

# NEWS IN brief

## N Korea may be close to nuke test: Seoul

AFP, Seoul  
North Korea could well be preparing to carry out a fourth nuclear test, South Korea said yesterday, citing increased activity at its main test site. Seoul says North Korea's nuclear weapons programme was at a stage where it could conduct a

## MERS death toll hits 81 in Saudi

AFP, RIYADH  
The MERS death toll has climbed to 81 in Saudi Arabia, which sacked its health minister as cases of infection by the coronavirus mount in the country. The World Health Organisation said on April 17 that it has been informed of 243 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with MERS worldwide, including 93 234 schoolgirls still missing in Nigeria

REUTERS, Maiduguri  
Parents of girls abducted by Boko Haram Islamists were searching for their daughters in a remote forest, they told the state governor on Monday, adding that 234 were still missing, a much higher figure than authori-

## Deported for a tattoo!



INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A British tourist in Sri Lanka is currently being held in a detention centre ahead of deportation, because of a Buddha tattoo her arm which police said could cause religious offence. Sri Lankan police said Naomi Michelle Coleman, 37, was arrested at Bandaranaike International Airport in the capital, Colombo, after she arrived from India. A police spokesman said she was arrested for "hurting others' religious feelings" after the tattoo of a Buddha seated on a lotus flower was spotted on her right arm. Buddhism is the religion of the country's majority ethnic Sinhalese and Buddhist tattoos are seen as culturally insensitive.



## FUNERAL OF MARQUEZ

Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto (R) and Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos (L) pay their respects to late Colombian Literature Nobel Prize laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez, during the tribute in his honour at the Fine Arts Palace in Mexico City, yesterday. Mexico bids farewell Monday to its favorite adoptive son, Garcia Marquez, with a national tribute filled with the late Nobel winner's favorite music and roses. Marquez died in Mexico City on Thursday aged 87.



## Syria using chem arms again: US

AFP, Beirut  
New claims have emerged that President Bashar al-Assad's regime may have launched attacks with an industrial chemical earlier this month, despite an international agreement to eliminate Syria's chemical arsenal. The latest evidence, cited by the United States and France, comes as Syria plans to hold a June 3 presidential poll, which the United Nations and the Syrian opposition have slammed as a "farce" that flies in the face of efforts to end the country's three-year war. "We have indications of the use of a toxic industrial chemical, probably chlorine, in Syria this month, in the opposition-dominated village of Kafr Zita," White House spokesman Jay Carney said Monday. "We are examining allegations that the government was responsible." The revelation follows Sunday's announcement by French President Francois Hollande that his country had "information" -- but no proof -- that Assad's regime was still using chemical weapons.

## Russia trying to pull Ukraine apart: Biden

Pledges support to Kiev as Russia, US swap blame on deal

AFP, Kiev  
US Vice President Joe Biden yesterday accused Russia of "trying to pull Ukraine apart" and pledged Washington's strong support for Kiev's leaders, as a Cold War-style confrontation over the former Soviet republic ratcheted up. Biden was speaking in Kiev amid worrying signs on the ground that diplomacy was failing to calm the crisis. Pro-Kremlin rebels in Ukraine's east overnight claimed control of the police station in the town of Kramatorsk, where they already occupied the town hall. Ukraine's acting president, Oleksandr Turchynov, said the new seizure "puts a cross through all the agreements reached in Geneva". That referred to an accord signed last Thursday by Ukraine, Russia, the United States and Europe designed to de-escalate the volatile situation and prevent it spiraling into civil war, or worse. But the pro-Moscow separatists -- who Kiev and Washington say are backed by Russian

special forces -- are ignoring the accord's demands that they disarm and cease occupying buildings in a string of eastern towns. Russia says Kiev's leaders -- whom it regards as illegitimate -- are to blame for the collapse of the accord. It says ultra-nationalists involved in months of Kiev protests that ousted pro-Kremlin president Viktor Yanukovich in February killed rebels in an attack Sunday near the eastern town of Strylivka. A funeral for the militants was held yesterday. Bells rung loudly from Strylivka's Orthodox church and women wept as three coffins were carried out. Tens of thousands of Russian troops are massed on Ukraine's eastern border in what NATO believes is a state of readiness to invade. The United States and NATO have responded by boosting their own forces in eastern Europe. Biden, after meeting Ukraine's leaders in Kiev, called on Russia to pull back those forces, and to reverse its annexation last month of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula.

## SOUTH KOREA FERRY Death toll reaches 108

AFP, Jinju  
The confirmed death toll from South Korea's ferry disaster rose sharply to more than 120 yesterday as divers speeded up the grim task of recovering bodies from the submerged ship and police took two more of its crew into custody. Rescuers searching for bodies have been able to take advantage of better weather on Tuesday, officials say, with more than 190 passengers still missing or presumed trapped inside the vessel. The ferry tipped over and sank within two hours, but it is not yet clear why. The crew have been criticised for allegedly failing to save passengers. Five have been charged with not fulfilling their duty to evacuate passengers safely, officials told the South Korean Yonhap news agency.

## Sherpas put Everest season on doubt

AFP, Kathmandu  
Nepalese guides on Mount Everest yesterday said they had decided to abandon this year's climbing season, to honour 16 colleagues killed in an avalanche last week. The decision throws the plans of hundreds of foreign mountaineers into chaos, with many of them waiting in base camp after paying tens of thousands of dollars to scale the world's highest peak. The sherpas perform essential tasks on the 8,848-metre (29,029-foot) mountain, carrying equipment and food as well as repairing ladders and fixing ropes to reduce risks for their clients. "We had a long meeting this afternoon and we decided to stop our climbing this year to honour our fallen brothers. All sherpas are united in this," local guide Tulsu Gurung told AFP from base camp. The guides had threatened to cancel all climbing on Mount Everest and issued an ultimatum to the government, demanding higher compensation, an agreement to revise insurance payments and a welfare fund by next Monday. The sherpas have asked for \$10,000 to be paid to families of the guides killed in the avalanche as well as those who were injured and cannot resume work. Sherpas earn between \$3,000 to \$6,000 a season, but their insurance cover is almost always inadequate when accidents happen. More than 300 people, most of them local guides, have died on the peak since the first ascent by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay in 1953.



Japanese lawmakers follow a Shinto priest (R) during a visit to the controversial Yasukuni shrine to honour the war dead at shrine's spring festival in Tokyo, yesterday. A group of nearly 150 Japanese lawmakers visited the controversial Yasukuni war shrine, a move that could further worsen ties with Asian neighbours, on the eve of US President Barack Obama's arrival. PHOTO: AFP

## LOK SABHA ELECTION 2014

### 3 aircrafts ensure Modi is home every night

TNN, Ahmedabad  
Ever since he kick-started his campaign, Narendra Modi has been criss-crossing the country. But, BJP's PM candidate has rarely felt homesick, thanks to a fleet of three aircrafts -- one jet and two choppers -- which bring him home every night. Modi has addressed over 150 rallies across the country, clocking 2.4 lakh km, or an average of about 1,100km a day. He has logged in the most flying hours, followed by Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi, industry experts said. Almost every day, Modi takes off from Ahmedabad airport in an EMB-135BJ, an Embraer aircraft, for his rallies. The jet is owned by Kamavati Aviation, a group company of the Adani Group. "We record two movements of Modi's aircraft daily. No matter where he goes

to address rallies, he always comes back home," said an air traffic control official. Over the past few days, Modi flew in an Augusta AW-139 chopper, owned by the DLF Group, for his rallies in north India, especially in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. According to ATC officials, Modi has also flown in a Bell 412 chopper owned by a private charter service. According to experts, the cost of flying in a single-engine chopper is around Rs 70,000 to 75,000 per hour while in the case of a twin-engine chopper, the cost goes up to Rs 1 to 1.2 lakh per hour. For jets, the flying cost per hour comes to Rs 3 lakhs. Around 130 air charter service operators across the country are profiting from the extensive use of helicopters and business jets by parties and politicians. Industry sources said they're spending Rs 350-400 crore on chartered planes for campaigns.

## BRIEF ON INDIAN POLLS

### Son of Indira killer bites the drug bullet

TNN, Chummi, Gobindgarh  
Sarabjeet Singh Khalsa, son of Indira Gandhi's assassin Beant Singh, is not talking about the chain of events of 1984 even as he contests the Lok Sabha elections in Punjab's Fatehgarh Sahib constituency on a BSP ticket, but promises to take on drug addiction in Punjab, that he says, is forcing at least 7 out of 10 people into the blood-bath set up by sly crimelords of the state.

### BJP drops 'harsh' poll anthem

TNN, New Delhi  
Less than a month after the big-bang release of its poll anthem, BJP has quietly dropped the campaign song as its over-the-top projection of Narendra Modi was found to be an aggressive overkill.

By mid-April -- the anthem was released on March 25 -- there was a fairly wide consensus in the BJP brass that the theme needed to be further tweaked by

### Modi makes it up with Shiv Sena

THE HINDU ONLINE  
In his speech last time, Narendra Modi did not even mention the late Bal Thackeray, but this time, in the presence of Sena president Uddhav Thackeray, Modi made it a point to start his speech by mentioning the late Sena leader and praising his contribution.

Taking a jibe at Congress president Sonia Gandhi's meeting with Shahi Imam, Thackeray asked whether the Imam would now decide the next Prime Minister. "The saffron sea of humanity sitting ahead will decide the next PM," he said. He said infiltrators from Bangladesh too voted, and the new government would kick them out of the country.

## SEARCH FOR MH370

### Sub search to continue

REUTERS, Perth  
A US submarine drone will keep scouring the Indian Ocean floor for traces of a missing Malaysian jetliner after it finishes its current targeted search, Australian authorities told Reuters as a tropical cyclone suspended the air search. Authorities are under growing pressure to decide their next course of action as the Bluefin-21 drone nears the end of its first sweep of remote seabed which authorities believe is the most likely resting place of Malaysian Airlines flight MH370 which vanished on March 8 with 239 people on board. The Bluefin-21 is expected to finish its targeted search of a 10 square kms (6.2 square mile) stretch of ocean floor, where a signal suspected to be from the plane's black box was detected, come Wednesday. No wreckage has yet been found. "Bluefin-21 has now completed more than 80 percent of the focused underwater search area and further missions are planned," the Perth based Joint Agency Coordination Centre told Reuters in an email. "The search will continue. We are currently consulting very closely with our international partners on the best way to effect this for the future." As the Bluefin embarked on its 10th trip to depths of more than 4.5 kms, some 2,000 kms northwest of the Australian city of Perth, a tropical cyclone heading south over

## ATTACK ON HAMID MIR Pak senators call upon ISI to assist probe

AGENCIES  
Senators called upon the country's top intelligence agency to clear its name in cases of attacks on journalists and the matter of enforced disappearances. The role of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) was brought up in the house as members discussed Saturday's attack on senior journalist Hamid Mir in Karachi and allegations levelled by his family against the head of the agency, Lt Gen Zaheerul Islam. Deputy Chairman Sabir Baloch suspended the day's routine agenda to allow for a debate on the issue. Senators, mostly from the opposition benches, deplored the "ISI-bashing" that had ensued in sections of the media following the attack on Mir. They urged the ISI to avail itself of this opportunity and present itself before a newly-announced judicial commission to facilitate investigations and prove that it was not behind the unfortunate incidents. Leader of Opposition Aitzaz Ahsan said that though he had personally been critical of the ISI's

interference in the country's political history, he believed no one should "jump to (any) accusations against an institution". "The ISI has a chequered history. It has fathered and mothered the jihad in Afghanistan. Its involvement was proven in the Ashgar Khan case (manipulation of elections), Operation Midnight Jackal and the ill-planned Jalalabad operation of 1989," he said. "I was interior minister at the time of Operation Midnight Jackal and I personally took the ISI head on." But, he said, care should be taken not to malign the entire institution before the judicial commission had a chance to probe the matter. "The ISI should take (these allegations) as a challenge and extend its assistance in the investigations," MQM's Nasreen Jalil said. She said the ISI must also act to clear its name in the matter of missing persons. ANP's Haji Adeel alleged that in the past the ISI had "trained terrorists to send to Afghanistan and Kashmir".



## Militants kill 3 in Kashmir in vote warning

AFP, Srinagar  
Militants killed two local officials and another man in Indian Kashmir before issuing a warning to Kashmiris against voting this week in the country's mammoth election, police and residents said yesterday. The militants targeted two village council heads in separate attacks late on Monday in Pulwana district south of the main city of Srinagar, a senior police officer said. Separatists have called for a boycott of the general election which ends next month when headline Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi and his party are expected to vault to power after a decade of Congress-party rule. Posters warning residents of punishment if they went to the polls appeared early Tuesday morning in the Tral area where the attacks happened, according to residents who have seen them.

## Opponents attacking husband for political gains: Priyanka Gandhi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi  
Priyanka Gandhi Vadra yesterday accused the opposition of maligning her husband Robert Vadra with "false allegations" relating to land dealings for political gains. Addressing an election meeting in her mother and Congress chief Sonia Gandhi's parliamentary constituency Rae Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, Priyanka hit out at the opponents and said, "the more they attack my family, the stronger we would emerge." Later, talking to mediapersons, 42-year-old Priyanka asserted she would stand by her husband who has repeatedly been attacked by opposition leaders over "false charges". She expressed her concern saying the poll campaign, which should aim towards benefit of people, is being used to make personal attacks on her family. "My family is humiliated there are things that are said about my husband. The more they humiliate us, the stronger we become. I am saddened by the attacks but I have learnt from Indira Gandhi that the truth becomes courage," she said, referencing her grandmother and former prime minister. The opposition has charged that Robert Vadra was given sweetheart land deals in Haryana state ruled by Congress. Priyanka is not contesting ongoing parliamentary elections but is managing the campaigns for her mother and brother Rahul, 43, in their parliamentary constituencies in Uttar Pradesh.

