach that isn't balanced.

"I'm not going to ask students and seniors and middle class families to pay down the entire deficit while people like me making over \$250,000 aren't asked to pay a dime more in taxes. I'm not going to do that."

## Obama set to recast cabinet

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UN ambassador Susan Rice, who has been close to Obama for years, has long been seen as a likely replacement for Hillary at the State Department, despite being caught up in the furor over the raid in the US consulate in Benghazi.

Another possible contender is John Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, whose stock rose with Obama after he played Republican nominee Mitt Romney in practice runs for the recent presidential debates.

Rice would be the second African American woman in the job after Condoleezza Rice, to whom she is not related.

A report in Russia's Kommersant newspaper Thursday said that Moscow, with whom Rice has clashed heatedly over Syria, would prefer to see Kerry get the job, at a sensitive time between Obama and restored President Vladimir Putin.

Kerry would have to step down from the Senate, however, and there is concern that his Massachusetts berth could fall prey to Republican Scott Brown, who lost a race with Democrat Elizabeth Warren for the state's other Senate seat.

White House sources said that the usual timetable for replacing cabinet members -- in plenty of time for confirmation by

## Rohingya citizenship in legal limbo

AFP, Bangkok

Rohingya Muslims' statelessness is at the heart of bloody unrest that has torn through western Myanmar, but experts say the regime is unlikely to risk public ire by lifting them from citizenship limbo.

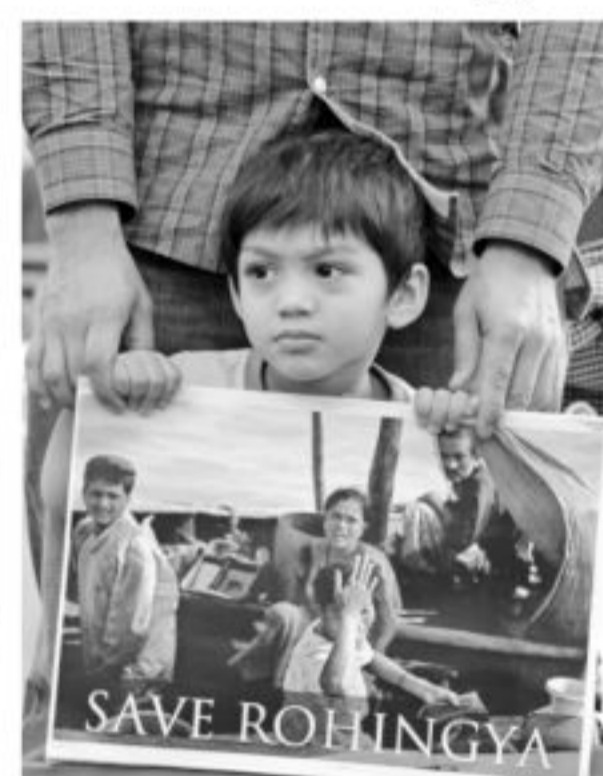
Rakhine state remains explosively tense after being convulsed by two major outbreaks of fighting involving Buddhist and Muslim communities since June that have left 180 dead and more than 110,000, mainly Rohingya, crammed into makeshift camps.

Local authorities told AFP on Wednesday they have begun a process of verifying the nationality of all the state's Muslims, amid widespread calls for those deemed "illegal" to be sent to a third country.

The precise goal of the survey was unclear.

With some 800,000 stateless Rohingya in Rakhine, the reformist government is under pressure to give them a legal status as it comes under international scrutiny with warnings that the conflict threatens its democratic transition.

"We would like the problems, the unresolved problems of the status of the Rohingya people, to be addressed by the leaders in Burma across politics," said Britain's Foreign Minister William Hague on Monday,



using Myanmar's former name.

The Rohingya, considered by the United Nations to be one of the most persecuted minorities on the planet, are seen by the government and many Burmese as illegal immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh.

Observers said the extreme level of hostility against the Rohingya in mainstream public opinion is likely to further inhibit any government efforts at widespread naturalisation, particularly as the country prepares for 2015 elections.

"The government could face a popular backlash if they unilaterally granted citizenship to the Rohingya," said Myanmar expert Nicholas Farelly at Australian National University.

The opposition, led by democracy champion Aung San Suu Kyi, has also disappointed international supporters by failing to speak up on behalf of the Rohingya, with many suggesting suspected concerns over the polls.

A 1982 law enshrines the citizenship of Myanmar's officially-recognised ethnic groups.

But the Rohingya were excluded, despite their claims to have met the criteria of having ancestors in the country before 1823, the date of the first Anglo-Burmese war and a benchmark before a colonial relationship that saw a flood of new arrivals into the country from south Asia.

## Iran fired on US drone in Gulf: US

AFP, Washington

The Pentagon revealed Thursday that two Iranian fighter jets fired on an unarmed US Predator drone in the Gulf last week but the aircraft was not hit, in an incident that underscored tensions in the region.

The incident occurred on November 1 -- less than a week before America's presidential election -- but the Pentagon kept it quiet until reports of the confrontation leaked out.

It was unclear whether the Iranians intended to warn off the unmanned drone.

## Anglicans elect new leader

AFP, London

Former oil executive Justin Welby was yesterday named as the next Archbishop of Canterbury, the spiritual head of the world's Anglicans, in a move aimed at healing schisms over gay and female bishops.

Welby, 56, who only became the Bishop of Durham a year ago, said the announcement by British Prime Minister David Cameron's Downing Street office was "astonishing and exciting".

He will replace Rowan Williams, who will retire in January after a decade spent battling divisions in the worldwide Anglican of around 80 million people.

Welby would be enthroned as archbishop in Canterbury Cathedral, in southeastern England, on March 21, 2013, the Archbishop of Canterbury's official office said in a statement.

Welby worked in the oil industry for 11 years before leaving to train for the Anglican priesthood and was first ordained as a deacon in 1992. "I was unable to get away from a sense of God calling," he said in an interview.



Jen Psaki has been mentioned as a possible replacement.

president sparked speculation on Tuesday when he said he wanted to sit down with Romney to work out how they could take the country forward.

Obama's first term "Team of Rivals" approach of choosing former political foes such as Hillary, modeled on that of his hero Abraham Lincoln, could apply in Romney's case, perhaps in the Commerce Secretary job.

However, it is unclear whether Romney would be prepared to swallow his pride and work for the man who vanquished him in a bitter White House campaign.