

NEWS IN brief

Egypt sets trial date for Brotherhood chief

AFP, Cairo

An Egyptian court has set December 9 for the Muslim Brotherhood chief and senior officials of the movement to face trial on new incitement charges, judicial sources said yesterday.

Brotherhood Supreme Guide Mohammed Badie and other leaders of the Islamist grouping including Essam al-Erian and Mohammed al-Beltagui face charges of inciting violence in the Cairo neighbourhood of Bahr al-Azham that led to deadly clashes in July.

US Navy christens new carrier

AFP, Washington

The American navy christened the first of its next generation of aircraft carriers on Saturday, a multi-billion-dollar vessel hailed as the most technologically advanced warship ever built.

The USS Gerald Ford, the 13-billion-dollar nuclear-powered carrier, is due to begin service in 2016.

Thai 'Red Shirts' rally ahead of key debate

AFP, Bangkok

Thousands of Thai pro-government "Red Shirts" massed in Bangkok yesterday in their first show of force since a wave of opposition protests against a controversial political amnesty bill.

The deeply divisive amnesty bill has inflamed festering political wounds in Thailand. Thai Senate was due to debate the bill today.

ABBA mulls possible reunion: report

AFP, Frankfurt

The legendary Swedish pop group ABBA, one of the world's best-selling pop bands, is mulling a possible reunion next year, singer Agnetha Faltskog said in a German newspaper interview yesterday.

ABBA was formed in 1972 with singer Agnetha Faltskog, guitarist and songwriter -- and later husband -- Bjorn Ulvaeus, as well as Benny Andersson and Anni-Frid Lyngstad.

C'WEALTH SUMMIT SKIP New Delhi defends India PM's decision

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday wrote to Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa -- sources said -- expressing regret for not being able to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting Summit.

In the PM's absence, External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid will head the Indian delegation at the CHOGM Summit to be held in Sri Lanka on November 15-16.

Salman yesterday defended Manmohan's decision to stay away from the Commonwealth Summit and told NDTV, "I don't think we should look at any one single dimension to this decision. Let's not forget that the Prime Minister doesn't always go to Commonwealth (meetings)."

Manmohan decided to skip the Summit bowing to mounting pressure from all political parties in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. They opposed India's participation at any level in the CHOGM alleging that the Sri Lankan government had committed gross violation of human rights (war crimes) and had no plans to devolve powers to the ethnic Tamils.

The Indian PM and his ruling Congress party had to face pressure also from its own federal ministers from the state asking the PM to boycott the Summit for the same reasons.

Asked if domestic politics prevailed over India's diplomatic and strategic interests, Salman said, "We have a very important relationship with Sri Lanka. I don't think we should see this as a switch-on-switch-off affair."

Sources said Congress did not want to be totally isolated in Tamil Nadu by allowing the prime minister to attend the Summit in Colombo. Had the PM gone to Sri Lanka, it would not have found either of the two key parties in Tamil Nadu as its ally.

Meanwhile, Sri Lankan immigration authorities yesterday briefly detained Senator Lee Rhiannon and New Zealand MP Jan Logie on a fact-finding mission into alleged human rights abuses, officials said.

An immigration official confirmed the pair were detained briefly at their hotel room for questioning, but declined to give details.



A body of a dead man is seen at the bay of Tacloban, eastern island of Leyte, yesterday. Super Typhoon Haiyan was a category 5 typhoon -- the highest level -- when it hit the Philippines, with maximum sustained winds estimated at 315 kilometres an hour, and gusts reaching 380 kilometres an hour, according to Japan's meteorological agency. The typhoon's death toll could soar well over 10,000, authorities said, making it the country's worst recorded natural disaster.

PHOTO: AFP

Maldives in crisis again

Court suspends run-off in a blow to democracy

AFP, Male

The Maldives' top court suspended the presidential election runoff scheduled for yesterday, blocking a vote for the third time in two months and raising fears of a prolonged political crisis in the young democracy.

Western countries have warned that delays in resolving the crisis will damage the Indian Ocean atoll nation and its fragile tourism-dependent economy.

The United States yesterday sharply rebuked the Maldives' top court.

"Efforts by the Supreme Court to repeatedly and unduly interfere in the electoral process subverts Maldives' democracy and takes decision-making out of the hands of the people," the US embassy to the Maldives and Sri Lanka said in a strongly-worded statement from Colombo.

Mohamed Nasheed, the country's first democratically elected leader who was ousted in February 2012, accused the court of deliberately delaying the elections to try to block his return to power.

Nasheed had appeared set to return to office after winning almost 47 percent of the vote in the first round of voting on Saturday.

His challenger in the runoff would have been Abdulla Yameen, half-brother of the country's former autocratic ruler Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who won almost 30 percent.

But the candidate who placed third on Saturday had insisted his supporters need more time to decide who to back in the runoff.

Just hours before the runoff vote was due to begin, the Supreme Court postponed it until November 16, despite a constitutional deadline of

November 11 to elect a new president.

The 2008 constitution, which ended 30 years of one-party rule by Gayoom, states that the new president must be elected by the time the outgoing president's term ends today.

"Next week, the Supreme Court will again use some flimsy excuse to delay the election and we will be back to square one," Nasheed told reporters.

"We don't think there is a conducive environment for elections (in the Maldives)."

Gayoom packed the judiciary and security forces with supporters during his iron-fisted rule before his ousting in a 2008 election.

Nasheed's comments will fuel suspicions that even if he eventually wins elections, he could still be thwarted. Nasheed also repeated his demand for the current president to step down until the crisis over elections is resolved.

Nasheed's party has warned that the country could be heading for a constitutional crisis without a leader today, although the Supreme Court has ruled that outgoing President Mohamed Waheed can remain as a caretaker.

Nasheed resigned in February 2012 following demonstrations and a mutiny by security forces which he denounced as a coup engineered by Waheed and former strongman Gayoom.

He swept to victory in the first round of elections on September 7 with 45 percent of the vote and was seen as front-runner in a second round runoff against Yameen scheduled for three weeks later.

But that runoff never happened because the Supreme Court annulled the first round after a defeated candidate linked to Gayoom complained of fraud. International and domestic election observers had said the voting was free and fair.



Iran, powers fail to clinch nuke deal

AFP, Geneva

Iran and world powers failed to clinch a long-sought deal yesterday on Tehran's nuclear programme despite marathon talks in Geneva but kept hopes alive by agreeing to meet here again on November 20.

In Tehran, Iranian President Hassan Rohani pleaded for parliament's backing in the negotiations while insisting that Iran would not abandon its nuclear rights, including uranium enrichment.

Hopes had soared for an impending deal after top world diplomats rushed to Geneva to join the talks, but faded after cracks began to show among world powers when France raised concerns.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said he was not discouraged by the failure of the talks, saying the meetings had taken place in a positive atmosphere and that he hoped to reach an agreement at the next talks.

Meanwhile, Israel was pulling out all the stops to avert what it considers a looming "bad and dangerous" deal with Iran over its nuclear programme, including using its influence in the US Congress.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he spoke to the US, Russian, French, German and British leaders -- five of the six world powers

negotiating with Iran -- and "told them that according to the information reaching Israel, the looming agreement is bad and dangerous".

"I hope they reach a good agreement, and we will do all we can to convince world powers to avoid a bad deal," he said at the opening of Israel's weekly cabinet meeting.

Israel launches global push to thwart deal

Rohani vows to preserve nuke rights

Economy Minister Naftali Bennett said earlier he would lobby Congress.

Israeli media yesterday reported that a delegation of senior American officials headed by lead US negotiator to the Iran talks, Wendy Sherman, was on its way to Israel to update Netanyahu.

Israel's deputy defence minister, Danny Danon, told public radio yesterday: "In another two and a half years there will be someone else in the White House, but we will still be here."

"If we have no choice we will act - that's why Israel has an air force," he added.

PHILIPPINE TYPHOON

Horror of the living dead

AFP, Tacloban

Tormented survivors of a typhoon that is feared to have killed more than 10,000 in the Philippines rummaged for food yesterday through debris scattered with corpses, while frenzied mobs looted aid convoys.

Two days after one of the most powerful storms ever recorded flattened entire towns across part of the Southeast Asian archipelago, desperate survival tactics created fresh horrors.

On the outskirts of Tacloban, a coastal eastern city of 220,000 where tsunami-like waves destroyed many buildings, Edward Gualberto accidentally stepped on bodies as he raided the wreckage of a home.

Wearing nothing but a pair of red basketball trousers, the father-of-four and village councillor apologised for his shabby appearance and for stealing from the dead.

"I am a decent person. But if you have not eaten in three days, you do shameful things to survive," Gualberto told AFP as he dug canned goods from the debris and flies swarmed over the bodies.

Like Gualberto, many said they had not eaten since the typhoon and overwhelmed authorities admitted they were unable to get enough relief supplies into the city.

Some broke through shops that had withstood the typhoon by hammering through glass windows and winning open steel barricades.

One desperate meat shop owner brandished a handgun in a failed bid to prevent one mob from entering his shop.

He was ignored and the shop was ransacked. The businessman just silently stood by, waving his gun in the air and shouting. When he realised he had lost the fight, he cursed them and walked away.

Nearby, pastry shop owner Emma Bermejo described the widespread looting as "anarchy".

"There is no security personnel, relief goods are too slow to arrive. People are dirty, hungry and thirsty. A few more days and they will begin to kill each other," she said.

Meanwhile, confused men, women and children walked aimlessly along roads strewn with overturned cars and felled power lines, some gagging from the stench of rotting flesh.

A team of military cadaver collectors had been deployed, but the soldiers appeared overwhelmed.

Some survivors handed out small letters to passers-by and reporters asking them to contact their relatives to relay their fate.

Many had wounds on their faces and were limping, while all had stories of unimaginable horror.

Two dead, 22 hurt in Texas shooting

AFP, Washington

At least two people were killed and 22 hurt in a shooting at a house party packed with young adults near Houston, Texas, police told US media yesterday.

Police are looking for two suspects in connection with the shooting late Saturday in Cypress, a suburb of Houston, Christina Garza at the Harris County Sheriff's Department told CNN.

"We have not been able to talk to a lot of the witnesses, because of the nature of their injuries. But we don't have any shooters in custody," Garza told CNN.

One person died in the house and the other died in the hospital, Garza said.

Those hurt were rushed to the hospital, though it's still unclear how many of those have gunshot wounds and how many were injured in the stampede to flee the shooting.

Venezuelan named Miss Universe

PTI, Moscow

Gabriela Isler, a 25-year-old television presenter and accomplished flamenco dancer from Venezuela, has been crowned Miss Universe 2013 at a grand finale here after beating 85 contestants across the globe.

Isler, who was so excited at being declared the winner that the tiara fell off her head when Miss Universe 2012 Olivia Culpo of United States handed the tiara to her at the event watched by an audience of nearly 1 billion across the world. This is the third win for Venezuela in the last six Miss Universe pageants.

"I have a lot of emotions. I can't describe all the things that I feel at this moment because I'm shaking," said excited Isler.

Taking the runner-up positions this year are Miss Spain, Patricia Rodriguez and Constanza Baez from Ecuador.



Warsaw climate talks begin

THE HINDU ONLINE

A day before the formal opening of the UN climate negotiations, delegates from more than 190 countries began informal parleys in order to set up common positions and strategies.

Many rounds of meetings between different blocs of countries and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) officials too went on in parallel with the Polish presidency keen to figure out a common ground.

The phrase "loss and damage" became a buzz word even as diplomats and negotiators from more than 190 countries continued to land in the Polish capital. "Loss and damage" refers to demands of the poorest countries that they must be compensated for inevitable losses caused by the existing level of greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere, which any amount of adaptation or reduction of future emissions will not stop.

The two key blocs of countries, Association of Small Island States (AOSIS) and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) have been at the forefront demanding an arrangement under the UN climate convention from the developed countries to support and compensate for such "loss and damage".

An Indian negotiator at Warsaw told The Hindu, "Warsaw talks will have to provide some kind of mechanism to address loss and damage by the end of the two weeks of talks for the negotiations to be successful here."

The developing countries have also asked for clarity on how the rich world will provide the \$100 billion annually it had promised to deliver, starting 2020. So far there has been little evidence that the developed countries are keen to do so and have instead suggested that the world depend upon investments from private players to secure the money to fight climate change.

Obama's portable zone of secrecy

NEW YORK TIMES ONLINE

When President Barack Obama travels abroad, his staff packs briefing books, gifts for foreign leaders and something more closely associated with camping than diplomacy: a tent.

Even when Obama travels to allied nations, aides quickly set up the security tent -- which has opaque sides and noise-making devices inside -- in a room near his hotel suite. When the president needs to read a classified document or have a sensitive conversation, he ducks into the tent to shield himself from secret video cameras and listening devices.

American security officials demand that their bosses -- not just the president, but members of Congress, diplomats, policy makers and military officers -- take such precautions when traveling abroad because it is widely acknowledged that their hosts often have no qualms about snooping on their guests.

The United States has come under withering criticism in recent weeks about revelations that the National Security Agency listened in on allied leaders like Chancellor Angela



Merkel of Germany. A panel created by Obama in August to review that practice, among other things, is scheduled to submit a preliminary report this week and a final report by the middle of next month. But American officials assume -- and can cite evidence -- that they get the same treatment when they travel abroad, even from European Union allies.

Spokesmen for the state department, the CIA, and the National Security Council declined to provide details on the measures the government takes to protect officials overseas. But more than a dozen current and former government officials, most of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity, described in interviews some of those measures.