

NEWS IN brief

Modi thanks Sharif for gift

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday thanked his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif for gifting his mother a "wonderful" white sari in more warm words between the South Asian leaders. "Nawaz Sharif... has sent a wonderful white sari for my mother," Modi tweeted from his personal account. "I am really grateful to him & will send it to my mother

Militant commander killed in NW Pakistan

A senior Taliban commander known for training suicide bombers was killed yesterday in a clash between rival factions in Pakistan's restive northwest, officials and militant sources said. Ashiqullah Mehsud of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan was killed during a clash with a recent break-away faction near the town of Mir Ali in the North Waziristan tribal district

D-Day leaders to dine in resistance landmark

The chateau where heads of state attending the 70th anniversary of D-Day will sit down for lunch today played a celebrated role in French resistance to the Nazis. Queen Elizabeth II, US President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin are among the dignitaries who will be treated to a locally-sourced meal produced by Michelin-starred chefs at the Chateau

Palestinians to turn to UN over Israel settlement drive

The Palestinians said yesterday they would appeal to the United Nations after Israel announced plans for 1,500 new settler homes in response to the formation of a Hamas-backed unity government. The new government of technocrats is recognised by both the European Union and the United States but Israel has vowed to boycott what it says is a "government of terror" supported

Afghan border attack kills 4 Pak soldiers

Militants killed four soldiers and wounded three others on Wednesday in a cross-border attack on Pakistani checkpoints situated along the troubled frontier with Afghanistan, officials said. The posts came under fire from the Afghan side early on Wednesday morning in the Manozangal and Mukha Tops areas of the Bajaur tribal region, one of seven such districts border-



Refugees from Crimea and eastern Ukrainian regions hold placards reading (L-R) "Stop Putin!", "I want to live in my house!", "Legal status for Crimean" during a rally to demand a legal legislation of their status in front of the Ukrainian parliament in Kiev yesterday. (Inset) Refugee children draw symbolic maps depicting their regions and cities, on the sidewalk at the entrance of the parliament during the rally. At least 10,000 people have been driven from their homes since the start of the Ukraine crisis, with Crimean Tatars the hardest-hit, according to the UN.

Ukraine closes border posts after night assault

Ukrainian authorities said yesterday they had closed three checkpoints on the border with Russia after nightly assaults by separatists. The move came as the government vowed to beef up its security presence to counter pro-Russian rebels, amid reports of continued fighting in the country's east. The three checkpoints, all in the volatile Lugansk region, were targeted in attacks by pro-Russian rebels overnight Wednesday to yesterday, the border guards said in a statement. "After an exchange of fire, the threat to the lives of people crossing the border prompted the evacuation of civilians and border guards at the checkpoints." The statement added that Chervonopartyzansk, Dolzhansky and Chervona Mogyla checkpoints had been temporarily closed, and that the Russian side had been notified. Insurgents fighting for an independent "People's Republic" remain in control of large parts of eastern Ukraine, and officials reported continued sporadic small arms fire yesterday. Donetsk, home to about one million people, has been reduced to a state of near-anarchy following heavy fighting between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian rebels around its international airport. The fighting has left about 40 dead according to reports, and the airport will remain closed at least until the end of the month, as the security of flights cannot be guaranteed. The streets of Donetsk are nearly deserted and under the control of insurgents, who man numerous checkpoints in the area. Ukrainian forces, who launched an "anti-terrorist operation" nearly two months ago, intensified their activities on Tuesday, concentrating their efforts on the rebel stronghold of Slavyansk, more than 100 kilometres north of Donetsk. Two Ukrainian soldiers have lost their lives in this week's fighting, while numerous insurgents have been killed.



Modi picks Bhutan for first foreign visit

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will undertake his first visit to Bhutan, the friendliest among all neighbouring countries, this month. Modi will be travelling to Bhutan and will hold talks on key bilateral and regional issues with the leadership of the Himalayan kingdom, top government sources said last night. The visit reflects the importance India attaches to its ties with Bhutan whose Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay was among the leaders from Saarc countries who attended Modi's swearing-in on May 26. After the swearing-in, Modi had held bilateral meeting with the Bhutanese leader. It is reliably learnt that an official team will be leaving for Thimphu today to set up the visit and work out the relevant logistics. The visit is likely to take place after the ongoing Parliament session, possibly in the third week of June, reports The Indian Express. The decision was taken over the past few days during which Modi's tour calendar was worked out. The PM, sources said, made it known that he would want to begin his visits from the neighbourhood, both to reach out as well as a policy priority. It may be recalled that Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had invited Modi to make her country as the first foreign destination for his official visit. On Bangladesh, sources said, the government still has to make up its mind on crucial agreements like the land boundary settlement, to which the BJP has not extended support and has been under constant pressure from its Assam unit. Modi's visit will also signal strong support to the Bhutanese monarchy's efforts at ushering in democracy in the Himalayan country, sources said.

New Kiev mayor vows 'zero tolerance' on graft

Vitali Klitschko, Ukraine's boxing champion turned pro-European protest leader, was sworn in as mayor of the capital Kiev yesterday, promising "zero tolerance" of corruption. Dressed in a dark suit and red tie, the former world boxing champion assumed his new title at Kiev's city hall, which has been controlled by pro-European protesters since December. "Change in our country will come from the capital, from Kiev," said Klitschko, who won 56.7 percent in the election for mayor, held at the same time as the presidential polls on May 25. "Kiev will become a true European capital," Klitschko vowed. "I declare a policy of zero tolerance on corruption," he said, promising an audit of all services provided by the authorities. "I don't promise it will be paradise in this city from tomorrow. We have many problems we need to solve together." Klitschko, who heads the pro-European Udar party, emerged as one of the leaders of the movement that ousted former president Viktor Yanukovich this spring, ending an administration widely seen as tainted by graft. He initially ran for the presidency but withdrew to put the weight of the pro-European camp behind frontrunner Petro Poroshenko, who ended up with a 54.7 percent majority and will be sworn in on Saturday. "I am happy that our alliance with Petro Poroshenko has secured such a level of confidence among the people of Kiev," Klitschko said. "The cooperation of the president, the Udar party and other democratic forces in parliament will enable us to put in place a programme of change."



INDIAN LOK SABHA

Swearing-in of 539 MPs starts

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi took oath as a member of the Lok Sabha yesterday, becoming the first of the 539 MPs to be sworn in as a member of the 16th lower House of parliament constituted after recent parliamentary elections in which his Bharatiya Janata Party swept to power with a landslide victory. Modi, 64, was sworn in as the lawmaker as he made his debut in parliament, followed by BJP patriarch Lal Krishna Advani and opposition Congress president Sonia Gandhi in the swearing-in ceremony of the newly-elected MPs. They were followed by PunroA Sangma (National People's Party), Arjun Charan Sethi (Biju Janata Dal), and Biren Singh Engti (Congress). Home Minister Rajnath Singh was first of the Cabinet Ministers to take oath, followed by External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj who spoke in Sanskrit to be sworn in. Railway Minister Sadananda Gowda took the oath in Kannada, his mother tongue. Attired in a white kurta and white jacket, Modi greeted Sonia Gandhi with folded hands when she reached his seat to greet him while going around the well after taking oath. He shook hands with the pro tem speaker Kamal Nath of Congress party and was greeted with a loud thumping of desks by the members. The total strength of the Lok Sabha is 543 but its effective strength stands at 539 now. Modi had resigned from Vadodara (in Gujarat state), one of the two parliamentary constituencies seats from where he had contested. Samajwadi Party president Mulayam Singh Yadav had quit his Mainpuri seat in Uttar Pradesh state while retaining Azamgarh. Telangana Rashtra Samithi chief K Chandrasekhar Rao gave up his Medak seat in newly-formed Telangana state after becoming the chief minister of India's 29th state. The Beed Lok Sabha constituency in Maharashtra state fell vacant after India's Rural Development Minister Gopinath Munde died in a road accident in Delhi on Tuesday.

A woman speaker; second time in history

India will have a woman Speaker of Lok Sabha, for the second time in its parliamentary history. Veteran Bharatiya Janata Party leader Sumitra Mahajan, 72, will be the Speaker of the new Lok Sabha, as 19 senior leaders drawn from all parties, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, moved motions today proposing her name for the high office. The first woman Speaker of the country was Meira Kumar who was defeated in recent parliamentary elections. Mahajan was the only name that was proposed as the deadline for filing nomination for the post came to a close yesterday. The formal election for the Speaker's post will take place today. She is an eight-term Lok Sabha member from central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh.



Afghan protesters shout slogans against Pakistan during a demonstration in Jalalabad, the capital of eastern Nangarhar province yesterday. Hundreds of residents of Nangarhar province from different districts in Afghanistan protested against rocket attacks and recent airstrikes by Pakistani forces along the Afghan border.

CANADA SHOOTING Manhunt as police officers killed in Moncton

A manhunt is under way in the Canadian city of Moncton after three police officers were shot dead and two hurt. Police said they were searching for Justin Bourque, 24, who was "armed and dangerous", and tweeted a picture of a suspect with weapons. Officials have warned people to stay inside and lock their doors. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police told the BBC the officers were shot responding to reports of an armed man wearing camouflage clothing. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has offered his condolences to those affected. "The sacrifice of these brave officers will be honoured and remembered," he said. Witnesses said they heard the first shots in north-west Moncton at about 20:00 local time (23:00 GMT) on Wednesday. More shots were reported about two hours later. Police searched through the night and continued their operations at daybreak, with officers combing wooded areas. Schools are closed and buses are not running.

DALAI LAMA SNUB Tibetan leader dismayed with Norway

The leader of Tibet's exiled government criticised yesterday the Norwegian government's decision not to meet the Dalai Lama, saying it should have resisted Chinese pressure. "It's unfortunate that the Norwegian leadership did not meet with the Dalai Lama because of the tremendous pressure of the Chinese government," Lobsang Sangay said in the northern Indian hill station of Dharamsala where he was launching a fresh campaign for autonomy for Tibetans in China. "Norway always has 10 percent surplus in its economy," said Sangay, prime minister of the exiled government. "Of all the countries, Norway should be the least dependent on the Chinese economy," he told AFP. "It seems unfortunate that the incident has happened which is clearly sad." Oslo has described its decision to snub the revered spiritual leader during a three-day trip to the country last month as a "necessary sacrifice" to normalise its relations with China. Beijing stopped all high-level contact with Norway after the Nobel Peace Prize was given to Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo in 2010. Oslo has faced public criticism for its decision to avoid the Tibetan spiritual leader who was in the country to

Chuck Hagel defends Taliban deal

US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel said the decision to strike a deal with the Taliban for the release of a US soldier was unanimous in the White House. Hagel told the BBC the agreement was made because it was believed Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl's life was "in peril". Barack Obama's administration had to act quickly and without first consulting Congress, he added. Sgt Bergdahl was freed after five years in captivity, in exchange for five Taliban prisoners from Guantanamo Bay. The White House is required to notify Congress 30 days before transferring detainees from Guantanamo Bay but decided that waiting was too risky. "It was our judgement based on the information that we had that his life, his health, were in peril," Hagel told the BBC. "I will tell you what I know and I made a judgement on this too - that would have seriously imperilled us ever getting him out."

