

NEWS IN brief

Indo-Pak border fire continues

Indian and Pakistani troops traded cross-border fire yesterday, officials said, the latest in a series of clashes that began earlier this month and have claimed at least 20 civilian lives. No one was injured in the latest incident. Each country holds part of the Himalayan territory but claims it in full.

UK mulling 2-yr-jail for 'trolling'

People found guilty of Internet "trolling" in Britain could be jailed for up to two years under government proposals outlined yesterday, following a number of high-profile cases of abuse on Twitter. There has been increasing concern in Britain about the growing scourge of Internet "trolls" who post hate-filled messages on social media, often threatening their targets.

Pak envoy summoned over Iran border killings

Iran has summoned the Pakistani ambassador Noor Muhammad Jadhmani and demanded immediate steps to stop attacks by "terrorists and rebels" that sparked deadly clashes on the countries' border, state media reported yesterday. Two Iranian border guards and a Pakistani paramilitary officer were killed in a shooting on Thursday evening, sources on the two sides said. Iran said rebels had tried to infiltrate the country.

Rival Koreas exchange border fire

North and South Korean troops yesterday briefly exchanged fire in the latest in a series of minor border skirmishes that have raised military tensions on the divided peninsula. The South's defence ministry said the exchange inside the Demilitarised Zone that separates the two rivals lasted only 10 minutes. There were no reported casualties.

Blast kills 7 Egypt soldiers in Sinai

A roadside bomb killed seven Egyptian soldiers and wounded four in the restive Sinai Peninsula yesterday, security officials said. The bomb exploded next to an armoured vehicle guarding a gas pipeline in north Sinai, the officials said.



A policeman holding a baton advances towards pro-democracy protesters as they clash on a street in the Mong Kok district of Hong Kong early yesterday. Hong Kong's embattled government said it will open talks with student demonstrators tomorrow, after three nights of violent clashes between police and protesters who have paralysed parts of the city with mass pro-democracy rallies.

PHOTO: AFP

EBOLA CRISIS

EU to scale up response

European foreign ministers are to meet today under pressure to scale up their response to the Ebola epidemic after warnings it could become the "disaster of our generation". Ahead of the talks, Aid agency Oxfam, which works in the two worst-hit countries -- Liberia and Sierra Leone -- issued a stark call for more troops, funding and medical staff to be sent to the west African epicentre of the outbreak. "There is a very strong political focus on this as the most immediate crisis facing us," a European diplomat said ahead of the meeting in Luxembourg. Another EU diplomat said Britain -- which has a navy ship bound for Sierra Leone laden with medical staff and supplies -- hoped to "galvanise EU action on Ebola". "There is a real sense that this is a tipping point and we must get to grips with it now," said the diplomat. "If we can deal with it in the country, we don't have to deal with it at home."

ISIS suffers heavy losses in battle for Kobane

Iraq PM to visit Iran; Turkey promise to intensify fight in Syria

The Islamic State (ISIS) group was taking heavy losses in the Syrian battleground of Kobane yesterday as Iraqi forces fought the jihadists buoyed by US backing for top government security appointments. US Secretary of State John Kerry said the appointment of defence and interior ministers after weeks of delay was a "very positive step forward" in the fightback against ISIS in Iraq, which Washington has made its priority. But US-led warplanes launched 11 air strikes near Kobane on Saturday and yesterday, US Central Command said, helping the town's Kurdish defenders to repulse a new attempt to cut their supply lines into Turkey.

The Kurdish fighters, who have been under IS assault for more than a month, weathered fierce street fighting and at least two jihadist suicide bombings but the front line remained unchanged, a Kurdish official said. From Saturday into yesterday morning, a total of 31 jihadists died in the battle, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The US military has said it sees "encouraging" signs in the battle for Kobane, although it warns the town may still fall. Meanwhile, the White House yesterday said President Barack Obama called his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan and that they pledged to "strengthen cooperation" against ISIS in Syria. But US commanders have said repeatedly the main priority remains the battle against ISIS in neighbouring Iraq, where the jihadists swept through much of the Sunni Arab heartland north and west of Baghdad in June. With Washington voicing approval, Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi's office announced that he is to head to Tehran today to discuss the fightback with his other key ally. Washington has acknowledged that Tehran has an important role to play in the battle against ISIS, although it has kept the main Shiite power out of the coalition it has forged against the jihadists for fear of alienating Sunnis. Although it has not been part of the US-led coalition, Tehran has been a key backer of Abadi's government in its efforts to hold back the jihadist advance.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said he and Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin had reached a price deal at high-stakes talks in Milan on Friday that otherwise focused on the six-month pro-Kremlin revolt convulsing the ex-Soviet state's separatist east. Two meetings mediated by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande -- as well as a brief exchange on their own -- marked the two leaders' most in-depth dialogue since Poroshenko's May election. Poroshenko said the meetings produced the broad outlines of a deal that could see Russia halt the gas supply cutoff it began in June -- its third in less than 10 years. He said a more detailed protocol agreement due to be completed by Tuesday will see Ukraine meet Russia's demand and pay \$385 per 1,000 cubic metres of gas for deliveries guaranteed through the end of March. Meanwhile, German intelligence has accused pro-Russian rebels of shooting down a Malaysian passenger jet over Ukraine using missiles captured from government forces, a media report said yesterday. Kiev and the West have previously charged that Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 was blown out of the sky in July by separatist fighters using a BUK surface-to-air system supplied by Russia, charges denied by Moscow. But the head of Germany's BND foreign spy agency said intelligence indicated the rebels had captured a BUK system from a Ukrainian base and fired a missile that exploded directly next to the plane, Spiegel magazine reported. The MH17 crashed on July 17 as it flew over rebel-held territory in eastern Ukraine, killing all 298 people on board, 153 of them Dutch.

Ukraine claims gas deal with Russia

Ukraine and Russia yesterday stood on the verge of resolving their latest gas war in time to keep the war-scarred nation and EU clients warm through the winter months. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said he and Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin had reached a price deal at high-stakes talks in Milan on Friday that otherwise focused on the six-month pro-Kremlin revolt convulsing the ex-Soviet state's separatist east. Two meetings mediated by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande -- as well as a brief exchange on their own -- marked the two leaders' most in-depth dialogue since Poroshenko's May election. Poroshenko said the meetings produced the broad outlines of a deal that could see Russia halt the gas supply cutoff it began in June -- its third in less than 10 years. He said a more detailed protocol agreement due to be completed by Tuesday will see Ukraine meet Russia's demand and pay \$385 per 1,000 cubic metres of gas for deliveries guaranteed through the end of March. Meanwhile, German intelligence has accused pro-Russian rebels of shooting down a Malaysian passenger jet over Ukraine using missiles captured from government forces, a media report said yesterday. Kiev and the West have previously charged that Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 was blown out of the sky in July by separatist fighters using a BUK surface-to-air system supplied by Russia, charges denied by Moscow. But the head of Germany's BND foreign spy agency said intelligence indicated the rebels had captured a BUK system from a Ukrainian base and fired a missile that exploded directly next to the plane, Spiegel magazine reported. The MH17 crashed on July 17 as it flew over rebel-held territory in eastern Ukraine, killing all 298 people on board, 153 of them Dutch.

Search ends for Nepal trekkers

Rescue teams in Nepal yesterday said that there are now no trekkers left stranded after completing their search for survivors of a devastating Himalayan storm. The focus now is on recovering bodies buried in the snow, a government spokesman told the BBC. Search teams yesterday rescued 34 more trekkers and guides stranded in the Himalayas since a deadly snowstorm struck five days ago at the height of the hiking season, officials said. Rescuers using helicopters also found three more bodies buried on the highly popular Annapurna Circuit trekking route, taking the total number of those confirmed or feared dead to 40. Those rescued include 17 Nepalese, 10 Germans, five Swedes and two Australians, Bhattarai told AFP, without giving details of their injuries or condition. Police have said 483 trekkers, guides and others have been rescued since Wednesday, including 292 foreigners. It is unclear how many people may still be missing in the country's worst-ever trekking disaster. Many survivors have been left with severe frostbite and will have to have limbs amputated. Nepal has pledged to set up a weather warning system after the snowstorm caught trekkers unaware as they heading to an exposed high mountain pass on the circuit.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is greeted by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) President Amit Shah as Modi arrives at the party headquarters to attend the BJP Parliamentary Board meeting in New Delhi, yesterday. Inset, Amit Shah is being welcomed by jubilant supporters at the BJP headquarters.



Refused to assisted suicide, Grandma, 86, starves herself to death

An 86-year-old woman who starved herself to death said before she died that she had "no alternative" given the UK's laws against assisted suicide. Jean Davies died on 1 October, five weeks after first embarking on a fast to end her life, even though she was not terminally ill. The right-to-die campaigner spoke to the Sunday Times during her fast, describing it as "hell" and "intolerable". Davies, who said her four children and two grandchildren supported her right to make her own choice on the matter, said no one would choose to die in that way "unless you thought your life was going to be so bad". She said she had suffered a range of medical conditions including fainting episodes and chronic back pain. Last week the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) clarified the law on assisted suicide in the wake of the case of paralysed former builder Paul Lamb and Jane Nicklinson, the widow of Tony who had suffered locked-in syndrome. Supreme court justices ruled against the pair in June, but DPP Alison Saunders said the judges' ruling allowed a clarity in the law around healthcare professionals. She said the likelihood of healthcare professionals being prosecuted depended on their "specific and professional duty of care to the person in question". She stressed there was "no immunity" for encouraging or assisting suicide, but right-to-life campaigner Dr Peter Saunders accused her of "decriminalising assisted suicide by doctors and other healthcare professionals".

ASSEMBLY POLLS IN MAHARASHTRA, HARYANA BJP tightens grip in India with thumping wins

India's right-wing ruling party yesterday secured strong victories in two important state elections, tightening its grip on power after storming to power nationally five months ago. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was assured of victory in Maharashtra, of which financial hub Mumbai is the capital, over its centre-left rival the Congress party which ruled the western state with its allies for 15 years. The BJP won outright for the first time in Haryana, which borders the national capital, handing the once-powerful Congress a humiliating defeat after its 10-year rule of the state, officials said. "We are two steps closer to our mission of a Congress-free India," BJP president Amit Shah told reporters in New Delhi with a grin as vote-counting continued. Success for the BJP in the states would also strengthen its power in the national parliament's upper house, crucial for the passing of contentious laws. The BJP currently lacks a majority in that chamber, whose composition is based on seats won in regional assemblies. The defeats are yet another blow for

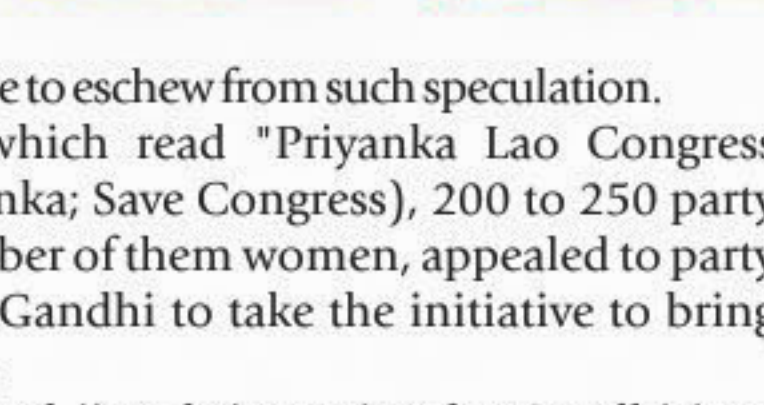
Congress, whose Gandhi dynasty has produced three prime ministers, following its thumping loss to the BJP in May after 10 years in charge nationally. Despite the wins, the BJP is expected to fall short of a majority in Maharashtra and is seen as needing a partner to form a government. The Hindu nationalist BJP is expected to mend ties with its ally of 25 years in Maharashtra, the far-right Shiv Sena, after deciding to campaign alone following an acrimonious split. BJP veteran leader LK Advani has called for unity of two old allies. Earlier, in a surprise development, NCP, a long time ally of Congress, offered outside support to BJP to form a government in Maharashtra "in the interest of stability and development" of the state. BJP said that it will examine NCP's offer. The BJP has won or was leading in 122 seats in Maharashtra, in tallies on the election commission's website, while Congress had 42 seats in the 288-member state assembly. Shiv Sena was leading in 63 seats there. In Haryana, the BJP secured a majority of 46 of the 90 seats up for grabs, and was leading in one more seat, while Congress had won or was leading in just 15.

As Congress faced defeat in both Maharashtra and Haryana, a group of party workers gathered outside the Congress office here demanding that Priyanka Gandhi join active politics. Meanwhile, Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi yesterday congratulated BJP for its success in Maharashtra and Haryana elections and said people in both the states have voted for change. "We accept people's verdict. Congress will work hard on the ground to once again earn people's confidence," Rahul said. This is not the first time that such a demand has been made but it has repeatedly been snubbed by Priyanka, who had even issued a terse statement some time back asking people to eschew from such speculation. Waving posters, which read "Priyanka Lao Congress Bachao" (Bring Priyanka; Save Congress), 200 to 250 party workers, a larger number of them women, appealed to party vice-president Rahul Gandhi to take the initiative to bring his sister into politics. "We appeal to Rahul ji to bring Priyanka Gandhi into active politics of Congress at a time when the party is passing through tough times. She can supplement him in stopping the march of Narendra Modi," a worker said outside the party office.

Call for Priyanka grows strong in Congress

Rahul Gandhi congratulates BJP

PTI, New Delhi



Biker gangs join fight against ISIS

A group of German bikers have followed in the footsteps of a Dutch Motorcycle Club and joined in the fight against ISIS in Syria. Members of the Cologne-based Median Empire Motorcycle Club, who reportedly have strong Kurdish links, have joined Kurdish militia in the fight against ISIS, with images and messages posted on Facebook reporting their progress. The Facebook profile for "AZAD 1%ER," who claims to be the founder and national president of the German biker club, has been posting images of his "brothers" in Syria, wearing Median Empire branded t-shirts and carrying guns. One post shows two men climbing a hill in Syria in their motorcycle get-up with guns slung over their shoulders, with the message: "Our boys were in Kobani today and told me they were shot at but nothing happened. They are okay," and promising to keep followers up to date. Earlier, 3 bikers from the Dutch No Surrender Banditos Club are understood to have travelled to Mosul, Iraq, to join forces with the Kurds.

