QATAR WORLD CUP 185 Nepalese died in 2013

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

The extent of the risks faced by migrant construction workers building the infrastructure for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar has been laid bare by official documents revealing 185 Nepalese men died last year alone.

The 2013 death toll, which is expected to rise further as new cases come to light, is likely to spark a fresh wave of concern over the treatment of migrant workers in Qatar.

According to the documents the total number of verified deaths among workers from Nepal, just one of several countries that supply workers to the gas rich state, is now at least 382 in two years alone.

The Int'l Trade Union Confederation has warned that up to 4,000 workers could die before a ball is kicked in 2022 without meaningful reform of the kafala system and stringent control of the myriad construction companies and sub-contractors involved.



Egyptians stand in front of the damaged facade of the Cairo police headquarters, following a car bomb explosion in the Egyptian capital which killed five people, police and health ministry officials said yesterday. From bottom left to right, officials look at a crater made by the blast; an Egyptian cop reacts and an Egyptian man carries an injured girl.







Thai polls can be postponed

Says constitutional court

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's Constitutional Court yesterday ruled that controversial elections scheduled for next month can be delayed due to deadly political unrest, adding to pressure on the embattled premier following weeks of mass opposition protests.

Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra has refused to step down or delay the vote following nearly three months of street rallies aimed at ousting her elected government and installing an unelected "people's council".

election, while protesters have vowed to disrupt voting, saying reforms are needed to tackle corruption and votebuying before polls are held in around a year to 18 months. While ruling that the February 2 vote can legally be

The main opposition party is boycotting the February 2

postponed, the Constitutional Court said it was the joint responsibility of Yingluck and the chairman of the Election Commission to make that decision.

The government had previously rejected the Election Commission's call to delay the polls, noting that under the constitution an election should normally be held no more than 60 days after the dissolution of parliament, which happened in early December.

Nine people have been killed and hundreds injured in grenade attacks, drive-by shootings and street clashes since the protests began at the end of October. The government on Tuesday declared a 60-day state of emergency in Bangkok and surrounding areas to deal with the unrest.

On Thursday, protest leader Suthep Thaugsuban threatened to "close every route" to polling stations, saying the election would not be allowed to take place.

A survey by Bangkok University released yesterday showed that nearly 80 percent of roughly 1,000 respondents planned to vote next month.

The demonstrators have staged a self-styled "shutdown" of Bangkok since January 13 although attendance has gradually fallen since last week. Advance voting tomorrow is seen as a litmus test of whether the polls will go smoothly.

Internet a 'gift' from god: Pope Francis

AFP, Vatican City

Pope Francis described the internet as "a gift from God" and called on Catholics to "boldly become citizens of the digital world".

"The internet... offers immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity. This is something truly good, a gift from God," the Argentine pontiff said in his first World Communication Day message.

"Let us boldly become citizens of the digital world. Let our communication be a balm which relieves pain and a fine wine which gladdens hearts," he said.

The 77-year-old pontiff is a keen Twitter user whose account has attracted more than 10 million followers.

enough

Barman tries to

TNN, London

A bartender at a

London restaurant

'arrest' Tony Blair

tried to make a 'citizen

arrest' on former British

PM Tony Blair when he

was having dinner with

Twiggy Garcia, the

friends and family.

staff member at the

upmarket Tramshed

restaurant attempted

to arrest Blair yester-

day for starting the

Iraq war.

Garcia made his

move while Blair was

eating. He said he was

greatly influenced by a

website arrestblair.org

that offered a bounty of

£2,150 to anyone who

can "arrest" him for

crimes against peace.

George W Bush and

for the death of tens

and thousands of

publication, Garcia

said, "I feel great. I'm

still in disbelief that I

citizen's arrest the

got the opportunity to

former PM. It is some-

thing I have wanted to

believe Blair is respon-

sible for the mass mur-

after taking our country

do for a few years. I

der of Iraqi civilians

into an illegal war."

people in Iraq.

The website holds

Tony Blair responsible

In an interview to a

But he also makes a point of privileging human relationships and physical touch, often walking among

the crowds who flock to see him in St. Peter's Square and embracing the ill or disabled.

However, Francis warned people not allow the desire to be connected to the digital world twenty-four hours a day to isolate them from society. "It is not enough to be passersby on the digital highways, simply 'connected'. Connections need to grow into true encounters," he said.

Rivals agree to meet, finally

Syria's warring sides have agreed to meet together today after a first day of peace talks in Geneva stumbled with President Bashar al-Assad's regime threatening to walk away. After meeting with delegations from the regime

and opposition, UN-Arab League Syria envoy Lakhdar Brahimi said they had agreed to "meet in the same room" after failing to do so on the first day of planned negotiations. Pulled together by the United Nations, Russia

and the United States, the delegations had been due to sit down early yesterday at UN headquarters in Geneva for PEACE TALKS their first face-to-face talks.

But plans for the meeting fell apart after the opposition insisted the regime must be prepared to discuss Assad leaving power.

"We knew that it was going to be difficult, complicated," Brahimi said. "We never expected this to be easy -- I think the two parties understand what is at

Foreign Minister Walid Muallem had earlier warned Brahimi that the Syrian delegation "will leave Geneva" should "serious sessions" fail to take place today.

Nazir al-Hakim, a member of the opposition delegation, told AFP it was only willing to negotiate on the basis of the agreement reached at the "Geneva I" peace conference in 2012, which called for the creation of a transitional government.

The regime rejects the opposition's contention that the Geneva I agreement requires Assad to go.

Expectations are very low for a breakthrough at the Geneva II discussions, which officials have said could last up to 10 days.

But diplomats believe that simply bringing the two sides together for the first time is a mark of progress and could be an important first step.

> With no one appearing ready for serious concessions, mediators will be

looking for short-term deals to keep the process moving forward, including on localised ceasefires, freer humanitarian access and prisoner exchanges.

The start of the conference in the Swiss town of Montreux on Wednesday was marked by fiery exchanges, with Muallem labelling the opposition "traitors" and agents of foreign governments.

Erupting after the regime cracked down on protests inspired by the Arab Spring, Syria's civil war has claimed more than 130,000 lives and forced

Ukraine president offers concessions

AFP, Kiev

President Viktor Yanukovych yesterday pledged to reshuffle his government and amend controversial anti-protest laws to ease Ukraine's crisis, after losing control of local administrations across the west of the country.

With the ex-Soviet state in shock after five days of deadly clashes, Yanukovych vowed to press on with talks with the opposition but warned he would use "all legal methods" if no solution was found. The protesters occupying the city centre

of the capital Kiev showed no sign of yielding and extended their barricades close to the presidential administration.

In one of the biggest blows to Yanukovych of the crisis so far, protesters seized control of regional administrations in six regions in anti-government and pro-EU western Ukraine.

These included the key Lviv region on the border with Poland which protesters had stormed and seized in the first such action on Thursday.

brief

Indian SC issues notice over Kejriwal protest

IANS, New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday issued notice on a PIL seeking action against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for violating the law while holding a constitutional position. Kejriwal had staged a sit-in earlier this week in the heart of the capital to seek action against the Delhi Police for not heeding the orders of his Ministers. The stir ended after two police

Gunman kills 5 Afghan cricket players

AP, Kabul, Afghanistan

An Afghan official says a gunman on a motorcycle opened fire at a group of local cricket players, killing five of them during a game in eastern Laghman prov-

ince. A provincial spokesman, Sarhadii Zhouak, says the attack took place on Thursday in Alinghar district. He says the attacker fled the scene. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

Doctors end strike in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

Hundreds of Nepalese doctors yesterday ended a five-day strike after the government agreed to meet their demands for medical education reforms, their professional association

said. Hospitals and clinics across the Himalayan nation have been shut since Sunday in support of an orthopaedic surgeon who launched a hunger strike, leaving thousands of patients without treatment.

Sri Lanka to release 61 Indian fishermen

PTI, Colombo

Sri Lanka yesterday announced it will release 61 Indian fishermen held in the country for alleged poaching, days after the two sides agreed to resolve the issue that has become an irritant in bilateral ties.

"As per the arrangements, India is to release 59 Sri Lankans and 3 trawlers. Sri Lanka would release 61 Indian fishermen and 15 boats," Fisheries Ministry spokesman Narendra Sri

Snowden sees 'no chance' for fair trial in US

AFP, Washington

Fugitive intelligence leaker Edward Snowden said Thursday he has no plans to return to the United States, because he would have "no chance" for a fair trial.

"The hundred-year old law under which I've been charged... forbids a public interest

defense," he said in a question-andanswer session on the "Free Snowden" website.

"This is especially frustrating, because it means there's no chance to have a fair trial, and no way I can come home and make my case to a jury," he said. The comments during the former National Security Agency contrac-

tor's first such public forum since June. Snowden was asked about the conditions under which he would return to the United States, where he faces espionage charges for leaking numerous documents about NSA

resolution for the government, the public, and myself, but it's unfortunately not possible in the face of current whistleblower

tors like myself," he said. "Maybe when Congress comes together to

protection laws, which, through a failure in

law, did not cover national security contrac-

end the programs... they'll reform the Whistleblower Protection Act, and we'll see a mechanism for all Americans, no matter who they work for, to get a fair trial."

His comments came hours after a US government privacy watchdog panel said the NSA's indiscriminate collection of bulk phone records is illegal and has had minimal value in fighting terrorism.

Also Thursday, US Attorney General Eric Holder said he was unlikely to consider

clemency for Snowden. Holder told MSNBC television US authorities "would engage in conversation"

about a resolution of the case if Snowden accepted responsibility for leaking govern-

One in five women get raped in US

AGENCIES

Nearly 22 million women about one in five— have been raped in their lifetime in the US, with nearly half of the victims subjected to sexual assault before the age of 18, according to a report by the White House.

Though women of all the races have been targeted, however, women beolonging to some races are more vulnerable than the others, thr report added.

The report also said that about 33.5% of multiracial women have been raped, as have 27% of American-Indian and Alaska's native women, compared to the 15% of Hispanic, 22% of Black, and 19% of White women.

Most of the victims know their assailants and a vast majority (which is nearly 98%) of the perpetrators are male, according to the report released on Wednesday.

Nearly 22 million American women and 1.6 million men have been raped in their lifetime, it said.

The report was issued by the White House ahead of a cabinet-level meeting of the White House council which was chaired by President Obama on women and girls with the council representatives from each agency to examine the progress made and to renew a call to root out abuse wherever it exists. The report titled "Rape

and Sexual Assault: A Renewed Call to Action" outlined the facts surrounding rape and sexual assault and identified the key areas to focus on and improve including efforts towards changing social norms, improving criminal

justice response etc.

She was gang-raped on an open platform

TNN, Suri

Cops in West Bengal's Birbhum district on Thursday arrested 14 men, including a village headman who had ordered the gang-rape of a 20-year-old tribal woman for alleged sexual relations with a man from outside her community. As tempers flared across the state and another anti-Mamata Banerjee wave over rising gender crime swelled, the chief minister replaced the district police chief C Sudhakar with Darjeeling SP S N Gupta.

Even as the administration claimed it had acted promptly, more gruesome details emerged. Villagers told TOI on Thursday that after the kangaroo court ordered her to be sexually savaged, the woman was placed on a raised bamboo platform so that the gang-rape was viewed by the entire village, children included.

"If the family does not pay up, go and enjoy yourselves," is what headman and now prime accused Boloi Murdy allegedly told the men.



The woman's family alleged she and her lover, a man from a nearby village, were tied up in Murdy's courtyard, where the kangaroo court was held and handed down the punishment — a Rs 50,000 fine for the man and gang rape for the woman. Some villagers told TOI that the woman's cries rent the air all night but no one stepped forward to help her. Even her family, who lives 50 metres away, could not rescue her.

"Among those who raped her were teenagers and some old enough to be her father," said a villager, who was willing to depose to escape arrest. "Almost the entire village — including children — had joined the kangaroo court. All of them hailed it as the correct move," he said. The village, 60km from Shantiniketan, the cultural

and academic hub created by Rabindranath Tagore, is populated by adivasis and has no electricity or school.

Even on Thursday, a day after the gang-rape by up to 13 people, the village didn't show any hint of repentance. The women, in fact, barracked police, insisting the men had done nothing wrong and that the woman had to be punished. The villagers threatened to ostracize the woman's family for cooperating with the authorities. "We will never allow the woman and her family to return," cried out villagers.

surveillance programs. "Returning to the US, I think, is the best Survey predicts worst show by Congress in 2014 polls

TNN, New Delhi

Led by Narendra Modi, the BJP is all set to stage an impressive show in the Indian general election, while Congress is headed for its worst performance.

According to CNN-

IBN-Lokniti-CSDS National Election Tracker, NDA may win 211-231 seats in the Lok Sabha election, while Congress-led ruling United Progressive Alliance will be a distant AIADMK getting 15-23 seats.

second with 107-127 seats.

out of a total 543 Lok Sabha seats. The Congress is projected to get 92-108 seats.

Narendra Modi continues to be the top choice for the prime minister's post with the backing of 34 per cent respondents— much

LOK SABHA ELECTION

BJP-led NDA may win 211-231 seats

Congress-led UPA may get 107-127 seats

AAP may get 6-12 seats

Mamata-led TMC may

win 20-28 seats

cent for the PM's post.

ahead of Rahul Gandhi who had only 15 per cent support, according to the survey. Sonia Gandhi is

projected third on the PM ratings at 5 per cent. It shows AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal getting support of three per

Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress is projected to get 20-28 Lok Sabha seats. The survey shows Jayalalithaa's

Left is projected to get only 15-23 seats. The poll shows BJP alone getting 192-210 The survey gives 6-12 Lok Sabha seats to AAP. It also projects dismal show by Samajwadi Party and BSP.

According to it, Samajwadi Party is projected to get only 8-14 seats and BSP 10-16 seats.