

PAPAL 'DIPLOMACY' IN MIDEAST Pope invites Peres, Abbas to Vatican to pray for peace

AGENCIES
Pope Francis yesterday invited Israeli President Shimon Peres and his Palestinian counterpart Mahmud Abbas to his home in the Vatican for a "heartfelt prayer" for peace.

"I wish to invite you, president Mahmud Abbas, together with President Shimon Peres, to join me in heartfelt prayer to God for the gift of peace," he said at the end of an open-air mass in Manger Square in the West Bank town of Bethlehem.

"I offer my home in the Vatican as a place for this encounter of prayer," he said.
"Building peace is difficult, but living without peace is a constant torment. The men and women of these lands, and of the entire world, all of them, ask us to bring before God their fervent hopes for peace."

As Francis entered the square to conduct the mass outside the Basilica of the Nativity, he was welcomed by 10,000 cheering pilgrims, who waved flags and sang hymns and carols as he drove up in a white open jeep.

Earlier, he urged an end to the "increasingly unacceptable" Israeli-Palestinian conflict, calling on leaders to show "courage" to achieve a peace based on a two-state solution.

Last month, US-led peace talks between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators collapsed in bitter recriminations. That ended a nine-month bid to reach a solution and left no political initiative on the horizon.

The Pope's spokesman, Federico Lombardi, told the BBC the move was papal peace initiative and believed to be the first of its kind.

Pope Francis has insisted the purpose of his Middle East trip is purely religious, but his first speech on his arrival in Bethlehem showed he is also willing to address pressing political issues, correspondents say.

On his way to Bethlehem, he stopped to pray at an 8m concrete wall that is part of the barrier Israel is building in and around the West Bank.

The Pope rested his head against the wall - which Israel says is needed for security, but the Palestinians see as a land grab - near graffiti reading: "Free Palestine."

Palestinian officials have noted that Pope Francis is the first pontiff to travel directly to the West Bank rather than enter via Israel. Many Palestinians see that as a recognition of their push for full statehood.



PHOTO: AP
A woman screams as she joins other protesters against military rule as they confront soldiers and police at Bangkok's shopping district, yesterday. Inset, angry anti-coup protesters confront military in the capital.

'Chocolate king' wins election

AFP, Kiev

Chocolate baron Petro Poroshenko yesterday claimed victory in Ukraine's presidential election, vowing to bring peace after months of turmoil and a pro-Russian insurgency that thwarted voting across much of the separatist east.

The 48-year-old self-made billionaire, who exit polls said had won almost 56 percent of the vote, swiftly declared that he would work to bring peace to Ukraine.

"My first decisive step will be aimed at ending the war, ending chaos, and bringing peace to a united and free Ukraine," he said at a press conference in Kiev.

"I am certain that our decisive actions will bring fairly quick results," he added.

"The presidential election showed that Ukrainians have chosen the path of European integration," Poroshenko said.

The results put him far ahead of his nearest rival Yulia Tymoshenko, the former prime minister who spearheaded the 2004 pro-democracy Orange Revolution.

If confirmed by election officials, the results will avoid the need for a June 15 runoff that would have extended political uncertainty at the most painful moment in Ukraine's 23-year-old post-Soviet history.

Ukrainians had voted en masse in the capital Kiev and the west of the country but the insurgency thwarted voting across most of the separatist east.

The election marked the culmination of a revolution that erupted last November, forced a pro-Russian president to flee in February and spiralled into an existential crisis when Moscow responded by declaring its right to invade Ukraine.

The pro-Moscow separatists have proclaimed independent "people's republics" in the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk and blocked voting there as that would imply they were still part of Ukraine. Nor was any vote held in Crimea, which Russia annexed in March after the overthrow of President Viktor Yanukovich.



The insurgency in the Russian-speaking eastern rust belt -- home to seven of Ukraine's 46 million people and most of its heavy industry -- has claimed more than 150 lives and unleashed the worst chill in East-West relations since the height of the Cold War.

Turnout was strong in Ukrainian speaking areas of the country but was down to a trickle in eastern cities such as Donetsk where masked gunmen in green fatigues patrolled the streets and thwarted voting in many areas.

Putin, who branded eastern Ukraine "New Russia" last month, has made more accommodating noises of late, saying on Saturday he would respect the voters' will. He has announced the pullback of tens of thousands of Russian troops massed on the border.

HC gets probe

FROM PAGE 16
Nurul and Manoj were transferred after the killing of seven people, including Narayanjanj panel mayor Nazrul Islam, as the victims' families and local people brought allegations against the duo that they had condoned crimes committed by Nur Hossain, the prime accused in the murder case.

On April 27, Nazrul along with his four aides and senior lawyer Chandan Sarker with his driver were kidnapped in broad daylight after they left the court area by two cars.

Six bodies, including those of Nazrul and Chandan, were found floating in the Shitalakshya river on April 30 while another was found the following day.

Meanwhile, ex-Rapid Action Battalion official Lt Commander SM Masud Rana was shown arrested yesterday in the case.

Narayanjanj Senior Judicial Magistrate KM Mohiuddin remanded him for eight days, reports our district correspondent.

Earlier, Lt Col (ret'd) Tareque Saeed Mohammad, son-in-law of Disaster Management and Relief Minister Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, and Maj (ret'd) Arif Hossain were remanded in the case.

On May 6, the three Rab officials were forced into retirement following allegations by Nazrul's father-in-law Shahidul Islam that Rab men had killed Nazrul in exchange for Tk 6 crore. They were arrested later in line with a High Court order.

Nazrul Mancha

Meanwhile, the families of five of the victims with the help of locals formed Shaheed Nazrul Parishad Mancha, a platform, to turn the public outcry into a movement for justice.

"The investigation is losing pace. No one of the criminals has been held; soon people will forget about it. So we have formed the platform to keep up the agitation," said Nazrul's brother Abdus Salam.

CONGRESS'S POLLS DEBACLE

Failed to gauge public mood, admits Sonia

THE HINDU ONLINE

The Congress failed to gauge the public anger against it, party president Sonia Gandhi admitted at a meeting of party MPs from both Houses of Parliament that re-elected her chairperson of the Parliamentary Party on Saturday.

There was no word on who would be the leaders and deputy leaders of the party in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, but party sources said Sonia is likely to lead the party in the lower House.

With only 44 members -- down from 206 in 2009 -- the Congress presence in the 16th Lok Sabha is the lowest ever.

Several party leaders, in moves widely construed as oblique attacks on the top leaders, have blamed their advisers for the party's dismal show.

Even as voices of dissent have been growing over the past few days, the Parliamentary Party passed a resolution that paid a tribute

to Sonia and vice-president Rahul Gandhi "for their indefatigable election campaigns across the country."

The CPP resolution also expressed the hope "that all progressive and secular forces in Parliament will coordinate their strategies effectively so as to present a united and cohesive Opposition which is the lifeblood of any democracy," offering cooperation to like-minded parties in this regard.

With the Congress not even winning 10 per cent of the seats in the Lok Sabha, the party may not be entitled to the Leader of Opposition post, unless the new Speaker is willing to recognise the pre-poll alliance of the United Progressive Alliance as a single unit, party sources said.

In her speech at the meeting, Sonia said: "The Congress has lost this time but this is not the first time; we have earlier also come back after losses ... We all should sit together and fight together."



I will punish you all

Rejected by girls, the killer vowed to kill them all

AGENCIES

Clusters of candles and flowers appeared overnight Saturday to Sunday on the streets of the California town where a Hollywood director's disturbed son killed six people and then himself.

The mementos, along with makeshift signs, were placed at the spots where the gunman -- identified as Elliot Rodger, 22 -- shot and killed three people late Friday in the town of Isla Vista, outside the University of California at Santa Barbara.

Rodger "repeatedly stabbed" three male victims at his apartment before going on the shooting rampage that wounded 13 others, Santa Barbara County Sheriff Bill Brown said at a press conference. By the end of his rampage, six victims were dead. Rodger died of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Rodger's father is Peter Rodger, an assistant director of the 2012 Hollywood blockbuster, "The Hunger Games". Lawyer Alan Shifman, speaking for the Rodger family, said Elliot Rodger had been

diagnosed as being a "highly functional Asperger's Syndrome child" and was being treated by "multiple" professionals.

Rodger left tortuous manifestos in print and videos posted online explaining his motive.

In a nearly seven-minute long YouTube rant titled "Elliot Rodger's Retribution," the shooter, sitting in a car, complains about women who rejected and ignored him, and vowed to "punish you all for it".

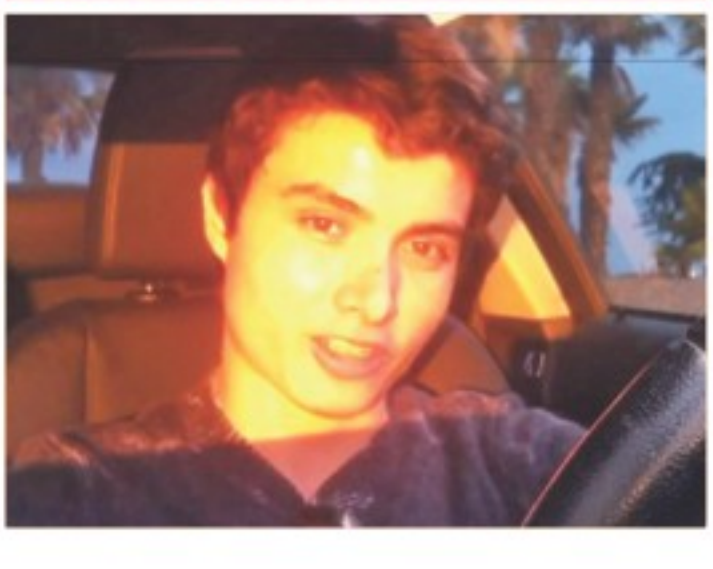
Elliot Rodger's difficulties with women were so devastating to him that he vowed to kill anyone he couldn't win over.

"I'm 22 years old and I'm still a virgin. I've never even kissed a girl," he says.

Rodger speaks of his life of "loneliness, rejection and unfulfilled desires".

"I don't know why you girls aren't attracted to me," he asks, "but I will punish you all for it."

US GUN VIOLENCE



MODI'S SWEARING IN CEREMONY

Party to break records

8 head of states, 150 envoys to attend show

HINDUSTAN TIMES ONLINE

Narendra Modi-led BJP has broken several electoral records in the Lok Sabha polls. His swearing-in ceremony too, will set several new precedents.

Rashtrapati Bhavan will see its highest-ever turnout which includes eight heads of state, almost 150 envoys with their retinue and personal guests of both the President and the new Prime Minister. The sitting arrangements in the Rashtrapati Bhavan forecourt have been made for 4,000 guests.

Prior to this oath-taking event, the largest gathering had been for former prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's swearing-in ceremony in 1999 of about 1200 guests.

In a first, almost 150 heads of foreign missions based in New Delhi have been invited. "Most of them have confirmed their presence for the function," an official added.

While request for passes, mostly by the BJP leaders, are pouring in routinely at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, PM-designate Modi has invited at least 17 governors for the event, among other guests. All of them have confirmed their presence.

Around 20 seats have been reserved for



Modi's personal guests like his family members and friends. They will sit along with President Pranab Mukherjee's personal guests.

All parliamentarians have been invited and, Congress sources said that both its president Sonia Gandhi and deputy Rahul Gandhi will attend the ceremony.

Outgoing Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will also come. Manmohan will also be present during the dinner that president will host for the eight heads of states today evening.

Putin eyes strong ties with Modi

PTI, St Petersburg

Russian President Vladimir Putin said his country was looking forward to working closely with newly-elected prime minister Narendra Modi and promised to work for lifting bilateral ties in economic, military and technical cooperation.

"Our relations are above political parties. We are friendly with the Indian people. We want to have good relations with India," Putin told a select group of journalists from the international media.

"I have met him (Modi). I am going to work with him closely," he said when asked about the Indian election that has thrown up a new government after 10 years.

Asked about Russia's working with the UPA government in the last 10 years and prospects of working with the new BJP-led government, Putin said the bilateral ties are above political parties.

He said India is an "outstanding civilisation" and congratulated the country on the recent successful conduct of the general elections.

Russia is going to make all arrangements for lifting the bilateral relations in economic, humanitarian, military and technical cooperation, he said.

GOODWILL GESTURE

Pak frees Indian inmates

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif yesterday ordered the release of 151 Indian prisoners ahead of his historic visit to New Delhi to attend Narendra Modi's swearing-in as premier.

Islamabad's move to free the prisoners -- mostly fishermen accused of violating Pakistan's territorial waters -- was welcomed by India as a diplomatic gesture ahead of the inauguration today.

Modi's invitation to Sharif to attend the ceremony has been widely seen as a bold diplomatic statement that he intends to improve strained ties between the nuclear-armed rivals.

Sharif, who won power in Pakistan last year for a third time, will also hold a bilateral meeting with Modi on the sidelines of the ceremony, Pakistani officials told Reuters.

EU ELECTION

Most states go to polls

AGENCIES

European elections culminate on "Super Sunday" when the remainder of the EU's 28 countries go to the polls, with the vote expected to confirm the dominance of pro-EU centrists despite a rise in support for the far-right and left.

Germany, France, Spain, Italy and Poland are among the major EU member states voting on Sunday, representing the bulk of the 388 million Europeans eligible to cast ballots and elect the 751 deputies to sit in the European Parliament from 2014-2019.

After years of economic crisis, rising unemployment and poor growth, many Europeans have come to question the wisdom of ever-closer EU integration and are expected to vote for Eurosceptic parties on the right or left that promise radical change.

Elections have already taken place in seven EU member states, including the UK, the Netherlands, Latvia and Malta. Results will be announced after the last poll closes at 21:00 GMT.

Opinion polls suggest at least a quarter of seats in the parliament will go to anti-EU or protest groups, but at least 70 percent will remain with the four mainstream, pro-EU blocs: the centre-left, centre-right, liberals and Greens.

Turnout - the most basic measure of citizens' engagement with Europe - is expected to fall again, dropping to just over 40 percent, marginally down from 43 percent in 2009.

The 751 seats of European Parliament are allocated in proportion to each country's population.

The vote will affect the lives of the EU's 500 million citizens, and the chamber has much more power than it used to.

Sri Lanka to release all Indian fishermen

THE HINDU ONLINE

Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa yesterday ordered the release of five Indian fishermen in custody in Colombo as a "goodwill gesture" that comes a day before he leaves to India to attend the ceremony in New Delhi where BJP leader Narendra Modi will be sworn in as prime minister of India.

The Sri Lankan government has been upbeat about the regime change in India. President Rajapaksa was among the first leaders to congratulate Modi, and also to confirm his participation at the swearing-in ceremony.

President Rajapaksa will hold bilateral meetings with Modi tomorrow, where Indo-Lanka relations are to be discussed broadly.

dance at the ceremony will be a first in the history of the two states, which both have nuclear arsenals and have fought four wars since gaining their independence from Britain in 1947. Repeated bids to improve relations have failed, though there have been incremental gains over the last decade.

The Pakistani PM is also likely to invite Modi to visit Pakistan, an official said on Saturday.

India's foreign ministry said Pakistan had notified New Delhi of its intention to free the prisoners as a "goodwill gesture" to coincide with the swearing-in.

Modi invited Pakistan PM Sharif and other neighbouring heads of government from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) to Monday's swearing-in.

Modi will be sworn in as PM 10 days after his party won national elections in a landslide, securing the biggest majority by a single party in 30 years.

