

NEWS IN brief

Modi to get Ajmer clerics' support!

As part of the BJP's grand Muslim outreach strategy, clerics from Ajmer Sharif, in their traditional skullcap and sherwani, will be seen honouring Narendra Modi and senior party leaders during the September 10 rally in the Pink City. Conscious of the images which would be beamed through the media, the party has issued specific directive that the Muslim representatives ought to be in traditional attire like men in sherwani and women in burqa.

Nasa launches spacecraft to Moon

Nasa has launched an unmanned spacecraft that aims to study the Moon's atmosphere, the US space agency's third lunar probe in five years.

Blazing a red path in the night sky, the spacecraft lifted off at 11:27 pm (Saturday 0327 GMT) aboard a converted Air Force ballistic missile known as the Minotaur V rocket from NASA's Wallops Flight Facility in Virginia.

31 infants die at Kolkata hospital

31 infants have died at the state-run B C Roy hospital in the past four days, official sources said.

Health department sources here said that terminally-ill infants were brought from private hospital or nursing home to this hospital and "in some cases nothing can be done". They ruled out any negligence on the part of the hospital.

'50 Boko Haram fighters killed'

Nigeria's military said Friday it had killed 50 Boko Haram Islamists in an operation in the northeast launched in response to an insurgent attack, in the latest violence to hit the region.

Gunmen suspected to be from the violent Islamist sect opened fire in a market on Thursday in the town of Gajiran, killing 15 people, residents said.

Gunmen kill 9 in Pakistan

Gunmen attacked a minibus and two other vehicles near Pakistan's northwestern city of Peshawar late on Friday, killing nine people, police said. The incident happened in the Mattani area on the outskirts of Peshawar.



Australian Prime Minister-elect Tony Abbott (C), his daughters Frances (L) and Louise (R) celebrate his victory in Sydney yesterday. Inset, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd with his wife Therese Rein gesture to crowd as he concedes defeat while speaking at a Labor Party function in Brisbane.

Tony Abbott to lead Australia

Rudd concedes poll defeat

Conservative challenger Tony Abbott declared Australia "under new management" yesterday as voters ended six years of tumultuous Labor rule, with Prime Minister Kevin Rudd conceding election defeat and vacating his party's leadership.

With more than 90 percent of the vote counted, the Australian Electoral Commission said Abbott's Liberal/National coalition was heading for a landslide win, leading in 90 seats in the 150-seat House of Representatives, to Labor's 55.

Abbott, a former trainee Catholic priest, boxing enthusiast and monarchist, capitalised on the infighting that saw Rudd oust Julia Gillard as Labor leader in June, three years after she did the same to him.

"I declare that Australia is under new management and I will once again open for business," the jubilant 55-year-old told cheering supporters at a luxury hotel in Sydney.

"I now look forward to forming a government that is competent, that is trustworthy, and which purposefully and steadfastly and methodically sets about delivering on our commitments to you, the Australian people."

"I am both proud and humbled as I shoulder the duties of government," he added.

Abbott is expected to be sworn in officially by Governor General Quentin Bryce next week.

Rudd said Labor had "fought the good fight", conceding defeat some 100 minutes after the polls closed.

"As prime minister of Australia, I wish him well in the high office of prime minister of this country," he said, adding that he will quit as party leader.



UK man breaks into Buckingham Palace

AFP, London

British police yesterday said they had arrested a man who scaled a fence to get into Buckingham Palace, the official London residence of Queen Elizabeth II.

No members of the royal family were in the palace at the time of the incident on Monday night, said a spokesman for London's Metropolitan Police.

The man was found "in an area currently open to the public during the day" and arrested for burglary, trespass and criminal damage, the spokesman said.

A second man was arrested outside the palace in central London for conspiracy to commit burglary.

It is one of the most serious security breaches at the palace since 1982 when unemployed Michael Fagan got inside the queen's private chambers while she was in bed.

Fagan spent 10 minutes talking to the queen after climbing over the palace walls and up a drainpipe, and she raised the alarm when Fagan asked for a cigarette.

UN readies emergency plan

AFP, United Nations

UN agencies have drawn up emergency plans for a military strike on Syria but are determined to keep delivering aid in the stricken country, a top UN official said.

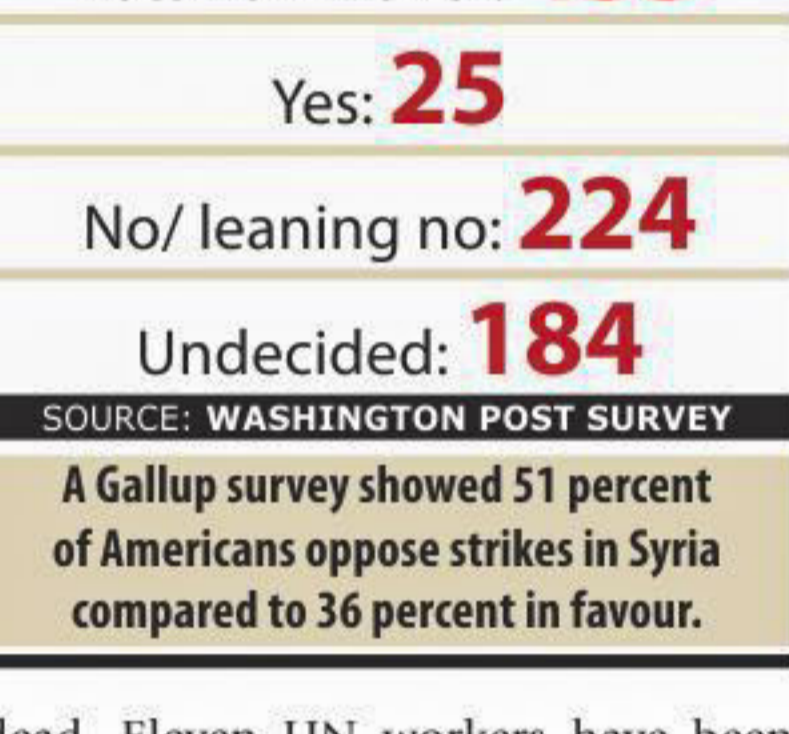
"We continue to update and look at our contingency planning" in case the numbers of refugees fleeing Syria rises, UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos said after a trip to Damascus on Friday.

The United Nations has concerns about the safety of its 4,500 staff in Syria, she added. But Amos said: "We have a commitment to continue our humanitarian operations."

Amos said the mainly Syrian staff "want to continue to work for the good of Syrians" but "at the same time they are mindful of the impact that any possible military action might have on themselves and their families."

UN agencies and private aid groups already have problems reaching many areas in Syria because of fallout from the 29-month-old conflict which the UN says has left more than 100,000

SUPPORT FOR SYRIA STRIKE IN US CONGRESS



dead. Eleven UN workers have been killed in the war.

Amos, speaking by video conference from Beirut, said she had discussed lifting obstacles to getting approval for aid deliveries, convoys and visas for aid workers with officials in President Bashar al-Assad's government.

More than 4.25 million people have

fled their homes in Syria and two million are registered as refugees in countries around Syria, according to UN figures.

Amos highlighted the case of Lebanon. The UN humanitarian coordinator in Lebanon, Robert Watkins, said there are now 726,000 Syrians registered with UN agencies and the figure is expected to rise above one million by the end of year.

The UN said this week that it would have to cut aid to more than a quarter of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon because of funding shortages.

The world body has launched its biggest ever annual appeal, \$4.4 billion, for Syria. Less than half has been raised so far.

Meanwhile, a US military strike on Syria would aim to stop a campaign by President Bashar al-Assad's regime "to kill their way to victory", US ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Powers said Friday.

US ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power made the statement as she sought to win over the many Americans who worry about US intervention in the 30-month-old conflict after Assad's suspected use of chemical weapons.

Julia Gillard exits politics

AFP, Sydney

Australia's first female prime minister, Julia Gillard, quietly exited politics yesterday, congratulating the woman who has taken over her constituency as Labor faced defeat in national elections.

The 51-year-old opted not to stand in the polls after being dumped as Labor leader in June and has stayed out of the spotlight since.

As election results came in yesterday, she emerged from her self-imposed silence to congratulate the successor in her Melbourne seat of Labor, Labor candidate Joanne Ryan.

She became prime minister in 2010 when she led a party room coup against then-Labor leader Kevin Rudd, in a move which shocked the nation but was designed to end months of dysfunction within the government.

With her career in politics finished, Gillard will become an honorary professor at Adelaide University.



Pro-Telangana activists hurl stones towards police during a protest against the 'Save Andhra Pradesh' meeting in Hyderabad yesterday. Andhra Pradesh Non-Gazetted Officers employees organised the public meeting against the proposed bifurcation of the state, while pro-Telangana groups held a 24-hour strike in protest of the gathering.

Pakistan releases 7 Taliban prisoners

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan yesterday announced the release of seven senior Afghan Taliban figures to help the peace process in war-torn neighbour Afghanistan, the foreign ministry said.

"In order to further facilitate the Afghan reconciliation process, Pakistan is releasing seven Taliban detainees namely Mansoor Dadullah, Said Wali, Abdul Manan, Karim Agha, Sher Afzal, Gul Muhammad and Muhammad Zai," it said in a statement.

"These releases are in addition to 26 Taliban detainees released during the last year," it added.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai urged Pakistan to help arrange peace talks between his government and the Taliban during a visit to Islamabad last week to meet with new Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Infuriated by the opening in June of a Taliban office in Qatar, considered a precursor towards talks with US officials, Karzai wants Pakistan to help open dialogue with the insurgents.

But analysts doubt whether Pakistan has the influence to force the Taliban to the negotiating table -- and the insurgents have publicly refused all contact with Karzai's government, branding it a US puppet.



Rahul would be ideal choice for PM

Says Manmohan Singh

PTI, On Board PM's Special Aircraft

Indicating he was ready to don any role in the Congress after the 2014 general elections, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday said he will be "very happy" to work under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi.

Singh also maintained that Rahul, the Congress vice-president, will be an "ideal choice" for the PM post after the next Lok Sabha polls.

"I have always maintained that Rahul Gandhi would be an ideal choice for the PM post after 2014 elections (Lok Sabha). I will be very happy to work in the Congress under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi," the prime minister told reporters accompanying him on board the special Air India aircraft on his way home after attending the G20 summit in the Russian city of St Petersburg.

80-year-old Singh was replying to a question on whether it is possible for him to seek a third term on the grounds that many in the Congress would like to see Rahul to lead the party.

Singh also did not rule out any alliances with erstwhile ally Trinamool Congress in the future, saying in politics there are no permanent enemies and permanent friends.

He was asked whether the Congress will seek an alliance with Trinamool for the upcoming parliamentary elections.

ODDLY enough



A man's quest for love

STAR DESK

For the past 12 years, Robert Darling, a 58-year old unemployed man from New Jersey, has been traveling to Manhattan in search of a life companion. To make it easier for women to notice him, he carries a sandwich board which reads "Looking for a rich lady to be my wife", along with his phone number and email.

Robert Darling has never had much luck with the ladies. He has never been in a serious relationship, and never realized he wanted someone to spend the rest of his life with until his middle age. Ever since 2001, Robert has been traveling to Manhattan twice a week. It might sound like a joke to a lot of people, but the lonely bachelor says that every time he leaves home he tells himself that could be the day he finally meets the woman he will settle down with.

Blasts hit Somali capital; 18 killed

AFP, Mogadishu

At least 18 people were killed in the Somali capital Mogadishu yesterday when two blasts ripped through a busy parking lot next to a restaurant, police said.

Police and witnesses said the first blast was a car laden with explosives that was parked by a restaurant, the Village, close to the theatre.

"Minutes after the bomb went off, I saw severed flesh flying past," said Idris Yusuf, who was in the restaurant at the time of the attack and who sustained slight leg injuries.

Nearby buildings were destroyed by the blasts, he said, and passers-by came running over to help the victims.

2.5cr mobiles, 90lakh tablets for free!

PTI, New Delhi

In another mega scheme to woo the poor, the Centre proposes to spend Rs 7,860 crore distributing 2.5 crore mobile phones and 90 lakh tablets virtually free of cost to targeted beneficiaries over the next four years starting 2014-15, in the name of bridging the digital divide in the country.

The mobile phones will come bundled with free connection charges for two years. The user, who will have to pay a one-time charge of Rs 300, will also get 30 minutes of talk time, 30 text messages and 30 Mb of data usage free per month. This scheme will be restricted to the rural population.

Similarly, tablets will be given away to students of classes XI and XII, both in rural and urban areas. These gadgets will have free data card connection for two years.

Largest volcano on Earth found

CNN ONLINE

Geologists on Thursday announced they had uncovered a stupendous volcano that is the biggest in the world and rivals the greatest in the Solar System.

An underwater volcano dubbed Tamu Massif was found some 1,000 miles east of Japan, says William Sager, a professor at the University of Houston, who led a team of scientists in the discovery.

The volcano is about the size of the state of New Mexico and is among the largest in the solar system, Sager says. Tamu Massif covers an area of about 120,000 square miles. In comparison, the largest active volcano on land, Hawaii's Mauna Loa, is about 2,000 square miles, Sager says.

Morsi accused of insulting judges

Egypt army defuses rail bomb, steps up Sinai operations

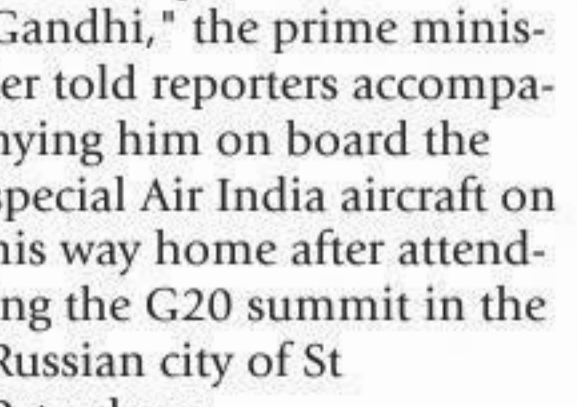
AFP, Cairo

An Egyptian prosecutor levelled new accusations against Mohamed Morsi, already facing trial on other charges, alleging the Islamist had insulted the country's judiciary when he was president as army launched operations against Sinai militants.

The prosecutor issued a new detention order for Morsi over his comments that judges had rigged a 2005 parliamentary election.

Morsi, who is already being held by the military at an unknown location, refused to cooperate with prosecutors, the official MENA news agency reported.

The military overthrew Morsi on July 3 following massive protests demanding his resignation after only a year in office.



Meanwhile, Egyptian army yesterday defused a bomb on a railroad linking the canal cities of Ismailiya and Suez, as air strikes hit suspected militants in the Sinai Peninsula, officials said.

The country has seen an uptick in bombings and shootings, mostly aimed at the security forces, since hundreds were killed in clashes when police broke up two Islamist protest camps in Cairo on August 14.