

AFP, Perth

Searchers engaged in a race against time to pinpoint "pings" from the missing Malaysian airliner's black boxes yesterday detected a possible fifth signal, fuelling hopes that wreckage will soon be found.

The beacons on flight MH370's data and cockpit voice recorders are due to fade, more than a month after the Boeing 777 vanished. So the Australian-led search is vying to determine an exact location before sending down a submersible to plumb the Indian Ocean depths.

The Perth-based Joint Agency Coordination Centre (JACC) said the latest ping was detected yesterday afternoon by an Australian air force P-3C Orion surveillance plane, which has been dropping dozens of sonar buoys into the remote waters of the search zone.

"The acoustic data will require further analysis overnight but shows potential of being from a made-made source," JACC chief Angus Houston said in a statement.

The Australian ship Ocean Shield, bearing a special US Navy "towed pinger locator", is now focused on a far smaller area of the Indian Ocean 2,280 kilometres (1,400 miles) northwest of Perth where it picked up two fresh signals Tuesday.

Those transmissions matched a pair of signals logged over the weekend.

"When you put those two (sets of pings) together, it makes us very optimistic," US Seventh fleet spokesman commander William Marks said earlier on CNN, adding that the search was getting "closer and closer".

Marks said he expected the pings to last "maybe another day or two" as the batteries powering the black box beacons fade after their normal lifespan of about 30 days.

## MULAYAM SHOCKER ON RAPE Boys make mistakes, why hang them?

NDTV ONLINE

Uttar Pradesh politician Mulayam Singh Yadav has sparked outrage with his comments questioning the death sentence to three men who were convicted of two gang-rapes in Mumbai last week. "Should rape cases be punished with hanging? They are boys, they make mistakes," he said yesterday while campaigning for the national election.

The three men have been handed the death sentence under a new law that punishes repeat offenders; they were found guilty of gang-raping two women, a photo-journalist and a telephone operator, at the abandoned Shakti Mills in Mumbai.

"Boys and girls ...later they had differences, and the girl went and gave a statement that I have been raped. And then the poor fellows, three of them have been sentenced to death. Should rape cases lead to hanging? They are boys, they make mistakes. Two or three have been given the death sentence in Mumbai. We will try and change such laws...we will also ensure punishment of those who report false cases," he said in Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh, the state his party has governed since 2012.

A complaint has been filed against him with the Election Commission and the National Commission for Women.

The comments come at a time rising crimes against women have triggered a nationwide debate on laws and the need to change deeply-entrenched chauvinism



Pro-Russian protesters reinforce their barricade outside the regional state administration building in the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Ukraine offers amnesty to pro-Russian separatists

AFP, Donetsk

The embattled acting president of Ukraine yesterday promised not to prosecute pro-Russian militants occupying government buildings in the east of the country if they laid down their arms and halted a four-day standoff.

The olive branch came as the clock ticked down to a Friday morning deadline for the separatists to walk out of the state security building in the eastern city of Lugansk and the seat of government in nearby Donetsk or face the possible use of force.

The armed assailants want the heavily Russified east of the culturally splintered ex-Soviet nation to hold independence referendums like the one that led to Moscow's annexation of Crimea last month.

Pro-Russian separatists reinforced barricades around the state security building in the eastern Ukrainian city of Luhansk and called on President Vladimir Putin for help after the government warned it could use force to restore order.

Protesters were also engaged in talks to ease the standoff, which Kiev has said could provide a pretext for a Russian invasion.

Their demands have added extra urgency to the first round of direct talks that EU and US diplomats have managed to convince both Moscow and Kiev to join at the end of next week.

Acting President Oleksandr Turchynov, in power since the February 22 ouster of a pro-Russian leader but deemed illegitimate by the Kremlin, told lawmakers that Ukraine's latest secessionist crisis could be resolved peacefully.

"If people lay down their arms and free the administration buildings... we guarantee that we will not launch any criminal proceedings against them," he promised.

The Donetsk separatists had earlier proclaimed the creation of their own "people's republic" and called on Russian President Vladimir Putin to push the tens of thousands of troops now massed along the border into Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland.

Many in Ukraine's southeast -- a region with a much longer history of Russian control that stretches back to tsarist times -- are wary of the more nationalist leaders who rose to power in Kiev. They have been looking to Putin for help.

But the two building occupations have drawn only small rallies of supporters. Some polls show that the region's majority would actually prefer avoiding joining the Russian Federation.

Both Washington and EU nations have accused the Kremlin of orchestrating the unrest in the east in order to have an excuse to invade the region -- a charge denied by Moscow.

But a seeming breakthrough in the worst East-West crisis since the Cold War era emerged on Tuesday when EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton confirmed that both Moscow and Kiev have agreed to join US officials for four-way talks. They are expected to be held in either Vienna or Geneva on April 17.

Meanwhile, Russian lawmakers at the Council of Europe's parliamentary assembly were stripped of their voting rights until the end of 2014 over Moscow's annexation of Crimea.

## BREAKUP OF USSR Treason probe sought against Gorbachev

REUTERS, Moscow

A small group of lawmakers have asked Russia's top prosecutor to investigate whether the last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, should face treason charges over his role in the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev dismissed the request as an act of publicity-seeking and said there were no grounds to charge him.

It follows a surge of patriotism since Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine last month, which has revived nostalgia among some Russians for the Soviet Union and boosted President Vladimir Putin's popularity ratings.

The seven-page request for an investigation says Gorbachev and other senior Soviet officials violated the law and the will of the people by letting the republics that made up the Soviet Union declare independence and break away.

"As a result of these criminal actions, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, a global superpower, was destroyed and ceased existing as a geopolitical reality," says the letter.

Signed by five lawmakers including two members of the United Russia party loyal to Putin, it was sent to Russian Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika on Wednesday. The Prosecutor General's office declined comment but said it generally takes up to 10 days to decide whether to start an investigation.

Gorbachev is celebrated in the West for his policies of "perestroika" (restructuring) and glasnost" (openness) and not resorting to widespread use of force to hold the Soviet Union together. But many Russians blame him for the superpower's collapse and some hanker for what they see as the relative stability of Soviet times.



## NEWSIN brief

### UN okays troops for CAR

AFP, United Nations

The Security Council yesterday voted unanimously to send 12,000 UN peacekeepers to the Central African Republic, where violence between Christians and Muslims has triggered fears of genocide. The resolution, submitted by France, will deploy up to 10,000 military personnel and 1,800 police to the former French colony where sectarian violence has killed thousands in the last

### World murders down: UN

AFP, Vienna

Murders have gone down worldwide but half of them still occur in countries with just 11 percent of the global population, in the Americas and Africa, a new UN report found yesterday. The UN office on drugs and crime said 437,000 people were murdered in 2012, compared to 468,000 in 2010, the first year its global study on homicide was conducted. Central America and southern Africa had rates of 26 and 30 people killed for every 100,000, more than four times the world

### Taiwan parliament occupation ends

AFP, Taipei

Taiwanese protesters ended their occupation of parliament yesterday, three weeks after taking over the main chamber to protest a contentious trade pact with China. The sit-in came to an end after parliament's Speaker Wang Jin-pyng pledged not to preside over further debate on the trade pact until a law has been introduced to monitor such agreements with China--

### Al-Jazeera journos back in Cairo court

AFP, Cairo

A Canadian-Egyptian Al-Jazeera journalist on trial in Egypt pleaded for his release yesterday, as the prosecution in the unprecedented trial of reporters submitted footage and pictures as evidence. Three detained journalists and 17 others people are on trial for alleged links to the blacklisted Muslim Brotherhood movement.



Catherine, the Duchess of Cambridge (L), plays with a child whilst on a walkabout in Seymour Square during a visit to the New Zealand city of Blenheim, yesterday. Britain's Prince William, Kate and their son Prince George are on a three-week tour of New Zealand and Australia.

PHOTO: AFP

## Myanmar wraps up controversial census

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar census takers made their final rounds yesterday in the country's first population tally in three decades, which triggered international concern over a refusal to recognise the stateless Rohingya.

More than 10 million households have taken part in the survey, according to official figures for the first 10 days of the 12-day exercise, which is designed to plug widespread information gaps in the poverty-stricken nation.

But the census has come under criticism from its own backers in the United Nations and Western governments after authorities decided not to allow minority Muslims to register their ethnicity as Rohingya following a fresh wave of unrest in the western state of Rakhine.

## WAR CRIMES

## Nepal bill offers amnesty

AFP, Kathmandu

Former Maoist rebels or security forces who committed crimes during Nepal's civil war could be granted amnesty except in rape cases under planned legislation, a senior lawmaker said yesterday.

The government late Wednesday introduced a bill in parliament to set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a Commission on the Disappeared, aimed at healing wounds from the decade-long conflict.

Those found guilty of serious crimes during hearings by the commissions could receive a pardon except for cases of rape,

said Ramesh Lekhak, a member of the ruling Nepali Congress party who drafted the bill.

"Our focus is on reconciliation. But the victim's consent will be mandatory to pardon the accused," he added.

The conflict between Maoist guerrillas and the state ended in 2006, leaving more than 16,000 dead. Rebels, soldiers and police were accused of serious human rights violations including killings, rapes, torture and disappearances.

Victims' rights groups accused politicians of bowing to demands from Maoist lawmakers to include an amnesty in the bill, despite recommendations from a government-appointed panel against one.

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