



Mumbai's renowned tiffin carriers adapt to changing lifestyles

POPE GETS WARM WELCOME AT WHITE HOUSE BY OBAMA



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin delivers a speech during the opening ceremony of the Moscow Grand Mosque in Moscow yesterday. — AFP

PUTIN OPENS HUGE NEW MOSQUE IN MOSCOW

\$170M PROJECT TOOK A DECADE TO COMPLETE

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow yesterday opened one of the biggest mosques in Europe, warning against the lure of jihadists as the government frets over its citizens fighting for the Islamic State group. Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas were the guests of honor at the unveiling of the 20,000-square meter mosque in the Russian capital.

"This mosque will become an extremely important spiritual centre for Muslims in Moscow and the whole Russia," Putin said in a televised speech. "It will be a source for education, spreading humanist ideas and the true val-

ues of Islam." The turquoise-domed mosque can host over 10,000 worshippers and is one of the largest in the country that will help to serve Russia's estimated 20 million Muslims.

The \$170 million project, which took a decade to complete, caused controversy over the destruction of an earlier mosque that stood on the site. Moscow—which has battled an Islamic insurgency in its volatile southern Caucasus region—is worried about the pull of extremist groups, especially Islamic State jihadists fighting in Syria and Iraq.

Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokolov last week esti-

mated that some 1,800 Russian citizens are fighting for the radical group. Putin in his speech lashed out at jihadist groups for their "attempts to cynically exploit religious feeling for political ends." "We see what is happening in the Middle East where terrorists from the so-called Islamic State group are compromising a great world religion, compromising Islam, in order to sow hate," he said. Putin was later set to meet Erdogan for talks that were expected to focus on the Syrian conflict, as the West frets about a buildup of Russian forces in the war-torn country.

The United States says Moscow has recently sent troops, tanks and fighter jets to Syria, sparking fears that

Russia could be looking to join the fight alongside its ally President Bashar Al-Assad. Turkey and Russia stand on opposing sides over the crisis in Syria, with Ankara fiercely backing the rebels trying to oust Assad.

Turkey is currently waging what Ankara describes as a two-pronged "war on terror" against both IS and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), although so far air strikes have overwhelmingly focused on bases of the Kurdish militants in northern Iraq. Moscow has been on a diplomatic push to try to get Western and regional powers involved in a coalition against IS to join forces with Assad. — AFP

FATHER OF SAUDI YOUTH ON DEATH ROW PLEADS KING FOR CLEMENCY

DUBAI: The father of a Saudi youth facing execution for taking part in pro-reform protests appealed to King Salman yesterday to spare his life. The sentence against Ali Al-Nimr, only 17 when he was arrested in February 2012, has drawn international condemnation over his young age at the time and allegations that he was tortured into making a confession.

It is the latest case to highlight the death penalty and human rights in the Islamic kingdom, which Amnesty International says is one of the world's most prolific executioners. In an interview with AFP, Mohammed Al-Nimr said he hoped the king would save his son. "We hope that the king will not sign" the execution order, Nimr said, after Saudi Arabia's highest court confirmed the death sentence, leaving his son's fate in the hands of the king.

Nimr warned that if his son is put to death the minority Shiite community could react violently, something he does not want to happen. "We don't need that; we don't need even one drop of blood," he said. The youth is a nephew of Nimr Al-Nimr, a Shiite religious leader who is also on death row.

Mohammed Al-Nimr, a Dammam businessman, was in Riyadh to visit his jailed brother for the Muslim feast of sacrifice, Eid Al-Adha, which falls today.

Nimr Al-Nimr was a driving force behind demonstrations that began four years ago in Eastern Province. Most of Sunni-dominated Saudi Arabia's Shiites live in the east, and have complained of marginalization.

'High morale'

Ali Al-Nimr's father admitted that his son, then a high school student, had joined thousands of other people in protest. But he said he is innocent of numerous other charges including burglary, attacking police and using a Molotov cocktail. The court sentenced Ali Al-Nimr to death but gave no further details. Execution in the kingdom is usually carried out with a



RIYADH: Mohammed Al-Nimr, the father of Ali Al-Nimr, a Saudi youth facing execution for taking part in pro-reform protests speaks during an interview — AFP

sword, sometimes in public.

France's foreign ministry appealed yesterday for a stay of execution and expressed concern about the case of the youth, "condemned to death even though he was a minor at the time of the incident," a spokesman said. France opposes the death penalty in all circumstances, the spokesman added. On Tuesday, UN rights experts also called for Ali Al-Nimr's life to be spared. A statement said the youth was reportedly tortured, coerced into a confession and denied adequate access to a lawyer before and during a trial that did not meet international standards.

"Any judgment imposing the death penalty upon persons who were children at the time of the offence,

and their execution, are incompatible with Saudi Arabia's international obligations," the experts said. Mohammed Al-Nimr said his last monthly visit with his son in the Dammam jail came three weeks ago, and he expects to see him again in a couple of days. "I am sure that his morale is very high, and he is strong," the father said, adding that the family is buoyed by the outpouring of global support on social media. Ali Al-Nimr is one of six sons and daughters in his family. Mohammed Al-Nimr said his son and Nimr Al-Nimr, are among eight Shiites who have exhausted all court appeals in connection with death sentences imposed after the protests. Ali Al-Nimr is the youngest of those eight, he said. — AFP

HUNGARY PM REJECTS MERKEL'S 'MORAL IMPERIALISM' IN CRISIS

BAD STAFFELSTEIN: Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban yesterday rejected what he called German Chancellor Angela Merkel's "moral imperialism" as he outlined his own rival plan to tackle Europe's migrant crisis. When asked what he expected from Merkel while Europe grapples with an influx of asylum-seekers, the hardline leader grinned: "I have a long list."

Orban accused Merkel of trying to impose her vision of an open EU on the rest of the bloc. "The most important thing is that there should be no moral imperialism," he said during a visit to the southern German state of Bavaria. Orban, speaking ahead of an EU summit in Brussels, said his country had a "democratic right" to a different approach.

The summit takes place amid a growing east-west split within the bloc after ministers forced through a controversial deal Tuesday to share out 120,000 refugees. "I don't doubt Germany's right to define its moral obligations for itself. They can decide if they accept every refugee or not... (but) that should only be compulsory for them," Orban said. "We are Hungarians however, we cannot think with German minds. Hungary should have the right to control the impact of a mass migration," he said. "The Hungarian people don't want this, we ask that the wishes of Hungarians be respected."

Global contingents

Orban revived recent proposals in what he called a six-point plan to resolve the crisis. They included persuading Greece, one of the EU countries on the front lines of the migrant influx, to hand over control of its borders to EU countries willing to help police them, as

well as separating asylum-seekers from "economic migrants" before they reach the passport-free Schengen zone.

Orban said he would also press fellow EU leaders to agree on a common list of safe countries of origin to which migrants can be returned, and to pitch in one percent of their EU income and their EU contributions to an emergency fund.

He urged the bloc to work closely with key non-EU countries playing a key role in the crisis such as Russia and Turkey, and the creation of a global system of migrant "contingents" for countries to take in. Overriding opposition from eastern European states, including Hungary, interior ministers approved plans Tuesday that require countries to take their share of the hundreds of thousands of migrants who have overwhelmed states such as Greece and Italy.

The deal was widely seen as a victory for Berlin in the German media, just as Germany expects up to one million asylum-seekers this year and has been clamouring for a "fair" distribution of migrants throughout the bloc. In response to the influx, Hungary has closed its border with Serbia and introduced draconian laws to punish those crossing into the country illegally.

Orban said yesterday that he would only consider voluntary measures to accept asylum-seekers. "Quotas and contingents are two different things. We reject the former, but are ready to discuss the latter," he said. Orban was invited to Germany by one of the most vocal critics of Merkel's migrant policies within her conservative bloc, Bavarian premier Horst Seehofer. — AFP