

NEWSIN

brief

Sri Lanka police form religious hate crimes unit

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka police yesterday announced a new unit to investigate religious hate crimes after attacks by Buddhist monks on churches and mosques last year raised concerns about religious freedom.

Police Inspector-General N K Illangakoon said the new unit would swiftly investigate any complaint relating to "religious matters" on the majority Buddhist island amid rising tensions over the attacks.

Another east Ukraine town seized

AFP, Kostyantynivka

Heavily armed pro-Russian gunmen yesterday seized another town in east Ukraine, storming the town hall in Kostyantynivka and setting up barricades, an AFP journalist saw.

Some 20 militants armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles and wearing uniforms with no insignias took control of the town hall and hoisted the flag of the "Donetsk Republic". The gunmen also set up a perimeter around the adjoining police station.

MERS cases spike to 339 in Saudi Arabia

CNN ONLINE

The number of new cases of the Middle East respiratory symptom coronavirus spiked by 26 over the week-end, including 10 deaths, the Saudi Arabian Health Ministry said.

This brings the total number of known cases of MERS-CoV to 339 in Saudi Arabia, including 102 deaths, according to the ministry.

Gadhafi's son face charges from 2011 uprising

CNN ONLINE

The second son of former Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi appeared via a video link Sunday at his trial at a court in Tripoli, where he and dozens of former senior regime officials face charges for crimes they are accused of committing during the 2011 revolution.

Saif al-Islam Gadhafi, once his father's heir apparent, has been held in the western mountain city of Zintan by the militiamen who captured him in 2011.



Seoul condemns North Korea 'foul' slurs

BBC, ONLINE

South Korea has condemned North Korea's latest verbal attack on its president as "unspeakable", after it likened her to a prostitute.

In remarks on Sunday, North Korea called President Park Geun-hye a "comfort woman", referring to sex slaves during World War Two.

It accused her of pandering to her "pimp", US President Barack Obama, who visited Seoul last week.

North Korea state media have carried personal attacks on South Korean leaders on many occasions in the past, but the rhetoric directed at Park - the first female president - appears to be particularly vicious.

On yesterday, Seoul's Unification Ministry spokesman Kim Eui-do urged Pyongyang to abide by an earlier agreement to stop the rhetoric.

He said the North's continuing "to issue unspeakable curses and foul words is an immoral act".

Obama announces sanctions on Russia

AFP, Kostyantynivka

The United States moved to impose fresh sanctions against Russia yesterday over the crisis in Ukraine, as pro-Kremlin gunmen seized another town in the east, further escalating tensions.

Speaking in the Philippines, US President Barack Obama said the sanctions would include export restrictions on high-tech defence goods in a bid to ratchet up pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin, blamed for the worst East-West crisis since the Cold War.

Top EU officials were also meeting in Brussels to step up European sanctions on Russia as part of a coordinated global effort against Moscow.

On the ground in eastern Ukraine, tensions spiked further as gunmen stormed the town hall and police offices in Kostyantynivka, the latest in a string of insurgent assaults on towns in the region.

In the flashpoint town of Slavyansk, rebels refused to release a group of international monitors from the OSCE after presenting them to the media as "prisoners of war" in what Germany said was a "repugnant" display.

Meanwhile, the threat of a full-scale invasion loomed large over the ex-Soviet country, with tens of thousands of Russian troops massed on the border and Ukraine's prime minister warning of efforts to start a "third world war".

On the last leg of a four-country Asia tour, Obama announced new steps to punish Russia for what the president has called "provocation" on Ukraine's border, where



Moscow has conducted military operations.

He said Washington would unveil a list of "individuals and companies" that will be sanctioned to build pressure on Putin and Russia's recession-hit economy.

He added the measures would also focus on "high-tech defence exports to Russia" that he said were not appropriate given the parlous climate between Moscow and the West.

The sanctions are in response to Russia's perceived lack of action to implement an April 17 accord struck in Geneva to defuse the crisis. Obama has said Moscow has not "lifted a finger" to enact the deal.

The goal was not to "go after Mr Putin personally", Obama said but to "change his calculus" and "encourage him to walk the walk and not just talk the talk" in resolving the crisis diplomatically.

The Group of Seven top economies has vowed swift joint action and EU diplomats were expected to expand the bloc's sanctions against Moscow at a meeting later yesterday.

The West has already imposed visa and travel restrictions on key members of Putin's inner circle and slapped sanctions on a top bank.

But some fear that undermining Russia's economy could tip the world back into recession, just as it begins to recover from the eurozone debt crisis.

Reflecting these jitters, stocks in Japan closed nearly one percent lower and the yen -- seen as a safe haven against uncertainty -- gained in value.



TAIWAN ANTI-NUCLEAR PROTESTS

A police officer sprays a fire extinguisher over cooking oil covering the road outside Taipei Railway Station after anti-nuclear demonstrators were removed from the area in Taipei yesterday. Taiwan police used water cannon to dislodge hundreds of overnight sit-in demonstrators, demanding the scrapping of a nearly completed nuclear power plant, one of the most controversial issues to have gripped the island for 30 years.

PHOTO: AFP

CHINA'S JAILING OF ILHAM TOHTI

Rushdie joins writers' protest

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

As tensions continue in China's north-western area of Xinjiang, writers including Paul Auster, Jennifer Egan, Siri Hustvedt and Salman Rushdie have written to the Guardian urging the Chinese president to release the Uighur writer and scholar Ilham Tohti.

Tohti, who founded the website Uighur Online in 2005 to promote dialogue in the ethnically divided region, was seized at his Beijing home by more than 30 police officers in January, disappearing for a month before being charged with "separatism" -- a charge which leaves him facing life imprisonment or even the death penalty if convicted.

The letter argues that Tohti's fate will have "profound implications for China's future".

"Mr Tohti founded Uighur Online with the express purpose of promoting understanding between Uighurs and Han Chinese, and he has never advocated violence or promoted a political agenda," the letter continues. "Instead, his website has served as a critically important counterpoint to the aggressive measures your administration has imposed against the Uighur people in the name of stability."

Xinjiang's budget for anti-terrorism operations has doubled in 2014, raising concerns of increased repression as the region steps up operations which the government describes as a battle against terrorism and religious extremism.

Tohti, who has been refused access to his lawyer, teaches economics at the Central University for Nationalities in Beijing and has spoken out on Uighur issues for many years.

Tohti is one of about 35 writers currently imprisoned in China, including the 2010 Nobel peace laureate, Liu Xiaobo. The number of authors in detention has remained roughly constant since the Beijing Olympics in 2008, while surveillance and harassment have steadily increased.



Obama seeks to soothe China

While boosting ties with Philippines

AFP, Manila

President Barack Obama said yesterday he had no desire to contain or counter China despite clinching a defence pact with the Philippines which will inject US forces close to the volatile South China Sea.

In the Philippines on the final leg of an Asian tour, Obama directly addressed leaders in Beijing, telling them that maritime territorial disputes needed to be addressed peacefully, not with "intimidation or coercion."

China's claims to various islands, reefs and atolls in the South and East China Sea have been a constant theme of Obama's tour of countries which fear being squeezed by the giant nation's emergence as a regional superpower.

SOUTH KOREA FERRY PROBE

3 arrested, accused of destroying evidence

CNN ONLINE

The scope of wrongdoing in the South Korean ferry sinking may extend far beyond the ship's crew, as prosecutors now believe evidence has been destroyed and that officials from an emergency call center and a local Coast Guard office may have failed to do their jobs.

Three members of the Korea Shipping Association's Incheon office were arrested on suspicion of destroying evidence connected to the ferry investigation, Incheon's chief prosecutor said yesterday.

The office's director was among those arrested and accused of destroying evidence related to the probe of Chonghaejin, the company that owns the ferry, prosecutor Song In-taek said.

Korea Shipping Association is a trade group that promotes the interests of the country's shipping industry.

And another prosecutor's office has issued search warrants for both the South Jeolla province emergency service operations center and the Coast Guard in Mokpo for alleged dereliction of duty, said Yang Joong-jin, the chief prosecutor in Mokpo.

The South Jeolla emergency center provides 119 service, which is akin to 911 emergency service in the United States.

The arrests and search warrants follow a spate of detentions after the ferry disaster on April 16. At least 189 bodies have been found, and 113 people are still missing from the sinking off the southwest coast of South Korea.

LOK SABHA POLLS 2014

'Clinching evidence' to arrest Modi in Ishrat case

PTI, Ahmedabad

Union minister Kapil Sibal raked up alleged fake encounter of Ishrat Jahan yesterday to hit out at Narendra Modi saying the BJP's PM nominee and Amit Shah were being "shielded" despite existence of "clinching" evidence to arrest them.

"I want to ask who is shielding Modi and Shah when, according lawyers like us, there is clinching evidence to arrest them in the case of fake encounter of Ishrat Jahan and three others," Sibal told reporters here.

Joining Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, party vice-president Rahul Gandhi and other leaders in attacking Modi's development model, Sibal said, "... Many models are being talked about in the country now, but this is an encounter model of Gujarat."

Elaborating about "clinching evidence" Sibal said, "There are call records of talk between accused police officer DG Vanzara and the then minister of state for Home Amit

Shah at the time of encounter and before the encounter that took place on June 15, 2004.

"There are statements of police officers under CrPC 164 pointing fingers at them," the minister said.

Quoting from resignation letter of Vanzara, Sibal said, "Vanzara has said that 'being field officers, they have simply implemented the conscious policy of this government.'"

"Clearly, all this could not have happened without Modi's knowledge," he alleged.

Responding to a query that whether the CBI which works under the Central government is protecting Modi and Shah from arrest, Sibal said, "CBI is not working under the Central government".

CBI, investigating the alleged fake encounter of Ishrat Jahan and three others, has not included any political leaders in chargesheets filed by it but has charged police and IB officers for murder and criminal conspiracy among other things.

Priyanka lowered politics : Jaitley

PTI, New Delhi

Attacking Priyanka Gandhi for her remarks comparing the BJP leaders to "panic-stricken rats", Arun Jaitley yesterday said she has "lowered the political discourse" with her language and the Vadra family needs to be "scared of the law".

"She has compared the BJP to 'panic-stricken rats'... Mrs Vadra has lowered the quality of political discourse by her comments... If any of my family members started referring to my opponents as rats and reptiles I surely will be a worried man," the BJP leader wrote on his blog.

The war of words between the BJP leaders and Priyanka Gandhi started on Sunday when she on Sunday said that the BJP was "baffled and running around like rats... I am not afraid of anyone and will continue to speak against their negative, destructive and shameful politics," after it released a video showing alleged wrongdoings in land deals involving her husband Robert Vadra.

On her remarks that she was not afraid of anyone, Jaitley said, "The Vadras are right that they need not be scared of anyone. They should only be scared of the law."



Sonia insulted Dalits, not me: Ramdev

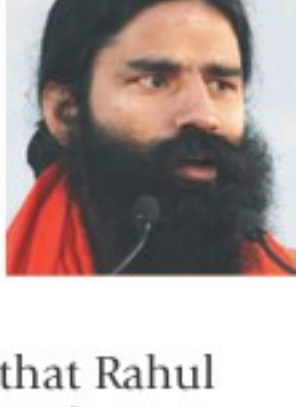
NDTV ONLINE

Yoga guru Ramdev, who has been banned from campaigning in Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, yesterday said it is Sonia Gandhi who has insulted Dalits, not him.

Baba Ramdev, as he is known, has been censured by the Election Commission for "malicious" recent remarks on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. The powerful commission said the comments amounted to an "attack on personal life" and were offensive and designed to create "disharmony among different classes or groups of people."

Ramdev, 43, had said at a rally in Lucknow last week that Rahul visits the homes of Dalits for "a honeymoon" and to "picnic." Those remarks have been derided by a series of parties as anti-Dalit; the BJP, for whom Ramdev has been campaigning, has said the comments were misunderstood.

Rahul's charges of crony capitalism are meant to repudiate the BJP's strong emphasis on Modi's economic development of Gujarat as proof of his ability to serve as a strong leader who will revive India's sluggish economy and create jobs.



17 killed in US tornadoes

BBC ONLINE

At least 17 people have been killed by tornadoes as a huge storm system swept across the central and southern United States.

Sixteen of the victims were in several suburbs of Little Rock in Arkansas, officials said.

One other person was killed in the town of Quapaw in the north-east of Oklahoma where officials said many buildings were badly damaged.

Tornadoes also struck in Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa and Missouri.

Most of the casualties were in suburbs west and north of Little Rock. The Arkansas Department of Emergency Management said 10 people died in Faulkner County, five in Pulaski County and one in White County.

Mayflower and Vilonia, two small towns in Faulkner County, appear to have borne the brunt of the damage. In Vilonia, the County Sheriff's office spoke of a "mass casualty situation".

The Arkansas tornado touched down about 16km west of the city of Little Rock and left a 65km path of destruction.

Congressman Tim Griffin told Reuters news agency an "entire neighbourhood of 50 homes or so" in Faulkner County had been destroyed, with many "completely gone except the foundation".

Many homes and businesses, including a new secondary school worth USD 14m, were left in ruins in Vilonia after the storm.

First reports from Oklahoma said two people had died in Quapaw but officials later revised the figure down to one. Another six people were injured.

Quapaw, which has a population of about 900, was badly hit by the tornado, Ottawa County Emergency Management director Joe Dan Morgan said.

The tornado then headed northwards into the state of Kansas where it struck Baxter Springs, injuring several people and causing further damage.

Over the weekend, storms struck the eastern part of the US, killing a child in North Carolina.

BRIEF ON INDIAN POLLS

Modi's hands 'dripping with blood': Trinamool

NDTV ONLINE

A day after it declared Narendra Modi "the butcher of Gujarat," Mamata Banerjee's party said that it is Modi who owes an apology.

"He has said that a painting by Mamata Banerjee sold for 1.86 crore. He has to apologise for that," said Mukul Roy, a top leader of the Trinamool Congress. "He (Modi) violated all decency while speaking at a rally," Mr Roy added.

Mamata's party reacted to Modi's comment with a strong statement that labelled him "the butcher of Gujarat", referring to the riots in 2002 in which more than a thousand people were killed in communal violence in Modi's home state. A Supreme Court inquiry has said there is no evidence that Modi, as chief minister, fuelled the riots. A court in Gujarat has upheld that report.

'Where did Congress get this specimen?': Modi on Rahul:

NDTV ONLINE

In an escalation of war of words, Narendra Modi yesterday dubbed Rahul Gandhi a "specimen" who has "little knowledge" of Gujarat and the Congress vice president hit back accusing him and BJP of adopting "double standards" on corruption and favouring select industrialists.

Modi lampooned Rahul for dishing out "falsehoods" in his speeches about vast job vacancies and the institution of the Lokayukta in his state. He also alleged that the Congress has so far sent 100 emissaries to his home town of Vadnagar to find out if he ever used to sell tea or not.