

NEWSIN brief

Egypt releases Al-Jazeera journalists
AFP, Cairo

Two Al-Jazeera journalists were freed from an Egyptian prison yesterday pending retrial, their families said, after spending more than a year in jail in a case that provoked global uproar. A Cairo court on Thursday ordered the release of Canadian Mohamed Fahmy and Egyptian Baher Mohamed, who face retrial on charges of supporting the blacklisted Muslim Brotherhood.

Six-day-old has heart transplant in US
AFP, Los Angeles

A six-day old premature baby has become the youngest infant to receive a heart transplant at a US hospital, doctors and her proud parents said Thursday. Baby Oliver Crawford underwent the operation at a hospital in Arizona after being born seven weeks ahead of schedule with a life threatening heart defect. But the baby is recovering well, doctors said.

NYT columnist David Carr dead at 58
AFP, Washington

David Carr, a New York Times media critic who was known for sharp wit and blunt style and overcame drug addiction to become one of America's most respected journalists, died Thursday at age 58. Carr collapsed in the newsroom Thursday and was later pronounced dead at a hospital, the Times said.

Pakistan hangs two more for murder
AFP, Muzaffarabad

Two men convicted of murder were hanged yesterday in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, the first executions in the disputed territory in more than 10 years. Their deaths bring to 24 the number of people hanged in Pakistan since the government ended a six-year moratorium on the death penalty in December.



Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi greets supporters as she leaves celebrations to mark the 100th birthday of the country's independence hero, her father Aung San, in the remote central Myanmar town of Natmouk, yesterday. Suu Kyi, who is leading the opposition to momentous elections later this year, addressed a crowd of thousands to mark the occasion.

PHOTO: AFP

RISING ATTACKS ON CHRISTIANS Indian PM orders crackdown

AFP, New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi summoned New Delhi's police commissioner yesterday after the latest attack on a Christian institution, amid claims his Hindu nationalist government is failing to protect religious minorities.

Modi ordered a police crackdown after a Catholic school was burgled overnight in the Indian capital, forcing its closure for the day, the sixth attack on a Christian building in the city since December.

"Prime Minister Modi called me over the recent cases of vandalism of Delhi churches and strictly instructed (us) to track down the culprits," commissioner BS Bassi told reporters.

"We have increased security around churches and are taking the case with utter seriousness. He asked us to ensure no such attacks take place in future," he said.

Modi said in a statement he asked the commissioner to "speedily investigate the recent incidents of vandalism" but did not specify those on churches and the school.

Priests, nuns and parishioners clashed with police earlier this month as they staged a protest in Delhi over what they said were five church vandalism and arson attacks since December.

Clergy accused Modi's government of failing to speak out against the attacks which they blamed on Hindu hardliners.

Critics say hardliners have felt emboldened since Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stormed to power in general elections last May.

Hardliners have been accused in recent months of trying to convince Muslims and Christians to convert to Hinduism, sparking outrage from political opponents in parliament.

Lanka aims to restore ties with US: FM

AFP, Washington

Sri Lanka is seeking to put ties with Washington back on course after several years of strain, Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera said Thursday as he met top US diplomat John Kerry.

Colombo hopes "to revive and strengthen the very strong bonds we have had with the United States for several decades," Samaraweera said at the start of talks at the State Department.

"Of course relations have been somewhat strained over the last few years. And my job, I feel, is to ensure that we put back our relations to an irreversible state of excellence in the coming months."

Sri Lanka looked forward to working closely with Washington as "for us, for a new administration, the United States of America is not a threat but a great opportunity."

India's permanent UNSC seat unacceptable

Nawaz Sharif tells Barack Obama

PTI, Islamabad

India's permanent membership in the reformed UN Security Council is unacceptable to Pakistan as it has not complied with UN resolutions on Kashmir, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has told US President Barack Obama.

The US president called Sharif on Thursday night and both leaders discussed issues of mutual interest and those related to regional stability and peace for over half-an-hour, officials here said.

During their conversation, Sharif expressed reservations about US support for India's bid to secure a permanent UN Security Council seat.

Sharif told Obama that India cannot become a UNSC permanent member due to its non-compliance of all the resolutions passed by the UN on Kashmir and has "not fulfilled the commitment to give the right of self-determination to people of Kashmir," officials said.

"India does not deserve to be a permanent member of the UN," Sharif was quoted as saying.

During his unprecedented second India visit last month, President Obama had reaf-

firmed his support for a reformed UN Security Council with India as a permanent member.

In his telephonic conversation with Obama, Sharif also said that Pakistan wanted to become a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Obama, during his India visit, had also reaffirmed the US' position that India is ready for NSG membership.

Obama visited India last month and was the chief guest at the Republic Day Parade, the first US President to do so. In his conversation with Sharif, Obama also discussed his India visit.

Sharif asked Obama to impress upon India to resume peace dialogue with Pakistan to address all outstanding issues including Kashmir, the News reported.

The two leaders also exchanged views about bilateral issues including terrorism and Obama congratulated Sharif on the success of operation 'Zarb-i-Azb' to wipe out militants from the North Waziristan tribal region.

The two also decided to meet at a convenient date.

Obama had also telephoned Sharif before going to India and had promised to take him into confidence at the conclusion of the visit.



Indian foreign secy to visit Pakistan

AFP, New Delhi

India's foreign secretary will travel to Pakistan as part of a regional tour in coming months, an official said yesterday, the first high-level visit since relations between the arch-rivals soured last year.

S Jaishankar will travel to Islamabad where "India will push its agenda" during bilateral meetings with officials, foreign ministry spokesman Syed Akbaruddin said at a briefing.

"The foreign secretary will visit all Saarc countries including Pakistan," Akbaruddin told reporters without giving specific dates and referring to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

Akbaruddin did not say whether the visit would likely result in peace talks resuming between the foreign secretaries of the nuclear-armed neighbours - talks which India abruptly cancelled last year.

Relations have soured between the neighbours over increased firing along their borders and India halting the talks in August enraged that Pakistan consulted Kashmiri separatist leaders before the dialogue began.

US Secretary of State John Kerry last month appealed to both nations to resume the talks, saying Washington was "deeply concerned" about a surge in violence on the border in Kashmir.

News of the visit came hours after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi phoned his Pakistani counterpart to wish his cricket team good luck ahead of a World Cup grudge match between the rivals.

Fatal mistake for mankind?

Plan to broadcast messages to alien worlds leaves cosmologists worrying

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A plan to beam powerful radio messages to possible alien civilisations on distant planets has caused consternation among some scientists who believe it could spell doom for humanity on Earth.

Leading figures behind the 50-year-old Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (Seti), which uses radio telescopes to listen passively for unnatural signals from space, have now proposed an "active" form of search known as Meti - Messages to Extraterrestrial Intelligence. These signals will be aimed at the parts of the galaxy where Earth-like planets and life may exist, based on the growing number of "exoplanets" beyond our solar system identified by the Kepler space telescope, which include many in the so-called "habitable zone" of a star.

However, critics say the proposal betrays the founding principles of Seti, which were about listening rather than transmitting.

They fear that sending signals of our existence could lead to visits from malign extraterrestrials intent on doing harm to humans.

"A small cadre of Seti radio astronomers has resisted the notion of international consultation before humanity takes the brash and irreversible step into Meti, shouting our presence into the cosmos," said David Brin, a space scientist and author. "That's all very well if the only one you're putting at risk is yourself. But when that risk is imposed upon our children and all of humanity on the planet, is it too much to ask that we discuss it first?"

He is not alone in his concerns. Professor Stephen Hawking, the Cambridge cosmologist, warned in 2010 that humans should keep as silent as possible because alien civilisations may be attracted to Earth and have the technology to travel here and exploit its resources.



Crowds watch as Indian fire force personnel attempt to retrieve the bodies of victims from the Bangalore-Ernakulam train which derailed after a boulder fell on the track in Bidaragere, about 50 kms from Bangalor, yesterday. At least ten people were killed in the accident with more bodies still trapped in the wreckage, officials said.

PHOTO: AFP

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