

NEWS IN

brief

Guantanamo hunger strike widens

AFP, Washington

More Guantanamo prisoners have joined a hunger strike to protest their indefinite detention at the US-run military jail, with 97 out of 166 detainees refusing food, officials said Friday.

Among the strikers, 19 have been given nasal feeding tubes, and five of those are hospitalized but do not have life-threatening conditions, Guantanamo Bay spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Samuel House said in a statement.

The rapidly-growing protest movement began on February 6, when inmates claimed prison officials searched their copies of the Koran for contra-band, according to their lawyers. Officials have denied any mishandling of Islam's holy book.

Bomb hits police station in Benghazi

AP, Tripoli

Libyan security officials say a blast hit a police station in the eastern city of Benghazi, causing no human casualties but underlining the fragile security situation in the country's east.

The explosion took place early morning Saturday at Barka police station, destroying the facade, the officials said. It was the second bombing at the site this year.

A day earlier, a militiaman was killed when armed men attacked the headquarters of his pro-government group, Uqba ibn Nafi, in the eastern city of Darnah. The area is largely controlled by

Japan PM Abe escapes car injury

AFP, Tokyo

A limousine carrying Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was involved in a five-car pile-up at a toll gate in Tokyo yesterday but he escaped without any injuries, police said.

Two guards in a police car accompanying Abe's official vehicle suffered slight injuries to the face, a Metropolitan Police Department spokesman said.

The police car made a sudden stop at the toll gate, which led to Abe's vehicle bumping into it from behind.

Two other police cars and a saloon carrying reporters, which were trailing Abe's limousine,

Napoleon's ring sold in Vienna

AFP, Vienna

A silver lock of an Austrian emperor's hair and a ring containing a jewel unearthed by Napoleon in Egypt and then given to his wife Josephine have been auctioned in Vienna.

Franz Joseph's hair lock went for 13,720 euros (\$17,870) to an unidentified buyer while an unnamed Italian telephone bidder bought the ring for 97,900 euros, the Dorotheum auction housesaid.

Napoleon (1769-1821) discovered the antique gemstone during his militarily disastrous but scientifically successful expedition -- it also turned up the famed Rosetta Stone -- to Egypt in 1798-99.

2 dead in India hospital roof collapse

AFP, Bhopal, India

Two people were killed and 16 injured when the ceiling of a hospital in central India came crashing down, trapping patients and employees under the rubble, officials said Saturday.

Rescue workers smashed through giant slabs of concrete and combed through other debris to search for victims after the ceiling of the first floor of the women's wing of the Kasturba Gandhi Hospital in Bhopal caved in Friday.

"The bodies of two persons were found when the rescue team started removing debris from the collapsed structure," Nikunj Shrivastava, chief district administrative officer, told reporters at the scene.

Obama warns Assad on chemical weapons

Russia warns on Syria chemical arms 'pretext'

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama has warned Syria that using chemical weapons would be a "game changer," as he faces rising pressure at home and abroad to intervene in the country's bloody civil war.

But speaking Friday, a day after US officials said they suspected the use of the deadly agent sarin in small-scale attacks, Obama warned that Washington must act prudently, and establish exactly if, how and when such arms were used.

Obama, who had previously told Syrian President Bashar al-Assad that the use of chemical weapons would cross a "red line," promised a "vigorous" US and international probe into the latest reports.

But he appeared wary of launching military action based on initial intelligence reports of chemical weapons use.

Obama did reiterate that the use of chemical weapons would be "a game changer," as he met Jordan's King Abdullah II in the Oval Office.

"I think all of us, not just in the United States but around the world, recognise how we cannot stand by and permit the systematic use of weapons like chemical weapons on civilian populations," he said.

"We have to act prudently. We have to make assessments deliberately," he cautioned.

Meanwhile, Claims that chemical weap-



King Abdullah II of Jordan and Barack Obama

ons have been used in Syria should not become a pretext for a foreign military intervention in the country, Russia's deputy foreign minister Mikhail Bogdanov said on Saturday.

"If there is serious evidence of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, it should be presented immediately and not concealed," said Bogdanov, who is Russian President Vladimir Putin's Middle East envoy, during a visit to Beirut.

"We must check the information immediately and in conformity with international criteria and not use it to achieve other objectives. It must not be a pretext for an intervention in Syria," added Bogdanov, according to an Arabic translation of his remarks.

Adding to the political heat on Obama, the Syrian opposition urged the UN Security Council to take immediate steps, possibly even by imposing a no-fly zone.



SECTARIAN UNREST Maliki points to Syria

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki pointed a finger yesterday at the civil war in neighbouring Syria for the return of sectarian strife to Iraq, as a five-day wave of violence has killed 215 people.

And the head of the Sahwa anti-Qaeda militia forces threatened war on militants if those who have killed Iraqi soldiers are not turned over.

Sectarian strife "came back to Iraq, because it began in another place in this region," Maliki said in televised remarks.

A civil war pitting mainly Sunni Muslim rebels against the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, a member of the Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, has killed more than 70,000 people.

In Iraq, Sunni-Shia sectarian violence, which peaked in 2006 and 2006, killed tens of thousands.

Pak army protest humiliating treatment to Musharraf

DAWN ONLINE

A group of military officers protested on Friday against what they called humiliating treatment being meted out to former military ruler retired Gen Pervez Musharraf.

A delegation of 75 officers from Command and Staff College, Quetta, led by Col Saqib Ali Cheema, met Chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Defence and Defence Production Mushahid Hussain Sayed at the Parliament House and expressed concern over the arrest of the former president.

"The military officers were of the opinion that under the constitution the armed forces could not be criticised," the source said. Senator Hussain agreed with the views



of the military officers and said: "We are all proud of professionalism of our armed forces and in the constitution judiciary and armed forces are national institutions which should not be subject to any kind of criticism."

He told Dawn that the officers had asked him if there was anything in the constitution which allowed anyone to humiliate any institution. He said he had told them that the constitution had no provision to let any institution or any person humiliate any other institution.

General Musharraf returned to the country on March 23 to take part in active politics and contest the May 11 elections, but his nomination papers were rejected from the four constituencies selected by him.



POWERFUL NATIONS IN WORLD India ranks 8th

TNN, New Delhi

India is among the top 10 most powerful countries in the world. In a first-of-its-kind study of "national power" a group of eminent strategic experts and scholars have placed India at the eighth position among a group of 27 most powerful countries in the world.

The study, conducted by the New Delhi-based Foundation for National Security Research (FSNR), judged "national power" by various indices, including energy security, population, technological capability etc. An interesting index of national power was judged by "foreign affairs capability", which includes self-reliance in defence, membership of multilateral groupings, role in global rule-making and soft power. Interestingly, though China comes out as the second most powerful nation in the world after the US, Chinese foreign affairs' capability is comparable to India's, even though in terms of total power New Delhi comes way below Beijing.

Professor Satish Kumar, introducing the study, said, "The Group of Experts evolved a criterion consisting of the following elements for the selection of countries which could be regarded as actually or potentially the most powerful: (i) Population above 50 million; (ii) GDP above US\$ 500 billion; and (iii) defence expenditure above US\$ 5 billion." The effort, he said, was to have an Indian assessment of indices of power.

The US is by far the world's most powerful nation, several notches ahead of its nearest competitor, China. The study observes, "China is still much lower than the US in energy security, technological capability and foreign affairs capability. Even in economic and military fields, the indexed value of China's capabilities is much lower than that of US. Therefore, any notion that China will pose a threat to the supremacy of the US in the near future has to be tempered with caution."

How powerful is India as a state? And how does India stack up against the most powerful states in the world?

Boston blasts suspects' mother in terror database

AP, Washington

US intelligence agencies added the mother of the Boston bombing suspects to a government terrorism database 18 months before the bombings, two officials told The Associated Press. She called it "lies and hypocrisy" and said she has never been linked to crimes or terrorism.

The CIA asked for the older suspect, now dead, and his mother to be added to a terrorist database in the fall of 2011, after the Russian government contacted the agency with concerns that both had become religious militants, according to officials briefed on the investigation. About six months earlier, the FBI investigated Tamerlan Tsarnaev and his mother, Zubeidat Tsarnaeva, also at Russia's request, one of the officials said. The FBI found no ties to terrorism.



Zubeidat



Deal reached on Italian govt

AFP, Rome

Italy's prime minister finally unveiled a new government yesterday, breaking a two-month stalemate that shook market confidence in the recession-hit country and tested the patience of European partners.

Centre-left moderate Enrico Letta named as his deputy Angelino Alfano, from the centre-right party of former premier and billionaire tycoon Silvio Berlusconi.

Fabrizio Saccomanni, a director at Italy's central bank, was handed the post of finance and economy minister, tasked with dragging the eurozone's third-largest economy from its worst recession in 20 years.

Emma Bonino, a former European commissioner, will be the new foreign minister in a new government with a "strong female element," noted Letta.

Alfano will also hold the post of interior minister while his predecessor in that job, Anna Maria Cancellieri, will run the justice ministry.

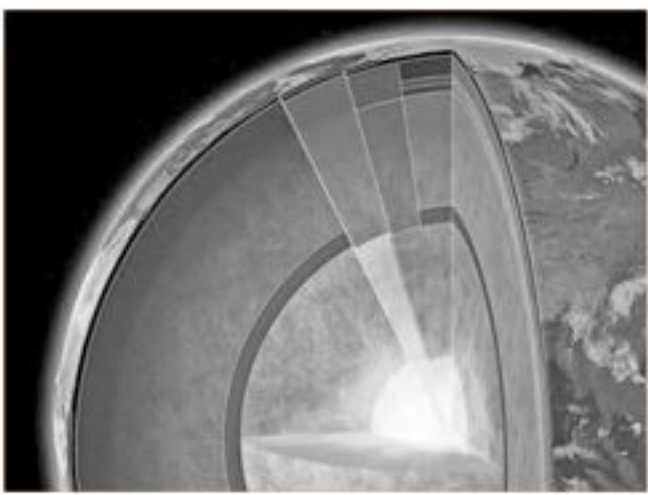
The new cabinet was expected to be officially sworn in on Sunday.

The 46-year-old leftist moderate Letta also officially accepted the role of prime minister, as the constitution requires, after forging the hard-fought deal between his Democratic Party (PD) and Berlusconi's People of Freedom party (PDL).

Earth's core hotter than thought

BBC ONLINE

New measurements suggest the Earth's inner core is far hotter than prior experiments suggested, putting it at 6,000C - as hot as the Sun's surface.



The solid iron core is actually crystalline, surrounded by liquid. But the temperature at which that crystal can form had been a subject of long-running debate.

Experiments outlined in Science used X-rays to probe tiny samples of iron at extraordinary pressures to examine how the iron crystals form and melt.

Seismic waves captured after earthquakes around the globe can give a great deal of information as to the thickness and density of layers in the Earth, but they give no indication of temperature.

That has to be worked out either in computer models that simulate the Earth's insides, or in the laboratory.

Measurements in the early 1990s of iron's "melting curves" - from which the core's temperature can be deduced - suggested a core temperature of about 5,000C.

French Socialists call for tougher stance on Merkel

REUTERS, Paris

France's ruling Socialist Party is pressing President Francois Hollande to toughen his stance towards a German counterpart it describes as "self-centered", arguing that Chancellor Angela Merkel's pro-austerity policies are hurting Europe.

The message - spelled out in a 21-page document to be presented at a party brainstorming conference in June - added to growing criticism of Berlin from across the Rhine after Socialist National Assembly speaker Claude Bartolone this week raised the prospect of a "confrontation" with Merkel.

The rhetoric follows a French appeal for an extra year to bring its public deficit below 3 percent of economic output in line with European targets, as rising unemployment keeps Europe's no. 2 economy in the doldrums.

"The friendship between France and Germany is not a friendship between France and the European policy of Chancellor Merkel," read the document,



Merkel

which has been endorsed by the Socialist Party but could still be tweaked before its June meeting on Europe.

Criticizing current European policies as an "unholy alliance between the Thatcherite tone" of Britain's prime minister and the "self-centered intransigence" of Chancellor Merkel, the document urges France to speak out against austerity.

A source in Hollande's office said the document represented only the party, but did not dispute its central message.

"There is a line in the text saying the friendship between France and Germany does not only mean Mrs Merkel's policies," the source said. "Friendship lets us criticize her policies, that's what one needs to understand from this document".

Cooperation between France and Germany has long provided the main motor for decision making in the European Union, but a debt crisis has strained those ties in the past year as ideologically opposed leaders have disagreed on points of economic policy.

Cheetahs in race to survive

AFP, Johannesburg

The cheetah, the world's fastest land animal, survived mass extinction during the last ice age 10,000 years ago.

But it has taken just the last few decades for man to place the hunter on the endangered species list, with experts warning it could disappear from the wild by 2030.

Unlike rhinos and elephants, the cheetah is not a target in Africa's poaching bloodbath. But it is the only big cat to adapt poorly in wildlife reserves as its natural habitat is increasingly wiped out.

"Cheetahs don't do well in protected wildlife reserves due to increased competition from other larger predators, such as lions and hyenas, which thrive in protected areas," Laurie Marker of the Cheetah Conservation Fund in Namibia told AFP.

"Most protected areas are unable to maintain viable cheetah populations," she added.

In the early 20th century, the global cheetah population was around 100,000 with populations throughout Africa, the Middle East and several Asian countries.

