

NEWS IN

brief

Mumbai Building Collapse: 9 held

PTI, Thane

Two builders arrested over the deadly collapse of a seven-storey apartment block that killed 74 people appeared in court in western India yesterday.

Jamil Qureshi and Salim Sheikh had fled after the illegal structure in Thane district on the outskirts of Mumbai collapsed on Thursday evening but were arrested by police a day later.

The pair, along with seven others arrested in connection with the tragedy, were remanded in

Hackers attack Israel websites

AFP, Jerusalem

Hackers have launched an assault on Israeli websites, but the damage has been minimal as the Jewish state is prepared to fend off such attacks, one of the country's top cyber experts said yesterday.

The hackers associated with the activist group Anonymous reportedly hit the websites of the premier's office, the defence ministry, the education ministry and the Central Bureau of Statistics, among

Ukraine pardons Tymoshenko ally

AFP, Kiev

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich has pardoned a close ally of jailed former premier Yulia Tymoshenko, former interior minister Yuriy Lutsenko, his office said in a statement yesterday.

The statement said the decree was in line with ongoing reforms of the country's criminal legislation "aimed at humanising legal norms and reducing the number of people held in custody."

The presidential decree comes after Ukraine's high court earlier this week rejected an appeal by Lutsenko against his four-year jail term for abuse

Kejriwal breaks 15-day-long fast

IANS, New Delhi

Activist-turned-politician Arvind Kejriwal Saturday ended his 15-day-long fast, announcing that the Delhi assembly election will be fought on the issue of water and electricity - the reason for his protest.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader was on a hunger strike since March 23 against the allegedly inflated water and power bills.

Kejriwal said that the government which cannot make water and power available for its people has no right to rule.

Ban calls Malala 'daughter of the UN'

ANI, Islamabad

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called Pakistani education activist Malala Yousufzai 'a daughter of the United Nations' when he spoke to her to mark the 1,000-day milestone in the run-up to a Millennium Development Goal to reduce poverty by the end of 2015.

In a Skype conversation from Madrid, where the secretary-general is on a visit, he described the 15-year-old who was attacked by the Taliban for opposing restrictions on going to school as 'a symbol of hope, a daughter of the United Nations', according to a video of the talk released at UN Headquarters in New York, reports The Nation.

Ban told Malala that the UN will always support her and people like her.

Malala told Ban that it is an honour for her to be associated with the UN. She said her goal is simple: peace and happiness in this world, adding that the way to see peace is through education. She added that she wants to be a leader and 'to serve this whole world'.

Ban told the youngster that he was 'deeply impressed' and looked forward to meeting her.



US delays missile test to cool N Korea tensions

China says 'won't allow trouble at doorstep'; Pyongyang mulls new missile test

AFP, Seoul

The US has delayed an intercontinental ballistic missile test to avoid stoking tensions with North Korea, as fears escalated that weeks of angry rhetoric could erupt into conflict on the Korean peninsula.

The Pentagon's disclosure that it would reschedule the test due in California next week comes as the international community grows increasingly nervous that the situation could spiral out of control.

A US defence official said Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel postponed the Minuteman 3 test at Vandenberg Air Force Base until next month due to concerns it "might be misconstrued by some as suggesting that we were intending to exacerbate the current crisis with North Korea".

China is the North's sole major ally but its patience with Pyongyang shows signs of wearing thin.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi said China opposes "provocative words and actions" from any party in the region and would "not allow troublemaking on China's door-



North Korean soldiers taking part in a shooting training towards targets with images of South Korean Defense Minister Kim Kwan-Jin at an undisclosed location.

PHOTO: AFP

step", in sharply worded comments Saturday to UN chief Ban Ki-moon.

North Korea, incensed by UN sanctions following its nuclear and missile tests and by South Korean-US military drills, has issued a series of apocalyptic threats of nuclear war in recent weeks.

It has also reportedly loaded two intermediate-range missiles on mobile launchers and hidden them in underground facilities near its east coast, raising speculation it is preparing for a provocative launch.



People hit each other with pillows as they take part in the world's 6th annual Pillow Fight Day in Washington Square Park in New York on Saturday. The massive pillow fight, which is the New York City's 8th annual, takes place in cities around the world.

PHOTO: AFP

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Fear grows in Egypt under Islamist rule

REUTERS, Cairo

The Arab Spring was supposed to bring freedom to Egypt. Instead, concern is growing inside and outside the country that an illiberal wind is blowing the transition from autocracy off course.

Arrest warrants issued by the prosecutor general against activists and a comedian accused of insulting President Mohamed Morsi have hardened opposition fears of a crackdown on dissent by the Muslim Brotherhood-led authorities.

The satirist, Bassem Youssef's El-Bernameg, was freed on Saturday after a Cairo court rejected petition by an Islamist lawyer to ban his satirical show for insulting the Egyptian president.

The suit was filed by a Muslim Brotherhood lawyer who complained that the programme, which has been likened to The Daily Show hosted by Jon Stewart in the US, had excessive

sexual innuendo and was critical of Morsi, who is also a member of the Brotherhood.

There have been multiple complaints filed in courts and to state prosecutors by Islamist lawyers against Youssef and other public figures for their political or religious opinions.

Opposition groups and activists say such lawsuits against public figures are part of a wider campaign to intimidate critics of the new government.

Two dozen cases of "insulting the president" were brought in Egypt in the first 200 days of Mursi's rule - four times as many as during Mubarak's 30 years in power, said Gamal Eid, a human rights lawyer.

In parliament, Islamist lawmakers are debating draft laws seen by liberals as a threat to civil society and the right to demonstrate - vital elements of a modern democracy.



Bassem Youssef

The United States, which gives Egypt about \$1.5 billion in annual aid, directed its sharpest criticism so far at the Islamist-led authorities this week, citing a "disturbing trend of growing restrictions on freedom of expression".

Secretary of State John Kerry said the Obama administration had "real concerns about the direction that Egypt appears to be moving in", mentioning arrests, street violence and "a lack of inclusivity with respect to the opposition".

Xi promises peaceful China for neighbors

REUTERS, Boao

China's President Xi Jinping yesterday pledged that change and peaceful development will power his country's economic rise and sustain growth within its borders and beyond.

Stressing that peace was pivotal for the future of the world's second biggest economy, Xi appealed to business and political leaders to use diplomacy and dialogue to resolve disputes and allow wealth to spread and solve problems.

"For Asia, development is still the top question, development is still crucial for solving many problems and conflicts," Xi told a forum in Boao on the southern Chinese island province of Hainan.

"Without peace, there is no need to talk about development," to added, speaking to an audience of executives and foreign leaders including Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard, Myanmar President Thein Sein and IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde.

Painting a picture of a richer China in 2020, when the government expects average rural and urban incomes will be double 2010 levels, Xi said his country would increasingly export its wealth to its neighbors.

Xi's message of China's peaceful and inclusive rise was echoed earlier when nearly a dozen senior executives from Chinese state-owned firms met peers from top Australian banks and companies.

Andrew Forrest, an Australian iron ore magnate and founder of Fortescue Metals Group, who chaired the closed-door meeting, told reporters that Chinese state firm executives wanted Australians to know that China was not "expansionist" or "aggressive".



Court clears Musharraf for Pak poll

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan's former military ruler Gen Pervez Musharraf was given approval yesterday to run for parliament in a remote northern district after being rejected in two other parts of the country, his aide said.

Rashid Qureshi said election officials in Chitral, near the Afghan border, accepted Musharraf's nomination papers.

Musharraf, who seized power in a military coup in 1999 but was forced to step down nearly a decade later, returned to Pakistan from exile last month to run for the National Assembly.

Musharraf's two other applications to run in districts in southern and central Pakistan were rejected while a third in Islamabad is pending.

Opponents have filed objections based on actions he took while ruling Pakistan. His opponents allege that he violated the constitution by overthrowing an elected government in 1999, was involved in the killing of a nationalist leader, ousted superior judiciary judges and ordered a raid against a mosque in downtown Islamabad that had become a sanctuary for militants.

Maduro invokes curse on opposition voters

Says there is a US-led plot to kill him

AGENCIES

Venezuelan acting President Nicolas Maduro said on Saturday a centuries-old curse would fall on the heads of those who do not vote for him in next week's election to pick a successor to late leader Hugo Chavez.

Maduro's invocation of the "curse of Macarapana" was the latest twist in an increasingly surreal fight between him and opposition leader Henrique Capriles for control of the South American OPEC nation of 29 million people.

"If anyone among the people votes against Nicolas Maduro, he is voting against himself, and the curse of Macarapana is falling on him," said Maduro, referring to the 16th century Battle of Macarapana when Spanish colonial fighters massacred local Indian forces.

Wearing a local indigenous hat at a rally in Amazonas state, a largely jungle territory on the borders of Brazil and



Colombia, Maduro compared Capriles and the opposition coalition to the enslaving Spanish occupiers.

"If the bourgeoisie win, they are going to privatize health and education, they are going to take land from the Indians, the curse of Macarapana would come on you," he headed.

Calling himself the "son" of Chavez, Maduro has more than a 10-point lead in most polls, although Capriles supporters are predicting a late pro-opposition surge as sympathy wears off from the former president's death a month ago.

Children among 15 killed in Syria air raid

AFP, Beirut

Nine children were among at least 15 people killed in an air strike on a mainly Kurdish district of the northern Syrian city of Aleppo on Saturday, a watchdog said.

After the strike, Kurdish fighters killed five soldiers in an attack on an army checkpoint, the watchdog added.

Up until now, Syria's Kurds have been split over their country's anti-regime uprising, with most trying to maintain neutrality.

Elsewhere in Syria, the air force targeted Al-Hajar al-Aswad in southern Damascus and Qadam in the southwest, said the watchdog, which relies on a broad network of doctors, lawyers and activists for its reports.

Warplanes also raided Yabrud near Damascus and Qusayr in the central province of Homs, as tanks shelled rebel enclaves in Homs city.

The UN says more than 70,000 people have been killed in Syria's two-year conflict, which broke out after the army unleashed a brutal crackdown against dissent, turning the uprising into a bloody insurgency.

Time running out on Iran nuke talks: Kerry

urges Turkey, Israel to normalise ties

AFP, Istanbul

The United States' top diplomat yesterday warned Iran that time is running out on nuclear negotiations between the Islamic republic and world powers after the recent talks have failed to break the deadlock.

"This is not an endless process. ... You can't just talk for the sake of talking," Secretary of State John Kerry told a news conference in Istanbul.

Two days of talks in Almaty between Iran and world powers have resulted nothing new and no new date was agreed for the resumption of negotiations.

The continuing diplomatic deadlock comes as Israel refuses to rule out a pre-emptive strike targeting atomic facilities in the Islamic republic.

Meanwhile, Kerry yesterday called on Turkey and Israel to fully normalise their



ties, two weeks after the Jewish state's US-brokered apology for a deadly 2010 raid on a Gaza aid flotilla organised by a Turkish charity.

"We would like to see this relationship that is important to stability in the Middle East, critical to the peace process itself, we would like

to see this relationship back on track in its full measure," Kerry told a joint news conference with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in Istanbul.

Israel apologised to Ankara on March 22 for the deaths of nine Turkish activists in a botched raid by Israeli commandos on a Gaza-bound aid ship, in a breakthrough engineered by US President Barack Obama during a visit to Jerusalem.

The apology ended a nearly three-year rift between Israel and Turkey -- two key US allies in the region -- and the two countries are due to begin talks on compensation on Friday.