NEWSIN

Russian bids farewell

to slain Putin critic

Thousands of mourners

yesterday filed past the cof-

fin of slain Russian opposi-

tion leader Boris Nemtsov,

bidding farewell to a charis-

matic activist whose brazen

former deputy prime minis-

ter and longtime Putin critic

who was gunned down near

the Kremlin late Friday, was

buried in Moscow yesterday.

Russia, Ukraine strike

Russia and Ukraine reached a

deal Monday to supply gas to

Europe until the end of March

after President Vladimir Putin

and Western leaders admitted

there was still progress to be

ceasefire. The deal struck after

tense talks in Brussels secures

gas supplies to the European

Nigeria 'kills 70 Boko

Nigerian troops backed by

civilian vigilantes yesterday

than 70 Boko Haram fight-

ers in a foiled attack to cap-

ture the strategic town of

Konduga near Maiduguri.

entered the fishing town

with a large herd of cattle

opened fire on troops sta-

to a six-hour gun battle.

Rare goblin shark

found in Australia

AFP, Sydney

tioned in the town, leading

A rare sea creature described

Australia and delivered to a

showed off its fleshy snout,

museum which yesterday

nail-like teeth and flabby

pink body. The prehistoric-

looking goblin sharks live

on deep sea bottoms and

little is known about their

as an "alien of the deep"

has been found off

pretending to be herders and

Around 150 militants

claimed to have killed more

Haram fighters'

Union until the end of winter.

made in implementing a

gas delivery deal

AFP, Geneva

assassination shocked the

country. The 55-year-old

AFP, Moscow

briet

GAZA

War Crimes

Palestinians to

formally go to

ICC in April

. The Palestinians will for-

International Criminal

· war crimes in Gaza and

· tant steps will be filing a

: complaint against Israel at

the ICC on April 1 over the

· (2014) Gaza war and settle-

: Mohammed Shtayyeh, a

faction of the Palestine

. Liberation Organisation.

On January 2, the

process which is due to

· take effect on April 1, set-

: ting the scene for potential

: legal action against Israeli

and quickly moved to cut

· off millions of dollars in

: monthly tax payments it

collects on behalf of the

· Palestinian Authority,

exacerbating an already

There was no immediate

response from Israel, with

man Emmanuel Nachshon

refusing to react to a decla-

ration which he described

as "speculative and hypo-

On January 16, the ICC

announced "a preliminary

examination" into Israel's

included last year's war in

and 73 Israelis were killed

during the conflict in July

and August, with UN fig-

About 2,200 Palestinians

ning in June which

actions over a period begin-

thetical".

Gaza.

foreign ministry spokes-

severe financial crisis.

· Ramallah-based

Israel reacted furiously,

· officials for alleged war

crimes.

· Palestinians moved to join

: the Hague-based court in a

· member of Fatah, the main

: ment activity," said

official said.

Court on April 1 to com-

plain about alleged Israeli

settlement activity, a senior

"One of the first impor-

mally approach the

Offensive took place keeping US in the dark

AGENCIES

The Iraqi military launched a major campaign to take back a key city from the selfproclaimed Islamic State over the weekend-a move that caught the US "by surprise," in the words of one American government official.

The US-led coalition forces that have conducted seven months of airstrikes on Iraq's behalf did not participate in the attack, defense officials told The Daily Beast, and the American military has no plans to chip in.

Instead, embedded Iranian advisors and Iranian-backed Shia militias are taking part in the offensive on the largely Sunni town, raising the prospect that the fight to beat back ISIS could become a sectarian war.

The news is the latest indication that not

all is well with the American effort against the terror group. On Friday, US defense officials told The Daily Beast that a planned offensive against the ISIS stronghold of Mosul had been indefinitely post-

poned after Iraqi officials argued that the timing was theirs to decide. Over the weekend, an American-backed rebel group in Syria announced that it was dissolving, and joining an Islamist faction.

Then there was the unexpected battle for Tikrit. Over the weekend, a reported 30,000 troops and militiamen-mostly Shias -stormed the Sunni dominated city of Tikrit, former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's hometown and the symbolic birthplace of his three decades of repressive practices against the majority Shiapopulation.

US officials were largely left in the dark of the planning and timing of the operation, defense officials said. The Pentagon said Monday it was not conducting airstrikes in support of the Tikrit offensive because the Iraqi government did not ask

The US had seen the prospect of strikes in Tikrit for a while but the timing and nature of the attack "caught us by surprise," one government official explained to The Daily The Iraqi decision to cut out the US-led

coalition turned the war against ISIS in Iraq into a dual track approach—one carried out by the US-led coalition another directed by the Iranians. Each has its own military strat-

And there were several reports that Maj Gen Qassem Soleimani, the shadowy commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' overseas operation arm is also on

the ground near Tikrit. "As long as the Iranians perceive that what we're doing comports with their objectives-which is eliminating ISIL-we're on a parallel course there,"

Director of National Intelligence James Clapper told an audience at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York on

> Monday. There are already fears that the Iraqi effort, backed by their Iranian supporters, will decimate parts of the city, defense offi-

cials said. Such actions would have great symbolic effect and make it increasingly unlikely of mending sectarian tensions between the minority Sunnis and their Shiadominated government. "This is a real bellweather," said a sec-

ond defense official. "If this becomes a sectarian battle, we will shift to simply counter terrorism, and away from training Iraqi forces. And the coalition will come

On the ground, Iraqi forces closed in on Tikrit yesterday, their progress slowed by jihadist snipers and booby traps.

The recapture of Tikrit is of both strategic and symbolic importance.

Military commanders have said Tikrit is a stepping stone for an even more ambitious operation aimed at retaking Mosul, the large northern city which has been the main Iraq hub of ISIS.

India, Pakistan

hold first talks

Pakistan and India held their

first high-level talks for nearly

a year yesterday, with a senior

Indian diplomat hailing the

meeting in Islamabad as

Subrahmanyam Jaishankar is

visiting Pakistan for the first

senior-level dialogue between

the nuclear-armed rivals since

their prime ministers met in

countries, always fraught,

soured further last August amid increased firing along

their borders and a row over a

Pakistani diplomat meeting

official for foreign affairs,

met his counterpart Aizaz

Ahmed Chaudhry and said

afterwards talks were held

"in a very positive and con-

together to find common

ground and narrow our differ-

"We agreed to work

"I reiterated our known

structive atmosphere".

ences," he told reporters.

Jaishankar, India's top

Relations between the two

New Delhi last May.

Kashmiri separatists.

Indian Foreign Secretary

"positive and constructive".

in a year

AFP, Islamabad



Iran deal threatens Israel's existence

Says Netanyahu; Obama scoffs at the notion

AFP, Washington

Israel and the United States clashed furiously over the Iran nuclear talks yesterday, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warning the deal under discussion would leave his country open to annihilation.

However, US President Barack Obama hit back immediately, scoffing that he had presented no idea of his own to contain the Iranian threat.

Netanyahu's party faces a close-fought Israeli parliamentary election in two weeks time and he has been accused in some quarters of imperilling Israel's close ties with Washington for personal political gain.

But, in a determined speech to a packed joint session of US Congress, he offered before the month is out.

"That deal will not prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons," he declared. "It would all but guarantee that Iran gets those weapons, lots of them."

"This deal has two major concessions. One, leaving Iran with a vast nuclear programme. Two, lifting the restrictions on that program in about a decade.

"That's why this deal is so bad. It doesn't block Iran's path to the bomb. It paves Iran's path to the bomb," he said. While some 50 members of Obama's

Democrats stayed away from Netanyahu's address, he was welcomed with a warm standing ovation and left to raucous applause. Later, Obama said, "I am not focused

in the politics of this. I am not focused on the theatre ... As far as I can tell, there was nothing new. "On the core issue, which is how to pre-

vent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon pulled no punches in his denunciation of which would make it far more dangerous, the accord that he expects Tehran to be the prime minister [Netanyahu] did not offer any viable alternatives."

"We don't yet have a deal ... But if we are successful then, in fact, this will be the best deal possible with to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapon," he added.

Ex-CIA chief pleads guilty to misdemeanour

BBC ONLINE

David Petraeus, a former CIA director and four-star general, has reached a plea deal with the US Justice Department in which he will admit to mishandling classified materials.

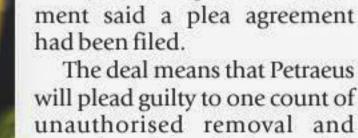
It ends a long investigation into whether he provided secret information to his mistress.

He resigned from his post at the CIA in 2012, after it emerged he was having an affair with his biographer Paula Broadwell.

A Justice Department statement said a plea agreement had been filed.

mum sentence of one year in prison, the New York Times reported.

Mr Petraeus has signed the deal, Justice Department spokesman Marc



unauthorised removal and retention of classified material, but could avoid an embarrassing trial The charge carries a maxi-



MYANMAR **EDUCATION REFORM PROTEST**

Iraqi forces fire weaponry from a position in the

northern part of Diyala province on Monday.

Riot police (R) confront students (L) during a protest march in central Myanmar town of Letpadan, yesterday. Some 200 Students yesterday defied an order to disperse. Students have rallied for months over a controversial education bill that they say is undemocratic and have collected support from ordinary people and monks in their march, which began in the central city of Mandalay in January.

PHOTO:

Of the day

When the Congress was unwilling to credit others for India's freedom, how can they credit others for India's develop-

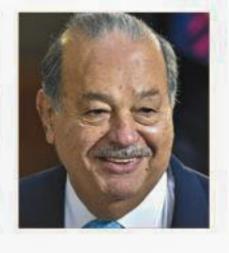
ment.

Indian Prime Minister

Narendra Modi

Bill Gates still world's





Billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates kept his spot as the world's richest man, a rank he has held for 16 of the past 21 years, Forbes magazine said Monday.

The Microsoft co-founder's fortune increased \$3.2 billion since last year to \$79.2 billion, the business magazine said, despite a \$1.5 billion gift of Microsoft shares to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in November.

Mexican telecom tycoon Carlos Slim held onto second place thanks to his \$77.1 billion, ahead of American investor Warren Buffett, with \$72.7 billion, who gained a whooping \$14.5 billion from last year.

In fourth was Amancio Ortega, founder of the Inditex fashion group.

Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg jumped five spots to land in number 16, the first time he made it within the exclusive circle of the world's 20 richest people.

Indian State bans beef Introduces jail time for possession

AFP, Mumbai

India's western state of Maharashtra has introduced a ban on beef so strict that even possession could land you in jail for five years, media reports and the chief minister said yesterday. The country's Hindu majority considers cows sacred, and

several states already ban their slaughter. But the latest measures in Maharashtra -- home to India's commercial centre Mumbai -- go even further, making the sale or possession of beef an offence punishable by a five-

year jail term or a 10,000 rupee (\$160) fine. The Indian Express newspaper said the measures became law after President Pranab Mukherjee gave his assent to a legal

amendment -- which was passed by the state parliament two decades ago, but was never sent to a president for approval. The measures include a ban on the slaughter of bulls and

bullocks, hitherto legal with a vet's certificate, although it will still be legal to slaughter buffalo." The ban didn't go unnoticed and led to an acrimonious

debate on the social media with #BeefBan top-trending on India's twitter.

"In Maharashtra, all chicken, goats and sheep are currently thinking -- Why should gais (cows) have all the fun?

#BeefBan," Ramesh Srivats said on Twitter. The decision led to many angry exchanges on social

media with people on different sides of the divide citing personal freedom, religious beliefs, history, environment and even animal rights to make their point.

we are in the treasury benches we know it all. Many took snarky jibes at the local state government for Everyone has to work its decision. "And in other news, safer to be born a cow than together." a girl in India," Sonika Mehta said on Twitter.

Threats do not work in a democracy: Modi

THE HINDU ONLINE

Speaking in the Rajya Sabha on the motion of thanks to the President's address, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi took on the opposition saying that in a democracy threats do not work.

ernment's schemes.

However, he added: "We do

not feel that just because

Taking a dig at the Congress, he said: "When men as she travelled the Congress was unwilling home from the cinema to credit others for India's with a male friend. freedom, how can they credit others for India's development." He went on to list NDA-I programmes that the UPA "repackaged" to counter the Congress charge that the Centre was repackaging previous gov-

caused by her being out at night. "A decent girl won't roam around

at nine o'clock at night," he said. "A girl is far more responsible for

rape than a boy. Boys and girls are not

She would have lived if she allowed the rape

Delhi bus rapist blames dead victim for attack

are good.

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

One of the men convicted of gang raping a woman on a bus in Delhi has blamed his victim for the fatal attack, saying "girls are far more responsible for rape" than men.

The 23-year-old physiotherapy student died of horrific injuries two weeks after being assaulted by six

Among them was Mukesh Singh, who claims he was driving the bus during the incident on 16

December 2012 and did not take part. In an interview with the BBC from prison, where he is awaiting execution, he referred to the

woman's murder as "an accident"

been raped with metal bars, causing catastrophic internal injuries. Jyoti's death sparked a wave of

unprecedented protests across India and the world and five of the perpetrators were sentenced to death.

equal. ... About 20 per cent of girls

"Jyoti", meaning "flame", was found

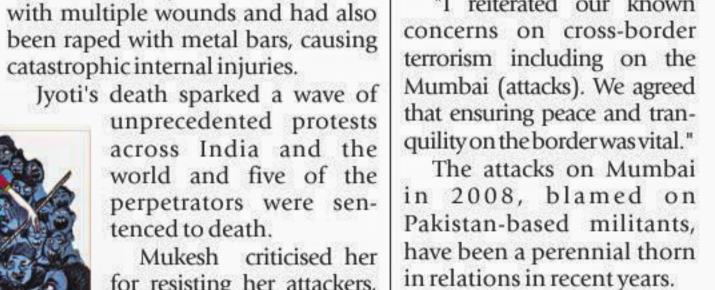
Police said his victim, known as

Mukesh criticised her for resisting her attackers, saying: "When being raped, she shouldn't fight back.

"She should just be silent and allow the rape. Then

they'd have dropped her off after doing her and only hit the boy." Her male friend was badly beaten and suffered broken limbs but survived to testify against Singh and the five other men at their trial.

along with four others.



India has been infuriated at Pakistan's failure to either extradite or prosecute effectively the alleged masterminds of the carnage, which left 166 people dead.

Jaishankar's trip is part of a tour that also includes Bhutan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. But Pakistan-India issues, Singh was sentenced to death by which tend to dominate hanging for Jyoti's rape and murder, regional politics, were clearly prominent on the agenda.