

China PM pledges stronger partnership with Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang yesterday vowed to strengthen his country's partnership with Pakistan as he arrived for a visit less than two weeks after the country's general election. The long-time allies will look to use the two-day trip to boost trade ties, and Li will meet prime minister-elect Nawaz Sharif -- who has not yet been sworn in -- as well as holding talks with senior officials. Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) party swept to victory in the May 11 general election on a promise to revitalise the struggling economy. Help from its giant northern neighbour will be important to this. Trade between China and Pakistan hit an annual \$12 billion for the first time last year, according to Islamabad's foreign ministry, and the two sides plan to raise this to \$15 billion in the next two to three years. Li, arriving from India on his first overseas tour as premier, was met by President Asif Ali Zardari on the tarmac at Nur Khan air base in Rawalpindi next to Islamabad.



Li Keqiang and Asif Ali Zardari

Li Keqiang and Asif Ali Zardari with Zardari and caretaker prime minister Mir Hazar Khan Khoso yesterday before meeting Sharif today. Pakistan's former ambassador to the United States Tariq Fatemi said the visit was crucial in drawing the economic roadmap for the incoming government. The PML-N faces a daunting array of problems: a bloody Islamist militancy, sluggish economic growth, high inflation, a crumbling currency, the threat of a balance of payments crisis and crippling electricity shortages. Li will address a special session of the Pakistani senate, the upper house of parliament, and the two sides are expected to sign memorandums of understanding on economic, energy and science issues.

"The purpose of the visit is to devise a strategy to bolster future cooperation and friendship," Li said in a statement quoted by state broadcaster PTV. "We will strengthen a strategic partnership with Pakistan in whatever the international scenario and circumstances are."

The Chinese premier was scheduled to hold talks with Zardari and caretaker prime minister Mir Hazar Khan Khoso yesterday before meeting Sharif today. Pakistan's former ambassador to the United States Tariq Fatemi said the visit was crucial in drawing the economic roadmap for the incoming government. The PML-N faces a daunting array of problems: a bloody Islamist militancy, sluggish economic growth, high inflation, a crumbling currency, the threat of a balance of payments crisis and crippling electricity shortages. Li will address a special session of the Pakistani senate, the upper house of parliament, and the two sides are expected to sign memorandums of understanding on economic, energy and science issues.

US moves to end Myanmar sanctions

AFP, Washington

A key US senator on Tuesday backed an end to US sanctions on Myanmar after a landmark visit by the country's reformist leader, signaling a new normalization in relations despite rights concerns. President Thein Sein, a general-turned-civilian who ended Myanmar's long isolation from the West, met lawmakers at the US Capitol one day after the first White House summit by a leader of his country in nearly 50 years. Senator Mitch McConnell, who has spearheaded Myanmar sanctions for the past decade over human rights concerns, said after his meeting that he would not support a renewal of a ban on imports from the country formerly known as Burma.

Grim poll ratings mar Congress anniversary

AFP, New Delhi

India's scandal-rocked Congress party yesterday marked its last anniversary in power before facing voters in 2014, amid dismal poll ratings and a growing clamour for Premier Manmohan Singh to quit. An opinion poll by the CNN-IBN television network made grim reading for the government, with 67 percent of respondents saying it has lost its credibility due to multiple graft scandals and 61 percent saying Singh should exit. Analysts described the ratings as further evidence of a government in terminal decline, with Rajeev Malik, economist at investment house CLSA, saying the poll read almost like an "obituary". "Congress should apologise for its years of misrule," Sushma Swaraj, leader of the Hindu nationalist opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), told a news conference, adding Singh may be "prime minister but he is no leader". The mandate of Congress, re-elected for a second five-year term in 2009 under the leadership of populist party president Sonia Gandhi, expires next May. Gandhi is widely regarded as calling the shots in the government and her son Rahul is being lined up by the party to take power. The CNN-IBN poll showed 56 percent of respondents oppose Congress winning another term. Some 38 percent wanted Narendra Modi, the communally divisive chief minister of thriving Gujarat state, to run for the BJP as prime minister. Rahul Gandhi, who is a lacklustre performer and has shown reluctance to take the post, was supported by just 14 percent of voters.

First female amputee wins Everest

AFP, Kathmandu



Arunima Sinha

An Indian woman who lost her leg after she was thrown from a moving train two years ago has become the first female amputee to climb Everest, expedition organisers said yesterday. Arunima Sinha, 26, from the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, reached the peak on Tuesday morning after a slow climb from Everest Base Camp. Two years ago, the former national-level volleyball player was shoved from a moving train by thieves when she reportedly attempted to fight them off as they tried to steal her purse. A passing train crushed her left leg, forcing doctors to amputate below the knee to save her life. "At that time everyone was worried for me. I then realised I had to do something in my life so that people stop looking at me with pity," Sinha told Indian TV before



A PICTURE OF DESTRUCTION

An aerial view of destroyed houses and buildings in Moore, Oklahoma where a tornado of EF5 strength touched down yesterday killing at least 24 people and leveling everything in its path. *Inset*, women have their dinner at what is left of their tornado devastated home. Residents turned to the daunting task of rebuilding the wasteland yesterday as rescue efforts in Oklahoma wound down.



PHOTO: AFP

Imran Khan leaves hospital

AFP, Lahore



Pakistani politician Imran Khan left hospital yesterday, two weeks after breaking bones in his back in a fall at a rally for the country's general election, where his party scored a major breakthrough. The 60-year-old was ordered to remain immobile in bed after he fractured vertebrae and a rib in a dramatic tumble from a hoist lifting him to a stage just days before the

Musharraf's bail plea rejected

AFP, Islamabad

A Pakistani court yesterday refused bail to former military leader Pervez Musharraf over the detention of judges during his 1999-2008 rule, the state prosecutor said. The ruling came two days after a court granted bail to Musharraf over the murder of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, who was killed in a gun and bomb attack in 2007.

Zimbabwe gets new charter

AFP, Harare

President Robert Mugabe signed Zimbabwe's new constitution into law yesterday, clearing the path to crucial elections later this year. The 89-year-old, who has ruled Zimbabwe since independence from Britain in 1980, signed the document two months after it was overwhelmingly approved by Zimbabweans at a referendum. "This is a happening of joy, great joy indeed," Mugabe said at the signing ceremony. Mugabe's 33-year-rule, at first lauded as enlightened, has in recent decades been tainted by rights abuses against his oppo-

ODDLY enough

Air freshener from cow dung!
STAR DESK

Two Indonesian high school student have impressed judges at the national Science Project Olympiad with their ingenious air freshener made from cow dung. The organic product actually has a pleasant plant-like fragrance. Dwi Nailul Izzah and Rintya Aprianti Miki managed to surpass 1,000 other participants at the Indonesian Science Project Olympiad (ISPO), held at the end of February, in Jakarta, and won gold medals for their original invention.

Meet a new spider-man
STAR DESK

26-year-old Mustang Wanted got the nickname "real-life Spider-Man" after he spent the last decade climbing atop some of the highest structures in the former USSR, and taking unbelievable photos of himself dangling on one hand or tiptoeing on metal rails. Ever since he was just a child, Mustang Wanted had a taste for extreme sports.

Man killed in suspected terror attack in London

AGENCIES

A man thought to be a serving British soldier was killed by two armed men in a frenzied attack on a London street yesterday, in what the government is treating as a suspected act of terrorism. Witnesses told of a gruesome scene in which the man was hit by a car, then hacked with cleavers and his body dumped in the middle of the road. The two suspects in the killing were injured in a confrontation with police and have been taken to two hospitals, where they are being treated. CNN affiliate ITN aired a video showing a man holding a meat cleaver and saying, "we swear by almighty Allah we will never stop fighting you." Prime Minister David Cameron described the killing as "truly shocking" on Twitter. He has called a meeting of the country's civil emergency committee, known as

COBRA, to discuss authorities' response.

One witness, identified only as James, said two men had attacked another man, aged about 20, who was wearing a T-shirt of military charity Help for Heroes. "These two guys were crazed. They were just animals. They dragged him from the pavement and dumped his body in the middle of the road and left his body there," he told LBC radio. He said after the "horrendous" attack, the two men, who were also in their 20s, stood around, waving knives and a gun, and asked people to take pictures of them "as if they wanted to be on TV or something". Downing Street said Prime Minister David Cameron, who was planning to stay in Paris overnight after meeting the French president, would be returning to the UK tonight. Whitehall sources have told the BBC it is "a fair supposition" that the incident was a terrorist incident but police have not commented publicly on the suggestion.

PRESIDENTIAL RACE Iran bars liberal candidates

AFP, Tehran

Iran said the moderate ex-president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was among those barred from standing in next month's presidential election, provoking a sharp reaction from Washington. Rafsanjani and a controversial aide of incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had been ruled unsuitable, the interior ministry said. The Guardians Council, a conservative-dominated vetting body, omitted Rafsanjani, who served as president from 1989 to 1997, from its list of eight approved candidates. It also excluded Esfandiar Rahim Mashaie, a confidant of Ahmadinejad and



Rafsanjani



Mashaie

his former chief of staff. The council gave no explanation for the disqualifications. Meanwhile, Ahmadinejad yesterday contested the disqualification of Mashaie. "I will pursue this case through the supreme leader until the last moment and I hope this problem will be solved," he said on the president's office website, adding his man Mashaie had been "a victim of injustice". Rafsanjani's camp said the ex-president would not challenge his disqualification. The disqualifications appeared to put lead nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili, a figure close to Khamenei, in the front seat.

World powers urge Assad to go ahead of key meet

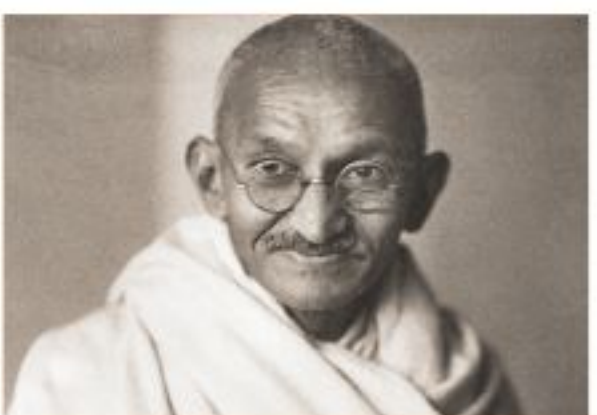
AFP, Amman

Britain and Qatar urged President Bashar al-Assad to step down, as major world powers yesterday gathered to seek ways toward a peaceful end to Syria's conflict. And the United States urged Assad to make a "commitment to find peace" in a country whose conflict has killed more than 94,000 people and threatens to spill beyond its borders. "It is the longstanding view of the UK that Assad needs to go, and we have never been able to see any solution which involves him staying," British Foreign Secretary William Hague said in Amman ahead of a Friends of Syria meeting to discuss a US-Russian proposal for peace talks. Qatar, a key supporter of the Syrian opposition, echoed that. "A political solution must be reached to end the conflict and meet the aspirations of the Syrian people who, as we know, demand changing the regime and changing President Bashar al-Assad, who insists on killing his people," Sheikh Hamad bin Jasssem al-Thani said in Doha. The foreign ministers of Britain, Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and the United States are attending the gathering.

US immigration bill passes major hurdle

AP, Washington

Far-reaching legislation to grant a chance at citizenship to millions of immigrants living illegally in the United States cleared the Senate Judiciary Committee on a solid bipartisan vote on Tuesday night after supporters sidestepped a controversy over the rights of gay spouses. The 13-5 vote cleared the way for an epic showdown on the Senate floor on the measure, which is one of President Barack Obama's top domestic priorities yet also gives the Republican Party a chance to recast itself as more appealing to minorities. The committee's action sparked rejoicing from immigration activists who crowded into a Senate committee room to witness the proceedings. "Yes, we can!" they shouted as they clapped rhythmically to show their pleasure. In addition to creating a pathway to citizenship for 11.5 million immigrants, the legislation creates a new program for low-skilled foreign labour and would permit highly skilled workers into the country at far higher levels than is currently the case. At the same time, it requires the government to take costly new steps to guard against future illegal immigration. There was suspense to the end of the committee's deliberations, when Sen. Patrick Leahy, who serves as chairman, sparked a debate over his proposal to give same-sex and heterosexual spouses equal rights under immigration law. "I don't want to be the Senator who asks people to choose between the love of their life and the love of their country," he said, adding he wanted to hear from others on the committee. In response, he heard a chorus of pleas from the Bill's supporters, seconding private appeals from the White House, not to force a vote that they warned would lead to the Bill's demise. "I believe in my heart of hearts that what you're doing is the right and just thing," said one of them, Sen. Richard Durbin. "But I believe this is the wrong moment, that this is the wrong bill." In the hours leading to a final vote, the panel also agreed to a last-minute compromise covering an increase in the visa program for high-tech workers, a deal that brought Sen. Orrin Hatch, over to the ranks of supporters. Under the compromise, the number of highly skilled workers admitted to the country would rise from 65,000 annually to 110,000, with the possibility of a further rise to 180,000, depending in part on unemployment levels. Firms where foreign labour accounts for at least 15 percent of the skilled work force would be subjected to tighter conditions than companies less dependent on H-1B visa holders.



Gandhi's last will, sandals sold at auction

BBC ONLINE

Mahatma Gandhi's last will and testament has sold at auction for £55,000. The two-page document written in Gujarati, was one of 50 items of Gandhi memorabilia, including a blood sample and his sandals up for sale. The guide price for the will, signed by Gandhi in his Gujarati signature, was between £30,000 and £40,000. His sandals sold for £19,000 at Ludlow Racecourse in Shropshire, £9,000 more than their asking price. The sample of blood on a microscope slide which he gave to a friend after an appendix operation in the 1920s, failed to sell, auctioneers Mullock's said. A "rare British Parliament paper declaring Gandhi a terrorist" from 1932, which had a guide price of between £200 and £300, went for £260. A printed illustration showing Gandhi shaking hands with George V sold for £25. Other lots include Gandhi's bed linen and his prayer beads. A spokesman for the auctioneers said they were "very pleased" with how the sale went.