

NEWS IN brief

Pakistan releases 40 Indian prisoners

PTI, Karachi
Pakistan yesterday released 40 Indian prisoners from a jail here, officials said. The release comes a day after Indian PM Narendra Modi and his Pak counterpart Nawaz Sharif shook hands and exchanged pleasantries at the 18th Saarc Summit in Nepal. The released Indian prisoners included 36 fishermen and 4 others.

Thailand votes to ban commercial surrogacy

AFP, Bangkok
Thailand's parliament has voted to ban commercial surrogacy after outrage erupted over the unregulated industry following a series of scandals. A draft bill -- which would see those caught profiting from surrogacy punished with up to ten years in prison -- passed its first reading in the country's military-stacked parliament.

Four dead, 3 missing in French floods

AFP, Paris
Four people died and three were missing after violent storms triggered flash flooding, uprooting trees and ripping off roofs in south-eastern France, authorities said yesterday. Helicopters, soldiers, divers and paramilitary police carried out dozens of rescue operations in the region.

Storm batters Aussie city

AFP, Brisbane
Planes were flipped and roofs ripped off when hail and powerful winds tore through Australia's east coast, leaving a damage bill of more than Aus\$100 million. The storm, which officials said was one of the worst seen in the country, rained hailstones the size of tennis balls on cars and buildings late Thursday, flooding streets and injuring 39 people.

In shocking scenes, a woman desperately clung to a TV yesterday after a brawl broke out at the Asda store in Wembley over a cut-price item. The woman competed with other shoppers to try and get her hands on the last Polaroid TV in the store. Scenes of violence and chaos broke out across the UK as thousands of customers flooded shops and supermarkets to try and get their hands on cut-price goods during the Black Friday sales.

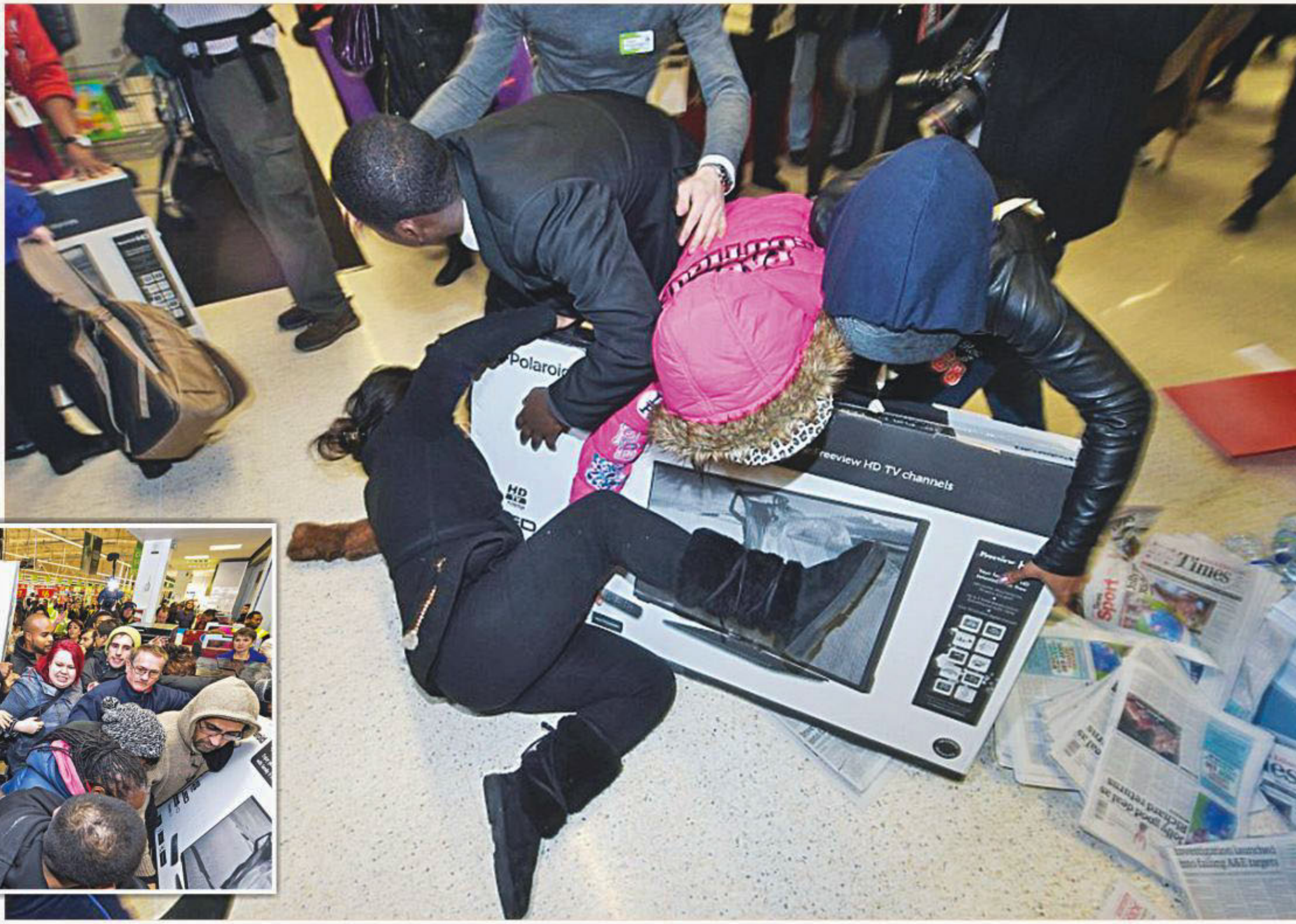


PHOTO: MAIL ONLINE



Thailand moves to bar Yingluck from politics

After delaying polls, parliament sets ex-PM's impeachment date

AFP, Bangkok
Thailand's military-stacked legislature pushed ahead yesterday with plans to impeach ousted former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra in what analysts say is an attempt to neuter her family's influence in politics for good.

Yingluck, Thailand's first female premier and the sister of fellow ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra, was removed from office in a controversial court ruling shortly before the army toppled the remnants of her elected government on May 22.

Despite being forced out of office, the military plan to impeach her over her administration's loss-making rice subsidy programme which -- while popular among her rural powerbase -- was a driving force behind protests against her now toppled government.

The kingdom's National Legislative Assembly, a loyalist body filled with junta appointees, voted yesterday to bring an impeachment hearing in the New Year.

"The opening of impeachment set on January 9 at 10am and I think the whole process will take about 30 days," assembly member Jetn Siratharanont told AFP. Yingluck's legal team had hoped to delay the hearing so they could gather more evidence but their request was denied.

Analysts say the impeachment proceedings are part of a wider campaign to make sure her family -- who are loathed by the military and Bangkok-based royalist establishment -- cannot enter office again.

"This is all part of the attempt by the junta to eliminate the Shinawatras from Thai politics," Pavin Chachavalpongun, an expert on Thailand and staunch junta critic at Japan's Kyoto University, told AFP. "The junta is trying to install infrastructure, through drafting a new constitution and also through a series of pending cases, to make sure that if there is ever another election someone like Yingluck -- or someone closely associated with her -- will not be able to stand," he added.

A successful impeachment needs three fifths of the national legislature to vote in favour and could see Yingluck barred from politics for five years.



'Pak to have 200 nuke warheads by 2020'

THE HINDU ONLINE

Pakistan is likely to have enough fissile material to build over 200 nuclear warheads by 2020, according to the latest report by Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), a US think tank.

The CFR special report "Strategic Stability in the Second Nuclear Age", authored by Gregory Koblenz from George Mason University, states that "Pakistan, which has the fastest growing nuclear weapon program in the world, is believed to have enough fissile material to produce between 110 and 120 nuclear warheads. By 2020, Pakistan could have a fissile material stockpile sufficient to produce more than 200 nuclear weapons."

According to the findings of the report, South Asia is the region "most at risk of a breakdown in strategic stability due to an explosive mixture of unresolved territorial disputes, cross-border terrorism, and growing nuclear arsenals." The report details that "Pakistan has deployed or is developing eleven delivery systems for its nuclear warheads, including aircraft, ballistic missiles, and cruise missiles."

While Pakistan is focused predominantly on the threat posed by India, it is reportedly also concerned by the potential for the United States to launch a military operation to seize or disarm Pakistani nuclear weapons, the report says. This concern, the report continues, is based in part on reported contingency planning by the US military to prevent Pakistani nuclear weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists.

Describing the current period as a second nuclear age, the report says that the "security dilemma" of the Cold War, has given way to a "security trilemma" where actions taken by one state to protect itself from a second make a third feel insecure. Due to this trilemma, the report says, though nuclear arsenals are shrinking in the rest of the world, Asia is witnessing a nuclear build up. Unlike the remaining Permanent Five countries, China is increasing and diversifying its nuclear arsenal.

France eyes two-year deadline for ME peace

MPs debate to recognize Palestine

AFP, Paris

France's foreign minister yesterday urged a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within two years, as French MPs debated a symbolic motion to recognise Palestine as a state.

Laurent Fabius said the United Nations Security Council was working on a resolution to relaunch and conclude talks. "A deadline of two years is the one most often mentioned and the French government can agree with this figure," he told MPs.

The Palestinians are planning to formally submit to the UN Security Council a draft resolution calling for an Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territory in 2016.

Fabius also said France was prepared to host international talks to drive the peace bid forward. "If these efforts fail; if this last attempt at a negotiated settlement does not work, then France will have to do its duty and recognise the state of Palestine without delay and we are ready to do that," stressed Fabius, without fixing a deadline for such a recognition.

Paris has frequently said France would recognise a Palestinian state "when the time comes", arguing that a two-state solution to the Middle East conflict logically implies recognition of Palestine.

The minister's comments came as French lawmakers debated the non-binding motion urging the government to recognise Palestine as a state, amid growing European frustration at the moribund Middle East peace process.

The motion is expected to pass comfortably on December 2 when the lower house of parliament votes on the text proposed by the ruling Socialists.



Egyptians react next to a man who was shot in Cairo's working class district of Matariya during clashes between Islamist protestors and police yesterday. Two people were killed in yesterday's clashes just hours after unidentified attackers shot dead a senior army officer in the Egyptian capital.

PHOTO: AFP



BBC ONLINE

Capoeira - a Brazilian martial art form combining dance - has been given a special protected status by Unesco, the UN's cultural arm.

A Unesco representative said defining capoeira as "intangible cultural heritage" would help Brazil preserve the tradition.

Capoeira was originally created by African slaves to keep their fighting skills alive, disguising it a dance. It is performed by two players who dance on their hands and feet. A combination of martial art, dance and sport,

capoeira is performed to percussion and chanting. It requires great physical strength and flexibility and is regarded as being of immense acrobatic beauty.

"It is one of the most important symbols of Brazilian identity and is present throughout our national territory as well as being practiced in more than 160 countries," the Brazilian culture ministry said in a statement.

Brazil now has five cultural art forms which have been given Unesco cultural heritage status. They include several dance and music forms, indigenous rituals and art.

Brazilian martial art receives Unesco status

OBAMA ON US IMMIGRATION REFORMS Only Natives can oppose my plan

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

President Obama quite succinctly summed up the absurdity of the Republicans' issues with his immigration reform in Chicago yesterday, arguing that perhaps the only people who can legitimately be pissed off about illegal immigrants are Native Americans.

Returning to his hometown to speak, the president tried to place his recent executive action, which saved five million immigrants from deportation, within a great American tradition of welcoming foreigners.

"If you look at the history of immigration in this country, each successive wave there have been periods where the folks who were already here have said, 'Well I don't want those folks,'" he said. "Even though the only people who have the right to say that are some Native Americans."

His orders were sufficient in upsetting the GOP, but he also faced criticism from immigration activists who feel they do not go far enough.



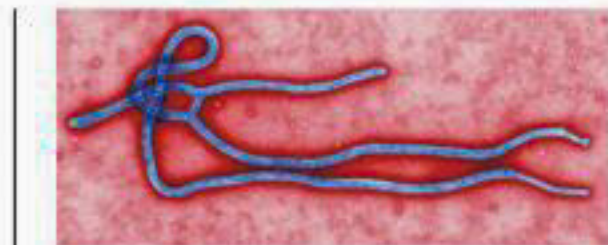
Hecklers shouted "Not one more!" and "Stop deportations!" and "There is no justice!" during the speech, to which he replied at one point: "It doesn't make much sense to yell at me right now."

Ploughing on, he argued: "Part of what America is about is stitching together folks from different backgrounds and different faiths and different ethnicities. That's what makes us special and, look, let's face it, sometimes that's hard to do, but it's worthwhile, it's worth doing."

As the immigration debate rumbles on, Obama made a joke about it yesterday as he pardoned the turkey as is Thanksgiving tradition.

"I am here to announce what I'm sure will be the most talked-about executive action this month," he joked.

"Today, I'm taking an action fully within my legal authority, the same kind of action taken by Democrats and Republican presidents before me, to spare the lives of two turkeys -- Mac and Cheese -- from a terrible and delicious fate."



Ebola tests in 15 minutes!

AFP, Conakry

British-funded researchers are to conduct trials in Guinea on a 15-minute Ebola test, the Wellcome Trust and UK government said in a joint statement yesterday.

The prototype is six times faster than current tests and aims to speed up diagnosis, the London-based global research charity and the Department for International Development (DFID) said.

"A reliable, 15-minute test that can confirm cases of Ebola would be a key tool for effective management of the Ebola outbreak, allowing patients to be identified, isolated and cared for as soon as possible," said Val Snewin of the Wellcome Trust.

She said the test was designed to be suitable for remote field hospitals where electricity and cold storage are often scarce.

Early detection of Ebola leads to better infection control as medics can identify and isolate confirmed cases faster and start treating patients sooner.

The trials will be led by researchers from Dakar's Pasteur Institute at an Ebola treatment centre in the Guinean capital Conakry in the coming weeks.

Britain already has an Ebola laboratory in Sierra Leone and is building two others in its former colony.

Cash for the trials is coming from a £6.5 million fund provided by DFID and the Wellcome Trust which is also paying for a number of other.

The biggest Ebola epidemic on record has claimed around 5,700 lives in west Africa since the beginning of the year.

The diagnostic tool works by antibodies reacting to the presence of the virus in a tiny sample, which can be a drop of blood, plasma or urine, it said.

Work is also under way in several laboratories on developing a vaccine or cure for the killer haemorrhagic fever against which no specific drug treatment exists.

One of four ISIS recruits returns India

THE HINDU ONLINE

Arif Majid, one of the four Muslim youth who had reportedly left India in May this year to fight alongside the militant group Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq, has returned yesterday morning, The Hindu has learnt.

The four young men identified as Arif Majid, Fahad Shaikh, Amaan Tandel and Saheem Tanki hail from Kalyan district in Thane on the outskirts of Mumbai.

On May 25, they left along with 40 others by an Etihad flight to Baghdad on a pilgrimage. On May 31, they called for a private taxi which dropped them at Mosul. Since then, they went missing and are believed to have joined the militant group.

Sources in the NIA have told the paper that the Home Ministry has decided to take a sympathetic view of the case and the government won't press any case against Arif.