

True religion can't be basis of hatred

Says Indian prime minister

PTI, New Delhi

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday said true religion cannot be the basis of hatred and division, but of mutual respect and tolerance for faiths and beliefs of all.

"It is no use celebrating Swamiji's life, paying our respects to his ideas and teachings and honouring his memory if we do not imbibe the values that he advocated," he said while paying homage to the memory of Swami Vivekananda on his 150th birth anniversary.

Manmohan said, "His truly great message for us which is of great relevance to our country and our sub-continent, was that true religion and true religiosity cannot be the basis of hatred and division but of mutual respect and tolerance for faiths and beliefs of all."

Recalling Vivekananda's famous address at the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893, he said, "Swami Vivekananda said sectarianism, bigotry and fanaticism have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often with human blood, destroyed civilisation and sent whole nations to disrepair. 'Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now,' he added.

Manmohan, while attending the closing ceremony of Vivekanand's 150th birth anniversary, said he has been personally inspired by Vivekanand's syncretic views that "All who have actually attained any real religious experience never wrangle over the form in which different religions are expressed. They know that the soul of all religions is the same and so they have no quarrel with anybody just because he or she does not speak in the same tongue."



Iran nuke deal to take effect from Jan 20

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday said that the landmark agreement the Islamic republic clinched with world powers on its disputed nuclear programme will take effect from January 20.

"The implementation of the joint plan of action will start from January 20," foreign ministry spokeswoman Marzieh Afkham told Mehr news agency.

Media reports said Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Abbas Araqchi was to hold a news conference later yesterday.

Iran and the European Union agreed Friday on how to implement the deal on containing Tehran's nuclear programme, but it still must be approved by each country before it can take effect.

Under the deal reached in November, Tehran agreed to curb parts of its nuclear drive for six months in exchange for receiving modest relief from international sanctions to save its hard-hit economy.



Participants compete in a "Makepung" or bull race with water buffaloes at Kaliakah village in Jembrana on the Indonesian island of Bali, yesterday. The event attracted tourists on the popular holiday destination island.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

Mediators meet Machar in S Sudan

AFP, Juba

Envoy from the United States and South Sudan's neighbours met Saturday with the rebel leader Riek Machar for a ceasefire in South Sudan as fighting raged yesterday for the last rebel-held town. There were unconfirmed news reports that mediators will meet with President Salva Kiir today.

Minister shot dead in Libya

AFP, Tripoli

Libya's deputy industry minister, Hassan al-Droui, was shot dead during a visit to his hometown of Sirte, east of Tripoli, security and hospital sources said yesterday.

The identity of the shooters was not immediately known, but the official's death was the first assassination of a member of the transitional government since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in October 2011. Droui was a former member of the National Transitional Council, the political arm of the rebellion that brought an end to Gaddafi's 42-year rule.

French first lady Valerie hospitalised

AFP, Paris

Valerie Trierweiler, the girlfriend of French President Francois Hollande, was hospitalised after he was reported to be having an affair with an actress, officials told AFP yesterday.

Aides to the "first girl friend" said she had been admitted on Friday "for a rest and to undergo some tests," and was expected to leave hospital on Monday. Closer magazine reported on Friday that Hollande, 59, has been having an illicit affair with actress Julie Gayet, 41.



Abdel Fatah al-Sisi

seen as a test of popularity for army chief Abdel Fatah al-Sisi.

According to the government's timetable, the referendum will be followed by parliamentary and presidential elections this year, although it has not yet decided on the order.

The turnout, and the percentage of Yes votes, will be monitored by Sisi as he decides whether to run for president, military sources say.

The military had said it would deploy 160,000 soldiers to guard about 30,000 polling stations.

There is little doubt the popular Sisi would win the presidential election. He is seen as a strong man capable of bringing stability to Egypt after more than three years of turmoil. He has had songs dedicated to him and his face appears on chocolates and posters on the streets of Egypt.

Sisi's candidacy would further deepen the divisions between the many Egyptians who believe a firm hand is needed to steer the country through crisis and Islamists bearing the brunt of a state crackdown on dissent.

Egypt will hold a two-day referendum tomorrow on a new constitution, in a vote

Wonder if I will ever reunite with my family

Devyani reveals her anguish

AFP, New Delhi

An Indian diplomat at the centre of a bitter row with the United States yesterday told of her "immense stress" at leaving behind her young family in New York, and vowed to clear her name.

Indian consulate official Devyani Khobragade was allowed to leave the United States on Friday after a month-long dispute over her arrest and strip-search on suspicion of visa fraud involving her domestic servant. She now faces arrest if she lands in US.

Khobragade, 39, told an Indian newspaper of her anguish at leaving behind her daughters, aged seven and four, in New York along with her husband, a US citizen, who works as an academic.

"I wonder if I will be able to ever reunite with my family, my husband, my little kids. I miss them," Khobragade told The Sunday Express.

"What if my children choose to study and work in the US? What if I can never return to the US, which I cannot now. Does it mean we will never be able to live together as a family again?" she said.

"I know I am honest, and I will come out clean," she added.

US seeks probe into S Lanka war crimes

Rajapakse to test popularity with local polls

AFP, Colombo

The United States yesterday called for Sri Lanka to investigate rights abuses by security forces after a top envoy completed a fact-finding mission to the island, the US embassy in Colombo said.

US State Department war crimes investigator Stephen Rapp "listened to eyewitness accounts about serious human rights abuses" during his five-day mission to the island that ended on Saturday, the embassy said.

"During ambassador Rapp's discussions, he listened to eyewitness accounts about serious human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, including those that occurred at the end of the war," the embassy said in a statement.

"In that context the government of the US encourages the government of Sri Lanka to seek the truth through independent and credible investigations, and where relevant, have prosecutions," it said.

During the visit, the embassy sparked fury within the Sri Lankan government by tweeting that army shelling killed hundreds of families in January 2009, the final stages of Sri Lanka's war against Tamil rebels.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka yesterday called snap local elections seen as a gauge of President Mahinda Rajapakse's popularity ahead of national polls expected to be held later this year, officials said.

The elections are likely to be held on March, an official said.

Rajapakse is expected to win the polls that will take place in the ethnic Sinhalese-majority heartland where he enjoys strong support for crushing Tamil rebels and ending Sri Lanka's decades-long war in 2009.



Egypt army chief signals may run for president

Leaders eye legitimacy in tomorrow's vote on charter

AGENCIES

Egypt's army chief General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi gave his clearest signal yet of his interest in becoming president, a move that could turn the clock back to the days when the presidency was controlled by men from the military.

Sisi, who ousted Egypt's first democratically elected leader Mohamed Morsi last July after mass protests against his one-year rule, is widely expected to seek the top job but has not yet announced plans to run.

"If I run then it must be at the request of the people and with a mandate from my army... We work in a democracy," he said, speaking at an army seminar in Cairo.

The state MENA news agency quoted Sisi on Saturday as urging Egyptians to "assume national responsibility and turn out in force to vote in the constitutional referendum in order to correct the democratic path and build a modern democratic state."

Egypt will hold a two-day referendum tomorrow on a new constitution, in a vote

seen as a test of popularity for army chief Abdel Fatah al-Sisi.

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Sisi's candidacy would further deepen the divisions between the many Egyptians who believe a firm hand is needed to steer the country through crisis and Islamists bearing the brunt of a state crackdown on dissent.



Israeli President Shimon Peres lays a wreath by the coffin of former prime minister Ariel Sharon displayed at the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) in Jerusalem, yesterday. Israelis are paying their respects to Sharon, whose controversial life inspired admiration and provoked revulsion and whose death drew emotional reactions even after eight years in a coma.

Syria rebels pressed to sign up for talks

AFP, Paris

Western powers yesterday stepped up their pressure on Syria's divided opposition to enter talks with President Bashar al-Assad's regime at the start of a new round of diplomatic efforts to end the country's civil war.

US Secretary of State John Kerry joined ministers from 10 other countries at a Paris meeting aimed at persuading the opposition to attend talks scheduled for Montreux, Switzerland on January 22.

The Swiss talks have been organised in an attempt to form a national transitional government that could involve figures from the current regime and the opposition. But opposition leaders are wary of being drawn into a process they fear could result in Assad clinging on to power.



REUTERS, Dallas

A permit to hunt a black rhino in Namibia sold for \$350,000 at an auction in Dallas on Saturday with proceeds going to protect the endangered animals despite protests from animal rights groups that saw the sale as immoral conservation.

The license allows for the killing of a single, post-breeding bull, with Namibian wildlife officials on hand for the hunt to make sure an appropriate animal is selected.

The Dallas Safari Club had been expecting the permit to bring \$250,000 to \$1 million at an auction held during its annual convention. The hunt will help in managing the population and provide an underfunded Namibian government hard cash in the expensive battle to thwart poachers, it said.

More than 75,000 people signed an online petition at www.causes.com to stop the sale, saying black rhinos cannot be protected if they are allowed to be killed.

There are about 25,000 rhinos in Africa -- 20,000 white rhinos and 5,000 black rhinos.

UK's Iraq abuse files submitted to ICC

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A devastating 250-page dossier, detailing allegations of beatings, electrocution, mock executions and sexual assault, has been presented to the International Criminal Court, and could result in some of Britain's leading defence figures facing prosecution for "systematic" war crimes.

General Sir Peter Wall, the head of the British Army; former defence secretary Geoff Hoon; and former defence minister Adam Ingram are among those named in the report, entitled "The Responsibility of UK Officials for War Crimes Involving Systematic Detainee Abuse in Iraq from 2003-2008".

The dossier is the most detailed ever submitted to the ICC's Office of the Prosecutor on war crimes allegedly committed by British forces in Iraq.

US tested biological weapons in Japan

AFP, Tokyo

The US army conducted field experiments of biological weapons, which could harm rice cropping, in the Japanese island of Okinawa in the early 1960s, Kyodo news agency reported yesterday.

The US is "believed to have had China and Southeast Asia in mind in developing such crop-harming agents," the report stated.

In the tests conducted, at least a dozen times between 1961 and 1962, rice blast fungus was released over rice fields and data was collected on how it affected rice production, Kyodo said, citing the documents.

Rice blast disease causes lesions to form on the plant, threatening the crop.

The fungus, which is known to occur in 85 countries, is estimated to destroy enough rice to feed 60 million people each year.

The US government decided in 1969 to discard all biological weapons in its possession, Kyodo said. Okinawa was under post-World War II US rule until 1972.

We Mourn



We are deeply shocked and grieved at the sad demise of Mrs. Ferdous Begum (78), beloved mother of Mr. Jashim Uddin, Director, Dhaka Bank Limited due to old age complication at the Apollo Hospitals, Dhaka on Saturday January 11, 2014 at 1:00 P.M. (Innalillah wa Inna illaihe Rajeun).

On behalf of the Board of Directors and all employees of Dhaka Bank Limited, we express our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family and pray to the Almighty Allah to grant eternal peace to the departed soul.

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