

NEWSIN brief

Thai lese majeste detainee dies

AFP, Bangkok

A famous Thai fortune teller charged with royal defamation has died in military custody, officials said yesterday, the second time in weeks a person caught up in a shadowy palace intrigue probe has been found dead while in detention. Thai authorities said Suriyan Sucharitpolwong died of a blood infection on Saturday evening.

Britain can survive outside EU: Cameron

AFP, London

Britain can survive outside the European Union, Prime Minister David Cameron said yesterday as he denied he was planning to campaign for Britain to stay in the EU regardless of the outcome of reform talks. "The argument isn't whether Britain could survive outside of Europe. Of course it could," Cameron told the annual conference of the Confederation of British Industry, the country's main business lobby.

Egypt military detains activist journalist

AFP, Cairo

Egyptian military prosecutors yesterday ordered the detention of investigative journalist and rights activist Hossam Bahgat on suspicion of publishing false information, the news site for which he works said. The Mada Masr website said Bahgat, 37, was ordered detained for four days for questioning on suspicion of "spreading false news aimed at harming national interests."

Jakarta plans crocodile-guarded prison island

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia's anti-drugs agency has proposed building a prison on an island guarded by crocodiles to hold death row drug convicts, an official said yesterday, an idea that wouldn't be out of place in a James Bond film. The proposal is the pet project of anti-drugs chief Budi Waseso, who plans to visit various parts of the archipelago in his search for fierce reptiles to guard the jail.

Jordan policeman kills 2 US instructors

AFP, Amman

A Jordanian policeman yesterday shot dead two US instructors and a South African before being gunned down at a police training centre east of the capital, a government spokesman said. Mohammed Momani said the assailant also wounded two other American instructors and four Jordanians before he was shot dead by police colleagues at the centre in Al-Mowager, 30 kilometres from Amman.

Lanka minister quits over arms scandal

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's police minister resigned yesterday following allegations he tried to shield a private security firm under investigation for gun running and money laundering. Law and Order Minister Tilak Marapana said he quit to protect the government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe who was under intense pressure from cabinet colleagues to sack him. Marapana told parliament last week the security firm had not committed wrong doing, despite an ongoing probe into the discovery of two floating armouries run by the company off Sri Lanka's southern coast.



STRONG START FOR SUU KYI'S PARTY

Myanmar opposition leader Suu Kyi applauds while delivering her speech from the balcony of the National League of Democracy headquarters in Yangon yesterday. Inset, a buddhist monk reads a newspaper as another browses his smartphone in Yangon for official results. NLD won 49 of the parliamentary seats declared in the first round of results after Sunday's general election. PHOTO: AFP

REFUGEE DEATH

Unrest hits Aussie migrant centre

AFP, Sydney

Detainees set buildings alight and armed themselves with baseball bats in a riot at an Australian immigration facility on Christmas Island, people at the centre said yesterday, with officials admitting the situation was out of control. The disturbance at the Indian Ocean island centre comes after the unexplained death of an escaped asylum-seeker. Detainees have complained about their treatment at the facility, which currently houses 203 men, among them asylum-seekers awaiting processing and non-citizens being deported because they have criminal convictions. "Order or control hasn't been regained within the centre," Immigration Minister Peter Dutton told Sky News. He added that no injuries had been listed, no damage been done to the perimeter fence and no one had since tried to escape. The Department for Immigration and Border Protection described the incident as a "major disturbance" but denied there was a large scale riot. "There is currently no large scale 'riot' involving the majority of the centre's population... but the centre remains tense and staff have been withdrawn from compounds for safety reasons," a department statement said.

US concerned by 'far from perfect' vote

AFP, Washington

The United States welcomed Myanmar's landmark election Sunday, but warned of "important structural and systemic impediments" to full democratization in the Southeast Asian nation after decades of military rule. US Secretary of State John Kerry said the massive turnout, which could see opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's party catapulted to power, was a "testament to the courage and sacrifice shown by the people of Burma over many decades." But "while these elections were an important step forward, we recognize that they were far from perfect," Kerry added. "There remain important structural and systemic impediments to the realization of full democratic and civilian government." The top US diplomat pointed to a large

number of unelected seats reserved for the military, the disfranchisement of minorities such as Rohingya Muslims and the "arbitrary" disqualification of certain candidates. "We must also acknowledge significant flaws and challenges that will need to be addressed going forward," said Washington's United Nations envoy, Samantha Power, as she urged calm in the post-election period. "These are fundamental issues of fairness and inclusivity." Millions of people cast their ballots for the first time in a quarter of a century, in an event heavy with history and filled with emotion. Early indications were of an 80 percent turnout. "We will continue to watch the vote counting process, and encourage all parties to help ensure the tabulation is transparent and credible and any complaints are addressed promptly, transparently and appropriately," Kerry said.



'Results not a mandate to disrupt parliament' Soul-searching begins for BJP

TNN, New Delhi

The government yesterday reminded the opposition that the victory of the Mahagathbandhan in Bihar's assembly polls should not be used as ammunition to 'obstruct' the upcoming Winter Session of Parliament, because the results reflect the aspirations of the state's people and not the nation's. "We will do a detailed analysis of the outcome, but all concerned need to understand that the Bihar verdict needs to be taken in the right perspective. To interpret the results as mandate to disrupt Parliament is questioning the wisdom of people of the state," said parliamentary affairs minister M Venkaiah Naidu in an interaction with the media, after a meeting of the cabinet committee on parliamentary affairs. The minister said the BJP respects the verdict of the people of Bihar. "The verdict is a clear statement of Bihar's aspirations as their develop-

ment and that of India are inter-linked and mutually re-enforcing. People of Bihar also want development like any other state and have given their mandate to Nitish, but it is to be understood that the mandate is for their aspirations and not for Parliament," Naidu said.

BIHAR POLLS

The Winter Session of Parliament is set to begin on November 26 and end on December 23. The Parliament session is expected to begin on a stormy note as the opposition is likely to corner the government on issues like the return of awards by writers and filmmakers, the Dadri beef lynching and related incidents. The Narendra Modi government is keen to take up important legislations like the goods and services tax bill, the Land Acquisition Bill, the Real Estate Regulation and Development Bill and the Negotiable Instruments Arbitration Bill.

NDTV ONLINE

Indian financial markets took fright yesterday at the humiliating defeat suffered in the pivotal Bihar election by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his party, whose leaders have begun meeting amid calls for a rethink of policies and priorities. The PM will meet nearly a dozen senior colleagues of the BJP, including its president Amit Shah, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and Home Minister Rajnath Singh. "We have to identify what went wrong," said Ram Madhav, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) general secretary. Some BJP lawmakers have called now for the party to refocus on a more unifying agenda focusing on economic development after a campaign that used rhetoric in Bihar and was accused of attempting to polarise voters along caste and religious lines. "We have to be single mindedly focused on development, development, development," said Chandan Mitra, a BJP member of parliament. "We can't afford to be distracted by anything else."

NEPAL FUEL CRISIS

Domestic flights to be cancelled

AP, Kathmandu

Airlines in Nepal have been forced to cancel more than half of their domestic flights because of an ongoing fuel shortage, an official said yesterday. More than 70 percent of domestic flights were cancelled Sunday and about half were cancelled yesterday, said Utsav Raj Kharel, the manager of Kathmandu's airport. International flights were operating on a normal schedule because they are required to fill their tanks before flying to Nepal. Passengers were stranded by the cancelled flights in Kathmandu, the capital, and other cities. About 2,000 passengers a day normally fly in and out of Kathmandu's airport on domestic routes. For weeks, members of the Madhesi ethnic community protest-

ing Nepal's new constitution have blocked the southern border with India, preventing fuel and other essential items from entering the country. India, which has close cultural ties with the Madhesi, has also restricted fuel supplies to Nepal, which relies on its giant neighbour for most of its fuel. Nepal has struck a deal with private supplier to fly in fuel from Bangladesh to ease crippling shortages that have sparked fears of domestic flights being grounded. "We have reached an agreement with a private company, Petromax Nepal, who will air-lift ATF (aviation turbine fuel) from Bangladesh in the next three to four days," said Mukunda Ghimire, a spokesman for Nepal Oil Corporation on Sunday.

Russian activist sets FSB door on fire

AFP, Moscow

Russian authorities yesterday detained a political performance artist best known for nailing his scrotum to Red Square after he torched the doors to the headquarters of the FSB security service, the successor to the KGB. Pyotr Pavlensky set fire to the wooden doors of the sprawling FSB building in downtown Moscow around 1:00am, his lawyer Olga Chavdar told AFP from the Moscow police station where he was being held. A video posted online shows flames leaping to the top of the doorway as Pavlensky stands in front of it holding a petrol canister, before a policeman comes running up. The video titled "The Burning Door of the Lubyanka" -- referring to the popular name for the symbolic security service headquarters -- can be viewed here <https://vimeo.com/145096472>. In a message released along with the video, Pavlensky said: "The FSB acts using a method of unending terror and holds power over 146 million people." The FSB headquarters, which take up an entire block, were used by Soviet-era secret police for interrogations, jailing opponents and extra-judicial killings. President Vladimir Putin briefly headed the FSB and was a KGB agent in East Germany during the Soviet era. Pavlensky's lawyer said the FSB questioned the activist and asked him whether he had intended to kill anyone.



"He was detained at 1:00am after which he was in the FSB headquarters, where they insistently asked him whose death he wanted," she said. "He told them 'What are you saying? I don't want anyone's death'," she said. Chavdar said it was unclear what charges Pavlensky could face but suggested "they could charge him with arson", for which he could be imprisoned for up to five years. "I think it will be a criminal case, everything points to that. It's hard to say what charge: anything can happen in our country," the lawyer said. In his statement, Pavlensky accused the FSB of "terrorism" and said that "the threat of inevitable reprisals hangs over everyone within the range of security cameras, phone-tapping and passport control borders." He called the act a "reflex to fight for my own life." Two journalists who watched were questioned before being released, reported the Dozhd independent channel, whose journalist was at the scene. Pavlensky in 2013 stripped naked and nailed his scrotum to the cobblestones of Red Square to protest against tight police control. The case was eventually closed due to the lack of any crime. He has been charged with vandalism and faces up to three years in jail for another performance called Freedom, held in Saint Petersburg last year.