

NEWS IN brief

Saudi observes day of mourning

More foreign leaders flocked to Saudi Arabia paying their respects to King Salman yesterday, as the normally gridlocked streets of Riyadh turned quiet on a day of mourning for his predecessor Abdullah. Salman, 79, acceded to the throne on Friday after Abdullah's death at the age of 90.

Boko Haram wages new Nigeria attacks

Nigeria's military fought Boko Haram militants in the restive city of Maiduguri yesterday, as US Secretary of State John Kerry visited the country. Militants launched a dawn raid on Jintilo village, prompting soldiers to respond with heavy weaponry and air strikes. At the same time, Islamist fighters attacked Monguno.

Avalanche kills 6 in French Alps

Rescue workers yesterday found the bodies of six skiers who went missing a day earlier after being carried away by an avalanche during a trek in the Queyras mountain range in the French Alps, police said. Around 30 people die annually in avalanches in France, whose mountain ranges attract snow buffs from around the world.

Pak air strikes kill 35 militants

Pakistan's military said it killed 35 militants in fresh air strikes early yesterday as part of a major offensive against the Taliban and other insurgents in the northwest. Officials said the air attacks were mounted in the Datta Khel area of North Waziristan tribal district, which borders Afghanistan.



OBAMA IN INDIA

Clockwise from top left, Indian PM Narendra Modi receives US President Barack Obama and US First Lady Michelle Obama at airport; Obama receives Guard of Honour on his arrival at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi; Obama pays respects at Mahatma Gandhi Memorial; Indian National Security Guard (NSG) commandos arrive to provide security ahead of Obama's arrival at Raj Ghat; Modi and Obama talk in the gardens between meetings at Hyderabad House in New Delhi.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS



Woman leads Guard of Honour for Obama

Wing Commander Pooja Thakur became the first woman to lead the ceremonial Guard of Honour which was inspected by the US President Barack Obama at Rashtrapathi Bhavan yesterday. 'Nari shakti' (woman power) is the theme for Republic Day parade this year where Obama is the chief guest. For the first time, all women officer contingents of the army, air force and navy will walk down the Rajpath today.

Modi breaks protocol

Indian Prime minister Narendra Modi broke from protocol morning as he drove in to welcome Obama at the gate of his aircraft, the personal gesture elevating the already high profile of the presidential visit. Attired in a kurta with a saffron shawl draped on one shoulder, Modi greeted Obama with a spontaneous hug. However, Obama was received the same honour in 2010 when Manmohan Singh received him at the airport by breaking protocol.

100 saris for Michelle

Indian weavers are planning to give US First Lady Michelle Obama 100 hand-woven silk saris during her visit to New Delhi with her husband, a local businessman said yesterday. The weavers have spent months painstakingly making the garments which they hope will promote their centuries-old industry in India's holiest city Varanasi, as they face threats from cheaper, mass-produced competition. "We have used pure gold and silver threads for the sari that we have prepared for Michelle," said Pervez Matin, whose family has been in the weaving business for three generations. "It was woven on a handloom by our workers over two months," he told AFP by phone from Varanasi. The stylish First Lady stepped off Air Force One wearing a tailored dress and matching jacket with splashes of blue, black and white, by Indian-American designer Bibhu Mohapatra.

From cold shoulder to warm hugs : Obama's visit aimed at containing China: Report

AFP, New Delhi

At first glance, they might appear unlikely friends or allies. One is a right-wing nationalist and long-time international pariah, while the other is an unabashed liberal and Nobel peace laureate. But as Barack Obama and Narendra Modi clasped each other in a bear hug yesterday, the US and Indian leaders highlighted a bond that observers say stems in part from their humble backgrounds and mutual outsider status. "They defied the circumstances of their origins, rising to the top of the totem pole," Pramit Pal Chaudhuri wrote in the Hindustan Times. "They are both rebels with a cause." The US was the last Western power to end Modi's isolation which stemmed from an eruption of communal violence in Gujarat. With relations already soured in late 2013 by the arrest and strip-search of an Indian diplomat in New York, Time magazine predicted last year "the atmosphere could soon become even more tense" with Modi in power. But not only has Modi refrained from voicing bitterness, his first meeting with Obama at the White House in September went far better than many had hoped. "I think they struck up a very good chemis-

try," the White House's Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes told reporters, recalling how the pair had had a long discussion over dinner. Weeks after that ice-breaker, the two governments resolved a row over food subsidies that had been blocking a global trade agreement, underlining the sense that the pair could do business together. US officials say Obama has savoured dealing with a leader who, thanks to his thumping election majority, can get things done. While Obama may come from the left of US politics and Modi from the right of India's political spectrum, Suresh said they shared basic common goals. "Modi knows that for the vast socio-economic changes including his ambitious Make in India campaign, he needs American investments and technology, in sectors like defence, energy, nuclear and national security," Suresh said. "President Obama obviously wants to revive (the) American economy, create jobs and for him India is a great market that offers him an opportunity to fulfil the aspirations of his own people. "And America certainly needs an emerging India as a key partner in the Asia-Pacific, particularly in the light of China's emergence."

As US President Barack Obama arrived in India for an unprecedented second visit, a wary Beijing kept a close watch on its outcome amid commentaries by official think tanks here that the trip is aimed at containing China but New Delhi will not fall for it. Obama's arrival was a breaking news on state-run CCTV which showed live feed of him being received by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the airport with questions on how it is going to impact China and whether it was part of the US strategy to contain Beijing's growing influence in the region. Highlighting the significance of Obama's visit from China's point of view, Prof Wang Yewei of the School of international relations at the Renmin University told CCTV that Obama became the first US President visiting India for the second time and the visit was also aimed at leaving his diplomatic legacy. Also from US point of view, India is the key for America's so called Indo-Pacific strategy aimed at containing China besides balancing Beijing's Silk Road push into the Indian Ocean, he said. "Of course it is American strategy to use India against China. But we understand India also need strategic co-operation with US in defence and security because India has suffered due to separatists and terrorist attacks and need capital investment from the US. We should understand that from India's needs," Wang said. The visit was also aimed at containing the Chinese and Russian influence in India, he said. "But India is a civilisational state for long time and pursues independent foreign policy. It is not easy for anybody to use it," he said.

PTI, Beijing



Shaima al-Sabbagh is being carried away after she was injured during clashes with police during a rare leftwing protest in central Cairo on late Saturday. Shaima was among the 11 who died in unrest on Egypt's fourth uprising anniversary yesterday.



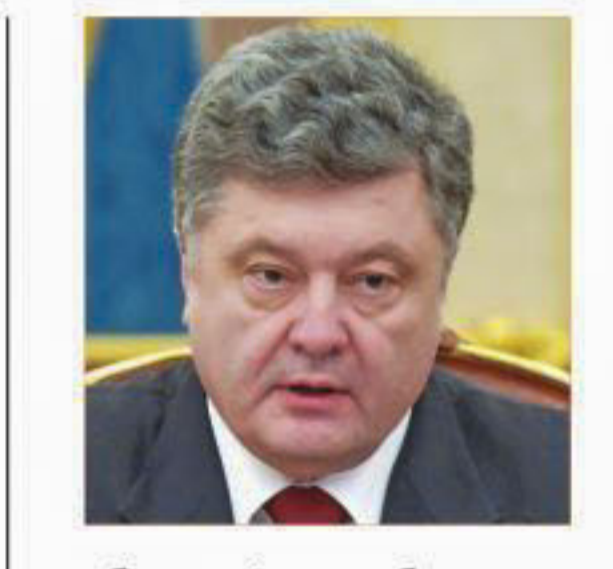
PHOTO: AFP

World leaders condemn ISIS's 'outrageous' hostage murder

AFP, Tokyo

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe yesterday branded the murder of a Japanese hostage by Islamic State militants as "outrageous and unforgivable" and demanded the immediate release of a second captive, amid a tide of global revulsion. The apparent beheading of self-employed security contractor Haruna Yukawa was announced in a video generally agreed to be credible, and appeared to mark a grave turn of events in a crisis that has gripped Japan for nearly a week. "Such an act of terrorism is outrageous and unforgivable," Abe told broadcaster NHK. "I condemn it strongly and resolutely," he said, calling for the immediate freeing of Yukawa's fellow captive, freelance journalist Kenji Goto. US President Barack Obama led the worldwide condemnation of what he called

the "brutal murder". Obama, who arrived in New Delhi yesterday for a three-day visit, telephoned Abe from the Indian capital "to offer condolences for the murder... and to convey solidarity with the Japanese people", said a White House statement. British Prime Minister David Cameron decried the Islamic State movement's "murderous barbarity", and French President Francois Hollande labelled it a "barbaric assassination". Australia's Prime Minister Tony Abbott called it "an absolute atrocity" carried out by a "death cult". Germany's Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier condemned the killing as "an odious crime". EU foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini said the beheading "is yet another demonstration that this organisation's ideology and actions are in breach of all universally recognised values and rights".



Ukraine bats for truce after rebel attacks

AFP, Kiev

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said yesterday he saw "no alternative" to a September truce with separatist rebels, after a weekend rocket assault that killed 30 people in a government-held city. "Ukraine remains a firm proponent of a peaceful solution," Poroshenko told an emergency Ukrainian National Security and Defence Council meeting. "We see no alternative to Minsk," he added in reference to the Belarussian capital where the often-broken September 5 ceasefire agreement was signed. Saturday's rocket assault on the government-held port of Mariupol came a day after rebel commander Alexander Zakharchenko pulled out of all future peace talks with the pro-Western government in Kiev. Zakharchenko announced the launch of a new offensive aimed at capturing Mariupol and other eastern lands allied to Kiev a few hours after the attack. Poroshenko said the European Union would hold a meeting of its foreign ministers today at which Kiev would lobby for still firmer sanctions against Russia. He said that Ukraine and the 28-nation bloc "will coordinate steps for improving Ukraine's security and upping the pressure on Russia."

Anti-austerity Syriza poised for Greek election victory

AFP, Athens

Radical anti-austerity party Syriza headed for a stunning victory in Greece's election yesterday, exit polls showed, putting it on a collision course with the EU over plans to rewrite the country's massive bailout deal. Syriza took between 36 and 38 percent of the vote, according to updated exit polls, compared to between 26 percent and 28 percent for the conservative New Democracy party of incumbent Prime Minister Antonis Samaras. If the result is confirmed, Syriza would become the first anti-austerity party in government in Europe and its 40-year-old leader Alexis Tsipras would be Greece's youngest prime minister in 150 years. Syriza has vowed to renegotiate the terms of Greece's 240-billion-euro (\$269 billion) bailout with the European Union and the International Monetary Fund and reverse the public sector spending cuts and labour



Alexis Tsipras

market reforms that were introduced in return for the emergency aid. The prospect of Greece defaulting on its debt repayments under a Syriza government is likely to spark fears the country could be forced to leave the eurozone. "This appears to be a historic victory, a message that does not only concern the Greek people, it resounds all over Europe and brings relief," Syriza party spokesman Panos Skourletis told Mega TV. Projections showed that Syriza may win up to 154 seats in the 300-seat parliament, meaning it could rule without a coalition partner. Neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn and the pro-European To Potami are in a neck-and-neck race for third place with between 6.0 percent and 7.0 percent apiece, according to exit polls. Analysts said Syriza's absolute majority hinged on whether a new party formed by former socialist prime minister George Papandreou would muster the 3.0 percent required for parliamentary representation.

Nepal Charter Conflict MPs to vote defying Maoists

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's parliamentary speaker yesterday announced plans for a vote on a new national constitution to end a political deadlock, sparking fresh anger from opposition lawmakers. The ruling and opposition parties have spent years locked in a stalemate over the terms of a constitution designed to draw a line under a decade of civil war. Lawmakers' failure to reach agreement before a deadline last Thursday triggered a political crisis in the country. Speaker Subash Nembang said he had decided to press ahead with a vote rather than wait until an agreement could be hammered out between the ruling parties and the opposition, which is led by former Maoist rebels.

The WWII female codebreakers

Their secrets revealed after 70 years of silence

For thousands of women during the Second World War an ugly Edwardian mansion in Buckinghamshire was called home. Day after day, they decoded messages about upcoming attacks, learned about the Nazis' plans for the Holocaust and ultimately read the communiqués that revealed the Germans' fear of defeat. Yet these unsung heroines - who included Kate Middleton's grandmother - couldn't tell anyone about their critical contribution to the war effort and it's only now that they're breaking decades of silence to talk about the extraordinary time. The intelligence centre and its work was conducted under conditions of strictest secrecy and Churchill once described

Bletchley staff as: "The geese that laid the golden eggs and never cackled." A total of 12,000 people worked there, with 80 per cent of them women - one of them was Joan Clarke, the cryptologist who worked closely with Engima machine genius Alan Turing, and was played by Keira Knightley in the Oscar-nominated film, the Imitation Game. Now more than 70 years later, 45 women have shared their stories in The Debs Of Bletchley Park And Other Stories by its chief historical adviser, Michael Smith. From sleeping in huts so cold their flannels froze over night to wading through reams of paper each day, these women may have been closeted away in London's commuter belt but in many ways they were at the frontline of the war effort.



Marigold Phillips was one of the WWII code breakers.