

NEWSINbrief

Doval named India's security adviser

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Ajit Kumar Doval, former chief of India's Intelligence Bureau and one of the finest operational brains, was yesterday appointed the National Security Adviser (NSA) of India. Doval, who retired from government service nine years ago, succeeds career diplomat Shivshankar Menon in that post. He will be the second NSA boss after M K Narayanan to have a professional career in intelligence.



'Aleppo air raids killed 2,000 in 2014'

AFP, Beirut

Barrel bombings and other Syrian government air raids on rebel districts of Aleppo and surrounding areas have killed 1,963 civilians since January, including 567 children, a monitoring group said yesterday. Government aircraft launched a bombing campaign against rebel-held districts in the east in mid-December, frequently dropping shrapnel-packed

Peres, Abbas to pray at Vatican on June 8

AFP, Vatican City

Israeli President Shimon Peres and his Palestinian counterpart Mahmud Abbas will pray for peace at the Vatican on June 8, the Holy See said Thursday. Pope Francis had invited the pair to his home for a "heartfelt prayer" for peace during his

'Time to start new US-Cuba ties'

AFP, Havana

The head of the US Chamber of Commerce made an urgent plea Thursday to relaunch relations between Cuba and the United States. Thomas Donohue spoke at the end of the highest-profile visit of an American official to the communist-ruled island in years. Washington has maintained an economic embargo clamped on Cuba since 1962, and the two have never moved off a Cold War

20 years for Facebook protests!

AFP, Tehran

An Iranian court has sentenced eight people to jail terms ranging from seven to 20 years for crimes including anti-regime propaganda posted on Facebook, an opposition website has said. They were charged with "insulting the supreme leader and the authorities, anti-regime activities, sacrilege and spreading lies,"

No Thai polls for at least a yr: junta

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's junta chief yesterday ruled out elections for at least a year to allow time for political "reforms", and defended the recent military coup in the face of rising international alarm.

In a televised national address more than a week after the army takeover, Prayut Chan-O-Cha said the new military regime planned to work towards returning the nation of 67 million people to democracy in around 15 months.

The general, who was given crucial royal endorsement on Monday, said a first phase of around three months would focus on "reconciliation" in the ferociously divided nation.

A cabinet and new draft constitution would then be put in place to enact reforms during a second year-long phase. Only after this could elections be held.

Thailand's military seized power on May 22 -- the 19th actual or attempted putsch in its modern history -- and set about rounding up scores of political figures, academics and activists.

Authorities have abrogated the constitution, curtailed civil liberties under martial law and imposed a nightly curfew.

Prayut noted the international alarm over the coup, but said the country needed time to find a "righteous and legitimate" path for the country's democracy.

On Thursday, the United States reiterated a call for a swift return to democratic rule. The European Union voiced "extreme concern".

Around 300 people have now been held for periods of up to seven days.

Kiev breaches Geneva Convention: Moscow

Second OSCE team goes missing in restiv east

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday accused Kiev's armed forces of breaching international law protecting civilians in wartime by killing and wounding peaceful citizens as it fights pro-Russian insurgents.

The Investigative Committee, the Russian equivalent of the FBI, said in a statement that Ukraine's armed forces as well as its National Guard and the Right Sector ultra-nationalist group caused civilian deaths "in breach of the Geneva Convention of 1949 on protecting the civilian population in time of war."

"Those guilty of the deaths of peaceful civilians and children according to all the canons of international law must bear responsibility for this," the statement said.

Russia said it had opened a criminal case under Russian law to probe "the use of banned means and methods in fighting a war."

A second team of European monitors was reported missing in restive eastern yesterday despite army claims it had regained control over much of the separatist rust belt. Earlier,

a team of OSCE who went missing on Monday was confirmed detained by separatists on charge of spying.

The United States meanwhile voiced growing concern over the sudden appearance of fighters from Russia's war-ravaged Chechnya among rebels who have been waging a seven-week insurgency against Kiev's rule.

The increasingly volatile conflict -- growing ever more complex as rivalries

emerge among rebel commanders -- has ensnared a steadily climbing number of Europeans tasked with helping to resolve a crisis that has threatened the very survival of Ukraine.

Western leaders have long accused the Kremlin of choreographing the insurgency in order to upset the rule of the European-aligned team that rose to power in Kiev in February -- a charge Russian President Vladimir Putin denies.

The defence ministry said on Friday that the eastern insurgency has thus far claimed the lives of 49 Ukrainian servicemen and

UKRAINE CRISIS



Pro-Russian fighters of Vostok (East) battalion rip apart an Ukrainian flag outside a regional state building in the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

India to set up rape crisis cell

AFP, Lucknow

Outrage grew in India yesterday over two shocking rape cases as the new government said it was planning to set up a special crisis cell to ensure justice for victims of sex attacks.

On Thursday it emerged that two teenagers from a low caste had been found hanging from a tree after being gang-raped in their village. A day later police said the father of the chief suspect in another rape case had savagely attacked the mother of his son's alleged victim.

Rights activists and politicians said that the cases highlighted that the authorities in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh were "not serious" about tackling sexual crimes.

India revised its laws on sex attacks in the wake of the December 2012 gang-rape of a student on a bus in New Delhi which triggered outrage, but they have done little to stem the tide of sex attacks.

Police in Uttar Pradesh said that three people, including a police constable, had been arrested in connection with a sex attack on the two girls in the village of Budaun earlier this week.

But Maneka Gandhi, India's welfare minister, said that every officer who had been involved in the case should be dismissed.

Don't include my life in textbooks: Modi

TNN, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has opposed the move of some BJP-ruled state governments to include a chapter on his life in school textbooks.

"Am reading in the news that some states want to include Narendra Modi's life struggles as a part of their school curriculum," the prime minister tweeted yesterday.

"I firmly believe that the life story of living individuals should not be included as a part of the school curriculum," Modi said.

Expressing disapproval of the move, Modi further tweeted, "India has a rich history of several stalwarts who made India what it is today. Young minds should read about these greats & emulate them."

Modi's reactions come in response to move by several BJP-led state governments to include a chapter on his struggles in school textbooks.

Modi's disapproval of living individuals becoming part of the school curriculum

prompted governments in BJP-ruled Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh to drop the plan to include his life story in syllabi.

Earlier, the Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan governments had also announced that they were considering teaching the biography of Narendra Modi in schools.

Madhya Pradesh minister for school education had said on Sunday the government is considering teaching chapters on life of Narendra Modi from Classes III to VI.

MODI MOVES TO OFFICIAL RESIDENCE Five days after being sworn-in, Narendra Modi yesterday moved to the Indian prime minister's official residence at the Race Course Road.

Modi, who was staying temporarily at the nearby Gujarat Bhawan, went to the 5, Race Course Road this morning and a small pooja was performed there. Manmohan Singh vacated the Race Course Road residence after Modi's swearing-in on May 26 but the new prime minister did not shift as it was being refurbished.

INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY How far Modi may go?

STAR DESK

Indians want their version of the American Dream. And so they have voted for a man who promises more for less: more development and growth, with less harassment and red tape.

Modi has never addressed foreign policy at length and Indian campaigns rarely involve debates on world affairs. Few in New Delhi seem to have a clear sense of his plans. And the ones who know won't talk.

Modi has certainly begun with a flourish, scoring a coup in getting his Pakistani counterpart to attend his swearing-in. The ceremony also saw almost all the regional leaders on the same platform.

It is indeed a refreshing marker of proactive engagement - the opposite of India's foreign policy in years gone by.

In an excellent essay in Foreign Affairs last month, Manjari Chatterjee Miller described how Indian foreign policy in the last 50 years has been characterised "more by continuity than by change" -- irrespective of the party in power.

India's relations with major powers have stayed stable. Broadly, there are two reasons behind this trend. One is India's historic pledge of "non-alignment": the country's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru founded the global Non-Aligned Movement, a group of states agreeing to not align with major powers.

The other reason is India's neglect of foreign policy planning from the very top: civil servants get little-to-no instruction from the prime minister's office, and so have great levels of autonomy and wield significant power. It has often been pointed out that India has fewer diplomats than Singapore, a country with a population 1/250th the size of India's. India has consistently punched below its weight despite aspiring to be a global player

Many writers and commentators have expressed fears about Modi's foreign policy on two main fronts. First, that he will channel his brand of pro-Hindu nationalism into friction with Pakistan. Second, that he will use his prior history with Washington -- Modi's US visa was revoked in 2005 over a never-before-used religious freedoms act -- as a reason to snub the world's biggest economy. But with each passing day, we are witnessing an evolving Modi, a realist whose goal is to grow India Inc. and do business with anyone -- at home or abroad -- who can help achieve that goal.

However, with clear and strong mandate, Modi may bring a longer-term vision to India's foreign policy planning. And for the first time in India's history, prime minister's office, for better or worse, may take charge of foreign policy issues.

But expecting a drastic course correction is possibly not on the cards.

Modi will maintain India's strong ties with Russia. There's a long history of cooperation between New Delhi and Moscow that dates back to the early years of the Cold War. While trade and investment with Russia are now far less important for India, Moscow remains India's chief arms supplier by far. Modi has no reason to rock that boat.

Both the Congress and the BJP have long believed that China is India's principal geo-strategic adversary. That outlook won't change. Yet things have become more complicated over the last two decades: China is now India's main trade partner, so the relationship is not all about security and conflict.

Though Modi has attacked previous Indian leaders for not standing up to China over territorial and water-sharing issues, he won't be looking to pick fights with Beijing.

Pakistan will be Modi's other foreign policy preoccupation, but he's likely to prove wrong those who think he'll take a dramatically tougher line toward Islamabad. He might use the anti-Pakistan trump card only if he fails to deliver the promised development.

One country with which Modi is eager to step up its security ties is Japan. The Congress laid the foundation for this, and the BJP will build on it. India is the one Asian power that's not unnerved by Abe's commitment to change Japan's minimalist defense policy.

New Delhi wants a strong partner on China's eastern flank and sees Japan, with its economic and technological prowess, as well-suited to that role. Like New Delhi, Tokyo also sees China as it's biggest security problem.

In all, those expecting big changes from Modi on the foreign policy front are apt to be disappointed. While he believes that India is destined to be a global power, he also understands that that goal will never be met unless India gets its economic act together. If Modi makes big changes,



Expecting a drastic course correction in foreign policy is possibly not on the cards.



BRITAIN'S PROBE ON IRAQ WAR Blair-Bush records to be revealed

AFP, London

Britain's government yesterday agreed to give extracts of letters from Tony Blair to George W Bush to an inquiry into the Iraq war, overcoming the main hurdle to publication of the long-awaited report.

The probe will receive "gists and quotes" of communications from former prime minister Blair to ex-president Bush in the run-up to the conflict in 2003, inquiry chief John Chilcot said in an official letter.

But Bush's replies will not be included in the report, which is examining Britain's involvement in the war, Chilcot said.

The inquiry was set up in 2009 and was expected to report in 2010. But disagreements over the publication of some 25 written notes from Blair to Bush and more than 130 records of conversations have been the biggest factor in delaying the findings of the inquiry. He did not give a date but reports earlier this year said it was expected before the end of the year.

US drones arrive in Japan; Abe seeks greater role in Asia

AP, Misawa Air Base

The US Air Force has deployed two of its most advanced long-distance surveillance drones to a base in northern Japan over the past week, enhancing its ability to monitor nuclear activities in North Korea and Chinese naval operations.

The deployment of the two unarmed Global Hawk drones to Japan, a key US ally, is intended to demonstrate Washington's commitment to security in Asia as part of its rebalancing of forces to the Pacific. But it will likely rankle with China and North Korea, which have been working to improve their own unmanned aircraft fleets.

The drone is considered particularly valuable because it can conduct long-range missions without the limitations of pilot fatigue, is able to fly at a maximum 18.3 kilometers and can "loiter" around any particular site of interest for 24 hours or more.

From Japan, it can easily monitor areas on the Asian mainland -- including North Korea's nuclear sites -- or targets at sea -- such as areas where China and other countries have had confrontations over territory.

Tokyo plans to buy three Global Hawks.



Under a mutual security pact, the US maintains about 50,000 troops in Japan, which is home to several major air bases, the headquarters of the US 7th Fleet and more than 10,000 Marines.

Tokyo is now hotly debating a significant revamp of the role of its military forces, which have since World War II been rebuilt and are now one of the strongest in Asia.

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe yesterday vowed that his country would play a larger role in promoting peace in Asia, and called for the rule of law to be upheld in the region.

Laying out a vision of Tokyo as a counterweight to the growing might of China, Abe offered Japan's help to regional partners "to ensure security of the seas and skies".

He said Japan and the United States stood ready to bolster security cooperation with Australia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean).

Abe said Japan will provide 10 new coast guard patrol ships to Philippines, which has one of Asia's most poorly equipped security forces.

Abe delivered his speech as tensions simmer over territorial disputes, involving China and some Southeast Asian states in the South China Sea as well as between Tokyo and Beijing in the East China Sea.

Drugs, prostitution add £10b to UK economy!

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Illegal drugs and prostitution have contributed £10 billion to the UK economy -- more than house building, official data has revealed.

According to data by the Office for National Statistics, calculated at current prices, the illegal drug trade and prostitution combined had an impact of £10bn on gross domestic product (GDP) in 2009, whereas "own-account construction" was worth £4bn in 2009.

Own-account construction was defined as "the production of new dwellings and major repairs and improvements by enterprises and households for their own use".

Of the £10billion figure, £5.3 billion was attributable to prostitution and £4.4 billion attributable to the sale of illicit drugs. £0.828 billion alone came from cannabis.

The ONS, which published the data ahead of the National Accounts release in September, said the £10 billion figure is based on various sources and assumptions.

"The new estimates cover the import, production and sale of illegal drugs and the provision of prostitution services," it explained.

The figures come after The European Drug Report 2014 analysed the sewage systems of 42 cities for traces of the drug and found the English capital had the highest cocaine use of any city tested, with consumption of the drug appearing to peak on a Tuesday.