



CAMBODIA GARMENT PROTEST TURNS VIOLENT

Police stand guard as garment workers agitate for higher wages in front of a factory in Phnom Penh. Left, photos show garment workers clash with special forces. Right, security forces arrest protesters while injured people are being taken to hospital. Cambodian police opened fire on protesting garment workers yesterday, killing at least three. Human rights campaigners condemned the crackdown as the country's worst state violence against civilians in more than a decade.

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PHOTO: AFP

NEWSIN brief

Australia endures hottest year on record
BBC ONLINE

Australia experienced its hottest year on record in 2013, officials have said. Temperatures were 1.2C above the long term average, the warmest since records began in 1910, the Bureau of Meteorology said in its annual report. The year also saw a record-warm winter that led into the most devastating fires in Sydney since

Arson in Chinese consulate in US
CNN ONLINE

The FBI is investigating an arson fire at the Chinese consulate in San Francisco, an incident that has China's diplomats calling on the United States Thursday to "take all measures to provide adequate protection."

FIR against 3-yr-old in Pakistan!
PTI, Lahore

Police have registered an FIR against a three-year-old boy and his mother for allegedly attacking and looting a man in Multan district of Pakistan's Punjab province. Mohammad Farooq said that Farrukh Bibi and her son Saud attacked him with a dagger and snatched his cell phone and Rs 22,000 in cash. Police registered the case after the complainant bribed them, Farrukh Bibi alleged. The court has summoned the police officials

Rahul may be declared PM candidate on Jan 17

AFP, New Delhi

The path is clear for India's Gandhi family scion Rahul to become the Congress party's next prime ministerial candidate, following premier Manmohan Singh's announcement yesterday that he will step down before this year's polls.

Rahul, 43, is already number two in the Congress, behind his mother Sonia who is party president, and he is chief strategist for the national elections.

The party originally had no plans to declare its candidate for the top job before voting, but newspapers are now speculating that Rahul will be promoted as early as a meeting on January 17.

Congress faces a resurgent opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), running a successful campaign centered on its candidate Narendra Modi.

Media-shy bachelor Rahul has no ministerial experience and has never sought a government job, but his elevation is seen internally as a natural progression in a party dominated by his family.

However, the son, grandson and great-grandson of former prime ministers faces a difficult task in turning around the fortunes of



Congress in the upcoming polls and doubts still remain about his appetite for the job.

He accepted the position of number two in the party in January last year, raising hopes he would play a larger public role in setting policy and priorities.

But since then he has only intermittently taken the spotlight and Congress suffered a string of state election defeats in the final months of 2013 despite him being projected as the party's new face.

The Gandhi family is descended through Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister after independence from Britain in 1947, his daughter Indira Gandhi, who was twice premier, and Indira's son Rajiv.

Tragedy, as well as power, has coloured the family's role in Indian history. Indira was assassinated in 1984 by her bodyguards, while Rajiv was killed by a suicide bomber in 1991 when campaigning for reelection.

He was educated in India and at Harvard and Cambridge, and first worked in business management in London before winning the family constituency seat of Amethi in Uttar Pradesh state in 2004.

Dozens of Qaeda fighters killed in Iraq clashes

AFP, Ramadi

Iraqi forces and tribesmen killed dozens of al-Qaeda-linked militants yesterday as they fought to dislodge them in and near the Anbar provincial capital of Ramadi, a senior militia leader said.

Parts of Ramadi and Fallujah, west of Baghdad, have been held by militants for days, harkening back to the years after the 2003 US-led invasion when both cities were insurgent strongholds.

Fighting began in the Ramadi area Monday, when security forces removed the main anti-government protest camp set up after demonstrations broke out in late 2012 against what Sunni Arabs say is the marginalisation and targeting of their community. Anger at the Shia-led government among the Sunni minority is seen as one of the main drivers of the worst violence to hit Iraq in five years.

A police captain had earlier said fighters from ISIL, which operates in Syria as well, had advanced in early morning clashes into areas of central Ramadi and deployed snipers on one street. Fallujah was the target of two major assaults after the 2003 invasion, in which American forces saw some of their heaviest fighting since the Vietnam

NY Times, Guardian call for Snowden clemency

AFP, Washington

The New York Times and Guardian newspapers called on Thursday for US leaker Edward Snowden to be granted clemency for his revelations on US government spying.

The two dailies in separate editorials hailed the fugitive computer specialist, who has sought refuge in Russia after leaking reams of information about the secretive US National Security Agency and its data gathering techniques.

"He may have committed a crime to do so, but he has done his country a great service," the Times wrote.

"It is time for the United States to offer Snowden a plea bargain or some form of clemency."

Britain's Guardian newspaper meanwhile urged Washington "to allow Snowden to return to the US with dignity," calling his revelations exposing the extent of Washington's electronic eavesdropping at home and abroad an act of "moral courage."

The Times called on the US government to offer Snowden a deal that "would allow him to return home (and) face at least substantially reduced punishment."

India PM says Indo-US ties won't hurt

PTI, New Delhi

The row between the US and India over the arrest of an Indian diplomat in New York is a "temporary aberration" in bilateral relations, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said yesterday.

The prime minister told the media here that the UPA government attached "the highest priority to strengthen the strategic partnership between our two countries."

"There have been recently some hiccups but I sincerely believe that these are temporary aberrations, and diplomacy should be given a chance to resolve the issues that have arisen," he said.

Devyani Khobragade was arrested on December 12 on charges of visa fraud and misrepresentation.

India has strongly objected to her arrest, and in protest has withdrawn many of the diplomatic privileges granted to the American diplomats in India.

Bomb plot in telco advertisement!

THE INDEPENDENT ONLINE

Prosecutors in Egypt have this week questioned officials of one of the largest telecommunications companies in the country over allegations that their advert included coded signals for bomb attacks by the Muslim Brotherhood.

Egyptian state security prosecutors have questioned the makers of a commercial for Vodafone Egypt which features popular puppet Abla Fahita, a widow attempting to reactivate the phone line previously used by her late husband.

In the advert, the puppet can be seen talking on the phone while her daughter Karkoura searches for her deceased father's sim card. Speaking on the phone with a friend, Fahita says she asked for the sniffer dog of a shopping mall to help search for the missing card and discusses another character called "Mama Touta".

However, video-blogger and youth activist Ahmed Spider accused the advert of containing pro-Muslim Brotherhood messages during an hour long appearance on Egyptian television on Tuesday.

Spider said the mall and the dog were code words for the planned sites of a coming attack, and "Mama Touta" is a secret name for the Brotherhood.

The Egyptian unit of Vodafone, the world's biggest mobile operator by revenue, rejected the suggestions.

Three killed as clashes erupt in Egypt

AFP, Cairo

At least three people were killed as supporters of deposed Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi clashed with police and opponents in three cities yesterday, security officials said.

Thousands of the Islamist's backers had rallied across the country before police intervened to disperse the protests with tear gas and birdshot.

One man was killed by birdshot to his chest in the Suez canal city of Ismailiya. Another man was killed and three were wounded in clashes in the city of Fayoum, southwest of Cairo, security officials said. And in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria, a third person was killed, officials said.



Snow covers cars in the Humboldt Park neighborhood in Chicago, Illinois. A fierce winter storm brought dangerous glacial temperatures and widespread chaos to the northeastern United States yesterday, forcing the cancellation of thousands of flights. With more than 24 inches of snow falling in one Massachusetts town, a state of emergency was declared in New York and New Jersey states.

PHOTO: AFP

Hollande's popularity problem

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

François Hollande has had a troubled term as France's President. But despite his domestic problems he should expect that other world leaders might be prepared to shake him by the hand.

Now it appears he has had difficulty even getting that done.

And it's not just other world leaders Hollande is failing to connect with – polls show he is now the most unpopular French



Hollande with Iranian President Rohani



With Austrian President Fischer



With Russian President Medvedev



With Danish PM Helle Thorning-Schmidt

Peace talks fail to abate South Sudan fighting

AGENCIES

South Sudan's warring parties began negotiations Friday to end nearly three weeks of raging conflict which has left thousands feared dead and taken the world's youngest nation to the brink of all-out civil war.

Aid agencies have warned of a looming humanitarian catastrophe in South Sudan.

On Thursday, as the government accused rebel forces of forcibly recruiting civilians for their attempt to march on the capital, humanitarian agencies warned that tens of thousands of refugees were without food, water or shelter.

On the ground, fighting intensified as the army moved on a key rebel-held town, even as government and rebel negotiating teams gathered at a luxury hotel in neighbouring Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa.

"We have enough forces who will defeat

the rebels within 24 hours," army spokesman Philip Aguer said in South Sudan, with reports of heavy battles involving tanks and artillery on the outskirts of Bor, a dusty town that has already exchanged hands three times since fighting began.

The US embassy in South Sudan ordered a further pullout of staff and urged all citizens to leave on an evacuation flight it had organised because of the "deteriorating security situation."

The ongoing battles prompted the top UN aid official in South Sudan, Toby Lanzer, to warn that soldiers and rebels must protect civilians and aid workers, or risk worsening a situation he described as "critical".

But in the calm of the hotel in Addis Ababa, rivals met special envoys from regional nations, ahead of direct talks that sources suggested may not take place until at least today.

France planted 'bomb' in London to test security

THE INDEPENDENT ONLINE

A French secret agent planted a "bomb" in the grounds of the residence of Paris's envoy to London to test British security – provoking fury when it was discovered by Scotland Yard, a British national archive file revealed.

Two containers of high explosive were discovered by a sniffer dog shortly before the ambassador was due to host President François Mitterrand in October 1984. When police questioned the security officer responsible, more explosive was found stashed in his hotel room.