City

NEWS_{IN} brief Egypt polls set for

February or March

AFP, Cairo

Egypt is to hold parliamentary elections in February or March, two months after the country votes on a new constitution, a foreign ministry official said yesterday.

The official said the schedule, in line with a timetable set out by the country's interim president, was on track.

US loses Unesco voting rights

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

American influence in culture, science and education around the world took a high-profile blow yesterday after the US automatically lost voting rights at Unesco after missing a crucial deadline to repay its debt to the world's cultural agency.

The US has not paid its dues to the Paris-based UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation in protest over the decision by world governments to make Palestine a Unesco member in 2011. Israel suspended its dues at the same time and also lost voting rights yesterday.

Indian Mars mission on track

AFP, New Delhi

India's Mars spacecraft has completed the first of a series of engine firings designed to free it from Earth's gravitational pull and propel it towards the Red Planet, scientists said yesterday.

India began the quest to become the first Asian country to reach Mars on Tuesday with the succesful launch from its southern space station of a 1.35 tonne unmanned probe, which is strapped to a rocket.

Jordan to take Saudi seat at UNSC

AFP, United Nations

Jordan is expected to take up a UN Security Council seat that Saudi Arabia won and then rejected, diplo-

mats said Thursday. Envoys said Jordan had been reluctant to take up the Asia-Pacific seat on the 15nation council but had been persuaded by the Saudis.

Man held over China party office blasts

CNN ONLINE

A local man has been arrested in connection with a series of explosions that rocked Communist Party offices in a northern Chinese province earlier this

week killing one person.

The suspect, named as 41-year-old Feng Zhijun, was captured during a raid on his home at 2:00am local time yesterday morning, police in Shanxi said, according to the state-run Xinhua news agency. The report said Feng admitted







TYPHOON HAIYAN LASHES PHILIPPINES

A resident walks past high waves pounding the sea wall amidst strong winds as Typhoon Haiyan hit the city of Legaspi, south of Manila, yesterday. Top right, a man walks past a fallen tree. One of the most intense typhoons on record whipped the Philippines yesterday, killing three people and terrifying millions as monster winds tore roofs off buildings and giant waves washed away flimsy homes. (Story on page 16)

PHOTO: AFP

Israel only suspect in Arafat death'

AFP, Ramallah

being the "only suspect" in Yasser Arafat's death yesterday, a day after Swiss laboratory experts said tests suggested he was killed by polonium poisoning.

2004, and the Palestinian government in Ramallah demanded France send it the results of a probe launched there over a year ago as soon as possible.

"We say that Israel is the one and only suspect in the case of Yasser Arafat's assassination, and we will continue to carry out a thorough investigation to find out and confirm all the details and all elements of the case," said Tawfiq Tirawi, the head of the Palestinian Authority's inquiry into the death.

Tirawi said Palestinian investigators had studied the findings of Swiss scientists released this week which "moderately" supported the notion that Arafat had been poisoned

"This is the crime of the 21st century," Tirawi told a news conference in Ramallah. "The fundamental (goal) is to find out who is behind the liquidation of Yasser Arafat."

Since Arafat's death, Palestinian society has long given currency to the rumour that Palestinian investigators accused Israel of he was murdered, with Israel the party most often blamed.

Following Tirawi's allegations, Israel once again firmly denied killing Arafat.

Arafat died in France on November 11, The Palestinian president died in Paris in 2004 at the age of 75 after falling sick a month earlier, but doctors were unable to specify the cause of death and no postmortem was carried out at the time.

> In November 2012, his remains were exhumed and samples taken, partly to investigate whether he had been poisoned with polonium -- a suspicion that grew after the assassination in that manner of Russian ex-spy and Kremlin critic Alexander Litvinenko in London in 2006.

Speaking to reporters in Lausanne on Thursday, the Swiss team said the test results neither confirmed nor denied polonium was the actual cause of his death, although they provided "moderate" backing for the idea he was poisoned by the rare and highly radioactive element.

They said the quantity of the deadly substance found on his remains pointed to the involvement of a third party.

Maldives goes | IRAN NUKE TALKS to poll today

AFP, Male

Maldives yesterday insisted presidential polls set for today would go ahead as it raced to avert a constitutional crisis while the deposed front-runner said he was hoping for a firstround victory.

"God willing, we will win this election in one round," said former president Mohamed Nasheed, in his last campaign speech.

Today's polls will be the third attempt to elect a president in as many months.

Maldives needs to have a new president in place by next Monday when the current presidential term ends to avoid a constitutional crisis.

The United States, Britain and Canada have warned that failure to go ahead with the rescheduled ballot could damage the Indian Ocean atoll nation and its fragile tourism-dependent economy.

Israel furious as parties near deal in Geneva

AFP, Ben Gurion

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday warned John Kerry as he was offering Iran the "deal of the century" as the US top diplomat travelled to talks in Geneva seeking a nuclear accord.

Netanyahu vowed that Israel would not be bound by any international agreement on Iran's nuclear programme and reserved the right to do whatever is necessary to defend itself -- a clear allusion to a preemptive military strike.

Iran slammed Netanyahu's "fear mongering", saying that the Jewish state, the region's sole if undeclared nuclear power, was "the major source of ... instability" and had no legal credibility.

Meeting with the US Secretary of State on the tarmac of Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv, the Israeli leader, a fierce opponent of any let-up in sanctions, lashed out at the world powers' cautious rapprochement with Iran and denounced the proposed agreement being hammered out in Switzerland.

Kerry flew in from Amman for a brief stopover in Tel Aviv where he held a twohour meeting with Netanyahu in a bid to soothe Israeli anger ahead of his arrival in Geneva for a landmark three-way meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton.

"Iran got the deal of the century and the international community got a bad deal, this is a very bad deal. Israel utterly rejects it," Netanyahu told reporters of the propos-

als under discussion.

"Israel is not obliged by this agreement and Israel will do everything it needs to

defend itself and the security of its people." Israel views a nuclear-armed Iran as an existential threat and has consistently refused to rule out a pre-emptive military strike to prevent that from happening.

From Geneva, Zarif hit back at





Zarif

Netanyahu, saying Israel did not "have any credibility, not in fact, nor in law. Washington, meanwhile, made clear that

Kerry's arrival in Geneva did not signal that there is a done deal with Iran. "In an effort to help narrow the differences in negotiations, Secretary Kerry will travel to Geneva," State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said. Washington, which has not had diplomatic

relations with Iran for three decades, has repeatedly said it is going into the talks with eyes wide open, seeking to explore the diplomatic possibilities of bringing its suspect nuclear programme under international control.

Iran is anxious for relief from crippling Western economic sanctions that have cut oil revenues by more than half, caused the value of the rial to plunge and pushed inflation above 40 percent.

Meth boom sweeping Asia

AFP, Bangkok

The United Nations sounded the alarm yesterday over record seizures of methamphetamine, with the drug flooding streets and clubs in Asia and enticing a new generation of users.

Last year 227 million methamphetamine pills were seized in East and Southeast Asia -- up 59 percent from the year before, and a more than seven-fold increase compared with 2008, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime said.

"If you look at the five year trends, since 2008 the seizures have increased pretty exponentially," said UNODC regional analyst Shawn Kelley, with data suggesting the trend continued into 2013.

He said the "huge spike" was due to increased efforts by law enforcement agencies as well as soaring production in Myanmar and an increase in the smuggling of drugs into Asia from other regions.

Methamphetamine can be ingested, smoked, snorted and injected. In its pill form -- known in Thailand as

"yaba", which means "crazy medicine" -it is used both as a party drug and pickme-up for low paid workers with long hours.

In China, methamphetamine is the second most popular drug of choice among the country's more than two mil-

lion registered users, after heroin. It is ranked as the top drug of concern

in Japan.

AFP, Dubai

Dubai municipality has dished out 2.8 million an initiative by the Gulf

emirate to fight obesity. The "Your Weight in Gold" campaign promised one gram of gold for each kilogram shed, provided the contestants lost at least two kilos by August 16.

Ahmad al-Sheikh, a 27-year-old Syrian architect, claimed the top prize of 63 grams of gold worth 10,048 dirhams after losing

US ready to work with

the Commonwealth summit in Sri Lanka.

PTI, Washington

The US would be willing to work with BJP's prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi, if the party is voted to power in the next general elections, senior Obama administration

"We will work with the leader of the world's largest democracy. There is no question about that," a senior US official on

Thursday said when asked about the prospects of working with an Indian government led by Bharatiya Janata

the Indian media and not at all an issue in the US government.

"I think that the United States had a very strong relationship with the previous Indian government when it was under BJP leadership," the US official said.

India is an enduring one, it is a bipartisan in the United States, irrespective of who is in office," the official said.

2 killed as militias clash

Two people were killed and 29 others wounded in deadly clashes between rival Libyan militias in Tripoli sparked by the death of one of their leaders, the health

Libya has been plagued by deadly unrest since Nato-backed rebels toppled the regime of now slain veteran dictator Muammar

Gaddafi in 2011. The latest fighting erupted following news that militia chief Nuri Friwan died Thursday of injuries incurred at a checkpoint manned by a rival group in in eastern Tripoli. To avenge Friwan's death, armed members of the Misrata militia

blocking the main road to

the area, witnesses said.

UK PM calls for probe into Sri Lanka abuse claims Colombo bars rights experts ahead of C'Wealth meet

AFP, London

Prime Minister David Cameron has promised

Britain's Tamil community he will push for an international probe into alleged war crimes and human rights abuses when he attends a Commonwealth summit in Sri Lanka. Cameron held talks with critics of

PHOTO:

AFP

President Mahinda Rajapaksa's rule to explain his decision to attend the meeting in Colombo on November 15-17 despite calls for a boycott. He also set out plans to visit the north of

the island to meet those caught up in the bloody 2009 suppression of the Tamil Tigers' independence battle. Sri Lanka, which faces international cen-

sure over alleged war crimes, has revoked visas of human rights experts for a meeting coinciding with a Commonwealth summit, the International Bar Association said Friday.

The London-based IBA's team of experts had their visas withdrawn ahead of their planned attendance at a seminar next week in Colombo, where the 53-member

Commonwealth bloc also holds its summit

-- an event that takes place every two years.

The Bar Association of Sri Lanka said the government's decision to block their foreign guest speakers amounted to a "clear assault" on freedom of speech and association.

The International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute was due to attend a seminar titled: "Making Commonwealth Values a Reality: the Rule of Law and the Independence of the Legal Profession."

IBAHRI said Sri Lankan authorities revoked the visas on Wednesday, saying they were unable to "facilitate any visits" during an "embargoed period from October 20 to November 20".

International rights groups have said up to 40,000 civilians may have been killed in the final offensive against Tamil Tiger rebels, a charge denied by Colombo.

Commonwealth heavyweight Canada has said it will boycott the meeting of heads of government in protest at alleged war crimes and rights abuses on the island.

Canada has also threatened to withdraw funding for the Commonwealth over the issue. The UN estimates the bloody war in Sri Lanka cost 100,000 lives between 1972 and 2009.

Zawahiri splits main Qaeda faction in Syria

AFP, Dubai

Al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri has ordered the disbanding of the main jihadist faction in Syria, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, in an audio message aired on Al-Jazeera yesterday. The head of al-Qaeda

also stressed that the Al-Nusra Front was the branch of the global jihadist group in Syria. "The Islamic State in Iraq

and the Levant is to be abolished, while the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) remains functioning," he said. Zawahiri said the leader

Bakr al-Baghdadi, "has made a mistake by establishing the Islamic state of Iraq and the Levant without asking for our permission, or even informing us."

of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu

ODDLY enough

causing the blasts.

Gold for weight losers in Dubai

dirhams (\$762,942) worth of gold in prizes to contestants in a weight-loss challenge,

26 kilos.

Narendra Modi

Britain's Prince Charles (4R) poses with priests during a visit to Akshardham

temple in New Delhi, yesterday. Britain's Prince Charles is touring India ahead of

officials here have said, asserting that the enduring bilateral relationship is to continue irrespective of the poll results.

Party's PM nominee Narendra Modi. Dismissing visa as a non-issue, the official said it was largely a creation of

"I think the relationship between the United States and

According to another US official "there is not a lot of angst about him (Modi)" in the US government, but it is believed that the administration has decided to maintain the status quo on this issue for the very reason that it might be seen as an interference in the internal domestic polity of India.

in Tripoli

AFP, Tripoli

ministry said yesterday.

drove to the Soug al-Jomaa district in vehicles equipped with anti-aircraft guns,