

NEWS IN brief

Sri Lanka floods displace over 100,000

IANAS, Colombo

Floods caused by days of torrential rain have displaced over 100,000 people in Sri Lanka, latest government data showed yesterday. At least 23 people were killed and one person remains missing, Xinhua

Violence kills 36 in Iraq

AFP, Mosul

Twin suicide bombings targeting Iraq's Shabak minority and fighting between security forces and militants killed 36 people in the northern province of Nineveh yesterday, officials said. So far this year, more than 4,300 people have been killed in violence.

Thai junta detains anti-coup leader

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's junta yesterday said that it had captured a fugitive anti-coup leader facing possible imprisonment, as the ruling generals seek to stamp out any criticism of their seizure of power. Sombat Boonngamanong, who spearheaded an online campaign to stage illegal flashmob rallies against the military takeover, was arrested late Thursday in Chonburi southeast of Bangkok.

Kejriwal put on trial over defamation case

PTI, New Delhi

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Arvind Kejriwal was put on trial by a Delhi court yesterday on charges of defamation on a complaint filed against him by BJP leader Nitin Gadhkar. The court framed the charge after Kejriwal, former Delhi chief minister, refused to heed to the magistrate's suggestion to amicably resolve the case filed against

Alleged cop killer surrenders in Canada

AFP, Montreal

A gunman suspected of killing three Canadian police officers and wounding two others in a brazen attack surrendered yesterday after a manhunt that put a province under lockdown. The search for Justin Bourque had put the city of Moncton on lockdown for

Seattle campus shooting kills 1

AFP, Los Angeles

A gunman killed one person and injured three others Thursday on a college campus in the northwestern US city of Seattle. The

UK voters can now sack MPs who misbehave

TNN, London

A landmark new legislation announced by the monarch of Britain on Wednesday will allow voters to sack misbehaving MPs. The Queen in her speech announced the Recall of MPs Bill that will allow constituents to force a by-election if an MP behaves badly. But the voters will require the signatures of at least 10% of registered voters within an eight-week period. The new power of recall will be triggered only if MPs are given jail sentences or if the House of Commons agree that they have engaged in serious wrongdoing.



70TH D-DAY ANNIVERSARY

Russian President Vladimir Putin (3rd R) arrives for a group photo for the 70th anniversary of the D-Day landings at Benouville Castle, June 6, 2014. World leaders and veterans gathered by the beaches of Normandy to mark the 70th anniversary of the Allied landings in Normandy on D-Day during World War II. Also pictured are (L-R) US President Barack Obama, Britain's Queen Elizabeth, French President Francois Hollande, Denmark's Queen Margrethe II and Luxembourg's Grand Duke Henri. Obama and Putin held informal talks yesterday, diplomatic sources said, amid the worst crisis in ties between the United States and Russia in decades over the unrest in Ukraine. PHOTO: AFP

D-Day spirit ignites hope

AFP, Benouville

Russia and Ukraine appeared to have made a long-awaited breakthrough in efforts to resolve a damaging crisis in their relations after conciliatory talks on the sidelines of Friday's D-Day anniversary ceremonies.

Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian president-elect Petro Poroshenko embraced the spirit of the day that signalled the end of World War II by announcing they would jointly seek a ceasefire in the conflict between government forces and pro-Russian rebels in southeastern Ukraine.

The two leaders shook hands and talked for a quarter of an hour in a meeting brokered by French President Francois Hollande before a lunch of world leaders attending the D-Day events.

A series of positive commentaries on the encounter followed from both Kiev and Moscow, raising hopes of a peaceful de-escalation of a crisis that erupted when Russia annexed Crimea in March and sparked a damaging chill in its relations with western powers.

The rift with the West looked to be healing too as Putin had his first face-to-face encounter with US President Barack Obama. US officials styled the meeting as an informal chat but Putin portrayed them as "substantial" discussions.

Putin told Russian TV that Poroshenko had the "right approach" to ending the crisis while the Ukrainian

president-elect, who is due to be inaugurated today, said he believed there was a "good chance" of a successful dialogue with Moscow.

Putin revealed that the two countries were close to a deal on the vexed issue of Russian gas supplies to its former Soviet partner.

Russia indicated it would send an ambassador to Kiev for Poroshenko's investiture in what will be seen as de facto recognition of the new president's legitimacy.

A ceasefire could be harder to deliver as, for it to be accepted by the rebels, there would have to be some sort of pullback by Ukrainian government forces which Kiev would regard as an infringement of its right to police all of its sovereign territory as it sees fit.

Tensions in southeastern Ukraine have mounted in recent days with the government admitting on Thursday that it had lost control of three border posts that were being routinely attacked by the rebels.

The Russian president has repeatedly emphasised that he does not control the rebels while the Western powers accuse Moscow of pulling their strings.

According to French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, Putin admitted he could have a "certain influence but not total influence" over events in Ukraine.

If there is a ceasefire and a significant de-escalation of the crisis, it will be a major coup for Hollande and the gastro-diplomacy that has brought Putin in from the cold.

UKRAINE CRISIS

Abdullah escapes assassination bid

AFP, Kabul

Afghan presidential front-runner Abdullah Abdullah escaped an assassination attempt yesterday when two blasts hit his campaign motorcade in Kabul, killing at least six people just ahead of a hotly contested run-off election.

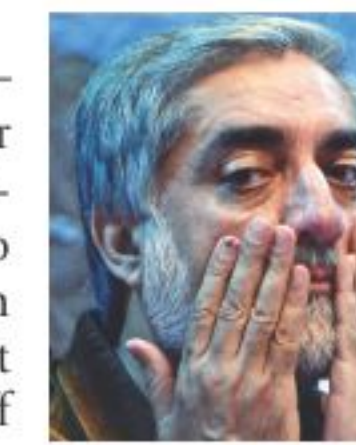
"The first attack was a suicide car bomb on a convoy of Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and the second was a mine attack," Sayed Gul Agha Hashemi, head of Kabul police's criminal investigation branch, told AFP.

Abdullah said he was unhurt, but at least six people were killed and 22 others wounded, according to the interior ministry.

The blast site was cordoned off by security officials as ambulances rushed to the scene and took the wounded to hospital, making their way through a sandstorm that hit the capital.

The blast occurred soon after Abdullah left an election rally in the city's Ariana hotel. Some witnesses in the area reported hearing two ear-splitting explosions.

The assassination attempt came ahead of the second-round presidential election on June 14, which Taliban insurgents have threatened to disrupt.



Sword-wielding Sikh activists clash with members of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhandak Committee (SGPC) during commemorations for the 30th anniversary of Operation Blue Star at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, yesterday. At least 12 people were wounded in the violence. PHOTO: AFP

Modi may tour Japan in July

Reports say Indian PM likely to visit US in September

AFP, New Delhi

India's new Prime Minister Narendra Modi will likely visit Japan next month, the foreign ministry said yesterday, in a boost for Tokyo as it looks to shore up regional alliances and counter an increasingly assertive China.

Modi, whose Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party won a landslide victory in May's elections, is set to make his maiden foreign trip as premier to neighbouring Bhutan later this month.

Foreign ministry spokesman Syed Akbaruddin said that while the (South Asian) "neighbourhood remains India's priority", Japan has offered to host Modi soon and he will likely take up the invitation in July.

Modi's first trip to the United States, meanwhile, will "most likely" be in September, Akbaruddin added.

The world is closely watching Modi's first moves as leader of the world's biggest democracy, and a visit would be a boost for

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as he seeks to raise Asian support to counter China's increasing regional assertiveness.

New Delhi, like Tokyo, has a long-running territorial dispute with Beijing, whose growing military confidence is causing disquiet in Asia and beyond.

China is in a row with Japan over ownership of several islands in the East China Sea, and at odds with India over a long-running border dispute that flared into a brief war in 1961.

The Asian giant is also locked in tense maritime territorial rows with neighbours in the South China Sea, which Beijing claims almost in its entirety.

The United States, Japan's key ally, is concerned about China's growing economic and military clout and would welcome a closer relationship between New Delhi and Tokyo, which geographically bookend Beijing.

Abe and Modi exchanged friendly greetings on Twitter after his landslide win.



'Not arming Syria rebels was president's call'

AFP, Washington

Beginning a dry run for her seemingly inevitable US presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton has put some space between herself and Barack Obama on foreign policy in her latest memoir.

In one of several passages recounting her differences with the president during her time serving at his secretary of state, Clinton said she favored arming rebels early in Syria's civil war.

Hillary's long-awaited book "Hard Choices" -- seen as an unofficial start to her expected presidential run -- is set for a June 10 release.

The memoir touches on the Iraq war, the Benghazi attack, Washington's ties with the Kremlin and Russia's invasion of neighbor Ukraine, as well as fallout from the Arab Spring.

The Syria episode illustrates a key break between Hillary, who lost the Democratic nomination to Obama in 2008, and a president whose popularity has plummeted in his second term.

She said she was convinced that arming and training moderate Syrian rebels was the best way to turn the tide against strongman Bashar al-Assad.

"The risks of both action and inaction were high, (but) the president's inclination was to stay the present course and not take the significant further step of arming rebels," she added.



Hillary Clinton

'Sometimes rape is right'

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

A state minister from Indian prime minister Narendra Modi's ruling party has described rape as a "social crime", saying "sometimes it's right, sometimes it's wrong", in the latest controversial remarks by an Indian politician about rape.

The political leaders of Uttar Pradesh, the state where two cousins aged 12 and 14 were raped and hanged last week, have faced criticism for failing to visit the scene and for accusing the media of hyping the story.

"This is a social crime which depends on men and women. Sometimes it's right, sometimes it's wrong," said Babulal Gaur, the home minister in the BJP-run central state of Madhya Pradesh.

The minister said that the crime of rape can only be considered to have been committed if it is reported to police.

Pak girl survives 'honour killing'

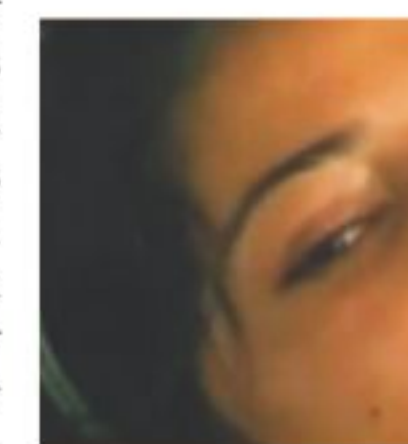
She was shot, thrown in canal for love marriage

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

An 18-year-old woman in Pakistan has survived being shot and thrown into a canal by her family for marrying for love, just weeks after Farzana Parveen was stoned to death by her family in a so-called honour killing that drew worldwide condemnation.

Ali Akbar, a local police official, said Saba Maqsood was attacked and shot by her father, uncle, brother and aunt and thrown into the waterway in the city of Hafizabad in Punjab province.

Police said she has survived injuries to her cheek and hand but was unconscious when she was thrown into the water. She quickly regained consciousness, however, and managed to crawl to the bank, where two passers-by helped her.



Saba Maqsood

'Criminal of word'

Escaped French killer returns to Swiss jail, as promised

AFP, Geneva

A French murderer who escaped from a Swiss prison this week, leaving a letter vowing to turn himself back in after taking a few days off, has kept his promise, authorities said yesterday.

The 38-year-old man, who had been serving part of a 15-year sentence for the brutal murder of a prostitute at a semi-open Geneva penal institution, sparked an international manhunt when he failed to return on Sunday after spending the day working outside the prison.

In a letter addressed to his mother, he had explained that he needed four to five days of freedom and vowed to turn himself in once he had taken "some air".

"I will behave while I'm on the lam," he promised in the letter, his lawyer told AFP.

Keeping his promise, he walked back into the prison late Thursday, Geneva authorities said in a statement.

The man, who was found guilty in 2005 of stabbing a prostitute 110 times, was denied an early conditional release in March.