

NEWS IN  
brief

## Ahmadinejad in historic Egypt visit

REUTERS, Cairo

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad yesterday arrived in Egypt on the first trip by an Iranian head of state since the 1979 revolution, underlining the thaw in relations since Egyptians elected an Islamist head of state.

Such a visit would have been unthinkable during the rule of Hosni Mubarak.

Analysts doubt that the historic changes that brought Mursi to power in Egypt will result in a full restoration of diplomatic ties between states whose relations were broken off after the Iranian revolution and the conclusion of Egypt's peace

## Gas build-up caused Mexico blast

AFP, Mexico City

A gas build-up caused the explosion that rocked the headquarters of Mexico's state-owned oil firm last week, killing 37 people, officials said Monday, ruling out a bomb attack.

The announcement came four days after the tragedy at Pemex, a delay that triggered much speculation about the cause of the blast at the firm's offices in the heart of Mexico City. The blast

## Iran nuke talks on Feb 26

AFP, Tehran

Iran will attend fresh negotiations with world powers in Kazakhstan on February 26 over Tehran's disputed nuclear activities, its top negotiator Saeed Jalili said in a statement released yesterday.

The decision was made in a phone conversation earlier Tuesday between the offices of Jalili and European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, Iran's official IRNA news agency reported citing the statement.

## Pak House OKs bill on snooping

PTI, Islamabad

A controversial bill that will give Pakistan's intelligence agencies sweeping powers to conduct surveillance and collect electronic data has been passed by both houses of parliament, paving the way for it to be signed into law by the president.

The Fair Trial Bill 2012 has been criticized by rights groups for posing a threat to privacy and civil liberties. As a law, it will empower intelligence and security agencies to tap phone calls, monitor emails and gather data from SMSs as

## Ahmadinejad compared with monkey

AFP, Washington

Outspoken US Senator John McCain raised eyebrows online Monday when he compared Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to a monkey that the Islamic republic recently launched into space.

"So Ahmadinejad wants to be first Iranian in space - wasn't he just there last week?" said a message on McCain's official Twitter feed, followed by the headline and link to a recent story: "Iran launches monkey into space."

The comments followed Ahmadinejad's claim earlier Monday that he is ready "to be the first man in space" under Iran's ambitious program which aims to send a human being into orbit by 2020.

## Gay Issue: UK PM faces party revolt

AFP, London

British Prime Minister David Cameron faces a battle to placate traditionalists in his Conservative Party bitterly opposed to gay marriage ahead of a parliamentary vote on the contentious issue yesterday.

Cameron has championed the drive to allow same-sex couples to marry, but it is fast becoming a highly divisive issue for his party.

## Opposition in muddle over call to oust Morsi

AGENCIES

Egypt's main opposition alliance denied that it was demanding the overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi, backing away from an earlier statement that appeared to do just that.

Meanwhile, Central Bank of Egypt yesterday said the country's foreign reserves fell by almost 10 percent to \$13.6 billion in January, below what it had in December described as a "critical minimum" of \$15 billion.

The bank had warned last month that its reserves had reached critical levels at \$15 billion, only enough to cover three months of imports, as political turmoil forced the government to postpone subsidy cuts and the finalisation of a deal with the IMF for \$4.8 billion in aid.

After a week of nationwide violence between protesters and security forces in which 59 people were killed, the Front had issued a statement on Saturday calling for Morsi, his interior minister and other associates to be investigated and put on trial for "killings, torture and illegal detentions".

It said it supported peaceful protests to achieve these demands and called for Egyptians to rally in the streets.

However, NSF spokesman Khaled

Daoud said on Monday the coalition of liberal, social democratic and leftist parties was not demanding the removal of the Islamist Morsi, who became Egypt's first democratically elected president seven months ago.

"We are not calling for the overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi right now. We believe he is elected but that doesn't give him the right to change all the rules of the game," Daoud said.

The Front includes liberal politicians such as former UN nuclear agency head Mohamed ElBaradei and former Arab League chief Amr Moussa, who last week signed a statement mediated by the country's leading Muslim scholar renouncing violence and calling for a national dialogue.

The Front said it would not engage in dialogue until what it called the blood-bath had stopped, those responsible were tried, and the opposition's previously stated demands were met.

Those demands include forming a national unity government, which Morsi has rejected before parliamentary elections due in April, and revising a controversial Islamist-leaning constitution adopted last December.

## Kashmir girl band quits after fatwa

AFP, Srinagar

An all-girl teenage rock band from Indian-administered Kashmir has decided to quit after the region's top Muslim cleric declared their music to be "un-Islamic", their manager said Tuesday.

Pragaash, a three-piece group whose members are still in high school, had been the target of an online hate campaign ever since winning a "Battle of the Bands" contest in December.

But after initially insisting they would continue making music, they have now called it a day after the Grand Mufti of Jammu and Kashmir, Bashiruddin Ahmad, branded them as "indecent" and issued a fatwa calling for them to quit.

"After the fatwa the girls decided to quit and disband," Adnan Mattoo, the band's manager, said in brief comments to AFP.

Pragaash consisted of base guitarist Aneeqa Khalid, singer Noma Nazir and drummer Farah Deeba.

The comments by the grand mufti have been widely criticised with the state's Chief Minister Omar Abdullah among those calling on the band not to be intimidated into giving up on music.

The attacks against Pragaash have heightened concerns about artistic freedom in India.

## India, Nepal begin tiger census

BBC ONLINE

Forest and nature protection officials from Nepal and India yesterday started their first ever joint survey of tigers.

The survey will take place in a dozen or more wildlife preserves and forests spread across the Terai Arc region that the two South Asian nations share.

The project aims to identify the exact number of Royal Bengal tigers residing in this zone. It will also study the availability of prey to assist with conservation strategies.

The Terai Arc Landscape spreads over 950km across the Indian states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand and into southern Nepal.

The region is estimated to be home to 500 tigers at present - one of the world's densest concentrations of tigers, according to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

WWF is one of the organisations involved in the survey, which is being led by the governments of India and Nepal.

As part of the survey, officials are installing hundreds of camera traps (remote motion-sensitive cameras) along



the wild paths frequented by the tigers, allowing tigers who come into the cameras' range to be identified.

"The same tiger trapped by a camera here on the Nepali side could cross over into India, but that tiger will be trapped by another camera there," Megh Bahadur Pandey, the director general of Nepal's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, told the BBC.

That means no tiger will be counted twice. Tens of thousands of Royal Bengal tigers used to roam Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal, but their population currently stands at just a little over 3,000.

## Mirza Fakhrul freed, finally

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opposition alliance on December 9 last year.

Last month, the BNP leader got bail from the HC in five other cases filed with different police stations in the capital in connection with arson, vandalism and rampage during the road blockade. But each time he was implicated in another case and shown arrested.

Fakhrul was arrested on December 11 last year in the first of six cases and sent to jail.

His name is also men-

tioned in the "descriptions" of 14 more cases concerning the December 9 violence.

BNP and its alliance partners were agitating for unconditional release of Fakhrul since he was arrested and sent to jail.

On January 27, the HC directed the government not to harass Fakhrul in the next two months by implicating him in other cases "without the due process of law". But he can be implicated if there are charges of cognisable offence against him, it said.

DELHI GANG-RAPE  
Victim's friend testifies in court as trial starts

REUTERS, New Delhi

The trial of five men charged with gang-raping and murdering a young woman on a bus in New Delhi opened on Tuesday with closed-door testimony from her friend who appeared at court in a wheelchair, still bearing the scars of injuries from the attack.

The 28-year-old software engineer, who may not be identified, is the prosecution's star witness in a case that has triggered nationwide protests, an intense debate about rampant crime against women in India and tougher anti-rape laws.

The five accused are Vinay Sharma, a gym assistant, Ram Singh, the bus driver, his brother Mukesh Singh, bus cleaner Akshay Kumar Singh and fruit vendor Pawan Kumar. They have pleaded not guilty to charges of rape and murder. A sixth accused is being tried separately as a juvenile.

Police allege the six attacked the 23-year-old trainee physiotherapist and her friend on the bus as the couple returned home from watching a movie on December 16. The woman was repeatedly raped and tortured with a metal bar. The couple were also severely beaten before being thrown onto a road. The woman died of internal injuries in a Singapore hospital two weeks later.

In his statement to police after the assault, the friend said their attackers had asked "where are you going with a girl so late at night?" before launching a furious assault. While he was being beaten, the woman was repeatedly raped, he said, according to a police charge sheet seen by Reuters.



## 54 countries helped CIA renditions

AFP, Washington

Fifty-four foreign governments assisted the CIA in a global campaign that included harsh interrogations of suspects, a rights advocacy group said yesterday, as it pressed for greater accountability.

The report by Open Society Foundation marks the most comprehensive list of countries that helped the United States in what critics saw as excesses by then president George W Bush's administration after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Bush authorized "extraordinary rendition" -- the transferring of individuals without legal process -- to allow US and foreign intelligence agencies to interrogate alleged extremists outside the protections ensured on US soil after the September 11, 2001 attacks

BRAHMAPUTRA DAMS  
China promises India no harm

AGENCIES

China has assured India that the new hydropower dams it is planning to build on the Brahmaputra will not come in the way of flood control and environmental efforts for protecting the people and land across the border in the Indian northeast.

Beijing said on Monday it was maintaining "close communication and cooperation" with India on the issue, adding that it would ensure there would be "no negative impact".

China has kept New Delhi guessing about its plans for the Brahmaputra without giving a clear reply to Indian queries for over three years.

The Chinese State Council has approved plans for the construction of three new hydropower projects in the middle reaches of the Brahmaputra, or Yarlung Zangbo as it is known in China. The projects were listed in an energy development plan for 2011-15 announced on January 23.

## King Richard III



A plastic facial model made from the recently discovered skull of England's King Richard III, is pictured during a press conference in London yesterday. The face of Richard III was revealed for the first time in more than 500 years following a reconstruction of his skeleton found underneath a carpark.

PHOTO: AFP

## Verdict comes after 5-yr

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Jamaat leaders, including Mollah, and three non-Bangalees on charge of killing 345 people in Mirpur during the war.

Other accused of the cases include Jamaat Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami, Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed and Assistant Secretary General M u h a m m a d Kamaruzzaman.

Both the cases were filed with the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka. The court directed the Keraniganj and Pallabi police to register Mozaffar's and Amir's case respectively.

Both the cases' documents were transferred to the office of the investigation agency, designated to probe the war crimes cases, through the registrar's office of the International Crimes Tribunal after its formation on March 25, 2010.

The agency, receiving

the cases' documents as complaint-1, started investigation into crimes allegedly committed by the four Jamaat leaders including Mollah in July 2010.

Two and a half years into filing of the case, police arrested Quader Mollah and Kamaruzzaman in connection with Amir's case on July 13, 2010.

On August 2, 2010, they were shown arrested in a case filed for crimes against humanity committed in 1971.

Later, Mozaffar and Amir gave testimony as the first and the ninth prosecution witnesses respectively as the tribunal framed separate charges in two incidents in Mollah's case.

On completion of probe against Mollah, the investigation agency handed over its report to the prosecution on October 31, 2011.

The prosecution on December 18, 2011 sub-

mitted formal charges against Mollah before the Tribunal-1, which took the charges into cognisance on December 28.

On April 16 last year, the case was transferred to the International Crimes Tribunal-2 after it was set up on March 22 for expeditious trial. After the charge framing hearing, the Tribunal-2 indicted Mollah with six charges of crimes against humanity.

According to the charges, Mollah "actively took part" in the killings of at least 381 unarmed people in Dhaka's Mirpur and Keraniganj areas in six different incidents.

Mollah, the then president of Dhaka University's Shahidullah Hall unit Islami Chhatra Sangha, organised formation of Al-Badr with the members of the Jamaat's student body in 1971, the order said.

On June 20, 2012, the

prosecution placed their opening statement in the case against Mollah and started to produce their witnesses on July 3.

As many as 12 prosecution witnesses including the two investigation officers of the case testified against Mollah. Six people, including the accused himself, testified as the defence witnesses since November 15, 2012.

After Tribunal-1 chairman Justice Nizamul Huq resigned in December amid a controversy, Mollah sought retrial of his case, but the Tribunal-2 rejected his petition on January 7 as "it didn't find any merit of it to consider".

The prosecution and the defence placed their closing arguments between December 17, 2012 and January 17 and the tribunal kept the case waiting for verdict on the last day.

## Verdict not acceptable

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and dissatisfaction saying it was not people's verdict, and claiming that justice was not done in the judgement.

SHAFIUDDIN MOLLAH "Quader Mollah should be hanged for several times for his role during the Liberation War," said victim of the war crimes convict Shafiuddin Mollah.

Shafiuddin, also the sixth prosecution witness, said war crimes accused Jamaat leader Mollah had directly taken part in the killing of 360-370 Bangalees at Alubdi village in Pallabi of Dhaka on April 24, 1971.

"If Bachchu Razakar [Abul Kalam Azad] could be handed down capital punishment, Quader Mollah should be hanged several times for what he had done during the Liberation War in 1971," he added.

Shafiuddin Mollah, who

lost his uncle in the killing spree, questioned how the tribunal could give this verdict.

"The verdict was not right and up to our expectations," he said. KHONDAKER ABUL AHSAN

Khondaker Abul Ahsan, the fifth prosecution witness of the war crimes case against Mollah, said, "None of us is happy with the verdict."

Ahsan, son of journalist, litterateur and lawyer Shaheed Khondaker Abu Taleb, in his deposition before the International Crimes Tribunal-2 said Quader Mollah and his accomplices had killed his father during the Liberation War.

"He [Quader Mollah] was directly involved in mass killing including the killing of my father," Ahsan said.

He, however, expressed the

hope that something good would happen in the Appellate Division.

SYED SHAHIDUL HAQUE MAMA "Justice was not done," said Syed Shahidul Haque Mama, a freedom fighter and the second prosecution witness in the case.

Shahidul said he had come all the way from Sweden to give deposition in the case driven by his conscience.

"The crimes committed by Quader Mollah were severe. I thought he would be handed down capital punishment," Shahidul said, adding, he got no word to express his frustration.

He, however, said the tribunal did not show biasness.

Shahidul, also chief of Mama Group Guerrilla Bahini, gave deposition on July 10, 2012. He fled in from Sweden last week to

see the verdict.

QUAZI ROSY

Poet Quazi Rosy, a prosecution witness in Mollah's case, said she was frustrated by the verdict.

"It's not people's verdict," Rosy, a close friend and neighbour of pro-liberation poet and martyr Meherun Nesa, told The Daily Star in her reaction.

According to yesterday's verdict, Mollah incurs criminal liability for complicity in commission of the murder of Meherun Nesa and her mother and two brothers at their house in Mirpur during the Liberation War.

Rosy demanded highest punishment of Mollah by disposing off the appeal as soon as possible.

"Then the departed soul of Meherun Nesa will finally be at peace and the nation will get rid of the stigma," she said.