

**NEWS IN brief**

**Moscow metro fire causes panic**

Seven commuters were hospitalised and thousands evacuated from the Moscow metro yesterday after a high-voltage electric cable caught fire, filling station platforms with smoke at the height of the rush hour, emergency officials said. The affected section of the metro was shut down temporarily as firefighters

**Gayoom meets Manmohan Singh**

Ahead of the presidential elections in the Maldives, former dictator of 30 years, Abdul Gayoom, met PM Manmohan Singh on Tuesday. Gayoom's Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) will be one of the key players in the upcoming presidential elections. He has announced that his cousin Abdullah Yameen will be PPM's

**BJP sweeps by-polls**

India's main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) yesterday got a major boost sweeping six parliamentary and legislative assembly by-elections in Gujarat while West Bengal's ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) won another parliamentary by-

**Blast at NY school hurts 7**

Seven people, including two students, were injured Tuesday in an apparent accidental gas explosion at a college north of New York City, authorities said. "There were seven injuries. All of them minor injuries. They were transferred to the hospital to be checked out," a police spokesman told AFP about

**MJ's daughter attempts suicide**

Paris Jackson, 15, the only daughter of late pop legend Michael Jackson, is in hospital after attempting to kill herself, a publicist has confirmed. Angel Howansky, long-time publicist for Jacksons, could not confirm reports of a possible drug overdose or multiple cuts on her wrist, says the BBC's Alastair Leithead in Los

**Sharif takes charge as Pakistan PM**

*Calls for end to US drone strikes*

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's new Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif yesterday called for an end to US drone strikes in the country's northwest, as he took office for an unprecedented third term.

Some 13 years after he was deposed in a coup and sent into exile, the 63-year-old was formally chosen by a vote in the National Assembly and later took the oath of office from President Asif Ali Zardari.

The country faces a daunting array of problems ranging from crippling power cuts to Taliban militancy, and the new prime minister said citizens should be in no doubt about the challenges ahead.

The state of the economy was "beyond imagination", he told parliament.

Sharif has advocated peace talks with the Taliban, though the powerful military is said to harbour deep scepticism about the idea of doing deals with the militants.

He publicly criticised the drone strike that killed Taliban deputy Waliur Rehman last week, echoing long-held Pakistani complaints that the US campaign violates national sovereignty.

On Wednesday Sharif used his first speech as PM to reiterate his concerns.

"We respect the sovereignty of others and they should also respect our sovereignty and



independence. This campaign should come to an end," he said, calling for a comprehensive strategy to root out extremism.

According to Britain's Bureau of Investigative Journalism, CIA drone attacks in Pakistan have killed up to 3,587 people since 2004.

Ties with Washington will be a key issue in Sharif's tenure.

On the economic front, Sharif painted a bleak picture of the nation's finances but said his government was determined to put things right.

In Wednesday's National Assembly session, Sharif took 244 votes -- beating his nearest rival Amin Faheem, of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) who took 42 and Javed Hashmi of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party with 31.

**NEWS ANALYSIS**

**Third time lucky?**

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's new prime minister Nawaz Sharif has assumed the reins of government for a historic third term in what observers describe as a test of his political statesmanship and acumen.

The 63-year-old, who was sentenced to life in prison after being deposed in a military coup in 1999, has a power base rooted in Pakistan's richest and most populous province, where he is known as the Lion of the Punjab.

A hugely wealthy steel tycoon, considered strong on the economy but seen by some as soft on the Taliban, he inherits enormous problems of sagging finances and a stifling energy crisis.

He comes across as soft-spoken and shy with international media but earned a reputation for combativeness during his two previous terms as PM, from 1990 to 1993, and from 1997 to 1999.

Veteran political analyst Talat Masood said the Sharif of 2013 is a different man from the hothead of the 1990s who riled Pakistan's powerful military.

"I personally think that he has gained a lot in these last several years. He is a far more mature politician, he has understood the dynamics of the civil-military relationship," Masood told AFP.

"He is a much more mature, balanced and experienced third-time prime minister."

He has been seen as a pragmatist in the West but raised eyebrows by calling for peace talks with the Pakistani Taliban, blamed for killing thousands of Pakistanis in the past six years.

And on Friday he publicly criticised a US drone strike that killed the militants' second-in-command in northwest Pakistan as a violation of sovereignty, echoing Islamabad's longstanding complaint about the controversial missile attacks.

Born on December 25, 1949 into a wealthy family of industrialists in Lahore, the capital of Punjab and the political nerve centre of Pakistan, Sharif took a law degree before joining his father's steel company.

He entered politics and under the patronage of military dictator Zia-ul Haq became first finance minister and then chief minister of Punjab -- a post he held for five years from 1985 until he was elected prime minister in 1990.

He beat arch-rival Benazir Bhutto in the polls and served a three-year term until he was sacked on corruption charges and replaced by Bhutto, before returning to power in a landslide in 1997.

With a huge majority behind him, he set about cementing his liberal economic policies and in 1998 won huge popularity when he made Pakistan a nuclear power, but his government buckled under tensions with the army, which seized power in 1999.



**Rice made Obama's top security adviser**

CNN ONLINE

Susan Rice, US ambassador to the United Nations, will replace Tom Donilon as President Barack Obama's national security adviser, a senior administration official said Wednesday.

The president was scheduled to announce the change yesterday afternoon at the White House, an administration official said.

Rice, a longtime Obama confidante, became the center of controversy in the days after the attack on a US diplomatic post in Benghazi, Libya, last year after she maintained the attack was a spontaneous act during a protest rather than the terror attack.

She was considered a top contender to succeed Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the start of Obama's second term, but Republican pushback forced her to withdraw from consideration in December.

Obama ultimately nominated former US Sen John Kerry for the post.

Obama picked Donilon -- then deputy national security adviser -- to replace retired Marine Gen Jim Jones for the post in October 2010.

Donilon was heavily involved in the raid to kill Osama bin Laden in 2011.

Rice was considered a possible candidate for the job when Jones stepped down, as she was one of Obama's most public foreign policy voices during his 2008 presidential campaign.

Obama will also name former aide and genocide expert Samantha Power as the new US ambassador to the United Nations, to replace Susan Rice, a US official said.



**FLOOD IN EUROPE**

Vehicles are stranded at a dead end of a road partially submerged in floodwaters from the swollen Labe (Elbe) river near the city of Litomerice, Czech Republic yesterday. German, Czech and Austrian river cities braced for rising flood waters, evacuating thousands and boosting defences along the swollen Elbe and Danube, after inundations from heavy rains left 12 people dead.

PHOTO: REUTERS

**Troops rout rebels in key Syria city**

*France, UK confirm use of sarin gas*

AFP, Damascus

Syrian troops ousted rebels from the strategic town of Qusayr near the Lebanese border yesterday after a devastating 17-day assault led by Hezbollah fighters from across the frontier.

The boost for government forces in a 26-month conflict that has increasingly stalemated came as former colonial power France said the international community was now obliged to respond to test results from both French and British laboratories confirming the use of banned nerve agent sarin.

Washington has always said that confirmation of battlefield use of Syria's known chemical arsenal or any other weapon of mass destruction would be a "game-changer" for Western policy towards the conflict that monitors say has killed more than 94,000 people.

US and Russian envoys have been working with the United Nations for weeks to try to organise a peace conference, but after new preparatory talks on Wednesday dele-

gates acknowledged that no meeting would happen before next month.

The two major outside powers have been struggling to overcome strong objections from the rebels to a proposed invitation to the government side without a prior commitment that President Bashar al-Assad step down.

The rebels conceded they had lost Qusayr after controlling it for a year, but opposition interim leader George Sabra declared they would fight on "until the whole country is liberated".

The army, for its part, said the "heroic victory" in the offensive, launched on May 19, served as a warning that it would "crush" the rebels and bring "security and stability to every inch of our land".

The battle for Qusayr, a conduit for fighters and weapons just 10 kilometres from Lebanon and linking Damascus to the Mediterranean coast, left the town in ruins.

Its capture opens the way for forces loyal to Assad to move on the central city of Homs, much of which the rebels still control.

**Now, Irish woman raped in Kolkata**

AP, Kolkata

Police yesterday said they have arrested a man accused of raping an Irish woman who volunteered at a children's charity in Kolkata.

The local businessman who was arrested was to be produced in court later yesterday, according to a police official, who said he could not be named because he wasn't authorised to speak to reporters.

The man attended a party the woman hosted to celebrate her 21st birthday late Friday, the official said. She later went to the man's house where she drank a cup of tea and passed out, then she was raped, the official said.

Few other details were immediately available.

**Pakistan fomenting Punjab militancy**

*Accuses Indian HM; Manmohan talks tough on Maoists*

AFP, New Delhi

India yesterday accused Pakistan's intelligence agency of trying to recruit and train militants to carry out attacks across the border in the Indian state of Punjab.

Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde said Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency was pressuring Sikh militant leaders to target Punjab and other parts of India.

He also accused the ISI of training Sikh youths in facilities in Pakistan.

The minister singled out the threat to the northwestern state during a speech to state chief ministers gathered in the capital for an annual conference on internal security.

Also addressing the conference, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh urged the state and national governments to work together to curb the "very grave threat" of Maoist insurgents in central India.

He said that Naxal violence has no place in democracy and the Centre and state governments must work together to deal with the "very grave threat" posed by Maoists.

He has previously described the rebels as the country's most serious internal security threat. The Maoists last month killed 24 people including local political leaders in an ambush in Chhattisgarh state.

**Rohingyas, cops clash in Myanmar; 3 killed**

AFP, Yangon

Three Muslim Rohingya women have been shot dead in a confrontation with security forces in a violence-torn region of western Myanmar, police said yesterday.

The incident happened on Tuesday in a camp for victims of communal violence in Patein in Rakhine State, local police officer Maung Maung Mya told AFP by telephone.

"The three died as warning shots were fired," he said, adding that four others were injured.

He said tensions had erupted because some Rohingya at the camp were refusing to move to new shelters provided by the authorities.

"They think they will lose their own land if they are moved to the new shelters. So they don't move."

Up to 140,000 people -- mainly Rohingya -- were displaced in two waves of sectarian unrest between Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine last year that left about 200 people dead.

Myanmar views its population of roughly 800,000 Rohingya as illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. They are considered by the United Nations to be one of the world's most persecuted minorities.



An employee walks past a billboard at a Coca-Cola bottling plant in Yangon on Tuesday. Coca-Cola on June 4 opened a factory in Yangon as it returns to the former pariah state after an absence of more than six decades.

PHOTO: AFP

**Xi ON LATAM TOUR**  
**China, Mexico agree on 'strategic' partnership**

AFP, Mexico City

Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Mexican counterpart vowed to work jointly to access international markets, like the lucrative US market, as part of a new strategic partnership.

Xi yesterday begins his second day of a three-day visit to the Latin American economic powerhouse, which will include a speech before Mexico's congress.

Xi arrived in Mexico after visiting Costa Rica, and after meeting Caribbean leaders in Trinidad and Tobago. Xi travels to the United States tomorrow for a much-anticipated weekend summit with US President Barack Obama.

China has in recent years aggressively pushed trade and investment ties with the developing world, particularly Africa and Latin America, to secure raw materials to fuel its economic growth and wield greater geopolitical influence in relation to the United States.

On Tuesday Xi and Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto pledged to enhance diplomatic and trade ties between the two countries, and to smooth over their long-



standing rivalry on exporting products to the United States.

Xi in turn praised the "comprehensive strategic partnership" between the two countries.

China has expanded its trade and investment ties with Latin America in recent years as the world's second biggest economy taps into the region's mineral and oil wealth to fuel its economic growth.

In Costa Rica, Xi and President Laura Chinchilla signed agreements on projects worth nearly \$2 billion, including upgrades of an oil refinery, a key highway and public transport.

**ODDLY enough**

**Lizard named after Morrison**



AFP, Paris

A giant lizard, Barbaturrex morrisoni, that lived 40 million years ago at a time when Earth was a hot-house has been named in honour of rock singer Jim Morrison, palaeontologists said on Wednesday.

"I was listening to The Doors quite a bit during research," said Jason Head of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln who led the analysis.

"Some of their musical imagery includes reptiles and ancient places, and Jim Morrison was of course the Lizard King, so it kind of came together," he added.

**Fake PhDs on sale!**

AFP, Shillong

Police are investigating an Indian university in Shillong suspected of issuing fake PhDs after it awarded more than 400 doctorates in a single year, officers said yesterday.

The Times of India reported Monday that PhDs from CMJ were on sale for between \$4,000-10,000, with the amount paid determining how quickly the qualification would be granted.

Credentials fraud is a serious problem in India, fuelled by a huge demand for