

NEWS IN brief

Indian soldier killed in Pak firing

AN army soldier was killed and two women were injured yesterday when Pakistani troops targeted Indian posts and villages along the Line of Control (LoC) in the twin frontier districts of Poonch and Rajouri in Jammu & Kashmir. "Ceasefire violations in Rajouri sector are being retaliated with massive fire assault. One army soldier was martyred," a spokesman of Indian Army said.

Pak stays execution of mentally ill man

PAKISTAN'S Supreme Court yesterday issued a last minute reprieve to a mentally ill man set to face the gallows this week, after his lawyers challenged the ruling using the last legal manoeuvre available to them. Lawyers and rights groups say convicted murderer Imdad Ali, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia, cannot be executed as he cannot understand his crime and punishment.

Nepal drains risky lake near Everest

NEPAL has successfully drained part of a giant glacial lake near Mount Everest, averting risk of a disastrous flood that could have threatened thousands of lives, officials said yesterday. Imja Tsho, located at an altitude of 5,010 metres, is the fastest-growing glacial lake in Nepal. Scientists say climate change is causing Himalayan glaciers to melt at an alarming rate, creating huge glacial lakes.

World piracy drops to 20-yr low: watchdog

PIRATE attacks worldwide fell to a 20-year low in the third quarter, the International Maritime Bureau said yesterday, as it credited anti-piracy efforts by authorities and the shipping industry. The IMB said in its latest quarterly report that 42 instances of piracy on the high seas were recorded in July-September. "With just 42 attacks worldwide this quarter, maritime piracy is at its lowest since 1996," it said.

Afghans losing war on drugs: minister

AFGHANISTAN is losing a multi-billion dollar war on drugs as it combats terrorism, a minister warned, denouncing a lack of political will and dwindling foreign aid to fight narcotics. The comments from Baz Mohammad Ahmadi, deputy minister of interior for counter-narcotics, come after the UN last week reported a 10 percent jump in opium cultivation this year to the third-highest level in more than two decades.



Iraqui Counter Terrorism Section (CTS) members carry an injured comrade during clashes with Islamic State (IS) group jihadists near the village of Bazwaya, on the eastern edges of Mosul, yesterday.

Delhi chokes after Diwali fireworks

AFP, New Delhi

New Delhi was shrouded in a thick blanket of toxic smog yesterday after millions of Indians lit firecrackers to mark the Diwali festival, with authorities reporting record levels of pollution in parts of the capital.

The reading for pollutants in the atmosphere breached the 1,000 microgram mark for the first time in one neighbourhood in south Delhi -- 10 times the World Health Organization's recommended level.

It came on the same day that another United Nations body reported how some 300 million children live with outdoor air so polluted it can cause serious physical damage, with the situation most acute in South Asia.

Gufuran Beig, chief scientist at India's state-run System of Air Quality Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR), said needles on monitors in the RK Puram neighbourhood had flickered briefly past the 1,000 level late on Sunday night at the finale of a frenzy of fireworks.

The levels had subsided through the night but were still running at more than 500 in several districts across the capital by afternoon.

"Almost 60-70 percent of the smoke came from the firecrackers," said Beig, who said the situation had been widely expected given that Diwali is always one of the worst periods for pollution.

"It was already predicted that the levels would increase several notches," he told AFP.

In a health advisory on its website, SAFAR said there was a "serious risk" of respiratory problems for people living in Delhi and all outdoor physical activity should be avoided.

Assault on Aleppo slows

AGENCIES

A rebel assault to break the siege of Syria's Aleppo slowed yesterday amid fierce resistance from regime forces, as the UN said it was "appalled" by opposition fire on civilians.

Rebels launched a major assault on Friday, backed by car bombs and salvos of rockets, to break through government lines and reach the 250,000 people besieged in the city's east.

Since Friday, opposition factions allied with jihadists have amassed on Aleppo's western outskirts in a bid to end the regime's three-month encirclement of the city's eastern districts.

While they scored an initial advance, the offensive has since slowed, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor, reports AFP.

"Since Sunday, the regime has been taking the initiative and the clashes are less intense," Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman said yesterday.

"The only thing that has been accomplished is partial control over Dahiyet al-Assad," a neighbourhood on Aleppo's western outskirts that rebels entered on Friday, he said.

Syrian state media said militants had fired

shells containing chlorine gas at a residential area of the government-held western part of the city, al-Hamdaniya. Rebels denied that, and said government forces had fired poison gas on another frontline.

The rebels said the army had shelled rebel-held Rashideen district with chlorine and shared videos purportedly showing victims with respiratory problems, reports Reuters.

"The momentum of the rebel offensive slowed after failing to take control of the '3000' apartment block and the military complex," a pro-regime military source said, referring to two built-up areas southwest of Aleppo.

Meanwhile, a poll showed yesterday nearly half of Russians fear that Moscow's bombing campaign in Syria could

spark World War III.

Forty-eight percent of Russians were concerned that "heightened tensions in relations between Russia and the West could grow into World War III," according to a poll conducted by independent pollster Levada Centre last week.

In a new toll yesterday, the Observatory said a total of 61 regime fighters and allied militiamen were killed in the assault, as well as 72 Syrian rebels.

Iraqi troops enter first district inside Mosul

AGENCIES

Iraqi troops entered the Karama district of the Islamic State stronghold of Mosul yesterday, their first advance into the city itself after two weeks of fighting in the surrounding area to dislodge the militants, an officer said.

"They have entered Mosul," General Wissam Araji of the US-trained Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) told Reuters. "They are fighting now in Hay (district) al-Karama."

The counter-terrorism unit resumed the offensive on the eastern front yesterday. It had paused its advance last week after it made gains quicker than forces on other fronts, to allow them to close the gap and get nearer to the city.

Iraqi security forces and Kurdish Peshmerga fighters started the offensive on Oct 17, with air and ground support from the US-led coalition against the hardline Sunni group.

CTS will hold its advance in Karama until the forces on the other fronts advance "to protect their back," Araji said in Bazwaya, a vil-

lage which was retaken from Islamic State earlier in the day, at the edge of the city's eastern suburb.

CTS also faced mortar fire as they pushed from the Christian town of Bartalla towards Mosul's eastern suburbs, AFP correspondents at the front said.

As an aircraft struck a suspected IS mortar position in the distance, a convoy of Humvees sprayed gunfire across the arid plain at an industrial area held by jihadists.

Lieutenant Colonel Muntadhar al-Shimmari said CTS had recaptured Bazwaya, one of two IS-held villages that had been standing between Iraqi forces and the eastern edges of Mosul.

CTS forces had entered the second village, Gogjali, and were battling to retake it, Staff Lieutenant General Abdelwahab al-Saadi, a senior CTS commander said.

Backed by air and ground support from a US-led coalition, tens of thousands of Iraqi fighters are converging on Mosul on different fronts, in the country's biggest military operation in years.

Rajoy takes oath as Spain's PM

AFP, Madrid

Spain's conservative leader Mariano Rajoy was sworn in yesterday for a second term as prime minister, bringing a close to 10 months of political limbo.

"I swear to faithfully fulfil the obligations of prime minister and to show loyalty to the king," Rajoy said with his hand on the Spanish constitution, at a ceremony attended by King Felipe VI and broadcast live on national television.

Rajoy, leader of the conservative Popular Party (PP), is set to spend the next three days forming a new cabinet for his hard-won minority government.

A senior party source said he was staying tight-lipped about his cabinet picks, planning to notify ministers of their new jobs "a half-hour before".

The comeback follows a victorious confidence vote in parliament on Saturday -- only possible because Spain's Socialists (PSOE) decided to abstain and not vote against him.

Still it is clear that Rajoy faces unprecedented opposition as Spain grapples with painful economic reforms and resurgent Catalan separatism.

When the PP ruled from 2011 to 2015, it enjoyed an absolute majority in parliament.



Obama lights first-ever diya

PTI, Washington

US President Barack Obama has celebrated Diwali by lighting the first-ever diya in the Oval Office of the White House and hoped that his successors would continue the tradition.

Obama, who was the first president to celebrate Diwali personally at the White House in 2009, talked about this momentous occasion in a Facebook post soon after he kindled the diya in his Oval Office with some Indian-Americans working in his administration.

"I was proud to be the first President to host a Diwali celebration at the White House in 2009, and Michelle and I will never forget how the people of India welcomed us with open arms and hearts and danced with us in Mumbai on Diwali," Obama said.

"This year, I was honoured to kindle the first-ever diya in the Oval Office -- a lamp that symbolises how darkness will always be overcome by light. It is a tradition that I

hope future Presidents will continue," Obama said on the White House Facebook page, which became viral on the social media.

By late night, it was liked by more than 1.5 lakh people and shared more than 33,000 times.

"On behalf of the entire Obama family, I wish you and your loved ones peace and happiness on this Diwali," Obama said.

"To all who are celebrating the festival of lights across America and around the world, happy Diwali. As Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists light the diya, share in prayers, decorate their homes, and open their doors to host and feast with loved ones, we recognise that this holiday rejoices in the triumph of good over evil and knowledge over ignorance," said the US President.

"It also speaks to a broader truth about our shared American experience. It's a reminder of what's possible when we see beyond the differences that too often divide us. It's a reflection of the hopes and dreams that bind us together," he said.



Trump's major donation was to hotel fountain

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The biggest ever donation made by Donald Trump's charitable foundation was a \$264,631 gift paid for the refurbishment of a New York fountain outside one of the billionaire businessman's own hotels, it has been reported.

The claims come amid allegations he hasn't donated any money to the charity since 2008.

The fee, which is thought to be the largest ever paid by the Donald J Trump Foundation in its 29-year history, was used to renovate the monument outside the Plaza Hotel on the edge of Central Park, New York, according to the Washington Post.

The donation was made in 1989 to restore the Pulitzer Fountain, which stands outside the front doors of one of Trump's flagship hotels -- meaning such a 'charitable donation' would likely have benefited his own business, it has been suggested.

Analysis also appears to reveal the Trump Foundation has received twice as much in funding from other donors as it has from Trump.

Tax records seen by the Post reportedly show the Foundation has benefitted from \$5.5 million of donations made by the Republican candidate since it was founded in 1987, compared with \$9.3 million from other donors, including world wrestling executive Vince McMahon. Trump has not donated to his foundation since 2008, the records appear to show.

Reports also suggest the organisation's smallest ever gift was a \$7 donation paid to the Boy Scouts in 1989 -- the same amount it cost at the time to register a new Scout. Trump's eldest son, Donald Junior, was 11 at the time. It is unknown whether the 'donation' was paid to register his child.



US Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton waves as she boards her campaign plane at the Westchester County Airport in White Plains, New York, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Clinton opens slim lead in swing states

Renewed FBI investigation 'doesn't mean anything', says early Democrat voter

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Hillary Clinton has opened up a slim lead across several decisive swing states among early voters in the presidential election -- despite the announcement of a fresh FBI investigation into the former Secretary of State.

At least 21 million have cast their votes in the US, including in the states likely to determine the result.

The turnout in the states that were previously on a knife-edge will comfort the Democratic campaign after this year's so-called 'October surprise', a term used to refer to significant, late-breaking stories that could swing an election.

Almost a quarter of potential voters have cast their ballots in Nevada, Colorado and Florida. Although their votes will not be counted until the day of the election, registered Democrats are outstripping Republicans in some key areas.

In Colorado, Democrats are exceeding their performance in the 2012 election. Although Barack Obama ultimately claimed the state, at this moment in the last election, the Democrats were behind Republicans by about 19,000 votes. This time, 39 percent of the ballots cast

have been from registered Democrats and only 35 percent from Republicans.

Similarly in Nevada, Democrats have so far outpaced Republicans by seven percentage points.

Clinton is also ahead in North Carolina, a crucial state that has oscillated between red and blue. Democrats are far ahead in the number of votes cast so far, with 43 percent compared to the Republicans 31 percent.

And, in a further surprise twist, Democrats have also improved their position in conservative Utah, where polling had shown the race was neck-and-neck.

In an election already riddled with scandal, interviews with early voters suggested news of the fresh FBI investigation had failed to persuade people to switch from Clinton to Donald Trump.

Fernando Gonzales, a 25-year-old who voted Democrat in Miami, told the New York Times: "The October surprise doesn't mean anything. The bar's been lowered so much, you can't lower it any more."

Trump's best gains were in Iowa. So far, 38,280 more Democrats than Republicans have voted, but that is a narrower advantage than at this point in 2012, when Democrats outpaced Republicans by 53,719.



Main opposition Republican People's Party members and politicians hold copy of Cumhuriyet newspaper in front of the newspaper's headquarters in Istanbul during a police operation yesterday. Turkish police detained the editor-in-chief of Cumhuriyet while the daily said several of its writers were taken into police custody. PHOTO: AFP