

# NEWSIN brief

## Farc rebels agree land reform

Colombia and the Marxist-led FARC rebels have reached agreement on the critical issue of agrarian reform, the two sides said on Sunday in a major step forward for the peace process aimed at ending their long war.

They said the accord called for the economic and social development of rural areas and providing land to the people living there, which addresses one of the main issues that led the FARC, or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, to form in 1964 as a communist agrarian reform movement and launch its insurgency.

## Nurse murders 11 in Sydney

A nurse has pleaded guilty to murdering 11 elderly people by setting fire to the Sydney nursing home where he worked.

Roger Dean also pleaded guilty to causing grievous bodily harm to another eight nursing home residents injured by the blaze in 2011. The 37-year-old registered nurse was on duty when he set the fire and later appeared on television describing his efforts to rescue trapped people at the nursing home in the suburb of Quakers Hill.

## Communist ambush kills 7 cops in Philippines

Communist guerrillas set off a roadside bomb and opened fire on a truck carrying police in the northern Philippines yesterday, killing seven and wounding seven officers.

The members of the elite police Special Action Force were en route to a hospital for a regular medical test when the rebels, hiding in the bush along the road, detonated the explosive device and sprayed the vehicle with gunfire, said the regional police director, Chief Superintendent Rodrigo de Gracia.

## 'Cyber command for India soon'

India will soon form a cyber command to handle the online threats being faced by the country, defence minister A K Antony said here on Saturday.

"We have already got a mechanism for cyber security but we are augmenting it further and the forces are finalizing a proposal for a cyber command," he told reporters on the sidelines of the passing-out parade of the new batch of cadets at the Indian Naval Academy in Kannur.

## Vietnam arrests popular blogger

A prominent Vietnamese blogger has been arrested for posting articles critical of the communist government, reports said yesterday, in the latest crackdown on dissent in the authoritarian country.

Truong Duy Nhat, 49, was detained Sunday at his home in the coastal city of Danang and escorted to Vietnam's capital Hanoi for questioning, the state-run Tuoi Tre newspaper said.

## India bus accident kills 19

At least 19 people were killed early yesterday when a bus plunged into a canal in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, an official said.

Twenty-three others were rescued and taken to hospital with injuries after the accident in Etah district, 265 kilometres from state capital Lucknow, local administrator Lokesh M told AFP by telephone.

## WWII MARINE'S DIARY Brief look at brief life

Before Cpl Thomas "Cotton" Jones was killed by a Japanese sniper in the South Pacific in 1944, he wrote what he called his "last life request" to anyone who might find his diary: Please give it to Laura Mae Davis, the girl he loved.

Davis did get to read the diary - but not until nearly 70 years later, when she saw it in a display case at the National World War II Museum.

"I didn't have any idea there was a diary in there," said the 90-year-old Mooresville, Ind, woman. She said it brought tears to her eyes.

Laura Mae Davis Burlingame - she married an Army Air Corps man in 1945 - had gone to the New Orleans museum on April 24 looking for a display commemorating the young Marine who had been her high-school sweetheart.

"I figured I'd see pictures of him and the fellows he'd served with and articles about where he served," she said.

She was stunned to find the diary of the 22-year-old machine gunner.

Curator Eric Rivet (rih-VET) let her take a closer look, using white gloves to protect the old papers from skin oils. It was the first time in his 17 years of museum work that someone found "themselves mentioned in an artifact in the museum," Rivet said.

The diary was a gift to Jones from Davis. They had met in the class of '41 at Winslow High School. "He was a basketball player and I was a cheerleader," she said.

Jones had given her his class ring but they weren't engaged, she said. They had dated through high school. They went to the prom together.

## OBAMA VISITS OKLAHOMA TORNADO VICTIMS



US President Barack Obama talks with Plaza Towers Elementary School Principal Amy Simpson as Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin and FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate watch during a visit to the tornado affected Plaza Towers Elementary School on Sunday in Moore, Oklahoma. Obama is in the Oklahoma City area to survey damage from the tornado, which struck a week ago and will meet with victims and first responders.

PHOTO: AFP

## India's anti-terror agency probes Maoist attack Says Home Minister Shinde

Union Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde has said the National Investigation Agency (NIA) will probe the Maoist attack on Congress leaders in Chhattisgarh.

Speaking from the United States, where he is on an official visit, Shinde said he has briefed Prime Minister Manmohan Singh about the decision to hand over the investigation to the NIA, and also asked Union Home Secretary R K Singh to monitor the probe.

On Sunday, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, Congress President Sonia Gandhi and Congress Vice President Rahul Gandhi along with other leaders visited Chhattisgarh to review the situation arising out of the Maoist attack on the state Congress leadership.

Heavily-armed Maoists had ambushed a convoy of Congress leaders in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district on Saturday, killing 28 people, including Congress leader Mahendra Kurma, Pradesh Congress Committee chief Nand Kumar Patel, his son Dinesh and ex-MLA Uday Mudliyar and injuring 32 others, including former union minister V C Shukla.

Shukla is being treated at a Gurgaon's Medanta hospital where he is stated to be critical but stable.

The Congress convoy, returning from the party's Parivartan Yatra was targeted near Darbha forest in Jagdalpur, about 340 km south of state capital Raipur.

## Syria fighting rages amid reports of chemical attacks

### Rocket hits Israel; Syrian TV correspondent killed

Heavy fighting raged yesterday around the strategic border town of Qusair and the capital Damascus, amid renewed reports of chemical weapons attacks by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces, reported Reuters.

Opposition activists said Syrian troops backed by Lebanese Hezbollah fighters were advancing in areas around Qusair, pressing a sustained assault on a town long used by rebels as a way station for arms and other supplies from Lebanon.

Assad's forces now hold about two-thirds of Qusair, said one activist who asked not to be named. Rebel reinforcements from elsewhere in Syria were trying to relieve the pressure, but their attacks had bogged down on the outskirts.

Meanwhile, AP reported, Syria's Information Ministry says rebels have killed a TV correspondent who was covering clashes near the border with Lebanon.

The ministry says Yara Abbas, a prominent female war reporter for state-owned Al-Ikhbariyah TV, was attacked by rebels near the military air base of Dabaa in the central province of Homs.

Fierce clashes cut the highway running north from Damascus to the central city of Homs and shook the eastern outskirts of the capital, where dozens of people were suffering the effects of an apparent chemical attack, opposition sources said.

Video posted online from the eastern suburb of Harasta showed lines of victims lying on the floor of a large room, covered in blankets and breathing from oxygen masks.

A rocket was fired from south Lebanon towards Israel on Sunday, Lebanese security sources said, and residents of a northern Israeli town reported hearing a blast.



Yara Abbas

## Kerry unveils \$4b Palestinian investment plan

US secretary of state John Kerry unveiled on Sunday a plan to boost the Palestinian economy by attracting \$4 billion in private investment, saying it could transform the lives of the people.

As he seeks to bring Israel and the Palestinians back to the table to negotiate a peace deal, Kerry said it was also imperative to create jobs and meet the hopes of young people for a better economic future.

He has tasked Tony Blair, the Quartet's special envoy to the Middle East, with drawing up a plan to revitalise the West Bank through boosting industries such as tourism, construction, information technology and agriculture.

## Sharif formally nominated for Pak prime minister

### PPP's Khursheed nominated leader of opposition

The PML-N has formally nominated its chief Nawaz Sharif for the office of Prime Minister after the party moved towards a simple majority in the 342-member National Assembly or Pakistan's lower house of parliament.

The final approval for Sharif's nomination will be made during a meeting of the PML-N's parliamentary committee before the start of the first session of the new National Assembly, reported PTI.

Meanwhile, Dawn News reported, the PPP-nominated leader of opposition in the National Assembly, Syed Khursheed Ahmed Shah, has said his party would like to see the incoming PML-N government completing its five-year term and believes that this will "permanently close the door to dictatorship".

"If the PML-N government completes its tenure, then no force will be able to even think of derailing democracy," Mr Shah told reporters at the PPP's central secretariat here on Saturday after he was nominated as leader of opposition in the National Assembly.

The party won 126 of 272 directly elected seats in the lower house of parliament.

Eighteen independent candidates recently joined the PML-N, taking its tally of directly elected seats to 144.

The new Prime Minister will be formally elected during the first session of the new National Assembly, which is expected to be summoned on June 1.



Chinese villagers pushing their van on a flooded street in Kaili, southwest China's Guizhou province on Sunday. China is stepping up monitoring of water levels in its rivers and reservoirs, the government said, after rainstorms hit the south earlier this month and left dozens of people dead or missing.

PHOTO: AFP

## Over 260m victims of caste-based bias: UN

More than 260 million people across the world are still victims of human rights abuses due to caste-based discrimination, a group of independent experts appointed by the UN warned on Saturday and asked South Asian countries to strengthen legislation to protect them.

"This form (caste-based) of discrimination entails gross and wide-ranging human rights abuses, including brutal forms of violence," the group of experts noted.

People considered low caste in South Asia are known as 'dalits' or 'untouchables'.

In many countries, they face marginalization, social and economic exclusion, segregation in housing, limited access to basic services, including water and sanitation and employment, and work in conditions similar to slavery.

Two years ago, Nepal adopted the 'caste-based discrimination and untouchability bill', a landmark law that protects the rights of dalits.

Recently, the British government decided the equality act would cover caste discrimination to protect dalits in diaspora communities. The experts expressed concern about a serious lack of implementation in countries where legislation exists, and called for an effective application of laws, policies and programme to protect those affected by this discrimination.

## Suu Kyi criticises Rohingya 2-child rule

Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday criticised a ban on Rohingya having more than two children in strife-torn Rakhine state as counter to human rights, in rare comments on the plight of the Muslim group.

The opposition leader, who has been accused by activists of failing to speak up for the marginalised Rohingya, said she opposed the controversial rule, imposed by the previous junta and reaffirmed recently by local authorities in the wake of deadly unrest.

"It is not good to have such discrimination. And it is not in line with human rights either," the veteran democracy activist told reporters in Yangon, adding she could not confirm whether the policy was being implemented.

Rakhine authorities on Sunday told AFP that the rule had been reaffirmed in two Muslim-majority townships in the state.

Win Myaing, spokesperson for the Rakhine government, said the order was designed to "enforce monogamy and not to have more than two children".

He said the policy had previously been put on hold because of fears over "conflicts among communities" in the state.

Up to 140,000 people -- mainly Rohingya Muslims -- were displaced in two waves of sectarian unrest between Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine last year.

Human Rights Watch has accused the authorities of being a party to ethnic cleansing over the violence, which killed some 200 people and saw mobs torch whole villages.

It described the population policy as "abhorrent, inhumane" and "completely contrary to human rights".



## Rebels attack Sudan army base

Rebels with tanks attacked an army base in Sudan's top oil-producing state of South Kordofan on Sunday, and both sides claimed victory.

The Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF), an umbrella of insurgent groups which aims to topple President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, has stepped up attacks in the past month, trying to force the army to fight on fronts hundreds of miles apart to drain stretched state resources.

Sudan has accused neighbour South Sudan of backing rebels in the South Kordofan and Blue Nile border states.

Iuba denies this, but diplomats say the allegation is credible.

The violence has strained ties between the nations, which came close to all-out war in border clashes last year and have struggled to put an end to tensions that have hampered their economies.

## ODDLY enough

### Wood made car!



It's not the world's first wooden car, but it is the first of its kind in Vietnam.

Featuring a body made exclusively from high-quality wood and decorated with intricate carvings, the Achilles has been turning heads on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City.

The one-of-a-kind vehicle was created by Le Nguyen Khang, owner of Binh Duong-based wood processing firm Le Lumber.

He told reporters the idea of building a wooden car started off as a joke, while he was talking to an English friend who works in the travel business.

The sketch for his unusual automobile was completed with the help of 11 of his best employees, he worked on it for 16 months.