

NEWSIN brief

India orders hundreds of porn sites blocked

AFP, New Delhi

India has ordered hundreds of porn sites blocked citing "objectionable" content, a government official said yesterday, kicking off an angry row about freedom of speech in the world's biggest democracy.

The telecommunications ministry has directed Internet service providers (ISPs) to block 857 websites, in the government's first major crackdown on online pornography.

EX-UK PM caught up in child sex abuse claim

AFP, London

A former prime minister was drawn into the complex web of historic child sex abuse allegations in Britain yesterday, when the police watchdog announced an investigation involving 1970s leader Edward Heath.

The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) said it would investigate a claim from a retired senior policeman that prosecution of a person accused of child sex abuse in the 1990s was dropped when they threatened to

Four killed ahead of new Ukraine peace talks

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine yesterday reported the death of four soldiers in widespread clashes with pro-Russian rebels that came only hours ahead of fresh talks on ending the 15-month separatist revolt.

Military spokesman Andriy Lysenko said another 15 servicemen had been wounded in the past 24 hours of fighting across the eastern Russian-speaking provinces of Lugansk and Donetsk.

Ex-security chiefs urge Netanyahu to accept Iran deal

AFP, Jerusalem

Many Israeli ex-generals and former security chiefs have signed a petition urging Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to accept the nuclear deal between world powers and Iran, which he strongly opposes.

A petition signed by the former officials and made public yesterday calls the July 14 accord a "fait accompli".

Six militants killed in North Caucasus

AFP, Moscow

Russian security forces have killed six Islamist militants with suspected ties to foreign terrorists in the country's volatile North Caucasus, the anti-terror committee said yesterday.

Special forces launched an anti-terror operation overnight in the southern Russian city of Nalchik, surrounding militants that had barricaded themselves in an apartment building.



Flood-affected resident sit above floodwaters in Kalay, upper Myanmar's Sagaing region yesterday. A general view shows a gas station submerged by floodwaters in Sagaing region. People rest at an evacuation camp in Kalay. Myanmar authorities said the death toll from flash floods and landslides caused by weeks of unrelenting rain rose to 46. **STORY ON PAGE 16**



PHOTO:
AFP

Modi govt inks peace pact with Naga rebels

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday announced a peace accord with a faction of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), an armed rebel group in northeast India, ending the country's oldest insurgency.

"My warm greetings to all those present here today, on this historic occasion," Modi said in his address to the nation, after the signing of the peace accord between the government interlocutor and Th Muivah, NSCN's influential IM faction's general secretary.

"Today is historic, a golden moment, when they quit weapons and join the mainstream. I welcome them," he added.

The agreement is expected to pave the way for peace in northeast India, particularly in the underdeveloped state of Nagaland, which shares its border with Myanmar.

The NSCN rebel group -- over six decades old -- is seen as the biggest and most violent insurgencies from amongst the dozens of big and small armed tribal and guerrilla armies that operate in India's seven northeastern states.

Even as recent as this June, at least 20 Indian soldiers were killed in a single rebel attack in the region.

India's National Investigation Agency later announced the capture of Khumlo Abi Anal, an operative of NSCN's other faction that operates out of neighbouring Myanmar.

"I believe that weapons or violence is not the way to solve problems and this [NSCN's] entry into the mainstream is the way ahead," Modi said.

"I believe that NSCN will also act as an inspiration for those [rebel groups] who want to come from a bad path to good path across the country," added the PM.

A government statement yesterday said the details and execution plan of the peace accord will be "released shortly."

"The agreement will end the oldest insurgency in the country. It will restore peace and pave the way for prosperity in the North East [India]," the statement added.

Peace in the region, particularly Nagaland, is seen as an important step for implementing the Modi government's "Act East" policy, which aims to develop the region by closer economic ties with East Asian countries in the immediate neighbourhood.

Turkey vows to press anti-terror offensive

AFP, Istanbul

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday vowed to do "whatever necessary" in Turkey's controversial fight against Kurdish militants, with no end in sight to a two-week cycle of violence.

Ankara is waging a two-pronged cross border "anti-terror" offensive against Islamic State (ISIS) militants in Syria and Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) rebels in northern Iraq, after a wave of attacks in the country.

But so far, the air strikes against the PKK targets in northern Iraq have far outweighed those against ISIS, raising concerns about the extent of possible civilian casualties.

Erdogan told reporters returning with him on a trip to Asia that the Kurdish authorities in northern Iraq should be taking action against the PKK bases there.

"If they cannot, Turkey will do whatever necessary to defend itself," he was quoted as telling reporters on his presidential jet.

But with the PKK staging daily attacks on security forces in reprisal for Turkish bombing raids, Erdogan denied there would be any return to the 1990s when the group's separatist insurgency was at its peak.

"I don't believe that. That's impossible. Maybe those who say this want to return to the 1990s," he said, quoted by the Sabah daily and other newspapers.

Syrian jet crashes in rebel-held town

27 killed; dozens injured

REUTERS, Beirut

At least 27 people were killed and dozens injured when a Syrian army fighter jet crashed into a busy marketplace in the rebel-held northwestern town of Ariha yesterday, residents and witnesses said.

Most of the dead were civilians on the ground in the Idlib provincial town that fell to a coalition of Islamist insurgents in May, according to the Britain-based Observatory for Human Rights, which tracks violence across Syria.

Scores were also injured, according to the monitor and witnesses. There was no immediate reaction from the Syrian army.

The military plane had dropped a bomb in the heart of the city center main commercial street where shopkeepers open in the early morning before crashing in the middle of the marketplace, two witnesses told Reuters.

"The plane had dropped a bomb on the main Bazaar street at low altitude only seconds before it crashed," said Ghazal Abdullah, a resident who was close to the incident.

The Observatory said the jet was not shot down. Fighting has intensified of late in rural Idlib province between government forces and an insurgent grouping called Jaish al Fateh, or Army of Conquest, which includes Syria's al Qaeda offshoot Nusra Front.

Ariha's fall had left the insurgents in control of most of Idlib province, which borders Turkey and neighbors Latakia, the heartland of President Bashar al-Assad's Alawite sect, on the Mediterranean coast.

Most of the rich agricultural region, however, has since come under heavy aerial bombardment by Assad's forces in

Mullah Omar's family refuses to back new Taliban leader

AFP, Kabul

The family of deceased Taliban leader Mullah Omar has refused to pledge allegiance to his successor, calling on religious scholars to settle a growing rift within insurgent ranks over the power transition.

Mullah Akhtar Mansour was announced as the new Taliban chief on Friday after the insurgents confirmed the death of Mullah Omar, who led the militant movement for some 20 years.

But splits immediately emerged between Mansour and those who challenged his appointment, including the late leader's son Yakoub and his brother, Mullah Abdul Manan.

"Our family... has not declared allegiance to anyone amid these differences," Manan said in an audio message released Sunday, without naming Mansour.

"We want the ulema (religious scholars) to resolve the differences rather than declaring allegiance to any side," said the audio

message, which Taliban sources confirmed was from Manan.

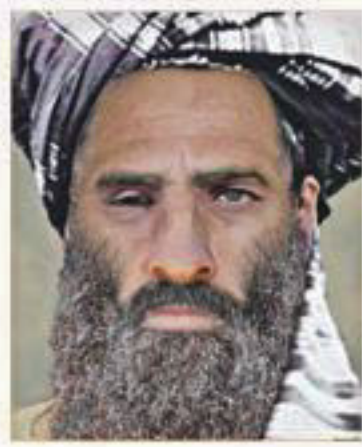
"Our family will serve the new leader... if he is elected with consensus."

Mansour on Saturday called for unity in the Taliban in his first audio message since becoming head of the group as it faces its biggest leadership crisis in recent years.

His comments were apparently aimed at averting a factional split at a time of growing discord over the direction of peace talks with the Afghan government.

Yakoub and several other members of the Taliban's ruling council walked out of the meeting at which Mansour was declared leader, refusing to pledge allegiance to him, a Taliban source told AFP.

"Part of the insurgency is troubled and needs answers from Mansour and his allies: why did they hide Mullah Omar's death all these years? Did they deceive us by putting out fake statements in his name just to serve their own interests?" he said.



Thai workers install statues of Thai kings at Ratchapakdi Park in Prachuap Khiri Khan province yesterday. The park, under construction by the Thai army, honours the country's royal institution and is located at a military compound near the Klai Kangwon Palace.

PHOTO: AFP

Glaciers melt to lowest level on record: study

AFP, Paris

Glaciers worldwide have shrunk to levels not seen in 120 years of record-keeping, with melt-off accelerating in the first decade of the 21st century, according to a study released yesterday.

On average, glaciers currently lose between 50 to 150 centimetres (20 to 60 inches) of thickness every year, reported the study, published in the Journal of Glaciology.

"This is two to three times more than the corresponding average of the 20th century," said Michael Zemp, director of the World Glacier Monitoring Service and the study's lead author.

More than a billion people, especially in Asia and South America, get more than half of their drinking water from the seasonal melting of snow melt and glacier ice, previous research has shown.

The current rate of global glacier melt is without precedent for the 120 years covered by scientific observation, and probably for much longer, Zemp added.

Moreover, accelerated ice loss has created a dynamic whereby glaciers in

many regions will continue to diminish even if global warming did not continue to boost global temperatures.

Preliminary data from the last five years, not covered in the study, suggest that rapid decline of ice mass is continuing apace.



The 20th-century record ice loss observed in 1998 "has been exceeded in 2003, 2006, 2011, 2013, and probably again in 2014," Kemp said.

The long-term trend of glacier retreat takes into account shorter periods where, in some locations, glaciers have regained some of their lost ice mass.

Iran bans newspaper of nuke deal critic

AFP, Tehran

Iran banned a weekly newspaper owned by a critic of its nuclear deal yesterday and issued a formal warning to the country's leading conservative daily for alleged breaches of reporting guidelines.

The penalties were the first issued by the government since new guidance on media coverage of the historic accord was issued last week, underscoring sensitivity about the nuclear issue in Tehran.

The Press Supervisory Board banned "9th Day Weekly", managed by ultra-conservative lawmaker Hamid Rasaie and named after the Persian calendar date of a major pro-government rally on December 30, 2009.

It also gave warning notices to the Kayhan daily and another outlet, the Raja news website.

Cameron is 'inexperienced', Boris is a 'clown'

Reveal Hillary Clinton emails

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

David Cameron is "aristocratic, unsure, inexperienced, oblique and largely uncommitted"; Boris Johnson is "Tory clown prince".

That is, at least, according to emails released from a private system used by Hillary Clinton.

The damning assessments were allegedly made by Sidney Blumenthal, a key confidant of Clinton and a former White House aide to Bill Clinton.

The messages were among tens of thousands of pages of emails which Clinton was required to hand over to the US State Department earlier this year, following complaints that she had used a private email system for official business.

Other damning messages include one dating from 2009 in which Mr Blumenthal advises Mrs Clinton: "A Cameron government would be more aristocratic and even narrowly Etonian... Sharply contrasting especially with striving and classless perspective of the

grocer's daughter, Margaret Thatcher."

A further email describes an attempt by Ed Balls and Gordon Brown to limit David Miliband's influence in the Labour party as being "like the Tudors."



Clinton is the Democrat's front runner in the bid for the Presidential election in 2016.

A Downing Street spokesperson said: "The special relationship between the UK and the United States is as strong as ever and the president recently acknowledged the importance of the alliance to the US."

Boko Haram 'under siege'

Nigeria rescues 178 hostages

AFP, Maiduguri

Nigeria's military said yesterday it had "besieged" Boko Haram positions in the Islamist militant group's northeastern heartland after setting free 178 hostages, mainly women and children.

The ongoing operation has led to the capture of a Boko Haram commander, according to the army, while a "large number" of the extremists have been killed in air strikes.

The hostages were released on Sunday near Aulari, about 70 kilometres (40 miles) south of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, once a jihadist stronghold.

"During the offensive operations, 178 people held captive by the terrorists were rescued. They include 101 children, 67 women and 10 men," military spokesman Colonel Tukur Gusau said.

The Nigerian military has announced the release of hundreds of people held by Boko Haram in recent months, many of them in the vast Sambisa forest, a longtime bastion of the Islamist group.

"The military operation... will continue until the terrorists are totally subdued. For now, we have besieged the forest and military operations are going on from different fronts," army spokesman Colonel Sani Usman told AFP.

He said the freed hostages were being screened and processed and would be reunited with their families after further security checks.

However the soldier was unable to give any details on the identity or rank of the Boko Haram commander seized in the operation to free the hostages, except that the militant was "undergoing interrogation".

Air strikes on Friday and Saturday hit the village of Bitu on the fringes of the forest near the Cameroonian border, where Boko Haram was preparing to launch an

operation to launch an