

Tejpal's judicial
custody extended
by 12 days

PTI, Panaji

A local court t=yesterday extended the judicial custody of Tehelka founder editor Tarun Tejpal for 12 days even as his lawyer moved a bail petition.

Tejpal, who is accused of sexually assaulting a woman journalist, has been lodged in Sada sub jail near Vasco town.

Dubai police in record
\$31m drugs haul

AFP, Dubai

Dubai police have made a record drug seizure of some 4.6 million Captagon pills, an amphetamine-like stimulant, worth more than \$31 million, the local press reported yesterday.

Dubai's police chief, Major General Khamis Mattar al-Mazeina, said the "outstanding operation" codenamed "Nine ball" had dealt a major blow to drug trafficking in the United Arab Emirates, the Khaleej Times newspaper reported.

Germany weighs
Russia ties on 'coup'
of freed tycoon

AFP, Berlin

The release of Kremlin critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky represents a resounding victory for German diplomacy just as the country is reassessing its complex ties with Russia, analysts said yesterday.

Veteran top German diplomat Hans-Dietrich Genscher worked in secret for more than two years to win the release of Khodorkovsky, once Russia's richest man and a political threat to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Khodorkovsky himself, whisked to Berlin on a German businessman's private jet Friday upon his shock release after a decade behind bars, started a news conference Sunday by thanking Merkel and Genscher for their crucial help, indicating he had "no idea" of Germany's efforts while he was still in prison.

Headgear banned
as Philippine malls
fight crime

AFP, Manila

Police in the Philippine capital have banned the wearing of caps and sun-glasses in shopping malls to stop criminals concealing their identity from security cameras.

The ban was imposed after a gang of hammer-wielding robbers looted a jewellery store at a popular suburban Manila shopping mall on December 15. The suspects are believed to have used baseball caps to hide their identities.

Can't lift ban on
Musharraf's travel:
Pak court

AFP, Karachi

A Pakistani court yesterday said it was unable to lift a travel ban on former military ruler Pervez Musharraf, a day before his trial for treason was due to start.

Musharraf's lawyer petitioned the Sindh High Court last month to remove the retired general's name from an "exit control list" so he could leave the country to visit his sick mother in Dubai.

Musharraf lawyer AQ Hallipota said the Sindh court in Karachi had ruled that as the government imposed the travel ban, it must decide on whether or not to lift it.

"A two-member bench of the Sindh High Court has ruled that it did not put Musharraf's name on the ECL," AQ Hallipota told AFP.

He said the court asked the petitioner to contact the appropriate forum -- the government.

The 70-year-old has faced criminal cases dating back to his 1999-2008 rule since returning to Pakistan, including the murder of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto.



Thai protesters step
up campaign

Main opposition vows to boycott elections

AFP, Bangkok

Thai opposition protesters yesterday stepped up their campaign to disrupt upcoming elections, trying to block candidate registrations as part of efforts to banish Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra and her family from politics.

The main opposition Democrat Party, which has not won an elected majority in parliament in about two decades, has vowed to boycott the February 2 polls called by Yingluck following weeks of street rallies by her opponents.

It is the latest chapter in a years-old political crisis which broadly pits a Bangkok-based elite against mostly rural and poor supporters of Yingluck and her brother Thaksin Shinawatra, a divisive former premier who was ousted in a coup in 2006.

Hundreds of demonstrators surrounded a stadium in Bangkok yesterday where representatives of political parties were trying to register to run in the polls ahead of the December 27 deadline.

Nine parties, including Yingluck's Puea Thai, managed to enter although officials were unable to fully complete their registration, according to the country's Election Commission.

About two dozen parties filed complaints with the police because they were prevented from entering.

But it appeared to be only a temporary setback with the election authorities expressing confidence

that the parties would be able to register in time.

"For those parties that cannot enter the stadium we will contact them and made appointments for them to submit documents," Election Commissioner Dhirawat Dhirarajit told AFP.

Puea Thai party said that Yingluck was on top of the party's list of candidates -- a position that would usually make her Puea Thai's pick for prime minister if it wins the polls.

Her candidacy is certain to anger the demonstrators, who want to rid Thai politics of the influence of her brother Thaksin -- a billionaire tycoon turned premier whom protesters accuse of controlling the government from his home in Dubai.

At least 150,000 people joined the latest anti-Thaksin mass protest in the capital on Sunday, according to an estimate from National Security Council chief Paradorn Pattanabut. Organisers said the turnout was much higher.

Protest leader Suthep Thaugsuban has vowed to "shut the country down" to prevent people voting.

The demonstrators' self-proclaimed People's Democratic Reform Committee is calling for an unelected "people's council" to be installed to oversee sweeping but loosely-defined reforms before new elections in around a year to 18 months.

Thaksin's "Red Shirt" supporters have voiced fears that the recent protests are aimed at encouraging the military to seize power, in a country which has seen 18 successful or attempted coups since 1932.

S Sudan army to wrest
back rebel-held town

AFP, Juba

South Sudan's army was poised for a major offensive against rebel forces, the president said yesterday, as the country slid towards civil war despite international peace efforts.

Expectations of a major upsurge in fighting came as the United Nations warned that the situation in the world's youngest nation was fast unravelling, with hundreds of thousands of civilians now at risk.

Fighting has gripped South Sudan for more than a week, after President Salva Kiir accused his former deputy Riek Machar, who was fired from the government in July, of attempting a coup.

Machar denied the claim and accused Kiir of carrying out a vicious purge of his rivals. Vowing to oust Kiir, his forces have since seized the town of Bor, capital of the powder keg eastern Jonglei state and located just 200 kilometres north of Juba, as well as the town of Bentiu, capital of crucial oil-producing Unity state.

The army is "now ready to move to Bor," President Salva Kiir told parliament, adding that the counter-attack to wrest back the town after it was captured on Wednesday was delayed until US had airlifted

citizens out.

"The forces of Machar are still in control of the town, but we readying to take back control," South Sudan army spokesman Philip Aguer told AFP.

The comments came despite days of shuttle diplomacy by African nations and calls from the United States, Britain and the United Nations for the fighting to stop.

The UN's top humanitarian coordinator in South Sudan, Toby Lanzer, visited the besieged town of Bor on Sunday, and said the situation was rapidly deteriorating. "There are hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese who've fled into the bush or back to their villages to get out of harm's way," he said.

Asked which areas of the conflict-torn country he was most concerned about, Lanzer said that "it would be quicker to talk about which areas I'm not worried about."

"I hope to be wrong, otherwise, hundreds of thousands will need help very soon," he said, adding he was "very concerned that a battle looms" in Bor, where he admitted that the UN peacekeepers were unlikely to be in a position to protect the estimated 15,000 civilians seeking shelter at the UN base there.



BJP says AAP
betrayed
people of
Delhi

NDTV ONLINE

The BJP yesterday accused the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) of "betraying the people of Delhi" after its leader Arvind Kejriwal said he will form a minority government with outside support of the Congress.

Harsh Vardhan, the Bharatiya Janata Party's chief ministerial candidate in Delhi, said by aligning with the Congress, the AAP has proved that they were hungry for power.

"The AAP fought the election on the anti-corruption plank and now they have taken support from a party that has been completely rejected by the people of Delhi. This proves that AAP is hungry for power," Harsh Vardhan said.

"This is a betrayal of the wishes of the people of Delhi," he added.

The BJP emerged as the single largest party with 31 seats, but it fell short of a majority in the 70-member house. The AAP stood second with 28 seats while the Congress took the third spot with just eight seats.

After the BJP decided not to form the government, the AAP told Delhi Lt.Governor Najeeb Jung that it needed 10 days' time to decide its course of action. The AAP then held what it called a referendum to ask people whether it should form a minority government.

Criticizing the AAP for holding the referendum, Harsh Vardhan said the opinion of a few hundred cannot supersede the mandate of lakhs of people.



Turkey Photojournalist Association chief for Istanbul and Reuters Turkey chief Murad Sezer (C) reads a statement as Turkish media workers hold posters of kidnapped photojournalist Bunyamin Aygun yesterday in front of the Milliyet Newspaper Headquarters in Istanbul. Turkish photographer Bunyamin Aygun has disappeared in neighbouring Syria while covering the civil war there. His fate and whereabouts are not known but some media outlets said he had been kidnapped by Al-Qaeda affiliates in Syria.

PHOTO: AFP

Snowden in charm
offensive in Brazil's press

AFP, Brasilia

US leaker Edward Snowden said in a TV interview here that he would accept asylum in Brazil if offered, but not if it were in exchange for information about US intelligence.

Snowden, in an interview broadcast late Sunday on the news show "Fantastico" on Globo TV network, also criticized the panel that is reviewing US intelligence gathering, pointing out that it was hand-picked by the White House and that the changes it called for were cosmetic.

Nevertheless he acknowledged that the panel represented an important first step in reining in the massive US surveillance programs.

On Tuesday, the Folha de Sao Paulo newspaper ran "an open letter to the Brazilian people" signed by Snowden in which he said he stood ready to help the Brazilian Senate's investigation of US eavesdropping on Brazilian targets.

But in the interview broadcast Sunday, Snowden clarified that he was not offering to swap information for an asylum.

Snowden's charm offensive with the Brazilian government and people may mean he is hoping for a fresh look from President Dilma Rousseff's government -- perhaps for asylum or a humanitarian visa.

Pussy riot punks freed
from prison

Amnestied pair criticise Putin after release

REUTERS, Krasnoyarsk, Nizhny Novgorod

Two members of Russian punk protest band Pussy Riot were freed from prison yesterday, deriding President Vladimir Putin's amnesty that led to their early release as a propaganda stunt and promising to fight for human rights.

Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, 24, shouted "Russia without Putin" following her release from a Siberian prison, hours after band mate Maria Alyokhina, 25, was freed from jail in the Volga River city of Nizhny Novgorod.

Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina were sentenced to two years in prison for a profanity-laced protest against Putin in a Russian Orthodox church in 2012 after a



Maria Alyokhina

trial Kremlin critics said was part of a clampdown on dissent in his third presidential term.

Alyokhina echoed critics who said the amnesty was far too narrow and aimed at deflecting criticism over human rights before the Olympics in the Black Sea city of Sochi on February 7-23.

"I do not think it is a humanitarian act, I think it is a PR stunt," she said by telephone in comments to the Russian Internet and TV channel Dohzd. "My attitude to the president has not changed."

Tolokonnikova, who staged a hunger strike earlier this year and drew attention to stark conditions and long hours of mandatory labor in the jail where she was previously held, said she would fight for prisoners' rights.

Jimmy Carter calls
for elections in Syria

AFP, Washington

Former US president Jimmy Carter yesterday proposed three principles as a basis for Syria peace talks in Geneva: free elections, respect for their results and the deployment of peacekeepers.

The talks have gone nowhere up to now because each belligerent "has been allowed to define the preconditions for negotiations," Carter, who won the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize, wrote in an opinion piece in the Washington Post.

While President Bashar al-Assad considers his opponents terrorists and will not talk until they lay down their arms, the fractured opposition is demanding a full regime change, giving Assad no incentive to bargain.

Carter with co-writer American University professor Robert Pastor in an article proposed basing the Geneva talks -- set to begin in Switzerland on January 22 -- on letting the Syrian people decide on their future government in a free election closely monitored by international observers; an assurance that the victors will respect sectarian and minority groups; and the deployment of "a robust peacekeeping force" to make sure those goals are achieved.

They warned, unless these "difficult steps" are taken "the war may very well go on for another decade and likely create a wider circle of destruction and death."

INDIA-US DIPLOMAT ROW
New Indian
envoy to arrive
in Washington

NDTV ONLINE

S Jaishankar, the new Indian Ambassador to the US, will arrive in Washington tomorrow to take charge amid a raging diplomatic row over the arrest and strip-search of senior diplomat Devyani Khobragade on visa fraud charges.

Jaishankar, who till recently was India's Ambassador to China, arrives in Washington, today, at a time when bilateral ties threatened to hit a low in more than a decade in the aftermath of the arrest of Khobragade.

Jaishankar's first task would be to prevent the relationship from getting derailed any further.

He would have to wait for several weeks before formally presenting his diplomatic credentials to US President Barack Obama, scheduled to return from his year end vacation on January 5.

Israel condemns US
spying revelations

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Senior Israeli officials have called on the US to stop spying on Israel, after revelations that the National Security Agency had intercepted emails from the offices of the country's former leaders.

It is the first time Israeli officials have expressed anger since details of US spying on Israel began to trickle out in documents leaked by the former NSA contractor Edward Snowden. The scandal has spurred renewed calls for the release of Jonathan Pollard, a former US intelligence analyst who has been imprisoned in the US for nearly three decades for spying for Israel.

"This thing is not legitimate," the Israeli intelligence minister, Yuval Steinitz, told Israel Radio. He called for both countries to enter an agreement regarding espionage.

"It's quite embarrassing between countries who are allies," the tourism minister, Uzi Landau, said. "It's this moment more than any other moment that Jonathan Pollard [should] be released."

Documents leaked by Snowden -- and published last week in the Guardian, Der Spiegel and the New York Times -- revealed that British agents from GCHQ worked with the NSA from 2008-11 to target email addresses belonging to the offices of then Israeli prime minister, Ehud Olmert, and the defence minister, Ehud Barak.

Amir Dan, spokesman for Olmert, played down the revelations. He said the email address targeted was meant for queries from the public and was not used for sensitive communications. "There is no chance there was a security or intelligence breach caused from this email address," he said.

Ehud Barak could not immediately be reached for comment.