

NEWS IN
briefIndia, China agree to
terror intel sharing

THE HINDU ONLINE

The Home Ministries of India and China have agreed to be only a phone call away from each other, by deciding to establish missing telecom links, as part of a broader security engagement between the two neighbours. The bridging of the communication divide is part of a major effort, undertaken during the visit of Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh, to forge institutional linkages between the Ministry of Home Affairs and China's Ministry of Public Security.

Egyptians vote again
to elect new House

AFP, Cairo

Egyptians yesterday voted across 13 of the country's 27 provinces in the second phase of parliamentary elections after a low turnout marred the first stage in the absence of any opposition. The election is expected to elect lawmakers who firmly back President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. There was only 26.6 percent turnout in the first phase.

Power lines blown
up in Crimea

AFP, Moscow

Crimea declared a state of emergency yesterday after its main electricity power lines from Ukraine were blown up, leaving the Russian-annexed peninsula in darkness. Crimea depends on Ukraine for its electricity supplies. Crimea experienced several total power cuts last winter, attributed by the authorities to repairs and technical problems, but seen by residents as deliberate pressure from Ukraine.

Gunmen kill TV
journo in Pakistan

AFP, Peshawar

Unidentified gunmen yesterday killed a Pakistani TV journalist, police said, the second such murder this month in the insurgency-hit northwest. Attackers riding a motorcycle fired on 42-year-old Hafeez Ur Rehman near his home on the outskirts of Kohat, a town in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Rehman, who had been working as a journalist for 12 years, was employed by the Neo TV network.

Bomb threat grounds
Turkey Airlines plane

AFP, Ottawa

A Turkish Airlines plane with 256 passengers flying from New York to Istanbul was diverted to Canada yesterday because of a bomb threat, police said. The latest threat follows incidents last Tuesday, when two Air France planes flying from the US to Paris were diverted because of similar bomb scares.



Soldiers and rescue workers search for the bodies of miners killed in a landslide in a jade mining area in Hpakhant, in Myanmar's Kachin state, yesterday. Inset, bodies of miners killed in the landslide. Around 100 people have died in a huge landslide in northern Myanmar, officials said as search teams continued to find bodies in one of the deadliest disasters to strike the country's shadowy jade industry.

PHOTO:
AFP

Don't succumb to terror fears

Obama urges world leaders to show 'steel' in the wake of recent attacks

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

US President Barack Obama yesterday called for resolve in the face of heightened jihadist threats, insisting panicked citizens must not succumb to fear and urging world leaders not to abandon a climate summit in Paris.

With Brussels in lockdown, cities from Beirut to Bamako reeling from attacks, and Americans jittery that they too may come under assault, Obama said the world must show steel.

That starts, he said, with leaders who are scheduled to attend climate talks later this month in Paris, where 130 people were killed in one night of blood-soaked violence.

The perpetrators of the Paris attacks were not "masterminds" he said, but rather "a bunch of killers with good social media".

"It's absolutely vital for every country, every leader, to send a signal that the viciousness of a handful of killers does not stop the world from doing vital business," he said.

But Obama sought to show that even as allies take the fight to the

Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq, an equally vital battle will be fought on the home front.

"In addition to hunting down terrorists, in addition to effective intelligence, in addition to missile strikes and in addition to cutting off financing, he said, "the most powerful tool we have to fight ISIL is to say that we're not afraid."

"They cannot strike a mortal blow against France or the United States or a country like Malaysia, but they can make people fearful," Obama said, speaking in Kuala Lumpur and using an acronym for Islamic State.

Obama was ending a nine-day trip to Turkey and Asia that has been clouded by the Paris terror attacks and credible threats that prompted Belgian authorities to deploy troops and impose a lockdown as they hunt suspects.

Amid wall-to-wall and sometimes breathless television coverage of terror threats, Obama urged journalists to "maintain perspective".



allowed the Islamic State group to spread by refusing to send US troops to Syria or step up the air campaign there, Obama made his most determined pledge yet to win the fight.

"The American people in the past have confronted some very real, enormous threats. And we beat them. We vanquished them," he said. "This will be no different."

But Obama sought to show that even as allies take the fight to the

FRESH CLASHES OVER CHARTER
Nepal police kill two protesters

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepalese police shot and killed two protesters after fresh clashes erupted in the country's southern plains as a crisis over a new constitution deepens, a senior local officer said yesterday.

The clashes broke out late on Saturday in the southeastern district of Saptari as protesters armed with batons and home-made tools tried to block a highway in defiance of police orders, the officer said.

"Two were killed in the police firing," district police chief Bhim Dhakal told AFP. "The police were forced to fire after the protesters became violent and attacked," adding that more than 40 protesters and police were also injured in the unrest.

Nepal is heavily dependent on India for fuel and other supplies, but little cargo has crossed the border from India since protests against the constitution broke out in late September.

As a nationwide fuel shortage deepens, medical supplies are now also running dry in the impoverished, landlocked country. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Friday urged protesters to stop blocking essential supplies and called for dialogue to resolve the crisis.

More than 40 people have been killed in clashes between police and people protesting against the constitution.

Nepal's government accuses India, which has criticised the new constitution, of retaliating with an "unofficial blockade".

Three Palestinians killed
after knife, car attacks

AFP, Jerusalem

Three Palestinians, including a teen, attacked Israelis with knives and a car in the West Bank yesterday and were killed when civilians and security forces intervened, the latest in a nearly two-month wave of violence.

In the latest incident, an Israeli was stabbed in the West Bank south of Jerusalem and the Palestinian attacker was shot dead afterwards, Israeli police said, with the female victim reported in critical condition.

No Israelis were reported seriously wounded in the first two attacks, which occurred after the violence had shown signs of subsiding last week before a new series of assaults began Thursday.

With the attacks defying international efforts to restore calm, US Secretary of State John Kerry is to travel to Israel and the West Bank to meet Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu and Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas tomorrow.

Yesterday's first attack saw a 16-year-old Palestinian girl who tried to stab an Israeli run over by a Jewish settler then shot dead by soldiers. The Israeli military said in a statement that the attack occurred at a junction south of Nablus, adding that "forces and a bystander responded to the immediate threat, shooting the attacker".

Palestinian security officials confirmed she had died of her wounds and identified her as Asheraqat Qatanani, from Askar refugee camp near Nablus.

Later, a Palestinian driving a taxi attempted to ram into civilians and charged at them with a knife before being shot dead, police said. It provided no further details on the civilian, who was lightly wounded.

The attacks were the latest in the wave of violence since October 1 that has left 88 dead on the Palestinian side as well as 15 Israelis, an American and an Eritrean.

A supporter (C, in yellow) from pro-democracy group Civic Passion stands in front of supporters of other candidates during a district council election campaign rally in Hong Kong, China, yesterday. Hong Kong voted in district level elections yesterday that will mark the first real test of public sentiment since pro-democracy protests crippled parts of the Chinese-controlled city last year.

PHOTO:
REUTERS

CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGE

'RESURRECTION PLANTS' OFFER HOPE

AFP, Johannesburg

As the race to adapt to climate change quickens, a South African scientist is leading global research into developing crops that mimic the extraordinary survival skills of "resurrection plants".

Jill Farrant, a professor of molecular and cell biology at the University of Cape Town, hopes that unlocking the genetic codes of drought-tolerant plants could help farmers toil in increasingly hot and dry conditions.

With more than 130 known varieties in the world, resurrection plants are a unique group of flora that can survive extreme water shortages for years.

During a drought, the plant acts like a seed, becoming so dry it appears dead.

But when the skies finally open and the rain pours down, the shrivelled plant bursts "back to life", turning green and robust in just a few hours.

"I want to cater to the subsistence farmer, the person who wants to make enough food to live."

Farrant, 55, told AFP.

"Farmers are becoming more and more dispirited, and droughts are killing them."

A farmer's daughter, Farrant recalls stumbling across a resurrection plant as a nine-year-old and being amazed at its seemingly immortal properties.



"I wrote in my diary about a plant that had died and came back after the rain," she said.

She returned to the subject professionally in 1994, and has since become the world's leading expert in her field.

Environmentalists fear that more and more of Africa will be reduced to a dust bowl by global warming.

with higher temperatures, reduced water supplies and population growth threatening to trigger worsening famines.

Climate change could reduce maize yields across southern Africa by as much as 30 percent by 2030, according to the UN Environment Programme.

Ahead of the United Nations conference in Paris at the end of November, countries are facing growing pressure to keep global warming below two degrees celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-Industrial Revolution levels by weaning their carbon-hungry societies off fossil fuels.

But, scientists say it is just as important to adapt to the new reality.

"Soil, cropping systems, farming systems -- they all must have the capacity to recover from a drastic change in climate," said Rattan Lal, professor of soil science at Ohio State University.

"We should make agriculture part of the solution to our issues... the climate change problem is so huge everything should be on the table."

Argentina votes on big economic, political change

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentines yesterday voted in a presidential runoff that could end 12 years of leftist government and see the pro-business opposition seize command of Latin America's third-biggest economy.

Polls show that the mayor of Buenos Aires, former Boca Juniors football executive Mauricio Macri, 56, could beat his left-wing rival Daniel Scioli, 58, an ex-power champion.

If Macri breaks the grip of Peronism, the broad populist movement that has dominated Argentine politics for a century, he could become Argentina's most economically liberal leader since the 1990s.

Polling started at 8:00am. Voting was due to close at 2100 GMT with first results expected in the following hours.

Syria gaining ground in
'nearly every front'

Assad thanks Russia for its military campaign

AFP, Damascus

Syrian government troops are advancing on "nearly every front" thanks to Russian air strikes that began in September, President Bashar al-Assad said in an interview with Chinese television released Sunday.

The embattled president also said he favoured new peace talks to be hosted in Moscow, but stressed that the Syrian conflict could not be resolved with "defeating terrorism".

In the interview with China's Phoenix television, Assad said the situation in Syria had "improved in a very good way" since Russia began air strikes on September 30.

"Now I can say that the army is making advancement in nearly every front... in many different directions and areas on the Syrian ground," he said, speaking in English.

Russia is coordinating its air strikes with Damascus, unlike the US-led coalition fighting the Islamic State group, which Assad and his government criticise as ineffective.

The army has made minimal progress on

the ground, according to groups monitoring the war, though the Russian strikes have reportedly boosted morale among government troops and supporters.

Moscow has also sought a leading role in a political resolution to the conflict, participating in high-level talks in Vienna with other powers recently in a bid to create a framework for peace.

Assad said he backed Moscow's efforts to organise new dialogue between the regime and opposition in a "Moscow 3" conference, but insisted a political solution could only be achieved with the defeat of "terrorism".

Assad's government considers all those who oppose his regime "terrorists," and has framed the conflict that began with anti-government demonstrations in March 2011 as a "war on terror". Russia yesterday said it had killed 11 fighters linked to the extremist Islamic State group in a special operation in its volatile North Caucasus region. Those killed had sworn allegiance to IS this year, a source in the region's law enforcement authorities told RIA Novosti news agency.

ASEAN SUMMIT

China under
fresh fire over
sea rows

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

China came under renewed criticism yesterday over its rising profile in the South China Sea as it jostled with the United States for regional influence at the conclusion of a week of top-level diplomacy.

Asian-Pacific leaders met in Malaysia with China finding itself in the firing line over its land reclamation projects that have turned tiny atolls into fully-fledged islands with potential military uses.

"The world is watching, to see if Beijing will behave like a "responsible global leader" in the standoff, Philippine President Benigno Aquino told the assembled leaders.

The talks -- which included the United States, China, Japan and others -- were hosted by the 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean).

Asean on Saturday issued a joint statement stressing the need to maintain freedom of navigation and over-flight rights in the South China Sea.

President Barack Obama, who earlier in the week repeated US calls for China to stop the land reclamation, yesterday announced that he would host the Asean leaders at a meeting in the United States next year.

China insists on sovereignty over virtually all the resource-endowed South China Sea, which is also claimed in part by Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei, and non-Asean member Taiwan.

With Obama present, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang told yesterday's closed-door summit that countries "from outside the region" should stop inflaming tensions over the maritime dispute, a Chinese official said afterward.

The official, Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin, also criticised the recent US deployment of naval vessels to the South China Sea.