

NEWS IN  
briefIndian woman shot  
dead by rebels in  
rape attempt: police

AFP, Shillong

Rebels shot dead a woman in northeast India after she resisted their attempt to gang-rape her, police said yesterday, the latest in a string of sex attacks to shock the country.

Police said the 35-year-old mother of four was at home in a remote village of Meghalaya state when militants of the outlawed Car National Liberation

Albania backed for  
EU candidate status

AFP, Brussels

The EU's executive yesterday urged the bloc's leaders to approve Albania as an official candidate for membership at a summit in Brussels at the end of the month.

The European Commission said Albania had made sufficient progress in fighting corruption and organised crime to win a green light to line up with the other nations knocking

## Iraq attacks kill 20

AFP, Baghdad

A wave of attacks across Iraq, including twin car bombs in an ethnically mixed tinderbox city, killed 20 people yesterday as a year-long surge of violence showed no signs of let-up.

Nearly 50 people were also wounded in the violence, which struck in and around Baghdad, as well as in Salaheddin and Kirkuk provinces to its north, all areas afflicted by near-daily bloodshed. In the deadliest attack, two vehicles rigged with explosives went off in the centre of Kirkuk, killing eight people and leaving nine wounded, said provincial health chief Sabah

Gazprom delays  
Ukraine gas  
deadline to June 10

AFP, Moscow

Russia's gas giant Gazprom said yesterday it was giving Ukraine an extra day to start paying for gas ahead of time or risk a cut in its supply.

Gazprom had earlier postponed the deadline from June 3 to 9 after Kiev made an initial payment of \$786 million to cover

Obama and Putin spar as  
rebels battle in Ukraine

AFP, Warsaw

President Barack Obama yesterday condemned Russia's "dark tactics" and bullying in Ukraine and President Vladimir Putin hit back at American "aggression," as new venom deepened the worst US-Russia clash in decades.

Obama met Ukraine's president-elect Petro Poroshenko in Warsaw and promised years of US support, then blasted Russia and vowed to protect ex-Soviet states in NATO in a hawkish speech marking 25 years of Polish democracy.

"How can we allow the dark tactics of the 20th century to define this new century?" Obama asked, as he adopted the mantle of 'leader of the West' worn by previous presidents during the Cold War.

"As we've been reminded by Russia's aggression in Ukraine, our free nations cannot be complacent in pursuit of the vision we share -- a Europe that is whole and free and at peace," said Obama who spoke behind bullet proof glass in front of the Royal Castle in Warsaw -- a rebuilt symbol of Polish triumph over the destruction and tyranny of the 20th century.

Obama will come face-to-face with Putin tomorrow in France. Though several European leaders are meeting the Russian leader and hope to pursue dialogue to ease the Ukraine crisis -- which saw hundreds of rebels battle government forces yesterday -- Washington remains to be convinced.

"We will not accept Russia's occupation of Crimea or its violations of Ukraine's sovereignty," Obama said.

"Our free nations will stand united so that further Russian provocations will only mean more isolation and costs for Russia," Obama said, before heading to Belgium and a G7 summit dedicated to coordinating policy towards Moscow.

Putin said that he could not under-



PHOTO: AFP

US President Barack Obama and President-elect Petro Poroshenko  
of Ukraine shake hands during a meeting in Warsaw, Poland, yesterday.

stand why Obama, who has spent months trying to isolate him over Ukraine, would not hold a formal meeting with him during 70th anniversary commemorations in Normandy.

"It is his choice, I am ready for dialogue," Putin said in an interview with French broadcasters Europe1 and TF1 conducted at his dacha in the Black Sea resort of Sochi.

The Russian leader accused the United States of hypocrisy in its "aggressive" attempts to punish Russia over Ukraine.

"We have almost no military forces abroad yet look: everywhere in the world there are American military bases, American troops thousands of kilometres from their borders.

"They interfere in the interior affairs of this or that country. So it is difficult to accuse us of abuses."

Unlike Obama, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Francois Hollande and British Prime Minister David Cameron will meet one-on-one with Putin in France -- reflecting their nations' greater exposure to Russian economic power.

Obama met Poroshenko days before his inauguration and declared himself "deeply impressed" by the chocolate tycoon Ukrainians chose on May 25 to lead them back from a political and economic precipice.

"The United States is absolutely committed to standing behind the Ukrainian people not just in the coming days, weeks, but in the coming years," Obama told reporters.

In Ukraine, three government soldiers were injured in a massive all-night attack carried out by hundreds of pro-Russian insurgents in the nation's restive east, authorities in Kiev said yesterday.

The assault on a position held by the Ukrainian National Guard in the Lugansk region began Tuesday evening and lasted 10 hours, the interior ministry said, adding that six rebels were also killed in the fighting.

The 300 rebels who took part in the attack were armed with automatic weapons, rocket launchers and mortars, and the Ukrainian forces fought "to the last bullet," according to the ministry.

QUEEN ELIZABETH'S SPEECH  
New law will let  
voters sack MPs

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

The government will bring in a new law allowing voters to sack misbehaving MPs under new legislation included in the Queen England's speech.

The new power of recall -- promised in the coalition agreement in 2010 -- will be triggered only if MPs are given jail sentences or if the House of Commons resolves that they have engaged in "serious wrongdoing". Voters would then have to collect the signatures of 10% of constituents to force a byelection.

Campaigners for the law -- including the Tory backbencher Zac Goldsmith -- claimed the bill did not go far enough because MPs would still have a veto on the powers. He claimed that voters had been "duped" by its inclusion in the speech and that the government had watered down the promise fearing it could lead to "kangaroo courts" for MPs.

The Queen's speech, which sets out new legislation, contained a mixed bag of 11 bills for the final year of the coalition, including proposals for local elections to national park authorities, a law to prevent invasive species entering the UK and legal protections for have-a-go heroes.

The bills are largely uncontroversial for the coalition partners but they fail to finalise powers to allow fracking for gas under people's homes in time to set out details in the speech.

Labour has suggested the coalition is running out of ideas as the speech does not contain many grand ideas for transforming the country. The opposition has accused the government of creating a "zombie parliament", as Conservatives and Liberal Democrats find it increasingly difficult to find areas of agreement.

Most of the bigger proposals have already been announced by George Osborne, the chancellor, at the budget and the autumn statement. These include a pensions bill giving people more control over how they save their money for old age, a small business bill that cuts red tape, increases transparency about corporate ownership and reforms zero-hours contracts, and a childcare payments bill offering tax relief on childcare.

However, one new measure that does not require legislation

Germany opens  
NSA tapping  
inquiry

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Germany's federal prosecutor has opened an investigation over alleged snooping by the US National Security Agency on Angela Merkel's mobile phone.

"I informed parliament's legal affairs committee that I have started a preliminary investigation over tapping of a mobile phone of the chancellor," Harald Range said.

The long-anticipated inquiry, which follows allegations last year that US spies had eavesdropped on the German chancellor's mobile in the past, is against unnamed persons, Range said after addressing the committee.

However, he said he had decided against opening an investigation into claims of wider NSA surveillance against German citizens.

The move may again strain Berlin's ties with Washington, which both countries' leaders have been at pains to restore following the reports of sweeping NSA spying on internet and phone communications overseas.

Data-sensitive Germans reacted with outrage to the accusations by the fugitive intelligence contractor Edward Snowden amid sensitivity over mass state spying on citizens by the Stasi secret police in the former communist East Germany.

A parliamentary panel has been established to assess the extent of spying by the NSA and its partners on German citizens and politicians, and whether German intelligence



A Pakistani man reads a newspaper at a closed market in Karachi yesterday following the arrest of Altaf Hussain, head of Pakistan's Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) party, in London.

PHOTO: AFP

India's new Lok Sabha  
holds first session

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The first session of India's new Lok Sabha began yesterday in the capital with senior Congress leader Kamal Nath being appointed the pro tem Speaker.

Before entering parliament, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who will take oath as a first-time MP tomorrow, told the media that "in this temple of democracy we will work for the hopes and aspirations and the dreams of people".

The proceedings of the House began on a sombre note with Kamal Nath reading out a condolence message for the Union Rural Development Minister Gopinath Munde, who died in a car accident in the Capital on Tuesday.

Amid thumping of desks, Modi, 63, walked into the Lok Sabha as the victor closely followed by senior BJP leader Lal Krishna Advani.

Earlier, 67-year-old Kamal Nath was sworn in as the pro tem Speaker by President Pranab Mukherjee at a simple function in the Rashtrapati Bhavan which was attended by Prime Minister Modi, Vice President Hamid Ansari and Parliamentary Affairs Minister M Venkaiah Naid.

Nath sought consent of the members for taking up the oath taking exercise on Thursday. As the members agreed, Nath postponed the exercise for today.

Before adjourning for the day, the House observed silence for two minutes as a mark of respect to Munde.

Altaf Hussain's  
arrest puts Karachi  
on knife-edge

AFP, Karachi

For more than two decades, Altaf Hussain has wielded control of this freewheeling, violent city of 20 million half a world away from his drab London suburb home.

His arrest on Tuesday by British police has left Pakistan's biggest city on edge and fuelled questions about the future of his political machine.

The 60-year-old is revered by his fiercely loyal supporters -- mainly ethnic Mohajirs who migrated from India at the time of partition, while critics accuse him of running his party as a violent mafia-like organisation.

Party workers appeared to be in a state of shock yesterday at a protest rally organised on the main thoroughfare of this city and attended by thousands.

The sentiments are indicative of how deep passion for politics runs in Karachi, which grew from a small fishing town in the 19th century to Pakistan's economic hub.

It is home to large numbers of all the country's religious and ethnic groups, whose political parties developed armed wings during the 1980s.

The MQM was founded by Hussain in 1984 in response to the marginalisation of Mohajirs -- migrants who fled India amid the violence of the sub-continent's partition.

Despite the MQM's early successes in bringing development and assistance to Mohajirs, the turbulent city continued to see violent clashes resulting in a military operation in the city in 1992.

Hussain fled the country saying he feared for his life and settled in London, where he began to address thousands of supporters in Pakistan by videoconference or simply by phone.

Police searched Hussain's house for four years during the investigation into the murder of MQM founder Imran Farooq.

Despite being repeatedly accused of inciting violence during his speeches, British authorities awarded him with a passport in 2002 -- partly due to his party's secular, anti-Taliban outlook.

Hussain wrote to former British prime minister Tony Blair in 2001 offering help against Al-Qaeda in return for the abolition of the country's feared Inter Services Intelligence agency, the British government confirmed two years ago.

TIANANMEN ANNIVERSARY  
Commemorations not allowed

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Scores of Chinese plainclothes and uniformed police patrolled Tiananmen Square yesterday, while censors scrubbed material from the internet, as authorities sought to prevent any commemoration of the bloody suppression of the pro-democracy protests 25 years ago.

Dozens of activists and other critics have already been placed under house arrest or detained by the Chinese authorities in the runup to the anniversary of the 1989 massacre.

Relatives of some of the hundreds, or even thousands, of victims were allowed to mourn at their graves, but only under police escort, said Zhang Xianling, of the Tiananmen Mothers group.

The group wants the government to

name the dead, overturn the official verdict that the events were a "counterrevolutionary riot", and allow families to mourn peacefully in public.

But while the government would like to erase all memories of the crackdown, tens of thousands are expected to gather at a candlelit vigil to mourn the dead in Hong Kong -- allowed to hold such assemblies, unlike people on the mainland, under the greater freedom permitted in the region. Organisers have said they expect record attendance, with perhaps 150,000 or more people gathering.

Another, smaller vigil is expected in Taiwan. The Taiwanese president, Ma Ying-jeou, described the crackdown as "an enormous historical wound" and said China had to redress the wrongs.

Kerry arrives in Beirut on  
unannounced visit

AFP, Beirut

John Kerry arrived in Beirut yesterday, beginning an unannounced visit that is the first by a US secretary of state to Lebanon in five years, an AFP journalist said.

Kerry is in Beirut to announce \$290 million in aid to boost UN efforts in Syria and neighbouring countries hosting refugees, a US diplomatic source said. He will also urge Lebanon to fill the country's presidential void "as soon as possible".

Kerry's visit comes more than three years into a conflict that is raging in neighbouring Syria, which has had major political, humanitarian and security consequences on tiny Lebanon.

According to the diplomatic source, Kerry

would meet Lebanese Prime Minister Tammam Salam, parliament speaker Nabih Berri and Maronite Patriarch Beshara Rai.

"The secretary is going to announce our next response to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and UN system appeals," said the source, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Syria's war has created an unprecedented refugee crisis, pushing some three million people out of their country, including more than a million into Lebanon.

The visit also comes during a protracted political crisis in Lebanon, which has been without a president since last month because of unbreachable divisions between pro- and anti-Damascus camps in the country.

Rocky road ahead  
for Egypt president-  
elect Sisi

AFP, Cairo

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who romped home in Egypt's presidential election after crushing Islamists, faces a tough task to restore stability and revive a battered economy amid fears of a return to autocracy.

The crushing victory over leftist leader Hamdeen Sabbahi had never been in doubt, with many lauding the retired field marshal as a hero for ending Morsi's year of divisive rule 11 months ago.

But global rights watchdogs, international leaders and experts have warned that real challenges now face Sisi as he inherits a deeply polarised country.

The United States said it looks forward to working with Sisi but expressed concerns about the "restrictive political environment" in which last week's vote took place.

The May 26-28 election was boycotted by Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood and youth groups of the 2011 popular uprising, after both were targeted in a withering crackdown on dissent.

"We urge the president-elect and the government to adopt the reforms that are needed to govern with accountability and transparency, ensure justice for every individual, and demonstrate a commitment to the protection of the universal rights of all Egyptians," said the White House.

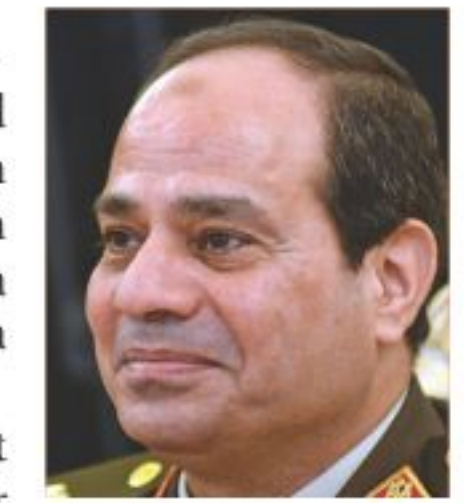
It was only in April that Washington partially lifted its annual aid to Egypt worth around \$1.5 billion, which it had frozen after the military deposed Morsi.

Ahead of the presidential election, rights group Amnesty International had said the vote did not mean the slate would be wiped "clean... of gross human rights violations".

Since Morsi's ouster in July 2013, a government crackdown targeting the Brotherhood has killed more than 1,400 people and jailed over 15,000.

The authorities have also sentenced hundreds of Morsi supporters to death after speedy trials which United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon expressed "alarm" over.

Analysts say it will be tough for the Egyptian authorities to restore stability amid the prevailing polarisation across the country.

Australia probes  
possible MH370  
witness account

AFP, Sydney

Australia was yesterday investigating an account from a sailor who said she may have seen Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 on fire, as officials said the underwater hunt for the plane could dive much deeper.

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau, which is leading the search at the request of the Malaysian government, is looking at the claim from a British yachtswoman made this week.

"The ATSB received... a message from a member of the public, reporting that they had seen what they believed to be a burning aircraft in the sky above the Indian Ocean on the night of the disappearance of MH370," a spokesman told AFP in an email.

"That information has been forwarded to the ATSB's MH370 Search Strategy Working Group for review."

The ATSB yesterday released a request for tenders for a company to dive even deeper, to depths of up to 6,000 metres.

It said the successful bidder would be engaged as a prime contractor and provide the expertise, equipment and vessels needed to carry out the search for the