

## Nepal's customs delaying aid to victims: UN

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Bureaucracy at Kathmandu airport was holding up vital relief supplies for survivors of the earthquake in Nepal on Saturday as the death toll from the disaster passed 6,600.

UN Resident Representative Jamie McGoldrick said the government must loosen customs restrictions to deal with the increasing flow of relief material and avoid bottlenecks.

Material was piling up at the Kathmandu airport instead of being ferried out to victims, McGoldrick told Reuters.

"They should not be using peacetime customs methodology," he said.

Nepal exempted tarpaulins and tents from import taxes on Friday but a home ministry spokesman, Laxmi Prasad Dhakal, said all goods coming in from overseas had to be inspected.

Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat on Friday had appealed to international donors to send tents, tarpaulins and basic food supplies and said some of the items received were of no use.

Nepali government officials have said efforts to step up the pace of delivery of relief material to remote areas were also frustrated by a shortage of supply trucks and drivers.

One thousand EU citizens are still unaccounted for in Nepal, diplomats said Friday.

The Europeans had mostly been climbing in the avalanche-hit Everest region and trekking in the remote Langtang range in the Himalayas near the epicentre of the quake that ripped up infrastructure and left tens of thousands homeless.

Another EU official said on condition of anonymity that the majority were likely to be found safe, but given the difficulty of the terrain and poor communications, their whereabouts were currently unknown.



Nepalese villagers gather around relief aid dropped from an Indian army chopper at Kharibot, in Gorkha district, yesterday. Nepal has ruled out the possibility of finding more survivors buried in the rubble from a massive earthquake that killed more than 6,700 people and devastated vast swathes of one of Asia's poorest countries.

## NEPAL QUAKE KEY FACTS

### DEATH TOLL

6,621 people killed in Nepal, 14,023 injured

More than 100 killed in neighbouring countries

12 European killed, 1,000 missing

### SURVIVOURS

8m people have been affected

2.8m people displaced

More than 3.5m estimated to be in need of food assistance

1.7 m children are in need of humanitarian aid

### AID PLEDGES & NEEDS

Rescuers from 22 countries are involved in the relief effort while \$61 m has been pledged

The UN has appealed for \$415 million

### RECONSTRUCTION

160,786 homes destroyed and another 143,673 damaged

Some 16,000 schools damaged

Reconstruction costs could top

## Maldives' democracy in danger Says Kerry in Sri Lanka, hails 'enormous progress' by Colombo

AFP, Malé

US Secretary of State John Kerry yesterday said that democracy was in danger in the Maldives as police made nearly 200 arrests at a protest over the jailing of the paradise islands' ex-president.

Police fired tear gas and baton-charged Friday night's protest on the main island of Male, said witnesses to what was the biggest show of support for Mohamed Nasheed since he was handed a 13-year term in March.

Nasheed's Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) said one of its top lieutenants were among those arrested, while the head of the largest Islamist party in the mainly Muslim nation was detained.

The streets of Male appeared to be calm yesterday as police put the number of arrests at 193.

But while authorities defended their use of force to break up the protest, Kerry added his voice to the growing chorus of criticism of President

Abudulla Yameen's regime.

"We see even now how regrettably there are troubling signs that democracy is under threat in the Maldives where the former president Nasheed has been imprisoned without due process," said Kerry.

"This is an injustice that needs to be addressed soon," he added on a visit to Sri Lanka.

Nasheed, a climate change activist who was imprisoned during the three-decade rule of former strongman ruler Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, became the archipelago's first democratically elected leader in 2008.

He was toppled in February 2012 after a mutiny by police and troops that followed weeks of protests over his ordering of the arrest of a top judge who had been appointed by Gayoom.

The arrest formed the centre-piece of Nasheed's prosecution. His conviction triggered widespread interna-

### KERRY IN SRI LANKA



tional condemnation and alarm in regional powerhouse India.

Meanwhile, Kerry yesterday said the United States wanted to renew ties with Sri Lanka and announced the start of an annual bilateral dialogue after years of tensions with the island nation's former government.

Kerry arrived in the South Asian country earlier yesterday, the first time in a decade that a US secretary of state has visited Sri Lanka.

Washington had years of tensions over human rights with former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, who was unseated by Mathripala Sirisena.

Kerry said Washington wanted to work with Sirisena and lauded the new government's efforts to tackle corruption, build democratic institutions and address the wrongs of the past through a process of national reconciliation.

## 'Living goddess' survives Nepal quake

AFP, Kathmandu

When a devastating quake hit Nepal last week, a nine-year-old girl worshipped as a living goddess was preparing to receive devotees at her home in the heart of Kathmandu's Durbar Square.

As the earth shook, the ancient temples and statues that packed the square collapsed, sending a massive cloud of rubble and dust into the air. But the home of the living goddess, or Kumari, escaped with just a few cracks.

"She protected us," said Durga Shakya, the 55-year-old caretaker of the Kumari house, who like all her entourage is from the Newar community indigenous to the Kathmandu valley.

"Look around, the Kumari home is intact. There is a little crack on the other



side, but otherwise nothing has happened," she told AFP in Kathmandu.

"Even inside, nothing has fallen down, everything is fine."

The Kumari, a pre-pubescent Newar girl, lives in isolation in her small palace and emerges only on feast days when she is paraded through Kathmandu in ceremonial dress.

The popular tradition combines elements of Hinduism and Buddhism and selection criteria are strict.

Priests say that to become a Kumari, a girl must have a number of specific physical attributes including an unblemished body, a chest like a lion and thighs like a deer.

Even if they fulfil all the physical requirements, aspiring Kumaris must then prove their bravery by not crying at the sight of a sacrificed buffalo.

## NEWS IN brief

### Boko Haram: Nigeria rescues more hostages

AFP, Abuja

Nigeria troops have freed some 700 women and children from Boko Haram's Sambisa forest stronghold over the past week. In the latest rescue, 234 women and children were rescued through the Kawuri and Konduga end of Sambisa forest on Thursday, the defence headquarters said in a

### Afghan team to meet with Taliban in Qatar

AFP, Kabul

An Afghan delegation left for Qatar yesterday where they will hold two days of "open discussion" with Taliban representatives aimed at ending Afghanistan's long war, according to an official. The Taliban's official spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, confirmed that an eight-strong Taliban delegation would attend the event. Previous efforts to open dialogue with the

### Russia's Yemen appeal fails at UNSC

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council failed to back a Russian appeal for an immediate ceasefire or humanitarian pauses in war-torn Yemen, where critical fuel shortages threatened relief efforts and doctors described desperate scenes. During a closed-door council meeting, Russia proposed a draft statement calling for an immediate ceasefire or at least humanitarian pauses, and an urgent return to political negotiations, but failed to get the

## Britain celebrates birth of a princess

AFP, London

Prince William's wife Kate yesterday gave birth to a baby girl to cheers from a crowd outside the hospital as Britain celebrated the royal family's new fourth in line to the throne.

The news was announced to the world in a tweet from Kensington Palace, the couple's official residence in London, and by a traditional town-crier with a bell on the steps of the Lindo Wing of St Mary's Hospital.

A proclamation signed by the royal doctors was also placed on a gilded easel in front of Buckingham Palace, where hundreds of curious onlookers crowded in front of the gates to witness the historic moment.

"Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cambridge was safely delivered of a daughter at 8.34am," the Kensington Palace press office said in a statement. Mother and baby "are both doing well," it said.

William was present for the birth and the baby weighed in eight pounds and three ounces (3.7 kilos).

William and Kate were expected to leave the hospital later yesterday with their baby girl, their second child after Prince George who was born in 2013.

The new Princess of Cambridge will be fourth in line to the throne after Queen Elizabeth's eldest son Charles, grandson William and great-grandson George.



Britain's Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, and his wife Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge show their newly-born daughter, their second child, to the media outside the Lindo Wing at St Mary's Hospital in central London, yesterday. Inset, the newborn princess, who is also the fourth in line to succeed Queen Elizabeth II. PHOTO: AFP

## BLACK MAN'S DEATH IN CUSTODY Baltimore fumes despite murder charges for cops

AFP, Baltimore

Numerous protesters were arrested for defying a curfew in Baltimore Friday night, hours after six police were charged over the death of an African-American man who was in their custody.

The protesters struck a defiant chord with police, even after the six officers were charged earlier in the day over the death of 25-year-old Freddie Gray.

The scene contrasted with Thursday night, when protesters largely cleared the street as the 10:00pm curfew set in.

The curfew was imposed following mass protests and riots earlier in the week in the city.

The charges ranged from second-degree murder and manslaughter to misconduct and were announced in a surprise statement by Maryland state prosecutor Marilyn Mosby.

All six officers -- three of them black and



three white, according to mugshots broadcast by CNN -- were taken into custody and later posted bond, reports said.

The death of Gray, 25, who is the latest African American to lose his life at the hands of police, has reignited simmering resentment in the United States over law enforcement tactics, particularly in their dealings with African Americans.

Gray, who had a record of non-violent drug offenses, died a week after his arrest from spinal injuries sustained when he was arrested in a west Baltimore public housing project.

Facing the most serious charge, second-degree murder, is African American officer Caesar Goodson, the driver of the van that transported Gray to a police station. Three other officers were charged with involuntary manslaughter, second-degree assault and misconduct.

## US-led coalition strikes kill 52 civilians in Syria

AFP, Beirut

US-led air strikes targeting the Islamic State group killed at least 52 civilians in a village in northern Syria, a monitoring group said yesterday.

"Air strikes by the coalition early on Friday on the village of Birmahle in Aleppo province killed 52 civilians," said Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. 7 of them are children, he added.

Prior to Friday's strikes, the coalition's raids had killed 66 civilians since it began attacking ISIS positions in Syria in September 2014.

According to the Britain-based Observatory, the air campaign has killed more than 2,000 people in total, including at least 1,922 ISIS fighters.

## The face of Lenin's 'true love' revealed

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

She was described admirably by Vladimir Lenin's wife as the "primeval force of the Black Earth", a revolutionary firebrand with sparkling brown eyes whose natural aroma was of "fresh meadow grasses".

It is no wonder then that the search for an image of Apollinariya Yakubova, considered by some to be the Communist leader's true love, has captured the imagination of generations of historians.

Until now, a photograph of Yakubova has proved elusive. But on 1 May, the Cambridge New Journal revealed her face for the first time after a researcher dug deep into forgotten vaults in Moscow.

Academics have long debated whether Lenin ever recovered from being rejected by Yakubova -- or "Lirochka" as he called her -- after she spurned his marriage proposal. Their intimate letters have been scrutinised, and much attention paid to the scorn that was later to be heaped on her by Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, who had been one of her closest allies.



## Girl rejects foul-mouthed groom at alter

THE STATESMAN ONLINE

A Muslim girl rejected her groom at a government-sponsored mass wedding in Madhya Pradesh because she overheard him using foul language and misbehaving with people.

Azra Bi (18) told officials conducting the mass wedding that she did not want to marry a man such as Rafat Pathan (23) because his foul-mouthed ways suggested he was unlikely to treat her with dignity.

The mass wedding was being organised under a state-sponsored scheme for poor people who cannot afford the expense of nuptials at Sironj in Vidisha district of the central Indian state.

Azra of Narkheda village was to wed Rafat Pathan of Mahoti at a ceremony that saw 396 Hindu and 55 Muslim couples getting married on Friday.

Moments before their wedding, Azra overheard Rafat using abusive language repeatedly while talking to his friends. Upset at his behaviour, she walked up to a district officer, Manish Sharma, and informed him of her decision.

Sharma deputed his subordinate, Yasha Rai, to talk to Azra. "Azra told me that she was upset with the man's abusive language and bad behavior so she did not want to get married to him," Rai told The Statesman.

The official also said that Azra was unhappy at not even having met the groom before the planned wedding.

"Azra said that she had to say yes to the wedding as a compromise because they are very poor and her father remains ill while she has unmarried younger sisters too, but after seeing the boy's behavior she changed her mind," Rai said.

The official added that the girl has studied till standard VIII and has expressed a strong desire to continue her studies.