

# NEWSIN brief

## Malaysia PM unveils cabinet

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's premier yesterday unveiled a cabinet line-up which he said would help national reconciliation after a racially divisive election, but which was noticeably light on Chinese faces.

Prime Minister Najib Razak's Barisan Nasional (National Front) coalition, which has ruled multiracial Malaysia for 56 years, fended off the strongest opposition challenge ever in an election marked by anger over racially divisive policies.

"Over the past months and years, divisions have opened up in Malaysian society. Now it is time for all of us, in government and beyond, to put the bitterness behind us," Najib said in introducing his line-up.

## Nigeria declares emergency

AFP, Abuja

Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan on Tuesday imposed a "state of emergency" in three states menaced by Islamist group Boko Haram, saying the level of violence called for "extraordinary measures".

The insurgents, who say they are fighting to create an Islamic state in the north, have carried out scores of attacks since 2009 but Jonathan said the violence can no longer be treated as "militancy or criminality".

The president for the first time acknowledged that parts of Borno state have been "taken over" by insurgents.

## Sanjay Dutt to surrender today

TNN, Mumbai

Sanjay Dutt will surrender today before a special TADA court in Mumbai to undergo his remaining jail term in the 1993 Mumbai blasts case, according to his lawyer.

His plea for a review of his conviction in the case has already been rejected by the Supreme Court.

The apex court on Tuesday refused to give Dutt extra time to surrender on a plea by a Bollywood producer.

## Brazil okays same sex marriage

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Brazil on Tuesday became the third and largest Latin American country to give a de facto green light to same-sex marriage.

In a bold stride for the majority Roman Catholic nation, the National Council of Justice (NCJ), a panel which oversees Brazil's legal system, said government offices that issue marriage licenses had no standing to reject gay couples.

Uruguay's and Argentina are the other two LatAm countries.

# Imran vows to work with Pakistan PM-elect Sharif

AFP, Lahore

Pakistani politician Imran Khan yesterday vowed to cooperate with incoming prime minister Nawaz Sharif on terrorism and other major challenges following key elections.

Khan made the remarks from his hospital bed, where he is laid up with a fractured spine after falling at a campaign rally, after his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) polled third place, behind Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N).

"We have decided that despite severe differences that we have, we will work together to resolve major national problems including terrorism," Khan said in a video message aired during a PTI press conference.

He harshly criticised Sharif and the centre-right PML-N during the campaign for last Saturday's general election and had vowed to go into opposition.

Sharif pledged to work with Khan for the good of the country, after visiting the former cricket star in hospital on Tuesday.

Khan is credited with helping to inspire 60 per cent turnout at the polls, having galvanised the youth and urban middle class in particular with promises to end corruption, introduce tax reform and stand up to the Americans.



"Elections are over and we all as a nation want to move forward," Khan said, adding he wanted all politicians and the military to sit down together and find a solution to domestic terrorism, which has killed thousands of people in Pakistan.

"We cannot ensure prosperity until we eliminate the issue of terrorism," he said.

Partial official results confirm PML-N on 123 seats, with the outgoing Pakistan People's Party on 31 and PTI on 26. Another 18 of the 272 directly elected seats in the national assembly are still to be declared.

Khan's party won the most seats in the Taliban-hit northwest, where he has vowed to put together a provincial coalition government and turn it into a "role model" for the rest of the country.

But he alleged Wednesday that vote rigging had taken place in 25 constituencies and said he would ask the election commission to order recounting in at least four.

Meanwhile, PTI, Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) and Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) yesterday finalised a formula over the formation of government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, according to which JI and QWP would get three ministries each whereas, the PTI would hold the chief minister and speaker positions in the province.

## US defends seizure of AP phone logs

AFP, Washington

The beleaguered US government claims it was only trying to protect American lives when it took the drastic step of seizing journalists' phone records in a probe of what it calls a major security breach.

Attorney General Eric Holder hit back on Tuesday, defending the action in which the Justice Department secretly took two months of telephone logs from news operations of the Associated Press. He said this was done as part of a probe into a security breach which had put the people at risk.

The investigators' action is believed to be linked to a probe into a story on a foiled terror plot, which they suspect contained leaked information.

The revelation of the seizure brought a flurry of criticism of what critics called an unprecedented assault on press freedom.



PHOTO: AFP

A Palestinian sets fire to a tyre during clashes between hundreds of Palestinians and Israeli soldiers at the gate of the Ofer prison after a march marking the 65th Nakba day or "catastrophe" when the Jewish state was created in 1948 and 760,000 Palestinians fled their homes. The protestors demonstrated to assert their "right to return" to the place from where their ancestors had fled.



## Manmohan files nomination papers for Rajya Sabha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday filed his nomination papers for election from north-eastern state of Assam to the Rajya Sabha, upper House of Indian parliament.

Singh, 80, submitted his papers before the state Legislative Assembly Secretary GP Das on the Assembly premises in Guwahati.

The prime minister's Upper House term expires on June 14 and polls will be held on May 30, if necessary.

Singh, who became prime minister in May 2004 and was re-elected in May 2009, has been a member of Rajya Sabha since 1991.

The electoral college for Rajya Sabha members consist of members of state legislatures.

Congress, with an absolute majority in the 126-member Assam legislative assembly, can easily ensure the victory of Singh in the event of a contest for the Rajya Sabha seat.

The Indian prime minister, in a brief interaction with the media, expressed his gratitude to the people of Assam for making it possible for him to file nomination for the Rajya Sabha for the fifth time since 1991.

## North Pole shifts due to global warming

AGENCIES

The North Pole has shifted east because of ice sheet loss caused by rising temperatures, a new study published in Geophysical Research Letters has found, according to the scientific journal Nature.

The pole drifted southeast toward northern Labrador, Canada, at a rate of about 6 centimeters per year between 1982 and 2005. But since 2005, the direction and speed of the pole's journey changed. It started moving rapidly east towards Greenland at a rate of more than 21 centimeters per year.

There has been huge ice sheet loss in the polar regions due to global warming.

The study was carried out by scientists from the University of Texas, Austin, using data collected by NASA's Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment (GRACE).

Earth's two geographic poles do not have a fixed location. As the distribution of snow, rain and humidity changes every year, the poles too wobble around, usually in a circular manner.

GRACE's twin probes measure changes in the Earth's gravity field, which can be used to track shifts in the distribution of water and ice, Nature said. The researchers led by Jianli Chen, a geophysicist, used GRACE data to model how melting icecaps affect Earth's mass distribution. They found that more than 90% of the post-2005 polar shift was because of increasing ice loss and sea-level rise.

## UN General Assembly set to vote on Syria resolution

Communication blackout as fighting flares around Aleppo prison

AGENCIES

The UN General Assembly was scheduled to vote on a draft resolution that condemns Syrian authorities and accepts the opposition Syrian National Coalition as party to a potential political transition.

Russia, a close ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, is opposed to the resolution, which was drafted by Qatar and other Arab nations and circulated among the 193 UN member states.

Some Western diplomats said it was unlikely to win as many votes as a resolution that passed last year with 133 in favour. No country has a veto in the General Assembly.

The Syrian conflict started more than two years ago with mainly peaceful demonstrations against Assad, but turned into a civil war. Islamist militants have emerged as the most potent

of the anti-Assad rebels.

Another senior UN diplomat, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, said this draft resolution was stronger than the earlier resolution, prompting Russia to write to all states to complain that it was unbalanced. The diplomat said Russia had also warned that it could hinder preparations for a Syria peace conference, as agreed by Russia and the United States.

The official news agency SANA, meanwhile, said that Internet and telephone lines were down because of a faulty fibre optic cable, in the second such incident in the past week.

Syria's Internet was down for two days last week, with state media blaming the blackout on a technical fault but activists and a watchdog accused the regime of deliberating cutting the connection to shield military operations.

## 'SPY' SCANDAL Russia, US seek to limit damage

AFP, Moscow

Russia and the United States yesterday sought to limit the damage to already troubled ties from a new spy scandal that erupted when Moscow caught a blonde-wigged alleged CIA agent who was reportedly seeking information on the Boston bombings.

The suspected agent, who Moscow says was caught with a "typical espionage arsenal" of money and disguises, is said to have been working undercover as a low-ranking third secretary at the US embassy.

The man, named as Ryan C Fogle, was caught red-handed in a blonde wig as he tried to recruit a Russian security agent with an advance of \$100,000 for intelligence on the Northern Caucasus, according to the Russian FSB security service.

The Kommersant daily said that Fogle was likely to have been seeking intelligence about the Boston marathon bombers whose origins were in the Russian Northern Caucasus, despite pledges by security services to cooperate in the investigation.

US ambassador to Moscow Michael McFaul met officials at the Russian foreign ministry yesterday morning after being summoned to explain the presence of the alleged CIA agent.

The foreign ministry said that Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov had issued a protest to McFaul, confirming that Fogle had to leave in the "shortest possible time".



## Cameron faces parliamentary revolt over EU

REUTERS, London

Prime Minister David Cameron was to face a humiliating challenge to his authority yesterday when scores of rebels in his ruling party will attack him in parliament over his stance on Britain's membership of the European Union.

In a further blow to Cameron's leadership, up to 100 Conservative MPs will take the highly unusual step of voting to criticise his government's legislative plans, a week after they were first put before parliament.

The rebels are angry that the government's policy proposals did not include steps to make Cameron's promise of a referendum on Britain's EU membership legally binding.

The party turmoil has fuelled talk of Britain sliding towards the EU exit and has stirred memories of Conservative infighting that contributed to the downfall of former PMs Margaret Thatcher and John Major.

While the vote is non-binding, a big mutiny would be an embarrassment for Cameron less than two years before the next parliamentary election and would embolden eurosceptics pushing him to take a harder line on Europe.

Cameron, who will miss the showdown because he is visiting the United States, played down its significance, saying he was "extremely relaxed".

Cameron had hoped to end party squabbling over Europe in January when he promised to renegotiate Britain's EU role and hold a referendum on its membership before the end of 2017, provided he wins the next general election in 2015.

## ODDLY enough

### LED lights can damage your eyes

PTI, London

Light-emitting diode (LED) lights may cause permanent damage to your eyes, a new research has claimed.

The study found that exposure to LED lights can cause irreparable harm to the retina of the human eye.

Researchers said this is likely to become a global epidemic in the medium term given that computer, mobiles and TV screens, and even traffic and street lights, have been gradually replaced with LED.

### Fastest robot faster than Bolt

TNN, London

The world's fastest robot has now left the world's fastest man behind.

Scientists at the world's oldest vet college, the Royal Veterinary College, have studied the cheetah in the African wild for over five years, to create the world's fastest robot.

Speaking to TOI, RVC's expert of locomotor biomechanics Alan Wilson said the robot has now clocked 29 miles per hour compared to Bolt's speed of 27.

## Mayan pyramid bulldozed for road!



THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

A construction company has essentially destroyed one of Belize's largest Mayan pyramids with diggers and bulldozers to extract crushed rock for a road-building project, authorities have announced.

The head of the Belize Institute of Archaeology, Jaime Awe, said on Tuesday that the destruction at the Nohmul complex in northern Belize was detected late last week. The ceremonial centre dates back at least 2,300 years and is the most important site in northern Belize, near the border with Mexico.

"It's a feeling of incredible disbelief because of the ignorance and the insensitivity... they were using this for road fill," Awe said. "It's like being punched in the stomach, it's just so horrendous."

Photos from the scene showed diggers clawing away at the pyramid's sloping sides, leaving an isolated core of limestone cobbles at the centre, with what appears to be a narrow Mayan chamber dangling above one clawed-out section.

Belizean police said they were conducting an investigation and criminal charges were possible. The Nohmul complex sits on private land, but Belizean laws say that any pre-Hispanic ruins are under government protection.

The Belize community action group Citizens Organised for Liberty Through Action called the destruction of the archaeological site "an obscene example of disrespect for the environment and history".

It is not the first time this has happened in Belize, a country dotted with hundreds of Mayan ruins, though few as large as Nohmul.

Norman Hammond, an emeritus professor of archaeology at Boston University who worked on Belizean research projects in the 1980s, wrote in an email that "bulldozing Maya mounds for road fill is an endemic problem in Belize (the whole of the San Estevan centre has gone, both of the major pyramids at Louisville, other structures at Nohmul, many smaller sites), but this sounds like the biggest yet".

## Seven killed in floods in Sri Lanka

AFP, Colombo

At least seven people have been killed and two are missing in floods and mudslides following heavy rain across Sri Lanka, the disaster management centre said yesterday.

A tropical cyclone east of the island did not make landfall but caused unusually heavy rain in the past two days which triggered flash floods, it said.

Five of the dead drowned in flooding while two were buried in mudslides.

Some 13 people have been injured while another 115,000 have been forced to flee flooded homes.

The weather department said rains subsided by yesterday afternoon as Cyclone Mahasen moved away.

## Aussie PM brought to tears in parliament

AFP, Sydney

Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard's tough exterior cracked yesterday as she choked back tears while introducing a bill into parliament on disability reforms.

The country's first female leader, seen as a hard-talking survivor in male-dominated politics, spoke in a quivering voice of people with disabilities she had recently met.

She said a proposed national disability insurance scheme would let people like 17-year-old Sandy from Brisbane realise their dreams for life.

"When I met this young man he handed me a card signed by him and his mates to say thanks for what we are doing for people with disability," an emotional Gillard said.

"Over the past six years, the idea of a national disability insurance scheme has found a place in our nation's heart. In March, we gave it a place in our nation's laws."

"Today we inscribe it in our nation's finances," she added before being comforted by Disability Reform Minister Jenny Macklin.

When fully operational, the scheme is expected to cover 410,000 Australians with disabilities and cost upwards of A\$15 billion (US\$15 billion) a year to run, providing extra personal care and physical therapy.

