

NEWS IN brief

India lifts ban on Jain fast to death

India's Supreme Court yesterday suspended an order of the Rajasthan high court banning santhara - the controversial Jain ritual of fasting unto death. Earlier this month, the high court had ruled that the voluntary religious practice of santhara was a form of suicide and, therefore, illegal. Jains had protested against the order, saying suicide was sin, whereas santhara was religion.

Obama invites Pak PM to the White House

US President Barack Obama has invited Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to visit Washington October 22, the White House said in a statement Sunday. US national security adviser Susan Rice, who extended the invitation when met with Sharif in Islamabad over weekend, commended Pakistan for supporting recent peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, the White House said.

Gunmen kidnap journalist in Nigeria

Gunmen in Nigeria's southern oil city Port Harcourt have kidnapped a senior journalist working for a private national newspaper, police and the daily announced yesterday. Donu Kogbara, a renowned columnist for Vanguard newspaper, was abducted Sunday morning from outside her residence in the southern city, which is capital of Rivers State, the daily said.

200 people of Iraqi town held by ISIS

The mayor of a remote, Islamic State-held town in western Iraq said yesterday that some 200 residents have been detained by the group at an unknown location following clashes there. Trouble in Rutbah, in Anbar province near the Jordanian border, started Saturday when ISIS militants killed a local resident for killing a member of the group as part of a long-running clan blood feud.

Somalia aid crisis 'critical': UN

War-torn Somalia remains in a "critical" state four years after a devastating famine, the UN warned yesterday, noting a sharp rise in those needing food aid. "The levels of food insecurity and malnutrition are critical. Humanitarian actors and donors have prevented the situation being a lot worse than it is, but we all need to do more," UN aid chief for Somalia Peter de Clercq said in a statement.



Migrants' children demonstrate with their placards in their transit zone of Western (Nyugati) railway station in Budapest yesterday. Inset, police officers control cars arriving to Austria at a checkpoint in the village of Nickelsdorf.



Malaysia PM calls for unity

Refuses to resign after mass protests

Malaysia's PM Najib Razak has refused to resign after mass protests, and has called for national unity. Speaking in a public address to mark Malaysia's National Day yesterday, Najib said it was clear the rest of Malaysia backed the government. "We will never allow anyone from within or from outside, [to] simply walk in and steal, ruin or destroy all that we have built so far," the state news agency Bernama quoted him as saying. "Let us all remember, if we are not united, lose our solidarity and cohesion, all problems will not be resolved, and everything we have laboriously built will be destroyed just like that." He said protests which "disrupt public order and only inconvenience the people" did not reflect maturity and were "not the proper channel to voice opinions in a democratic country". Tens of thousands of people took to the streets at the weekend, urging Najib to step down over allegations he took hundreds of millions of dollars of public funds. Najib said such protests were "not the proper channel to voice opinions in a democratic country". He has denied pocketing \$700m (£455m) of public money. The payments, first revealed by the Wall Street Journal, came from the IMDB state investment fund, which Najib set up on coming into office in 2009. Najib has removed several leading officials who had criticised his handling of the scandal. Malaysia's anti-corruption agency has effectively cleared him, saying the money was from foreign donors.



MIGRANT EXODUS TO EU

'Won't turn away those who need protection'

Says EU commissioner

Europe "will never turn away those who need protection," said Frans Timmermans, vice-president of the EU Commission, during a visit to the northern French port of Calais yesterday. He also said Brussels would provide an additional five million euros to help France manage the thousands of migrants and refugees living in squalid conditions around Calais, hoping to reach Britain. He spoke alongside French Prime Minister Manuel Valls, who said too few EU countries were helping to deal with huge migration flows and raised the issue of deploying border guards at the EU's external frontiers. "Too many countries are refusing to play their part. It goes against the European spirit and we can't accept it," he said in a speech at the northern French port. Huge traffic jams stretching back 50 kilometres built up along the Austro-Hungarian border yesterday as Austrian police stepped up security checks in the hunt for people smugglers. The measure was put in place on Sunday, three days after an abandoned lorry containing 71 dead migrants, four of them children, was discovered on a motorway near the Hungarian border. Since the operation began at 1830 GMT, more than 200 migrants have been picked up, and another five people have detained on suspicion of smuggling, officials said. "The main aim is to target smug-

DEVELOPMENTS
Austria clamps down to catch migrant smugglers
Hungary allows migrants onto trains bound for Germany

gling gangs. What is happening here are controls conducted by traffic police and security forces -- these are not border controls," said police spokesman Helmut Marban. Meanwhile, several hundred migrants stuck for days in makeshift refugee camps at train stations in Budapest were yesterday allowed to board trains headed for Austria and Germany, an AFP correspondent at the scene said. Hungarian police had previously prevented as many as 2,000 migrants from leaving the station because they had no legal papers. But yesterday there were no security forces present as the refugees, many from Syria, rushed to get on trains leaving for Vienna, Munich and Berlin. People were running along the platform to catch an Austria-bound train scheduled to leave at 1110 GMT, with some helping to lift a woman in a wheelchair into a carriage.

Indira mulled strike on Pak nuke sites

PTI, Washington

Returning to power in 1980, the then Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi had considered a military strike on Pakistan's nuclear installations to prevent it from acquiring weapons capabilities, a declassified CIA document has claimed. Such a consideration by the then Indian Prime Minister was being made when the US was in an advanced stage of providing its fighter jets F-16 to Pakistan, says the September 8, 1981, document titled 'India's Reaction to Nuclear Developments in Pakistan', which was prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). A redacted version of the 12-page document was posted on the CIA website in June this year, according to which the then Indian government led by Gandhi in 1981 was concerned about the progress made by Pakistan on its nuclear weapons programme and believed that Islamabad was steps away from acquiring a nuclear weapon. The US had the same assessment. "In the extreme case, if Indian concerns increase over the next two or three months, we believe the conditions could be ripe for a decision by Prime Minister Gandhi to instigate a military confrontation with Pakistan, primarily to provide a framework for destroying Pakistan's nuclear facilities," the then highly sensitive CIA report claimed. At the time of writing of the report, the CIA said Gandhi had not taken any such decision in that regard. According to the report, as Pakistan was in an advanced stage of producing plutonium and highly enriched uranium for use in nuclear weapons, Gandhi evidently responded to the threat by authorising Indian nuclear test preparations.



Boko Haram kills 80 in Nigeria

AFP, Kano

Suspected Boko Haram gunmen on horseback shot dead nearly 80 people in separate attacks on three villages in Nigeria's restive northeast at the weekend, a vigilante and residents said yesterday. Vigilante Babakura Kolo said 68 people were killed in the attack on Baanu village in Borno state late on Friday while residents said another 11 people were shot dead in two other villages on Saturday and Sunday. "Reports reached us of an attack on Baanu village late Friday where Boko Haram gunmen riding on horses opened fire on the village. Sixty-eight people were killed in the attack," Kolo told AFP. He said the gunmen stormed Baanu around 8:30 pm, shooting sporadically. Baanu resident Aisami Ari who fled the attack to state capital Maiduguri on Saturday, also confirmed the attack and the death toll. "The attackers came on horses around 8.30 pm and began shooting sporadically. The whole village was thrown into confusion and everybody fled. We returned after they had gone and found out they had killed 68 people in the village," he said. A government official, who demanded anonymity, however put the death toll at 56. Kolo also said four people were killed in another attack by the Islamists in nearby Kuruwa village on Saturday. "They shot dead four people in the village, including the chief imam of the village, his son and two neighbours," he said. Local resident Saleh Musa told AFP of a third attack on Hambagda on Sunday where they killed seven villagers and injured five others.

Bangkok bomb hunt narrows

AFP, Bangkok

The hunt for those behind the Bangkok shrine blast narrowed yesterday as police revealed they have two new suspects after more bomb-making paraphernalia was found in a suburban apartment. Police are now seeking a Thai woman and an unidentified man after bomb-making materials were discovered over the weekend in an apartment in the suburb of Dinburi. Investigators believe it was used as a hideout by the network that carried out the attack. "We found fertiliser bags, watches, radio controls -- parts to make bombs and electric charges," said national police spokesman Prawut Thavornsir. "We are confident they are the same group." Thai police chief announced yesterday he was handing his own officers a reward of some \$84,000 for apprehending a man who has been charged in connection with this month's deadly Bangkok bomb blast. Police had detained an unidentified foreign man on Saturday morning at another flat nearby.



Activists of few radical Ukrainian parties clash with police officers in front of the parliament in Kiev yesterday. At least 90 were wounded in the clash after lawmakers gave initial approval to constitutional changes granting more autonomy to pro-Russian separatists. A loud blast was heard outside parliament shortly after the bill was passed.

Tallest mountain in North America renamed

AFP, Washington

Mount McKinley, the tallest of North America's mountains, is officially being renamed Denali, the White House said Sunday, on the eve of President Barack Obama's historic visit to Alaska. The mountain had been named in 1896 for a future US president, William McKinley, but local authorities had worked on the change for years, restoring an Alaska Native name with deep cultural significance. "Finalizing a process initiated by the State of Alaska in 1975, President Obama is announcing that the Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell used her authority to rename the mountain as 'Denali,'" a White House statement said. "Generally believed to be central to the Athabaskan creation story, Denali is a site of significant cultural importance to many Alaska Natives. The name 'Denali' has been used for many years and is widely used across the state today," it added. Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, a Republican, led the effort to make the change official. "I'd like to thank the president for work-



Taliban covered up Mullah Omar's death

AFP, Kabul

The Taliban in Afghanistan yesterday admitted covering up longtime leader Mullah Omar's death for two years, saying they had wanted to keep it secret until foreign forces ended their fight against the militants. The group confirmed in July that Omar had died without saying when, deepening internal divisions with many insurgents accusing the leadership of keeping them in the dark while issuing statements in his name. The admission of a cover up was buried in a lengthy biography of new Taliban chief Mullah Akhtar Mansour, apparently published to boost his image and quell the growing internal rancour over his appointment. Posted on the Taliban website in five languages, the biography acknowledged that Omar died in April 2013 -- as was first claimed by Afghan intelligence. "Several key members of the supreme leading council of the Islamic Emirate (Taliban) and authentic religious scholars together decided on concealing the tragic news of passing away of (Omar)... and keep this secret limited to the very few colleagues who were already informed of this incorrigible loss," said the biography, which ran to nearly 5,000 words. "One of the main reasons behind this decision was... that 2013 was considered the final year of power testing between the mujahideen and foreign invaders who... had announced that at the end of 2014, all military operations by foreign troops would be concluded."

Thein signs off monogamy law

REUTERS, Naypyidaw

Myanmar's president yesterday signed into law the last of four controversial bills championed by radical Buddhists but decried by rights groups as aimed at discriminating against the country's Muslim minority. Myanmar, which will hold its first democratic national poll in more than two decades on Nov. 8, has seen a flowering of anti-Muslim hate speech since the military gave up full power and opened up politics and the economy in 2011. President Thein Sein signed the Monogamy Bill after it was passed by parliament on August 21, Zaw Htay, a senior official at the president's office, told Reuters. The law was briefly sent back to parliament for review before being signed.

Kalburgi victim of Hindu fanatics?

BBC ONLINE

So who killed Malleshappa Kalburgi, a leading Indian scholar and a well-known rationalist thinker? Police say they are still investigating the motive for Sunday morning's killing. Two men arrived by motorcycle at the scholar's home in Dharwad in Karnataka state. One knocked on his door, entered the house claiming to be Dr Kalburgi's student, had a brief conversation with the teacher -- then shot him dead and escaped on the waiting bike. Dr Kalburgi's killing comes two years after the murder of another prominent rationalist-thinker, Dr Narendra Dabholkar, in the western city of Pune. His killers have still not been caught. The death of a "straight-talking, rationalist researcher of ancient Kannada literature", as a newspaper described him, has shocked the nation. Police are exploring whether the killing is linked to last year's remarks by Dr Kalburgi against idol worship, which had angered right-wing Hindu groups. The former university vice-chancellor had been given police protection after Hindu hardliners protested against his comments. Some of these groups actually celebrated the professor's killing on social media yesterday. Many believe Dr Kalburgi made many enemies within his own Lingayat community -- an influential Hindu sect that dominates life and politics in Karnataka -- with his outspoken remarks about its traditional beliefs and practices.

