

NEWSIN
brief

Suicide blast kills 3
Nato soldiers in Kabul

AFP, Kabul

A Taliban suicide bomber rammed an explosives-laden car into a Nato convoy in Kabul yesterday, triggering a massive blast that killed one Polish soldier and two other foreign troops as well as wounding at least 13 civilians. The attack was mounted during morning rush-hour traffic outside the Supreme Court and near the heavily-fortified US embassy, on a route used by Nato convoys every day.

French govt faces
crunch confidence vote

AFP, Paris

France's under-fire government faces a crucial parliamentary confidence vote yesterday as the country battles a political and economic crisis and President Francois Hollande's popularity stagnates at record lows at 13 percent. Experts say the government is unlikely to lose the confidence vote but it will certainly expose splits within Hollande's ruling Socialist Party.

'Mobile phone lane'
for pedestrians!

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The Chinese city of Chongqing has created a "mobile phone lane" on a stretch of pavement, offering a path for those seemingly too engrossed in messaging and other activity on their phones to pay close attention to where they are going. However, the city's property manager says the move is intended to be ironic, reminding people that it is dangerous to become too entranced by what they are doing on their handsets while walking. Chongqing, in south-west China, is the country's third-largest "megacity".

Typhoon Kalmaegi
hits China's Hainan

AFP, Beijing

A powerful typhoon slammed into southern China yesterday, swamping ships, grounding flights and forcing thousands -- many of them still recovering from a previous storm -- to leave home. Typhoon Kalmaegi made landfall on the east coast of Hainan island packing winds of 144 kilometres an hour, the China Meteorological Administration said.

Drunk-man-eating leopard
claims 12th victim in India

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A man-eating leopard has claimed its latest victim, following a string of attacks on mainly drunken villagers as they attempt to make their way home. The big cat claimed its latest victim on Thursday, when it killed a 44-year-old man from Badeth village. The leopard first killed in 2012, when it pounced on a 46-year-old man from Seimar Village. It has since killed 12 people, including two women, and injured 4 others, local authorities say. Madan Paneru from Kotali village told the Telegraph most of the victims were drunk when the leopard savaged them.



Pak MPs thrown off plane

AFP, Islamabad

Video of angry Pakistani airline passengers throwing two lawmakers off a plane for delaying its departure went viral yesterday, sparking a passionate debate online about the country's so-called 'VIP culture'. The Monday night Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) flight from Karachi to the capital Islamabad took off almost two hours late for the two politicians. But this time irate passengers on the PIA plane decided to hit back -- aiming a string of invective toward Ramesh Vankwani, a minority Hindu member of the ruling PML-N party, and later at the country's former interior minister Rehman Malik. In one of the videos, apparently shot on mobile phone, the passengers can be seen waiting at the door of the plane for Malik. As he walks down the jetway, a man shouts: "Malik saheb (Sir) you should go back. You should apologise to these passengers. You should be ashamed of yourself!" The embarrassed politician later turned back. Vankwani left the flight after passengers threatened to beat him with shoes.



Rehman Malik

Ukraine ratifies EU pact

Rebels vow separation despite Kiev's self-rule offer; violence rages; Russia to deploy reinforcements to Crimea area

AFP, Kiev

Ukrainian lawmakers ratified a landmark EU pact yesterday that steers the ex-Soviet state closer to the West, and pledged autonomy for pro-Russian rebels waging war in the east.

But Russia signalled it had no intention of backing down in the most serious East-West standoff since the Cold war, with the announcement it plans to boost its troop presence in annexed Crimea.

Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said it was a "priority" to send reinforcements to the Black Sea peninsula because of what he described as the escalating Ukraine crisis and the buildup of foreign troops on its border.

The European and Ukrainian parliaments earlier held simultaneous votes to approve the political and economic association agreement that lies at the heart of the country's worst crisis since independence in 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed.

Lawmakers in Kiev voted to grant self-rule to the separatist east and offer amnesty to rebel fighters under a peace plan drawn up 11 days ago to halt the bloody five-month conflict. Insurgent leaders reacted cautiously to the moves, although they insist they want nothing less than full independence in the industrial regions that have been outside Kiev's control since April.

Poroshenko said the adoption of the 1,200-page association agreement with the European Union was Ukraine's first step towards membership of the 28-nation bloc.

European parliament president Martin Schulz described the ratification as a "historic moment" that met the "dreams of the people who fought for democracy" in Ukraine.

But the occasion was muted by a decision to bow to Russian pressure and delay until 2016 the implementation of a free trade deal that would pull Ukraine out of a rival Kremlin-led customs union.



Petro Poroshenko shows a newly voted Ukrainian law about the ratification of the Ukraine-EU association agreement at the Ukrainian Parliament in Kiev, yesterday.

However, both sides accuse the other of repeated violations and officials said yesterday that five civilians and three Ukrainian soldiers had been killed around the rebel stronghold of Donetsk in the past 24 hours.

Under the terms of the truce, lawmakers adopted "special status" legislation that offers three years of limited self-rule to the coal and steel belt known as the Donbass that generates a quarter of Ukraine's exports.

Poroshenko argued Monday that his plan offered the best way out of the crisis because it guarantees "the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of our state".

But some political leaders in Kiev and especially members of right-wing groups that played a small but instrumental role in the protests that forced out the old regime, have questioned whether Poroshenko is ceding too much to Moscow.

The legislation calls for local polls in Donetsk and Lugansk in December and allows local legislatures to set up their own police forces and name judges and prosecutors.

Crucially, it also guarantees the right for Russian to be used in all state institutions -- a particularly sensitive issue in the mainly Russian-speaking regions.

The rejection of the broad EU pact by Kremlin-backed president Viktor Yanukovich in November triggered the bloody chain of events that led to his ouster in February, Russia's subsequent seizure of Crimea and the unleashing of the revolt in the east.

The conflict has now claimed almost 2,900 lives and sent at least 600,000 people fleeing their homes, according to UN figures.

But a European-mediated truce that Kiev and Moscow clinched on September 5 has offered the first significant glimmer of hope that the crisis in Ukraine may be abating.

US warplanes have been targeting IS jihadists in northern Iraq since August 8, and in recent days hit the militants southwest of Baghdad for the first time, in a significant expansion of the campaign.

Meanwhile, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel told US lawmakers that plans are being laid to hit targets in Syria, where the IS group is holding hostages and has a stronghold in the city of Raqqa.

"This plan includes targeted actions against ISIL safe havens in Syria, including its command and control, logistics capabilities, and infrastructure," Hagel told the Senate Armed Services Committee.

But the US military's top-ranking officer, General Martin Dempsey, told the same hearing the bombing would not match the huge raids that accompanied the start of the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq.

"This will not look like 'shock and awe' because that is not how ISIL is organized, but it will be persistent and sustainable," Dempsey said, using the term Washington used for its 2003 bombardment.

Dempsey also went further that any US official has gone before in admitting that the military advisors that Obama has dispatched to bolster Iraqi forces could get involved in combat.

Obama's administration has insisted that his action against the IS extremists is not the start of another US ground war in the Middle East, and that there will be no large-scale American invasion. But nearly 300 US military advisers are already working with Iraqi government forces, 300 more are on their way and Dempsey refused to rule out their providing "close combat advising."



A woman protests against US military action in Iraq as Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel (L) and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army Gen Martin Dempsey testify before the Senate Armed Services Committee in Washington, DC, yesterday.

US mulling 'combat role'

AFP, Washington

The United States plans to strike the Islamic State group in its Syrian strongholds and could send military advisors into combat alongside Iraqi troops, American commanders said yesterday.

Military leaders warned of a further escalation in their battle against the jihadists just as two branches of the rival al-Qaeda group called for a united front against the war coalition.

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Bypoll results jolt BJP

India's ruling party loses 13 of 24 seats in 3 states

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India's ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party yesterday suffered a major blow in the legislative assembly by-elections in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat states just four months after having swept in parliamentary polls.

BJP lost 13 of the 24 assembly seats held by it in the three states in the bypolls considered yet another test of popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The only solace for BJP on an otherwise gloomy day was its maiden entry in West Bengal assembly as the party's candidate won Dakshin Basirhat seat bordering Bangladesh. The other assembly seat (Chowringhee in central Kolkata) bypoll was won by the state's ruling Trinamool Congress.

The reverses for BJP in the by-elections came after the party's disappointing performance in assembly by-elections in Bihar, Uttarakhand, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh states in the last two months.

Out of the total of 32 assembly seats across nine states, where byelections were held on September 13 and for which counting of votes was taken up yesterday, BJP won 10, Congress seven and Mulayam Singh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party seven while the rest going to other parties.

In Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous and electorally crucial state where BJP was on a high after a near-total sweep of the total of 80 Lok Sabha seats, the party suffered a humiliating blow as it lost seven of the 11 seats held by it, including one held by its ally Apna Dal.

Equally crushing was BJP's defeat in the byelections in Rajasthan where it conceded three of the four seats to Congress which also managed to wrest three of the nine seats in Gujarat.

All the seats in Uttar Pradesh (11), Gujarat (9) and Rajasthan (4) were held by BJP and the bypolls were necessitated after the state legislature members were elected to the Lok Sabha, lower House of Parliament.

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Xi arrives in Sri Lanka

AFP, Colombo

China's President Xi Jinping yesterday held talks with his Sri Lankan counterpart, seeking to strengthen defence ties with the strategically located Indian Ocean nation that could provoke unease in neighbouring India.

China is increasingly asserting its influence in Sri Lanka, a midway point on one of the world's busiest international shipping lanes.

It is already the largest investor, having financed the construction of a deep-sea port and an international airport.

During his visit Xi will kick off building work on a Beijing-funded \$1.4 billion port city and launch Sri Lanka's biggest electricity generator, a Chinese-funded 900-megawatt coal-fired power plant.

In a letter published on the front page of Sri Lanka's state-run Daily News yesterday, Xi said he wants to "enhance exchanges and cooperation between us in maritime, business, infrastructure, defence, tourism and other areas".

The reference to defence came despite the repeated insistence of Sri Lankan officials that relations were based on commercial rather than security considerations, an apparent attempt to allay Indian fears.

Some officials in New Delhi have voiced fears in the past that China's growing engagement in the region is a deliberate strategy to encircle India.

Xi also said no country should be allowed to intervene in the affairs of the small island nation, which has historically come under India's influence. Beijing has consistently supported Colombo in its efforts to resist a UN investigation into alleged war crimes against Tamil Tiger rebels, while India has pushed Sri Lanka to ensure accountability.

Xi was greeted by President Rajapakse with a ceremony involving dozens of schoolchildren and elephants dressed in colourful and ornate clothing.

The two sides are expected to finalise more than 20 agreements on trade and aid.

100m saved from hunger
over last decade: UN

AFP, Rome

The number of hungry people in the world has dropped by 100 million over the last 10 years but one in nine are still undernourished, with Asia home to the majority of the underfed, the UN said yesterday.

The UN's food agencies said the global number was down over 200 million since the early 1990s, but warned that despite the progress made, "about 805 million people in the world suffer from hunger."

The Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of undernourished people by 2015 is within reach "if appropriate and immediate efforts are stepped up," the Food and Agriculture Organization, International Fund for

Ebola fight will
cost \$1b: UN

AFP, Geneva

Nearly \$1.0 billion dollars is needed to fight the Ebola outbreak raging in west Africa, the United Nations said yesterday, warning that 20,000 could be infected by year-end.

UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos said there was a "huge funding challenge".

The capacity of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia to provide even the most basic necessities was, she warned, "on the brink of collapse."

US President Barack Obama was yesterday set to announce US efforts to "turn the tide" in the Ebola epidemic, with plans to order 3,000 US military personnel to west Africa.

US advisors will also train up to 500 health care providers per week in Liberia, according to the plan Obama was set to unveil in Atlanta.

The United Nations said the response to the crisis will require \$987.8 million, with about half needed for the worst-hit country, Liberia.

Its announcement comes amid mounting global alarm over the worst-ever Ebola epidemic, which by Friday had claimed 2,461 lives out of 4,985 cases, according to fresh numbers from the World Health Organization.

The UN document estimates that some 20,000 people could be infected with Ebola by the end of the year, with Guinea accounting for 16 percent of infections, Sierra Leone 34 percent and Liberia a full 40 percent.