

NEWSIN brief

Kim Jong-un 'has baby daughter'

BBC ONLINE

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has a baby daughter called Ju-ae, retired US basketball player Dennis Rodman says.

Rodman, who was in North Korea last week on a "basketball diplomacy tour", made the comments in an interview with The Guardian newspaper.

He said that she spent time with Kim's family by the sea, and described him as "a good dad".

Explosion kills two outside China school

DPA, Beijing

An explosion killed at least two people and injured 17 others yesterday outside a primary school in the tourist city of Guilin in southwestern China's Guangxi region, state media said.

Ten children were among the injured, including one in critical condition, after the explosion on a motorized tricycle cart around 8 a.m. near Guilin's Balijie Primary School, local police said.

55 killed in CAR battles

REUTERS, Bangui

At least 55 people were killed in clashes over the weekend between gunmen loyal to Central African Republic's (CAR) former president and the ex-rebels who ousted him, the government and a regional peacekeeper said yesterday. The latest fighting in a country the United Nations has warned is on the brink of collapse took place on Saturday and Sunday around Bossangoa about 300 km north of the capital.

Khmer Rouge top prosecutor resigns

AP, Phnom Penh

The international prosecutor for Cambodia's Khmer Rouge tribunal said yesterday that he is resigning next week, citing personal reasons. The resignation of co-prosecutor Andrew Cayley of Britain takes effect September 16, almost four years after he joined the financially troubled UN-backed tribunal in 2009.

Guatemala bar attack kills 11

AFP, Guatemala City

At least 11 people were killed and another 15 injured in an armed standoff at a liquor store in Guatemala, rescue officials said. Rescue workers found victims dead in "hiding places," in the store's bathrooms, and in surrounding streets, Sergio Vasquez, spokesman for the volunteer firefighters told local media.

Give up weapons: Russia Syria welcomes Moscow's proposal

AGENCIES

Russia has asked Syria to put its chemical weapons stockpile under "international control" in a bid to avoid US military strikes, and then have them destroyed, reported BBC.



Sergei Lavrov

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the offer was made during talks with his Syrian counterpart, and he hoped for a quick response from Damascus.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has again denied using chemical weapons.

Syria welcomes a Russian proposal to place the nation's chemical weapons under international control, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem said yesterday after talks in Moscow, praising the Kremlin for seeking to "prevent American aggression".

Moualem, who spoke to reporters through an interpreter after Russia expressed hope the proposal could avert military strikes against Syria, stopped short of saying explicitly that President Bashar al-Assad's government accepted it, Reuters reported.

But the US is threatening strikes, accusing the Assad regime of war crimes.

US Secretary of State John Kerry, in Europe to garner support for the military action, has once again warned that taking no action is riskier than launching strikes.

When asked at a news conference whether there was anything Assad could do to avoid military action, Kerry replied that he could hand over his entire stockpile of chemical weapons within the next week.

US officials later clarified that Kerry was making a "rhetorical argument" rather than a serious offer.

However, Lavrov later called on Syria to "place the chemical weapons under international control and then have them destroyed".

He said the offer had been made to Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem during talks in Moscow.

Lavrov said he did not know whether Damascus would agree, but Russia was hoping for a positive response.

Cyprus rules out role in any US-led strike

REUTERS, Nicosia

Cyprus said yesterday it would have no involvement of any kind in a potential US-led strike on Syria, which lies about 100 km to its east.

It would, however, be ready to offer assistance to third-country nationals evacuated from the Middle East, Cypriot government spokesman Christos Stylianides said.

The island's close proximity to the Middle East and the British military bases there has given rise to speculation about its role in a US-led strike, even though Britain's parliament has ruled out any offensive operation.

"Any contribution of the Republic of Cyprus is strictly humanitarian," Stylianides said.

Syria vote tests pro-Israel groups' influence in US

AP, Washington

Of all the interests backing President Barack Obama's call for Congress to authorize military strikes on Syria, perhaps none is more concerned about the prospect of a "no" vote than America's pro-Israel lobby, which is finding it difficult to overcome widespread opposition to the use of force.

Considered to be some of the most influential lobbyists in Capitol Hill, officials with several pro-Israel groups say they are running into rare resistance from lawmakers, even among staunch Israel advocates on whose support they could almost unquestionably count in the past.

The administration has sought and won support for the vote from most of the major pro-Israel groups that traditionally have been most effective in promoting legislation to enhance Israel's security.

Among those that have released public statements and made private calls to lawmakers to urge them to vote "yes" are The American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, the Anti-Defamation League and the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

"There is no question that it is very challenging," said an official from one, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to speak publicly on behalf of the organization. "It is an extremely challenging environment right now." The crux of their argument is that inaction will undermine American credibility in limiting the development and use of weapons of mass destruction with a direct impact on Israel's security, particularly as it relates to Iran and its nuclear program.



Mamnoon Hussain

Pakistan new president takes office

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's new President Mamnoon Hussain took office yesterday, presiding over a government battling to overcome a Taliban insurgency, resolve an energy crisis and repair the economy.

A respected businessman from the financial capital of Karachi but with no political powerbase of his own, Hussain is Pakistan's 12th president and a ceremonial head of state.

His time in office should cement Pakistan's transition back to a strong prime minister and parliamentary democracy after his predecessor reversed amendments made by military rulers.

Hussain was sworn in by chief justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry in a short ceremony after political leaders gathered together for cross-party talks on how to tackle growing insecurity.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and outgoing president Asif Ali Zardari watched as Hussain took oath, wearing a black hat in the style of Pakistan's founding father Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

The 73-year-old Hussain was elected on July 30 by members of the four provincial assemblies and the federal parliament.

A close ally of Sharif, Hussain's low-key persona and lack of personal power will put him in stark contrast to Zardari.



ANTI-WAR PROTESTS CONTINUE ALL OVER THE WORLD

(From left clockwise) A protester holds a poster burning on which is depicted former US president George W Bush taking off a mask of current President Barack Obama near the US embassy, east of Beirut. A protester, wearing a poster wrapped on his head with the portrait of the Syrian president and draped in a Syrian national flag, takes part in a rally to show support to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad yesterday in Damascus. Labor group members shout slogans and hold placards outside the de facto US embassy in Taipei.



22 of India's 32 big cities face water crisis

TNN, New Delhi

Water scarcity is fast becoming urban India's number one woe, with government's own data revealing that residents in 22 out of 32 major cities have to deal with daily shortages.

The worst-hit city is Jamshedpur, where the gap between demand and supply is a yawning 70 percent. The crisis is acute in Kanpur, Asansol, Dhanbad, Meerut, Faridabad, Visakhapatnam, Madurai and Hyderabad - where supply fails to meet almost 30 percent of the demand - according to data provided by states which was placed in the Lok Sabha during the recently-concluded Parliament session by the urban development ministry.

The figures reveal that in Greater Mumbai and Delhi - which have the highest water demand among all cities - the gap between demand and supply is comparatively less. The shortfall is 24 percent for Delhi and 17 percent for Mumbai. However, the situation is worse than that.

For example, in Delhi, 3,156 million litres of water (MLD) is supplied against the requirement of 4,158. But around 40 percent of the supply is lost in distribution resulting in a much wider gap between demand and supply than what's recorded.

"In official records, many cities might be getting adequate water. But because of faulty engineering and poor maintenance, the actual availability is much less," said Dilip Fouzdar, a water resource management professional.

COMMUNAL RIOTS IN INDIA Toll mounts, Manmohan speaks to UP chief minister

IANS, New Delhi

Shoot-at-sight orders were issued Monday in Uttar Pradesh's Muzaffarnagar district as the toll in communal clashes, one of the worst in the country in recent times, went up to 31.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called UP Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav to offer help while BSP leader Mayawati demanded president's rule in the country's most populous state of 210 million people.

With violence refusing to abate in rural areas of the town, with a significant Muslim population, authorities gave shoot-at-sight orders against rioters in Muzaffarnagar district, known for its sugar mills amidst sprawling sugarcane fields. It is located barely 120 km from the national capital.

Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) Arun Kumar told IANS that cases have been slapped on 40 identified people and 1,000 "unknown" people for their involve-



Manmohan Singh

ment in inciting mobs and for being involved in the riots.

Sectarian violence started when some people pelted stones at a bus carrying people to a "mahapanchayat" where elders of two religious groups were meeting to sort out the simmering tension between Jats, a farming community, and Muslims Akhilesh Yadav and assure him all help. Officials in the Chief Minister's Office told IANS that the prime minister assured Akhilesh Yadav, 40, a first time chief minister, that whatever security forces the state government required will be dispatched immediately.

In the 12-minute long conversation, the prime minister also asked the chief minister to take control of the situation and ensure that peace returned to the violence-hit areas.

Mubarak's ex-PM backs Sisi for Egypt president

REUTERS, Cairo

Former Egyptian Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq says he will back army chief General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi for president, adding to speculation that the man who led the overthrow of President Mohamed Mursi could become head of state.

Shafiq, a former air force commander who came second in last year's presidential election, said he would not run if Sisi stood in the election expected next year.

The comment suggests why, just months before the election, there are no declared candidates as politicians wait to see if Sisi is going to run before announcing their own intentions. In separate comments, former Arab League chief Amr Moussa, who also ran in last year's election, said Sisi would win by a landslide. Egyptians had become "angry and afraid of anarchy and terrorism" and wanted a decisive leader, he said.

Sisi has said he does not seek authority though speculation he will run has mounted since he toppled the Muslim Brotherhood's Mursi from the presidency on July 3. He is feted on state TV, while his picture appears across Cairo.

In an interview with Dream 2 television, Shafiq said he would run for president if he had broad support but he would not contest an election if Sisi did.



General al-Sisi



Long-lost Van Gogh painting discovered

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

The Van Gogh Museum says it has identified a long-lost Vincent van Gogh painting that spent years in a Norwegian attic and was believed to be by another painter. It is the first full-size canvas by the Dutch master discovered since 1928.

Sunset at Montmajour depicts trees, bushes and sky, painted with Van Gogh's familiar thick brush strokes. It can be dated to the exact day it was painted because the artist described it in a letter to his brother, Theo, and said he painted it the previous day - 4 July, 1888.

He said the painting was done "on a stony head where small twisted oaks grow". Museum experts said the painting was authenticated by letters, style and the physical materials used, and they had traced its history.

UK PM leaves his papers in public on train

AP, London

Downing Street officials say Britain's secrets weren't at risk despite a photograph showing Prime Minister David Cameron's official red box of papers left in public view on a train table.

A front-page photograph yesterday in the Daily Mirror showed the famous, battered red box marked "Prime Minister" apparently unattended while Mr. Cameron left his seat on a weekend train to Scotland.

The newspaper said other passengers could have rifled through the box and studied secret plans for military options in Syria or details about disagreements with Russia over policy toward Syria.

A Downing Street statement, however, indicated that Mr. Cameron's security team was in place and the box was not unattended.

US spied on Brazil's Petrobras, Google

AP, Rio De Janeiro

Documents leaked by Edward Snowden indicate the National Security Agency spied on Brazil's state-run oil company, the private computer networks of Google and a company that facilitates most of the world's international bank transfers, a Brazilian TV report says.

Globo TV, however, gave no information about what the NSA may have obtained from Petrobras, Google and the Belgium-based Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, an organization better known as SWIFT that oversees international bank transfers thought to be secure transactions.

All three companies are included in an NSA training manual for new agents on how to target the private computer networks of big companies, the report said.

Earlier reports based on Snowden's documents revealed the existence of the NSA's PRISM program, which gives the agency comprehensive access to customer data from companies like Google and Facebook.

Separate reports last week in the Guardian, New York Times and ProPublica, also based on Snowden's leak, said the NSA and its British counterpart had developed "new access opportunities" into Google's computers by 2012, but the documents didn't indicate how extensive the project was or what kind of data it could access.

James Klapper, director of U.S. national intelligence, said in a statement that "it is not a secret that the Intelligence Community collects information about economic and financial matters, and terrorist financing."

UAE happiest Arab country

IANS, Dubai

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been ranked the happiest Arab country and 14th happiest globally, according to the United Nations' 'World Happiness Report'.

Vice-president and prime minister of the UAE and ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum has lauded the achievement of happiness for Emiratis, which he described as an approach followed by the founding fathers of the UAE and institutions as well as a manner of work that governs all of our policies and decisions.

"This (ranking) would not have been possible without the efforts of sincere men, excellent teamwork and full coordination and integration between all local and federal government sectors," he added.

"All development plans that we approved, all initiatives that we launched and all the government policies and laws, have one common goal - achieving the happiness of our people," he said.

ODDLYenough



Back seat driving!

STAR DESK

The Nissan Patrol modified by Ali, of Kingdom Customs Garage, in Dubai, looks completely normal, but open the front door and you'll notice a few details are missing. And by details I mean the steering wheel, pedals, shift stick...

Probably sick of sitting behind the wheel while his friends had all the fun in the back, Ali, a tuner from Dubai moved the driver's seat to the back of his Nissan Patrol.

The steering wheel now sits behind the front seats, along with the pedals, dashboard gauges, manual transmission and even the rear-view mirror.

All that's left in the front is the dashboard and a series of LED screens for the passengers to pass the time while the driver does his thing in the back.