

36 killed in Russia mine tragedy

BBC ONLINE
A total of 36 people, including five rescue workers, are presumed dead following an explosion at a coal mine in northern Russia, officials said yesterday.
Four miners were killed when a methane leak triggered two explosions in the mine near Vorkuta on Thursday.
Rescuers were trying to rescue 26 trapped miners when a new blast occurred, killing five rescue workers and a miner.
The rescue operation has been halted and those missing are presumed dead.
The incident is one of the worst Russian mining disasters in recent times.
"The circumstances in the affected part of the mine did not allow anyone to survive," Russia's Emergencies Minister Vladimir Puchkov said.
"In the underground space where the 26 miners were, there are high temperatures and no oxygen", he added.



A young Syrian refugee screams in pain while he and hundreds of others line up at the Greek-Macedonian border on Saturday as the border crossing is reopened briefly near the Greek village of Idomeni. PHOTO: REUTERS

Trapped migrants numbers to soar

WArns Greece as crisis worsens
AGENCIES
Greece warned yesterday the number of refugees and migrants on its soil could more than triple next month, reaching as many as 70,000, as a Balkan cap on border crossings left thousands "trapped" in the country.
"We estimate that in our country the number of those trapped will be from 50,000-70,000 people next month," Migration Minister Yiannis Mouzalas said. "Today, there are 22,000 refugees and migrants," he added in an interview with Mega Channel TV.
Some 6,500 people were stuck at the Idomeni camp on Greece's northern border with Macedonia yesterday as Macedonian border officials let only 300 refugees and migrants pass the day before.
Dozens staged a protest on the rail tracks near Idomeni yesterday, an AFP photographer said.
The build-up at the camp, which can hold up to 1,500 people, began in earnest last week after Macedonia began refusing entry to Afghans and imposed stricter document controls on Syrians and Iraqis.
The European Union fears Mediterranean migrant smuggling gangs are reviving a route from Egypt, officials told Reuters, putting thousands of people to sea in recent months as they face problems in Libya and Turkey.
"It's an increasing issue," an EU official said of increased activity after a quiet year among smugglers around Alexandria that has raised particular concerns in Europe about Islamist militants from Sinai using the route to reach Greece or Italy.
"Our major concern is that among smugglers and migrants there may also be militants from the Sinai, affiliated to al Qaeda or Islamic State," a second EU official said.

JNU ROW



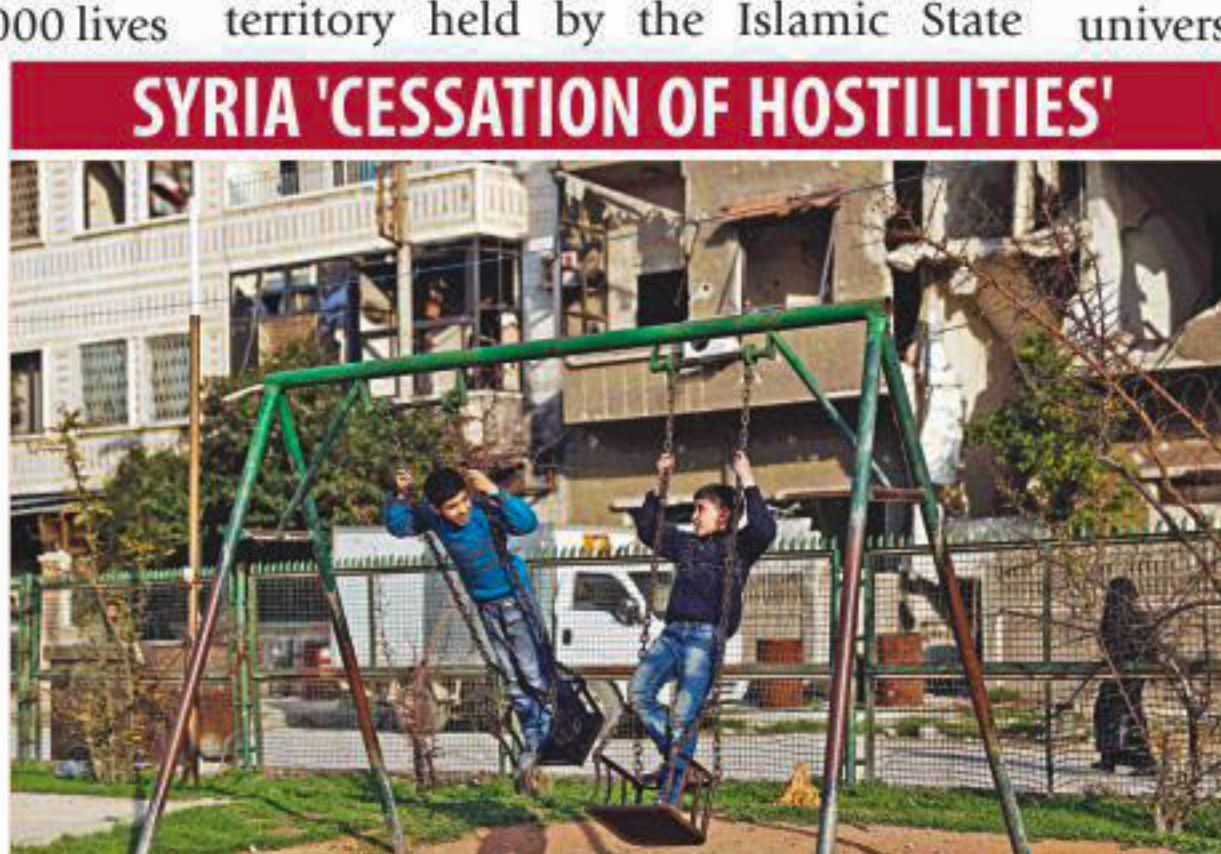
Rahul, Kejriwal booked on sedition charges

PTI, Hyderabad
Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury are among nine persons who have been booked on sedition charges in connection with the JNU row, police said yesterday.
An FIR has been registered against Rahul, Kejriwal, Yechury, Congress leaders Anand Sharma and Ajay Maken, CPI leader D Raja, JD(U) Spokesperson KC Tyagi, JNUSU president Kanhaiya Kumar and JNU research scholar Umar Khalid on the order of a court here, based on a complaint filed by lawyer Janardhan Goud.
The court has posted the matter for hearing on March 4.
In his petition, Goud said Rahul and other leaders, despite being aware that Delhi Police had registered a case against Kanhaiya on charge of sedition had visited JNU campus and knowingly supported them and hence it "amounted to sedition".
Kanhaiya and Khalid, who have earlier been arrested in Delhi on sedition charge, have also been booked here on the same charge. Goud had filed a complaint in the court of Metropolitan Magistrate here on Thursday, seeking its direction to police for registration of a case against Kanhaiya and Khalid for allegedly raising anti-India and pro-Afzal Guru slogans on JNU campus and others.

Blame-trading tests truce

AFP, Damascus
Major players in Syria's war traded accusations yesterday over violations of the first major ceasefire in the five-year conflict, but the truce remained largely intact on its second day.
Aid groups hope to use the lull in fighting that has claimed 270,000 lives and displaced more than half the population to deliver desperately needed supplies.
A successful truce would also create a more favourable backdrop for peace talks that collapsed in acrimony in early February as a Russia-backed regime offensive in northern Syria caused tens of thousands to flee.
Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's office said he and US Secretary of State John Kerry had "hailed" the ceasefire in a phone call, and discussed ways of improving cooperation between their militaries.
The main opposition grouping yesterday described the ceasefire as "positive" but vowed to lodge a formal complaint with the United Nations and foreign governments about

breaches on the first day.
However, a spokesman for the High Negotiating Committee (HNC) said they will stick to the cessation of hostilities despite what they said were 15 violations by Syrian government forces on Saturday and more breaches yesterday.
The ceasefire does not apply to territory held by the Islamic State targeting "moderate opposition" groups.
Russia, which has waged a five-month bombing campaign to support Assad, blamed "moderate" rebels, Turkey and jihadists for nine ceasefire violations.
In Damascus, dentistry student Mehdi al-Ani spent Sunday at his university's cafe with friends, enjoying the sunshine.
"Yesterday, we only heard two or three shells -- but I pretended like I didn't hear anything. The ceasefire will continue, God willing," he said.
In the second city of Aleppo, children strolled to their first day of school of the week without hugging close to the curb for fear of rocket attacks, an AFP correspondent said.
The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitoring group, reported air strikes -- believed to be either Syrian or Russian -- on seven villages in the provinces of Hama and Aleppo. It was unclear if the raids hit areas covered by the ceasefire, which excludes territory held by IS and Al-Nusra.



Syrian children play on a swing at a park in the rebel-held town of Douma on Saturday, on the first day of the landmark ceasefire agreement. PHOTO: AFP

Reformists win all 30 seats in Iran capital

BBC ONLINE
Allies of Iran's reformist President Hassan Rouhani have won a landslide victory in Tehran, in the first parliamentary vote since Iran signed a nuclear deal with world powers.
With 90% of the votes counted, the pro-Rouhani List of Hope is set to take all 30 parliamentary seats in the capital.
The leading conservative candidate Gholamali Haddad-Adel is in 31st place.
Millions voted on Friday to elect the 290-seat parliament as well as members of the Assembly of Experts.
The 88-member assembly appoints Iran's Supreme Leader and might end up choosing a successor to Ayatollah Khamenei, who is 76 and has suffered ill-health.
Early results gave former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a moderate conservative, and Mr Rouhani the most votes for the assembly, which is composed of mostly elder and senior clerics.
The parliamentary result in Tehran is significant because lawmakers from the capital usually determine the political

direction of the house, analysts say.
However, reformists look to have done less well in constituencies outside the capital.
Rouhani said on Saturday that the election gave the government more credibility and clout.
Voting was extended three times on Friday as crowds reportedly flocked to polling stations. Turnout was more than 60%.
Reformists, who want better relations with the outside world and more freedoms at home, were hoping to gain influence in the conservative-dominated bodies.
But of 12,000 people who registered as candidates, only half were allowed to stand including just 200 moderates.
This was the first election to be held since last year's deal between Iran and world powers over the country's nuclear programme and the lifting of sanctions.
BBC Persian's Ali Hamedani says the economy was a key issue in the process.
With sanctions lifted and Western investors beginning to return to Iran, there are high hopes for an improvement in daily life, he says.



Swiss reject proposal to expel foreign criminals

AFP, Geneva
Swiss voters yesterday rejected a proposal to automatically deport foreign criminals for even minor offences, according to referendum results showing a majority of cantons opposed.
The poll came at a time when many European countries are hardening their attitudes to migrants after more than a million arrived on the continent's shores last year.
Under Swiss law voters can change a law by popular ballot. To be passed it must be approved by a majority of cantons as well as a majority of electors.
According to the latest results Sunday evening, the proposal was rejected by a majority of cantons, while the gfs.bern polling institute forecast that 59 percent of voters opposed it.
The definitive voter result was expected later in the evening.
In a referendum six years ago, more than half of Swiss voters backed strengthening rules to automatically expel foreign nationals convicted of violent or sexual crimes.
The populist right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP) -- which has accused parliament of dragging its feet on writing the text into law and watering it down when it did so last March -- proposed tougher rules which were put to the people in Sunday's referendum.



A boy walks at the site of suicide blasts in Baghdad's Sadr City yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

ATHEIST TWEETS Saudi man gets 10 yrs, 2000 lashes

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK
A court in Saudi Arabia has sentenced a man to 10 years in prison and 2,000 lashes for expressing his atheism in hundreds of social media posts.
The report carried in Al Watan says the 28-year-old man admitted to being an atheist and refused to repent, saying that what he wrote reflected his own beliefs and that he had the right to express them. The report did not name the man.
It added that 'religious police' in charge of monitoring social networks found more than 600 tweets denying the existence of God, ridiculing the Quranic verses, accusing all prophets of lies and saying their teaching fuelled hostilities. The court also fined him 20,000 riyals -- or, just short of £4,000.
In 2014 the oil-rich kingdom, under the late Saudi King Abdullah, introduced a series of new laws which defined atheists as terrorists, according to a report released from Human Rights Watch.
In a string of royal decrees and an overarching new piece of legislation to deal with terrorism generally, King Abdullah attempted to clamp down on all forms of political dissent and protests that could "harm public order".
Article one of the new provisions defined terrorism as "calling for atheist thought in any form, or calling into question the fundamentals of the Islamic religion on which this country is based".

'She burned herself to be less attractive'

AFP, Geneva
One eight-year-old was repeatedly sold and raped, while another girl set herself on fire to make herself less attractive to her jihadist captors.
These are only two of the more than 1,400 horror stories German doctor Jan Ilhan Kizilhan has heard first-hand from Yazidi women and girls once enslaved by Islamic State jihadists in Iraq.
"They have been through hell," he told AFP in an interview in Geneva.
Kizilhan heads a project that has brought 1,100 women and girls to Germany to help heal their deep physical and psychological wounds.
As Yazidis, who follow a unique faith despised by IS, the women raped and sometimes left pregnant by the jihadists are seen by many in their community as a source of dishonour.
Those who are shunned become

impoverished and risk falling into prostitution to support themselves, and a large number commit suicide, Kizilhan said.
Kizilhan shuddered as he recalled the case of one girl he had met in a refugee camp last August, who suffered burns to over 80 percent of her body.
"She had no nose, no ears left," he said, adding that he was even more shocked when he learned what had happened to her.
IS fighters had held the girl and

her sisters for weeks, raping and torturing them, before they escaped.
Then one night sleeping in her tent in the refugee camp, the girl dreamt IS fighters were outside. In a panic she poured gasoline over herself and lit a match, hoping it would make her so ugly they would not rape her again.
Kizilhan had that girl chartered out immediately for fear she might not survive. She remains in hospital in Germany after more than a dozen operations, and will still need 30 more types of skin and bone surgery.
Most of the girls and women in the programme were between 16 and 20, he said, adding that the oldest was in her 40s. The youngest was eight.
"IS sold her eight times during the 10 months she was held hostage, and raped her hundreds of times," Kizilhan said, shaking his head in disgust.



Horror Tales of Yazidis

Congress to move privilege motion against Smriti Irani

THE HINDU ONLINE
With the Congress deciding to move privilege motions against Indian Human Resource Development Minister Smriti Irani in both Houses alleging that her statements on the death of Hyderabad University student Rohith Vemula misled parliament, the political discourse around the death is set to get shriller.
Vemula's mother Radhika met Congress president Sonia Gandhi, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury and Janata Dal (United) leader KC Tyagi on Saturday in a sign that political heat from his alleged suicide is unlikely to die down soon.
"She is pained that the HRD Minister lied and that the Prime Minister has taken no action against his Ministers who branded Rohith anti-national, despite Modi calling

him Mother India's son," Tyagi said after the meeting. KTS Tulsi and Tyagi will also move privilege motions against the Minister.
On Friday, Vemula's mother accused Irani of lying in Parliament, something that has led the Opposition parties to decide on cornering the government and the Minister on the facts.
The BJP has been maintaining that Rohith Vemula was an OBC and not a Dalit, something said even by the Telangana Police. The Opposition parties are taking his mother's line, endorsed by Scheduled Caste Commission Chairman PL Punia: She, as a Dalit, brought up her son, who was a Scheduled Caste as per law and had a certificate. BSP chief Mayawati had also attacked HRD Minister Smriti Irani in Parliament, saying the judicial inquiry into the suicide was not under a Dalit judge.

