

News  
in brief15 killed in Thai  
school bus crash

**BANGKOK:** At least 15 people, including 13 children, were killed when a bus carrying students on a trip to the seaside collided with a lorry in eastern Thailand yesterday, police said. The smash is the latest in a series of deadly accidents involving buses in Thailand, where roads are among the most dangerous in the world. Forty-seven others were injured in the pre-dawn accident in Prachinburi province involving a double-decker bus and an 18-wheel truck, the authorities said. The students, aged around 10 to 14 years old, were heading to the resort city of Pattaya from the northeastern province of Nakhon Ratchasima. Twenty-three of those hurt are in hospital with injuries including broken arms and legs, the Public Health Ministry said. A row of bodies covered by sheets was seen laid out by the side of the wreckage of the bus, whose top deck was crushed on one side. Police said the bus driver had fled the scene of the crash—a relatively common occurrence in Thailand, where safety standards are generally poor. The cause of the accident has not yet been established but the authorities suspect human error or a mechanical problem. “The bus’s brakes may have failed or the driver might have fallen asleep,” Police Lieutenant Colonel Anukarn Thamvijarn said by telephone. A recent report by the World Health Organization said Thailand saw some 38.1 road deaths per 100,000 people in 2010—behind only the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean and the South Pacific island of Niue.

Maoist rebels kill  
six police in India

**RAIPUR:** Maoist rebels opened fire and triggered landmines in India’s restive Chhattisgarh state yesterday, killing six policemen in the latest in a string of deadly attacks on security forces. The insurgents attacked the policemen as they were on a combing operation near Shyamgiri jungle in Dantewada district, about 263 kilometers from state capital Raipur. “A team of 12 policemen was trying to secure an area when the Maoists detonated landmines and started firing indiscriminately at them,” police director general Amarnath Upadhyay said. “Six policemen died on the spot. We have rushed reinforcements and are awaiting further details,” he added. The Dantewada district witnessed one of the worst-ever incidents involving security forces in April 2010 when guerrillas killed at least 60 policemen in an ambush. The Maoists have become a potent insurgent force, demanding land and jobs for the poor and fighting for a communist society by toppling what they call India’s “semi-colonial, semi-feudal” form of rule. The insurgency is believed to have cost tens of thousands of lives, with much action focused around the insurgent-dominated, so-called “Red Corridor” stretching through central and eastern India. Critics believe military action is not enough to stem the unrest, saying the real solution is better governance and development.

China busts baby  
trafficking ring

**BEIJING:** China this month arrested more than 1,000 people suspected of involvement in baby-trafficking, in a police operation which also rescued 382 infants, local media reported yesterday. A total of 1,094 suspects involved in four baby trafficking rings were detained in a nationwide operation which began on February 19, the Beijing News daily said, citing a police statement. China has a flourishing underground child trafficking industry, for which tens of thousands of children are believed to be stolen each year, with demand fuelled by a one-child limit combined with a traditional preference for sons. Police were alerted after investigating a series of adoption websites which were found to be fronts for child traffickers, the Beijing News report said. China’s state-run Xinhua news agency added that the use of such websites was an emerging trend amongst traffickers. It was unclear whether the rescued infants would be reunited with their parents. Last month China gave a suspended death sentence—generally commuted to life in prison—to a doctor who abducted and sold newborn babies in a case that drew widespread outrage. Zhang Shuxia, an obstetrician, was found guilty of stealing seven children, the court said, adding that she tricked parents into giving up their babies by telling them the newborns were sick or had died.

US SLAMS CRACKDOWN ON  
PRO-DEMOCRACY PROTESTS

## GCC SLAMMED OVER DANGEROUS, EXPLOITIVE WORKING CONDITIONS

**WASHINGTON:** The United States on Thursday denounced what it said was the growing use of security forces by repressive regimes to crackdown on a worldwide groundswell of pro-democracy protests. “The fundamental struggle for dignity, for decency in the treatment of human beings... is a driving force in all of human history,” Secretary of State John Kerry said as he released his department’s annual human rights report.

But 2013 was “one of the most momentous years in the struggle for greater rights and freedoms in modern history,” the top US diplomat told reporters. Kerry lamented what he said were the hundreds “murdered in the dead of night” in Syria in a chemical weapons attack. He also denounced the rolling back of gay rights in almost 80 countries around the world, which he dubbed “an affront to every reasonable conscience.” The US, he said, promotes global human rights to build a world “where marching peacefully in the street does not get you beaten up in a blind alley, or even killed in plain sight.”

From Sudan in the Horn of Africa, to the streets of Ukraine, the bombed-out neighborhoods of Syria and remote areas of Myanmar, security forces must be held to account for human rights abuses if democratic transitions are to succeed, the report insisted. “This is about accountability,” Kerry insisted. “It’s about ending impunity.” In 2013, “transitioning democracies dealt with predictable setbacks in their quest for political change, and new democracies struggled to deliver effective governance and uphold rule of law,” the report said.

## Authoritarian rule

The State Department’s annual country-by-country index was released as the world marks the 65th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But six decades later “more than one third of the world’s population still lives under authoritarian rule,” the

report found. “A widening gap persists between the rights conferred by law and the daily realities for many around the globe.”

The report also highlighted how new and fragile democracies, emerging out of the Arab Spring, are cracking down on civil society. In Bahrain where campaigners have urged the monarchy to bring in constitutional reforms the report denounced the “arrest and detention of protesters on vague charges, in some cases leading to their torture in detention.” But while rights groups welcomed the US assessment, they demanded more than words.

“The US State Department showed once again today it is not lacking information about the repression happening in Bahrain, just short of the will to do much about it,” said Brian Dooley, from Human Rights First. “The US policy of muted public criticism over the last three years clearly hasn’t worked.” In Tehran, where a new more open leadership came to power in August, US officials said “our conclusion is that we’ve seen little meaningful improvement in human rights in Iran under the new government.” The report also threw a spotlight on a lack of labor rights in countries such as Bangladesh, where more than 1,000 garment workers were killed in a factory building collapse in April.

“Dangerous and exploitive” working conditions in other nations such as the gold mines in Nigeria and migrant workers in the Gulf also came in for criticism. The use of military might to suppress dissent was particularly egregious in Syria, where President Bashar Al-Assad’s regime was accused of unleashing a sarin gas attack in August that allegedly killed some 1,429 civilians, including 426 children. Egypt was also heavily criticized for “the removal of an elected civilian government and excessive use of force by security forces, including unlawful killings and torture,” among the Arab nation’s most significant human rights abuses.—AFP



**BANGUI:** A convoy of French troops, around fifty armored tanks and trucks, arrives in Bangui from Chad to reinforce the French troops of operation Sangaris. — AFP

HOLLANDE SEEKS C AFRICA  
UNITY AS FRANCE DIGS IN

**BANGUI:** French President Francois Hollande urged unity in the Central African Republic yesterday, nearly three months into a tough military mission to stop religious bloodshed. His high-security visit to Bangui caps a week that saw the French parliament extend Operation Sangaris and another 400 extra troops arrive in the deeply unstable former French colony, taking their number to 2,000. Hollande went straight to the airport base of Operation Sangaris for a briefing with his Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and the commander of the French mission, General Francisco Soriano, journalists at the scene said. One aim of the intervention is “to avoid at any price the partition of the country”, Hollande said while he reviewed French troops, adding that “thousands of lives have been saved thanks to you”. “The stakes of this visit are to assess what has been accomplished in three months and to decide on the next missions,” the French leader said. Faced with relentless bloodshed in which armed extremist Christian militias have slaughtered Muslim civilians in revenge for atrocities by a mainly

Muslim rebel alliance that seized power for 10 months last year, France has been forced to change its objectives. “Francois Hollande thought that the mission of the Sangaris troops would be over in a few months. A mistake,” the Bangui daily Le Quotidien declared yesterday.

## ‘We’re already dead’

Hollande was set to meet interim President Catherine Samba Panza, who has urged France and the 6,000 troops deployed by the African Union to make full use of their UN mandate to “wipe out these unchecked elements that poison our lives”. France sought to help “reestablish the authority of the state, renew dialogue” and prevent partition, Hollande said. Paris has acknowledged that its troops face considerable difficulties in halting the conflict, but Soriano stressed Thursday that the Central African people needed to start doing their share. “Central Africans need to participate in the reconstruction of their own country. We already do a lot,” the general said.—AFP