

NEWS IN brief

37 Qaeda suspects killed in Yemen

Yemen's army killed 37 Al-Qaeda suspects and wounded dozens yesterday as part of a major offensive launched in the south of the country last week, the defence ministry said. The "terrorists" were killed in the Maifaa region of Shabwa province on the sixth day of the operation against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) militants, the ministry said in text messages sent to journalists.

Iraq violence kills 30

Shelling in the Iraqi city of Fallujah, held by anti-government fighters for more than four months, has killed 11 people in less than 24 hours as militants attacked a bus carrying Shia pilgrims north of Baghdad. The bloodshed comes during vote counting from the April 30 general election, the first since American troops withdrew in late 2011, and amid a protracted surge in nationwide unrest.

Children numbers hits new low in Japan

The number of children in Japan has fallen to a new low, while the amount of people over 65 has reached a record high as the population ages and shrinks, the government said yesterday. There were an estimated 16.33 million children aged under 15 as of April 1, down 160,000 from a year earlier, the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry said. It was the 33rd straight annual decline and the lowest level since records began in 1950, according to the ministry.

2 candidates to test Assad in Syria vote

Syria's constitutional court said yesterday the candidacies of incumbent Bashar al-Assad, widely expected to return to power, and two other hopefuls have been accepted for a June 3 presidential election. "The supreme constitutional court announces... the acceptance of candidacy bids registered by... Maher Abdel Hafiz Hajjar, Hassan Abdallah al-Nuri and Bashar Hafez al-Assad," a court official said.

'Free abducted girls', orders Nigeria leader

Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan yesterday ordered top security chiefs and officials to secure the safe release of 223 schoolgirls abducted three weeks ago by suspected Islamists, his spokesman said. Gunmen believed to be Boko Haram Islamists stormed the girls' boarding school on April 14, and abducted them.



People hold candles as they mourn inside the burned trade union building in the southern Ukrainian city of Odessa yesterday. Inset, red carnations have been left in homage to the victims inside the burned building in the scenic Ukrainian port city of Odessa where anger simmers a day after brutal clashes claimed 42 lives.



PHOTO: AFP

Soldiers patrol tense Assam after ethnic killings

Death toll hits 35; blame game begins

The Indian government appealed for calm yesterday after at least 32 Muslims were shot dead in the north-eastern state of Assam in attacks targeting women and children and blamed on tribal separatists. As more than 5,000 soldiers and police patrolled the restive tea-growing region, Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde said the killings appeared aimed at provoking a "full fledged" communal conflict. Police blame indigenous Bodo tribesmen for the violence on Thursday and Friday nights in the region, where Muslims have long been accused of grabbing land after migrating from across the Bangladesh border. "The objective of this (separatist) group seems to be aimed at starting a full fledged communal flagration," Shinde said in a statement, adding the violence was targeted at

women and children. "The public leaders of both Bodo and (the) minority community must see to it that things do not deteriorate," the minister said, urging the region to maintain "peace and calm". The violence comes during the final stretch of the country's mammoth general election, which has seen religious and ethnic tensions flare and deadly attacks staged elsewhere in the country including by Maoist rebels. Thousands of families have fled their homes since masked gunmen went on the rampage in Baksa and neighbouring Kokrajhar district, shooting Muslims dead including children as young as 18 months as they slept. Shinde put the death toll at 32. But a senior police official said two more bodies were discovered yesterday while a teenager died of her injuries overnight Saturday, taking the number killed to 35.

SECTARIAN ATTACKS

Riots Russian Plot to disintegrate Ukraine

Says Kiev; expands offensive against pro-Russians

Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatseniuk accused Russia yesterday of engineering clashes in Odessa that led to the deaths of more than 40 pro-Russian activists in a blazing building and pushed the country closer to civil war. Yatseniuk, speaking in Odessa, attacked police forces in the Black Sea port city, suggesting they were more interested in the fruits of corruption than maintaining order. Had they done their job, he said, "these terrorist organisations would have been foiled". Friday's clashes were the most deadly since Moscow-oriented president Viktor Yanukovich was forced to flee in February and pro-Russian militants launched uprisings in the industrial east. They also marked the first serious disorder outside eastern areas since Yanukovich fell, heralding possible future trouble for Kiev. "There were dozens of casualties resulting from a well-prepared and organised action against people, against Ukraine and against Odessa," Yatseniuk told representatives of social organisations. He dismissed Russian accusations that his gov-

ernment was provoking bloodshed in the east with an operation to restore Kiev's authority in a series of cities under rebel control. "The process of dialogue had begun, only it was drowned out by the sound of shooting from automatic rifles of Russian production," he said. Ukraine also vowed yesterday to broaden its operation against pro-Russian rebels as the crisis-hit country observed a second day of mourning after the violence. National Security and Defence Council chief Andriy Parubiy said the armed forces would expand the "active stage of the operation in other towns where extremists and terrorists are carrying out illegal activities". AFP reporters near the eastern town of Kostyantynivka, where rebels seized the town hall on April 28, saw a pro-Russian checkpoint abandoned and smouldering while barricades were being hastily erected in the centre. Rebels defending the town hall behind makeshift barriers told AFP there had been fighting overnight near the town's television tower.

UKRAINE CRISIS

AGENCIES



An Afghan policeman beats landslide-affected villagers waiting to receive relief supplies during aid distribution at the scene of the disaster in Argo district of Badakhshan yesterday. Aid groups rushed to reach survivors of a landslide in northern Afghanistan that entombed a village, killing hundreds of people and leaving 700 families homeless in the mountains.

PHOTO: AFP

AFGHAN LANDSLIDE Aid rushed to survivors amid chaos

Aid groups yesterday rushed to help survivors of a landslide in northern Afghanistan that entombed a village, killing hundreds of people and leaving 700 families homeless in the mountains. Much of Aab Bareek village in Badakhshan province was swallowed on Friday by a fast-moving tide of mud and rock that swept down the hillside and left almost no trace of 300 homes. Government officials said the current death toll was at least 300 and warned it could rise by hundreds more, after initial reports suggested that as many as 2,500 people may have died. Large crowds gathered at the remote disaster site, where rescue efforts were abandoned due to the volume of deep mud covering houses. Only a few bodies have been pulled from the debris. "Around 1,000 families are thought to have been affected with some 300 houses totally destroyed," the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said in a statement. "Assessments to determine priorities on immediate child protection and water, sanitation, and hygiene needs for (displaced) families are continuing." Tents, emergency food supplies, health services and support for children who lost parents were being organised after many survivors spent another night in the open.

AFP, Aab Bareek

Congress, allies differ on snoopgate probe

The issue of snoopgate inquiry allegedly involving BJP's prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi ran into trouble yesterday with two UPA constituents — NCP and National Conference — opposing the move to appoint a judge in the "dying hours" of the government. The Congress, however, declared that there was "no compromise" as the issue involved women of the country. In a setback to the efforts to name a judge before May 16, 2014, the NCP and the National Conference questioned the move. "When the results of the Lok Sabha elections are due in two weeks' time, where is the need for such an inquiry?" senior NCP leader and Union Minister Praful Patel told PTI. The NCP stand came a day after law minister and Congress leader Kapil Sibal said that the government plans to name a judge for the inquiry before counting of votes for the general elections scheduled on May 16. It was alleged that illegal surveillance was carried out on a young woman in Gujarat in 2009 at the behest of Modi. Defending the Centre's move, Sibal had asked why it was being questioned when Modi government itself had set up a probe panel into the issue, showing that there was something to be investigated. He had also said that the state government's probe panel, which was supposed to give its report within three months, has not held a single meeting till date. BJP has accused Congress of laying down an "agenda of confrontation" and suggested that it will be "reciprocated" once the saffron party comes to power.

Modi takes jibe at Mamata

Over her 'paper tiger' comment
PTI, Bankura
Taking a jibe at Mamata Banerjee over her "paper tiger" comment, Narendra Modi yesterday said that a real tiger is one who jails those involved in the Sharada chit fund scam and gets back money of the poor. Modi also said that Banerjee's attack on him would not deter him in helping Bengal if BJP comes to power at the Centre and a strong BJP government would also ensure that the West Bengal chief minister does her job seriously. Three days back, Banerjee had taken swipe at Modi, saying there was a difference between a "paper tiger" and a Royal Bengal Tiger.

18 killed, 145 injured as train derailed in India

THE HINDU ONLINE
Eighteen people were killed and 145 injured after an engine and four coaches of a train derailed between Nagothane and Roha stations in Maharashtra, railway authorities said. The accident happened at 9:40 am yesterday. The injured were rushed to a nearby local hospital. "Eighteen lives have been lost in the tragedy," Maharashtra Home Minister R.R. Patil told the IANS news agency after visiting the spot. "We are giving all possible help to the victims' families and providing medical attention to the injured," he added. "The Railway ministry has announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh to the next of kin of dead, Rs 50,000 to the grievously injured and Rs 10,000 to persons who sustained minor injuries," a Central Railways press statement said. Doctors of the Konkan Railways and other officials are assisting CR for quick relief and restoration work. Rescue teams are trying to extricate bodies that have been trapped inside the bogies that turned turtle owing to the accident.

Nerd Prom: Obama mocks himself, Putin, press

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE
The US president, Barack Obama, joked about the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, and issues much closer to home as he headlined the White House Correspondents' Association dinner Saturday night. The annual tradition has the president mocking others and himself as celebrities mingle with journalists and politicians. Obama made fun of conservative television hosts' talk about Putin's bare chest and a comment from one last year about Putin being headed for a Nobel peace prize. "To be fair, they give those to just about anybody these days," said Obama, who received the prize in 2009. The president also joked about opposition claims that he had been born overseas rather than in the United States. Looking ahead to a possible successor, Obama said it will be a lot harder for Republicans to prove that Hillary Rodham Clinton was born in Kenya. The president poked fun at CNN's extensive coverage of the search for the missing Malaysia Airlines plane. He said he was still jet-lagged from his visit in recent days to Malaysia and added, "The lengths we have to go to get CNN coverage these days!" Obama also turned the humour on himself and his difficult 2013, including the deeply troubled rollout of the website for his health care overhaul.

