



Pakistani political party activists burn an effigy during a protest against US drone attacks in Pakistan tribal region, in Bannu yesterday. Right-wing Pakistani political parties postponed a scheduled blockade of Nato supply lines meant to protest the killing of the Taliban chief, citing recent sectarian clashes.

PHOTO: AFP

## NEWSINbrief

### More arrests in Greek boat tragedy

AFP, Athens

Greek authorities have made more arrests over Friday's boat tragedy that left 12 of 27 migrants of unknown nationalities dead, including four children, after an alleged attempt to smuggle them to Italy, the coastguard said yesterday.

"A 34-year-old foreign national and a 53-year-old woman have been arrested as members of a criminal organisation illegally smuggling migrants," the coast-guard said in a statement. A 58-year-old foreign national -- the captain of the eight-metre fibreglass boat that sank off a small western mainland Greek coastal town -- and a 20-year-old Greek had already been arrested.

### Kosovo Serbs return to polls

AFP, Kosovska Mitrovica

Repeat elections took place yesterday in Kosovo's flashpoint town of Kosovska Mitrovica where ethnic Serbs were casting ballots under heavy security after violence led to the cancellation of a previous vote.

Voting for local mayors and councillors was repeated at three polling stations in the Serb-populated part of the ethnically divided town after masked Serbian extremists destroyed ballot boxes during the previous election on November 3.

### Powerful quake hits south Atlantic

AFP, Washington

A powerful 7.8 magnitude undersea earthquake struck in the Scotia Sea, a remote region in the far south Atlantic near Antarctica, US earthquake monitors reported yesterday.

There were no tsunami warnings since there were no vertical movements in the seafloor as occur in a subduction quake, when one tectonic plate moves under another one, said Randy Baldwin at the National Earthquake Information Center in Golden, Colorado.

### Two dead in Iraq unrest, six militants die in attacks

AFP, Baghdad

Violence in Iraq killed two people yesterday, officials said, while six militants also died in a series of attempted attacks, the latest in a nationwide surge in unrest.

Mired in its worst bloodshed since 2008, Iraq has been forced to appeal for international help to combat militancy only months before its first general election in four years.

## WAR CRIMES INVESTIGATION

# Sri Lanka ready to defy Cameron

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

David Cameron has set a four-month deadline for Sri Lanka to investigate allegations of war crimes, in a parting shot at the host country as he left the Commonwealth summit early.

The British prime minister left Colombo having failed to secure any concessions from President Mahinda Rajapaksa or persuade fellow leaders to criticise Sri Lanka's record in a communique.

Before he left Cameron gave Sri Lanka until March to order an independent inquiry into alleged brutality against civilians or face an international UN-backed investigation.

However, Rajapaksa reacted defiantly to the UK's call, saying "people in glass houses shouldn't throw stones", adding that Sri Lanka would "take its own time" in probing alleged abuses.

Cameron said he had given a balanced account of what he saw in Jaffna after visiting newspaper journalists whose six col-

leagues were killed and a refugee camp where hundreds of people have been living since 1990.

After attacking the country's human rights failings, the prime minister headed to the Gulf Air Show in an attempt to help British businesses sell Eurofighter Typhoon fighter jets and arms to the United Arab Emirates, which also has a controversial record on allowing dissent.

It is the last leg of Cameron's controversial tour of India, Sri Lanka and the Gulf, which led Labour to criticise his decision to attend the biennial Commonwealth gathering.

India, Canada and Mauritius have all boycotted the summit in protest at the Sri Lankan regime's alleged brutality against some Tamils but Cameron decided to go in order to visit the troubled north of the country.



## Commonwealth puts on united front

Amnesty urges no let-up in pressure

AFP, Colombo

Commonwealth leaders agreed on steps to tackle high debt and poverty as they staged a show of unity after a summit in Sri Lanka dominated by a bitter dispute over war crimes.

Following a three-day meeting in Colombo, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa announced that a communique had been agreed by the Commonwealth's 53 member nations after a summit which he said had been characterised by "fruitful discussions".

But he was again forced on the defensive and warned his critics against pushing him "into a corner" by setting an ultimatum to address war crimes allegations by next March. "I am happy with the outcome we have reached at this CHOGM," said Rajapaksa, who has spent much of the summit having to fend off allegations that his government's troops killed as many as 40,000 civilians at the end of the country's 37-year conflict.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International urged Commonwealth leaders yesterday not to ease pressure on Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa to investigate war crimes.

The London-based rights watchdog said Sri Lanka may regret having hosted the three-day Commonwealth summit "which has proved a PR disaster" for Colombo.

The summit was troubled even before it started, with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh joining a boycott called by Canadian Premier Stephen Harper to protest at Colombo's rights record.

## 50 dead in Russian plane crash

REUTERS, Moscow

A Boeing 737-500 airliner crashed on landing in the Russian city of Kazan yesterday, killing all 50 on board.

The Tatarstan airlines flight from Moscow was trying to abort its landing in order to make a second approach, but it exploded on hitting the runway, killing all 44 passengers and six crew on board, emergency officials said.

The only picture shown from the scene on Russian television reports was a blurred still shot of the plane's fuselage with firefighters in the foreground, apparently after they had extinguished a fire at the scene.

Flight U363 took off from Moscow's Domodedovo airport at 6:25 pm and crashed just over an hour later, emergency officials said. The plane was 23 years old.

According to eyewitness reports, the Boeing lost altitude quickly and its fuel tank exploded on impact. There were high winds and cloudy skies over the airport in central Russia. Temperatures were above zero.

Boeing officials at the Dubai Airshow declined to comment on the crash.

A spokesman for state aviation oversight agency Rosaviatsia said authorities would search for the flight recorders.

## MIGRANT ISSUE

# Rahul makes scathing attacks on BJP, Shiv Sena

PTI, New Delhi

Launching a scathing attack on BJP and its ally Shiv Sena for targeting migrants in Maharashtra and Karnataka, Rahul Gandhi yesterday warned that this has fanned tension, while Congress has taken everyone along irrespective of caste, religion or the region they come from.

"In Karnataka, Maharashtra they create tension. People from Uttar Pradesh go to Maharashtra and people from Shiv Sena make them run away. But here (in states) we have love and take everyone along," the said.

He also claimed that UPA has created more country, besides empowering women.

"We see all as equal. us. They could be Christian, belong to any He was addressing an

Ambedkar Nagar in South Delhi where his grandmother and late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had addressed an election rally in the 1980s.

This was Rahul's second election rally in Delhi, the first being in Mangolpuri recently in the run up to the December four assembly elections.

Talking of the issue of corruption, which has been used by BJP to target UPA government, Mr. Gandhi said Congress gave people RTI to fight it.

"The decisions used to be taken inside closed door have come out in open. You can ask government anything," he said.



Typhoon survivors gather outside gates as they wait for evacuation flights from Tacloban airport yesterday. Grieving survivors of the monster typhoon Haiyan in the mainly Catholic Philippines flocked to shattered churches, listening to soothing sermons and asking questions of God nine days after the storm ripped their communities apart.

PHOTO: AFP

## Kerry to visit Israel on Friday: Netanyahu

AFP, Jerusalem

US Secretary of State John Kerry is to visit Israel on Friday to discuss the Iranian nuclear talks and peace with the Palestinians, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.

Speaking to his ministers, Netanyahu said he would also discuss the Iran talks with French President Francois Hollande, after he arrived in Israel yesterday, as well as with Russian President Vladimir Putin when he travels to meet him in Moscow on Wednesday.

"We will also do that with the American Secretary of State John Kerry, who arrives here on Friday," the Israeli premier said, quoted by his office after a weekly meeting of his cabinet.

"I hope we'll be able to convince our friends this week and in the following days to get a much better deal. It can be achieved," he said in remarks ahead of a new round of talks in Geneva between world powers and Iran from November 20.

"Iran is under economic pressure, and continuing to apply pressure and even increasing it can yield a much better diplomatic result."

## MOOTED PEACE TALKS US welcomes Syrian rebels' decision

AFP, Washington

The United States Tuesday welcomed the decision by Syria's rebel Opposition National Coalition to take part in mooted Geneva peace talks.

"This is a significant step forward in the process to convene the Geneva conference, the goal of which is... establishing by mutual consent of the two negotiating delegations a transitional governing body exercising full executive powers," said State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki.

"We also welcome the inclusion of representatives of the Kurdish National Coalition within the Syrian Coalition, ensuring the Coalition is more inclusive of Syria's diversity," she stressed.

Syria's main opposition grouping said Monday it will attend peace talks but only on the condition that President Bashar al-Assad transfers power and is excluded from any transition process.

In a statement issued after two days of meetings in Istanbul, the key National Coalition said it would take part in mooted peace talks in Geneva "on the basis of the full transfer of power."

It also stipulated "that Bashar al-Assad and those with the blood of Syrians on their hands have no role in the transitional phase and Syria's future."

## Next round nuke talks 'difficult': Iran

AFP, Tehran

Senior Iranian negotiator Abbas Araqchi said the next round of talks between Tehran and world powers over the country's nuclear programme will be "difficult," media reported yesterday.

Negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 countries -- Britain, France, the United States, Russia and China plus Germany -- restart in Geneva on Wednesday after the last session failed to seal a deal.

"The next round of nuclear talks will be difficult," Araqchi, who is also deputy foreign minister, said in comments quoted by the official IRNA news agency.

"No agreement will be reached without securing the rights of the Iranian nation" on its nuclear programme and uranium enrichment, he added.

Israel and the West suspect Iran is trying to enrich uranium to develop atomic weapons, an allegation the Islamic republic denies.

The suspicions have seen Tehran slapped with punishing international

sanctions over its nuclear activities.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also reiterated Tehran's insistence on its right to enrich uranium.

"All parties should respect Iran's right to enrichment and refrain from ignoring its right," ISNA news agency quoted Zarif as saying.

"Uranium enrichment is an integral part of Iran's rights under the Non-Proliferation Treaty," he said.

The last round of talks, which saw the foreign ministers of the P5+1 group rush to Geneva in the hope of clinching a deal with Iran, ended inconclusively.

US Secretary of State John Kerry blamed Iran for scuttling those talks.

But Iran, backed by Russia, denied the claim and said French objections to the draft thrashed out by Tehran and Washington had prevented an agreement.

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius had cast doubts on a deal, citing concerns about the heavy water reactor Iran is building at Arak and its stockpiles of 20 percent enriched uranium.

## UN urges Qatar to improve migrant labour conditions

AFP, Doha

A top UN official yesterday urged Qatar to improve conditions for foreign labourers, as the Gulf emirate builds a massive infrastructure for the 2022 football World Cup.

"Many migrants face human rights violations in the workplace," said the UN special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Francois Crepeau, concluding an eight-day visit to Qatar, which has come under fire over the alleged exploitation of workers.

"Some are not paid their wages, or are paid less than agreed," he said.

Qatar has the highest ratio of migrants to citizens in the world. Approximately 88 per cent of the total population are foreign workers, he noted.

## ODDLY enough

# Downing Street rejects call to lower age of consent

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Downing Street and Nick Clegg have joined forces to reject a call by a leading public health official to consider lowering the age of consent to 15.

A spokesman for the prime minister said the current age of 16 was designed to protect children, a view echoed by the deputy prime minister who rejected a "blanket reduction" in the age of consent.

Professor John Ashton, president of the Faculty of Public Health, had called for a lowering of the age of consent to make it easier for 15-year-olds to seek contraception and sexual health advice from the NHS. Figures show that up to a third of teenagers have sex before they reach 16.

Downing Street gave the proposal short shrift. A spokesman told the BBC: "We reject the call to lower the age of consent. Current age is in place to protect children and there are no plans to change it."

The deputy prime minister echoed No 10. Asked on the Andrew Marr Show on BBC1 what he thought of Ashton's call, Clegg said: "I am not in favour of that. The age of consent has been a British law for generations in order to protect children."

While accepting that there was problem, he said that a blanket reduction in the age of consent was not an answer and that the topic needed to be debated.