

NEWS IN brief

Iran bears no hostility to West: Rohani

Iran has no intention of committing acts of aggression but retains the right to defend itself militarily, President Hassan Rohani said yesterday. Speaking at a parade to mark Army Day, Rohani delivered a peaceful message that referenced negotiations with leading powers aimed at securing a permanent deal to resolve a decade-long impasse over Tehran's nuclear programme.

Gulf states agree deal to end Qatar row

Gulf foreign ministers agreed a deal Thursday to end months of unprecedented tension between Qatar and other members of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council over the Muslim Brotherhood. At an extraordinary meeting in Riyadh, the ministers agreed that the policies of GCC member states should not undermine the "interests, security and stability" of each other, a statement said.

Dust storm kills at least 27 in UP

At least 27 persons were killed and more than 30 injured in a strong dust storm that lashed Uttar Pradesh, district officials said. The gusty wind, which was followed by showers, uprooted trees, electricity poles and hutments, causing severe damage to public and private property on Thursday evening.

Pakistan to hold fresh talks with Taliban

The Pakistani government is planning a fresh round of talks with Taliban negotiators at the weekend, officials said yesterday, despite the militants' refusal to extend a ceasefire called to help peace efforts. On Wednesday the militants said they would not extend the ceasefire they began on March 1 to help talks, complaining of a lack of movement from the government side. Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan said in a statement that he has called a meeting with the TTP's talks committee

ATTACK ON UN BASE Dozens killed in South Sudan

The United Nations yesterday said at least 58 people were killed and more than 100 others wounded in an attack against one of its bases in South Sudan sheltering thousands of civilians.

The top UN official in the war-torn nation, Toby Lanzer, praised peacekeepers from India, Nepal and South Korea for preventing what could have been a massacre of up to 5,000 people, and vowed the world body would use "lethal force" again to protect civilians under their protection.

"We will do everything necessary to protect the lives of people in our protection, including the use of lethal force," Lanzer told AFP.

In the clearest account yet of Thursday's incident in the government-controlled town of Bor, Lanzer described how a group of around 350 armed youths in civilian clothes "used extremely violent force to breach the perimeter" of the UN base.

He said they opened fire on terrified civilians, who have sought shelter with the UN from a wave of ethnic violence, with the apparent aim of killing as many people as possible.

"When we realised we were under attack we responded... the quick actions of the peacekeepers saved lives," Lanzer said.

"Forty-eight bodies, including children, women, men, have been recovered from inside the base. The bodies of 10 attackers have been found outside the base. The total death toll is 58, but that could increase as over 100 people were wounded, some of them very seriously," he said.

Lanzer said measures had been taken to boost security at other UN bases in the country, which are sheltering close to 60,000 people from different ethnic groups, and that the South Sudanese government was also being asked to ensure such attacks are not repeated.

He said South Sudan's conflict, which began on December 15 following a clash between army units loyal to President Salva Kiir and troops backing ousted vice president Riek Machar, had now descended into "a cycle of revenge".

The UN's aid agency UNOCHA said it was "particularly outraged by deliberate and targeted killings of civilians in hospitals, churches, UN peacekeeping bases and other places where people's rights should be sacrosanct".

Most of the civilians hiding in the UN base in Bor are thought to be ethnic Nuer, the same tribe of Machar, who now leads a rebel force comprised of ethnic militia and army defectors. During the week the rebels captured the town of Bentiu, a key oil hub in the north.

Kiir, an ethnic Dinka, still controls the capital and maintains the loyalty of a large part of the army. He is also backed by troops from neighbouring Uganda.

Ukraine separatists dig in despite deal

Kiev to receive US 'non-lethal' military aid

Pro-Russian rebels defiantly kept their grip on nearly a dozen towns in eastern Ukraine yesterday, refusing to abide by an international deal to ease tensions unless the Western-backed government in Kiev steps down first.

The refusal to budge came only hours after an unexpected diplomatic breakthrough Thursday worked out between Kiev, Moscow, Washington and Brussels following talks in Geneva to defuse the deepest East-West crisis since the Cold War.

If the hard-won agreement collapses -- as Western and Ukrainian leaders fear it might -- the United States has said it will quickly increase sanctions on Russia, which it holds responsible for supporting the separatists and stoking the crisis.

The surprise agreement hammered out in Geneva called for "all illegal armed groups" to disarm and leave seized state buildings and squares. In return they would benefit from an amnesty for actions over the past two weeks that brought Ukraine to the brink of civil war.

But in the main eastern city of Donetsk, where rebel gunmen wearing ski-masks still occupied a barricaded government building, there was defiance, with the Russian national anthem blared out through speakers. In nearby Slavyansk, insurgents remained defiant, holed up inside a seized police station with six armoured personnel carriers captured from the Ukrainian army on Wednesday still parked on the streets.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andriy Deshchysya suggested the authorities would hold off temporarily from any more military action on the ground to give the agreement time to take.

The Ukrainian government and many Western states strongly believe the occupations took place with the active support of elite Russian military units, allegations Moscow has denied.

Leaders also cautioned the deal could fail with US President Barack Obama, who has locked horns with Russian President Vladimir Putin over Ukraine's future, expressing doubts that Moscow will deliver.

Obama warned that if there was no progress in days, "additional consequences" would be imposed on Russia on top of sanctions the United States and European Union have already imposed on Putin's inner circle.

Meanwhile, US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel on Thursday said the United States will send helmets, medical supplies and other non-lethal military aid to Ukraine.

The aid includes medical supplies, helmets, sleeping mats and water purification units for Ukrainian troops, as well as shelters, small power generators and hand

Obama to save drowning Putin!



INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Barack Obama was complimented from an unlikely source yesterday, after Vladimir Putin described him during a TV interview as "a courageous and good person" -- who would save the Russian president if he were ever drowning.

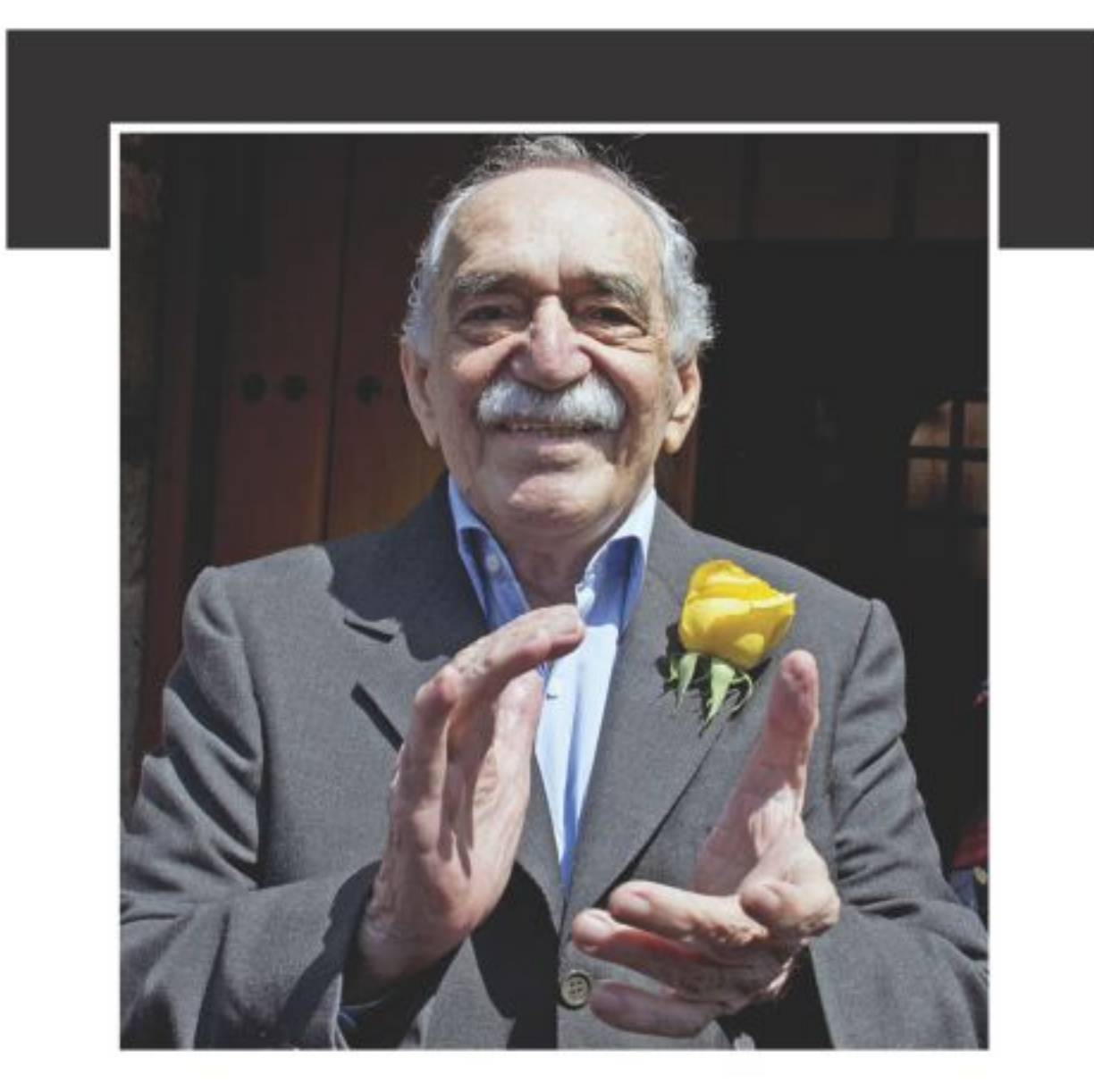
Putin told this when he was questioned if Obama would save him from drowning.

"I don't think I have close personal relationship with Obama", Putin admitted, before saying: "I think Obama is a courageous and good person and he would for sure save me."

His confidence doesn't quite match the state of international relations between the two powers as the situation in Ukraine continues to deteriorate.



FERRY TRAGEDY South Korean Navy's SSU members prepare to search for missing passengers near buoys installed to mark a capsized ferry at sea off Jindo, yesterday. Divers finally entered the South Korean ferry yesterday, two days after it sank, as investigators sought arrest warrants against the captain and two of his crew who abandoned the ferry while it was capsizing. The confirmed death toll of the tragedy stood at 28 while 268 people were still missing.



ADIOS MAESTRO

AFP, Mexico City

Tributes poured in yesterday for Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the Nobel-winning Colombian author whose "magical realism" told epic stories of love, family and dictatorship in Latin America.

He died Thursday at age 87.

Known affectionately as "Gabo," the author of "One Hundred Years of Solitude" and "Love in the Time of Cholera" was one of the world's most popular Latin American novelists and godfather of a literary movement that witnessed a continent in turmoil.

"One thousand years of solitude and sadness for the death of the greatest Colombian of all time," Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos tweeted. He later declared three days of national mourning.

"The world has lost one of its greatest visionary writers," US President Barack Obama said, while French President Francois Hollande paid tribute to "a literary giant" who was "one of the most influential South American intellectuals of our time."

"Gabriel Garcia Marquez was a voice of Latin America who became a voice of our world. His imagination has made us richer, and his passing away makes us poorer," said EU President Jose Manuel Barroso.

The cause of death was not revealed but Garcia Marquez had been hospitalized for pneumonia on March 31 and discharged a week later to recover at his Mexico City home.

His wife Mercedes and two sons were reportedly by his side at home when he died. The family said his body would be cremated, and officials announced a public tribute will be held in Mexico City Monday.

Born March 6, 1927, in the village of Aracataca on Colombia's Caribbean coast, Garcia Marquez was the son of a telegraph operator. He was raised by his grandparents and aunts in a tropical culture influenced by the heritage of Spanish settlers, indigenous populations and black slaves. The exotic legends of his homeland inspired him to write profusely.

School vice principal commits suicide

REUTERS, MOKPO/JINDO

The vice-principal of a South Korean high school who accompanied hundreds of pupils on a ferry that capsized has committed suicide, police said yesterday, as hopes faded of finding any of the 274 missing alive.

The Sewol, carrying 476 passengers and crew, capsized on Wednesday on a journey from the port of Incheon to the southern holiday island of Jeju.

Kang Min-gyu, 52, had been missing since Thursday. He appeared to have hanged himself with his belt from a tree outside a gym in the port city of Jindo where relatives of the people missing on the ship, mostly children from the school, were gathered.

Police said Kang did not leave a suicide note and that they had started looking for him after he was reported missing by a fellow teacher. He was rescued from the ferry after it capsized.

Twenty-eight people had been officially declared dead before Kang's suicide. One hundred and seventy-four were rescued. Most of the missing are students from the Danwon High School on the outskirts of Seoul, who were on a holiday trip. The government revised the total number of passengers and the number of people rescued, saying there had been further inaccuracies in tabulation, without elaborating.



Stop violence in Rakhine: US

AFP, United Nations

The US ambassador to the UN urged Myanmar on Thursday to intervene to stop communal violence there and protect humanitarian workers in the volatile western state of Rakhine.

Myanmar, formerly called Burma, has been shaken by religious unrest in recent years with at least 250 people killed in Buddhist-Muslim clashes since 2012.

Violence forced humanitarian workers to flee Rakhine earlier this month, leaving thousands facing looming food and water shortages.

"We continue to support Burma's reforms, but are greatly concerned that without effective government intervention violence in Rakhine could worsen, lives will be lost, and the critically needed humanitarian presence will not be sustainable," Samantha Power said.

"The government must take urgent steps to avoid more violence and to prevent setbacks on the journey to democracy and prosperity."

She spoke after the UN special adviser on Myanmar, Vijay Nambiar, updated the UN Security Council on the situation in the country's west.

Striking cops cause chaos in Brazil; 39 killed

AFP, Salvador

Troops patrolled the World Cup host city of Salvador on Thursday after a deadly orgy of violence triggered by a police strike less than two months before thousands of fans descend on the coastal Brazilian metropolis for the football extravaganza.

The cops are demanding a pay increase and career plan improvements.

Thirty-nine deaths and widespread looting of supermarkets, pharmacies and electronics stores were reported in a 48-hour crime wave, adding to concerns about Brazil's ability to deliver a safe World Cup.

State officials said Thursday police were back on duty after ending their industrial dispute, which got under way on Tuesday.

Two years ago, 157 people died in a wave of violence after Bahia police went on strike for 12 days.

The defense ministry said 2,500 soldiers had been mobilized while Rousseff also authorized the deployment of 250 national elite police officers, a figure that could be boosted to 5,000 men "until normal conditions are re-established," the ministry said prior to news the strike had ended.

LOK SABHA ELECTION 2014

US urges pro-business govt in New Delhi

REUTERS, Washington

The United States has urged the Indian government that emerges from ongoing elections to follow economic policies that encourage investment, saying Washington would like to see bilateral trade grow to \$500 billion a year.

Nisha Biswal, US assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asia, said future economic growth in South Asia hinged on India as the region's growth engine.

However, Biswal said that while Indian leaders had targeted \$1 trillion in infrastructure investment over five years to close gaps preventing growth in manufacturing, policies still inhibited foreign investment. She said India ranked a poor 134 out of 189 countries as a place to invest and start a business.

"India, the world's largest democracy, must decide its own path to the future," Biswal said in a speech at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

"Will it make the reforms necessary to attract investment? Will it capitalize on the opportunities that lie in front of it?"

"Those are the questions that India's voters are asking as they cast their ballots and those are the questions that we want to see answered," she said.

Growth in Asia's third-largest economy, has almost halved to below 5 percent in the past two years on weak investment and consumer demand, the worst slowdown since the 1980s.

Polls show the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the main opposition party, is on course to win most seats in the election that began on April 7.

Osama to contest against Modi!

IANS, Patna

Meraj Khalid Noor, popularly known as Bihar's Osama bin Laden due to his uncanny resemblance to the late al-Qaeda leader, yesterday announced that he would contest the Lok Sabha poll against BJP's prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi from Varanasi.

"I have decided to contest polls against Modi from Varanasi," said Noor, who is president of Ram India, a newly floated political outfit.

"After much thought I decided to fight against Modi," Noor told IANS.

Patna-based Noor was once the darling of Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader and former chief minister Lalu Prasad and the Lok Janshakti Party's (LJP) Ram Vilas Paswan to woo Muslim voters.

Noor is tall, well built and sports a long black beard. Like the now dead al-Qaeda chief, he is always seen in white robes and a turban to match. The al-Qaeda leader was gunned down by US commandos in his hideout in Pakistan in May 2011.

BRIEF ON INDIAN POLLS

FIR sought against Rahul, Priyanka

PTI, Amethi

AAP candidate Kumar Vishwas yesterday filed an application with police seeking registration of an FIR against Priyanka Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and some Congress workers in connection with an alleged threat by a party man. When asked about it, Vishwas said that on April 15 during Priyanka Gandhi's tour, a video of Congress worker Vinod Mishra had been "leaked" in which he allegedly said "Vishwas is talking against Rahul, I will shoot him." Vishwas alleged that instead of telling about it to the police, Priyanka called Mishra at the guest house. He said that he would also approach the Election Commission.

BJP will realise Gandhiji's dreams: Rajnath

PTI, Thane

BJP president Rajnath Singh said that his party would realise Mahatma Gandhi's dreams, something which the Congress could not do. Addressing a campaign meeting at Kalyan in the district on Thursday night, Rajnath said Gandhiji had called for dissolution of the Congress after independence, but Congress leaders did not heed his advice. BJP would fulfil the dreams of the father of the nation, he said, promising a corruption-free regime and several reforms.

Hotel room fire: Mamata sees conspiracy

THE HINDU ONLINE

Hinting at a conspiracy behind the fire mishap at her hotel room on Thursday, Trinamool Congress chairperson and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee yesterday said that she had a narrow escape as she could have died of suffocation. Addressing an election rally at Nalhati, in Birbhum district of the State, she said: "When I was in the washroom after returning from the election campaign, I found that the entire room was full of smoke. Fortunately, I had not bolted the door. Had I done so, I would not have been able to come out of the room," Mamata said of the fire from the air conditioner in her