

NEWS IN brief

Delhi rapes increase by one third in 2014

AFP, New Delhi
The number of rapes reported in New Delhi increased by nearly a third in the last year, police said yesterday, highlighting the alarming levels of sexual violence against women in the Indian capital. At an annual briefing with reporters, Delhi Police Commissioner Bhim Sain Bassi said that a total of 2,069 rape cases were reported in New Delhi in the 12 months leading up to December 15, against 1,571 reported the previous year, an increase of 31.6 percent.

Saudi King has pneumonia

AFP, Riyadh
Saudi King Abdullah, hospitalised earlier this week, is suffering from pneumonia and breathing with the aid of a tube, but is in stable condition, the royal court said yesterday. The long-ailing king, who is believed to be around 90 years old, was admitted to the King Abdulaziz Medical City in Riyadh on Wednesday for checks.

Former NY governor Mario Cuomo dies

BBC ONLINE
Three-time Democratic governor of New York Mario Cuomo has died just hours before his son Andrew was inaugurated for a second term as governor, family sources say. Cuomo, 82, refused a number of proposals to seek the US presidency during the course of a long career. He died of heart failure at his home.

Court stops execution of Pak murder convict

PTI, Lahore
A Pakistani court yesterday ordered the authorities to stop the execution of a death row convict involved in the killing of a soldier in 2000. Pakistan has lifted a moratorium on capital punishment after its bloodiest-ever terror attack on a school last month and vowed to crush terrorists.

5 new countries join UNSC

IANS, United Nations
Five new countries on Thursday joined the UN Security Council as non-permanent members, while Chile assumed the rotating presidency for January. With the start of a new year, five new countries — Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Venezuela and Spain — have begun their two-year term, replacing Argentina, Australia, Luxembourg, South Korea and Rwanda.



Handout picture released by the Brazilian presidency showing Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff (L) waving as she heads to the National Congress in Brasilia to take the oath of office for her second term, on Thursday. The 67-year-old left-wing former urban guerrilla begins her second term Thursday, aiming to get economic growth back on track, and to rebuild government credibility after a major kickbacks scandal.

ICC MEMBERSHIP BID Palestine presents request to UN

AFP, United Nations
The Palestinian envoy to the United Nations yesterday formally requested membership in the International Criminal Court, which would allow them to lodge war crimes complaints against Israel.
Membership of the Rome Statute, which governs the ICC, would open a way for Palestinians to pursue criminal complaints in The Hague, but is firmly opposed by both Israel and the United States.
"This is a very significant step," envoy Riyad Mansour told reporters. "We are seeking justice for all the victims that have been killed by Israel, the occupying power."
UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is to review the letters and notify state members on the request within 60 days.
Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas signed requests to join the ICC and 16 other conventions on Wednesday, a day after the Security Council failed to adopt a resolution paving the way to full statehood.
The United States has said it strongly opposes the move, branding it "counterproductive" to efforts to restart the peace process with Israel. But the Palestinians hope joining the court will pave the way for them to seek justice against Israel for its actions in the occupied territories.
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged the Hague-based ICC to reject the request, arguing that the Palestinian Authority (PA) did not rank as a state.

Mourning and fury over China stampede deaths

AFP, Shanghai
The bitter pain of bereavement yesterday turned to tears of anger for relatives of the 36 killed in a New Year's Eve crush in Shanghai, as they accused authorities of failing to control the crowds.



Chen Yi, Shanghai's first Communist mayor.

Li Juan was only a few metres away from her younger sister Li Na on the Bund when the accident happened on a wide stairway leading to a waterfront promenade.
"It all feels like a dream and I still cannot believe that she is gone," she said, weeping uncontrollably and struggling to get her words out.
The 23-year-old victim worked as an assistant teacher in an early learning centre.
"The government is responsible for the accident," Li said, adding she only saw six to eight police on the staircase.
The stampede took place as vast numbers of people crammed into a square named for

female. The youngest was a 12-year-old boy, Mao Yongjie.
The crush is Shanghai's worst accident since a fire in a high-rise residential building killed 58 people in 2010, and a black mark for the commercial hub's international reputation.
City authorities yesterday raised the number of injured by two to 49, according to a statement. Four were in critical condition, Xinhua said citing hospital sources, and another nine were severely hurt.
People continued to gather at the accident scene, some laying flowers in a government-approved show of mourning.

Aircraft's behaviour before crash 'on the edge of logic'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

AirAsia flight QZ8501, which crashed into the Java Sea on Sunday, behaved in ways "bordering on the edge of logic", according to an Indonesian aviation expert.



Comments from various experts come as France's crash investigation agency said its specialist black box search team and equipment would arrive early Friday at the search area for the AirAsia flight. The black box will reveal what happened in the final moments of the crash, as the truth behind the cause is still unknown.
Officials say 162 people died the plane crashed on route from Surabaya to Singapore on Sunday.
Indonesian aviation analyst Gerry Soejatman believes the aircraft rose up as fast as a fighter jet and then dropped back into the ocean almost vertically into the water.
And the extreme weather which

Airbus 320-200 encountered meant the pilots were helpless to save the passengers and crew on-board, Soejatman told Fairfax media after he examined figures leaked from the official air crash investigation team.
He said "It's really hard to comprehend [the plane acted in a way] bordering on the edge of logic," as it plunged into the water "like a piece of metal being thrown down."
Soejatman believes the crash occurred because the aircraft was caught in a severe updraft, followed by an equally severe ground draft, with the leaked figures showing that it climbed at a staggering rate of 6000ft to 9000ft per minute.
The aircraft then fell at 11,000ft a minute, with bursts of up to 24,000ft -

in marked contrast to regular circumstances, when a plane would climb between 1000ft to 1500ft on a sustained basis, gaining 3000ft in a burst.
"You can't do that at altitude in an Airbus 320 with pilot action," he argued.
In contrast, aviation expert Peter Marosszeky, from the University of NSW, told the Sydney Morning Herald that the extremely low speed of the aircraft's descent - as low as 61 knots - would suggest the plane was heading almost straight down, explaining why it has been found in water just 10km from its last point of radar contact.
Mr Marosszeky surmised that a climb rate of at least 6000ft a minute would indicate a "severe weather event," because that rate of climb was a "domain for jet fighters."
But both experts agree that the jet plunged into the water almost vertically because of a freak weather pattern that placed it under extraordinary force.

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS BY CONFLICT Assam outscores Syria, Iraq

PTI, Guwahati

Assam had the highest conflict induced Internally Displaced Persons in the world during the year 2014 leaving crisis-hit Syria and Iraq behind, according to a report released yesterday by Asian Centre for Human Rights.
The report was prepared following field visits to the affected areas and claimed that there are over 3,00,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Assam, which is the highest in the world during 2014.
The displaced persons are currently reeling under a man-made humanitarian crisis in 85 relief camps in four districts of Assam — Sonitpur, Kokrajhar, Udalguri and Chirang districts. ACHR's director

Suhas Chakma said. The IDPs, mainly Adivasis, have been fleeing their homes following the killing of over 80 Adivasis by the NDFB(S) on December 23, 2014 in



Sonitpur, Kokrajhar and Chirang districts. An ACHR team assisted by Adivasi civil society organisations visited the affected areas on December 27 and the

team had limited access as curfew was imposed in Sonitpur and Udalguri districts. The police did not allow visit to interior places for security reasons.
The team visited Jagabharu High School Relief Camp, Hugarjuli Relief Camp and Tinsuti Relief Camp.
ACHR urged the state government to fully extend humanitarian assistance to all displaced persons irrespective of whether their villages were directly attacked or not.
They also demanded rehabilitation of displaced persons by providing adequate assistance such as housing, food rations for six months and ensuring that no relief camp was forcibly closed down and inmates asked to leave. ACHR also called for adequate security to IDPs voluntarily willing to return to their villages.



Tibetan spiritual leader and Nobel peace prize winner Dalai Lama poses with The Governor of the western Indian state of Gujarat OP Kohli (2R) and Founder and Chairman, Shree Ramkrishna Exports Pvt Ltd Govindbhai Dholakia (L) as he is presented with a citation for The Santokba Award in Surat, yesterday.

Vote for a 'known devil': Rajapakse

AFP, Jaffna

Sri Lanka's embattled President Mahinda Rajapakse yesterday urged minority Tamils to back him in next week's election, calling himself the "known devil", as he pitched for votes in the country's former war zone.
While he remains popular among ethnic majority Sinhalese voters, Rajapakse is widely detested by members of the country's biggest minority after overseeing the brutal crushing of a 37-year Tamil rebellion.
The main Tamil party has already endorsed Rajapakse's chief rival Maithripala Sirisena in the January 8 election but the incumbent told voters in the northern Jaffna region that he was committed to improving their livelihoods, pointing to improvements in infrastructure.
"This is my 11th visit to Jaffna as president," Rajapakse, who is South Asia's longest-serving leader after coming to power in 2005, told a rally.
"The devil you know is better than the unknown angel," he said in Sinhala, speaking through a translator.
"I am the known devil, so please vote for me."
Tamils account for around 13 percent of the 15 million people entitled to cast their ballots next Thursday and their choice of candidate could be crucial to the outcome of what is shaping up to be a tight contest.
Rajapakse had been the clear favourite but a series of defections by allies, including his one-time health minister Sirisena, have thrown the contest wide open and the president now needs every vote he can muster.
Meanwhile, Sri Lanka yesterday warned the European Union not to be "prescriptive" about next week's presidential elections after Colombo-based ambassadors urged the government to ensure a peaceful election.
"Domestic elections are not for foreign government representatives to be prescriptive about, that too, a few days ahead of the polls," the ministry said in a terse statement.

'Muslim' terror drills in Gujarat spark outrage

BBC ONLINE

There has been outrage in India after police in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state of Gujarat conducted mock security drills using fake "militants" dressed as Muslims.
A video of a drill in Surat district showed police restraining men wearing long tunics and white skullcaps.
Another video shot in the Narmada district had the "militants" shouting "Islam Zindabad (Long live Islam)".
Muslim leaders have called the videos "atrocious and highly condemnable".
Critics say the videos stereotype Muslims,

who make up nearly 14% of the country's 1.2 billion population.
After the videos were shown on Indian TV channels, Gujarat Chief Minister Anandiben Patel admitted that the exercise was "a mistake".
"It's wrong to link religion with terrorism. The issue has been resolved and the matter should be put to rest now. The mistake has been rectified," the chief minister said.
Police initially tried to brush off the criticism, saying the skullcaps were used "to give them a different look", but they later apologised saying it was an "avoidable situation".



Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse holds a baby as he interacts with supporters as a rally in the northern town of Vavuniya, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

I may never play guitar again

Bono says after bike accident

BBC ONLINE
U2 frontman Bono says he fears that he may never play guitar again following a bike accident last November.
He made the comment in his A to Z of 2014, published on the band's website.
Bono broke his arm in six places and fractured his eye socket, hand and shoulder blade in what he called a "freak accident" in New York.
In the letter to his fans, he said he was unable to move around physically and would have to "concentrate hard" to be fit for U2's next tour.
At the time, the hospital where Bono was being treated said he had been involved in "a high-energy bicycle accident when he attempted to avoid another rider".
The Irish rocker spoke this week about being on painkillers for weeks and said he had a "massive injury, I can't blame on anyone but myself".
The 54-year-old Dubliner revealed he now had a titanium elbow.
Bono said: "Recovery has been more difficult than I thought. As I write this, it is not clear that I will ever play guitar again. The band have reminded me that neither they nor western civilization are depending on this."
"I personally would very much miss fingering the frets of my green Irish falcon or my (red) Gretsch. Just for the pleasure, aside from writing tunes."
"But then does the Edge, or Jimmy Page, or any guitarist you know have a titanium elbow, as I do now? I'm all elbows, I am."



Ebola crisis will end in 2015: UN

BBC ONLINE

The deadly Ebola outbreak will be ended in 2015, the outgoing head of the UN team fighting the disease has said.
Anthony Banbury said the number of Ebola cases would be brought down to zero by the close of this year, but admitted that the end was "not close".
"We are engaged in an epic battle," he said.
The virus has killed nearly 8,000 people, mostly in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, where the disease started in December 2013.
Banbury admitted his three month mission had failed to hit its target of 100% safe burials and treatment of 70% of infected people.
But he praised international efforts and insisted "the global response to the Ebola crisis has been extremely successful".
"Going forward it's going to be extremely hard for us to bring it down to zero [cases], but that is what we will do," he told reporters, adding: "I believe we will end Ebola in 2015."