

NEWSIN
brief

Violence flares in China, Myanmar border

AFP, Yangon

Clashes have flared between Myanmar's army and rebels in an ethnic Chinese northern border area, state media said yesterday, as multiple conflicts in minority regions overshadow efforts to agree a countrywide ceasefire. Resurgence of conflict in the Kokang area of Shan state, which had been largely dormant for nearly six years, saw rebel troops attack Myanmar military positions in the area on Monday.

HK woman guilty of maid abuse: court

AFP, Hong Kong

A Hong Kong woman, Law Wan-tung, was convicted yesterday of beating and starving her Indonesian maid and keeping her prisoner in a case that sparked international outrage. The verdict was met with cheers by activists and supporters of Erwana Sulistyaningsih, 24, a former domestic helper who has become the face of a campaign for improved workers' rights in the financial hub.

29 African migrants die off Italian coast

AFP, Rome

Twenty-nine African migrants intercepted by Italian authorities while trying to reach Europe by boat in rough and icy conditions have died of hypothermia, most after being rescued, sources told AFP Monday. More than 3,200 people have died in the last year attempting to reach Italy by boat from North Africa. Over 170,000 people, a record number, landed there in 2014.

Russia to help build Egypt's first nuke plant

AFP, Cairo

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi yesterday said that Russia had agreed to jointly build his country's first nuclear power plant. A memorandum of understanding was signed Tuesday in the presence of Sisi and visiting Russian President Vladimir Putin.



Pro-Russian separatist fighters take pictures on February 9, 2015 next to a destroyed Ukrainian Army in Uglegorsk, 6 kms southwest of Debaltseve. Inset, Relatives react beside the body of a victim after shelling in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kramatorsk, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



Ukraine clashes intensify ahead of peace summit

Obama delays arms decision amid diplomatic whirlwind

AFP, Kiev

Intense fighting in Ukraine, including a rocket strike on Kiev's military headquarters in the east, killed at least 20 people yesterday on the eve of a four-way peace summit.

Pro-Russia rebels sought to encircle railway hub Debaltseve, and Ukrainian forces launched a counter-offensive around the strategic port of Mariupol as diplomats scrambled to finalise a deal to end the 10-month war at the summit in Minsk planned for Wednesday.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said rockets from a Tornado multiple launch system for the first time hit the military's command centre in Kramatorsk, a regional capital behind the frontlines considered to be under firm government control and far from rebel positions.

Local officials said the strike killed at least six people and wounded 21 in nearby residential areas.

Kiev and the West accuse Moscow of supplying and training the heavily armed separatists, but Russia denies the claims.

Another seven Ukrainian soldiers and seven civilians were killed in fighting over the last 24 hours, Kiev officials and rebels said, including in Debaltseve which the insurgents claim to have surrounded.

Rebels, diplomats and mediators gathered in the Belarussian capital to bridge gaps on a possible peace deal, which the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany hope to sign in Minsk today.

Rebel negotiator Denis Pushilin told the separatists' news agency that he was heading to Minsk for talks with mediators from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) as well as Russian and Ukrainian representatives.

French President Francois Hollande and German Chancellor Angela Merkel have been conducting frantic diplomacy, taking the "last chance" deal to Poroshenko and Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

Merkel was in Washington Monday for lengthy talks with the US President Barack Obama on the initiative to defuse fighting that has killed at least 5,400 people since April.

Obama agreed to hold off on sending arms to Ukraine until truce efforts have played out.

Kejriwal to take oath as Delhi CM on Feb 14

BJP heavyweights bite the dust in AAP sweep

PTI, New Delhi

Exactly a year after he had resigned as Delhi chief minister, AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal will be taking oath as the CM again on February 14 at Ramlila Maidan.

"Arvind Kejriwal will take oath as the Delhi Chief Minister on February 14 at Ramlila Maidan," AAP leader Ashutosh said after the party's landslide victory in the Delhi Assembly polls.

After AAP had thrown a surprise by uprooting Congress out of power in 2013 Assembly elections as a debutant party, Kejriwal had taken oath as

PARTY	SEATS	VOTE SHARE
AAP	67	54.3%
BJP	3	32.2%
CONGRESS	0	9.7%
OTHERS	0	3.8%

Delhi's seventh chief minister on December 28. However, after serving the government for 49 days, he had resigned on February 14 last year after his push for the anti-corruption Jan Lokpal Bill was blocked in the state Assembly by BJP and Congress.

This time, it was a crushing defeat for the BJP heavyweights including chief ministerial candidate Kiran Bedi. The BJP's "trump card", who was anointed as the party's face just weeks ahead of the polls, lost from Krishna Nagar, considered to be a "safe" seat. Bedi lost to AAP's SK Bagga.

Senior BJP leader Jagdish Mukhi, who had won from west Delhi's Janakpuri constituency for a record five times, lost to AAP's Rajesh Rishi.

Ram Vir Singh Bidhuri, former Delhi NCP president who was contesting from Badarpur area, lost to AAP's Narayan Dutt Sharma by a record margin of 47,583 votes.

DELHI STATE POLLS 2015

Hazare attacks Modi

TNN, Ralegan Siddhi

Anti-corruption crusader and noted Gandhian Anna Hazare yesterday



congratulated the Aam Aadmi Party's leader Arvind Kejriwal for his party's spectacular performance in Delhi Assembly polls. He said that the election result was in favour of AAP because the "achhe din only came for industrialists" after the Narendra Modi-led government came to power at the Centre eight months back. He also urged the AAP convenor, a former Team Anna member, not to forget his struggle for the Jan Lokpal Bill and take it forward.

AAP to test waters in West Bengal, UP

THE HINDU ONLINE

New political equations may emerge in West Bengal as some leaders of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has claimed that the party may contest in all 294 seats in the Assembly elections in the state. The party also declared to contest in Uttar Pradesh state polls. TMC chief Mamta Banerjee, who congratulated AAP for the landslide majority, may face a tough time as AAP may cut into the vote share of the ruling party in West Bengal.

QUOTE
of the day



"I have not lost, the BJP has lost. I gave it my best. BJP is a national party, it should introspect on why it has lost,"

--Says BJP's CM candidate Kiran Bedi after Delhi poll defeat

You are the virus, we are the cure

Anonymous vows to expose ISIS

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Anonymous has vowed fresh attacks against social media accounts affiliated with Isis, warning its supporters: "We will hunt you down and expose you."

The hacking collective's latest post comes after it "declared war" on jihadist websites and social networks in response to the Charlie Hebdo shooting massacre in January. The group claimed it has disabled some Twitter and Facebook accounts used by ISIS supporters.

ISIS has continuously used social media and the internet as a channel for disseminating propaganda, circulating brutal videos of hostages being killed and as a tool for radicalising and recruiting new members.

The video explains that 'Operation ISIS' is continuing and begins with the message that members of Anonymous are from all races, ethnicities, economic backgrounds and sexualities.

It then directly addresses ISIS, telling them: "We will hunt you, take down your sites, accounts, emails, and expose you. From now on, there [will be] no safe place for you online - you will be treated like a virus, and we are the cure. We own the internet now."



Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi (R) shakes hands with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin during their meeting in Cairo, yesterday. President Putin visited Egypt as Russia seeks to expand its reach in the Arab world's most populous country at a time when Cairo-Washington ties remain frayed.

PHOTO: AFP

Obama confirms death of ISIS hostage Mueller

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama yesterday confirmed the death of Kayla Jean Mueller -- who was taken hostage by the Islamic State group in Syria -- and vowed to hunt her captors.

"No matter how long it takes, the United States will find and bring to justice the terrorists who are responsible for Kayla's captivity and death," he said in a statement.

The 26-year-old Arizona aid worker was seized in August, 2013 in Aleppo.

Last week ISIS claimed she had been killed in a Jordanian air strike in the Syrian city of Raqa, the militant group's proclaimed "capital."

That account was treated with skepticism, but over the weekend ISIS sent Mueller's parents a "private message" with "additional information", that allowed the intelligence services to confirm her death, the White House and family said. The Washington Post reported that Mueller's family had been sent a photograph of their

daughter's body.

Mueller was believed to be the last US hostage being held by ISIS, following the execution of AFP contributor James Foley and American-Israeli journalist Steven Sotloff.

Mueller's Parents Carl and Marsha Mueller voiced their heartbreak at the death of their daughter, but said they were proud of her and the humanitarian work she did.

In a letter from captivity in early 2014 -- which was partially redacted -- Muller said she was "completely unharmed" by her captors but heavy-hearted about the toll it must be taken on her family.

"Just the thought of you all sends me into a fit of tears," she wrote in the letter released by her family.

She dreamt about family camping trips and imagined meeting them at the airport if she were released.

Obama praised Mueller's humanitarian work at home, in the Middle East and elsewhere.



Kayla Jean Mueller

DSK denies pimping charges

AFP, Lille

Former IMF boss Dominique Strauss-Kahn yesterday denied knowing the women he took part in sex parties with were prostitutes, as he took the stand at his French trial on charges of aggravated pimping.

"I committed no crime, no offence," Strauss-Kahn said in a letter read out to the court by the judge in the northern city of Lille.

He also said from the witness stand that the sex parties he attended were few and far between, and that there was none of the "wild activity" of which he is accused.

The 65-year-old former finance minister, once tipped to become the president of France, argues he is merely a libertine who engaged in orgies with consenting adults.

Syria 'informed' about air strikes

Says Assad; Obama to ask Congress for war authority; UAE rejoins fight

AGENCIES

President Bashar al-Assad said Damascus was being informed about US-led air strikes against jihadists in Syria and that they could help his government if they were "more serious".

In an interview broadcast by the BBC yesterday, the Syrian leader also denied his forces were using so-called barrel bombs, crude unguided munitions blamed for the deaths of thousands of civilians in rebel-held areas.

He also denied claims that Syria's government had used chemical weapons against its own people in August 2013, in an attack outside Damascus that killed up to 1,400 people.

A US-led coalition began carrying out air strikes against the Islamic State (ISIS) jihadist group in Syria on September 23, but it has pointedly refused to coordinate with Damascus.

Assad said communication was through third parties, including neighbouring Iraq. Damascus has grudgingly accepted the strikes against ISIS on its territory, saying it was informed before they started, but has repeatedly criticised the coalition for failing to coordinate with it.

Assad said the US-led strikes had the potential to help his government, but that so far they were not sufficiently "serious" to do so. More than 210,000 people have been killed in Syria since the conflict began in March 2011.

Meanwhile, six months after US military action began against ISIS, the White House is poised to send Capitol Hill this week language to formally authorise the mission. But it's far from certain if the measure can pass Congress, which is deeply divided on the issue.

The proposal from the Obama administration, which is expected on the Hill on Tuesday or Wednesday, would approve continued military operations against the terror group in the Mideast, but request a three-year mission so that the next president would have to come back to Congress for new approval, according to a congressional source familiar with the discussions.

The White House will also call for restrictions on American combat troops on the ground, but is also likely to allow some exceptions -- such as for search and rescue missions, multiple congressional sources said.

When the mission first began in August, the White House insisted President Barack Obama already had the legal authority without congressional action. But lawmakers in both parties demanded that Congress have a say in debating and approving the mission.

Meanwhile, the United Arab Emirates yesterday resumed air strikes against the Islamic State group which it had suspended after the jihadists captured a Jordanian pilot in December, the military said.



SODOMY CASE Court upholds Anwar Ibrahim's conviction

AFP, Putrajaya

Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim said he was the victim of a "political conspiracy" yesterday as the nation's highest court sent him to jail for five years on a sodomy conviction that will likely end his career.

Anwar had challenged a conviction handed down last year for sodomising a young male former aide, but the Federal Court struck down his appeal, saying there was "overwhelming evidence" of the crime.

The decision was sharply criticised by the United States, Australia and human rights organisations.

Sodomy is punishable by up to 20 years in prison in Muslim-majority Malaysia. Anwar was taken from the court in the afternoon to begin his sentence.

Government critics call the case part of a long-running campaign to destroy Anwar, a former deputy premier who was ousted from the ruling party in the late 1990s and later helped unite a previously divided and hapless opposition into a formidable force.

Anwar is now 67. Even if freed early, he is barred from politics for five years after his release, making another comeback unlikely.

WAR ON ISIS