

# NEWS IN brief

## S Korea, US launch largest-ever air drill

South Korea and the United States kicked off their largest-ever joint air drill yesterday at a time of elevated military tensions with North Korea. The so-called "Max Thunder" exercise, which is held twice a year, will last until April 25 and involve 103 aircraft and 1,400 service personnel, a South Korean air force spokesman said.

## Road accident kills 10 in California

A delivery truck ploughed into a bus carrying American students in northern California, killing ten people and injuring at least 30, the California Highway Patrol said. The bus was one of three bringing high school students to tour Humboldt State University on Thursday, which is about a six-hour drive north of San Francisco.

## Egypt cops shoot dead 2 Islamists

Policemen yesterday killed two armed members of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in a shootout in the Nile Delta north of the capital, state news agency MENA reported. The military-installed authorities have designated the Brotherhood a "terrorist organisation" under a crackdown since the army ousted Islamist president Mohamed Morsi last July.

## Turkey court annuls parts of judiciary law

Turkey's constitutional court yesterday overturned sections of a controversial judiciary reform adopted in response to a corruption scandal roiling the government, local media said. The court said the most controversial clause of the law, giving the justice ministry greater control over the appointment of prosecutors and judges, was unconstitutional, private NTV television reported.

## Lanka troops kill 'Tiger leaders'

Sri Lanka's military yesterday shot dead three men they believed were trying to revive the separatist Tamil Tiger movement five years after its defeat, a spokesman said. Military spokesman Brigadier Ruwan Wanigasooriya said troops killed the three, including a man they identified as a local leader of the Tigers, as they tried to escape a military cordon in a jungle.

# 'RISING ANTI-RUSSIA SENTIMENT' Europe's stability at stake: Russia

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov yesterday warned that European stability was being threatened by rising anti-Russian sentiment over the Ukraine crisis. "The current inflaming of anti-Russian sentiments takes place against the background of a spike of racism and xenophobia in many European countries, an increase in the number of ultra-radical groups and turning a blind eye to neo-Nazi phenomena, whether in Ukraine or elsewhere," he said. Russia's top diplomat, quoted by the state RIA Novosti news agency, added that this "carries an obvious threat to European stability." The Russian foreign minister also denied that Moscow had sent any soldiers or security agents to Ukraine's eastern regions where a separatist movement has demanded independence from Kiev. Meanwhile, Ukraine's embattled premier yesterday vowed to give more powers to the country's pro-Russian regions in an effort to stamp out a separatist insurgency as a new gas war with Russia threatened European supplies.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday threatened to cut off Ukraine's gas over unpaid bills. The decision could limit the supplies of at least 18 European nations for the third time since 2006. Putin's warning came after Russia had already hiked Ukraine's energy price by 81 percent and demanded that his neighbour rewrite its constitution in order to give eastern regions the right to set their own economic and diplomatic relations with Moscow. Putin's gas threat prompted the US State Department on Thursday to denounce "Russia's efforts to use energy as a tool of coercion" and President Barack Obama to raise the possibility of a third and most painful yet round of sanctions against Moscow. Meanwhile, EU yesterday urged Russia to honour its gas. "Europe is a reliable gas client and we expect our suppliers to meet their commitments", said European Commission spokeswoman Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen in the latest chapter of the East-West tug-of-war over Ukraine. Around a quarter of Europe's gas is bought from Russia, with half of that piped through Ukraine. Putin replied favourably. He said Moscow would fulfil its obligations to send natural gas to Europe but also said the United States had no business interfering in Russia's talks with Europe over Kiev's debt. "We certainly guarantee the fulfilment of our obligations before our European customers in full," Putin said in comments released by the Kremlin. "The issue is not about us, the issue is about securing transit through Ukraine."

**DEVELOPMENTS**



- Ukraine promises more power to east regions
- Putin says he will honour gas commitments to EU
- Obama threatens fresh sanctions

# LOK SABHA POLLS 2014

## 'Sonia weakened Manmohan'

**FOURTH PHASE OF VOTING TODAY**

5 CONSTITUENCIES

- Assam
- Sikkim
- Tripura

## HATE SPEECH EC bans rallies of Modi aide, SP leader in UP

Cracking the whip, the Indian Election Commission yesterday banned a close aide of BJP prime ministerial frontrunner Narendra Modi and Samajwadi Party leader Azam Khan from holding public meetings, taking out processions or holding roadshows in the key electoral state of Uttar Pradesh. Both the leaders were recently served by EC with show cause notices for allegedly giving hate speeches against communities during the campaign for general elections. The Commission also asked state authorities to initiate criminal proceedings against Modi aide Amit Shah and SP leader Khan. The tough stand was taken by the EC at a top-level meeting of Chief Election Commissioner V S Sampath and Election Commissioners H S Brahma and S N A Zaidi where the poll body exercised its constitutional powers to prevent the two leaders from further vitiating the poll atmosphere. The EC said it has been observing with serious concern that Khan and Shah have been making highly inflammatory speeches during the current election campaign for Lok Sabha polls.

In a book that has sent ripples across the political establishment for its timing, Sanjaya Baru, media adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in his first term, has said that Congress president Sonia Gandhi slowly chipped away at the authority of the Prime Minister's Office, created a parallel power structure and left a weakened prime minister who "allowed himself to become an object of such ridicule in his second term in office." In a book — "The Accidental Prime Minister — The Making and Unmaking of Manmohan Singh" — that hit the stands yesterday, Baru, who now works with a thinktank, said so weak was Manmohan Singh that he also failed to defend his (Baru's) promised reappointment after the 2009 election victory as secretary in the PMO and tamely surrendered to the party's veto. Giving several instances of Manmohan Singh capitulating to the extra-constitutional authority of Sonia Gandhi and refusing to assert himself, Baru wrote: "Initially, I saw his subservience as an aspect of his shy and self-effacing personality, but over time I felt, like many, that this might be his strategy for political survival." "I, like millions of his middle-class supporters, feel tragically cheated that he has allowed himself to become an object of such ridicule in his second term in office, in the process devaluing the office of the prime minister." The BJP promptly reacted with a 1-told-you-so, with party leader M Venkaiah Naidu saying, "I have been saying from day one,



Indian security personnel look on as a voter leaves a polling station after casting her ballot in Kahnmun in Mizoram, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

## 'Hitler' is a hit this election season

Will the real 'Hitler' please stand up? The world's largest democracy is going through the process of electing its government and the best abusive word that politicians can think of calling each other is 'Hitler'. The dictator of Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler committed suicide on April 30, 1945 but nearly 70 years after his death, his name is reverberating in India. Politicians of practically every party have been freely using the name 'Hitler' to hit out against their rivals. They could be using the name to mean anything - from liar, murderer to a cruel person. Congress party vice-president Rahul

Gandhi hit out at the Narendra Modi calling him Hitler recently. Congress leader Veerappa Moily too chose to pass a disparaging remark against Modi using the word. While Rahul Gandhi has called Modi 'Hitler', the former's mother, Congress president Sonia Gandhi, has been called Hitler by YSR CP leader Y S Jaganmohan Reddy. Even Kejriwal, the AAP chief, has been called a Hitler for his adamant nature. As a matter of fact 'Hitler', an Austrian surname, is supposed to mean 'one who lives in a hut' or 'guard' or 'look after'. When Indian politicians use the word, they surely do not use it to mean anyone of

# BRIEF ON INDIAN POLLS

## Congress invokes Vajpayee to target Modi

Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee may not be in active politics nowadays, but the Congress has brought the BJP's former 'poster boy' to limelight to target the opposition party's PM candidate Narendra Modi. Reminding the BJP of its 'Rajdharm', a post on the Congress website claims that Vajpayee believed that NDA's flop show in the 2004 general elections was related to Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi's failure to control the communal riots in his state in 2002. "Some people wanted to remove him. I was of the same opinion," said Vajpayee in Manali, the website quotes. This is confirmed by Jaswant Singh, who held key portfolios in the NDA government, it adds. The article on the Congress website further claims that in 2002 Vajpayee had even threatened to resign unless the BJP took action against Modi.

## Quitting Delhi govt a mistake: Kejriwal

In his first admission that his decision to quit as Delhi chief minister had gone wrong, Aam Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal told ET he mistimed the decision to resign, and that mistake meant AAP suffers a communication gap with the people. He said that AAP will have to be more careful in future. "I don't regret forming the government and quitting on principle. Those decisions were right. The mistake we made was to assume that the people will celebrate our decision to



A Palestinian woman gestures talking to an Israeli soldier during a weekly protest against the confiscation of land by Israel in the northern West Bank village of Salem, east of Nablus, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

## Palestinians join Geneva Conventions on war

The Palestinian Authority has signed up formally to the Geneva Conventions, which set down the rules of warfare and humanitarian operations in conflict zones, the treaties' guardian Switzerland confirmed yesterday. Swiss foreign ministry spokesman Pierre-Alain Eltschinger told AFP that the Palestinian Authority had declared itself party to the conventions on April 2. This was registered formally by Switzerland on Thursday, he added. The step is part of a new diplomatic drive by Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, coming as peace talks with Israel are close to collapse. Abbas said he had received a letter from the Swiss president confirming the registration, and praised it as "an historic day for the Palestinian people", a senior Palestinian official said. The Palestinians had pledged to freeze all moves to seek membership in UN organisations and international conventions -- a stepping stone to recognition of their hoped-for state -- during the talks in return for Israel's release of veteran Arab prisoners. Israel has meanwhile made a new bid to expand settlements in annexed Arab east Jerusalem. The original Geneva Conventions were crafted in the 19th century under the auspices of the Swiss-based International Committee of the Red Cross, and recast after World War II.

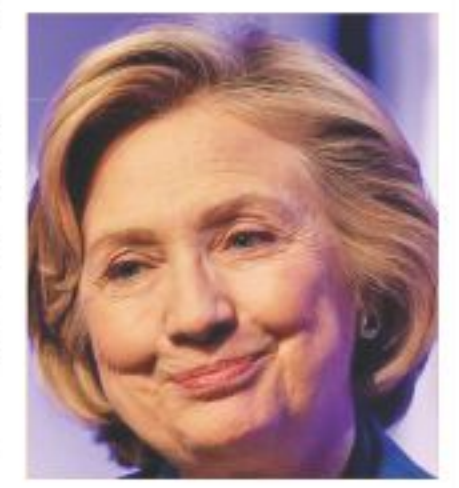


## 'Myanmar not yet a democracy'

Myanmar's opposition leader and Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday warned that her country, despite a spate of reforms hailed by the international community, "is not yet a democracy". Speaking in Berlin to accept a human rights award, she said the country formerly called Burma still needs a democratic constitution, true national reconciliation and a change of mindset among its ex-military rulers. She urged the world to keep a close eye on the government and to ask: "Does it want to go toward a truly democratic union or does it want to go towards an authoritarian state disguised in democratic garb?" Suu Kyi, 68, was released from years of house arrest in 2010, and a quasi-civilian government led by former general Thein Sein has since pushed reforms that have ended Myanmar's pariah status, lifted sanctions and sparked an investment boom. The former political prisoner has entered parliament, and her National League for Democracy (NLD) plans to contest elections next year, hoping to repeat a sweeping 1990 victory that was ignored by the former junta. However, her reputation has been tarnished over the past 18 months as a result of her failure to comment on brutal sectarian violence targeting Muslims in Myanmar, as well as continued military attacks against ethnic minority rebels.

# Woman throws shoe at Hillary

A woman rushed past security and threw a shoe at Hillary Clinton in Las Vegas yesterday, but it missed and the former US secretary of state laughed off the incident. The woman launched the projectile at the 66-year-old former First Lady as she was addressing a meeting of the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries (ISRI). Hillary, the presumed frontrunner for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2016, ducked as the object whizzed past at head height to the left of her. "What was that, a bat?... Is that somebody throwing something at me?" she said initially at the event at the Mandalay Bay hotel/casino, according to video footage by the local KTNV station. Regaining her composure and sense of humor, she added: "Is that part of Cirque du Soleil?" -- a reference to the acrobatic dance troupe, which has several shows in Vegas. "My goodness, I didn't know that solid waste management was so controversial. Thank goodness she didn't play softball like I did," she said, drawing laughter and cheers from the audience. The blonde woman who threw the shoe was immediately escorted out of the hall, her hands in the air. She was later arrested, according to the Las Vegas Review-Journal. A spokesman for the organizers said the woman was not accredited for the meeting.



# SEARCH FOR MH370 Detected 'pings' are from missing jet, says Aussie PM

Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott yesterday said he is "very confident" that signals detected in the search for Flight MH370 are from the aircraft's black box, whose batteries are waning fast more than a month after the plane vanished. "We have very much narrowed down the search area and we are very confident the signals are from the black box," Abbott said, while warning that the transmissions were "starting to fade." Abbott was speaking in Shanghai before meeting Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, state news agency Xinhua said. Two-thirds of the 239 on board the Malaysia Airlines jet were Chinese. Xi later thanked Abbott for Australia's efforts to search for the missing Malaysia Airlines flight, and Abbott expressed appreciation for China's involvement, Xinhua reported. Four signals linked to aircraft beacons have been detected by the Australian vessel Ocean Shield using US equipment, with the first two analysed as being consistent with those from aircraft flight recorders. The beacons on the plane's flight data and cockpit voice recorders have a normal battery lifespan of around 30 days. The plane vanished March 8. The Australian-led search for the Boeing 777, which disappeared en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, is racing to gather as many signals as possible to determine an exact resting place before a submersible is sent down to find wreckage. Striking a more cautious note than his prime minister, Angus Houston, head of the Perth-based Joint Agency Coordination Centre (JACC), said "there has been no major breakthrough in the search for MH370." He said the Ocean Shield would continue to trawl for pings. A decision to deploy a submersible sonar device "could be some days away," he said. The JACC said the steadily dwindling search area had been further reduced Friday to two zones totalling 46,700 square kilometres, about 2,300 kilometres northwest of Perth. No floating debris from the plane has yet been found, the JACC said, despite three weeks of searching in the area by ships and planes from several countries. Houston has stressed the need to find the wreckage to be absolutely certain of the plane's fate.

# Hot-cake voter!

As India holds the latest round of its mammoth elections yesterday, one man -- polygamist and sect leader Zionghaka Chana -- has become the voter every local politician wants to know. With 39 wives and 127 children and grandchildren, Chana is a voter like no other in the remote northeastern state of Mizoram, and can deliver a sizeable bloc of support. "We were witnessing a rush of politicians seeking votes in the last few days," Chana told AFP from his 100-room home in the hills of Baktawng village. "During every election we are much in demand as the winning margins of politicians in this state are slim, so even 100-odd votes matter to them," Chana, 70, said earlier this week. Mizoram is the only state voted yesterday after the Election Commission rescheduled polling following a dispute over whether tribal groups displaced during recent ethnic strife were allowed to vote in their refugee camps. Zionghaka Chana with his wives

