



# 'Mamata may dissolve WB Assembly'

THE HINDU ONLINE

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee may dissolve the West Bengal Legislative Assembly and call for fresh elections as she is on the back foot with the All-India Trinamool Congress government being embroiled in a number controversies, wondered Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly Surjya Kanta Mishra.

He was addressing the gathering here on Thursday organised by the Kolkata district Left Front against the alleged corruption in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation.

"Ms Banerjee may suddenly declare that she and her ministers are resigning and Assembly elections will be held afresh," said Mishra pointing out that the AITC is struggling to cope with the allegation of its leaders' involvement in the Saradha Ponzi scheme scam.

Suspended AITC MP Kunal Ghosh and Rajya Sabha MP Srinjoy Basu are currently in jail for their alleged involvement in the Saradha scam.

Mishra's urged Left Front workers to make most of the current situation when the AITC is on the back foot.

Mishra, also a Polit Bureau member of the Communist Party of India-Marxist sounded a note of caution to Left Front workers against failing to utilise this opportunity.

"This is the right time to engage in struggle. If you fail to capitalise on the opportunity, you will not get another chance."



Egypt's former president Hosni Mubarak waves after a court dismissed a murder charge against him over the deaths of protesters during a 2011 uprising that ended his decades-long rule. Inset, Pro-Mubarak supporters react after the verdict. PHOTO: AFP

# 'Arabs should leave Israel, with payment'

AFP, Jerusalem

Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman suggested Friday that Israel should offer "economic incentives" to encourage Arab Israelis to leave the country and relocate to a future Palestinian state.

Arab Israelis "who decide their identity is Palestinian can relinquish their Israeli citizenship and become citizens of the future Palestinian state," Lieberman said in manifesto of his Israel Beitenu party.

"The state of Israel should even encourage them to do so with a system of economic incentives," he added.

The text said only a peace "package deal" with Arab states and "land and population swaps of Arab Israelis" will ensure stable peace.

Lieberman has over the years time and again said any comprehensive regional peace plan would have to entail population exchanges to ensure "maximal separation" between Jews and Arabs in Israel.

Israel's 1.7 million Arab citizens, who make up over 20 percent of the population, are Palestinians who remained in the country following the creation of the Jewish state in 1948, along with their descendants.

Lieberman has long professed revoking citizenship from Arab Israelis who are not sufficiently "loyal" to the state, and last month called on Arab MPs to quit the Israeli political system.



Avigdor Lieberman

# Air strikes not hurting Syria as Iraq forces battle jihadists in Ramadi

AGENCIES

Two months of US-led air strikes have failed to weaken Islamic State (ISIS) militants, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem said yesterday as Iraqi forces and tribal fighters were locked in a fierce battle in the city of Ramadi.

A US-led coalition has carried out nearly 300 air strikes in Syria since September.

Moualem told Lebanon's TV the only way to tackle IS was to force Turkey to tighten border controls to stop foreign fighters crossing into Syria.

ISIS controls large swathes of both Syria and neighbouring Iraq.

The BBC's Jim Muir says the air strikes have been widely credited with helping to halt the advance of ISIS fighters on the border town of Kobane in northern Syria.

"All the indications say that [IS] today, after two months of coalition air strikes, is not weaker," Moualem told al-Mayadeen TV on Friday.

"If the [UN] Security Council and Washington do not force Turkey to control its borders then all of this action will not eliminate ISIS," he added.

Moualem also said Turkey's plan for a

no-fly zone over northern Syria would mean the de facto partition of Syria.

Turkey has a 900km (560-mile) border with Syria. Ankara has repeatedly denied backing militant Islamist groups - inadvertently or otherwise - to help Syrian rebels oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Meanwhile, Iraqi forces yesterday battled ISIS in Ramadi, where a fierce jihadist offensive threatens one of the last pockets in Anbar province still under government control.

"Fierce fighting pitting security forces and tribal units against IS is taking place in the Al-Hoz, Muallim and Bakr neighbourhoods," a police major told AFP.

"The clashes have been going on for several hours," he said, without specifying how many casualties the violence had claimed.

Al-Hoz district, in the south of the Anbar provincial capital, fell to IS during the past week of fighting in Ramadi, a large city on the Euphrates 100 kilometres (60 miles) west of Baghdad.

Sheikh Omar al-Alwani, the leader of one of the Sunni tribes opposing the jihadists and fighting alongside the government in Anbar, said slow military progress was being made.

## WAR ON ISIS

# VENEZUELA JAIL POISONING Death toll hits 35

AFP, Caracas

The death toll from the mass poisoning this week of inmates at a Venezuelan jail has risen to 35, a lawmaker said Friday, though prison officials insisted the tally was far lower.

The incident is the latest tragic incident to rock Venezuela's overcrowded, dirty and dangerous prison system -- reputed to be one of the world's most violent -- and many questions remained about what actually happened.

Prison officials at the facility, known locally as Urubana, say the poisoning took place Monday, when a group of hunger-striking inmates broke into the infirmary and ingested a cocktail of medicines including anti-seizure drugs, antibiotics and hypertension treatments. The action supposedly came as part of a protest against inhumane treatment and abuse at the hands of prison staff. But several families have told a prisoners' rights organization that the men were poisoned when they drank water provided by the prison.

Protesters carry banners during a demonstration against UN Security General Ban Ki-moon in Sittwe in the western Myanmar state of Rakhine, yesterday. Myanmar's parliament early November lambasted UN Security General Ban Ki-moon for using the term 'Rohingya', accusing him of interfering in the country's affairs during his visit early November that has kicked off fresh furor over the Muslim minority.

PHOTO: AFP



# MIKE BROWN SHOOTING

A demonstrator protests outside a Wal-Mart store on Black Friday near Ferguson, Missouri. Police in Ferguson arrested 15 people after fresh protests Friday over a grand jury decision not to indict a white policeman for shooting dead an unarmed black teenager, Michael brown. A UN watchdog, also on Friday, slammed police shootings of blacks in the US. The watchdog, which periodically reviews the records of the 156 countries that have ratified the Convention Against Torture, lamented the lack of US data on police brutality and investigations into such abuses.

PHOTO: AFP



# Sarkozy aims at party leadership, presidency

AFP, Paris

France's former president Nicolas Sarkozy was tipped to win the leadership of his right-wing UMP in party elections, a position seen as a potential springboard back into high office.

The 59-year-old broke the worst-kept secret in French politics when he announced his political comeback in September, presenting himself as the saviour of his bitterly divided conservative opposition party.

There are no doubts about his aim, if yet unstated: to win back the keys to the Elysee palace which he lost in a humiliating poll defeat to Francois Hollande in 2012.

"Staying in the background when everything is going so badly would be cowardice, the opposite of my idea of political commitment," Sarkozy told a political meeting on the eve of the vote.

The energetic former leader has criss-crossed the country to drum up support for his candidacy at the head of the party all the while slamming the "mediocrity" of Hollande's deeply unpopular Socialist government.

Pollsters expect Sarkozy to sail through the election despite his much-heralded return to politics largely seen as having fallen flat, with his tangle of legal woes continuing to dog him.

UMP members began voting by internet on Friday night, and polls close at 8:00pm yesterday. Results are expected shortly after.

However a victory still does not guarantee him a shot at toppling Hollande in presidential elections in 2017. Sarkozy has as many devotees as rivals in the deeply split party, which is currently run by a trio of former prime ministers appointed after former leader Jean-Francois Cope was forced to resign in May over a campaign funding scandal linked to Sarkozy's last election bid. This means the real battle comes when Sarkozy will have to fight off party heavyweights at UMP primaries due in 2016.



# Rajnath accuses Pakistan of destabilizing India

AGENCIES

India's home affairs minister yesterday accused Pakistani "state actors" of attempting to destabilise India, reiterating an accusation commonly levelled by the South Asian giant at its northern Muslim neighbour.

Home Affairs Minister Rajnath Singh told a security conference in India's north-east that Pakistan was still supporting militants fighting New Delhi's rule in Muslim-majority Kashmir.

Singh pointed to a guerrilla attack earlier this week on an army patrol in Indian-administered Kashmir in which at least 10 people were killed.

"It is unfortunate Pakistan does not mend its ways," Singh said, singling out Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence as one of the "state actors" seeking to roil India's security.

"I do not hesitate in saying Pakistani state actors have a role in destabilising India," Singh said, repeating a longstanding Indian demand that Pakistan rein in Islamic militants.

His remarks came as terrorists yesterday afternoon lobbed a hand grenade at an abandoned cinema hall at Lal Chowk, injuring eight people including a child and a CRPF officer, two days ahead of the second phase of assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir.

Police said the terrorists carried out the attack at 2.15pm and the police is ascertain-

ing as to how the terrorists sneaked in to the city. A heavy contingent of police and paramilitary forces has been deployed in the area to conduct a search operation to nab the culprits.

No terrorist group has taken the responsibility for the attack.

Various separatist and Pakistan-based terror groups in the valley have called for poll boycott but people are defying the



calls and participating in election campaigning.

Singh's remarks also come on the heels of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) summit held earlier this week in Nepal that was overshadowed by India and Pakistan's rivalry and ended with little progress towards regional integration.

# MOSQUE ATTACK IN NIGERIA

# Death toll climbs to 120; 270 hurt

AFP, Kano

Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan yesterday vowed to hunt down those behind "heinous" attacks which left at least 120 dead at the mosque of an Islamic leader who had issued a call to arms against Boko Haram.

At least 270 others were also wounded when two suicide bombers blew themselves up and gunmen opened fire during weekly prayers on Friday at the Grand Mosque in Kano, the biggest city in the mainly Muslim north of the country.

Jonathan had "directed the security agencies to launch a full-scale investigation and to leave no stone unturned until all agents of terror ... are tracked down and brought to justice," said a statement from his office yesterday.

"The president reaffirms that terrorism in all forms ... is a despicable and unjustifiable threat to our society."

The mosque is attached to the palace of the Emir of Kano Muhammad Sanusi II, Nigeria's second most senior Muslim cleric, who last week made a call at the same mosque, urging civilians to take up arms against Islamist extremists Boko Haram. The Emir was out of the country during the attacks.

The attack was widely seen as revenge for the call.

Jonathan urged Nigerians "not to despair in this moment of great trial in our nation's history but to remain united to confront the common enemy."

Mass casualties from Boko Haram attacks are not however a new phenomenon in the extremists' five-year insurgency. More than 13,000 people are thought to have died in total since 2009.



Pope Francis (L) visits the Blue Mosque (Sultan Ahmet mosque) with Mufti Rahmi Yaran in Istanbul, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

# A strong message from Pope Francis

REUTERS, Istanbul

Pope Francis prayed silently alongside a senior Islamic cleric in Istanbul's Blue Mosque yesterday, in a gesture of inter-religious harmony in a country bordering the conflicts in Syria and Iraq.

Pope Francis took off his shoes as he entered the huge mosque, before bowing his head in prayer for several minutes, facing Makkah and standing next to Istanbul's Grand Mufti Rahmi Yaran, in what a Vatican spokesman described as a joint "moment of silent adoration" of God.

A similar act by his predecessor Pope Benedict in 2006 drew criticism from conservative Catholics and some Muslims.

Pope Francis said on Friday that fighting hunger and poverty, rather than military intervention alone, was key to stopping the Islamist militants. He also called for an interfaith dialogue to counter fanaticism and fundamentalism during a visit to the Turkish capital, Ankara.

The Pope then visited Hagia Sofia - which for almost 1,000 years was the most important Orthodox cathedral, then for nearly five centuries a mosque under the Ottomans, and is currently a museum.

Istanbul was Byzantine's capital, known as Constantinople, until the Ottoman conquest in 1453.

For a city that passed from the Byzantines to the Ottomans, a place where religions, empires and cultures collided, the Pope's message of interfaith dialogue has profound resonance, says the BBC's Mark Lowen in Istanbul.

# 'Terror attack' kills 15 in Xinjiang

AFP, Beijing

Fifteen people have been killed and 14 others wounded in a "terrorist attack" in China's mostly Muslim Xinjiang region, the official Chinese news agency said yesterday.

A group of "terrorists" launched an attack on civilians Friday in Shache county, leaving four people dead and 14 wounded. Eleven "terrorists" were also shot dead during the violence, according to CCTV, China's state broadcaster.

Chinese state news agency Xinhua confirmed the death toll.

At around 1.30pm on Friday men armed with knives threw explosive devices and attacked crowds on commercial street, Xinhua reported.

The fresh unrest underscores the deterioration of the situation in Xinjiang, where Beijing has launched a severe crackdown in recent months with dozens of executions officially announced and hundreds of arrests, followed by speedy mass trials and the public exhibition of so-called "terrorists".