



Breaking customs, Indian widows play Holi with colours for the first time since the restoration of Assi Ghat by NGO Sulabh International in Varanasi, yesterday. Sulabh International undertook the de-silting of Assi Ghat, with 25 steps restored after being covered with mud and silt for decades.

PHOTO: AFP

## MYANMAR-REBEL CONFLICT

# Clashes rage near China border

AFP, Lashio

Myanmar's army intensified an offensive to flush out rebels from areas around a flashpoint town on the northeastern border with China, state media said yesterday, after 11 days of fighting displaced tens of thousands of people.

The conflict, which flared on February 9 when ethnic Kokang rebels killed nearly 50 soldiers during a series of attacks on Laukkai town, has seen at least 30,000 people flee into China, prompting Beijing to call for an end to the clashes.

A similar number of people are believed to be displaced within Myanmar's northern Shan State, but clear estimates are hard to glean as local aid groups have limited operations after a Myanmar Red Cross convoy came under fire.

The army has struck back against the rebels with air strikes and ground forces, after apparently being caught flat-footed by the pace and ferocity of the initial rebel assault.

"Army columns were in hot pursuit

of Kokang insurgents into retreat," around the Laukkai area, state mouthpiece the Global New Light of Myanmar reported Friday.

The report said the bodies of two rebels were recovered by Myanmar soldiers after fighting early Thursday to secure roads leading to Laukkai, which is now an apparent ghost town.

Rebels say they have also inflicted casualties on the army over recent days.

The conflict has renewed doubts over a government attempt to forge a nationwide ceasefire in a country peppered with bitter ethnic insurgencies.

The Kokang, who are mainly ethnic Chinese, have continued ambushes on army convoys despite losing dozens of men in the government push back.

They have been joined by other nearby rebel groups, including the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the powerful Kachin Independence Army, an ominous sign for peace in the country as it opens up and heads towards a crunch general election later this year.

Civilians have continued to stream into the Shan town of Lashio, some 140 kilometres from the fighting.

On Friday around 500 people were camped at the monastery where thousands who have fled the violence, many of them temporary workers, have taken refuge before travelling on to their homes in other parts of Myanmar.

Vice President Sai Mauk Kham was due to visit the site later Friday as the latest senior official to travel to Lashio after meeting wounded soldiers at the local military hospital.

Efforts to evacuate remote communities have been hampered by Tuesday's attack on a local Red Cross convoy which wounded two aid workers.

Myanmar has blamed Kokang rebel leader Phone Kya Shin for the upsurge of violence -- after six years of relative peace -- and called on Beijing to rein in any local officials who might be helping the group on its side of the border.

Reform-minded President Thein Sein has vowed "not to lose an inch of Myanmar's territory" to the rebels.



## 'GOVT MEDDLING' Amartya Sen quits Nalanda University

AFP, New Delhi

Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen has resigned as chancellor of an Indian university, accusing the government of political interference in higher education.

Sen spearheaded the revival of Nalanda University in the northern state of Bihar, one of the world's oldest seats of learning, taking over as chancellor in 2012 when it reopened.

But in an open letter to the university's governors, Sen said he has decided not to stay on as chancellor when his current term expires in July because it had become clear that the government did not want him there.

He said India's President Pranab Mukherjee, who has the final say over the appointment, had failed to reply to the board's unanimous recommendation that he remain chancellor.

"This delay, as well as the uncertainty involved, is leading, in effect, to a decisional gap, which is not helpful to Nalanda University's governance and its academic progress," he said.

The government later denied it was trying to "curtail" Sen's tenure. Sen, who won the Nobel in 1998 for his research into the roots of poverty, came out against India's Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi ahead of last year's election, saying the then opposition leader had not done enough to make minorities feel safe.

## Malaria on Myanmar-India border is 'huge threat'

BBC ONLINE

Resistance to the drug that has saved millions of lives from malaria has been detected over a wider area than previously thought, scientists warn.

The ability of the malaria parasite to shrug off the effects of artemisinin has been spreading since it emerged in South East Asia. Tests, published in Lancet Infectious Diseases, now show this resistance on the verge of entering India.

Experts said the development was "alarming" and an "enormous threat".

Deaths from malaria have nearly halved since 2000, and the infection now kills about 584,000 people each year.

But resistance to artemisinin threatens to undo all that hard work, and it has been detected in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar, also known as Burma.

Blood samples from 940 people with malaria from 55 sites across Myanmar showed this resistance was widespread across the country.

One site, in the Sagaing region, showed that resistant parasites were just 25km (15 miles) from the Indian border.

One of the researchers, Dr Charles Woodrow, from the Mahidol-Oxford Tropical Medicine Research Unit, in Thailand, told the BBC News website: "We can see artemisinin resistance is clearly present quite close to the Indian border, that's clearly a threat and in the future is likely to lead to extension of the problem to neighbouring areas."

Initially the other drug will pick up the slack to keep the combination effective, but Dr Woodrow says this resistance will "inevitably" lead to it failing.

Chloroquine probably saved hundreds of millions of lives, but resistance was discovered in 1957 around the border between Cambodia and Thailand.

Resistance spread around the world and reached Africa 17 years later.

Prof Mike Turner, the head of infection and immunobiology at the Wellcome Trust medical charity, said: "The new research shows that history is repeating itself. ... We are facing the imminent threat of resistance spreading into India, with thousands of lives at risk."

## Thailand bans surrogacy for foreigners

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand has passed a law banning foreign couples from using Thai women as surrogates after a series of high-profile scandals tainting the image of the hitherto unregulated industry.

The legislation was unanimously approved by Thailand's junta-picked parliament on Thursday in a bill spurred by the case of an Australian couple accused of abandoning a baby with Down's syndrome while taking his healthy twin sister carried by a Thai surrogate.

"Thailand and its women's uteruses will no longer be a hub" for surrogacy, said National Legislative Assembly member Wallop Tungkananurak.

Under the new law, likely to be enforced by June, only Thai couples or those where at least one partner comes from Thailand will be eligible to use surrogates in the kingdom.

People seeking surrogacy in Thailand will have to prove that they are unable to bear children and have no relatives to act as surrogates on their behalf.

Anyone found breaching the law could face up to 10 years in jail, said Wallop.

## CORPORATE SPYING ON MINISTRY India arrests six

AFP, New Delhi

Indian police have arrested six people including a senior journalist on charges of stealing top-secret documents from India's petroleum ministry and selling them on to energy companies, police said yesterday.

The arrests follow a major police sting operation to trap those responsible for taking the secret government documents, which police said were sold to private energy companies and consultancies.

The men, who also include two government employees, are alleged to have used duplicate keys and forged identity cards to gain access to the ministry at night and photocopy documents related to high-value bids and pricing policies.

"On the basis of preliminary investigations, we can say these documents had been obtained by independent energy consultants... and certain companies working in the field of energy," Delhi police chief Bhim Sain Bassi told reporters.

Police did not name the companies involved, but Reliance Industries, one of India's biggest business conglomerates, said one of its officials had been detained in connection with the case.

"The matter is under investigation... and we are determined to cooperate in every possible manner," a Reliance official told AFP, requesting anonymity.

Reliance, controlled by the country's wealthiest man Mukesh Ambani, derives most of its earnings from its massive energy operations.

The journalist, who ran an oil industry portal, was arrested late Thursday after a lengthy interrogation, a police source said told AFP, without giving further details.

Corporate espionage is a major problem in India. A report from the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry listed it as the ninth biggest threat to local companies in its 2014 survey.

The report also said that despite the presence of CCTV and tracking software, only 15-20 percent of corporate espionage cases are detected.

Another industry report in 2012 said more than one in three companies were involved in "some form of espionage to gain an advantage over their competitors".



## Bihar CM quits after losing party backing

AFP, Patna

The chief minister of one of India's biggest states resigned yesterday after weeks of political turmoil, paving the way for the return of his popular predecessor.

Jitan Ram Manjhi was left with little choice but to quit as chief minister of eastern Bihar state after he lost the backing of his Janata Dal (United) party.

He resigned hours before a confidence vote he was certain to lose, capping weeks of political uncertainty in India's third most populous state, which is also one of the nation's poorest.

He was booted out of the JD(U) earlier this month after defying an order from his one-time mentor and predecessor Nitish Kumar to vacate the position and allow him to return as chief minister.

Soon after Manjhi was formally expelled, Kumar was unanimously elected as leader of his party.

অমর ২১ ফেব্রুয়ারি

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## MODI SUIT sells for \$700,000

AFP, Ahmedabad

A diamond trader from Narendra Modi's home state yesterday won the bidding for the personalised pinstriped suit the Indian prime minister wore to meet Barack Obama, tendering nearly \$700,000 at a charity auction.

The bespoke wool suit with the words "Narendra Damodardas Modi" woven into the pinstripe proved a hot ticket at the three-day auction, sparking a bidding war that pushed the price up to 43.1 million rupees (\$692,000).

The suit was among more than 450 lots put up for auction by Modi in the city of Surat in his home state of Gujarat.

Modi has won a reputation as a fashion icon for his sometimes daring sartorial choices.

But wearing a suit with his own name on it was seen by many as a step too far, drawing accusations of narcissism -- possibly the reason Modi decided to sell it off.

The money raised will go towards cleaning up the holy Ganges river -- a pet project of India's Hindu nationalist prime minister.

দেশের সর্ববৃহৎ অনলাইন ব্যাংকিং নেটওয়ার্ক

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