

NEWS IN brief

Indonesia holds legislative polls

AFP, Jayapura
Indonesia's main opposition party was on course to win most votes yesterday in parliamentary elections and strengthen the chances of its popular candidate, Jakarta governor Joko Widodo, in an upcoming presidential poll. The legislative elections, the fourth in Indonesia since the downfall of the three-decade Suharto dictatorship in 1998, are important because they decide who can run at

INS Vikrant auctioned for Rs 60 crore

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi
A decommissioned warship of Indian Navy, which played a key role during the Bangladesh liberation war in 1971, has been auctioned for Rs 60 crore. Earlier, the government of western Indian state of Maharashtra had expressed its inability to maintain Vikrant, the Indian Navy's first aircraft carrier. The ship purchased from Britain in 1957, had played a key role in enforcing the naval blockade of East Pakistan during the Indo-Pakistan War

Garcia Marquez leaves hospital

AFP, Mexico City
Nobel literature laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez returned to his Mexico City home on Tuesday after a week-long hospitalization for pneumonia, but officials said he remains in "delicate" condition. Garcia Marquez overcame a lung infection after "quite severe pneumonic symptoms," Health Minister Mercedes Juan told Radio Formula.

British minister quits over expenses claims

AFP, London
Maria Miller, the minister who oversaw future regulation of Britain's newspapers, quit her cabinet post taking "full responsibility" yesterday following a row over expenses linked to a mortgage. She had faced a week of pressure from the main opposition Labour Party, and growing criticism from her Conservative Party colleagues, over payments she had claimed were linked to a loan on a home in

Myanmar vows to protect aid agencies

AFP, Yangon
Myanmar yesterday promised to protect international aid groups targeted by Buddhist mobs in a violence-torn western region, after a chorus of concern from foreign governments and the United Nations. Following an unusually swift investigation, Myanmar's reformist government conceded it had been slow to respond to unrest that forced humanitarian workers to flee Rakhine state last month, leaving thousands facing looming food and



Pro-Russian supporters applaud the gunmen outside the regional Security Service building in Lugansk, eastern Ukraine, yesterday.

Four-way talks to solve crisis

AFP, Kiev
Ukraine yesterday said that pro-Russian militants had freed 56 "hostages" after US and EU diplomats set up their first direct talks with Moscow and Kiev aimed at resolving the worst East-West standoff since the Cold War. Ukraine's SBU security service said the group walked free from its headquarters in Lugansk after separatists seized the building and other key government offices at the weekend in the mainly Russian-speaking eastern industrial heartland. The separatist raids have drawn Western charges that Russia -- its troops already massed along Ukraine's border in response to its ouster of a Moscow-backed regime -- is backing the separatists and plotting to grab more territory after annexing Crimea last month.

But US and EU diplomats also crucially agreed with Moscow that it was time to deescalate the worst European security crisis in decades by setting up a four-way round of negotiations involving Kiev next week. EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton's office confirmed she would meet US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov along with his Ukrainian counterpart Andriy Deshchysya in one of the European capitals, possibly on April 17. The breakthrough agreement was reached after hundreds of irate activists occupied a series of strategic buildings in the east at the weekend and declared independence for the bustling region of Donetsk. Ukraine's embattled leaders poured extra security forces into the flashpoint regions and regained control of the government seat in Kharkiv on Tuesday after a night of violence that included petrol bombs and stun grenades being hurled at police. But the militants remain holed up behind barricades of razor wire and old tyres in the administration building in

UKRAINE STANDOFF

Donetsk and the SBU headquarters in Lugansk -- the site of the alleged hostage taking. The SBU had accused the Kalashnikov-wielding separatists of rigging the building with explosives and refusing to let 60 people already inside "leave the building and return home". The claim sparked fears that Kiev's Western-backed leaders had run out of patience and were preparing to storm the occupied offices after labelling the separatists "terrorists". However, the United States said it was going into an upcoming meeting with Russia, Europe and Ukraine on the crisis in the former Soviet republic with low expectations. "I have to say that we don't have high expectations for these talks but we do believe it is very important to keep that diplomatic door open and will see what they bring," said Victoria Nuland, assistant secretary of state for European affairs. Months of deadly political turmoil threaten not only to break up the vast nation on the European Union's eastern frontier along its ethnic divisions but also plunge Moscow's relations with the West to a low that may take decades to repair. Kerry appeared to cast aside the last vestiges of diplomatic decorum Tuesday by explicitly accusing the Kremlin of sending operatives into eastern Ukraine to foment unrest. British Foreign Secretary William Hague backed up that message by noting the flareup bore "all the hallmarks of a Russian strategy to destabilise Ukraine". And Nato chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen reaffirmed on a visit to Paris that Moscow would be making a "historic mistake" if it were to intervene in Ukraine any further. But the Russian foreign ministry yesterday argued that "the United States and Ukraine have no reason to worry" because Moscow had no intention to invade its ex-Soviet

Blast kills 22 at Pak fruit market

AFP, Islamabad
A bomb tore through a bustling fruit and vegetable market in Islamabad yesterday, killing at least 22 people, police said, the latest violence to hit government peace talks with the Taliban. The blast took place around 8:00am at the wholesale market close to the Pakistani capital's twin city Rawalpindi, as hundreds of grocers and sellers gathered to trade. The bombing -- the deadliest to hit Islamabad since a huge truck bomb at the Marriott Hotel in 2008 -- left a 1.5-metre (five-foot) diameter crater and littered the site with body parts and guava fruits drenched in blood, an AFP reporter at the scene said. The attack comes as the government tries to negotiate an end to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan's (TTP) campaign of violence. Talks began between government and TTP intermediaries in February, but more than 160 people have been killed in attacks since the start of the process, leading many to question its worth. Javid Qazi, the vice-chancellor of the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) hospital, said 22 people had been killed and 96 wounded in the blast. The TTP's main spokesman Shahidullah Shahid said the group had nothing to do with the attack and urged the government to find those responsible. A bomb disposal official told AFP on condition of anonymity that the device hidden in a fruit box weighed five to six kilograms (11 to 13 pounds) and was packed with nuts and bolts to cause maximum carnage. Thousands have been killed in militant violence since the TTP rose up against the Pakistani state in 2007 but attacks on the capital, much of which is heavily guarded, have been rare in recent years.

Archie to die

AP, Los Angeles
Not even Archie Andrews is immortal in the world of comics. Archie Comics announced on Tuesday that the famous comic book character will heroically sacrifice himself while saving the life of a friend in a July installment of "Life with Archie," a comic book series that tells the story of grown-up renditions of Archie and his Riverdale gang. "We've been building up to this moment since we launched 'Life with Archie' five years ago and knew that any book that was telling the story of Archie's life as an adult had to also show his final moment," Archie Comics publisher and co-CEO Jon



LOK SABHA POLLS 2014

THIRD PHASE OF VOTING TODAY

91 CONSTITUENCIES

Bihar
Chhattisgarh
Haryana
Jammu and Kashmir
Jharkhand, Kerala
Madhya Pradesh
Maharashtra, Odisha
Uttar Pradesh
Andaman & Nicobar islands
Chandigarh
Lakshadweep
New Delhi

Kejriwal visits house of man who slapped him

PTI, New Delhi
Aam Aadmi Party leader Arvind Kejriwal yesterday visited the residence of the autorickshaw driver who had slapped him at a roadshow in Sultanpuri area of North-west Delhi and the AAP leader said he has "forgiven" him. "I forgave him," he said after meeting 38-year-old Lali at his residence in Aman Vihar area of Outer Delhi. On Tuesday, Lali had first garlanded Kejriwal and then slapped him at the roadshow. Kejriwal sustained a minor injury in his left eye and his spectacles were damaged in the attack. Lali had accused Kejriwal of not fulfilling promises made to auto drivers. Lali was later detained by the police but was let off as no complaint was lodged either by Kejriwal or AAP against him. The AAP leader had called off the roadshow following the incident and headed for Rajghat where he sat for over an hour. Later at a press conference, Kejriwal had alleged that attacks on him are a part of a "larger conspiracy" and questioned why these acts were only carried out against him and his party.

Israel halts peace talks with Palestine

AGENCIES
An Israeli government official yesterday said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has told his ministers to stop holding meetings with their Palestinian counterparts. The official said the move was in response to what Israel has called a "provocative" Palestinian bid to join United Nations agencies. Israel blames the Palestinians for the breakdown in the US-brokered peace talks. Under Netanyahu's order, cabinet ministers and their ministry directors can no longer meet their Palestinian counterparts, though lower-level contacts will continue. The sides frequently work on day-to-day issues, including the environment and security. Meanwhile, Arab foreign ministers gathered with Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas yesterday said Israel was "wholly responsible for the dangerous stalemate" in US-brokered peace talks scheduled to end on April 29. On Tuesday, US Secretary of State John Kerry also blamed the approval of Israeli settlements in annexed Arab east Jerusalem for derailing peace talks. The Palestinians responded by applying to adhere to 15 international treaties, breaking their own commitment.

Plane's search area narrowed

Two more pings heard
THE GUARDIAN ONLINE
The search area for the missing Malaysia airlines flight MH370 has been drastically reduced after two further detections of pings consistent with those of a black box from a plane late on Tuesday. The head of Australia's Joint Agency Co-ordination Centre, Angus Houston, yesterday said the Australian defence vessel Ocean Shield had detected two further pings on Tuesday -- one in the afternoon and one in the late evening -- that had allowed the search area to be further refined to 75,000 sq km. He said he was "optimistic" the plane would be found soon. "I can now tell you that Ocean Shield has been able to reacquire the signals on two further occasions; late yesterday afternoon and late last night," Houston said. The smaller area would make the task far more manageable and would allow searchers to "plan much tighter search patterns". "Ocean Shield is now searching a reduced and much more manageable search area on the ocean floor," he said. "I believe we are searching in the right area but we need to identify wreckage to be sure that this is the final resting place of MH370." The plane has been missing for more than a month and is believed to have crashed in the Indian Ocean, claiming the lives of all 239 passengers on board. Houston said the Ocean Shield would continue searching the area before launching the submersible underwater vehicle while the batteries of the black boxes are still believed to be active. The detections suggest at least one of the boxes is still transmitting, but that "they will very shortly fail". On Monday it was revealed that the Ocean Shield had detected two pings that were believed to be consistent with frequencies from a black box. Houston said on Wednesday the Australian Joint Acoustic Analysis Centre had analysed the two earlier pings detected by the Ocean Shield and found could have come from the plane. There are 11 military aircraft, four civilian aircraft and 14 ships taking part in the search yesterday.



Mass stabbing at US high school injures 20

AFP, New York
An American student stabbed 19 teenagers and a security guard in a bloody 30-minute rampage in the classrooms and hallways of a Pennsylvania high school yesterday, officials said. At least four students were critically injured in the shocking assault at Franklin Regional High School, said Thomas Seefeld, chief of police in Murrysville, an outer suburb of Pittsburgh. The 16-year-old boy walked down a hallway flashing two knives, stabbing fellow pupils and the guard as they began arriving for what should have been a routine school day, Seefeld said. Nineteen students and one male security guard were injured, mostly in the chest and stomach, officials confirmed. The school principal and another member of staff tried to overpower the suspect who was then arrested, Seefeld said. Officials said the assault began at 7:13am was over by 7:45am. It was not immediately clear what prompted the assailant, who is himself being treated for a hand injury, to attack. Doctor Mark Rubino at Forbes Regional Hospital, which is treating eight of the victims, said he expected everyone to survive despite what he called "deep penetrating" stab wounds. Wednesday's attack comes after a long and frequent line of US school shootings that have inflamed a nationwide debate over gun control in the United States.

BRIEF ON INDIAN POLLS

Mamata obeys EC, removes officials
PTI, Kolkata
Complying with the Election Commission's order, West Bengal government yesterday removed seven officials from their existing posts and replaced them with different officials as desired by the panel. After breathing fire, the Mamata Banerjee government buckled under unrelenting pressure last night and agreed to transfer seven top officials as the Election Commission put its foot down and gave an ultimatum for complying with its order by this morning. The EC had directed the state chief secretary Sanjay Mitra to execute the order by

BJP has digressed from Vajpayee's path: Nitish Kumar
PTI, Bihar
Launching an attack on former ally for raking up contentious issues like Ram temple, Article 370 and uniform civil code, chief minister Nitish Kumar yesterday said BJP had digressed from the path of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The three contentious issues in the BJP manifesto released on Monday were kept out of NDA agenda during regime of Atal Bihari Vajpayee in which Kumar was a minister. Highlighting development works of his government in the state in last 8 years, Kumar warned if the people did not strengthen his hands in the parliamentary elections, the development process would be



Women wait to cast their votes in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh yesterday.

Modi files nomination papers in Vadodara

Sonia accuses Modi of hiding 'true face'
STAR REPORT
Narendra Modi, BJP leader and frontrunner to be India's next Prime Minister, yesterday entered the fray for Vadodara parliamentary seat, a BJP stronghold, in his home state of Gujarat by filing his nomination papers in which his candidature was proposed by a humble tea-vendor among others. The symbolism of tea seller Kiran Mahida proposing 63-year-old Modi's candidature is not lost as the BJP leader, hailing from a backward caste, himself began his life as a boy selling tea in trains. Modi used a major portion of his cross-country election campaign focussing on his humble beginning as tea vendor after he was mocked by senior Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar who said that Modi was fit to be a 'chai wala'. Parliamentary polls in Vadodara will be held on April 30. Modi is also contesting a second parliamentary seat in the Hindu holy town of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh. Meanwhile, training her guns on Modi, Congress president Sonia Gandhi yesterday charged that he was being projected with his "true face" hidden behind a mask and as a "magician" who could cure all ills of the country. "These days you can see all over the country huge and costly advertisements are being showcased and an attempt is being made by them to hide the truth," the UPA Chairperson told an election rally in Kolar, Karnataka. She said, "An attempt is being made to hide the true face of one person with a mask; he is being projected as a cure for all ills and as a magician for the country."

