

NEWSIN brief

Myanmar peace process in rebel hands

Myanmar's army chief said peace in the war-ravaged nation is in the hands of ethnic rebels, in an interview broadcast yesterday, as a fresh surge in unrest in northern Kachin state casts doubt over ceasefire efforts. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said peace was the "only path" if the country is to continue its democratisation and development, in a rare interview with Singapore's Channel NewsAsia.

Congress moves EC against Kejriwal's remarks

Irked by his "bribe remarks" made at a poll rally on Sunday, India's Congress has moved the Election Commission against AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal demanding action against him. In a complaint to Chief Election Commissioner H S Brahma and Election Commissioner S N A Zaidi, Congress Secretary and in-charge of legal cell department K C Mittal said by making such a statement, Kejriwal is instigating people to take bribe for voting and has maligned the electoral process.

UN declares Mali Ebola free

The Malian government and the United Nations on Sunday declared the country free of Ebola after 42 days without any new cases of the deadly virus. Health Minister Ousmane Kone said no confirmed cases had been registered since December 6 when the last Ebola patient had tested negative. "I declare this day... the end of the epidemic of the Ebola virus in Mali," he said in a statement broadcast on state television ORTM.

Indian police arrest nine after 'Muslim men' burnt alive

Police have arrested nine people after a mob torched a house and burnt to death three men thought to be Muslims in an outbreak of communal violence in northern India, an official said yesterday. Police in riot gear were patrolling a village where Sunday's hours-long rampage and attack occurred in Bihar state, with tensions still high between the majority Hindu and minority Muslim communities.



Yemeni soldiers block streets around the presidential palace in Sanaa during fierce clashes between the presidential guard and members of the Shia Huthi movement yesterday. *Inset*, A member of Shia Huthi movement stands at a checkpoint in the Yemeni capital. PHOTO: AFP



Stop disrupting Parliament

Pranab tells MPs

India's president yesterday told lawmakers to stop disrupting parliament with protests, saying a "noisy minority cannot be allowed to gag a patient majority", as the government has struggled to pass legislation despite its strong mandate.



President Pranab Mukherjee said there was a growing tendency for lawmakers to resort to holding up parliament with protests, after a winter session in which the new government failed to push a number of key reforms through the house. "The cardinal principle of parliamentary democracy is that the majority has the mandate to rule while opposition has right to oppose, expose, and if numbers permit, to depose," Mukherjee said in a video address to students at national universities across the country. "But, under no circumstances should there be disruption of proceedings. A noisy minority cannot be allowed to gag a patient majority." Regular suspension of parliamentary proceedings is common in the world's largest democracy, where opposition lawmakers often resort to obstruction to denounce government policies and scandals. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won the biggest mandate in 30 years last May, raising hopes it be able to ensure the smooth passage of legislation. But the government was only able to pass 10 out of 37 bills it had listed in the winter session, which ended last month.

Yemen militia clash with army

Fire on PM's convoy, seize ground near presidential palace

Shia militia clashed with Yemen's army and fired on a convoy carrying the prime minister yesterday as pressure mounted on the embattled government of President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi.

since the Huthis seized control of Sanaa in September, raising fears the strategically important country bordering Saudi Arabia could collapse into a failed state. Shelling and gunfire could be heard as smoke rose over parts of the city, and residents fled many neighbourhoods. Witnesses said the fighting erupted early yesterday after the militia deployed reinforcements near the presidential palace.

YEMEN CRISIS

The military presidential guard sent troops onto the streets surrounding the palace and outside Hadi's residence. A security official said the army intervened when the Huthis began to set up a new checkpoint near the presidential palace. But a prominent Huthi chief, Ali al-Imad, accused the presidential guard of provoking the clashes, in a statement on his Facebook page. "Hadi's guard is trying to blow up the situation on the security front to create confusion on the political front," he said.

The US-backed leader's chief of staff was abducted on Saturday as the Huthis press for concessions in the writing of a new constitution. The president's office issued a statement calling for an "immediate ceasefire" but fighting continued. Yemen has been wracked by unrest

Israeli strike in Syria kills 12

Six Iranian soldiers among the dead

AFP, Beirut

Lebanon's Hezbollah movement prepared yesterday to bury the son of its slain former military commander after an Israeli strike that killed six of its fighters and raised tensions between the longtime foes.

The raid, near Quneitra on the Syrian-controlled side of the Golan Heights, enraged the group's supporters, but analysts said Hezbollah would seek to avoid a major escalation with Israel. "The Israeli strike killed six Iranian soldiers, including commanders, as well as the six members of Hezbollah. They were all in a convoy of three cars," a source close to the Lebanese Shia group told AFP.

Once solely focused on fighting the Jewish state, Shia Hezbollah is now deeply involved in the war in neighbouring Syria, where it backs President Bashar al-Assad.

With its forces spread thin, and little appetite in fragile Lebanon for a new conflict with Israel, analysts said Hezbollah would have to find a way to respond without provoking a full-on war.

Hezbollah officials said Jihad Mughniyeh, son of the late Imad Mughniyeh, would be buried yesterday afternoon in Beirut's southern suburbs, a stronghold of the militant group.

The six fighters killed on Sunday afternoon were carrying out a field reconnaissance mission in Mazraat Amal village, Hezbollah's Al-Manar television said.

An Israeli security source confirmed that an Israeli helicopter had carried out a strike against "terrorists" in the Golan who were allegedly carrying out an attack.



No terror during India trip

US warns Pakistan ahead of Obama's visit

PTI, Washington

Ahead of President Barack Obama's India visit, the US has asked Pakistan to ensure that there is no cross-border terror incident during the trip and subtly warned of "consequences" if any such attack is traced back to the country.

Obama will travel to New Delhi later this week to attend the Republic Day parade on January 26, the first US president to do so.

The US and Indian security agencies are taking extra care for Obama as he will be on an open air platform at Rajpath for more than two hours, witnessing the parade.

The warning has been issued keeping the track record of Pakistan-based militant groups that have carried out attacks in India coinciding with high-profile visits from the US. Militants had shot dead 36 Sikhs in March 20, 2000, in Anantnag district in Kashmir, coinciding with the visit of the then US President Bill Clinton to India.

The US forces in Afghanistan are also keeping a close eye on the activities of the terrorist groups in the region.

The US embassy in Pakistan too has been alerted. Ahead of the presidential trip, there is an unprecedented level of intelligence sharing between India and the US.

BOKO HARAM CRISIS Group of Cameroon captives freed

AFP, Yaounde

Around 20 of the dozens of hostages seized by Boko Haram in Cameroon at the weekend were released by the Islamists as they were chased by the army, media reports and sources said yesterday.

In their latest cross-border raid on Sunday, the Nigeria-based jihadists seized at least 60 people in northern Cameroon, most of them women and children.

But they released around 24 as they were chased by the army shortly after the raid, a source with a non-governmental organisation said on condition of anonymity.

Cameron's national radio and television reported that around 20

hostages were freed, but did not provide any details.

The weekend raid was the largest abduction ever carried out in Cameroon's far north region by Boko Haram and comes amid mounting fears the group is expanding its operations into neighbouring countries.

Cameroon had come under attack last Monday when it said its troops repelled a raid by Boko Haram on a northern military base, killing 143 militants in the process.

Brutal raids, massacres, suicide bomb attacks and kidnappings by the Islamists have claimed at least 13,000 lives and driven an estimated 1.5 million people from their homes, mainly in its stronghold in northeast Nigeria.



Personnel from Indonesia's national disaster agency transfer a body bag containing the recovered remains of a passenger from AirAsia flight QZ8501 at the port of Kumai on Borneo Island yesterday. Just over 50 bodies have been recovered from a total of 162 people who were on board when the Airbus A320-200 crashed into the sea on December 28. PHOTO: AFP

MLK HOLIDAY 'Selma' stars, Oprah march in Alabama

AP, Alabama

Oprah Winfrey and fellow actors from the movie "Selma" marched with hundreds in a tribute to Martin Luther King Jr, one of many events around the nation ushering in yesterday's federal holiday for the slain civil rights leader.

Remembrances of the King legacy come amid somber reflection by many on incidents in which unarmed black men were killed by police in recent months, spurring protests and heightening tensions in the US in Ferguson, Mo, where one fatal shooting caused weeks of violent protests, leaders urged reforms to the criminal justice system in the name of equality. "We need to be outraged when local law enforcement and the justice system repeatedly allow young, unarmed black men to encounter police and then wind up dead with no consequences," said US Rep William Clay, a St Louis Democrat. "Not just in Ferguson, but over and over again across this country."

The King holiday, meanwhile, was being met with activities nationwide, including plans for a wreath-laying in Maryland, a



tribute breakfast in Boston and volunteer service activities by churches and community groups in Illinois. In South Carolina, civil rights leaders readied for their biggest rally of the year. Winfrey helped lead a march by hundreds on Sunday with "Selma" director Ava DuVernay and actor David Oyelowo, who played King in the movie. "Selma" chronicled turbulent events leading up to the historic march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, and the subsequent passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Winfrey played activist Annie Lee Cooper in the movie, which was nominated for two Oscars, in categories of best picture and best original song.

I have not ordered to ban Yingluck Says Thai PM

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said yesterday he had not ordered his military-dominated legislature to vote against ousted former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra when her impeachment hearing concludes this week.

Yingluck's supporters and former members of her cabinet say the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) will vote against the former premier in a bid to try to end the political influence of her powerful family, including her brother, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Prayuth denied those allegations. "I have never sent any signal. Never. There has never been an order," Prayuth told reporters in Bangkok.

All 220 members of the NLA were hand-picked by the junta, known as the National Council for Peace and Order. Around 100 of them are former or currently-serving military officers. A decision to ban Yingluck from politics would require three-fifths of the vote. The hearings, which began on Jan. 9, concern Yingluck's role in a controversial rice subsidy scheme. The NLA will vote on Jan. 23 whether it finds Yingluck guilty of negligence over the scheme, a flagship policy of her administration.

If found guilty, Yingluck would be banned from political office for five years.



Turkey detains ship with 333 migrants

AFP, Istanbul

The Turkish coastguard intercepted in Mediterranean waters a ship carrying 333 mainly Syrian migrants bound for the European Union, the official Anatolia news agency said yesterday.

In an operation employing over 300 coastguard personnel, the coastguard captured the commercial vessel in open water off the Turkish port of Mersin in the northeastern Mediterranean close to Syria.

It said that the migrants -- the vast majority of whom are Syrian -- were taken back to Mersin after the overnight Sunday to Monday operation. Four Turks and 11 Syrians suspected of people smuggling have been detained over the incident, Anatolia added.

Fighting eases in Donetsk

Ukraine claims airport victory

AFP, Donetsk

Fighting eased in the Donetsk region yesterday after Ukraine launched a major offensive and claimed to clear pro-Russian rebels from most of the airport outside the key eastern city.

There were a number of sporadic explosions overnight, but the violence seemed to be far less than in previous days, when heavy clashes shook the area around the airport and shelling moved closer toward the city centre, killing at least 10 civilians.

It was unclear if the break in the fighting would last. Yesterday was also an important religious feast in Ukraine, with Orthodox Christians celebrating Epiphany.

Kiev and Moscow traded blamed for the complete breakdown of a September ceasefire in recent days, while UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon voiced alarm and called for an immediate end to the violence.

The UN Security Council is due to discuss the worsening crisis at a meeting tomorrow.

With rebels at one point claiming to control the airport, Ukraine launched a massive counter-offensive with tanks and other heavy artillery on Saturday which continued into Sunday.

Ukraine's military claimed on Sunday afternoon to have cleared out most of the airport, but there was no independent verification of their account, with journalists unable to approach the facility.