

NEWS IN brief

S Korea ferry captain jailed for 36 years

Lee Jun-Seok, 69, the captain of the South Korean ferry that sank in April with the loss of more than 300 lives, was jailed for 36 years yesterday, but acquitted of murdering those who died in the disaster. However, he was convicted of gross negligence and dereliction of duty, including abandoning his vessel while hundreds of passengers -- most of them schoolchildren -- remained trapped on board.

Gujarat makes voting compulsory in polls

THE HINDU ONLINE

Gujarat has become the first State in India to make voting compulsory in local bodies after state governor recently gave his sanction by signing the controversial Gujarat Local Authorities Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2009. The Gujarat Local Authorities Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2009 empowers an official chosen by the State Election Commission to declare an absent voter a "defaulter" except in case of illness or being out of station. The defaulter is liable for punishment but the nature of penalty is not specified.

60% of Indian men admit to wife-beating

TNN, New Delhi

In a damning indictment, about 60% Indian men have admitted to using violence to assert their dominance over their partner in a seven-state study that has highlighted the high prevalence of intimate partner violence in the country. Uttar Pradesh and Odisha have the highest incidence of such violence at 75% followed by Punjab and Haryana at 43% and Maharashtra at 37%.

Russia to provide Iran 2 more nuke reactors

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday signed a deal with Iran to build two new nuclear reactors at the Iranian Bushehr plant and expand the total number of reactors in the country to eight, Russian news agencies reported. Iran plans to build 20 more nuclear plants in the future, including four in Bushehr, to decrease its dependence on oil and gas.

Parliamentary polls within March: Sisi

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's parliamentary elections will be held before the end of March 2015, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi told a visiting US business delegation on Monday, his office said. Electing a new parliament is a key step in a roadmap announced by the army after it ousted Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's first freely elected president, on July 3, 2013.



US President Barack Obama, left, Chinese President Xi Jinping, right, and Russian President Vladimir Putin arrive at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit plenary session at the International Convention Center in Beijing, yesterday.

Modi arrives at Myanmar for Asean Summit

AGENCIES

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday set off on a tour which will take him to key summits and bilateral talks in Myanmar, Australia and Fiji.

Modi met Myanmar's President Thein Sein at the Presidential Palace shortly after his arrival at the Nay Pyi Taw international airport.

After his 45-minute meeting, Modi tweeted that he had a "very good" meeting with President Thein Sein. "We had extensive discussions covering various aspects of our bilateral relations," he said.

In Myanmar, Modi will attend the Asean-India summit and the East Asia Summit on Wednesday and Thursday. He will then visit Australia -- the first by an Indian PM in 28 years -- to attend the G20 summit, before going on to Fiji.

West confronts Putin

Abe says China and Japan 'need each other' amid row

AGENCIES

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday had a close-up brush with Western anger over the Ukraine crisis and the downing of Flight MH17, Tuesday as Japan PM called for Japan-China to step up tentative efforts to put deep hostility behind them.

Putin held separate bilateral meetings in Beijing with US President Barack Obama and Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott -- after the latter had used colourful sporting terminology to demand a face-to-face encounter with the Russian strongman.

But the Kremlin said that on the fate of the Malaysia Airlines plane at least, which the West says was downed by a Russian missile supplied to pro-Moscow rebels in Ukraine, Putin was not standing in the way of a full and transparent accounting.

The White House said Obama and Putin had met three times yesterday on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum

in the Chinese capital, which was taking place ahead of a G20 summit to be hosted by Abbott in Australia this weekend.

"Their conversations covered Iran, Syria, and Ukraine," National Security Council spokeswoman Bernadette Meehan told reporters in Beijing.

The biggest current differences between the US and Russia, though, are over Ukraine. In mid-October,

APEC SUMMIT

Putin accused Obama of having a hostile attitude towards Russia, while Obama decried "Russian aggression in Europe" in a recent speech to the United Nations General Assembly.

Earlier, US deputy national security adviser Ben Rhodes told reporters in Beijing: "We continue to be deeply troubled by Russian activities. If they continue... it's a recipe for isolation."

Western sanctions, as well as falling

oil prices, appear to have only antagonised the Russian leader instead of forcing him to change tack.

In Asia, Beijing and Tokyo's historically frosty relations have plunged to their lowest in decades over competing claims to Japanese-controlled islets in the East China Sea, and Tokyo's 20th-century history of aggression.

"Japan and China, we need each other. We are in a way inseparably bound with each other," Shinzo Abe told reporters in Beijing.

"Japan and China both have responsibility for peace and prosperity of the region and of the world."

Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Abe on Monday in Beijing on the sidelines of the APEC summit raising hopes of a possible thaw in tensions.

China and Japan are closely linked economically, but political tensions have endured between Asia's two heavyweights for decades, stemming largely from lingering anger over Japan's brutal World War II invasion of its neighbour.

Syria truce hope rises

AGENCIES

The UN mediator in the Syrian conflict, Staffan de Mistura, yesterday told the BBC he believes there is a fresh opportunity to resolve the country's crisis.

He said truce measures could succeed because of the common threat from Islamic State (ISIS) militants, as well as a growing weariness with conflict. The UN has called for "freeze zones" to halt fighting and improve aid. More than 200,000 people have died in Syria's increasingly fragmented civil war, now in its fourth year.

Rebel groups such as ISIS and the al-Qaeda-aligned Nusra Front have been fighting among themselves, as well as against forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad.

The UN plans call on all sides to freeze - or de-escalate - the violence through local truces to allow for the movement of humanitarian aid.

De Mistura said that first it was necessary to organise a freeze on fighting, then provide more humanitarian aid and then

encourage local political dialogue.

Earlier, Assad said his government was considering the UN truce plan for Aleppo. De Mistura on Monday discussed the plans with Assad during talks in the Syrian capital.

Meanwhile, a team of 50 US troops was on the ground in Iraq's frontline Anbar province yesterday as Washington steps up efforts to help Iraqi forces battle ISIS.

President Barack Obama has announced plans to double the number of American troops in Iraq to 3,000 as US-led efforts against the jihadists enter what he called a "new phase".

Egypt's deadliest militant group Ansar Beit al-Maqdis on Monday pledged allegiance to ISIS.

In Kobane, Kurds fighting the ISIS made advances yesterday. "The (Kurdish) People's Protection Units (YPG) recaptured streets and buildings in the south of Kobane, after a fierce battle against the IS that began yesterday (Monday) evening," said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

WAR ON ISIS

- US troops arrive in Iraq's Anbar
- Kurds 'recapture' areas of Kobane
- Egypt jihadists vow loyalty to ISIS

Pak militant attacks, bus crash kill 84

AFP, Pakistan

At least 57 people, including 18 children, were killed yesterday when a bus collided with a goods truck loaded with coal in southern Pakistan, officials said.

Meanwhile, a series of militant attacks across Pakistan yesterday left at least 27 people dead, including two officials overseeing security for a polio vaccination drive.

The accident happened near the city of Khairpur, 450 kilometres north of Karachi, the capital of southern Sindh province.

Television footage of the aftermath of crash showed the mangled bus lying on its side, its roof completely sheared off and battered green seats scattered around the scene.

Doctor Jaffer Soomro told AFP that 57 people were killed and 21 injured. Police said there were 17 women and 18 children among the dead.

"The accident was so severe that all of them died at the spot," except for one child who died undergoing treatment in hospital, Soomro told AFP by phone from Khairpur Civil Hospital.

Meanwhile, five separate strikes killed 27 people in Pakistan yesterday, including two roadside bombs, an attack on a military post and a car bombing targeting a judge. At least five soldiers and 15 militants were killed in a gunfight after insurgents attacked a checkpoint of the paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) in Orakzai, one of seven restive semi-autonomous tribal regions on the Afghan border.



A supporter of the Palestinian Fatah movement holds a portrait of late Palestinian leader and founder of the movement Yasser Arafat as she chants slogans during a rally to mark the tenth anniversary of his death in front of the Al-Azhar University in Gaza City, yesterday.



UK PM ready to accept a new 'cold war'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Britain should be prepared to accept a new "cold war" with Russia rather than allow President Putin to "rip up the international rulebook" through his actions in Ukraine, David Cameron warned Monday night.

In a stark assessment the Prime Minister said that if Russia continued on "its current path" its relationship with the rest of the world would be "radically different in the future".

Cameron was speaking ahead of the G20 meeting in Brisbane this weekend where he is expected to hold talks with President Putin.

In a speech to the Lord Mayor's banquet Cameron said he did not accept that a new cold war was inevitable but added that the UK would not back away from further economic and political confrontation with Moscow.

"Mikhail Gorbachev has warned that we are on the brink of a new Cold War. That is not an outcome we believe to be inevitable -- and neither is it one we seek," he said.

"But if Russia continues on its current path, then we will keep upping the pressure and Russia's relationship with the rest of the world will be radically different in the future."

Cameron insisted that economic sanctions were having an impact on Russia and added that unless a stand was taken by the West then the long term consequences for Europe's security would be far worse.

Mass sterilisation goes horribly wrong in India

Ten women killed; dozens hospitalised

AFP, Raipur

Ten women have died in India and dozens more are in hospital, some in a critical condition, after a state-run programme that pays women to undergo sterilisation went badly wrong, officials said yesterday.

Sterilisation is one of the most popular methods of family planning in India, where the government provides cash and other incentives to try to control the country's billion-plus population.

More than 60 women fell ill after undergoing the surgery over the weekend in the central state of Chhattisgarh, and 10 have now died, local official Sonmani Borah told AFP.

Around 80 women had the procedure at the local government-run sterilisation camp. The women suffered vomiting and a dramatic fall in blood pressure, said Borah, the commissioner for Bilaspur district, where the camp was held.

UN chief sets up Gaza inquiry

Another Intifada brewing?

AGENCIES

Fears were mounting that Israel may be facing a new Palestinian uprising on multiple fronts after violent attacks by individual Palestinians in Tel Aviv and near a West Bank settlement. Tensions also remained high in Arab areas in northern Israel, and Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas yesterday accused the Islamist movement Hamas of trying "to destroy" efforts to broker national unity through a series of bomb blasts in Gaza last week. Hamas quickly hit back, describing the allegations as "lies".

A Palestinian from the West Bank stabbed and critically wounded a soldier near a Tel Aviv railway station and fled, before being captured by police, Tel Aviv police chief Bentsi Sau said on Monday. Hours later, a Palestinian tried to run over pedestrians at a hitchhiking post near the entrance to the Alon Shvut settlement in the occupied West Bank.

He then got out of his car and stabbed three of them, media reports said. A 25-year-old woman was killed and a nearby security guard shot and seriously wounded the assailant, the reports added.

Violence continued yesterday. A young Palestinian was shot dead during clashes with the Israeli army in the southern West Bank, hospital sources told AFP.

UN chief sets up Gaza inquiry

Wave of violence hit Israel; Hamas-Fatah split widens

AGENCIES

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on Monday appointed a five-member panel to investigate Israeli attacks on UN shelters during the Gaza war and the discovery of Hamas weapons at UN sites.

Ban announced plans to set up a probe during his visit to Gaza last month after describing Israeli shelling of UN-run schools as a "moral outrage".

Israel maintained that Hamas militants were using the schools to store weapons and denied it had deliberately targeted the facilities, which were being used as shelters by Palestinian civilians during the 50-day war.

At least five UN facilities were hit during the conflict, killing scores of Palestinians including children, according to the UN refugee agency UNRWA.

The inquiry led by retired Dutch general Patrick Cammaert will focus on incidents from July 8 to August 26, he added. Ban toured the site of damaged UN shelters during his visit last month. The UN Human Rights Council in Geneva separately has set up a commission of inquiry into the Gaza offensive, led by Canadian lawyer William Schabas.