

NEWS IN  
brief

## Chavez's breathing problem 'persists'

AFP, Caracas

Venezuela's cancer-stricken President Hugo Chavez is still suffering from respiratory problems, and the evolution of that condition "has not been favorable," the information minister said Thursday.

The somewhat pessimistic medical report from the minister, Ernesto Villegas, comes after Chavez's surprise return home on Monday, following a fourth cancer surgery and more than two months of convalescence in Cuba.

He has not been seen or heard from since his arrival in Caracas, leaving supporters rattled and allowing doubts about his condition to deepen.

## Italy poll campaign wraps up

AFP, Rome

Italy held its final day of campaigning yesterday ahead of crucial elections, as international investors warned an unclear outcome could shake the economy and set off shockwaves through the eurozone.

Italians will cast their ballots tomorrow and the day after as they grapple with the longest recession in two decades and austerity cuts that have caused deep resentment in the euro area's third economy.

The most likely outcome is a centre-left government led by Democratic Party leader Pier Luigi Bersani, a former communist with a down-to-earth manner who now espouses broadly pro-

## More suicide bombs hit Mali

AFP, Bamako

Five people, including two suicide bombers, died in car bombings in northern Mali yesterday, a day after fierce urban battles between French-led forces and Islamists left up to 20 extremists dead, officials said.

Two kamikaze vehicles targeting civilians and members of the ethnic Tuareg rebel group the MNLA exploded near the town of Tessalit, killing three and wounding several others, a security source said.

The blasts came after al-Qaeda-linked rebels claimed a car bomb attack on Thursday near a camp occupied by French and Chadian troops in the city of Kidal, local officials said.

## Tymoshenko fit to leave hospital

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine's jailed former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko is now fit to leave the civilian hospital where she has spent the last nine months with back problems, the health ministry said yesterday, paving the way for her return to prison.

Tymoshenko, 52, has been in prison since August 2011 but was moved in May last year from her Kharkiv prison to hospital because she was in acute pain from a herniated disc.

The charismatic figurehead of the 2004 Orange Revolution was convicted of abuse of power and jailed for seven years in 2011 after losing a 2010 presidential race to Viktor Yanukovich.

## Maoist kills 6 cops in India

AFP, Patna, India

Maoist rebels yesterday killed six policemen in a landmine attack in the eastern Indian state of Bihar in their second deadly attack on security forces in recent weeks, police said.

"The Maoists targeted a convoy heading out on patrol duty, killing six policemen in Gaya district," district police chief NH Khan told AFP.

The attack is the latest in a simmering conflict that pits the insurgents against local and national authorities in the forests and rural areas of mainly central and eastern India.

The guerrillas, who say they are fighting for the rights of tribal people and landless farmers, often collect funds through extortion and protection

NORTH KOREA ROW  
Russia, China  
to oppose  
intervention

REUTERS, Moscow

Russia and China yesterday said they would oppose any foreign military intervention in North Korea over its recent nuclear test.

The two countries' foreign ministers condemned last week's test but said any action against North Korea had to be agreed at the United Nations, where Russia and China have the right of veto as permanent members of the Security Council.

Lavrov said China and Russia had agreed that it was "vitaly important not to ... allow the situation to be used as a pretext for military intervention."



US President Barack Obama shakes hands with Japan's new conservative Prime Minister Shinzo Abe following their bilateral meeting in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington yesterday. Obama said the US and Japan are committed to "strong actions" in response to North Korea's "provocations" as he welcomed the Japanese premier.

PHOTO: AFP

Egypt to hold  
parliamentary  
vote on April 27

AFP, Cairo

Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi on Thursday called parliamentary elections starting April 27, according to a presidential decree.

Voting will take place in four stages with the new People's Assembly invited to convene on July 6, according to the decree.

The election comes at a time when Egypt is gripped by unrest, insecurity and a crippling economic crisis and the country is deeply divided between Morsi's mainly Islamist supporters and a liberal-led opposition.

According to the decree, the first stage of voting will take place in five provinces including Cairo on April 27 and 28.

HYDERABAD BLAST  
India was warned  
about attack

AFP, Hyderabad

India's government was accused of major intelligence failures yesterday after twin bicycle bombings killed 16 people, as it emerged police were warned months ago of a possible attack at the site.

The near-simultaneous attacks Thursday night outside a cinema and a bus stand in Hyderabad's Dilsukh Nagar district were the first deadly bombings in India since 2011 and triggered international condemnation including from rival Pakistan.

But with no group claiming responsibility, the government was embarrassed by revelations which the opposition said exposed systemic security failures at a time when India is on heightened alert.

As investigators sifted through the wreckage in their hunt for the perpetrators, newspapers pointed the finger at Indian Mujahideen -- a group which has claimed responsibility for previous attacks.

A senior detective said two of the group's militants had spoken of a

possible attack during interrogation last October.

The main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party seized on the revelation as a sign of intelligence failure by the Congress party-led government.

"If they had specific information, what was the central government and the state government doing? Why was nothing done to prevent such an incident?" said Sushma Swaraj, the BJP's leader in parliament.

Speaking at the blast scene, Home Minister Shushil Kumar Shinde acknowledged authorities had received intelligence of a possible threat of attack but said "it was not specific".

The attacks prompted widespread condemnation, with new US Secretary of State John Kerry expressing sympathies for the "brave people" of Hyderabad.

And Pakistan, accused by New Delhi of responsibility for previous attacks, said "all acts of terrorism are unjustifiable regardless of their motivation".

Iran installing new  
nuke equipment

AFP, Vienna

World powers condemned Iran just days before talks on its controversial nuclear programme, after an IAEA report said it had begun installing advanced equipment at one of its main nuclear plants.

"On 6 February 2013, the Agency observed that Iran had started the installation of IR-2m centrifuges" at the Natanz plant, the International Atomic Energy Agency report said. "This is the first time that centrifuges more advanced than the IR-1 have been installed" at the plant in central Iran, the UN atomic watchdog added.

One official said Iran intended to install around 3,000 of the new centrifuges at Natanz enabling it to speed up the enrichment of uranium.

This process is at the heart of the international community's concerns about Iran's nuclear programme, since highly enriched uranium can be used in a nuclear weapon. The ability to enrich to 20 percent is technically speaking considerably closer to 90 percent, the level needed for a nuclear weapon.

The US State Department denounced the development as "yet another provocative step" by Iran and White House spokesman Jay Carney warned Tehran it had a choice.

Britain expressed "serious concern". Israel, the Middle East's sole if undeclared nuclear-armed state, warned that Tehran was "closer than ever" to achieving the amount of enriched uranium to make a nuclear bomb.

Tunisia gets  
new PM in a  
bid to end crisis

AFP, Tunis

Tunisia's President Moncef Marzouki tasked Interior Minister Ali Larayedh yesterday with forming a new government after Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali resigned amid a major political crisis.

Marzouki "wished Larayedh success and will hand him this evening the letter officially appointing him" as Jebali's successor, his spokesman Adnene Mancer said.

Larayedh "will have 15 days to form a new government and present its plan" to the head of state, Mancer said, adding that Marzouki urged him to do so "as quickly as possible because the country cannot wait any longer."

The ruling Islamist party Ennahda had put forward the name of Larayedh, 57, after its Shura Council selected him overnight.

Ennahda, which was already leading a coalition, has promised to build as broadly based a government as possible. And with its 89 MPs, it should have no difficulty getting the 109 votes needed for a majority.

Larayedh, who was imprisoned and tortured under the regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, has been interior minister since the dictator was ousted in 2011.



PHOTO: AFP

Russian Vice President Dmitri Medvedev and Cuban President Raul Castro at the Revolution Palace in Havana on Thursday. Medvedev is in Cuba in a three-day official visit.

Papal resignation linked to  
Vatican gay probe: Report

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

A potentially explosive report has linked the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI to the discovery of a network of gay prelates in the Vatican, some of whom - the report said - were being blackmailed by outsiders.

The pope's spokesman declined to confirm or deny the report, which was carried by the Italian daily newspaper La Repubblica.

The paper said the pope had taken the decision on 17 December that he was going to resign - the day he received a dossier compiled by three cardinals delegated to look into the so-called "Vatileaks" affair.

Last May Pope Benedict's butler, Paolo Gabriele, was arrested and charged with having stolen and leaked papal correspondence that depicted the Vatican as a seething hotbed of intrigue and infighting.

According to La Repubblica, the

dossier comprising "two volumes of almost 300 pages - bound in red" had been consigned to a safe in the papal apartments and would be delivered to the pope's successor upon his election.

Pope Benedict has said he will stand down at the end of this month; the first pope to resign voluntarily since Celestine V more than seven centuries ago. Since announcing his departure he has twice apparently referred to machinations inside the Vatican, saying that divisions "mar the face of the church", and warned against "the temptations of power".

La Repubblica's report was the latest in a string of claims that a gay network exists in the Vatican. In 2007 a senior official was suspended from the congregation, or department, for the priesthood, after he was filmed in a "sting" organised by an Italian television programme while apparently making sexual overtures to a younger man.

Turkey moves to curb  
army's role in politics

AFP, Ankara

Turkey's new constitution will reduce the political influence of the once-powerful military in order to steer the EU-hopeful country more on the path of democracy, a parliamentary source said yesterday.

The army, considered the self-appointed guardian of Turkish secularism, has intervened in politics since 1960 and has staged four coups. Since coming to power in 2002, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government has taken steps to curb the power of the military.

The four political parties represented in the 550-seat parliament have agreed to subordinate the army's top leadership, or General Staff, to the defence ministry in the new charter.

Under the existing constitution, drafted by the junta after the 1980 military takeover, the General Staff is directly tied to the prime ministry but is autonomous in exercising its legal powers and cannot be challenged by the defence ministry.

Hundreds of suspects, including army officers, are being tried over their alleged roles in plots to topple Erdogan's Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has undermined the army's prestige.

In case there is no agreement by April, Erdogan has warned that his ruling party, which has a strong majority in the parliament, will write a new text and put it to public vote.

## Germans who tried to topple Hitler

BBC ONLINE

Seventy years ago, three German students were executed in Munich for leading a resistance movement against Hitler. Since then, the members of the White Rose group have become German national heroes - Lilo Furst-Ramdohr was one of them.

In 1943, World War II was at its height - but in Munich, the centre of Nazi power, a group of students had started a campaign of passive resistance.

Liselotte Furst-Ramdohr, already a widow at the age of 29 following her husband's death on the Russian front, was introduced to the White Rose group by her friend, Alexander Schmorell.

Schmorell and his friends Christoph Probst and Hans Scholl had started writing leaflets encouraging Germans to join them in resisting the Nazi regime. With the help of a small group of collaborators, they distributed the leaflets to addresses selected at random from



Sophie Scholl

the phone book.

The White Rose delivered the leaflets by hand to addresses in the Munich area, and sent them to other cities through trusted couriers.

One of the best-known members of the group today is Hans Scholl's younger sister Sophie, later the subject of an Oscar-nominated film, Sophie Scholl: The Final Days. Furst-Ramdohr remembers that Sophie was so scared that she used to sleep in her brother's bed.

On 18 February, Hans and Sophie Scholl set off on their most daring expedition yet. They planned to distribute copies of their sixth - and

as it would turn out, final - leaflet at the University of Munich, where students would find them as they came out of lectures.

She was seen by a caretaker, who called the Gestapo. Hans Scholl had a draft for another leaflet in his pocket, which he attempted to swallow, but the Gestapo were too quick.

The Scholl siblings were arrested and tried in front of an emergency session of the People's Court. They were found guilty and executed by guillotine, along with their friend and collaborator Christoph Probst, on 22 February 1943.

Hans Scholl's last words before he was executed were: "Long live freedom!"

The rest of the White Rose group was thrown into panic and consequently executed.

Alexander Schmorell was made a saint by the Russian Orthodox church in 2012. "He would have laughed out loud if he'd known," says Furst-Ramdohr. "He wasn't a saint - he was just a normal person."

## \$200,000 per speech only

PTI, Washington

Hillary Clinton has signed up for speaking circuit and will charge a whopping USD 200,000 per appearance, an amount more than her annual salary as the US Secretary of State.

The USD 200,000-per-speech fee will be a sizable increase for 65-year-old Hillary, who made USD 186,000 annually as secretary of state before stepping down earlier this month.

"Now that she's out as Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton isn't going to be hurting for money, thanks to speaking fees of more USD 200,000 per speaking appearance, according to a source familiar with the situation," Buzzfeed reported.

Hillary will be represented by the New York-based Harry Walker agency, which also represents her husband Bill Clinton, the former US President.

According to CNN, she gave 471 paid speeches during his 11 years as a private citizen and raked in an average of USD 1,89,000 per event - joining the speaking industry's rarefied six-figure circle occupied by Arnold Schwarzenegger, Al Gore, Dick Cheney and Sarah Palin.

Hillary, however, according to Politico, will do some speeches pro bono, particularly those for the charities and causes she champions. She will also be involved in non-profit works.

