

NEWSIN

brief

**Musharraf won't appear in court**  
AFP, Islamabad

A lawyer representing Pakistan's former military ruler Pervez Musharraf yesterday said the retired general would not make a scheduled appearance at his treason trial today because of an ongoing illness. The 70-year-old was rushed to a military hospital on Thursday for "heart problem" while being taken to hear treason charges against him at a special tribunal in Islamabad.

**Ariel Sharon clinging to life**  
AFP, Tel Aviv

Former Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon was facing "imminent" death yesterday, the Tel Aviv hospital where he is in critical condition said. The health of the 85-year-old Sharon, who was dubbed "the Bulldozer" both for his style and physique, has been worsening since Wednesday when he suffered serious kidney problems after surgery.

**China probes 37,000 officials for graft**  
AFP, Beijing

China investigated almost 37,000 officials suspected of corruption in more than 27,000 cases between January and November, state media said yesterday. China's new leader Xi Jinping has taken a hard line against graft since coming to power a little over one year ago, warning that corruption could destroy the party.

**29 hurt as Saudi jet makes force-landing**  
AFP, Jeddah

A Saudi Arabian Airlines Boeing 767 jet made an emergency landing in the kingdom's Muslim holy city Medina yesterday, injuring 29 people, the airline and aviation authority said. The Saudia aircraft was travelling from Iran's second city of Mashhad with 315 people on board, General Authority of Civil Aviation spokesman Khalid al-Khaybari told AFP.

**Polish woman raped in India**  
AFP, New Delhi

A Polish woman was drugged and raped as she travelled to the Indian capital with her two-year-daughter, police said yesterday, the latest in a string of sexual attacks on women in the country. The woman, 33, and her daughter were travelling in a taxi from the city of Mathura where they live to New Delhi last Thursday when she was allegedly raped by the driver. The driver drugged the woman at some point during the 150-kilometre (93-mile) journey and she was attacked after she passed out, Delhi police spokesman Rajan Bhagat told AFP. The woman had been living in Mathura in Uttar Pradesh state for the past three years.

# Indian LS polls to be held from mid-April

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Parliamentary elections in India are likely to be held in phases from the middle of April to May this year. The much-awaited announcement for the poll schedule is likely to be made by the end of February or early March, for which work has already begun, top Election Commission sources said. The announcement of the poll schedule is expected towards the end of February or in the first week of March, said the sources. The term of the current 543-member Lok Sabha, lower House of Indian parliament, expires on June 1 and the new House has to be constituted by May 31. The Commission is looking into the issue of whether to spread the elections over five or six phases. An estimated 80 crore voters will be eligible to vote in the coming elections after new voters have been added to the electoral rolls whose final revision is underway. The Election Commission has already got the electoral rolls ready and they are likely to be out

before the end of this month, the sources said. A total of 1.1 crore poll personnel, half of them being security forces, will be deployed for smooth conduct of the polls and to ensure that they are free and fair. Meanwhile, India's new anti-graft party announced on Saturday it would contest most of the seats in upcoming general elections after its remarkable showing in the election to Delhi state legislative polls in December. Aam Admi Party (AAP), formed just a year ago, "will fight the general elections, contest in the maximum number of states and in as many seats as possible," its spokesman told reporters. However, it revised its expectations yesterday. The party won 28 seats in the 70-seat Delhi state assembly in polls in early December, routing the Congress party, which rules at the national level. Congress's debacle in Delhi and three other state polls has been seen as one more sign the powerful Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, which has given India three prime ministers since independence, may find it hard to retain power in the coming general elections.

**Third front an illusion: BJP**  
PTI, Bhubaneswar

Dubbing hopes of forming a third front ahead of 2014 elections as an "illusion", BJP yesterday said the party would dethrone "scam tainted" Congress government at the Centre. "Hopes for formation of a third front is an illusion. It can never happen. Similar experiments in the past have failed miserably," senior BJP leader Chandan Mitra told reporters here. "Even if the third front is formed, nobody knows who will be its leader", the BJP MP said noting that infights in such coalition will be its doom. BJP under Modi's leadership will contest the polls on two planks of anti corruption and development, Mitra said.

## India joins elite club in space race

AFP, Bangalore

India yesterday successfully launched its first rocket using domestically made booster technology, taking another step forward in its ambitious space programme. The Indian-made cryogenically-powered rocket blasted off from the southern spaceport of Sriharikota as scheduled, as Delhi tries to join an elite club of countries which have mastered the complex technology. The technology has only successfully been developed by a handful of countries including the United States, Russia, France, Japan and China. The 415-tonne rocket deployed a two-tonne advanced communications satellite 17 minutes after blast-off. India has for years been trying to develop its own cryogenic engine for rockets that are designed to put heavier satellites into high orbits, about 36,000 kilometres from Earth. The powerful booster technology, using super-cooled liquid fuel, is a much needed tool to help India capture a share of the lucrative global market for launching commercial satellites.

## Iraq preparing major attack to retake Fallujah

**US promises help, but no troops**  
AFP, Fallujah

Iraq is preparing a "major attack" to retake militant-held Fallujah, a senior official said yesterday, spelling a new assault for the city, west of Baghdad, where US forces repeatedly battled insurgents. Washington said it would help Baghdad in its fight against al-Qaeda-linked militants but that there would be no return of US troops. The takeover of Fallujah and parts of Anbar provincial capital Ramadi, farther west, is the first time militants have exercised such open control in major cities since the height of the bloody insurgency that followed the US-led invasion of 2003. "Iraqi forces are preparing for a major attack in Fallujah," a senior Iraqi official told AFP. Special forces have already conducted operations inside the city, the official said. The regular army has paused on the edge of the city to allow residents time to leave, after which it will launch "the attack to crush the terrorists". Secretary of State John Kerry yesterday said that the United States would provide assistance to Iraqi forces in their battle against the militants but that it was "their fight". Kerry said Washington was "very, very concerned" about the resurgence of ISIL but said it was not contemplating any return of US ground troops, after their withdrawal in December 2011. On Friday and Saturday, more than 160 people were killed in the worst violence to hit Anbar province in years. Both Ramadi and Fallujah were insurgent strongholds in the years after 2003, and Fallujah was the target of two major assaults in which US forces saw some of their heaviest fighting since the Vietnam War.



Syrians walk along a severely damaged road in the northeastern city of Deir Ezzor on Saturday. Syrian rebels have united to kill and capture dozens of jihadists in a new "revolution" against an al-Qaeda affiliate they accuse of worse abuses than the hated President Bashar al-Assad, activists said.

PHOTO: AFP

## US braces for record lows in big freeze

AFP, New York

Authorities urged Americans to stay indoors and stock up on food after a fierce winter storm killed 11 people and forecasters said the Arctic blast could bring record low temperatures. There was no sign of respite Saturday from the brutal chill that has struck since the start of 2014 in parts of the northeastern United States and Canada, prompting New York and New Jersey to declare a state of emergency. Following heavy snowfall Thursday, one of the coldest Arctic outbreaks in the past two decades is set to plunge America's Midwest close to record cold conditions. Chicago could today see some of its most bracing weather ever, with temperatures hovering around minus 10 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 23 Celsius), weather analysts said. Gusty winds could bring what forecasters at the National Weather Service called "very dangerous levels" of wind chill. "Incredibly, it may feel as cold as -50 to -60 (Fahrenheit) on Sunday night over sections of the north-central states with the frigid air remaining in place into early next week," it said. In such conditions, exposed skin would suffer frostbite in as little as five minutes, forecasters cautioned. Authorities have urged people in the worst-hit areas to spend the first weekend of the new year at home for their own safety and to allow rescue and clean-up teams to get to work as quickly as possible.

## MidEast peace plan will be 'fair, balanced': Kerry

AFP, Riyadh

Secretary of State John Kerry yesterday rejected Israeli and Palestinian claims the US was biased as he made a whistlestop tour of allies Jordan and Saudi Arabia to woo support for his peace plan. Kerry promised any agreed plan would be "fair and balanced" and likened his efforts to broker a compromise between the conflicting demands of the two sides to a puzzle. "In the end all of these core issues fit together like a mosaic, like a puzzle and you can't separate out one piece or another," Kerry said in Jerusalem before flying to Amman, and later Saudi Arabia. Each piece was interlinked, he stressed, and depended on the compromises the other side might be prepared to make. "And there's always tension as to when you put your card on the table as to which piece you're willing to do, when and how," said Kerry. But he warned his efforts could ultimately fail, saying he could not tell when "the last pieces may decide to fall into place, or may fall on the floor, and leave the puzzle unfinished. That's exactly what makes this such a challenge."

On the fourth day of his long trip to the region, Kerry was briefing the key Jordanian and Saudi stakeholders about his intense shuttling between Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas. Kerry kicked-started nine months of direct negotiations in July after a three-year hiatus. But Israeli and Palestinian officials have both traded accusations in recent days. "The Palestinians are continuing their campaign of inciting hatred, as we have seen in the last few days with their refusal to recognise Israel as a state for the Jewish people," Netanyahu told his cabinet yesterday. "This is the main issue that we're discussing with (Kerry). Among other key topics are Israel's security, which must remain in its hands," he added, in comments broadcast by public radio. A peace treaty would deal with all the core issues dividing the two sides, including the contours of a future Palestinian state, refugees, the fate of Jerusalem claimed by both as a capital, security and mutual recognition. A cabinet member close to Netanyahu said Sunday Israel rejects any US-proposed security concessions for the Jordan Valley, where the West Bank borders Jordan.

## 1914 again?

*World bears striking similarities with the build-up to World War I*  
THE INDEPENDENT ONLINE

History never repeats itself, but it sure does rhyme, it has been said. Now an internationally respected historian is warning that today's world bears a number of striking similarities with the build-up to the first World War. The newly mechanised armies of the early 20th century produced unprecedented slaughter on the battlefields of the "war to end all wars" after a spark lit in the Balkans with the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Professor Margaret MacMillan, of the University of Cambridge, argues that the Middle East could be viewed as the modern-day equivalent of this turbulent region. A nuclear arms race that would be likely to start if Iran developed a bomb "would make for a very dangerous world indeed, which could lead to a recreation of the kind of tinderbox that exploded in the Balkans 100 years ago - only this time with mushroom clouds," she writes in an essay for the Brookings Institution, a leading US think-tank. "While history does not repeat itself precisely, the Middle East today bears a worrying resemblance to the Balkans then," she says. "A similar mix of toxic nationalisms threatens to draw in outside powers as the US, Turkey, Russia, and Iran look to protect their interests and clients." Professor MacMillan highlights a string of other parallels between today and a century ago. Modern-day Islamist terrorists mirror the revolutionary communists and anarchists who carried out a string of assassinations in the name of a philosophy that sanctioned murder to achieve their vision of a better world. And in 1914, Germany was a rising force that sought to challenge the pre-eminent power of the time, the UK. Today, the growing power of China is perceived as a threat by some in the US. Transitions from one world power to another are always seen as dangerous times. Professor MacMillan, whose book *The War That Ended Peace* was published last year, said right-wing and nationalist sentiments were rising across the world and had also been a factor before the First World War. "It is tempting - and sobering - to compare today's relationship between China and the US with that between Germany and England a century ago," Professor MacMillan writes. She points to the growing disquiet in the US over Chinese investment in America while "the Chinese complain that the US treats them as a second-rate power". Another similarity highlighted by the historian is the belief that a full-scale war between the major powers is unthinkable after such a prolonged period of peace. "Now, as then, the march of globalisation has lulled us into a false sense of safety," she says. "The 100th anniversary of 1914 should make us reflect anew on our vulnerability to human error, sudden catastrophes, and sheer accident," she added.

## Hologram phone: A thing out of Star Wars

MAIL ONLINE

When Princess Leia appeared before Luke Skywalker as a hologram in the 1977 blockbuster *Star Wars*, it was very much a work of science fiction. But fast-forward four decades and the hologram telephone call is set to become reality. The technology is being pioneered by Leia Display Systems, a Polish company named after the *Star Wars* heroine. It aims to have a working model of the telephone operating by next year after it successfully built interactive 3D hologram machines. Marcin Panek, chief executive of Leia Display Systems, said the possibilities for the technology range from relatives virtually attending family occasions to specialist surgeons overseeing hospital operations while located on the other side of the world. He said the company was inspired after noticing the 3D effect created when a nightclub laser is beamed on to dry ice. He added that the first systems will cost thousands of pounds but, as with any technology breakthrough, the price will come down once they become more commonplace. Panek also claimed that within ten years we will see the creation of a *Star Trek*-style fully holographic room, in which 3D objects can be viewed and manipulated from every angle. He added: "It is not impossible, and with the technology moving so fast, it is only a matter of time."



## BUILDING COLLAPSE IN INDIA Death toll rises to 16, probe begins

PTI, Panaji

The toll in the building collapse in Goa rose to 16 yesterday, as the state government started a probe into why the accident took place, officials said. At least 11 people were hospitalised and around 20 were feared still buried under the debris as rescue work continued on a day when politics overshadowed the gloom caused by what was termed the biggest building collapse in the state. The five-storeyed building under construction collapsed on Saturday afternoon in the coastal town of Canacona, 80 km from here, trapping the on-site labourers. Rescue officials said the chances of survival of those still trapped appeared bleak. The accident is the latest in a string of deadly building collapses in India, some of which have highlighted shoddy construction standards. In September a rundown residential block in the financial hub Mumbai collapsed, killing 60 people.