

NEWS IN brief

New Libya PM's home attacked

Armed men attacked the home of new Libyan Prime Minister Ahmed Miitig in the capital Tripoli early yesterday, an aide said. Miitig and his family were in the house at the time of the 3:00am attack, but escaped unharmed. The premier's guards opened fire on the attackers, wounding two of them and arresting...

Nigeria holds talks to free schoolgirls

Nigeria's ex-president Olusegun Obasanjo has met with people close to Boko Haram in an attempt to broker the release of more than 200 kidnapped schoolgirls, a source close to the talks told AFP. Reports of the talks emerged as Nigeria's Chief of Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshal Alex Badeh, said the girls had been located while casting doubt on the prospect of rescuing them by force.

Abbas, Peres to attend Vatican peace prayer

Pope Francis on Monday praised the "courage" of Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas after both agreed to come to the Vatican to pray with him for peace. Francis on Monday ended his three-day trip to the Middle East that was packed with powerful symbolism but with...

LeT denies attack on Indian consulate

Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) denied Monday that it was behind an attack last week by gunmen on an Indian diplomatic mission in Afghanistan, in a call to AFP. Afghan President Hamid Karzai said Monday that he had been informed by a Western intelligence agency that LeT was responsible for the assault on the consulate in Herat which left two policemen wounded.

Malaysia releases sat-data on MH370

Malaysia yesterday released raw satellite data used to determine that missing Flight MH370 went down in the southern Indian Ocean, information demanded by passengers' relatives who are frustrated over the failure to find any wreckage. The Department of Civil Aviation (DCA) said it had worked with Inmarsat to provide 47 pages of data communication logs recorded by the British satellite operator, as well as explanatory notes for public...



MODI'S FIRST DAY AT OFFICE

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (centre R) meets with his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif (centre L) at Hyderabad House in New Delhi, yesterday. He also held bilateral talks with Maldives President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom (top right), (Bottom L-R) Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay and Nepalese Prime Minister Sushil Koirala. Modi held landmark talks with his regional counterparts and announced his new cabinet yesterday, in a high-energy start to his term in office. (More news on page 01)

PHOTO: AAA



SMALL GOVERNMENT IN INDIA 'Super' ministers may disrupt power balance

Narendra Modi's decision to merge ministries to make it more 'organic', and increase coordination between different departments could enable faster decision-making and lead to efficiency. But according to informed observers, it runs the risk of centralising power, making the bureaucracy excessively powerful and disrupting the 'balance' between different interests in governance.

In a statement on Sunday night, Modi's office explained the rationale of his decision, and said it was in line with his policy of 'maximum governance, minimum government'. One cabinet minister would head a cluster of ministries working in complementary sectors, top layers of government would be downsized, and the focus would be on 'integrated and interconnected nature' of governance.

"In the short-term, it will enable swift decisions, but in the medium and long-term, it removes the balance that comes from internal friction, which is necessary for a complex and diverse economy and society," said Shekhar Singh, who has lectured Indian civil servants for close to two decades. Singh added that more responsibility on cabinet ministers may result in the increased power of bureaucrats. "And finally, if ministries with contradictory interests are lumped together, the dominant economic and infrastructure-related ministries will prevail. The weaker ministries like environment and social justice will get washed away."

In choosing his Cabinet, Modi has taken many bold decisions. He has sidelined party elders like LK Advani and overruled RSS recommendations. In the end, the 45-member team that he announced bore the stamp of one man, Modi himself. For the most important cabinet roles, Modi drew on his most experienced colleagues (all from his own party, which has a majority with 282 seats on its own). Rajnath Singh and Arun Jaitley, key enthusiasts who helped Modi overcome the many hurdles through his campaign to become the 15th prime minister of India, will constitute his core team.

**14 ministers have criminal cases** At least 14 ministers of the new Indian cabinet have criminal cases against them. Cabinet minister Uma Bharti has the longest list of criminal cases against her — 13 cases including two charges of attempt to murder and one charge of creating enmity between communities. Nitin Gadkari



Donetsk assault kills dozens

Putin concerned as Obama pledges full support to new Kiev leader

Ukraine yesterday said it had recaptured the airport in the eastern city of Donetsk after a day of air strikes and fierce gun battles with pro-Moscow separatist militants that left dozens of people dead. Caught up in the drama in Donetsk were a team of international monitors with the OSCE who have gone missing after being detained at a checkpoint. As fear gripped the city's streets, Russian President Vladimir Putin called on Ukraine to end its "punitive" operation in the rebel-held east and for talks between Kiev and the insurgents.

UKRAINE CRISIS

"The full support of the United States" but UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon urged Ukraine to use "exclusively peaceful means" to regain control in the east. Donetsk mayor Oleksandr Lukyanenko said two civilians and 38 combatants had died and another 31 were wounded, including Russians and possibly Chechens.

Monday's air strikes represented the most forceful action yet by Kiev in its battle to crush a bloody rebellion that has raged in the coal and steel belt since early April, threatening to plunge the former Soviet state into all-out civil war. Its action also revived tensions between Kiev and Moscow, which had initially said it was ready to work with the new leader of its western neighbour. Poroshenko said Monday the military would press on with its offensive against the insurgents.

The 48-year-old pro-Western chocolate tycoon also said he was ready to engage with the Russian leadership and was optimistic a meeting with Putin could be arranged soon. But Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov — who initially said Moscow was open to "pragmatic dialogue" with the new leader — declared that a visit by Poroshenko was "not being considered".

Kejriwal freed from Jail after submitting bail

NDTV ONLINE

Arvind Kejriwal, the leader of the Aam Aadmi Party who has been in Delhi's Tihar jail for the last six days, was released from jail yesterday. A Delhi court ordered his release from jail after he furnished a personal bond in a defamation case filed against him by BJP's Nitin Gadkari. He had since been insisting that the court should not ask him for one and argued that he has committed no crime.

On Monday, he moved the Delhi High Court for his immediate release. Maneka Gandhi, an estranged member of the famed Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, returned to political power on Monday when she was sworn in as a member of India's new right-wing government. Maneka, who took the oath with the rest of the 46-member Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) cabinet, is famously known as the "other daughter-in-law" who lost out in the fight for the Nehru-Gandhi political throne. The 57-year-old, expected to be women's development minister in a second stint in a Hindu nationalist BJP cabinet, is one of the two daughters-in-law of late Congress premier Indira Gandhi. The Nehru-Gandhis are associated with the left-wing and secular Congress party, which has dominated Indian politics since independence but was routed in the elections that brought the BJP back to power.

Maneka makes a comeback

AFP, New Delhi

Maneka fell badly foul of her mother-in-law Indira after her husband Sanjay died in a 1980 airplane stunt. After Sanjay's death, Indira's older son Rajiv entered politics at his mother's behest and this branch of the family has dominated since, while Maneka and her son Varun joined the BJP. The current president of Congress is Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born widow of Rajiv, while her son Rahul led the disastrous party campaign for this year's polls. Maneka and her sister-in-law Sonia once lived under the same roof while Indira was prime minister "but hated each other like poison", the late Indian writer Khushwant Singh, a family friend, told AFP in 2005.



Maneka Gandhi with Varun

The ill-feeling has spilled over to the next generation. Priyanka Gandhi, Sonia's younger daughter, has said her cousin Varun's BJP membership goes against every principle the Nehru-

never been seriously in doubt. But the Brotherhood, subjected to a brutal police crackdown in which hundreds of its supporters have been killed, has called for boycott and said it will not recognise the outcome. So too have key activists behind the 2011 uprising that toppled long-time strongman Hosni Mubarak in 2011. They fear Sisi is an autocrat in the making. The interior ministry said turnout on the first day of the election was about 16 million out of the country's 53 million eligible voters. But some Cairo polling stations visited by AFP were deserted in the first hours of voting yesterday.

The rival candidates have portrayed the vote as a choice between stability and the freedoms promised by the pro-democracy uprisings in the region. The Arab world's most populous nation has been rocked by turmoil since the 2011 uprising which has ravaged the economy and its vital tourism sector. Sisi has said "true democracy" will take a couple of decades, and suggested he will not tolerate protests disrupting the economy.



Sabbahi



Fattah al-Sisi

The decision to extend the voting into today was made to "give a chance to the largest possible number of voters to cast their ballots," said a member of the electoral commission quoted by state news agency MENA. The commission added later in a statement that the vote had been extended because of a "heatwave that resulted in a crowding of voters during the evening hours". A comfortable win for Sisi over his sole rival, the leftist Hamdeen Sabbahi, has



World's heaviest man dies

AFP, Monterrey

A Mexican man who was once the world's heaviest human when he weighed, weighing 597 kilos (1,316 pounds) at one point, has died at the age of 48, medical officials said Monday. Preliminary reports say Manuel Uribe died due to an irregular heartbeat and an ailment linked to the loss of fluids in his legs, an official at the University Hospital in the northern city of Monterrey told AFP. After he was listed as the world's heaviest human by the Guinness World Records in 2007, Uribe began a diet that brought his weight down to 394 kilos. But he was taken to the hospital on May 2, transported with a crane from his home because he could not walk. Uribe got married in 2008 after being taken to the ceremony in a crane. A US television station had bought the broadcast rights for the event.

BREACH OF PRIVACY Zuckerberg summoned by Iran court

REUTERS, Dubai

A conservative Iranian court opened a case against instant messaging services WhatsApp and Instagram while also summoning Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg over complaints of privacy violation, state news agency ISNA reported yesterday. The Iranian court in the southern province of Fars opened the cases against the social networks after citizens complained of breaches of privacy. Zuckerberg, whose company owns WhatsApp and Instagram, is unlikely to heed the summons. The case underscores the growing struggle between moderate Iranian president Hassan Rohani's drive to increase Internet freedoms and demands by the conservative judiciary for tighter controls.

EU 'too big, too bossy': UK PM

AFP, Brussels

EU leaders yesterday wrestled for a joint response to a dismal European vote that saw dramatic gains by radical anti-establishment parties, with Britain, Germany and France calling for EU reforms. The anti-EU surge shows the European Union has got "too big and too bossy", said British Prime Minister David Cameron on arriving for an informal summit due to take stock of the election disaster.

The vote "is a clear message that we cannot just shrug off... and carry on as before," he added. "The EU has got too big, too bossy, too interfering and needs to concentrate on growth and jobs." France's President Francois Hollande, after his humiliating thrashing at the hands of the far-right National Front, also took aim at Brussels: "Europe must take heed of what happened in France," he said. The National Front topped the vote, leaving Hollande's ruling Socialists in third place with a mere 14 percent. Also on the leaders' dinner menu — and perhaps just as difficult to digest — will be tough talks on the nomination of new leaders for the different Brussels bureaucracies, in particular the presidency of the powerful European Commission. The four-day European Parliament election that ended Sunday served up a clear message of voters fed up with economic distress, belt-tightening austerity, immigration and, most of all, aloof and meddling bureaucrats in Brussels. After decades of striving to tighten EU integration with

LOW TURNOUT Egypt extends polling

AFP, Cairo

Egypt gave voters an extra day to vote for a president yesterday, in a surprise move amid a reportedly low turnout in the first election since the overthrow of the Islamist leader. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the ex-army chief who toppled Islamist president Mohamed Morsi last year, is the clear frontrunner. But his campaign had hoped for a large turnout for a decisive show of support. After reports of a meagre turnout on the first day of voting on Monday, his backers and sympathetic media harangued voters to go and vote as Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood had called for a boycott. The decision to extend the voting into today was made to "give a chance to the largest possible number of voters to cast their ballots," said a member of the electoral commission quoted by state news agency MENA.

The commission added later in a statement that the vote had been extended because of a "heatwave that resulted in a crowding of voters during the evening hours". A comfortable win for Sisi over his sole rival, the leftist Hamdeen Sabbahi, has

Geo TV apologises to Pak Army, ISI

PTI, Islamabad

Jang group-owned Geo TV network has apologised to Pakistan Army, the powerful spy agency ISI and its chief for leveling allegations against them over an assassination bid on leading anchor Hamid Mir. In a published apology on Monday in English daily 'The News' and Urdu newspaper 'Jang', the media group clarified that they were respectful of Pakistani forces and its leadership. "We have always appreciated their sacrifices to safeguard our borders and the security of our country," the apology letter said.

"After serious retrospection, editorial debates, feedback and engagement with all parties, directly and indirectly, we have concluded that our coverage immediately after the tragic and unnerving attack on Hamid Mir on April 19 was excessive, distressful and emotional," the media group said. It accepted that the coverage of the incident was "misleading, disproportionate and inappropriate, giving impression of a campaign," although it followed current media practices including the version of the armed forces.