

NEWSIN brief

John Kerry to meet with Putin in Russia

Top US diplomat John Kerry headed to Russia yesterday for his first visit in two years to meet President Vladimir Putin, as American ties with Moscow have plunged over the Ukraine crisis.

Kerry will hold talks today with Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in the Black Sea resort of Sochi, before traveling to Turkey for a key

Malaysia PM claims party's support despite scandal

Malaysia's embattled prime minister said his party's ruling council gave him its "undivided support" at a meeting yesterday, amid intensifying speculation over his future in the wake of a financial scandal.

The comments by Najib Razak followed a weekend in which pressure on him mounted over allegations of fraud and embezzlement at a debt-ridden, state-owned investment company that he

Swedish Supreme Court rejects Assange appeal

Sweden's Supreme Court said yesterday it had rejected an appeal by WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange against his arrest warrant for alleged rape and sexual assault.

Sweden issued the arrest warrant in 2010 following allegations from two Swedish women, one who claimed rape and another who alleged sexual assault.

Jazeera reporter sues channel over detention

An Al-Jazeera journalist on retrial in Egypt has sued his Qatari employer for \$100 million, his lawyers said yesterday, claiming the satellite network was negligent and supported black-listed Islamists.

Mohamed Fahmy and two other Al-Jazeera journalists were sentenced last year to up to 10 years in prison on charges of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood movement in its coverage of protests that

Bus crash in Indian Kashmir kills 23

An overloaded bus swerved off a highway and plunged down a gorge in Indian-administered Kashmir yesterday, killing 23 people on board, police said.

The accident happened when the driver lost control near the mountainous village of Marotthi, around 250 kilometres south of the



British Prime Minister David Cameron (C) poses for a group photo with newly-elected Conservative MPs at the Houses of Parliament in central London yesterday.

US-IRAN NUKE TALKS Saudi king skips Obama summit

Newly crowned Saudi King Salman has refused an invitation to attend a landmark summit hosted by President Barack Obama, amid angst over US-Iran nuclear negotiations.

Obama had invited six Gulf kings, emirs and sultans to the presidential retreat at Camp David, seeking to shore up wavering trust while Washington negotiates with regional power Tehran.

Obama's plans now lie in tatters, with only two heads of state slated to attend the Thursday meeting.

Saudi Arabia's embassy in Washington said Sunday that recently named Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef would instead lead the Saudi delegation to the meeting.

The king's youthful son, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman -- who is tipped as a possible future successor and who has driven recent military operations in Yemen -- will also attend.

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said Salman would miss the meeting "due to the timing of the summit, the scheduled humanitarian ceasefire in Yemen and the opening of the King Salman Center for Humanitarian Aid," according to the embassy statement.

Oman's Sultan Qaboos has been ill, and diplomats said Muscat will be represented by the deputy prime minister.

Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan will attend, according to diplomats, as United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan is also unwell and has not appeared in public since having an operation after a stroke last year.

Even before becoming king, Salman was rumored to be ill, and his son and the now crown prince have played oversized roles in Saudi foreign policy.

MEDITERRANEAN MIGRANTS

Libya rejects EU military plans

Libya has criticised EU proposals to authorise the use of force against people smugglers taking migrants across the Mediterranean to Europe.

The Libyan ambassador to the UN told the BBC that the EU's intentions were unclear and "very worrying".

The EU is seeking a UN mandate to allow military action to destroy or halt smugglers' boats in Libyan waters.

The measures are part of the EU's proposed plans to stop migrants drowning in the Mediterranean.

The UN estimates that 60,000 people have already tried to cross the Mediterranean this year. More than 1,800 people are feared to have died making the journey in 2015 - a 20-fold increase on the same period in 2014.

Many of the migrants are fleeing conflict or poverty in countries such as Syria, Eritrea, Nigeria and Somalia.

The EU is also discussing plans to expand maritime rescue services and introduce a quota system for distributing asylum seekers between EU

members. The European Commission is expected to propose the quota system on Wednesday, along with plans to increase legal means for migrants to come to Europe so that they do not turn to smugglers.

A quota system would need to be agreed by EU states and is highly con-



troversial, with many countries fiercely opposed.

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini is taking her case for international intervention in Libya to the UN Security Council in New York later yesterday.

The EU has proposed "systematic efforts to identify, capture and destroy

vessels before they are used by traffickers".

Diplomats are thought to be drafting a UN Security Council resolution that would allow EU vessels to conduct operations against smugglers in Libyan waters, under chapter seven of the UN charter that authorises the use of force to maintain international peace.

However, Libya's ambassador to the UN, Ibrahim Dabbashi, told the BBC that his country was against the proposal.

"The Libyan government has not been consulted by the European Union. They have left us in the dark about what their intentions are, what kind of military actions they are going to take in our territorial waters, so that is very worrying," he told the World Service's Newsday programme.

"We want to know... how they can distinguish between the fishers' boats and the traffickers' boats," he added.

Rights group Amnesty International has warned that military action could leave migrants trapped in Libya in desperate conditions.

NEPAL QUAKE

Red Cross launches texting service

The Red Cross and a Nepalese telecom firm launched an emergency texting service yesterday to send out real-time updates on aid distribution and weather warnings across the quake-hit Himalayan nation.

The free messaging service, set up by the charity and mobile network provider Nepal Telecom, will target users according to their location, offering them potentially "life-saving" information on weather and health hazards in time for the approaching monsoon.

The 7.8-magnitude earthquake sparked avalanches and landslides in northern Nepal, including on Mount Everest base camp, and killed more than 8,000 people, leaving thousands more homeless and in desperate need of food, clean water and shelter.

"As earthquake survivors battle to recover from this disaster, they are now faced with (the) prospect of the monsoon season which is just weeks away," said Dev Ratna Dhakhwa, Secretary General of the Nepal Red Cross.

"This life-saving service provides real-time information and warnings on flood risks, disease outbreaks and health advice to geographically targeted communities at the touch of a button," Dhakhwa said in a press release.

Did Obama lie about Laden's killing?

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist has claimed that Barack Obama lied about the killing of Osama bin Laden for his own political advantage, and that the former al-Qaeda leader was in fact an unarmed "invalid" when he was shot by US Navy Seals in 2011.

President Obama was accused of making up a number of key details that were fed to the public in the wake of the assassination, including that Bin Laden died in a fire-fight and that the Pakistani government had no role to play in the mission.

Seymour Hersh, whose previous investigations have included the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government, cited unnamed intelligence officials as part of what he called his "alternative history of the war on terror".

Writing in the London Review of Books, Hersh claimed that rather than hiding out in a compound in Abbottabad, Bin Laden was in fact being held prisoner by the Pakistani intelligence services when he was killed.

The article quotes "a retired senior intelli-

gence official who was knowledgeable about the initial intelligence about Bin Laden's presence in Abbottabad", who said Pakistan had secretly detained the wanted terrorist for years to use "as leverage against Taliban and al-Qaeda activities".

In the immediate aftermath of the killing, Obama told the media the mission had been a secret incursion into Pakistan and that a small team of Seals fought a dramatic gun battle with men inside Bin Laden's compound.

But according to Hersh's source, senior Pakistani officials willingly gave up Bin Laden's location to maintain good relations with the US and in exchange for a slice of a \$25 million reward fund.

They also facilitated the Navy Seals mission by cutting power to the compound and diverting the local military, it was alleged, and had even agreed with the White House upon an elaborate back story where it would be claimed that Bin Laden was killed in a drone strike in mountains on the Pakistan-Afghan border.



Team members of Medecins Sans Frontieres hand over medicines to residents in the village of Lee of Gorkha district some 100 kms north-west of Kathmandu in Nepal yesterday.

Delhi police officer hits woman with brick

BBC ONLINE

A policeman in the Indian capital, Delhi, has been arrested after television channels broadcast images of him attacking a woman with a brick.

In the footage, the policeman hits the woman in the back with the brick after she hurls a brick at his motorbike.

The video, shot by a passerby, led to outrage. The officer is now suspended.

The woman, who was taking her two daughters home from school on her scooter, says the fight began after the officer asked her for a bribe.



ing a red light and demanded 200 rupees (\$3; £2).

The woman said she then asked for a receipt, which he refused to provide.

The footage shows the woman hurling a brick first - at the officer's motorbike. But her older daughter told the NDTV news channel that the policeman had been the first to turn violent.

"When she tried to drive, uncle [the policeman] kicked the scooter and threw a stone at it. My mother picked up the stone and hit it at his bike. He twisted her arm and hit her with [the] brick," she said.

Delhi police commission BS Bassi said a criminal case had been registered against the officer.

Jayalalithaa cleared of corruption

AFP, Bangalore

The head of India's largest Tamil party was cleared of corruption yesterday, a verdict that sparked wild celebrations by supporters and paved the way for the return of one of the country's most powerful politicians.

Former film star Jayalalithaa Jayaram was forced to stand down as chief minister of prosperous Tamil Nadu state after being found guilty last September of amassing illegal wealth while in office.

The former film star was sentenced to four years in jail and fined one billion rupees (\$16 million) in a case that ran for nearly two decades.

But High Court judge C R Kumaraswamy declared her "appeal upheld" yesterday at a hearing in the southern city of Bangalore which

lasted only seconds.

Jayalalithaa hailed the decision as a victory for justice, claiming the case against her had always been politically motivated.

"I have not made any mistakes. And despite the charges against me, the court verdict has made me as shiny as gold," the leader said in a statement, adding the "prayers of Tamil Nadu people" have been answered.

Although Jayalalithaa had been forced to quit as chief minister of the southern state, her return is now seen as a formality as she continued to control her party while on bail awaiting the outcome of the appeal.

The 67-year-old enjoys huge popularity in Tamil Nadu where fans know her simply as "Amma" (Mother) and ministers have been known to prostrate themselves before her.



US admits must 'do better' on police practices

AFP, Geneva

The United States acknowledged before the UN yesterday that it has not done enough to uphold civil rights laws, following a string of recent killings of unarmed black men by police.

Speaking before the United Nations Human Rights Council, a US representative stressed the advances his country had made in establishing a range of civil rights laws since segregation ended more than half a century ago.

But a number of recent cases of police brutality against African Americans shows "we must rededicate ourselves to ensuring that our civil rights laws live up to their promise," said James Cadogan, a senior counselor in the justice department's civil rights division.

Prince Harry looking for love, wants kids

AFP, Wellington

Britain's Prince Harry said yesterday he wants to have children and would like a partner to "share the pressure" of royal duties, but is still waiting for the right woman.

The fifth in line to the throne made the comments in New Zealand where he is relaxing after calling time on a decade-long military career, saying he felt "at a crossroads".

He said the birth of brother William's second child Princess Charlotte last week had increased his desire for a family of his own.

"Of course, I would love to have kids right now, but there's a process that one has to go through," he told Britain's Sky News. "Tours like this are great fun, hopefully I'm doing alright by myself. It would be great to have someone else next to me to share the pressure. But, you know, time will come and whatever happens, happens I guess."

The 30-year-old, who split from girlfriend Cressida Bonas last year, railed against being labelled "the party prince".

"I never wanted that," he said, adding that he was looking for a role where he could "give something back" when he officially leaves the military next month.

