

NEWS IN
briefPak parliament
turns to solar power

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Amid a growing energy crisis, Pakistan is installing a 1.8 megawatt solar power plant at the Parliament House building in the capital city Islamabad.

Work on the project began in the first week of January. The initial cost - which is being funded by the Chinese government as a friendship gesture - is estimated at \$60m (£36.5m). The solar plant is projected to save almost \$1m each year in utility bills for the

US offers security help
at Sochi Olympics

AFP, Washington

The United States said Monday it was ready to deploy air and naval assets - including two ships - to help secure the upcoming Winter Olympics in Russia after terror threats. The offer came following US concern about possible attacks at the massive international sporting event that kicks off in the Black Sea resort city of Sochi

Four killed in Beirut
bomb blast

AFP, Beirut

Four people were killed in an apparent suicide car bombing in south Beirut yesterday, in the latest in a string of attacks targeting strongholds of the Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah. The blast is the sixth in a string targeting areas considered strongholds of Hezbollah since the group announced it was sending fighters to support President Bashar al-Assad's troops in Syria.

Israel plans 381 new
settler homes

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's government has approved plans to build 381 new settler homes in annexed east Jerusalem, Israeli settlement watchdog Peace Now told AFP yesterday. Israel on January 6 approved plans for 272 new homes in West Bank settlements, followed on January 10 by the unveiling of plans to build more than 1,800 new units in the West Bank

Doctors on strike
in Nepal

AP, Kathmandu

Thousands of doctors across Nepal have stayed away from work to support a colleague who has been on a hunger strike for days demanding reforms in medical education. Tens of thousands of patients have been deprived of medical services because of the doctors' strike. Only emergency services are being provided. The doctors' strike started Sunday. They say it will continue until their

British queen,
heir merge
media teams

AFP, London

The communications teams of Queen Elizabeth II and her heir, Prince Charles, are to merge, royal sources said Monday, which should help smooth his eventual transition to the throne.

The Sunday Telegraph newspaper called the latest move "the clearest indication to date that the queen and the Duke of Edinburgh are preparing to hand over an ever-increasing amount of their workload to the younger generations."

The switch is expected to take place within the coming months.

Charles is increasingly taking on major roles representing his mother, particularly abroad. The queen has not left Britain since visiting Australia in 2011.

'INDUSTRIAL SCALE KILLING'
Report says 11,000
died in Assad's jails

REUTERS, London

A Syrian military police photographer has supplied "clear evidence" showing the systematic torture and killing of about 11,000 detainees in circumstances that evoked Nazi death camps, former war crimes prosecutors said.

Syrian officials could face war crimes charges as a result of the evidence provided by the photographer, who has defected, the three prosecutors said.

One of the prosecutors said the evidence documented "industrial scale killing" that was reminiscent of the World War II concentration camps of Belsen and Auschwitz.

The trove of harrowing photographs ratchets up the pressure on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who the United States and its Western allies say has committed war crimes against his own people during the civil war.

Assad, once courted by Western leaders and now supported by Russia and Iran, has denied war crimes, saying he is fighting "terrorists" who want to use Syria to sow chaos across the Middle East.

But 55,000 images provided by the photographer, who fled Syria after passing the pictures to Assad's opponents, show emaciated and mutilated corpses.

Bearing signs of torture, some of the corpses had no eyes. Others showed signs of strangulation or electrocution.

"There is clear evidence, capable of being believed by a tribunal of fact in a court of law, of systematic torture and killing of detained persons by the agents of the Syrian government," the three prosecutors said in the 31-page report.

"Such evidence would support findings of crimes against humanity against the current Syrian regime. Such evidence could also support findings of war crimes against the



AFP, Montreux

Syria peace talks were in disarray yesterday before they began, buffeted by a botched UN invitation to Iran.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's unexpected, last-minute decision on Sunday to invite President Assad's main foreign backer Iran - only to withdraw the invitation a day later - proved a diplomatic fiasco, undermining talks that are already given little chance of success.

Iran was quick to respond, with Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Aragchi telling state television there was little chance of peace without Tehran's involvement.

Preparations were under way in the Swiss city of Montreux for today's start of the so-called Geneva II talks, after the abrupt United Nations reversal averted a Syrian opposition boycott.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif claimed the invitation had been withdrawn "under pressure", saying he had earlier made it clear to Ban that Tehran "does not accept any preconditions" to the talks.

The United States, which is organising the talks along with Russia and the UN, had said Iran could not attend unless it agreed to the principle of creating a transitional government set

out in June 2012 peace talks in Geneva.

Moscow, another key Assad ally, had pushed for Tehran to take part and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said it had been an error to withdraw the invitation.

"Of course this is a mistake," Lavrov told reporters.

But he also downplayed the move, saying "no disaster has happened" and

describing the peace talks as "largely ceremonial" and a "one-day event".

This week's talks will be the most intensive diplomatic effort yet to resolve Syria's civil war, which after nearly three years has left more than 100,000 dead and millions forced from their homes.

Months of diplomatic wrangling were needed to convince all sides to take part, with the main opposition group, the Syrian National Coalition, only agreeing at the last minute.

US Secretary of State John Kerry departed Washington before dawn yesterday to head to Switzerland, with officials warning the talks were just the start of a long and grinding process.

Deep divisions within the opposition were exposed ahead of the talks and questions have been raised about whether its delegation will be truly representative of Assad's opponents.

In an AFP interview published Monday, Assad bluntly ruled out a power-sharing deal. He insisted the peace conference should focus on what he called his "war against terrorism".

After the launch of the conference in Montreux, which will also bring together some 40 countries and regional bodies, the Syrian government and opposition are to start face-to-face talks in Geneva on Friday.

Pak forces raid Taliban den; 25 killed

AFP, Peshawar

Pakistani jets and helicopter gunships bombarded suspected Taliban hideouts in a northwestern tribal district yesterday, killing at least 25 people, in response to two major bombings targeting the military.

The air strikes came a day after a Taliban suicide bomber killed 13 people in a blast near army headquarters -- a rare strike close to the heart of Pakistan's powerful military establishment.

The focus of the operation was North Waziristan tribal district, a stronghold for Taliban and al-Qaeda linked militants on the border with Afghanistan.

Pilgrims killed

Meanwhile, at least 22 Shia pilgrims returning from Iran were killed and 20 others wounded when a bomb hit a bus in the southwest Pakistan province of Baluchistan yesterday, officials said.

The attack took place at Dringh village on the Pak-Iran highway in Baluchistan.

AAP risks losing
more than it gains

TNN, New Delhi

The Delhi government vs Delhi police face-off borders on the bizarre. Arvind Kejriwal is playing two diametrically opposite roles simultaneously - chief minister and leader of the opposition. With tension between AAP and the Congress escalating, Kejriwal might be looking to exit in what AAP would project as a 'blaze of glory' while taking on a 'corrupt and compromised system'.

There appears to be a larger strategy at play here - one aimed at general elections. But there are risks attached to it. The educated middle class is showing signs of being disillusioned with AAP; although it isn't overly fond of the police and would like to see a clean-up, the party's populist, confrontationist politics - particularly the actions of its ministers - has struck a discordant note.

AAP seems to be directing its appeal more at the 'underclass'. It may end up losing more than it gains. The educated middle class has the potential of being a pan-Indian vote bank; it may be more difficult to consolidate the 'underclass' vote because of considerations such as caste and community.



Indian police drag away a supporter of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal after demonstrators charged a barricade, which sealed off a protest site, in New Delhi, yesterday.

PHOTO:
AFPUkraine getting out
of control: Russia

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday warned that clashes between opposition and police in Ukraine were getting out of control and slammed the EU's "indecent" support of the protest movement against President Viktor Yanukovych.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that the fact that calls by Ukraine's pro-EU opposition leaders to refrain from violence failed to calm tensions in the capital Kiev meant that the situation was becoming explosive.

"I personally believe that those calls for prudence that the opposition leaders -- Vitali Klitschko in particular -- are making, they show that the situation is getting out of control," said Russia's top diplomat.

He reiterated criticism of what Ukraine's Soviet-era master Moscow sees as Europe's meddling into the sovereign affairs of the post-Soviet nation.

His comments came as a controversial anti-protest law which sparked unprecedented riots in Ukraine entered force yesterday.

The new laws, which ban nearly all forms of protest in the ex-Soviet country, were officially published in the newspaper of the Ukrainian parliament after a warning from President Viktor Yanukovych that the violence threatened the entire country.

Kejriwal calls off Delhi
sit-in, claims victory

AFP, New Delhi

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal yesterday called off his sit-in protest demanding police reform that has seen him run the city from a pavement for the last two days.

Kejriwal told a crowd that two policemen he wanted suspended for misconduct would be sent on leave, but he failed to secure his main demand that the city's police force be put under his government's control.

He said that the lieutenant-governor of Delhi had appealed to him to end his protest.

Kejriwal, an anti-corruption campaigner who swept to power last month, declared himself an "anarchist" on Monday and called a mass demonstration to disrupt Republic Day celebrations at the weekend.

Overnight, the 44-year-old slept outside on a pavement under a thick blanket, awakening to rains and strong winds.

His central demand was that the Delhi police, widely viewed as corrupt and inefficient, be trans-

ferred to his state government's control from the national home ministry. As with other demands in the past by different chief ministers, the central government refused to agree because of Delhi's status as the national capital.

He had warned earlier yesterday that he would escalate the demonstration and was prepared to sit indefinitely.

Kejriwal was sworn in as chief minister of the city of 17 million last month after his new Aam Aadmi (Common Man) Party made sensational gains in state elections against India's two biggest parties.

He plans to shake up national elections due before May by once again taking on the ruling Congress and the opposition BJP.

But after enjoying overwhelmingly positive media coverage and support from the poor and middle-class, there are signs his latest campaign has backfired and the honeymoon is over.

"Anarchist CM Plunges Delhi Into Chaos," read the front-page of the Hindu newspaper Tuesday morning, while the Economic Times headlined "Kejriwal Reduces Govt to a Chaotic Street Play".

End of poverty?

Bill Gates says there'll be no poor countries by 2035

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Bill Gates has said there will be "almost no poor countries by 2035", and that child mortality rates in the poorest nations will plummet to the same levels as in the US and UK in 1980. The world's richest man made the prediction in the Gates Foundation's annual letter, in which he and his wife, Melinda, sought to dispel three common "myths" surrounding the issues of world poverty.

The foundation, which is expected to have given away the entire Gates fortune of around \$67 billion by the time the couple have been dead for 20 years, has published a letter for each of the last five years detailing global philanthropic progress.

Speaking to Forbes Magazine's editor Randall Lane, Gates said there will soon come a point where "you'll have to give a reason why a country is poor". He said that while it is difficult to make predictions for nations where politics hinders progress (naming North Korea as an example), for almost everyone else there are "good examples to learn from".

Tackling the first myth, Gates wrote: "Poor countries are not doomed to stay poor."

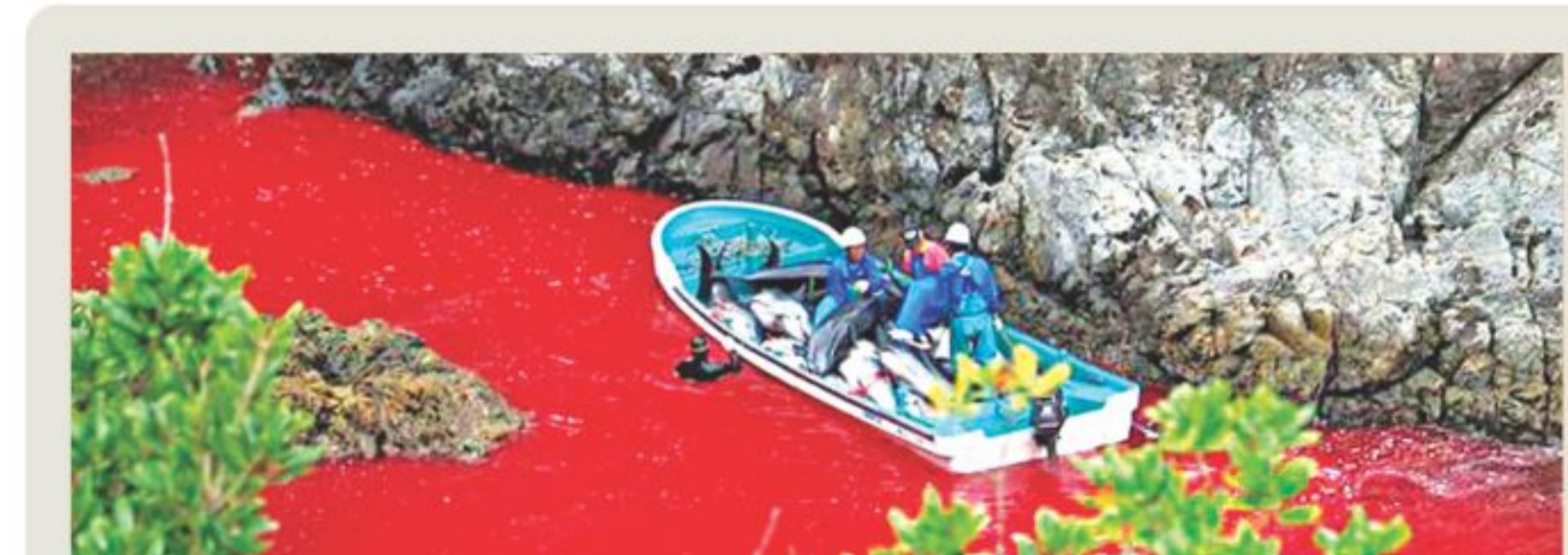
"I am optimistic enough about this that I am willing to make a prediction. By 2035, there will be almost no poor countries left in the world. Almost all countries will be what we now call lower-middle income or richer."

Identifying a second myth, that foreign aid is a waste of money, Gates said he was worried this was used as "an excuse for political leaders to try and cut back on it".

"Broadly speaking, aid is a fantastic investment, and we should be doing more," he wrote. "It saves and improves lives very effectively, laying the groundwork for long-term economic progress."

Addressing a final myth, that saving the lives of children leads to overpopulation, Melinda Gates wrote that "this kind of thinking has gotten the world into a lot of trouble".

"When children survive in greater numbers, parents decide to have smaller families. Saving lives doesn't lead to overpopulation - in fact, it's quite the opposite," she said.



Dolphin 'massacre'

REUTERS, Tokyo

Fishermen in Japan began slaughtering hundreds of bottlenose dolphins early yesterday morning, campaigners said, despite mounting international calls for the animals to be spared.

Members of the marine conservation group Sea Shepherd who are monitoring the annual cull in Taiji, on Japan's Pacific coast, said local fishermen had started killing an estimated 250 dolphins just before 7.30am.

The methods used to capture and kill the dolphins have attracted widespread condemnation. Fishermen bang metal

poles together beneath the water to confuse the animals' hypersensitive sonar before herding them into shallow water, where they are left for up to several days before being taken to the cove to be slaughtered.

Hidden from view beneath tarpaulin covers, the fishermen drive metal rods into the dolphins' spinal cords and leave them to die. "It takes up to 20 to 30 minutes for these dolphins to die, where they bleed out, suffocate or drown in the process of being dragged to the butcher house," an activist said.

Washington's ambassador to Tokyo, Caroline Kennedy, expressed "deep concern" over the dolphin hunt.

'NSA sets global
trend for spying'

AFP, Berlin

The United States is setting a dangerous example for the world with its sweeping surveillance programmes, giving governments an excuse for mass censorship of online communications, Human Rights Watch said in its annual report yesterday.

The National Security Agency's failure to respect privacy as a right will serve as a fig leaf for repressive states to force user data to stay within their own borders and crack down on free expression, New York-based HRW said.

"The US leads in ability for global data capture, but other nations and actors are likely to catch up, and some already insist that more data be kept within their reach," the group writes in its 667-page report examining the state of human rights in more than 90 countries, which was presented in Berlin.

On Friday, Obama banned eavesdropping on the leaders of allies and began reining in the vast collection of US citizens' phone data. But Kenneth Roth, executive director of the group, told Reuters in Berlin that Obama's had provided little more than "vague assurance" on the moni-

'Sunanda Pushkar died
of drug overdose'

PTI, New Delhi

The Indian subdivisional magistrate, probing the death of Sunanda Pushkar, directed the police yesterday to investigate the case thoroughly including the murder and suicide angles after he categorically pin-pointed "poisoning" as the reason behind the sensational demise.

Significantly, Alok Sharma, the SDM in his report, said no family member of Sunanda doubted any foul play in her death, the sources said.

Doctors at AIIMS who conducted autopsy on Sunanda had said her death was "sudden and unnatural" and it was caused by "drug overdose" which in other words could be called drug poisoning.

52-year-old Sunanda was found