

NEWS IN brief

Pakistan frees 172 Indian fishermen

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan, as a goodwill gesture, yesterday released 172 Indian fishermen who had been held for violating territorial waters in the Arabian Sea, officials said. Despite the releases, 349 Indian inmates still remain Pakistan's in custody.

3,415 Americans ditch their passports

CNN ONLINE

The number of Americans choosing to give up their passports hit a record 3,415 last year, up 14% from 2013, and 15 times more than in 2008, when only 231 people renounced their citizenship. Experts say the surge is coming from expats who no longer want to deal with complicated tax paperwork, a burden that has only gotten worse in recent years.

China opposes Iran deadline extension

AFP, Tehran

China is against another extension of the deadline for Iran to reach a deal with world powers in talks on its nuclear programme, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said in Tehran yesterday. Two deadlines for a permanent agreement on Iran's nuclear programme have been missed since an interim deal was reached in November 2013. The deadline is now extended to June 30.

Japan pledges \$15m to fight terror

AFP, Tokyo

Japan, reeling from the murder of two nationals by ISIS, will offer an extra \$15 million in aid to fight terrorism in Middle East and Africa. Japan hopes to demonstrate its resolve not to cave in to terrorism with the fresh assistance, which will be announced at a global counter-terrorism conference starting on Wednesday in Washington, the Sankei Shimbun said.



Ukrainian servicemen play football on a road at Svitlodarsk, approaching Debaltseve, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Ukraine 'quieter' after ceasefire

AFP, Donetsk

Fighting dropped sharply across eastern Ukraine yesterday but there was still sporadic shooting after a ceasefire came into force, the first step in a fragile peace plan aimed at ending 10 months of conflict.

An elderly man and woman died after a Grad missile hit the town of Popasna in the Lugansk region some 20 minutes after the truce began at midnight, pro-Kiev local governor Gennadiy Moskal said.

The firing allegedly came from an area which Kiev says is under the command of a renegade group of Cossack fighters who insist they will not obey rebel leaders' commands to lay down their guns.

Elsewhere across conflict zone, Ukraine's military said its forces had come under fire 10 times but that shooting had tailed off since 3:00am.

Both government and rebel sources said the ceasefire is being "generally respected".

The latest deal between Ukraine and the rebels, hammered out Thursday after marathon talks involving the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France, is seen as the best hope to stop fighting that has killed over 5,480 people since April.

But trust is low on all sides and scepticism remains high after the collapse of previous ceasefires.

Washington and Kiev accused Moscow of fuelling the last-gasp fighting Saturday by pouring arms across the border to help rebels grab territory. Moscow denied the claims.

US President Barack Obama has warned that he could start supplying arms to Ukraine if the truce collapses, something Europe is desperate to avoid.

The UN Security Council is expected to meet in emergency session Sunday to shore up the Ukraine peace deal.

Sri Lanka leader in India to make 'new beginning'

AFP, New Delhi

Sri Lanka's new president arrived in India Sunday on his first foreign trip in office, trying to rebuild ties hit by tensions over growing Chinese influence on the strategically located island.

Maithripala Sirisena landed in New Delhi for the four-day trip aimed at allaying Indian fears over China's influence on the island that strengthened under President Mahinda Rajapakse's decade-long rule.

During the visit, the 63-year-old leader is expected to meet his Indian counterpart Pranab Mukherjee besides holding talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on key issues, including peace and reconciliation process in his country.

According to presidential advisors, the Lankan president is desirous of making a new beginning in the India-Sri Lanka relations after bilateral ties suffered under Sirisena's predecessor Mahinda Rajapaksa over India's backing to US-moved resolutions at the UN rights body over alleged warcrimes.

"We will be making a new beginning with India," acting government spokesman

and minister Lakshman Kiriella said.

India has long considered Sri Lanka to be within its strategic sphere of influence.

But China ploughed huge sums into Sri Lankan infrastructure projects, becoming the country's biggest foreign financier and enjoying significant political and even military influence under Rajapakse.

Critics say China is trying to develop facilities around the Indian Ocean in a "string of pearls" strategy to counter the rise of its Asian rival India and secure its own economic interests.

"A first visit is always an opportunity to set directions.

President Sirisena will be welcomed warmly in Delhi," India's foreign ministry spokesman Syed Akbaruddin told reporters ahead of his arrival.

Sirisena is expected to try to secure greater Indian investment in Sri Lanka, which said last week it was seeking an international bailout of more than \$4.0 billion.

Sirisena will also travel to the Buddhist pilgrimage site of Bodh Gaya and a Hindu temple in Tirupati further south tomorrow before leaving a day after.



A policeman places flowers close to the scene of the cafe shooting in Oesterbroen.

PHOTO: INDEPENDENT.CO.UK



Unrest in Myanmar

People who fled from conflict areas near the Myanmar and Chinese border arrive on a truck at a temporary refugee camp at a monastery in Lashio, northern Myanmar, yesterday. Around a dozen ethnic rebels have been killed in a firefight with Myanmar troops and a further eight captured after renewed clashes there, state media said yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Hackers rob 100 banks in 30 countries

AFP, Washington

A sophisticated global cyberattack struck more than 100 banks in 30 countries stealing hundreds of millions of dollars, The New York Times reported Saturday.

Citing a soon to be released report from computer security company Kaspersky Lab, the newspaper said the attack involved malicious software that gave hackers long-term access to banking systems.

A group of Russians, Chinese and Europeans was able to siphon off around \$300 million in one of the world's largest bank robberies, the report said.

The money was transferred to bank accounts around the world in small-value amounts to avoid detection.

Hackers largely focused on banks in Russia, but millions of dollars were also taken from banks in Japan, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United States as well, the Times said.

Hackers had such advanced access to the banks' systems that they could force ATM machines to dispense cash at specific times and locations where hackers could pick it up.

QUOTE of the day



Israel is your home. We are preparing and calling for the absorption of mass immigration from Europe

Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu renews his call to Jews to move in to Israel after Copenhagen attacks



RIO MUD CARNIVAL

People enjoy themselves covered in mud ahead of "Bloco da Lama", a mud carnival party, about 250km south of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on Saturday. "Bloco da Lama" was started in 1986 by two teenagers playing with mud.

PHOTO: AFP



House collapse kills 13 sleeping Indians

AFP, Lucknow

A newly built house in northern India collapsed early yesterday killing 13 residents as they slept, the latest in a string of building cave-ins, police said.

The roof of the house suddenly gave way in Uttar Pradesh state, trapping the residents, four of whom managed to escape from the rubble with the help of neighbours, a police officer said.

Police said they were searching for the building contractor after suspecting poor construction was to blame for the accident in Dulhaipur village about 32 kilometres from the city of Varanasi.

A local official said 20,000 rupees would be given to the relatives of the victims as compensation for the accident.

The accident is the latest in a long line of deadly building collapses in India, some of which have highlighted shoddy construction standards.

AAP part of RSS plan against Congress

Says Congress leader Digvijaya Singh

AGENCIES

Congress yesterday sought to give a new twist to AAP's victory in the Delhi polls with party general secretary Digvijaya Singh saying Arvind Kejriwal is part of the overall plan of RSS for a "Congress Free India".

"Kejriwal is a part of the overall plan of RSS for a Congress Mukti Bharat. I know I would be abused by both RSS and Kejriwal fans," Singh tweeted.

Kejriwal took oath as the eighth chief minister of Delhi yesterday after winning with a thumping majority in the Delhi assembly polls.

"When I said RSS was behind Anna Movement, no one believed me I was called mad. But ultimately I was proved right and I would be this time too," he tweeted.

The AAP had won 67 of the 70 seats in Delhi decimating Congress and leaving only three seats for the BJP.

Meanwhile, Kejriwal will have six cabinet ministers but, in a first, will not keep any portfolio. Instead, he will look after overall functioning of the government.

Kejriwal on Saturday promised to make Delhi India's first corruption-free state and end what he called its "VIP culture".

The veteran anti-graft campaigner pledged to stick out his five-year term and said he would not succumb to arrogance after his upstart AAP won one of the biggest election victories the Indian capital has ever seen.



Limited climate change deal likely in Paris summit: IPCC

Modi says India can lead fight against global warming

AFP, Brussels

Encouraging progress at climate change talks points to the likelihood of an overall accord being reached at the Paris conference in December, but the deal is unlikely to adequately fight global warming, a top IPCC official said yesterday.

UN talks in Geneva ended Friday with a framework pact that scientists said at least identified enough common ground to foster hopes for success in Paris.

It is the first-ever proposal with buy-in from all the world's nations.

Jean-Pascal Van Ypersele, the Belgian deputy vice president of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, told AFP: "I am optimistic. We will have an accord in Paris."

But the goal of limiting the global temperature increase to just two degrees Celsius remains elusive, and Van Ypersele said it appeared the world is not ready to do what is needed to deliver that essential target.

"A deal in Paris will at least allow us to continue the work, but I fear time is passing and we have to make decisions by consensus," he said.

"I do not think today that we have the consensus to aim higher."

At a minimum, Paris pact must be in effect by 2020 to hit the UN goal of limiting

global warming to two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) over pre-Industrial Revolution levels. Scientists warn that current greenhouse gas emission trends put planet Earth on track for double that, or more, with the risk of catastrophic drought, storms and floods as well as rising sea levels.

Meanwhile, calling for an energy revolution in the country, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday said India had the strength and resources to lead the world's fight against global warming.

Speaking of the importance of solar energy in the Indian consciousness, Modi referred to increasing the scope of renewable sources in the current context.

"In our mythology we have imagined the sun god Surya riding on seven horses. In today's age the first four of the seven horses would respectively be thermal (coal), gas, hydro and nuclear energy."

"We need to utilise more the three other horses of solar, wind and biomass."

The UN has declared 2014-24 as the Decade of Sustainable Energy. Its Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) initiative signed a memorandum of understanding with the Gujarat government last month to support the UN objective to make sustainable energy accessible for all.