

# NEWSIN brief

## Pak 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 (£36.5). 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, Katmandu

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, her 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 Araqchi 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

# Syria talks in disarray

UN makes U-turn on Iran, scraps invitation; Russia terms move a mistake; Tehran says talks doomed to fail



PHOTO: AFP

Syrians help an injured child following an airstrike in Aleppo, yesterday. 10 people were killed in the strike.

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 bombed 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 come 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 Dringhar 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: AFP

# Ukraine 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 Yanukovich. 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 Yanukovich 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".

# '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 now 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

dead in a 5-star hotel in South Delhi on Friday night, a day after her twitter spat with Pakistani journalist Mehr Tarar over an alleged affair with Tharoor. AIIMS sources said the autopsy report submitted to the SDM mentioned about over a dozen injury marks on both hands of Sunanda and a minor bruise on her left cheek which could be due to use of "blunt force". The report, however, ruled out death due to the injuries. The autopsy report also said no food samples were found in Sunanda's stomach which according to doctors suggested that "she had not been eating". Police sources said two strips of anti-depressant drug alprazolam, commonly known as alprax, were found in the hotel suite where she was found dead.

