

HUNT FOR NIGERIA GIRLS

UN blacklists Boko Haram

Imposes sanctions

The United Nations imposed sanctions on Boko Haram Thursday, blacklisting it as an al-Qaeda-linked terrorist organization...

US Ambassador Samantha Power hailed the sanctions as "an important step" to support Nigeria in defeating "Boko Haram and hold its murderous leadership accountable for atrocities."

In the Nigerian capital Abuja, about 200 protesters called on President Goodluck Jonathan to do more to recover more than 200 girls kidnapped from a school by Boko Haram on April 14.

The mass abduction has triggered worldwide outrage.

The United States announced Wednesday that 80 military personnel had been deployed to Chad to help find the 223 missing girls.

The deployment marks a significant boost to an existing US military effort, which includes the use of unarmed surveillance drones, as well as manned aircraft over Nigeria.

The general behind the coup

AFP, Bangkok

The Thai general who took power in a coup is a staunch royalist with a penchant for wading ruthlessly into the country's political turmoil -- and justifying his actions as a defence of the nation and its revered monarchy.

Stern, pugnacious and known for bluntly stating his opinions, the 60-year-old army chief Prayut Chan-O-Cha was due to retire this September from an office he has held since 2010.

But as he imposed martial law across the kingdom on Tuesday, he hinted at his intention to occupy centre-stage for as long as the nation's political crisis persisted.

The warning took on substance just two days later after talks between the nation's bitter political rivals ended in Prayut declaring a dramatic coup -- with all of the parties whisked away to an unknown location in military trucks.

Prayut, who announced the coup in a televised statement, cited political violence which has seen 28 people killed and hundreds more wounded over nearly seven months of protest.

He had said he would not allow Thailand to become another "Ukraine or Egypt".

Thailand's army has staged 19 successful or attempted coups since 1932 and as army chief Prayut wields enormous political power within the country.

The general is seen as a staunch opponent of Thaksin Shinawatra and a scourge of the "Red Shirt" supporters of the self-exiled former telecoms magnate, who was

ousted as prime minister by a military coup in 2006 that triggered years of political chaos.

Experts say Prayut will be lauded as a saviour by royalists and Thaksin's establishment enemies.

After taking power, Prayut insisted the coup was his "responsibility" alone despite speculation of the involvement of other behind-the-scenes players.

Traditionally coups in Thailand are made with the approval of the royal palace, experts say, although it is unclear if that is the case in the current overthrow.

Born on March 21, 1954, in northeastern Thailand's Nakhon Ratchasima province -- the "Red Shirt" heartland, ironically -- Prayut rose from military college to become commander of the Queen's Guards in 1980.

He is seen as close and intensely loyal to Queen Sirikit, who has gradually receded from the public eye in recent years following illness.

Prayut is often described as the architect of a May 2010 army crackdown on a months-long Red Shirt rally in Bangkok. The crackdown left scores dead.

"He would have no qualms about shooting down Red Shirts" again, said Paul Chambers, director of research at the Institute of Southeast Asian Affairs at Chiang Mai University.

Prayut also supported the coup to depose Thaksin in 2006, according to a US diplomatic note released by the Wikileaks website, an act which saw Thailand tumble into an eight-year political quagmire from which it is yet to emerge.



Thailand power transfers

- 2001 Thai Rak Thai party wins vote. Thaksin Shinawatra forms coalition government
2005 Thaksin begins new term after second election victory
2006 Thaksin ousted in a bloodless coup. More than a year of military rule follows
2007 People Power Party, comprising Thaksin's allies, wins elections and forms coalition government
2008 PM Samak Sundaravej stripped of powers by Constitutional Court. Thaksin's brother-in-law Somchai Wongsawat takes his place
2008 Constitutional Court dissolves Somchai's party forcing him from office. Abhisit Vejjajiva becomes premier in army-backed coalition
2011 Thaksin allies sweep to power in elections on wave of Red Shirt support. Parliament in August elects Thaksin's sister Yingluck Shinawatra as PM
2014 Constitutional Court dismisses Yingluck and nine ministers from office for abuse of power
2014 Army chief Prayut Chan-O-Cha seizes power in a military coup



Thai soldier on patrol in Bangkok, May 22



Anti-coup activists hold signs as they gather in a protest in downtown Bangkok yesterday. Thailand's new military junta summoned the kingdom's ousted government leaders yesterday and banned them from leaving the country, following a coup that has provoked an international outcry.

PHOTO: AFP

Accept Modi's invite

Pak foreign office urges Sharif

IANS, Islamabad

The Pakistan foreign office has urged Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to attend the oath taking ceremony of India's new Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday, according to media reports yesterday.

But the government is yet to take a decision on whether or not Sharif should travel to New Delhi, Dawn online reported.

"The foreign office has made the recommendation and the decision will most likely be in (its) favour," a foreign office official said.

The leader of the opposition in the National Assembly, Khurshid Ahmed Shah, also urged Sharif to accept the invitation in the larger interest of the people of the two countries.

Foreign office spokesperson Tasneem Aslam said on Thursday that the bitterness towards Pakistan shown during the election campaign in India would subside after the formation of a new government in New Delhi.

"We hope that when the new government takes over, the kind of atmosphere that prevailed during the election rallies will be left behind and we will get down to the business of statecraft," Aslam said.

Modi has invited leaders of SAARC countries to his oath taking ceremony.

Putin vows to respect Ukraine vote results

Says US's 'unipolar world' has failed; fresh violence kills 7

AFP, Saint Petersburg

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday pledged to respect the outcome of Ukraine's presidential election but warned that the country had descended into all-out civil war after a bloody upsurge in separatist violence.

At least seven people were killed in fighting between rebels and defence forces outside the eastern industrial hub of Donetsk yesterday, a day after the deaths of 18 soldiers in the heaviest loss for the Ukraine military since the conflict began.

Interim President Oleksandr Turchynov called on voters to turn out in force tomorrow to prevent Ukraine "being turned into a part of a post-Soviet empire" by a weeks-long insurgency that Kiev and the West say is being orchestrated by Russia.

And Putin said he would "respect the choice of Ukrainian people".

"We are today working with those people who control the government and after the election we will of course work with the newly elected authorities," he said.

But he also accused the United States of choreographing a "coup" in February against a Kremlin-backed leader who upset the West by ditching a



closer alliance with Europe and seeking Moscow's economic help instead.

The West has threatened Russia with painful sanctions against entire sectors of its troubled economy should it be deemed to have disrupted an election that is almost certain to bring a new pro-Western leader to power.

Putin also said that sanctions imposed on Russian officials over the Ukraine crisis would backfire on Western countries.

"In the modern, interconnected world, economic sanctions as an instrument of political pressure can have a boomerang effect, and in the end they have an impact on the businesses and economies of the countries that initiated them," Putin told an economic forum in Saint Petersburg.

He also lashed out at the global influence of the United States.

"The model of a unipolar world has failed. Everyone can easily see it today, even those who try to act in the usual manner, to keep their monopoly, to dictate their rules of the game in politics, commerce and finance, to impose their cultural and behavioural norms," he said.

"The world is multipolar, people want to decide their own destinies, preserve their cultural and historical identities and civilisations," Putin said.

'Grateful to Modi for accepting me as wife'

PTI, Ahmedabad

As Narendra Modi gets ready to take oath as prime minister, his wife Jashodaben said she is extremely happy over his ascent to the top post and that he accepted her for the first time as his spouse.

"It is a matter of extreme happiness for me. I am so proud being his wife. I will pray to the God that he keeps surging ahead," Jashodaben said in an interview to Gujarati Channel 'TV9', aired on Wednesday.

She also expressed gratitude to Modi as he "accepted" her as his wife in the nomination papers filed for Lok Sabha election this time.

"He (Modi) for the first time accepted me as his wife when he filed the form in Vadodara in 2014. As after so many years, he accepted me as his wife, I feel good... I am his wife and will always remain his wife," she said.

Modi's first-time acknowledgement of his married status had sparked off a row during the campaign.

Asked if she would attend the swearing-in ceremony, she said, "I will attend if I am invited, why should not I."

Jashodaben is a retired schoolteacher. Modi, who was married to her when both were minor, left home and the family when he was a youngster and later joined RSS.



'US eager to engage with Modi'

TNN, Washington

US President Barack Obama and secretary of state John Kerry look forward to engaging with the new BJP government at the earliest, including welcoming India's prime minister-designate Narendra Modi to Washington, a senior US administration official reiterated on Thursday, implicitly acknowledging that the massive mandate the Indian electorate has given to the putative PM has effectively overturned the visa ban Washington had imposed on him.

"We recognize the Indian electorate has weighed in with a resounding mandate for Prime Minister Modi and we want to work with him for advancing his goals for India as a regional and global player," Nisha Desai Biswal, the US assistant secretary of state for south central Asia and the administration's pointperson for the region, told correspondents while reviewing the latest developments in India.

"The president stated definitely that we will be welcoming Prime Minister Modi. We, like rest of the world, have seen a remarkable election and a remarkable transition... the mandate the Indian electorate put forward is one that we strongly support and we stand ready to engage and assist when the new government is ready," Desai-Biswal said in a chastened elaboration of a swift turnaround in Washington DC, where Modi has been persona non grata for almost a decade for his alleged inaction or complicity in not containing the 2002 riots in Gujarat.

CONGRESS'S POLL DEBACLE Call for Priyanka grows stronger

PTI, New Delhi

Against the backdrop of debacle in the Indian Lok Sabha election, voices for bringing Priyanka Gandhi to the forefront if politics grew stronger within the Congress party with at least two leaders saying she is a "big fighter" and has the "natural ability" to connect with people.

Outgoing food minister KV Thomas said there should be internal party elections in the Congress right from the booth-level.

"As a Congressman, we wish that Priyanka Gandhi should come to the main arena. She should work with mother Sonia Gandhi and brother Rahul Gandhi as a team," Thomas told PTI.

"Priyanka is a big fighter. We have seen that in this election. Many people see madam Indira Gandhi in her. She is able to attract the people," said Thomas, who won the Lok Sabha election from Ernakulam constituency in Kerala.

He was asked about the reasons for defeat of the Congress party in the just-concluded general elections and steps needed to be taken for revival of the party.

He insisted that Rahul should not be blamed for the debacle, saying "We work as a team. So team has to share victory as well as defeat".

On the reasons for defeat, he said, "What went wrong, we have to analyse that. UPA I and II have taken number of initiatives like Right to Food and MNREGA. Economy has also improved. But we could not convey our achievements to people."

On the other hand, the Congress leader said, Modi was an "one-man army" who got backing of RSS and corporate houses. "We respect the verdict of the people. Let him (Narendra Modi) do the good job. We will play the role of a healthy and constructive opposition".

Raju, outgoing HRD minister, said Priyanka has always been supportive of Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi. "Whether she will come to the forefront is a personal choice... I think she has a natural ability to connect with the people... It is indeed a strength," Raju said, adding her association with Congress is "integral".

Congress party has always maintained that Priyanka's role was limited to Amethi and Rae Bareilly in this election.



Nice catch!

AFP, Beijing

Dramatic images of two Chinese men catching a young child after he fell from a second storey window were released yesterday by Chinese state media.

A man walking past a building during a thunderstorm in the southern province of Guangdong spotted a baby who had climbed dangerously onto the window sill, provincial broadcaster Guangdong TV said.

In the video footage shows, he was joined by another bystander, and both threw up their arms in anticipation of the child's fall.

Finally the infant tumbled down into the pair's arms.

Some reports on the incident Sunday have said he was a one-year-old looking for his mother.

The video has created a storm on social media worldwide, with thousands posting comments.



SECOND VERDICT OF ICC Congolese warlord gets 12 years

AFP, The Hague

The International Criminal Court yesterday sentenced Congolese warlord Germain "Simba" Katanga to 12 years in jail for arming an ethnic militia that carried out a "particularly cruel" 2003 village massacre.

"The chamber sentences Germain Katanga to 12 years in prison," presiding Judge Bruno Cotte told the Hague-based court in its second sentencing since opening in 2003.

The almost seven years that Katanga has already spend in detention will be deducted from the sentence, he said.

Katanga, 36, was convicted in March of war crimes and crimes against humanity including murder and pillaging for his role in the attack on Bogoro village in the volatile eastern Democratic Republic of Congo on February 24, 2003. More than 200 people were killed in the attack.

The man once known as "Simba" (lion), showed no emotion as the judge read the sentence.

The ICC however cleared Katanga of charges of rape, sexual slavery and using child soldiers. Katanga's lawyers have appealed his conviction and now have another 30 days to appeal his sentence.

The Hague-based ICC, the world's only permanent independent tribunal to try the world's worst crimes, has so far only convicted one other suspect. Katanga's arch-enemy and former Congolese rebel fighter Lubanga was sentenced in 2012 to 14 years for recruiting and enlisting child soldiers.

