

# NEWSIN brief

## Shah Rukh becomes Interpol ambassador

TNN, Mumbai

Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan has now joined hands with Interpol to promote greater awareness in preventing crime. He has been selected as the Interpol ambassador. Interpol is the world's largest international police organization with 190 member countries.

## Millions lose Internet access in US

AFP, New York

Time Warner Cable apologized for a "very serious failure" after millions of people across the United States were knocked off the Internet on Wednesday because of a fault. An estimated 11 million Internet subscribers were hit by the early morning outage, which lasted more than hour, The Wall Street Journal said, while other reports said the problem affected customers nationwide. Services had been restored, it said.

## Gunman kills journos in Pakistan

AFP, Quetta

A Gunman opened fire on the offices of a domestic private news agency in southwest Pakistan Thursday, killing three people including two journalists, officials said. The incident occurred in Quetta. No group has claimed the attack and the motive remains unclear.

## China landslide kills 7

AFP, Beijing

Seven people died and another 20 were left missing by a landslide in China, state media reported yesterday. The landslide engulfed a village near Fuquan city in the southwestern province of Guizhou, the Xinhua news agency said. Torrential rain complicated the rescue work, it added.



## I chased the 'wrong way for glory'

John Lennon's killer says he is 'sorry for being an idiot'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

John Lennon's killer has been denied his eighth attempt at being paroled, following a hearing in which he apologised to the board for being an "idiot" that had chased the "wrong way for glory".

Mark David Chapman released five shots on 8 December 1980 towards the former Beatle, hitting him four times outside the Upper West Side apartment that the musician had lived in.

Chapman, 59, pled guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced in 1981 to 20 years to life in jail.

# Pak army intervenes as mediator

Police launch murder probe against PM Nawaz Sharif in a bid to diffuse crisis

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's army chief was named mediator yesterday in a fortnight-long political crisis, fuelling speculation that the military could use the protests against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to re-assert its dominance over the civilian government.

Thousands of demonstrators led by populist cleric Tahir-ul-Qadri and politician Imran Khan have been camped outside the parliament building in Islamabad since August 15, demanding the prime minister step down.

Qadri and Khan announced General Raheel Sharif would mediate in the standoff after the cleric earlier rejected the government's decision to launch a murder investigation that named the prime minister as a suspect, saying it was not enough.

"The Pakistan army chief has officially asked us if it will be acceptable to the Azadi (freedom) march if he becomes a mediator and guarantor," Qadri told followers outside parliament Thursday.

"Do I have your consent?" he asked his audience, who loudly replied in the affirmative.

He added the army had asked for "24 hours for mediation".

The protests' other leader, cricket hero turned politician Imran Khan, confirmed the move in a separate speech.

"I want to tell you all that I will not disappoint you. The talks have already started," he added.



The leaders then left their camps to meet with the army chief, according to a military spokesperson on Twitter.

The two-week showdown at the heart of the capital has rattled the nuclear-armed state, and shaken Sharif's government just 15 months in to a five-year mandate.

As well as wide-ranging calls for political reform, Qadri has demanded police bring murder charges against Sharif over the killing of at least 10 of his followers in clashes with police in the eastern city of Lahore.

Earlier, a statement from the prime minister's office said that orders had been given to register a murder case against senior government officials including Sharif over the killing of Qadri's followers in an apparent last-ditch effort to resolve the crisis.

But Qadri rejected the move, complain-

ing the police had not included the same terror charges which were levelled at the cleric and his supporters over the incident against members of the government.

Khan and Qadri have alleged massive cheating in the May 2013 poll that saw Sharif sweep to power with a huge majority, though international observers said the vote was largely free and fair.

The two protest movements are not formally allied, but they have gained strength from one another, and Khan's position would be weakened if Qadri ended his vigil.

In a country that has seen three military coups, the threat of army intervention has cast a shadow over virtually every moment of political crisis.

Sharif met the powerful army chief to discuss the standoff earlier yesterday, the

second such meeting in three days.

The two men agreed to "take necessary measures for resumption of stalled process of negotiations for an expeditious resolution in the best national interest", a statement from the PM's office said.

Analyst Imtiaz Gul said that Sharif was likely to survive the crisis, but would need to make major concessions to the army in exchange for its support.

"It may not necessarily culminate in the resignation of Nawaz Sharif but as of now he seems to have surrendered a lot of political authority. He will emerge as a much weakened prime minister," said Gul.

The army is widely viewed as hostile toward Sharif's efforts to normalise ties with India, and wishes to allow former military ruler Pervez Musharraf, who is facing treason charges, to leave the country.

A military-negotiated end to the crisis would also lend credence to the view, held by many analysts, that the army and its intelligence agencies have been providing material aid to the opposition groups.

The government has set up a judicial commission to investigate poll rigging claims and a parliamentary committee to examine electoral reform, but neither move satisfied the protest leaders.

Neither protest movement has mobilised mass support beyond their core followers, and other opposition parties have shunned Khan's call to unseat the government and begin a campaign of civil disobedience.

## Erdogan sworn in Turkey as president

REUTERS, Ankara

Tayyip Erdogan was sworn in as Turkey's 12th president yesterday, cementing his position as its most powerful leader of recent times, in what his opponents fear heralds an increasingly authoritarian rule.

Reading the oath of office in a ceremony in parliament, Erdogan vowed to protect Turkey's independence and integrity, to abide by the constitution and by the principles of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, founder of the modern secular republic.

Moments after being sworn in, Erdogan appointed outgoing foreign minister as acting prime minister, according to an announcement in the official gazette. Davutoglu will oversee the existing cabinet until Erdogan asks him to form a new government, expected to be announced today.

Opponents warn his ambition to establish an executive presidential system will concentrate too much power in the hands of a leader with autocratic instincts and lead the country ever further from the secular ideals of Ataturk.

## Karzai packs up amid political chaos

AFP, Kabul

Outgoing Afghan President Hamid Karzai has packed up all his personal possessions and is ready to leave the palace, his spokesman said yesterday, even though the disputed election has failed to find his successor.

Karzai, who has lived in the former royal palace in central Kabul since 2002, has supervised the removal of his precious library of books from shelves inside his heavily-fortified residence.

He is due to move into another house in the city, though it is unclear how active he will be in politics after ruling Afghanistan for 13 turbulent years since the fall of the Taliban regime.

"The president has packed up already, days ago," Karzai's spokesman Aimal Faizi told AFP.

Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, the two candidates vying to succeed Karzai, are stuck in a prolonged stalemate over who won the June 14 election, which has been engulfed in allegations of massive fraud.

Karzai, 56, has lived in the vast palace complex behind multiple layers of rigorous security with his wife Zinat and their three children, the youngest of whom was born earlier this year.

Under the constitution, he is banned from standing for a



third term in office and he often said that he is looking forward to retirement and to becoming a "citizen of Afghanistan" who is ready to help his successor if asked.

Karzai, who has publicly stayed neutral during the election, has pushed for the inauguration to be held next Tuesday -- even though Ghani and Abdullah both still claim to have won.

But the political crisis has only deepened in recent days, with Abdullah pulling out a UN-supervised audit of all eight million votes.

Abdullah, who came far behind Ghani in preliminary results from the June run-off, accused the audit of failing to clean out fraudulent votes.

The withdrawal undermined a US-brokered deal in which both candidates agreed to accept the audit and for the winner to then form a national unity government.

Negotiations over the unity government have also struggled, while officials deny reports that some current ministers planned to break the impasse by setting up a "interim administration" to take power.

The UN has voiced fears that the impasse could trigger a spiral of instability and revive ethnic divisions as US-led Nato combat troops head home and Taliban insurgents seek to exploit months of political paralysis.

## Japan's war crimes confessions released

AFP, Beijing

After releasing daily confessions of 45 Japanese war criminals, China yesterday published them in a 6,000-page, 11-volume series of books, state media said -- at least the second such set.

The books are Beijing's latest bid to highlight the Asian rivals' bloody history, with relations between them at their worst in years.

The "confessions" -- of 45 war criminals who were tried and convicted by military courts in China after the war -- have been released online by the State Archives Administration (SAA) on a daily basis since early July.

The new books will compile scans of the men's original hand-written accounts, along with translations.

They are being published as "authorities continue their drive to raise awareness on China's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression", Xinhua said.

In the first "confession", dated 1954 and 38 pages long, Keiku Suzuki, described as a lieutenant general and commander of Japan's 117th Division, admitted ordering a Colonel Taisuke to "burn down the houses of about 800 households and slaughter 1,000 Chinese peasants in a mop-up operation" in the Tangshan area, according to the official translation.

China regularly accuses Japan of failing to face up to its history of aggression in Asia, criticism that has intensified since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was elected in December 2012 and has advocated a more muscular defence and foreign policy stance.

Chinese researchers say that more than 20 million people died as a result of Japan's invasion and occupation.

## Japan, India to ink rare earths deal

AFP, Tokyo

Tokyo and New Delhi will next week sign an agreement that will see around 2,000 tons of rare earths imported from India, a report said yesterday, as Japan looks to diversify supply away from China.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi are expected to agree on the deal at their summit in Tokyo on Monday, the Nikkei newspaper reported.

Modi will visit Japan from August 30 to September 3 on his first trip outside South Asia since coming to power.

Some 2,000 to 2,300 tons of rare earths -- roughly 15 percent of what Japan's manufacturers use each year -- will be shipped from India to Japan, it said, adding that imports will start as early as February.

China accounts for 95 percent of global production of rare earths, a category of 18 metals vital for the production of smartphones, hybrid car batteries, wind turbines, steel and low-energy light bulbs, amongst other things.

The country is home to 23 percent of global reserves of such metals, and this month lost an appeal on a ruling by the World Trade Organization that said it had violated global trade rules by restricting exports.



## Thai court drops murder charge against ex-PM

AFP, Bangkok

A Thai court yesterday dismissed murder charges against former premier Abhisit Vejjajiva and his ex-deputy over a bloody 2010 protest crackdown, months after a military coup tipped the balance of power in the politically divided nation.

Relatives of the victims criticised the surprise decision to drop the case as politically motivated. The charges were brought to court under a previous government led by Abhisit's rivals who have since been ousted from office.

Scores of demonstrators died under Abhisit's establishment-backed leadership in street clashes between mostly unarmed "Red Shirt" supporters of fugitive former premier Thaksin Shinawatra and security forces firing live rounds in Bangkok.

A criminal court in the capital, which previously agreed to hear the charges, ruled that it did not have jurisdiction in the case against Abhisit and his then-deputy Suthep Thaugsuban because they were holders of public office at the time and acting under an emergency decree.

It said the only court with the authority to consider the allegations was the Supreme Court's Criminal Division for Holders of Political Positions.

The ruling comes three months after the military seized power from Abhisit's political opponents in a bloodless coup.

Army chief General Prayut Chan-O-Cha, who was last week picked as prime minister of the Southeast Asian nation by a junta-appointed legislature, is often described as the architect of the 2010 crackdown.

No member of the armed forces has been prosecuted in connection with the deaths.

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