

# NEWS IN brief

## '135 civilians killed' in Nigerian attacks

IANS, Abuja

As many as 135 civilians have been killed since Wednesday in north east Nigeria, a senior official from the region has revealed. Senator Zannah said the attackers first target was a teacher training college in Dikwa town. They killed five people there and abducted several women. The attackers burned down the college library before escaping, Zannah said. The militants then attacked two villages near the border with Cameroon killing a further 130 people.

## Abdullah leads in Afghan vote

CNN ONLINE

In Afghanistan's historic presidential election, former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah is leading the early returns from last week's voting, the country's Independent Election Commission chairman said yesterday. Abdullah has 41.9% of the vote, according to Ahmad Yousuf Nuristani, who cautioned that it was too early to tell if a single candidate would get the majority of the vote needed to win the presidency without a runoff. Former Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani was second with 37.6% of the vote, officials said.

## Hollande's popularity hits new low

AFP, Paris

Popular approval for French President Francois Hollande has hit a new low of 18 percent, far below the 58 percent for his new Prime Minister Manuel Valls, an opinion poll showed yesterday. The least popular French president for decades, Hollande's poll rating fell five points, dipping below 20 percent for the first time since coming to power in 2012.

## Libya PM quits

AFP, Tripoli

Libya's prime minister Abdullah al-Thani stepped down yesterday, saying he and his family had been the victims of a "traitorous" armed attack the previous day. Thani quit less than a week after parliament tasked him with forming a new cabinet and a month after it ousted his predecessor for failing to rein in the lawlessness gripping the North African country.

## Second royal baby!

AFP, Dunedin

Royal watchers were scrutinising the duchess of Cambridge on her New Zealand tour yesterday, after husband Prince William appeared to hint a second baby is on the way. Kate, however, looked to dampen the speculation by drinking wine and going on a jet boat ride, neither of which are recommended for pregnant women.

The royals' eight-month-old son Prince George, third in line to the British throne, has been the star of their New Zealand tour so far.

But William suggested during a walkabout in the North Island town of Cambridge there may soon be another royal baby to share the spotlight.

During a meeting with Cynthia Read, who knitted the merino wool shawl which was New Zealand's official gift when George was born, William said according to several reports: "You might have to make another one soon!"

Read, who emigrated to New Zealand from England eight years ago, was convinced the prince was serious.



## CITY BURNING

General view during a fire in Valparaiso in Chile, on Saturday. Eleven people have died in the huge fire that consumed the outskirts of Chile's port city of Valparaiso and was advancing unchecked towards its UNESCO-listed historic center yesterday, destroying hundreds of homes along the way and forcing the evacuation of more than 3,000 people.

PHOTO: AFP

# Kiev takes on separatists

AFP, Stryvansk

At least two people were killed and nine wounded yesterday in gun battles between Ukrainian special forces and pro-Kremlin militias that threatened to scuttle the first international talks on the worst East-West crisis since the Cold War. The clashes across the ex-Soviet state's separatist eastern rust belt broke out a day after masked gunmen stormed a series of police and security service buildings in coordinated raids that Kiev blamed on the "provocative activities of Russian special services".

The heavily Russified region has been riven by unrest since a team of Western-backed leaders rose to power in February on the back of bloody protests against the old regime's decision to reject an EU alliance and look for future assistance from the Kremlin.

Russia has since massed around 40,000 soldiers along Ukraine's eastern frontier and threatened to halt its neighbour's gas supplies over unpaid bills -- a cutoff that would impact at least 18 EU nations and threaten further retaliation against the Kremlin.

Saturday's attacks were especially unsettling for both Kiev and Western leaders because of their remarkable similarity to events leading up to Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula last month.

The balaclava-clad gunmen were armed with special-issue assault rifles and scopes most often used by nations' crack security troops.

Many wore unmarked camouflage

## UKRAINE CRISIS

uniforms similar to those seen on the highly trained units that seized the Black Sea peninsula in early March. They also moved with military precision and cohesion.

But Russia denied any involvement. And it sternly warned Kiev late on Saturday that the use of force against pro-Russian protesters could ruin the chances of the two sides sitting down for US-EU mediated talks in Geneva on Thursday.

Ukraine's Interior Minister Arsen Avakov announced the launch of an

"anti-terrorist" operation in the eastern Donetsk region early yesterday.

He said crack units from Ukraine's SBU security service moved first into the city of Stryvansk to regain control of a police station that had been seized by about 20 militants on Saturday.

But Avakov admitted that his troops had to "regroup" after meeting stiff resistance and suffering casualties.

The local administration separately reported a series of heavy clashes on a highway linking Stryvansk with the region's capital Donetsk to the south.

Saturday's raids drew expressions of grave concern from world leaders and Russian warnings against any use of force against the militants.

The US State Department said John Kerry phoned his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov on Saturday to make "clear that if Russia did not take steps to deescalate in eastern Ukraine and move its troops back from Ukraine's border, there would be additional consequences".

Britain's Foreign Office said the wave of occupations of government buildings was "a dangerous escalation".

# Poison gas attack kills 2 in Syria

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

The Syrian government and rebel forces have blamed each other for a poison gas attack which is believed to have killed two people and injured scores of others.

The attack happened on Friday in Kfar Zeita near Hama. Footage on YouTube shows doctors and nurses trying to revive young men and several young children amid the crying of children. The doctors are seen massaging chests in a clean and well-equipped hospital. It is not possible to verify what has happened.

The main western-backed opposition group, the Syrian National Coalition, says dozens of people were hurt in the poison gas attack in the village of Kfar Zeita.

State-run Syrian television on Saturday blamed members of the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front for using chlorine gas at Kfar Zeita, killing two people and injuring more than 100.

In August, the Syrian government fired dozens of shells at Ghouta near Damascus, killing several hundred people. Almost all the evidence suggests the Syrian army fired the shells containing large amounts of the nerve agent sarin. Some commentators have suggested that rebels, possibly with the help of Turkey, were able to produce large quantities of the nerve agent and carry out the attack in order to invite US military involvement.

Syria has agreed to decommission all its chemical weapons.

# World can meet UN climate goal

UN panel urges 40-70 percent cut to greenhouse gas emissions by 2050

AFP, Berlin

The world has a likely chance of meeting the UN's warming limit of two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) if it cuts annual greenhouse gas emissions 40-70 percent by 2050, especially from energy, a top expert panel said yesterday.

The longer it takes to switch from carbon-polluting fuels to cleaner energy sources, the harder and more expensive the target will become to reach, it said.

It warned that on present trends the planet will be 3.7-4.8 C warmer by 2100 -- a level scientists say could be catastrophic.

"There is a clear message from science: to avoid dangerous interference with the climate system, we need to move away from business as usual," said Ottmar Edenhofer, co-chairman of the UN expert group that compiled the document.

"Many different pathways lead to a future within the boundaries set by the two degrees Celsius goal. All these require substantial investments."

The report is the third and final chapter of a mammoth overview by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) -- its first since 2007.

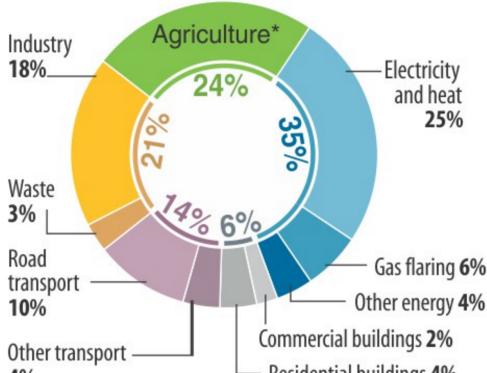
Compiled by hundreds of experts over four years, it collates the available science on climate change, seeking to inform national policies and the faltering global effort to formulate a pact by 2015 on curbing climate-altering emissions.

For a 66 percent or "likely" chance of meeting the 2C target, the report said, the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere should be contained at about 450 particles per million of CO2 equivalent (ppm CO2eq) in 2100 -- compared to 430 ppm CO2eq in 2011.

This would entail a 40-70 percent emissions reduction from 2010 to 2050, nearing zero by 2100.

## GREENHOUSE GAS (GHG) EMISSIONS

Energy supply, agriculture and industry are the main sources of direct GHG emissions. (Industry and buildings gain in importance if indirect emissions are included)



## BAISAKHI CELEBRATIONS

Hindu devotees carry earthen pots containing coconuts and water as they take part in a 'Kalash Yatra' religious procession as a part of Baisakhi celebration in Amritsar, yesterday. Baisakhi is a social festival celebrated across the Indian subcontinent to mark the start of a new year.

PHOTO: AFP

# Modi to respect Muslim traditions

AFP, New Delhi

Hindu hardliner Narendra Modi, tipped to be India's next premier, sought to reassure Muslims on Saturday saying he would respect their religious traditions.

Protection of India's secular status has surfaced as a key election issue with critics worrying Modi's Hindu nationalist rhetoric could stoke religious tensions in a country where 13 percent of the 1.2-billion population is Muslim.

While India is majority Hindu, it also has one of the world's largest Muslim populations.

Modi, leading the campaign of the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), said he refused to don a skullcap presented to him by a Muslim cleric three years ago because he did not want "to hoodwink people".

"I believe in respecting traditions of all religions. But at the same time, I have to respect my own tradition as well although I respect all traditions. I can't hoodwink people by wearing such skullcaps."

"But I believe in taking action against those who show disrespect to other's caps... they should be given the strictest punishment," said Modi, chief minister of the western of Gujarat. Many Muslims wear skullcaps.

He added: "Every citizen has the same rights as Narendra Modi."

Modi, whose state has prospered under his leadership, paints himself as a pro-business reformist who alone can revive the economy of the world's largest democracy and opinion polls favour the BJP to win the elections, ousting

the scandal-tainted Congress party after a decade of rule.

But Modi, a solitary figure remains a divisive figure after being accused of failing to swiftly curb 2002 anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat in which at least 1,000 people died.

Modi has repeatedly rejected accusations of wrongdoing and investigations have never found grounds to charge him.

Modi said he favoured upward mobility for Muslims, who official figures show generally are poorer, more illiterate and have lower access to education and smaller representation in public and sector jobs than their Hindu peers.

He suggested Muslims should enjoy the fruits of India's economic progress.

"I believe their children should get better educations. They should have a Koran in one hand and a computer in the other hand," Modi said.

Rahul Gandhi, who is leading the left-leaning Congress's campaign, told India's Aaj Tak television station in a separate interview that Modi has a divisive agenda.

"He represents an ideology that's to make Indians fight one another," Rahul said.

India's election authorities Friday ordered police to investigate remarks by a Modi top aide allegedly aimed at inciting religious violence. Amit Shah has been in the eye of a storm since he reportedly told several Hindu leaders to seek "revenge" at the ballot box.

He was speaking in a part of northern Uttar Pradesh state torn by Hindu-Muslim violence last September that left about 50 people dead.

# No mid-flight phone call from MH370: Malaysia

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia yesterday rejected claims that phone calls were made from Flight MH370 before it vanished, but refused to rule out any possibility in a so far fruitless investigation into the jet's disappearance.

The New Straits Times, quoting an anonymous source, had reported Saturday that co-pilot Fariq Abdul Hamid made a call which ended abruptly, possibly "because the aircraft was fast moving away from the (telecommunications) tower".

There had also been unconfirmed reports of calls by the plane's captain Zaharie Ahmad Shah before or during the flight.

Malaysian Transport Minister Hishammuddin Hussein told reporters that authorities had no knowledge of any calls from the jet's cockpit.

"As far as I know, no," he said when asked if any calls had been made.

Pilots Fariq and Zaharie have come under intense scrutiny since the plane vanished en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing with 239 people on board on March 8, with still no clue as to the cause of the disappearance.

Several theories have been put forward, including hijacking, a terrorist plot or a pilot gone rogue. But authorities are grasping at straws as to the fate of the plane without crucial data from the jet's "black box" flight recorder, which has yet to be located, and without any wreckage.

Several sonic 'pings' which authorities have said are consistent with a black box have been detected by ships in the search area in the remote southern Indian Ocean.

But Australia's Joint Agency Coordination Centre, which is leading the search, said yesterday that another 24 hours had passed without a confirmed signal, increasing fears that batteries in the beacons attached to the plane's two black boxes may now have run flat. The last pings were detected on Tuesday.

# Four killed in rebel attack in Indian Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Suspected militants yesterday killed two policemen guarding the home of a pro-India politician in Indian Kashmir in the first such attack in the restive region since national elections got underway, police said.

Two rebels sprayed bullets towards the home of a National Conference politician who was inside meeting party workers in the town of Khrew, 25 kilometers south of the main city of Srinagar, an officer and a party official said.

"The two policemen died before reaching hospital," the officer at the scene told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The attack sparked a gunbattle with government forces on patrol in the area that left both of the militants dead, the officer said.

Yawar Masoodi, a youth leader of the National Conference which rules at state level in the disputed Muslim-majority Himalayan region, and the party workers were unharmed.

The militants fled into nearby mustard fields after snatching the police officers' weapons. Government forces chased them, sparking the gunbattle as reinforcements from a nearby army camp also moved in, the officer said. The arms were recovered later.

The district in the Kashmir Valley where the attack took place will go to the polls on April 24 as part of India's mammoth elections that are staggered nationally over six weeks.

Rebels have long fought for independence or for the merger of the territory with Pakistan.

The fighting has left tens of thousands, mostly civilians, dead in the past 25 years.