

NEWSIN brief

Indian forces kill 14 Maoist rebels

Security forces killed 14 Maoists in a firefight in eastern India yesterday, police said, marking the latest bloodshed in a long conflict in which the rebels have been battling to overthrow the government. It was the single biggest rebel death toll in Orissa state from one incident and came amid an intense anti-Maoist campaign in the area conducted over the

Suicide blast kills 21 at Iraq funeral

A suicide bomber killed at least 21 people at the funeral of a member of Iraq's Shabak minority in the northern province of Nineveh yesterday, security and medical sources said. It was not immediately clear who was behind the attack, but Sunni Islamist militants have in the past targeted Shabaks, who are predominantly Shia, warning them to leave the area.

Philippine standoff nears end

Philippine troops were clearing out the last remaining Muslim Moro rebels after a six-day operation in the south that killed dozens of militants and allowed scores of hostages to flee, officials said yesterday. His comments boosted hopes that the crisis, which had left entire neighbourhoods razed to the ground by the gunmen and forced tens of thousands of residents to flee, would soon

Afghan US consulate attack toll hits 4

At least four Afghans were killed Friday in a Taliban suicide attack on the US consulate in the Afghan city of Herat, the State Department said Friday. There were no US casualties in the attack on Herat, it added. At least three Afghan guards and one interpreter were killed in the attack. Earlier, Afghan officials had said one guard was dead and 18

Anti-govt protest gears up in Poland

Tens of thousands of Polish trade unionists kicked off a march through the capital yesterday in the finale of a four-day protest against the unpopular and increasingly fragile centre-right government. The protest reflects widespread public gloom over this year's sharp economic slowdown in Poland, which has been dragged down by the eurozone crisis. The disillusionment has plunged the coalition government's popularity to its lowest level since Prime Minister Donald Tusk took

Geneva deal must end Syria suffering: Ban

UN leader Ban Ki-moon yesterday welcomed a Russian-US deal on Syria's chemical weapons but said it must be a stepping stone to ending the "appalling suffering" of Syrians, a spokeswoman said. Ban pledges UN support to implementing the accord reached by Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and US Secretary of State John Kerry, said a UN spokeswoman Vannina Mastracci.



keep to any plan drawn up to put his banned chemical arms under international control. Kerry and Lavrov agreed however that the UN Security Council should pass a resolution that would impose measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which allows use of force, if Assad breaches the accord. Earlier, Ban Ki-moon said on Friday he shares international doubts that Syria's President Bashar al-Assad will respect an international deal on his country's chemical weapons.

"The secretary general expresses his fervent hope that the agreement will, first, prevent any future use of chemical weapons in Syria and, second, help pave the path for a political solution to stop the appalling suffering inflicted on the Syrian people," she added. Ban said before the deal was announced that a peace conference could be held in October if all sides agreed. He had also expressed skepticism that Syria's President Bashar al-Assad would

"That (Assad's pledge over surrendering chemical stockpile) is positive, but at the same time I sense in the international community some sense of skepticism." "Yes, I also share" the doubts, he added. The accord was greeted with dismay by the Syrian opposition coalition, who have spent two years appealing to the west to give them the weapons needed to tilt the balance of the civil war in their favour.



US Secretary of State John Kerry, left, shares a laugh with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at the end of a press conference in Geneva yesterday after they agreed a deal to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons.

PHOTO: AFP

No change in visa policy on Modi: US

PTI, Washington

Even as the India's Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP nominated Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi as its prime ministerial candidate, the US has said that there is no change in its visa policy with regard to the BJP leader and that he was welcome to apply for the same.

"There is no change in our longstanding visa policy. With regard to the (Gujarat) chief minister, that he is welcome to apply for a visa and await a review like any other applicant."

"That review will be, of course, grounded in US law," State Department spokesperson Marie Harf, told reporters. "And I just am not going to speculate about what the outcome of that review might be," she said.

Harf said the US does not want to involve itself in the domestic Indian politics or for that of any other country.

"We're not involved in domestic Indian politics. If Mr Modi would like to apply for a visa and await a review like any other applicant, he's certainly free to do so," she said.

"I just don't have anything more for you on this. I'm not going to comment on domestic Indian politics," she said.

From RSS worker to BJP's PM candidate

NDTV ONLINE

Narendra Damodar Modi, one of India's most polarising figures, is the BJP's choice for prime minister.

The announcement came despite stiff opposition from BJP heavyweight LK Advani. His supporters argue that it was inevitable after the Gujarat Chief Minister was made the chairman of the BJP's election strategy committee, which virtually made him the party's face for the national elections due by May.

It became clear in December 2012 that Narendra Modi's aspiration to step out of Gujarat could not be ignored after he registered a third successive and very convincing win in the Assembly elections.

In the days since, he has lunched with ambassadors of the European Union, which ended its decade-long boycott of the Gujarat Chief Minister saying, "we are now in a new phase." They had boycotted all diplomatic engagement with him after the 2002 communal riots in Gujarat. And though the US continues to deny him a visa, some lawmakers in that country have suggested that the policy be reviewed.

Critics accuse Modi of not doing enough to stem communal violence in 2002; some have even alleged that he quietly encouraged it - allegations that he has strenuously denied and that have never been proved in inquiries.

In an interview earlier this year, Modi said that he did everything he could to check the violence, and controversially appeared to compare the deaths to that of a puppy being run over.

After years as a political pariah, shunned in India and abroad, Modi has spent the last few years trumpeting Gujarat's high growth and investment report card to project himself as a progressive, pro-development leader best equipped to help rid the country

of its economic and social problems. His detractors allege that marketing savvy and not a change of heart has shaped the new Modi.

Officials in Modi's government and local business leaders paint the picture of a man with a phenomenal memory, great attention to detail, unflagging energy and a flair for publicity. People who have met him say nothing escapes him. But they also describe him as a man with a vindictive streak, capable of holding grudges for years and intolerant of dissent.



Narendra Modi was born to lower middle-class parents in northern Gujarat on September 17, 1950. He holds a Master's degree in political science.

Modi joined and rose through the ranks of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the ideological parent of the BJP, early in life.

A stocky, bespectacled man with a trimmed white beard, the Gujarat Chief Minister is known for his ascetic lifestyle and enthusiasm for yoga. He rises early and has for years read news on the Internet. He uses social media very effectively, tweeting extensively and has more than 2.2 million followers on Twitter.

Though he married at a young age, he has never publicly acknowledged this. He has no children. Modi first became chief minister in October, 2001, just months before the communal riots.

Despite arms deal, threats remain Losing power hits 'like a fist'

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

The agreement in Geneva between the US and Russia on disarming Syria's chemical stockpile looks impressive on paper. It sets out a firm time frame for compliance. Syria must report what chemical stocks it holds within a week, far faster than the month President Bashar al-Assad requested. UN inspectors must be on the ground by November, and the stockpiles destroyed by the middle of next year.

Failure to comply, as both the US secretary of state, John Kerry, and Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, agreed, would result in a reference to the UN security council under chapter 7 of the UN charter - "Action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression". Optimistically the compliance process is being tied to the Geneva 2 peace conference.

The reality however is that the devil will be in the detail. Even as the two men spoke it was clear, from comments by Barack Obama and other officials that the red lines on all sides remain where they were at the beginning of this week.

The US - in the comments of both Kerry and Obama - still hold up the "possibility" of the threat of force if there is non-compliance from Syria, a step back in its military posture from a week ago. Definitions of full compliance, in any case, are likely to be contested over the coming months.

The real issue lies in what has been papered over in Geneva - the fundamental differences between Moscow and Washington over how the conflict in Syria should be brought to an end. That reference now will be made on the narrowest of issues - albeit a very serious one - over the past use and future retention of chemical weapons.

The wider war, which has claimed

over 100,000 lives on both sides and displaced 6.6 million, will continue with conventional weapons. And in the event of non-compliance the same arguments seen over recent months will be revisited. Because under chapter 7 there are different available options not least articles 41 and 42.

Under the text of article 41, "the security council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the members of the United Nations to apply such measures."

If that fails, the security council can invoke article 42, authorising it to "take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of members of the United Nations."

Says Australia's Gillard

AFP, Sydney

Losing power was like being "hit by a fist", Australia's first female prime minister Julia Gillard said yesterday, recounting the pain of being dumped by her party.

Gillard made history in 2010 when she became the first woman to lead the country after ousting Kevin Rudd in a Labor party room coup, a move that shocked the nation, which had voted Rudd into power just three years before.

But in June Gillard received the same treatment herself, with her parliamentary Labor colleagues returning the leadership to Rudd after she failed to turn around dismal opinion poll ratings.

"Losing power is felt physically, emotionally, in waves of sensation, in moments of acute distress," Gillard wrote in a piece published online in The Guardian yesterday.

"I know now that there are the odd



moments of relief as the stress ekes away and the hard weight that felt like it was sitting uncomfortably between your shoulder blades slips off.

"I know too that you can feel you are fine but then suddenly someone's words of comfort, or finding a memento at the back of the cupboard as you pack up, or even cracking jokes about old times, can bring forth a pain that hits you like a fist, pain so strong you feel it in your guts, your nerve endings."

Rudd ultimately lost the September 7 election to conservative leader Tony Abbott and has stepped down from the Labor leadership, which is now a contest between two of his former ministers, Anthony Albanese and Bill Shorten.

But Gillard said more needed to be done to heal the Labor Party after three years of bitter infighting over the leadership.



Egyptian toppled president Hosni Mubarak and his two sons Alaa, right, and Gamal stand behind bars during their trial in Cairo yesterday. Mubarak appears in court for the second time since his release from prison and he faces an array of charges, including complicity in the deaths of some 850 people killed in an uprising against him, and corruption.

PHOTO: AFP

Powerful blast kills 9 in Manipur

AFP, Shillong

A powerful bomb blast in India's restive northeast -- plagued for decades by separatist violence -- has killed nine labourers and injured about 21 other people, police said yesterday.

The explosion took place late Friday in a busy area on the outskirts of Imphal, capital of the state of Manipur, which borders Myanmar.

"The bomb was planted in a makeshift tent and was of high intensity," Manipur police chief MK Das told AFP by telephone.

Doctors said two of the injured were in critical condition. Police officials said the victims were migrant workers employed by a Kolkata-based company.

The motive for the explosion was not immediately known. No rebel group has yet claimed responsibility.

The remote state has long been affected by insurgent violence and is home to dozens of tribal groups and small guerrilla armies fighting New Delhi's rule.

They often compete against each other in turf wars for dominance in the state.

Rights groups slam death sentences Says capital punishment won't help; stresses on awareness programme

AFP, New Delhi

Indian rights groups yesterday voiced dismay over death sentences handed to four men for a fatal gang rape, saying it was unlikely to reverse the country's "rape crisis" despite a public clamour for their execution.

After a seven-month fast-track trial, Judge Yogesh Khanna said Friday the four men should be "hanged by the neck till they are dead" for the brutal rape of a 23-year-old woman on a bus last December.

Soon after the sentencing, people distributed sweets in the streets in celebration and tweeted that "justice" had been served.

But rights network Avaaz slammed the sentencing, urging the government instead to launch a mass public education campaign to stop India's "rape epidemic".

"Executing these men won't bring back the woman they raped or reverse



India's rape crisis. The only way to stop rape before it starts is with a massive public education campaign, the online activist network said.

Indian newspapers splashed the sentencing on their front pages along with mug shots of the four convicts whose crime shocked the nation and triggered weeks of street protests. "Showed no mercy, got no mercy" screamed a banner headline in the English language Hindustan Times while the Times of India said: "Death for four

for dastardly, diabolical, brutal crime".

In the lead-up to the sentencing, there had been a huge outcry for the four -- Vinay Sharma, Akshay Thakur, Pawan Gupta, and Mukesh Singh -- to be executed for their attack on the physiotherapy student and her male companion on December 16.

The newspapers, however, wondered if handing down the death penalty in rape cases would make women any safer across the country.

Last year, there were 24,923 cases of rape reported in India, according to the government's official statistics. But the actual figure is believed to be far higher with experts saying women are reluctant to file complaints for fear of social stigma in the socially conservative nation.

The Hindustan Times said the death penalty was "not an occasion to rejoice" because it would not stop sex crimes.

Human Rights Watch called the punishment "troubling".

Girl, 5, brutally raped in Pakistan

AFP, Lahore

A five-year old Pakistani girl was in critical condition yesterday after being kidnapped and brutally raped in the eastern city of Lahore, police said.

The girl was found outside a hospital at around 8:00pm on Friday, said Lahore police chief Chaudhry Shafiq, a day after she went missing from a low-income neighbourhood in the city.

Doctors said the child was raped several times, added Shafiq, and after receiving emergency care was transferred to the intensive care unit of nearby Services hospital.

Pakistan's Supreme Court yesterday summoned top police officials for an update on their investigation into the crime.

Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry has ordered the police chief of Punjab province to inform the court about the progress of the investigation after hearing reports about the rape victim late Friday, senior police official Omar Virk told reporters.

Beauty contest for Muslims!

AFP, Jakarta

The Miss World beauty contest, which has attracted fierce opposition by hardline Islamic groups in host country Indonesia, is now facing another challenge -- a rival pageant exclusively for Muslims.

The Muslimah World contest to be held on Wednesday in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta, is "Islam's answer to Miss World", the pageant's founder Eka Shanti said yesterday.

"Muslimah World is a beauty pageant, but the requirements are very different from Miss World -- you have to be pious, be a positive role model and show how you balance a life of spirituality in today's modernised world," Shanti told AFP.

The pageant is the latest backlash against Miss World, which has already dropped the bikini from its beach fashion round and has attracted more than a month of protests by Muslim hardliners demanding the show be scrapped.

The 20 Muslimah World finalists, from Iran, Malaysia, Brunei, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Indonesia, were chosen from more than 500, who took part in online rounds, reciting Quranic verses and telling stories of how they came to wear the Islamic headscarf, a requirement for the pageant.

