

NEWS IN brief

Mauritius won't host 2015 CHOGM

AFP, London

Mauritius will not host the next Commonwealth summit in 2015 as planned because of its boycott of this weekend's meeting in Sri Lanka, Prime Minister Navin Chandra Ramgoolam told British television on Friday.

Ramgoolam defended his decision not to attend the heads of government meeting (CHOGM) in Colombo, saying there was "total lack of accountability" about human rights abuses during the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict.

India gets its second aircraft carrier

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday ceremonially handed over a refurbished ex-Soviet aircraft carrier to India after a refit that overran by five years.

INS Vikramaditya will be India's second aircraft carrier. The ship is due to set sail on November 30 and arrive in India early next year. The refurbished ship is 284 metres long and is designed to carry 30 aircraft including MiG-29K fighters. The 44,500-ton-carrier has 1,600 crews.

US won't prosecute Greenwald

AFP, Washington

The US Justice Department has no plans to prosecute the journalist who facilitated Edward Snowden's leaks about US surveillance practices, Attorney General Eric Holder said in an interview published Friday.

Glenn Greenwald, an American, is based in Brazil and has written several news stories based on documents he received from Snowden.

Anonymous hacker gets 10-yr sentence

AFP, New York City

A computer programmer linked to the online hacktivist group Anonymous who pleaded guilty to hacking the intelligence firm Stratfor was sentenced Friday to 10 years in prison, prosecutors said.

Jeremy Hammond, 28, also was part of a group which broke into the FBI computer network and later delivered documents to WikiLeaks, according to investigators.

\$10m US bounty for Benghazi attackers

AFP, Washington

The State Department revealed Friday it has been quietly offering a \$10 million reward to help track down the militants behind last year's deadly attack on a US mission in Libya.

The brazen assault in Benghazi cost the lives of four Americans, including ambassador Chris Stevens, with the fatalities and disputes about what unfolded at the diplomatic base causing fury in Washington.

Forbes magazine up for sale

PTI, New York



US Marine Osprey aircraft arrive to deliver aid at Tacloban airport after Typhoon Haiyan hit the east coast of the Philippines, yesterday. Substantial food and medical aid finally began reaching desperate survivors of a super typhoon that killed thousands in the Philippines, but humanitarian groups warned of huge challenges in accessing devastated, remote communities.

ALLEGED RIGHTS ABUSE IN LANKA
Britain calls for int'l probe

REUTERS, Colombo

Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron yesterday threatened to push for an independent international inquiry into allegations of war crimes at the climax of Sri Lanka's 26-year civil war if the island nation does not conduct its own probe by March 2014.

Cameron has been the most vocal critic of Sri Lanka's record on rights during a biennale summit of Commonwealth nations being held in the capital Colombo. The normally sedate event has been shaken by the intensifying row over atrocities during the final months of the war and ongoing abuses ever since.

"Let me be very clear. If an investigation is not completed by March, then I will use our position on the UN Human Rights Council to work with the UN Human Rights Commission and call for a full credible and independent international inquiry," Cameron told reporters.

March is when the UNHRC next meets to assess Sri Lanka's progress on addressing human rights abuses including allegations of war crimes.

The Sri Lankan army crushed Tamil Tiger separatists in the final battle of a long civil war in 2009. A UN panel estimates 40,000 non-combatants died during the final phase of the civil war. Both sides committed atrocities but army shelling killed most victims, the panel concluded.

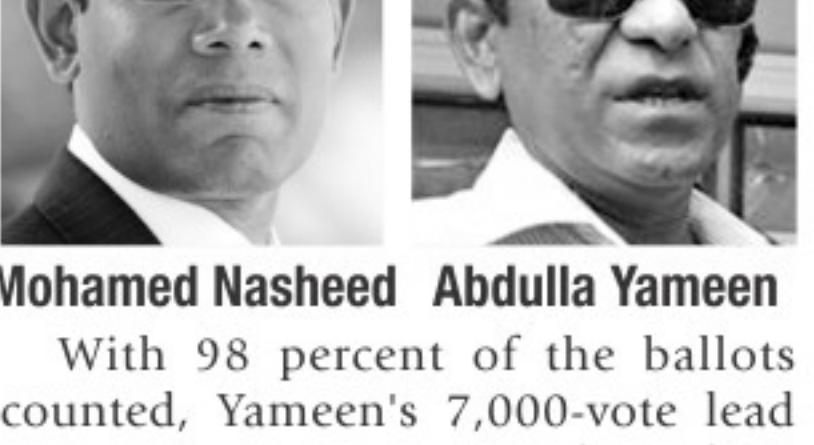
Since the end of the war, harassment of government critics, including attacks on journalists and human rights workers have continued. Sri Lanka says criticism of its record on rights amounts to foreign interference in its affairs.

Nasheed suffers shock defeat

Yameen, half brother of Gayoom, wins poll in Maldives

AFP, Male

PRESIDENTIAL RUN-OFF



Mohamed Nasheed Abdulla Yameen

warned of "appropriate measures" if yesterday's election did not go ahead.

Opposition leader Nasheed, a former pro-democracy campaigner who won the first free polls in 2008, had been the frontrunner 21 months after he resigned under pressure from demonstrators and mutinous police officers.

However, his main opponents united after his first round victory last week and mounted a formidable challenge, leading to Yameen's victory.

Yameen is the half-brother of former autocrat Maumoon Abdul Gayoom who ruled the archipelago famed for its coral-fringed islands for 30 years, before the nation embraced democracy.

The parliament yesterday scheduled a special session for today to inaugurate the new president in a further sign that this election may produce a clear winner.

In a highly unusual move on the eve of a national election, the incumbent president, Mohamed Waheed, left the country on Thursday to travel to Hong Kong for a medical appointment for his wife.

China to ease one-child policy: Xinhua

AFP, Beijing

China will relax its hugely controversial one-child policy, state media said Friday, in a major policy shift announced days after a meeting of the country's top Communist Party leaders.

The change to China's family-planning policy will let couples have two children if one of the parents is an only child, state news agency Xinhua reported, citing a "key decision" made by leaders at this week's gathering, known as the Third Plenum.

The policy was brought in during the late 1970s to control China's huge population, the world's largest, but has at times been brutally enforced.

The law currently restricts most couples to one child, with one of the exceptions allowing a second if both parents are only children.

"The birth policy will be adjusted and improved step by step to promote 'long-term balanced development of the population in China,'" Xinhua reported, citing the decision of top officials this week in Beijing.

Despite calls for relaxation of the family-planning law and rumours that it might be reformed, Chinese officials have repeatedly argued that the policy is still needed, claiming over-population threatens the country's development.

At the same time census officials warned earlier this year that China's working-age population had begun to shrink after three decades of astounding economic growth.

Dozens killed in Tripoli revolt against militias

AFP, Tripoli

The Libyan capital yesterday prepared to bury its dead after 32 people were killed and almost 400 wounded when a residents' revolt against militia rule degenerated into armed clashes.

After blasts and gunfire rocked several areas throughout the night, a relative calm returned to Tripoli in the morning with only sporadic Kalashnikov fire in the Ghargour district where the violence flared.

The militia at the centre of the bloodshed received reinforcements during the night from its home base in Misrata, 200 kilometres away, and recovered its headquarters in Ghargour.

Military police filtered access to the district on Saturday, warning motorists of the risks of gunfire. Witnesses said shots were being fired to welcome the reinforcements rather than in anger.

The government called for a ceasefire after a demonstration calling for the Misrata militia made up of former rebel fighters to leave the capital turned into a deadly confrontation between rival gunmen.

The militias are holdovers from the 2011 uprising that ousted dictator Moamer Kadhafi and are a powerful force in the increasingly lawless North African country.

The violence erupted when gunmen fired at hundreds of marchers carrying white flags from inside villas serving as their headquarters in the southern district of Gharghour.

That sparked violent retaliation as other militias assaulted the villas, set them partly on fire and expelled the Misrata fighters.

Netanyahu has repeatedly warned world powers against striking a "bad and dangerous" deal with Iran that fails to bring its alleged military nuclear programme to a complete halt.

On Wednesday, he warned that a "bad deal" could result in war.

Netanyahu's hard line has the backing of the Israeli public, according to an opinion poll published on Friday that showed 65.5 percent of Jewish respondents opposed to a deal with Iran.

Batkid saves Gotham City, wins Obama praise

AFP, San Francisco



A five-year-old boy recovering from cancer became a superhero for a day Friday, as San Francisco transformed itself into Gotham City and thousands turned out to see the Batkid fly to the rescue.

Even President Barack Obama got on the act after the story went viral, sending pint-size caped crusader Miles Scott a video message via the Vine video sharing service from Washington, looking into the camera and saying "Way to go, Miles! Way to Save Gotham City."

Miles, who was diagnosed with leukemia when he was 18 months old, was cheered as he roared out in his Batmobile to nab arch-villain Riddler and save a damsel in distress tied to the city's famous tram tracks.

Police chief Greg Suhr ordered his men to help the diminutive crime-fighter take on his nemesis the Penguin.

"I've never seen anything go viral like this, with the outpouring of support from across the world," said Patricia Wilson of Make-a-Wish Foundation, the charity which organized the dream day.

The city's San Francisco Chronicle printed a special edition for, with a "Gotham City Chronicle" masthead and a screaming headline: "Batkid Saves City!"

The US Attorney's office put out a spoof press release -- datelined "San Francisco/Gotham" -- announcing that the Riddler and the Penguin had been charged with conspiracy and kidnapping.

"Duo faces long prison terms thanks to Batkid," it said.

Israel, US at odds over Iran

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel and its US ally have hit a troubled patch in their close relationship, caused by differences over Iran's nuclear plans and peace with the Palestinians.

In a highly public spat, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Barack Obama are each seeking to directly address the other's public.

At the moment, Israeli Economy Minister Naftali Bennett is campaigning in Washington, while the US ambassador to Israel, Dan Shapiro, has been making his case in the Israeli media.

"I'm not telling the Americans what they should do; I just give them the information, it's for them to decide," Bennett, who heads the far-right Jewish Home party, told Israeli public radio by telephone on Friday.

"It's not really lobbying, more a dialogue between friends," he said of his meetings on Capitol Hill and a speech to the Brookings Saban Center for Middle East Policy.

Meanwhile, Shapiro told public radio the high-profile war

of words over a nascent deal Western powers are negotiating with Iran, which would see some easing of sanctions against the Islamic republic, was regrettable.

"It would be preferable if our differences were addressed in private, but sometimes that's not possible," he said.

In a speech to North American Jewish leaders in Jerusalem this week he said Obama "has made it

crystal clear that he will not permit Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon, period, and is prepared to use all elements of our national power to ensure that we are successful."

Despite such reassurances, Israeli media speak of a trans-Atlantic crisis of confidence over what Israel and the US say are Iran's plans to develop a nuclear

weapon. A second element involves increasingly fragile peace talks with the Palestinians amid an Israeli West Bank settlement drive, which has come in for sharp US criticism.

On Friday, left-leaning daily Haaretz cited an unnamed senior Israeli minister saying that Secretary of State John Kerry "can no longer serve as an honest broker between Israel and the Palestinians".

Israeli Home Front Minister Gilad Erdan lashed out at Kerry on Thursday for slamming Netanyahu's intensive campaigning against the emerging nuclear deal with Iran.

Netanyahu has repeatedly warned world powers against striking a "bad and dangerous" deal with Iran that fails to bring its alleged military nuclear programme to a complete halt.

On Wednesday, he warned that a "bad deal" could result in war.

Netanyahu's hard line has the backing of the Israeli public, according to an opinion poll published on Friday that showed 65.5 percent of Jewish respondents opposed to a deal with Iran.

Technology has given readers new ways to curl up with a good book, but the latest trend in Washington is surprisingly old-school: "little libraries," stuffed with paperbacks, cropping up on front lawns.

There's no card catalogue or late fees. The informal lending libraries work under a simple principle: "take a book, return a book."

You can bring back the same book you read, or put in a new one.

"Last week, 11 new books came in," said Kevin Sullivan, who launched his "little library" in Bethesda, a northern suburb of the US capital, in May 2011 on Mother's Day.

"It was a present for my wife, who is a big reader," he explained.

He started putting around 30 books a week in the little wooden house-shaped box perched on a red post at the end of his driveway.

On its roof is a quote from Oscar Wilde -- a homage to Sullivan's Irish heritage -- that reads, "The suspense is terrible. I hope it will last."

Half of the books are for children. Since Sullivan and his wife live near a school, they think it's great that parents and students "could stop at the library and get books."

The concept first started in a small city in the

midwestern state of Wisconsin, in 2009, as Todd Bol searched for a way to honour the generosity of his mother, a teacher, who had just died.

He built a small-scale replica of a schoolhouse, which he filled with his parents' books and posted a sign: "free books".

Soon his neighbours did the same thing at the end of their driveways. Now the little libraries have popped up as far as Ukraine and Pakistan.

In October, Bol sent 20 little libraries to be set up in Ghana. In India, he supports an aid group called "Going to School," which aims to build little libraries for 3,500 schools.

His "one little library" is turning into "15,000 libraries by the beginning of 2014, in 55 countries, in 50 states, at a rate of 700 to 1,000 new libraries a month," Bol told AFP.

Forbes magazine up for sale

PTI, New York



Forbes Media, which publishes the Forbes magazine, best known for its annual billionaire and power lists, is up for sale and hopes to generate at least US\$ 400 million through the move.

Forbes Media's Chief Executive Officer Michael Perlis wrote in an email to staff that the company has received "more than a few 'over the transom' indications of interest to buy Forbes Media."

"The frequency and serious nature of these overtures have brought us to a decision point. We're organizing a process to test the waters regarding a sale of Forbes Media," said Perlis, the first non-member to run the Forbes family.

Forbes has hired Deutsche Bank to represent the company in the sale and expects interest from "numerous suitors".

A New York Times report said that according to a person familiar with the sale process, Forbes Media is expected to generate at least US\$ 400 million with the sale.

Time Inc is being touted as among the potential buyers for Forbes after Forbes Media executives were seen at the Time headquarters.

Founded in 1917 by B C Forbes, the magazine is among the most powerful names in business journalism.

SECTARIAN CLASHES
Curfew as 9 killed in Pak city

AFP, Rawalpindi

Pakistan yesterday imposed a curfew in the city of Rawalpindi where sectarian clashes left nine people dead and more than 60 injured, officials said.

Violence erupted on Friday in the garrison-city, which neighbours the capital Islamabad, when a procession by Shia Muslims to mark the most important day of the mourning month of Muharram coincided with a sermon at a nearby Sunni mosque.

Angry Shia protesters attacked the Sunni mosque and seminary, torching its building and an adjacent cloth market, where workers yesterday were still battling to extinguish the fire completely.

The climate process suffered another blow with the announcement by Brazil overnight that deforestation of Amazonia had risen by 28 percent over the past year.

CLIMATE TALKS
Japan scales back emissions target