

# NEWS IN brief

## Modi joins Instagram

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi  
An admirer of social networking sites for quite a few years, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday made his debut on Instagram, the platform for sharing photos and videos. He shared his first photo from the 25th Asean Summit from Nay Pyi Taw in Myanmar, an official statement said.

## US has no role in HK protests: Obama

AFP, Beijing  
The US has no role in pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, President Barack Obama said in Beijing yesterday, despite Chinese accusations that foreign forces are involved. Protesters have been occupying key intersections in Hong Kong for more than six weeks calling for fully free polls in 2017.

## China shows off new stealth fighter

AFP, Zhuhai  
China's new stealth jet fighter rocketed skywards yesterday as Beijing puts on an unprecedented display of openness - and military force - at the country's premier airshow. Defence analysts say the J-31 is China's answer to the United States' F-35, though the Chinese jet lags behind the American one technologically.

## 'US never planned to take Laden alive'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK  
The US Navy Seal who claims to have killed Osama bin Laden says the team had no intention of capturing the al-Qaeda leader alive as they planned to raid his compound. Rob O'Neill was publicly named for the first time last week.

## 'I am not Malala' day observed

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK  
One month after Malala Yousafzai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her work promoting girls' education, a group of schools in Pakistan has announced an "I am not Malala" day. Now living and studying in Birmingham, back in Pakistan she is regularly portrayed as an insidious Western influence promoting an ideology that is against her country and religion. "I am not Malala" day was reportedly marked on Monday with walks, seminars and press conferences.

## Holy Grail of watches



MAIL ONLINE  
The 'Holy Grail' of watches sold at auction on Tuesday to a mystery buyer - for a world record £15.1 million.

Wealthy collectors descended on Geneva, Switzerland, for the sale of the Henry Graves Supercomplication. Made by Patek Philippe, it is the most complex watch ever assembled entirely by hand. Patek Philippe was commissioned by New York banker Henry Graves to make the watch in 1925. It took Swiss horologists three years to research and a further five to make, completing it in 1933. The watch has a gold openface minute repeating chronograph clockwatch with Westminster chimes. It also features a perpetual calendar, moon phases, sidereal time, power reserve, and indications for time of sunset and sunrise and the night sky of New York City.



Myanmar President Thein Sein (C) hold hands with Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang (C-L) and US President Barack Obama (C-R) as East Asia Summit leaders pose for a family picture ahead of a gala dinner at the Myanmar International Convention Center in Myanmar's capital Naypyidaw, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

# Tension spirals

### Nato reports Russian troops in separatist east as Kiev readies for combat

AFP, Donetsk  
Nato yesterday accused Russia of sending fresh columns of tanks, troops and military hardware into Ukraine as Kiev said it was preparing for a return to combat in the war-torn east. Ukraine's warning will fuel fears of a return to all-out conflict despite a two-month-old ceasefire deal which has halted fighting along much of the frontline but not stopped shelling at strategic flashpoints. The UN Security Council was set to hold an emergency session to discuss the Ukraine crisis at 1930 GMT, with representatives from the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) set to give an update on the situation on the ground. Defence Minister Stepan Poltorak said Kiev was getting set for a possible new round of fighting after seeing "increased activity" by Russia and pro-Moscow rebels across the region. "The main task I see is to prepare for combat operations. We are doing this, we are readying our reserves," Poltorak said at the start of a cabinet meeting. His comments came as Nato's supreme commander threw his

weight behind allegations that Moscow has stepped up the flow of armaments across the frontier in the past few days, the first such accusations from the US-led alliance since the signing of the truce deal September 5. "We have seen columns of Russian equipment, primarily Russian tanks, Russian artillery, Russian air defence systems and Russian combat troops entering into Ukraine," US General Philip Breedlove said in Sofia. Moscow immediately rejected the allegations, the latest in stream of denials that it is involved in the fighting that has rocked east Ukraine since early April. Russia, however, openly gives political backing to the rebels could have acquired the heavy weaponry typical of a regular army. Moscow deployed unmarked troops to seize the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea in March, first denying they were its forces before admitting it had sent in soldiers. The Ukraine crisis has sent relations between Russia and the West plummeting to their lowest point since the Cold War.

## UKRAINE CRISIS

# Obama in Myanmar to push faltering reforms

### UN chief highlights humanitarian plights of Rohingyas

AFP, Naypyidaw  
US President Barack Obama landed in Myanmar yesterday as the once cloistered nation hosted its biggest gathering of world leaders since shedding junta rule, but concerns over the pace of democratic reforms surfaced immediately. Obama, who will meet Southeast Asian leaders and attend the East Asia Summit in the purpose-built capital of Naypyidaw, signalled he would throw his political might into reigniting the democratic process. "In some areas there has been a slowdown in reforms, and even some steps backward," Obama said in an interview with news website The Irrawaddy published just before he arrived on Wednesday night from China. "In addition to restrictions on freedom of the press, we continue to see violations of basic human rights and abuses in the country's ethnic areas, including reports of extra-judicial killings, rape and forced labour." Earlier, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, also in Naypyidaw, highlighted the "serious humanitarian issue" of Myanmar's displaced Muslim



Rohingya minority. Around 140,000 Rohingyas languish in fetid camps after bouts of violence left scores of people dead - mostly from the Muslim group - in eastern Rakhine State.

OBAMA MEETS MODI  
Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a brief interaction tonight with Barack Obama during which the US President called him a "man of action". Modi and Obama met each other for the second time in six weeks at a Gala Dinner in Myanmar capital after the President played host to the Prime Minister at the White House in Washington in the last week of September. ASEAN LEADERS HOLD TALKS  
Earlier, the Association of Southeast Nations (Asean) held its leaders' meeting in the culmination of Myanmar's year-long chairmanship of the 10-member bloc. Key issues discussed included the row between several Asean members and China over territory in the South China Sea, and greater economic integration ahead of a Southeast Asian trade union mooted for 2015. Asean leaders are due to meet with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang today during the East Asia Summit, which groups the Southeast Asian bloc with the US, China, India, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Russia and New Zealand.



A Palestinian woman plays with her child on the rubble of their family's home which was destroyed during the 50-day Gaza war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip yesterday, in Khan Yunis' Khuzaa neighbourhood in the southern Gaza Strip near the Israeli border. PHOTO: AFP

# Israel announces new Jerusalem settlements

### Kerry to meet Palestinian leaders amid soaring tensions

AFP, Jerusalem  
Israel approved new settler homes in east Jerusalem yesterday despite mounting unrest, as US Secretary of State John Kerry was set for talks with the Palestinian leader on easing tensions. The new settlement construction was announced just hours after suspected Jewish extremists torched a West Bank mosque, in another development likely to inflame tempers in an already heated atmosphere. Months of unrest have escalated in recent days, spreading from annexed east Jerusalem to the West Bank and Arab communities across Israel, raising fears of a new Palestinian uprising. With no signs of tensions abating, Kerry was set to arrive in Jordan for talks with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas. An Israeli committee meanwhile approved plans to build 200 homes in Ramot, a neighbourhood of annexed east

Jerusalem, despite recent settlement announcements sparking outrage among the Palestinians. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon demanded that both sides do everything possible "to avoid further exacerbating an already tense environment". Since the current round of violence began five months ago with the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers by militants, at least 17 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank, according to an AFP count. FRENCH MPS TO VOTE ON RECOGNISING PALESTINE ON NOV 28  
Meanwhile French lawmakers are to vote on November 28 on a proposal urging the government to recognise Palestine as a state, a parliamentary source said. The non-binding but highly symbolic vote would follow a similar vote in the British parliament and after Sweden announced it formally recognised the state of Palestine.

# Afghan poppy cultivation at record high: UN

AFP, Kabul  
Opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan reached a record high in 2014, a United Nations report revealed yesterday, highlighting the failure of the multi-billion-dollar US-led campaign to crack down on the lucrative crop. The total area under cultivation was about 224,000 hectares in 2014, a seven percent increase on last year, according to the Afghanistan Opium Survey released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Just 74,000 hectares was being used to grow poppies in 2002, a year after the Taliban regime was toppled. Despite a decade of costly US and international counter-narcotics programmes, poppy farming has boomed in the south and west regions, which include the most volatile parts of the country where the Taliban insurgency is strongest. With US-led Nato troops withdrawing from Afghanistan, fears are rising that worsening instability could trigger further growth in opium culti-

vation as Afghan security forces struggle to push back the resurgent Taliban. Poppy farmers are often taxed by the Taliban, who use the cash to help fund their insurgency against government and NATO forces. Despite the presence of tens of thousands of foreign troops since a



US-led invasion ousted the Taliban, Afghanistan grows about 80 percent of the world's opium, which is used to produce highly addictive heroin. The survey said that potential opium production was estimated at 6,400 tons in 2014, a rapid increase of 17 percent from 2013, but not as high as the record 7,400 tons produced in 2007.

# Maharashtra CM wins trust vote

### 5 MLAs suspended over injuring state governor

PTI, Mumbai  
Amid high drama, the 13-day-old Devendra Fadnavis government won the trust motion in the Maharashtra assembly through a voice vote on Wednesday, drawing angry reactions from Shiv Sena and Congress which accused the ruling BJP of failing to prove its majority and "strangling democracy". As the speaker declared the motion passed after the "Ayes" and "Noes", there was a storm of protest by MLAs of Shiv Sena and Congress MLAs. Meanwhile, 5 Congress MLAs were suspended from the assembly for two years for causing injury to governor Ch Vidyasagar Rao when they tried to block his entry into the house to address a joint sitting of the bicameral legislature. The MLAs were protesting against the "unconstitutional" manner in which the motion of confidence in the Devendra Fadnavis government was passed. While moving the resolution, sources said the five MLAs had got close to the governor and apparently jostled him, injuring his hand.



Chelsea Clinton and her husband Marc Mezvinsky arrive for the 2014 Glamour Women of the Year Awards in New York on Monday to honor courageous and inspiring women who are changing the world. The new mom hit the red carpet for the first time since her daughter's birth on 27th of September, and she looked amazing. PHOTO: AFP

# Kurds cut ISIS supply route to Kobane

AFP, Beirut  
Kurdish forces fighting the Islamic State group in the flashpoint Syrian town of Kobane yesterday cut off a key supply route used by the jihadists, a monitoring group said. "The (Syrian Kurdish) People's Protection Units (YPG) targeted IS positions behind the (strategic) Mashta al-Nur hill and cut off the Halanj-Ain al-Arab road south of the town," said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, using the Arabic name Ain al-Arab for Kobane. It said 16 ISIS members were killed in the advance. The YPG has been fighting the ISIS since mid-September in Kobane. The Syrian Kurds are backed by Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga fighters and Syrian rebels. Kobane has become a major symbol of resistance against the IS, which in recent months has seized large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria. A US-led coalition on September 23 launched air strikes against ISIS positions in Syria, including around Kobane. On Wednesday, the Observatory said at least 865 people, 746 of them IS fighters, have been killed in the strikes. Another 50 were civilians, including eight children, while 68 of those killed were members of Syria's al-Qaeda affiliate. A car bomb near a main Baghdad square followed by a suicide bombing at a nearby police headquarters killed 11 people and wounded 23 yesterday, security and medical officials said. Baghdad is hit by near-daily bombings and shootings that kill hundreds of people each month. The violence comes as Iraqi security forces and pro-government fighters battle to push back the jihadist group, which has seized significant territory since June.

# EBOLA CRISIS

## Death toll tops 5,000

REUTERS, Geneva  
The death toll from the Ebola outbreak in West Africa's three hardest-hit countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone has risen to 5,147 out of 14,068 cases at the end of Nov. 9, the World Health Organization (WHO) said yesterday. A further 13 deaths and 30 cases have been recorded in five other countries - Nigeria and Senegal, which have stamped out the virus, as well as Mali, Spain and the United States, it said. "Steep increases" in Ebola cases continue in Sierra Leone, with 421 new infections reported in the week to Nov 9, while there have been a total of four confirmed and probable cases in Mali and four deaths, the UN agency said in its latest update.