

## Indian army chief warns Pakistan

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's army chief held out the threat of retaliating against Pakistan for the killing of two soldiers at the de facto border in Kashmir, saying he had asked his ground commanders to be aggressive in the face of provocation.

General Bikram Singh's strong remarks yesterday, amid mounting public anger at the alleged decapitation of one of the slain soldiers, appeared set to ratchet up tensions further with Pakistan, although analysts said a breakdown in ties was highly unlikely.

Islamabad blames India for the latest crisis in ties. The two nations have fought three wars, two over Kashmir, since independence in 1947 and are now both nuclear-armed.

Terming the beheading of the soldier as "gruesome", Singh told a news conference: "We reserve the right to retaliate at a time and place of our choosing."

Last week's fighting was the worst outbreak of violence in Kashmir, the Himalayan region both nations claim, since the two sides agreed a ceasefire nine years ago.

Both armies have lost two soldiers each in the fighting along parts of the 740-km ceasefire line this month.



Gen Bikram Singh

## UNHR chief calls for probe into N Korea

AFP, Geneva

UN human rights chief Navi Pillay yesterday demanded an international probe into the alarming human rights situation in ultra-authoritarian North Korea, decrying more than a half-century of devastating abuses.

"It is time the international community took a much firmer step towards finding the truth and applying serious pressure to bring about change for this beleaguered, subjugated population of 20 million people," the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said in a rare and strongly worded statement on North Korea.

## 'China to pay great importance to India'

PTI, Beijing

In his first direct comments on relations with India, China's new leader Xi Jinping has assured Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that his country would pay "great importance" to developing bilateral ties as their cooperation has brought "substantial benefits" to both sides.

"China will, as it has been doing, pay great importance to developing relations with India and expects to carry out close cooperation with India to create a brighter future of their bilateral relations," Xi wrote in a letter to Singh which was delivered to him by top Chinese diplomat Dai Bingguo in New Delhi on 11 January.

"China-India relations have maintained stable development in the past few years, which has brought about substantial benefits to the two countries and the two peoples," state-run Xinhua news agency quoted Xi as saying. He said the world has enough space for China and India to achieve common development.

Dai, China's chief negotiator in border talks with India, was in New Delhi last week to attend the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) security officials' meeting.



Xi Jinping

## French planes strike in Mali

Islamists vow to strike on France  
AFP, Bamako

French warplanes yesterday pounded Islamist positions in the town of Douentza in central Mali on the fourth day of an offensive against jihadists occupying the north of the country.

"Planes repeatedly bombed the Islamists' headquarters in Douentza. It was destroyed but the Islamists were not there," said a resident on condition of anonymity.

A local businessman said the place bombed was at the southern entry to the town and was the headquarters of the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), one of the Islamist rebel groups.

Nato said yesterday it supported French efforts to turn back the terrorist threat in Mali but that the alliance had received no request for assistance and had not discussed the conflict.

"We welcome the efforts of the international community in support of the implementation of the United Nations ... resolution 2085 (on Mali)," a Nato spokesman said.

Meanwhile, Islamist forces based in northern Mali vowed yesterday to avenge France's fierce military offensive against them on French soil.

"France has attacked Islam. We will strike at the heart of France," said a leader of the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), an offshoot of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

## NEWS IN brief

### Attack fears Taliban comeback

AFP, Mingora

The worst bomb attack in years has fuelled growing fears of a Taliban comeback in Pakistan's Swat valley, where schoolgirl rights activist Malala Yousafzai was shot in the head last October.

The 2009 air and ground offensive that appeared to have crushed a two-year Taliban insurgency in the scenic northwestern district was widely credited as Pakistan's most successful

### Tunisia marks Arab spring

AFP, Tunis

Tunisians yesterday marked two years since the flight into exile of veteran dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali amid a climate of uncertainty marked by social tension, a weak economy, threats from jihadists and a political impasse.

President Moncef Marzouki, Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali and parliamentary speaker Mustapha Ben Jaafar saluted the national flag at a modest ceremony in Tunis to mark the occasion.

### Swartz investigation launched

BBC ONLINE

The president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) yesterday asked for an internal investigation into its role in Aaron Swartz's prosecution.

Web activist and developer Swartz, who killed himself on Friday, was facing hacking charges in the US.

He was accused of illegally downloading research documents from academic service

### Kate's baby due in July

AFP, London

Prince William and his wife Catherine's first child is due in July, St James' Palace announced yesterday, adding that the mother-to-be is feeling better following her hospitalisation last month.

"Their Royal Highnesses The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge are delighted to confirm they are expecting a baby in July," the palace said in a statement, suggesting the 31-year-old is at least three months pregnant.

## Syria air strike kills children

AFP, Damascus

An air strike on a rebel town near Damascus killed 13 women and children yesterday, a watchdog said, fuelling international calls for a war crimes probe into the 22-month Syrian conflict.

Reports of the civilian deaths came as Human Rights Watch accused President Bashar al-Assad's regime of expanding its use of banned cluster bombs.

Monday's air strike on houses in the town of Moadamiyat al-Sham, southwest of Damascus, killed at least eight children and five women, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.



PHOTO: AFP

Sadhus or holy men carry a child adorned with marigold flowers on their shoulders as they all march towards the Sangham or the confluence of the Yamuna and Ganges rivers during the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad yesterday. The Mela will see up to 100 million worshippers gather over the next 55 days to take a ritual bath in the holy waters, believed to cleanse sins and bestow blessings.

## Rajuk boss resigns

FROM PAGE 1 construction job of a portion of Uttara Apartment Project (third phase) to a joint venture of local company Sikdar Real Estate, Dubai-based Scorn and South Korean Donga.

Nasrul Hamid Bipu, a ruling party lawmaker who is believed to be influencing Mannan to favour Donga-Scorn-Sikdar, and Ron Haque Sikdar, managing director of Sikdar Real Estate, were present at the meeting, ministry sources say.

As Rajuk chairman disagreed, the minister started shouting at him. Later in the day, Nurul Huda through his personal officer sent his resignation letter to Housing Secretary Khandaker Shawkat Hossain. However, both the secretary and the state minister deny receiving the letter.

Talking to The Daily Star over the phone yesterday, the secretary said the Rajuk chairman had primarily decided to quit but submitted no resignation letter to date.

Yesterday morning, the Rajuk chief told reporters at the ministry that he had submitted his resignation citing health reasons.

He refused to say why he withdrew his resignation, but sources say he did that at the request of ministry officials.

The construction of 6,600 apartments under the project in the capital's Uttara sector-18 was inaugurated on March 28, 2012. The consortium of Donga and local firm Ena Properties are constructing its 79 buildings.

The Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) and Public Works Department are jointly implementing the scheme.

Its total cost has been estimated at Tk 10,000 crore.

In September last year, Donga-Scorn-Sikdar became the lone bidder to submit papers for the Tk 5,500-crore task to construct 144 buildings of the project.

But, according to sources, tender evaluation committees are yet to give it a nod, saying Sikdar Real Estate has hardly any experience to do such a big job.

Contacted, Nasrul, also president of Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB), claimed he has nothing to do with the project and he knows nothing about it. He was not present at the meeting.

The lawmaker also said he had gone to the ministry only for five minutes on a purpose related to REHAB. Yesterday, both the minister and Rajuk chairman denied any disagreement between them. They even visited the newly inaugurated Hatirjheel project together.

"We worked with him [Rajuk chairman] over the last three and a half years and we also hope to work together in future," the state minister told reporters in the morning before the visit. "There is no conflict between us."

Talking to The Daily Star, Ron Haque of Sikdar Real Estate denied attending the meeting and said he had gone to the ministry on Sunday on a different purpose.

He said Donga and Scorn are Sikdar's partners with 75 percent share and have experience to do the job.

### CHAVEZ HEALTH

## Mixed signals spark confusion

AFP, Caracas

Mixed signals from officials in Venezuela sparked confusion yesterday over the condition of cancer-stricken Chavez, under treatment in a Cuban hospital for over a month.

Chavez is "fighting for his life," former vice president Elias Jaua said.

## All 13 dead

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On the first day of the incident, the foreign ministry identified 11 of the deceased as Bangladeshi nationals.

However, the ministry in a press statement yesterday confirmed that all the 13 victims are Bangladeshi nationals and they died on the first day of the fire incident.

Two of the deceased, who were later identified as Bangladeshi, are: Shaheen Khan, son of late Abdur Satter Khan of village Dhonpotti under Matlab upazila in Chandpur district. His passport number is E1150923 and CPR number 860566706. The other victim is Mofizul Islam, son of Joynal Abdin of village Boro Banisha under Chouara at Comilla Sadar Dakkhin. His

passport number is AB 3138352, and CPR number 860566706.

The ministry statement also mentioned that two injured Bangladeshis were undergoing treatment, and no other injured Bangladeshis died later.

On Friday, the roof of the three-storey building collapsed, as the deadly blaze swept through the camp, situated in the crowded Mukhargha neighbourhood in the Bahraini capital.

It took the fire-fighters around six hours to tame the flames at the 26-room unauthorised structure.

Most of the occupants of the building were Bangladeshis, living in cramped conditions.

## 18-party to form

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one of the key partners in the alliance, however, looked at this programme as an opportunity to press home its sole demand for the release of its top leaders facing war crimes trial, sources in the opposition told The Daily Star.

More than three weeks after Bishwajit was killed by some ruling party activists, the 18-party alliance on December 31 last year declared the protest programme for today.

The poor tailor was mistaken for a blockader and attacked with machete and iron rods at Victoria Park in Old Dhaka by activists of pro-AL student body Chhatra League during opposition-enforced road-block on December 9.

Prior to this protest, top BNP and Jamaat leaders spent a busy week to ensure huge gatherings in human walls to be formed in the capital.

Human walls will be formed between 11:00am and 12:00noon at important points stretching over 13 kilometres from Mohakhali to Victoria Park in Old Dhaka, party sources said yesterday evening.

The BNP high command asked the party's senior 20 leaders to monitor and ensure their presence in and around Tejgaon, Sastrasta, FDC intersection, Moghbazar, Kakrail, Matsya Bhaban, Shikha Bhaban, Nagar Bhaban, Golap Shah Mazar, Bongshal and Dholai Khal.

A BNP leader told The Daily Star that they were expecting over a lakh people in the gathering.

The programme was intended to press home BNP's demand for the restoration of caretaker government provision and an end to "government-sponsored forced disappearance" and repression on opposition leaders, said

## Accused admits

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magistrate in a Rajbari court and was sent to jail, said Abdur Razzak, officer-in-charge of Rajbari Sadar Police Station.

Police quoting locals said Rais, son of Arshad Sheikh of Gopalpur village in Sadar upazila of Rajbari, waylaid the girl on her way home from Brac School in the village around 10:30am.

He pushed a piece of cloth into her mouth and took her in a nearby bush, where he violated and strangled the girl to death.

Seeing Rais coming out of the bush, passersby noticed the girl lying in the bush and caught him red handed. They gave

him a good beating before handing him over to police.

On June 15 last year, he had attempted to violate the girl at the same spot, but failed.

Following a case filed with Rajbari Sadar Police Station the same day by the girl's father, police had rounded up Rais and sent him to jail through a local court.

On December 8, he walked free on bail. The trial in the case is underway.

The victim's family has filed a murder case against the accused. Police will investigate the murder and submit charge sheet soon, said the OC.

## 1.5 lakh study

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they would continue their drives against such illegal books.

In April, 1980, the government had banned study guides apprehending that such books stifle students' creativity. According to the Notebook Prohibition Act, 1980, such study guides for the students of class-II to class-VIII cannot be printed or marketed.

Sale of study guides and so-called note books for primary and secondary level students has continued unabated despite the ban on their printing, import, sale and distribution.

But traders take the opportunity of poor monitoring. Like previous years, a section of unscrupulous traders printed the books

ahead of the academic year for sale, especially in rural areas, sources said.

Meanwhile, unapproved supplementary textbooks have also flooded the market and educational institutions in the capital.

This year the government is providing supplementary grammar books on English and Bangla to class-VI to -IX for free. But since there was a delay in supply of the books, unscrupulous printers in connivance with some teachers flooded the market with unapproved books.

Allegation of selling textbooks, meant for free distribution, is also rife in Dhaka.

The NCTB chairman said he would look into the matter of unapproved supplementary textbooks in the market.

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