

NEWSIN brief

Scottish Vote: Record support for 'yes'

REUTERS, Edinburgh

A poll showing support for Scottish independence at its highest ever level threw the fate of the United Kingdom into question yesterday, just two weeks before Scots vote on whether to secede. The poll by YouGov showed the unionist lead had shrunk to 6 percentage points from 22 a month ago as support for independence jumped to 47 percent in August, suggesting a major shift in opinion ahead of the Sept 18 referendum.

Thai junta blocks rights meeting

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thailand's ruling junta yesterday ordered that a rights talk at a journalists' club in Bangkok be shut down, further stoking concerns over freedom of expression in the country since a military power grab in May. Police turned up at the Foreign Correspondent's Club of Thailand and stopped an event, entitled "Access to Justice in Thailand: Currently Unavailable" and organised by Thai rights groups and Amnesty International Thailand.

Ebola threatens food security in W Africa: FAO

REUTERS, Rome

The world's worst Ebola epidemic has put harvests at risk and sent food prices soaring in West Africa, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said yesterday, warning the problem would intensify in coming months. The FAO issued a special alert for Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, the three countries most affected by the outbreak, which has killed around 1,550 people since the virus was detected in the remote jungles of southeastern Guinea in March.

Attack on army convoy kills 11 in Sinai

REUTERS, Cairo

An attack on a convoy killed 11 members of the Egyptian security forces in the Sinai Peninsula yesterday, security and medical sources said. Two were killed by a roadside bomb and the others were shot as they tried to flee, the security sources said. Security sources said earlier that the attack killed 10 soldiers.

FBI, Apple probe nude photo leak

CNN ONLINE

A hacker's leak of nude photos of Jennifer Lawrence and other female celebrities is now a case for the FBI. Some of the alleged victims in the celebrity hacking case "have engaged with the FBI," a US official told CNN's Pamela Brown Monday. Apple confirmed to CNN Monday that it is looking into reports that its popular iCloud online data backup service may have been compromised by the hackers.



Photo taken on August 31, 2014, shows a burning Ukrainian patrol boat in the Azov Sea near Mariupol, on the Azov Sea coast, after it was targeted by alleged Russian shelling.



PHOTO: AFP



So far, so good
Survey says cities happy with Modi

TNN, New Delhi

So far, so good. That, in a nutshell, seems to be the popular assessment in big Indian cities about the performance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government in the first 100 days in office. They believe that the government has got its priorities largely right and holds promise for the future, but are not too enthused by its tackling of inflation.

Modi's own style is seen as a mix of decisive and dictatorial.

These are among the findings of an exclusive poll done for TOI in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune and Ahmedabad. Interestingly, there were relatively minor differences in responses of different genders, age groups and socio-economic strata, but huge variations among cities.

On the whole, Chennai and Kolkata emerged as the cities most sceptical of the new government's performance while Pune, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and Bangalore seem the most in awe of Brand Modi.

Overall, 16 per cent of respondents rated the performance of the government as 'excellent' and another 42 per cent rated it as 'good', which means a good majority approve the Modi government. About a third thought it was 'average' and roughly a 12th characterized the performance as 'poor' or 'very poor'.

Russia, Nato square off over Ukraine

AGENCIES

Russia declared Nato a major "threat" yesterday after the Western military alliance announced plans to reinforce defences in eastern Europe because of the Kremlin's perceived stoking of war in Ukraine.

Moscow's surprise declaration of a shift in its military doctrine came just ahead of a Nato's summit in Wales tomorrow at which beleaguered Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko will lobby US President Barack Obama for military support.

Obama will deliver a message of firm Nato support for its newest members from the former Soviet empire when he visits the tiny Baltic state of Estonia today.

Amid escalating tensions, Ukraine's defence minister on Monday said Russia is responsible for bringing a "great war" on Europe and will be responsible for "tens of thousands" of deaths if the crisis escalates.

Russia has consistently denied arming pro-Moscow insurgents, claiming that there has been - and will be - no military intervention.

On yesterday morning, however, its Security Council announced that it would update its "military doctrine by the end of 2014 to reflect Nato expansion".

It also warned that "military aggression against [Russian-controlled] Crimea will be considered aggression against Russia".



I could take Kiev in 2 weeks: Putin

The developments come after it emerged that Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly told the outgoing president of the European Commission he could "take Kiev in two weeks".

According to Italy's La Repubblica newspaper, Jose Manuel Barroso said that Putin made the comment after the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko had left the table at the Nato summit over the weekend during talks on the crisis.

Poroshenko has accused Russia of "direct and undisguised aggression" in the east of Ukraine.

Barroso reportedly said Putin first made the remarks in a telephone conversation held on 29 August, when the Russian president

DEVELOPMENTS

- Russia to alter military strategy eying Nato
- Nato readies rapid action force to 'strike fast and hard'
- EU decision on new sanctions by Friday
- Half a million displaced by conflict: UN

was accused of being responsible for the military action of the separatists in Ukraine.

Putin is reported to have interrupted, saying: "The issue is not this. If I want, I can take Kiev in two weeks".

However, yesterday morning a Russian official complained that the statement was "quoted out of context and carried a completely different meaning".

Ukraine on Tuesday reported losing 15 more soldiers in the latest day of clashes with Russian-backed insurgents whose ongoing offensive threatens to stamp Moscow's permanent hold on the eastern half of the ex-Soviet state.

Tensions between Russia and the West increased yesterday after it was revealed that

I will neither resign, nor go on leave: Pak PM

Govt, military deny Sharif's resignation call

PTI, Islamabad

Embattled Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on late Monday said he will neither resign nor go on leave, even as anti-government protesters led by Imran Khan and Tahirul Qadri continue to mount pressure on him to step down.

The statement came as reports claimed that Pakistan's powerful army chief General Raheel Sharif on Monday advised Sharif to step down during a meeting.

After the TV channel reports, both the government and military issued separate denials, dismissing the claims as "baseless".

Duniya TV reported that Gen Sharif has asked the PM Sharif to resign for a temporary three-month period as demanded by protesters to let an independent commission probe alleged rigging in last year's general election.

Addressing a meeting of leaders of political parties here, Nawaz said he would not allow to set a precedent under which a few people make hostage mandate of millions of people.

"We have rule of constitution here and we

will not allow any one to abrogate it," The Express Tribune quoted Nawaz as saying.

Following the meeting a joint declaration pointed out that future of Pakistan is linked with democracy and any deviation can be dangerous for federation of Pakistan.

The leaders expressed their firm resolve that they stand by the Prime Minister in the struggle to defend the democracy.

All parliamentary parties decided to become party to the petition filed in the Supreme Court for supremacy of the parliament, Radio Pakistan reported.

The leaders strongly condemned attacks on the parliament, Prime Minister House and PTI.

"These attacks are attacks on democracy and state," they said.

Meanwhile, hearing a set of petitions against sit-ins by the PTI and PAT on the Constitution Avenue, the Pakistan Supreme Court yesterday issued notices to all parliamentary parties as well as the PAT.

The notices were issued after petitioner Zulfiqar Naqvi pleaded to the court that all parliamentary parties be summoned so the deadlock can be resolved.

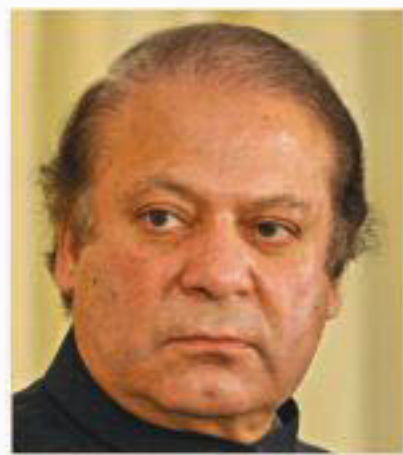


PHOTO: DAILY MAIL



IS BEHEADS SECOND US JOURNO

An image grab taken from a video released by the Islamic State (IS) and identified by private terrorism monitor SITE Intelligence Group yesterday shows a masked militant holding a knife and gesturing as he speaks to the camera in a desert landscape before beheading 31-year-old US freelance writer Steven Sotloff. The masked militant condemned US attacks on the IS before cutting Sotloff's throat. He then introduces a second captive, identified by name and said to be British and threatens to kill him. Story on page 16.

Govt forces gain ground against IS militants

IS accused of 'ethnic cleansing' as parliament stormed

AFP, Amelri

Iraqi forces made more progress yesterday in their fightback against jihadists, but in Baghdad anger boiled over as hundreds stormed parliament over the fate of missing soldiers who surrendered in June.

After breaking a months-long jihadist siege of the Shia Turkmen town of Amelri by Islamic State (IS) fighters, troops yesterday regained control of part of a key highway linking Baghdad to the north.

Two towns north of Amelri were also taken from the jihadists on Monday as Iraqi forces -- backed by US air strikes -- score their first major victories since the army's collapse across much of the north in June.

That collapse left some 1,700 soldiers in jihadist hands, with many believed to have been executed. Demanding to know their fates, angry relatives stormed parliament in Baghdad, attacked MPs and began a sit-in in its main chamber, an official said. Anti-riot police were trying to evict the

hundreds of protesters, who were also calling for some officers to be held accountable, said the official, who was present at parliament.

Concern over those in jihadist hands has been fuelled by reports of widespread atrocities, including accusations from Amnesty International of war crimes and ethnic cleansing.

The Sunni extremist IS declared an Islamic "caliphate" in regions under its control in Iraq and Syria after it swept through much of the Sunni Arab heartland north of Baghdad in June and then stormed minority Christian and Yazidi Kurdish areas.

IS has carried out beheadings, crucifixions and public stonings, and Amnesty yesterday accused it of "war crimes, including mass summary killings and abductions" in areas it controls.

"The massacres and abductions being carried out by the Islamic State provide harrowing new evidence that a wave of ethnic cleansing against minorities is sweeping across northern Iraq," said its senior crisis response adviser Donatella Rovera.

Boko Haram overrun Nigerian town

Scores killed; five thousands flee

REUTERS, Maiduguri

Islamist Boko Haram insurgents have overrun much of a northeastern Nigerian town after hours of fighting that has killed scores and displaced thousands of residents, several security sources said yesterday.

The Islamists launched an attack on the town of Bama, 70 km from the Borno state capital of Maiduguri, on Monday. They were initially repelled but came back in greater numbers overnight, the sources and witnesses said.

The sources said there were heavy casualties on both sides. One security source said as many as 5,000 people fled the town.

A soldier involved in the Bama fighting, who declined to be named, said the insurgents had targeted the Bama armoury with heavy weapons including tanks. As troops tried to repel the attack, they called in air reinforcements.

But by the time the fighter jet arrived, they had mostly lost the battle for this location. The jet then bombed the area but accidentally killed everyone there, both Nigerian troops and insurgents, the soldier said.

Because of Bama's proximity to Maiduguri, a large metropolis and home of a major army base, security officials are worried there is now little to keep Boko Haram from gaining access to a key city that was also the birthplace of their movement.

Their tactics have started to resemble those of Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army: kidnapping boys and forcing them to fight while taking girls as "wives".

Afghan militants 'may join IS'

BBC ONLINE

Fighters from a militant Islamic group in Afghanistan, allied to the Taliban, have told the BBC they are considering joining forces with Islamic State (IS).

Their commander also said they would still fight the Afghan government, even after Nato forces left in 2014.

Commander Mirwais said that if IS, which he called by its Arabic acronym Daish, proved a true Islamic caliphate, they would link up with it.

"We know Daish and we have links with some Daish members. We are waiting to see if they meet the requirements for an Islamic caliphate," Commander Mirwais said.

Scotland Yard put up for sale

AFP, London

A piece of criminal history can be yours for £250 million. London's world-famous Scotland Yard police force put its headquarters up for sale Tuesday.

The 22-storey, 600,000-square-foot office block, a short walk from both the Houses of Parliament and Buckingham Palace at Victoria, has been home to the Metropolitan Police since 1967.

The revolving sign outside is instantly recognisable as the backdrop to countless televised police appeals, but the triangular 1960s building is costly to run and badly designed for modern working practices.

"This is a hugely expensive building to run and operate," said Craig Mackey, deputy commissioner of the force.

"If we were to stay in this premises we would have to spend about £50 million on it."

Instead, the force is moving to a more modern building nearby, selling off the site and using the money and savings from reduced running costs to invest in frontline policing.

"The Yard", named after one of its earliest homes in the street named Great Scotland Yard, is one of the most famous forces in the world, and featured in detectives stories about fictional heroes Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot.