

UKRAINE CRISIS

5 rebels killed in fierce east battle

AFP, Kiev

Ukrainian forces killed five rebels yesterday while repelling an attack by 500 pro-Russian gunmen on a federal border guard camp in the strife-torn separatist east, Kiev officials said.

The border guard service said seven of its servicemen were wounded when "around 500 terrorists" attacked one of its units stationed outside the industrial city of Lugansk.

The rebels are "not only using mortar, grenade launchers and machineguns, but also firing from residential apartments and rooftops, using civilians as human shields," the border guard service said in a statement.

A spokesman for Ukraine's self-proclaimed "anti-terrorist operation" said the border guards eventually received air cover from fighter bombers that managed to destroy "two mortar crews of militants".

"After the aircraft returned to base, we received information that fighting around the Lugansk border unit resumed," Vladyslav Seleznyov told Kiev's ICTV television.

Russia has accused Ukraine of breaching the 1949 Geneva Conventions protecting civilians in wartime by killing peaceful citizens. It piled further diplomatic pressure on Kiev by announcing that it would submit a draft resolution to the United Nations Security Council later yesterday demanding an immediate end to fighting and the creation of a corridors that would allow civilians to escape the affected areas.

Ukraine has previously rejected the need for such an "aid corridor" out of fear that Russia might want to send in troops to supervise the evacuation.



Pro-Russian militants and firemen run away as they leave the Regional State building they seized during a shoot-out with Ukrainian border guards defending the Federal Border Headquarters building in the eastern Ukrainian city of Lugansk yesterday.

PHOTO:
AFP

India stays execution over 1993 Mumbai blasts

AFP, New Delhi

India's top court yesterday stayed the execution of a key plotter of the country's deadliest series of attacks.

Yakub Memon, brother of the alleged main plotter and fugitive Tiger Memon, had been sentenced to death for his role in the 1993 blasts which killed 257 people in Mumbai.

7 dead militants found in Karachi

AFP, Karachi

Seven bullet-ridden bodies of suspected militants were found dumped among bushes in Pakistan's port city of Karachi yesterday, officials said.

The deceased appeared to have been brought to the spot in the western Manghopir neighbourhood of the metropolis before being executed, senior police officer Sajid Noor told AFP. He added that police were investigating whether they belonged to the Pakistani Taliban or another group.

Truck bomb blast kills 10 in Homs

AFP, Damascus

A bomb-laden truck killed at least 10 people when it exploded in a village of the central Syrian province of Homs yesterday, state television said.

The attack comes a day before a presidential election is held in regime-held parts of the war-ravaged country, with the incumbent Bashar al-Assad expected to stay in power. Haraqi is a regime-held village.

3 Turkish engineers killed in Afghan suicide blast

AFP, Jalalabad

A suicide bomber killed three Turkish engineers and wounded another one yesterday in eastern Afghanistan, the latest attack on foreigners in the war-torn country.

It came after the US and the Taliban sealed a dramatic prisoner swap that saw soldier Bowe Bergdahl released for five senior insurgent figures, raising hopes for peace as foreign forces prepare to withdraw.

US prisoner swap ignites criticism

AFP, Kabul

The dramatic deal to free soldier Bowe Bergdahl in exchange for Taliban prisoners ignited criticism after the insurgents' leader declared a "big victory", but also raised hopes for peace as the US prepares to leave Afghanistan.

Washington has defended the swap as critical to saving Bergdahl's life.

But the exchange announced Saturday was criticised by Republican lawmakers, who said the five Taliban prisoners, all senior figures held at the US military prison in Guantanamo Bay, could return to the battlefield and pose a threat to Americans abroad. And Afghanistan's foreign ministry branded the deal as illegal.

Moscow pushes back Kiev gas cut ultimatum

AFP, Kiev

Crisis-hit Ukraine won a vital reprieve from Russia yesterday when Moscow pushed back until next week a possible cut in gas shipments that would also impact parts of Europe.

Russia's surprise decision came hours before the two sides were to lock horns in Brussels over a price dispute that emerged when Moscow cancelled the discounts it awarded pro-Kremlin leader Viktor Yanukovich prior to his February fall.

Moscow had threatened to halt all shipments to Ukraine -- a vital gas transit nation now seeking a closer alliance with the West -- from today in a repetition of interruptions that also hurt swathes of Europe in 2006 and 2009.

Ukraine received another vital boost with a visit to Kiev by US Assistant Secretary of Defence Derek Chollet.

Putin, Cameron to hold face-to-face Ukraine talks

AFP, London, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin will hold face-to-face talks on the Ukraine crisis with British Prime Minister David Cameron, Downing Street said yesterday.

The two leaders will meet after they attend events to mark the 70th anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy, France, on Friday.

"It is an important opportunity to set out the importance of a dialogue between the Russian government and the new Ukrainian government following the presidential elections that have happened over the last week or so in Ukraine," Cameron's official spokesman told reporters.

The talks will take place the day after Cameron, US President Barack Obama and other G7 leaders meet in Brussels for a summit at which Russia's annexation of Crimea and the tense situation in eastern Ukraine will be at the centre of discussions.

The Brussels summit was arranged after the leaders decided to boycott a planned G8 summit to be held in the Russian resort of Sochi, as a result of Russia's actions in Crimea.

Putin reacted angrily last month to reported comments from Prince Charles, the heir to the throne, compar-

ing him to Hitler.

On the other hand, Putin does not plan to meet Ukraine's president elect Petro Poroshenko when he attends the D-Day anniversary events.

"This question is not being worked upon," Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said yesterday when asked whether the leaders would meet in France.

Pro-Western billionaire and chocolate



company owner Poroshenko, who won last month's presidential election in Ukraine, is also due to attend the commemorations.

He has been trying to arrange what would be the first meeting between Putin and a Ukrainian leader since Russia's seizure of Crimea sparked the worst East-West crisis since the Cold War.

SYRIA ELECTIONS Undoubtedly outcome

CNN ONLINE

In the midst of a bloody and protracted civil war, the Syrian government is set to hold a presidential election today.

The outcome is hardly in doubt: President Bashar al-Assad is almost guaranteed to emerge victorious in a vote that opposition groups and many Western countries say will be rigged from the start. Syria isn't renowned for holding free and fair elections.

When he came to power 14 years ago, al-Assad ran unopposed, securing more than 99% of votes, according to state media. Seven years later, he won again with a similarly mountainous share of the vote.

Some analysts say the purpose of this week's vote, which UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon urged the Syrian government not to hold, is to send a message to al-Assad's opponents, both in Syria and abroad.

Spain's King to abdicate

CNN ONLINE

After nearly 40 years on the throne, King Juan Carlos I of Spain said yesterday that he will be stepping down.

It is "time to hand over to a new generation -- younger, with a lot of energy -- that can, with determination, take on and carry out the changes that the current situation demands, and to face with intensity and determination the challenges of tomorrow," he said in a televised statement, according to a CNN translation.

"The long, deep economic crisis we are going through has left a lot of scars socially, but it has also pointed toward a future of hope," he said.

Crown Prince Felipe, 46, will succeed his father. The king said he decided it was "time to prepare and pave way so that he who is in better conditions can continue."

Felipe is "stable" and has "the maturity, the preparation, and the sense of responsibility necessary" to serve as king and "to lead to a new stage of hope using his experience and the drive of a new generation," Juan Carlos added.

Spaniards generally hold Juan Carlos, 76, in high regard for his service to the nation and his defense of democracy after the death of the dictator Francisco Franco in 1975.

The focus of his reign was to bring about reconciliation between Spaniards of different political persuasions, and from different regions.

Many consider the king's finest hour to be his decisive stand to halt a right-wing military coup in 1981, when he went on television to say that the monarchy would not tolerate attempts to interrupt democracy by force.



Indian Bharatiya Janata Party demonstrators argue with policewomen during a protest against the recent gang-rape and murder of two girls, in Lucknow yesterday. Indian police fired water cannons at a group of mainly women protesting against the gang-rape and lynching of two girls in the country's largest state.

PHOTO:
AFP

INDIA'S SHAME CONTINUES

Acid was poured on latest gang rape victim's face

AGENCIES

Police in north India are trying to identify a young woman who was gang raped, strangled to death and then had acid poured on her face in an apparent attempt to hide her identity. The attack took place about 60 miles from the village where two girls were gang raped and hanged from a tree last week.

Officers said the body of the woman, believed to be 22 years old, was discovered on Saturday in a field in the village of Aithpura, close to the city of Bareilly.

According to the Press Trust of India news agency, the result of a post-mortem examination released yesterday showed the woman had been assaulted, made to drink acid and then strangled. Her face had later been mutilated with acid and petrol, appar-

ently in an attempt to hide her identity.

Meanwhile, three brothers have confessed to involvement in the gang rape of two teenage girls in India, a police officer told CNN.

The men have pleaded guilty to the rape charges but have not admitted to killing the girls, police spokesman Mukesh Saxena said Sunday.

All five known suspects, including two police officers, have been arrested, he said.

The police complaint also names two unknown people in the case. Investigations are trying to determine their identity, Saxena said.

The assault on the cousins, ages 14 and 16, sparked outrage in the community in Uttar Pradesh state. After being gang raped, they were hanged from a mango tree, police said.

Blair 'not seeking Euro president role'

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Britain has a great opportunity to lead a debate and build alliances among heads of government on the European council to create a long term "manifesto for change" that can end the cynicism and rejection of the European Union, Tony Blair has said in a major speech on the future of Europe.

In a call for the elected heads of government to seize the initiative and assert their authority over the unelected commission, he said in a speech to the CBI in London that "the new approach should be for the council representing the heads of government to set out a clear, focused and strong platform of change for Europe.

There has been speculation that Blair is touting himself as a potential new European council president in the wake of the speech and a meeting last week in Berlin with Germany's chancellor, Angela Merkel. He insisted yesterday he had "no personal ambitions", adding: "That is not going to happen".



Sisi mocking Egyptian satirist cancels show

AFP, Cairo

Egyptian satirist Bassem Youssef said yesterday he has cancelled his television show which mocked ex-army chief and president-in-waiting Abdel Fattah al-Sisi because of "enormous" pressure.

The heart surgeon turned comedian, often compared to US satirist Jon Stewart, had moved to Saudi-owned channel MBC last year after his show was suspended by the private Egyptian broadcaster CBC.

MBC's Egyptian affiliate which aired the weekly show Al-Bernameg (The Programme) said in April the show would be taken off air in May to avoid "influencing" the presidential election that Sisi won.

India's Andhra Pradesh splits

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh formally split yesterday into with its northern part becoming Telangana as the new and 29th state of the country and K Chandrasekhar Rao, who spearheaded a 14-year-old agitation for separate statehood, sworn in as its first Chief Minister amidst joyous celebrations.

The birth of Telangana capped years of street protests and shutdowns by pro-Telangana activists led by Rao's Telangana Rashtriya Samiti, which were often marred by violence, as residents of Telangana felt the region had long been neglected.

However, celebrations erupted across the Telangana region, consisting of ten districts of Andhra Pradesh and the capital city of Hyderabad, as the clock struck midnight last night. Telangana has a population of 35 million.

Hyderabad is home to India's major information technology and pharmaceutical industries and it would remain a shared capital by Telangana and residual Andhra Pradesh for the next decade before the latter creates a new capital city.

India's parliament had approved a law to carve out the new state in February this year, despite opposition from several lawmakers in the then ruling Congress Party. The then chief minister of Andhra Pradesh state, N Kiran Kumar Reddy, resigned after parliament approved the bill.

This is for the first time in southern India that two states have been created out of one state where people of both speak the same language: Telugu. Most of Indian states were created on the basis of language.

Andhra Pradesh state itself had been created out of the Telugu-speaking areas of the then Madras state in 1953.



Request for Proposal

External Evaluation of the "Social and Economic Security of Traditional Resource Users in the Sundarbans" Project

Relief International is currently accepting technical and financial proposals from qualified individuals/consulting firms based in Bangladesh to conduct an external evaluation of its project "Social and Economic Security of the Traditional Resource Users in the Sundarbans" implemented in Khulna, Sathkhira and Bagerhat districts over the period of 2011-2014. The overall objective of the project is to reduce extreme poverty in the target areas through outreach to workers in the informal economy such as, Traditional Resource Users in the Sundarban Impact Zone. The project is funded by European Commission.

For Terms of Reference (TOR) of the consultancy work, send an email to hrbd@ri.org with the subject line "External Evaluation- SESTS" or visit www.ri-bangladesh.org. **Deadline for submission: 15 June 2014.**