

NEWS IN brief

No Obama-Putin meet at APEC, G20: Report

AFP, Moscow
No bilateral meetings between Presidents Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin are scheduled during the APEC and G20 summits next week, a Kremlin spokesman said yesterday.

Burkina army 'wants to hand over power'

AFP, Ouagadougou
Burkina Faso's army wants to hand over power within two weeks, labour unions said on Tuesday, as international pressure mounted for a speedy transition after the fall of president Blaise Compaore.

Egypt school bus accident kills 18

AFP, Cairo
At least 18 people were killed when a bus packed with high school students collided with three other vehicles, including a tanker truck, in northern Egypt yesterday, medics said.

Shelling kills 11 children in Damascus

AFP, Beirut
Shelling of a rebel-held area in the northeast of the Syrian capital killed 11 children yesterday, a monitoring group said, with activists saying a school had been hit.



Ex Indian PM Manmohan Singh and his wife Gursharan Kaur pose during a photo session at the Imperial Palace, Japan, yesterday. He received the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Paulownia Flowers at the palace.

Pirate Bay co-founder held in Thailand

AFP, Bangkok
The Swedish co-founder of the Pirate Bay website was hauled to Bangkok yesterday following his arrest in northeast Thailand, with police from Stockholm waiting to press for his deportation to serve a jail term for copyright infringement.

China to punish officials who support Dalai Lama

AFP, Beijing
China will severely punish officials in Tibet who support the Dalai Lama, the exiled spiritual leader and Nobel laureate, the region's top Communist leader said according to state media reports yesterday.

Ukraine peace plan tatters

Kiev cuts finances, orders troop reinforcements to rebel region

AFP, Donetsk
The ceasefire in Ukraine hung by a thread yesterday after President Petro Poroshenko accused pro-Russian rebels of endangering the peace process and ordered troop reinforcements to eastern cities.



But the already tattered truce, which was signed September 5, has looked ever more fragile since rebels defied the government Sunday and held leadership elections that they described as legitimising their two self-declared independent states.

Ukrainian authorities say they are preparing for the worst, following rebel threats to expand their territory. Poroshenko said late Tuesday that he had ordered troop reinforcements to cities across the east to guard against a "possible offensive in the direction of Mariupol, Berdyansk, Kharkiv and Lugansk."

Russia said it "respected" the rebel elections, but Kiev, the European Union and United States all said that the polls had badly damaged the peace process, which was based on giving rebel areas autonomy, not independence.

As a result, Poroshenko said, he was asking parliament to rescind the law on offering autonomy to the rebels, who are based around the cities of Donetsk and Lugansk.

The separatists adopted a conciliatory tone yesterday, saying that they were ready to try and resurrect the peace process.

But Yatsenyuk likewise signalled the government was taking a tougher line, announcing an end to subsidies for the eastern regions till normalcy returns.

Gas and power supplies will continue, he said.

Analysts say the Ukrainian government's biggest fear is the threat of an offensive by Russian-backed separatists to capture Mariupol and then push along the coast to establish a land corridor linking Russia to Crimea -- another Ukrainian region, which was invaded and annexed by Russia in March.



Palestinian girls attend class inside their school which was destroyed during the 50 days of conflict between Israel and Hamas last summer, in the Shejaiya neighborhood of Gaza City, yesterday.

Israel committed war crimes

Says Amnesty as UN warns of another Gaza war; tension builds in Jerusalem

AGENCIES
Amnesty International yesterday accused Israel of committing war crimes during its campaign in Gaza as UN warns of another conflict looming in the war-ravaged territory.

conduct amounted to war crimes. It adds that war crimes were also committed by Palestinian militants.

The 50-day war killed more than 2,100 Palestinians, most of them civilians, and 72 people on the Israeli side, all but six of whom were soldiers.

Israel's foreign ministry rejected the report's findings, saying Amnesty "ignores documented war crimes perpetrated by Hamas" and had produced no evidence to back up its claims.

Amnesty says it documented eight instances in which Israeli forces attacked homes in Gaza without warning, killing "at least 104 civilians including 62 children."

"The report reveals a pattern of frequent Israeli attacks using large aerial bombs to level civilian homes, sometimes killing entire families," Amnesty said.

While possible military targets were identified in some cases, "the devastation to civilian lives ... was clearly disproportionate", it added.

The group said it had to conduct research for the report remotely as Israel denied it and other watchdogs access to Gaza.

Meanwhile, a senior United Nations official on Tuesday said that there is still not an effective or united Palestinian government in place in Gaza and unless stability is achieved rapidly, another conflict will engulf the territory.

Robert Turner, director of operations for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Gaza, said the extent of damage and homelessness after the July-August war was worse than first thought. The latest estimates suggested reconstruction would take two to three years if all went well, he said.

"If we do not have political stability, I think if we do not have a national Palestinian government, I think if we do not have at least an easing of the blockade, yes there will be another war," Turner told reporters.

US takes hands-off stance on future of Suu Kyi

REUTERS, Washington
Despite hailing Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi as "an icon of democracy," US President Barack Obama is quietly acquiescing to the government's decision to bar her from running for the presidency in next year's election, US officials say.

former name. "We can't prejudice the outcome, nor would we as a modern democracy. We're not going to weigh in and say a certain person should run in the election."

Suu Kyi is ineligible for the presidency because Myanmar's military-drafted constitution bars candidates with a foreign child or spouse. Her late husband was British, as are her two sons.

The official said, however, that Obama would press for an election that is "free, fair, open and credible" and seek unspecified constitutional changes. Obama will also press Myanmar's leaders to end persecution of religious minorities including Rohingya Muslims in western Rakhine State, the official said.

A backdrop to Washington's decision not to press too hard on behalf of Suu Kyi is China, Myanmar's giant northern neighbor. During its long isolation, Myanmar relied on Beijing as its closest ally, but concern has deepened over China's growing influence over Myanmar's economy, partly prompting the shift to improve ties with Washington.

The risk for US policymakers is that pushing reforms too aggressively could backfire and lead Myanmar back into Beijing's embrace.

BLASPHEMY ALLEGATION Pak Christian couple beaten to death

REUTERS, Lahore
Police in Pakistan arrested dozens of people yesterday after a mob beat a Christian couple to death and burned their bodies for allegedly desecrating a Quran.

Blasphemy is a serious offense in conservative Muslim Pakistan where those accused are sometimes lynched on the spot.

The latest incident took place in a village in Punjab province on Tuesday when a local cleric told his community through the loudspeakers of his mosque to punish the couple for burning a few pages of the Quran, a police source said.

A mob then gathered outside the house of Shehzad Masih, 32, and his wife Shama, in her 20s, dragged them out and beat them to death, police said. Their bodies were then set on fire in a brick kiln where they worked.

INDEPENDENCE DRIVE Catalonia to hold vote defying Spain

AFP, Barcelona
Catalonia's leader yesterday vowed that a symbolic independence vote banned by the Spanish government will go ahead on November 9, setting up a constitutional conflict unprecedented in post-Franco Spain.

Defying the latest in a string of legal challenges by Madrid, regional president Artur Mas promised to defend Catalans' "right to decide", despite an order from Spain's Constitutional Court a day earlier to suspend the planned vote.

"We have decided to carry on with this participative process... All peoples have the right to decide their future," Mas said in a speech.

"We are defending fundamental rights protected by basic laws: freedom of conscience, freedom of participation and freedom of expression."

Sunday's vote, which Mas insisted is not a "referendum", will be organised by volunteers without an official electoral roll, but holding it in defiance of the court's veto would put Mas on delicate ground.

"If they go ahead, it will be civil disobedience -- not for the people who vote but for the public officials involved. That is a penal offence," said Yolanda Gomez, a constitutional law expert at Spain's distance-learning university UNED.

Catalonia took a step towards greater autonomy in 2006 when it formally adopted a charter that assigned it the status of a "nation". But in 2010 the Constitutional Court overruled that nationhood claim, fuelling pro-independence feeling.

Catalans were fired up by the independence referendum in Scotland in September, even though voters there rejected a separation from Britain.



Indian security personnel stand guard at Indira Gandhi International airport in New Delhi, yesterday.

Taliban threatens to attack India

US says Pak using terror proxies to counter India's military superiority

AGENCIES
A new Pakistani Taliban group behind this week's devastating suicide bombing on the Pakistani-Indian border yesterday said the attack was as much aimed at India as Pakistan, suggesting that Indian targets might be next.

At least 57 Pakistanis were killed during a popular flag-lowering ceremony on Sunday when a bomber tried to get as close as possible to the border in a possible attempt to cause casualties on the Indian side as well.

Ehsanullah Ehsan, a prominent militant and spokesman for the group, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan Jamaat Ahrar (TTP-JA), said he had warned Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi that attacks in India were in the pipeline.

"I told him that his hands are red with the blood of Kashmiri mujahideen and innocent people of Gujarat for which he would have to pay the price," he told Reuters by telephone from an undisclosed location.

He earlier tweeted in English: "You (Modi) are the killer of hundreds of Muslims. We will (will) take the revenge of innocent people of Kashmir and Gugarat" (sic). An Indian intelligence official said the account appeared genuine.

TTP-JA has announced its support for the Middle Eastern group Islamic State, whose belligerent anti-Western ideology has begun to inspire militants across South Asia.

On Tuesday, India's navy withdrew two warships from the eastern port of Kolkata after intelligence agencies warned of an attack on the port and the city between November 4 and 7.

Meanwhile, the US department of defense, in its latest six-monthly report on Afghanistan, says Pakistan uses its militants as "proxy forces to hedge against the loss of influence in Afghanistan and to counter India's superior military".

The 100-page report also noted that the Indian consulate in Herat was attacked by heavily armed militants three days before the swearing in of Narendra Modi.

This is not the first time the US has pointed fingers at Pakistan's support of terrorism. Admiral Mike Mullen, former chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, had told the US Congress in his final interview that the Haqqani network and Afghan Taliban were a "veritable arm" of Pakistan's ISI and army, ruining his relations with the then Pakistan army chief Gen Ashfaq Pervez Kayani.

FORBES MOST POWERFUL LEADER Putin beats Obama again

AFP, New York

For a second year in a row, Russian President Vladimir Putin has beaten Barack Obama to the title of world's most powerful leader as ranked by Forbes.

In a year in which Russia annexed Crimea, stoked a conflict in Ukraine and clinched a multi-billion-dollar gas pipeline deal with China that Forbes called the world's largest construction project, Putin remained on top.

It was the third time in Obama's presidency that he has lost top billing -- twice to Putin and once to Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

The 2014 list of 72 powerbrokers was chosen to reflect one for every 100 million lesser mortals on Earth and the top five remained unchanged from last year.

Third prize went to Jinping, who is expected to rule for a decade in which China is set to eclipse the United States as

the world's largest economy. Pope Francis was number four and German Chancellor Angela Merkel number five.

Among 12 newcomers are Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, number 15; Alibaba founder and China's richest man Jack Ma, number 30; and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed caliph of the Islamic State group, number 54.

While 26 on the list come from the United States, Asia Pacific made a strong showing with 19 from the region, including six from China. The list includes 17 heads of state who run nations with a combined GDP of \$48 trillion and 39 CEOs and chairs who control over \$3.6 trillion in annual revenue.

Nine women made the cut -- but for the first time two women -- Merkel and US Federal Reserve chair Janet Yellen -- reached the top 10.



UNHCR seeks to end statelessness in 10 yrs

AGENCIES

The United Nations launched a campaign Tuesday to end the hellish limbo of 10 million stateless people worldwide deprived of a nationality and basic rights, almost a fifth of them in Myanmar and Ivory Coast.

The UNHCR said a child is born stateless every 10 minutes, as it announced the global push backed in an open letter by the actress Angelina Jolie to end the scourge within a decade.

"Statelessness makes people feel like their very existence is a crime," UNHCR chief Guterres told reporters in Geneva.

"We have a historic opportunity to end the scourge of statelessness within 10 years, and give back hope to millions of people. We cannot afford to fail this challenge."

It estimates that at least 10 million people are currently stateless, having neither nationality nor passport. This can lead to denial of their access to medical care, education and political rights, such as voting.

The UNHCR wants to end this by getting countries to grant nationality to stateless children and offer citizenship to ethnic minorities.

Ethnic minorities -- such as Myanmar's Rohingya community -- are denied citizenship, and with it many rights. The group, viewed by the UN as one of the world's most persecuted peoples, faces widespread restrictions, including curbs on movement, education and marriage.

WAR ON ISIS UK to send more trainers to aid Iraq army

AFP, Baghdad

Britain will send more trainers to Iraq to help the country in its battle against the Islamic State jihadist group, Defence Secretary Michael Fallon said yesterday.

Britain is carrying out air strikes against ISIS jihadists who have seized swathes of Iraq as part of a US-led campaign to help push the group back, and is already training Kurdish troops.

He said the training would be for battalions able to leave the front lines, but did not specify if it would involve Iraqi soldiers, police or both. The exact number of trainers that will be sent has not yet been decided, he said.

Prime Minister David Cameron has ruled out sending combat troops back into Iraq, wary of committing to a new conflict six months from a general election.

