

NEWSIN brief

India to launch Mars probe on Nov 5

TNN, Chennai

India will launch its first interplanetary probe, Mars orbiter spacecraft, at 2:36pm on November 5, when the planets will come to their closest, Isro said yesterday.

The Rs450-crore Mars Orbiter Mission involves a complex set of operations including injection of the spacecraft into an earth orbit, and later, through multiple manoeuvres, hooking it to the Mars orbit, which is more than 400 million km from earth.

Iran urges reforms at United Nations

AFP, Tehran

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi yesterday called on the United Nations to undertake reforms to reflect the "growing role of developing countries".

"... reforms must reflect the change in global order, particularly the growing role of developing countries, the right of nations to determine their own fates and to allow (nations) to enjoy new technologies," said Araqchi, whose country holds the presidency of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Israel kills militant near Ramallah

AFP, Kufri Nemeih

Israeli troops on Tuesday killed an Islamic Jihad militant said to be behind the 2012 bombing of a Tel Aviv bus, officials said, as the Palestinian movement confirmed his death.

The army confirmed the incident, naming the dead man as Mohammed Assi and describing him as an Islamic Jihad militant responsible for the November 2012 bombing of a Tel Aviv bus that wounded 29 people.

Rival Sudan leaders seek Abyei deal

AFP, Juba

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir met with his southern counterpart Salva Kiir amid pressure to strike a deal on the disputed Abyei region and other issues left unresolved since South Sudan won independence.

Abyei, a mineral-rich region, was meant to vote on whether to be part of Sudan or South Sudan in January 2011. But a referendum to decide the region's fate has been repeatedly stalled, with residents now saying they will organise their own vote to determine their fate.

ODDLY enough



Obama catches fainting woman

BBC ONLINE

President Barack Obama has caught a woman who was apparently about to faint while he hosted a press conference at the White House on Monday.

"I got you," he told the woman as she began to swoon during a Rose Garden event to address glitches in his administration's health-care insurance website.

"This happens when I talk too long," the president quipped. The woman, Karmel Allison, recovered and said later she was a pregnant diabetic, tweeting: "Thanks, @BarackObama for catching me!"



Tibetan activists hold a demonstration yesterday outside the United Nations offices in Geneva saying more must be done to hold Beijing to account. China was subjected to heavy scrutiny by the UN Human Rights Council and attending countries yesterday as it failed to comply the council's recommendations in 2009 on poverty reduction, judicial reforms and ethnic minority rights. China refuted all allegations and said it had either implemented or the recommendations were being carried out during the past four years.

PHOTO: AFP

Indian PM arrives in Beijing

PTI, Beijing

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday arrived in Beijing on a three-day visit during which India and China are expected to ink several key pacts, including an agreement on a mechanism to prevent incursions by Chinese troops along the line of actual control.

Manmohan, who arrived here from Russia, will hold talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang today on a host of issues. He will also meet Zhang Dejiang, chairman of the National People's Congress, the Chinese parliament.

The landmark agreement on border cooperation -- expected to be signed today -- is aimed to avoid face-offs between the armies of the two countries like in Depsang valley in Ladakh recently.

Syria peace hope in jeopardy

Opposition, Saudi Arabia up ante as Assad remains defiant

AGENCIES

Plans for talks in Geneva to end the fighting in Syria were in jeopardy yesterday after the opposition refused to attend unless President Bashar al-Assad is forced from power and a furious Saudi Arabia made clear it would no longer co-operate with the United States over the civil war.

Western and Arab powers yesterday agreed with Syrian opposition leaders that President Bashar al-Assad should play no future role in government, but they struggled to convince the rebels to attend key peace talks in Geneva next month.

The rebels, who met with the so-called Friends of Syria group of 11 countries in London, said they would not take part in the Geneva conference in late November if any regime members were there, and insisted that Assad's departure was essential.

The head of the national coalition, Ahmad Jarba, also rejected hints by Hague and French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius that Iran could play a role if it backs the plan for a transitional government.

But a defiant Assad still showed no sign of backing down after a two-and-

FRIENDS OF SYRIA MEET

Powers agree on no future role for Assad

Push rebels to join Geneva meet

Urge unity in rebel ranks

Rebels reject Iran's mediator's role

Russia scraps meet

a-half-year civil war that has left more than 115,000 people dead, saying that he was ready to run for re-election as president in 2014.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague said the London meeting had urged the Syrian National Coalition -- the main opposition umbrella group -- to "commit itself fully" to the so-called Geneva 2 talks.

Hague said the Friends of Syria agreed that they would put their "united and collective weight" behind efforts to form a transitional government and that "Assad would play no role in that future government of Syria".

US Secretary of State John Kerry took a similar position, saying that

Assad had "lost all legitimacy".

The Syrian opposition is due to meet at the start of November to finalise their position on the Geneva talks, which are a follow-up to a peace conference held in the Swiss city in June 2012.

But any deal between the powers SNC may not solve the problems on the ground.

Many of the mostly Islamist rebels fighting in Syria refuse to recognise the exiled opposition favoured by the West.

Efforts to present a united front suffered a further setback when it emerged that Saudi Arabia's intelligence chief had said the kingdom would make a "major shift" in relations with the United States in protest at its perceived inaction over Syria and its overtures to Iran.

Prince Bandar bin Sultan has told European diplomats that Washington had failed to act on Syria among other Middle Eastern issues, according to a source close to Saudi policy.

There would be no further coordination with the United States over the war in Syria, where the Saudis have armed and financed rebel groups fighting Assad, the source said.

SCHOOL LUNCH TRAGEDY

Two charged with murder in India

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

A school principal and her husband were arrested and charged with murder of 23 children aged between five and 12 who died from eating pesticide-contaminated lunches in July at a school in Bihar, police said yesterday.

The trial of Meena Devi and her husband politician Arjun Rai, who could face the death penalty if convicted, was expected to begin soon, said police officer Varun Kumar Sinha.

One of the cooks told police investigators that the cooking oil appeared different, but that the principal had told her to use it anyway.

Both denied the charges and told police there was no deliberate act on their part.

Lalu ousted from Indian parliament

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India's powerful politician and Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Lalu Prasad Yadav, who was convicted in a corruption case and jailed recently, was yesterday disqualified from the Lok Sabha, the lower House of Parliament, in line with a court directive that bars convicted lawmakers from office.

The former chief minister of Bihar state, along with another politician Jagdish Sharma of Janata Dal (U), which now rules the state, was disqualified from Lok Sabha.

The two lawmakers were disqualified from their memberships after the Lok Sabha Speaker Meira Kumar issued notices to them in connection with the 17-year-old fodder scam case.

The disqualifications come following the SC judgement that struck down a legal provision protecting a convicted lawmaker from disqualification on the ground of pendency of appeal in higher courts.

Lalu, who is now lodged in a jail in Ranchi, the capital of eastern state of Jharkhand, was on October 3 sentenced to five years rigorous imprisonment by a special Central Bureau of Investigation Court. Jagdish, on the other hand, was given four years of rigorous imprisonment.

On Monday, convicted Congress leader Rasheed Masood became the first Indian lawmaker to lose his parliamentary seat after the July 10 Supreme Court judgement that struck down a provision under which incumbent sitting lawmakers could avoid disqualification till pendency of the appeal against conviction in a higher court.



Maldives poll crisis deepens

AFP, Male

The Maldives yesterday faced the prospect of a constitutional crisis after one of the main political parties warned it may not support plans to restage aborted elections next month.

Following an international backlash over the last-minute cancellation of an election scheduled for last weekend, the Elections Commission announced late Monday that a new poll would be held on November 9.

Commission chairman Fuwad Thowfeek also said in a post on Twitter that a run-off would take place on November 16 if no candidate won more than 50 percent of the votes.

However the constitution requires that a new president be in place by November 11, fuelling concerns about a constitutional crisis.

Although supporters of the frontrunner and opposition leader Mohamed Nasheed welcomed the announcement of a new poll, a key ally of his rival Abdullah Yameen branded the commission as "arrogant".

Yameen, the half-brother of the Maldives' long-time leader Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, was a distant second to Nasheed in a first round of voting held across the Indian Ocean archipelago on September 7.



Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi poses with the President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, eastern France, yesterday after she received the Sakharov human rights prize, she won in 1990 at the height of the Myanmar military crackdown.

PHOTO: AFP

Yoko Ono thanks McCartney for clearing her name

She appreciates his acknowledgment that Beatles had not split over her, even if four decades late

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Finally, 43 years after they broke up, undisputed peace has broken out in the Beatles' camp. Last year, Paul McCartney admitted the band's split had not been the fault of Yoko Ono, who married John Lennon in 1969. Now Ono has said she is "thankful" for McCartney's words.

In an interview with the Times, Ono said of McCartney's admission: "I was very, very thankful. I mean I was shocked. I thought, 'Now you are saying it? Now, after 40 years? But it was very good. In the atmosphere that the world created for us, it was not easy for him to say something like that.'"

Nevertheless, she said the hatred directed at her in the wake of the Beatles'

break-up had been a crucial factor in her development as an artist in the subsequent years. "I'm starting to understand something interesting," she said. "If all those people hadn't bashed me, what would I be doing now? What I am now was made by all those terrible incidents. I thought it was terrible all those years, but when I think about it now, I realise it was a blessing."

It seems impossible to keep the Beatles out of the

news. McCartney has just released his latest solo album, New, and the Beatles themselves are likely to chalk up yet another No 1 album when the second volume of their BBC sessions is released on November 11. For those who prefer something quieter, Ringo Starr has put together a picture book for small children based on the lyrics of Octopus's Garden.



Brunei adopts tough Islamic punishments

AFP, Bandar Seri Begawan

The Sultan of Brunei yesterday introduced tough Islamic punishments including death by stoning for crimes such as adultery, making his oil-rich realm the first East Asian country to do so at the national level.

Sultan Hassanah Bolkiah - one of the world's wealthiest men -- said a new Sharia Penal Code in the works for years was officially introduced yesterday and would "come into force six months hereafter and in phases", sparking sharp criticism from rights groups.

Under the code, which applies only to Muslims, punishments can include stoning to death for adultery, severing of limbs for theft, and flogging for violations ranging from abortion to alcohol consumption.

'White Widow' wrote 'love poem' for Laden

TNN, London

The world's most wanted woman, Samantha Lewthwaite, dubbed the "White Widow", wrote a poem telling of her "love" for Osama Bin Laden.

Lewthwaite wrote an ode to Osama during her life on the run.

According to Independent, the verse is full of spelling mistakes and a cavalier attitude to grammar, but poem explained about her adoration for the al-Qaeda founder.

She wrote: "Oh sheik osama my father, my brother. My love for you is like no other. Oh Sheik Osama now that you are gone/The muslims must wake up they must be strong."

The 34 lines were found by police on a computer belonging to Lewthwaite along with a flash drive, which showed she had spent eight years researching bomb-making.

Sky News, investigating Lewthwaite unearthed evidence that she was present in Nairobi at the time of the attack by the Somali Islamist group al-Shabaab. She had been living in a flat overlooking the Westgate mall where 67 died.



All LatAm states spied on by US

Says Greenwald

AFP, Miami

Glenn Greenwald, the former Guardian reporter who broke many of the recent stories about secret US surveillance programs, claimed Monday that all Latin American countries had been spied on by Washington.

Speaking to a press association, he said he would report about each case in the region and warned that more spying within the United States would also be revealed.

Greenwald's comments came as France and Mexico angrily demanded swift explanations Monday about fresh leaks by former US security contractor Edward Snowden.

The leaks alleged the United States had spied on millions of French phone communications and that the National Security Agency had also hacked into former Mexican president Felipe Calderon's email account.

Greenwald, an American journalist living in Brazil, spoke via video conference to the 69th assembly of the Inter American Press Association.

Multiple Latin American meetings were monitored, Greenwald said, including those of the Organization of American States, as well as talks on free trade treaties, although he did not go into more details.

According to Greenwald, disclosures released Monday by the French newspaper Le Monde, which created controversy between Paris and Washington, had been in the hands of the French daily for some time.