

# NEWSIN brief

## Afghan deputy minister kidnapped

AFP, Kabul  
An senior Afghan government official was kidnapped along with his driver on his way to work in Kabul yesterday, an interior ministry official said. Ahmad Shah Waheed, deputy minister for public works, was taken by gunmen at around 7:00am from the Khairkhana neighbourhood of the capital, said the official who declined to be named. The motive for the incident is not clear, but kidnapping of wealthy individuals for ransom is common in

## Sisi submits bid for Egypt presidency

DPA, Cairo  
Former Army chief Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi officially submitted his papers to run for Egypt's presidential elections on Monday, around six weeks ahead of the polls. Lawyer Mohammed Bahaa Abu Shuqa went to the headquarters of the Election Commission in Cairo to present the official documents on behalf of al-Sisi, the campaign said. Elections

## Manning's prison sentence upheld

REUTERS, New York  
A US Army general has denied clemency for Chelsea Manning and upheld the former soldier's 35-year prison sentence for providing secret files to WikiLeaks in the biggest breach of classified materials in US history, the Army said Monday. The soldier, formerly known as Bradley Manning, was working as an intelligence analyst in Baghdad in 2010 when she gave the pro-transparency site WikiLeaks 700,000 documents, videos, diplomatic cables and battlefield



Pro-Russia protester storm a regional police building as one prepares a petrol bomb in the eastern Ukrainian city of Horlivka on Monday. PHOTO: AFP

# Ukraine on brink of civil war

## Warns Russian PM as Kiev launches assault on separatists

AGENCIES

Russia declared Ukraine on the brink of civil war yesterday as Kiev said an "anti-terrorist operation" against pro-Moscow separatists was under way, with troops and armoured personnel carriers seen near a flashpoint eastern town. The warning came after Ukraine's ousted president Viktor Yanukovich warned on Sunday that Ukraine had "one foot into a civil war". The move came, twenty-four hours after an Ukrainian ultimatum expired for the separatists to lay down their arms. Interim President Oleksander Turchynov insisted the operation had started in the eastern Donetsk region, although it would happen in stages and "in a considered way". Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev gave a gloomy assessment after at least two people died on Sunday when Kiev unsuccessfully tried to regain control in the town of Sloviansk, about 150 km from the Russian border. "Blood has once again been spilt in Ukraine. The country is on the brink of civil war," he said on his Facebook page. Earlier, Turchynov accused Russia of trying to enflame the country's southeast. Oleksandr Turchynov's impassioned charges against Ukraine's historic master came only hours after a

### KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- Obama urges Putin to rein in insurgents
- Lavrov says use of force may derail talks
- UN says ethnic tensions exaggerated
- EU holds more sanctions on Moscow

"frank and direct" exchange on the crisis between US President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. But the heated phone conversation appeared to break no new ground as the Kremlin chief continued to reject any links to the Russian-speaking gunmen who have occupied town halls and police stations in nearly 10 cities across Ukraine's struggling eastern rust belt since the start of the month. White House said Obama urged Putin to "use his influence with these armed, pro-Russian groups to convince them to depart the buildings they have seized." Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov yesterday warned against use of force to pro-Russian protesters. "The use of force would sabotage the opportunity offered by the four-party negotiations in Geneva," he said

in Beijing after meeting his Chinese counterpart. European foreign ministers meanwhile held back on unleashing punishing economic sanctions against Russia in hopes that EU-US mediated talks tomorrow in Geneva between Moscow and Kiev could help deescalate the most explosive East-West standoff since the Cold War. The crisis was exacerbated further still by two episodes on Monday with a dash of Cold War-style intrigue: a confrontation in the Black Sea in which a Russian warplane "buzzed" a US destroyer and a weekend visit to Kiev by CIA chief John Brennan. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had demanded an explanation over Brennan's visit. Moscow accuses Kiev of provoking the crisis by ignoring the rights of citizens who use Russian as their first language, and has promised to protect them from attack. It also highlights the presence of far-right nationalists among Kiev's new rulers. However, a United Nations report cast doubt on whether Russian-speakers were seriously threatened. "Although there were some attacks against the ethnic Russian community, these were neither systematic nor widespread," said the report by the UN human rights office.

## SEARCH FOR MH370

### Undersea drone hunt may take 2 months

REUTERS, Sydney/perth

A US Navy underwater drone sent to search for a missing Malaysian jetliner on the floor of the Indian Ocean could take up to two months to scour a 600sq km area where the plane is believed to have sunk, US search authorities said yesterday. The prediction coincided with the end to the abbreviated first mission by the Bluefin-21 autonomous underwater vehicle six hours into what was meant to be a 16-hour operation on Monday after it exceeded its 4.5km depth limit and was automatically returned to the surface. The introduction of the undersea drone marks a new slower paced phase in the search for Malaysia Airlines MH370 which disappeared on March 8 and is presumed to have crashed thousands of km off course with the loss of all 239 people on board. From its aborted first mission, the Bluefin-21 produced six hours of data which authorities analysed to find no objects of interest, authorities added. The drone was expected to embark on its second search mission late yesterday.

## RAID ON SCHOOL IN NIGERIA

# Islamists abduct dozens of girls

AGENCIES

Heavily armed Boko Haram Islamists kidnapped more than 100 girls from a school in northeast Nigeria, sparking a search by soldiers to track down the attackers, a security source and witnesses said yesterday. The unprecedented mass abduction in Borno state came hours after a bomb blast ripped through a crowded bus station on the outskirts of Abuja, killing 75 people, the deadliest attack ever in Nigeria's capital. The violence underscored the serious threat the Islamists pose to Africa's most populous country, with the group capable of carrying out large-scale attacks in remote areas and massive bombings in major urban centres. Gunmen stormed the Government Girls Secondary School in the Chibok area of Borno after sundown on Monday, torching several buildings before opening fire on soldiers and police who were guarding the school, witnesses said. Nigerian media reported that two members of the security forces had been killed, and residents said 170 houses were burnt down during the attack. The girls were then forced onto trucks and driven away by the attackers, multiple witnesses said. The exact number of missing students had yet to be established, as some of the girls had managed to return to their homes. Parents had earlier told the BBC that more than 200 students had been taken from the school. Boko Haram, whose name means "Western education is forbidden" in the local Hausa language, has been waging an armed campaign for an Islamic state in northern Nigeria. Boko Haram is blamed for killing thousands of people across north and central Nigeria since 2009 in an uprising aimed at creating a strict Islamic state in the north. The group has carried out scores of school attacks, spraying gunfire on students in their sleep and bombing educational buildings across the north. But a mass kidnapping specifically targeting girls is unprecedented in the group's rebellion.

# India recognises third gender

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

India's top court has issued a landmark verdict creating a third gender category that allows transgendered people to identify themselves as such on official documents. Activists say it will give relief to millions of people who face discrimination in India's deeply conservative society. The Supreme Court directed the federal and state governments to include transgendered people in all welfare programmes for the poor, including education, healthcare and jobs to help them overcome social and economic challenges. Before yesterday's judgment, transgendered Indians had to identify themselves as male or female in all official documents. The court noted that it was the right of every human being to choose their gender while granting rights to those who identify themselves as neither male nor female. "All documents will now have a third category marked transgender. This verdict has come as a great relief for all of us. Today I am proud to be an Indian," said Laxmi Tripathi, a transgender activist who had petitioned the court. Recently, India's election commission for the first time allowed a third gender choice - "other" - on voter registration forms. Some 28,000 voters registered themselves in that category. Overall, there are an estimated three million transgender people in India.



## Community service for Berlusconi!

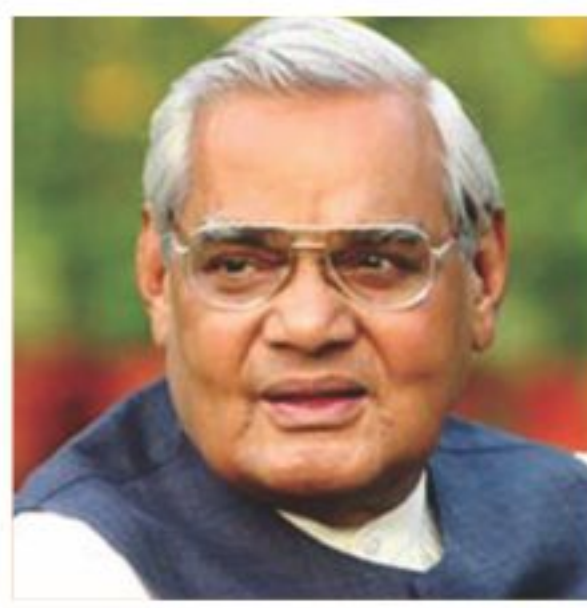
AFP, Rome  
An Italian court yesterday ordered former prime minister and billionaire tycoon Silvio Berlusconi to do a year of community service in an old person's home in a symbolic but humiliating punishment for tax fraud. The flamboyant 77-year-old media magnate will have to work at the centre "one day a week and for not less than four hours", Milan judge Pasquale Nobile De Santis said in his ruling published by Italian media. The ANSA news agency identified the centre as the Fondazione Sacra Famiglia -- a Church-run centre for disabled and elderly people with 2,000 patients in Cesano Boscone, a south-

# NSA stories take Pulitzer Prize

AFP, New York

Guardian US and Washington Post won a prestigious Pulitzer Prize on Monday for reporting on secret US surveillance programmes revealed by former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden. The British and American newspapers shared the award for public service journalism handed out by the Pulitzer committee at Columbia University in New York. The US unit of the British newspaper was honoured for "helping through aggressive reporting to spark a debate about the relationship between the government and the public over issues of security and privacy," the committee said. It recognized Post for its "authoritative and insightful reports that helped the public understand how the (NSA) disclosures fit into the larger framework of national security." The shared award went to the two newspapers credited with breaking the news about NSA surveillance programmes, without specifically citing the journalists involved. The reporters who played key roles in the story included Glenn Greenwald, who has since left the Guardian, and colleague Ewen MacAskill. Barton Gellman, who already has two Pulitzers, was the writer of most of the Washington Post reports. Laura Poitras, a documentary filmmaker who was the point of contact for Snowden, had the unusual distinction of sharing bylines in both the Guardian and the Post on the topic. Among the other Pulitzers, Boston Globe staff won the breaking news award "for its exhaustive and empathetic coverage of the Boston Marathon bombings. New York Times won awards for breaking news photography and feature photography. The fiction award went to Donna Tartt for her novel "The Goldfinch".

# LOK SABHA POLLS 2014



## Vajpayee weakest PM: Congress

### Advani hits back

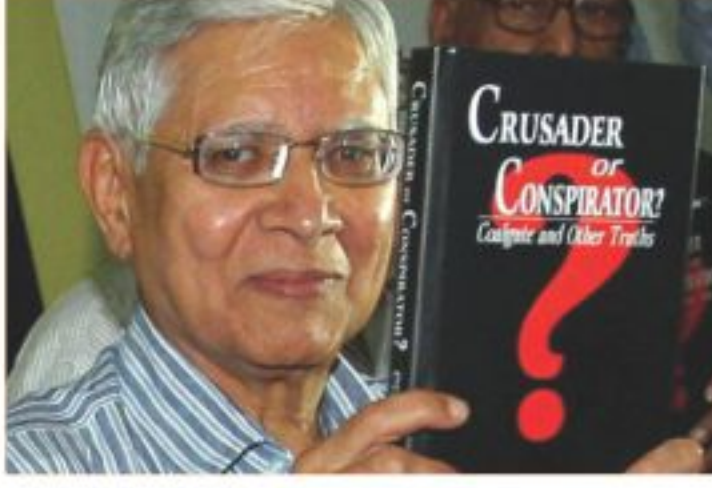
PTI, New Delhi

Days after the Congress praised Atal Bihari Vajpayee to target Narendra Modi, the party did a U-turn on Monday calling the BJP veteran "the weakest PM India ever had", a taunt often directed at Manmohan Singh by the opposition party. In his tweet, Congress spokesman Sanjay Jha alleged that Vajpayee was the "weakest" prime minister as he had failed to protect India's border and interests while dealing with Pakistan. He said that Vajpayee had even failed to handle Narendra Modi whom he wanted removed as chief minister in the wake of Gujarat riots in 2002. "The weakest PM ever was AB Vajpayee, who wanted to sack Modi for the ghastly Gujarat massacre, but succumbed to BJP bullying," he tweeted. However, on Thursday, in its official website the Congress had asserted that no leader in BJP can match the stature of Vajpayee, the founding president of the party. Meanwhile, senior BJP leader L K Advani on Monday hit back at Congress saying Vajpayee's six years as prime minister were better for India's development than the long rule of Congress's prime ministers Jawaharal Nehru and Indira Gandhi.

# New book adds fuel to fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

A new book by a former top bureaucrat created further furore on Monday by saying that Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was heading a government in which he had "little" political authority. In his book "Crusader or Conspirator? Coalgate and other Truths" released on Monday, P C Parakh Parakh, who retired as Coal Ministry Secretary in December 2005, recalled an incident when he had gone to meet the Prime Minister on a farewell call after submitting his resignation to the then Cabinet Secretary B K Chaturvedi. 68-year-old Parakh said in his book that he had submitted his resignation after BJP lawmaker Dharmendra Pradhan had insulted him during a Parliamentary Standing Committee meeting and no response came from the government. Parakh, against whom Central Bureau of Investigation has registered a case in a scam relating to alleged illegalities in allocation of financially lucrative coal mines, said the Prime Minister had expressed his anguish and stated that "he (Singh) faced similar problems everyday. But it would not be in national interest if he was to offer his resignation on every such issue." He claimed that the Prime Minister was unable to prevent his own junior ministers from blocking a move towards a more transparent system of bidding for coal mines. Late last week, a book by Manmohan Singh's ex-media advisor Sanjaya Baru claimed that the Prime Minister accepted that the real centre of power as Congress party President Sonia Gandhi and that he "averted his eyes from corruption". Baru was Singh's media advisor between 2004 and 2008. The Prime Minister's Office slammed Baru's book saying it "smacks of fiction and coloured views of a former adviser and it is an attempt to misuse a privileged position and access to high office to gain credibility and to apparently exploit it for commercial gain". The release of the two books came bang in the midst of high-octane campaign for parliamentary elections and has given a handle to Congress party's main challenger Bharatiya Janata Party, led by Narendra Modi, to chuckle and attack the government.



# BJP rules out change to 'no-first-use' nuke doctrine

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India's main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party, tipped to win the ongoing national elections, has ruled out any change in the country's "no-first-use" nuclear weapons doctrine. BJP triggered speculation about an end to the doctrine last week when its manifesto said the party, if voted back to power, would "revise and update" India's policy. "The no-first-use policy for nuclear weapons was a well thought-out stand... We don't intend to reverse it," BJP President Rajnath Singh told the Hindustan Times newspaper in an interview published on Monday. The policy was adopted after a series of nuclear tests in 1998 during the last BJP-led coalition government, headed by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, which led to international condemnation and sanctions being placed on the country by Western powers. However, the tests earned India greater acceptability as a nuclear power, despite it not being a signatory of the 1970 UN Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty which aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. Any change in nuclear policy would be of most significance to India's neighbours and nuclear-powered Pakistan and China. Strategic analysts have pointed out that the "no-first-use" policy is a mere promise that could be ignored by New Delhi in a conflict situation. China was the first country to adopt the "no-first-use" nuclear policy in 1964, but nuclear-rival Pakistan, with whom India has fought

# Pak cannibal brothers arrested

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Two brothers in Bhakkar, Pakistan who were imprisoned for cannibalism have now returned to eating human flesh, it has been reported, after the head of a boy was discovered at their house. Arif and Farman were first arrested in April 2011 after they were found to have disinterred and devoured up to 150 corpses from a local graveyard. Pakistan has no specific laws against cannibalism, alarmingly, but the pair were arrested under the Maintenance of Public Order section of the Pakistan Penal Code and sentenced to two years in prison along with Rs50,000 in fines. After completing their prison time in Mianwali's district jail, the brothers returned to their hometown of Bhakkar to the outrage of its locals. Police raided their home this week and recovered the head of a human boy,



according to District Police Officer Ameer Abdullah, with Arif being arrested, while Farman managed to flee. Farman Ali was arrested yesterday. Arif has told police that Ali stole the body of the two-day-old child from a graveyard in Darya Khan village, around 300 kilometres south of Islamabad, before they cooked and ate it. The pair previously spent most of their jail time in King Edward Medical University in Lahore, where they were examined by the neurophysiology department.