

## NEWS IN brief

### Huge tunnel bomb kills 30 Syria troops

AFP, Beirut

At least 30 Syrian soldiers were killed by the explosion of a powerful bomb in a long tunnel that scores of rebels spent weeks digging under a checkpoint, a monitor said yesterday.

A video posted online by Syria's biggest rebel alliance, the Islamic Front, showed an enormous explosion ripping open the ground and throwing huge quantities of earth and debris dozens of metres

### Iraq bombings kill eight officials

AFP, Baghdad

Clashes near an Iraqi city held by anti-government fighters and bombings targeting soldiers killed at least eight people yesterday, officials said, the latest casualties of a protracted surge of nationwide violence.

The government has blamed external factors such as the civil war in neighbouring Syria for the bloodshed, but analysts and diplomats say anger among the Sunni Arab minority over alleged mistreatment by the Shi'ite-led authorities has played a

### Attack kills 2 Pak pro-government fighters

AFP, Peshawar

Two members of a pro-government militia were killed when their vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb in northwest Pakistan yesterday, officials said.

The incident happened in the Mastak area of the Khyber tribal district, 71 kilometres southwest of the region's main city of Peshawar. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack. A senior security official said the militia to which the men belonged was battling the Lashkar-e-

### Saudi dismantles 'terror' group

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia has dismantled a "terrorist organisation" that was plotting attacks against government installations and foreign interests, the interior ministry announced yesterday.

Authorities have arrested 62 suspected members of the group, among them three foreigners, the ministry said in a statement carried by the official Al-

### Polio vaccination points at Pak airports

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan will set up mandatory immunisation points at airports to help stop its polio outbreak spreading abroad, officials said yesterday, though a health minister said the move played into the Taliban's hands.

The World Health Organisation warned on Monday that the crippling disease has re-emerged as a public health emergency and urged infected nations to implement vaccine requirements for all inter-

### Civilian diver dies in S Korea ferry search

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

A civilian diver has died while helping to search for bodies on the sunken Sewol ferry in South Korea.

The 53-year-old had been pulled to the surface unconscious by fellow divers after losing communication about five minutes after he began what was his first dive on the wreck, government task force spokesman Ko Myung-seok said. He was pronounced dead at a hospital.

It is the only death so far in the recovery operation, according to the coast guard. Despite the death divers were continuing to search yesterday. Efforts were assisted by better weather



A pro-Russian militant holds a Kalashnikov as he guards a barricade outside the city hall in downtown Kramatorsk, eastern Ukraine, yesterday, a day after heavy fighting between pro-Russian militants and Ukrainian troops killed at least 34 people near the eastern Ukrainian city of Slavyansk.

PHOTO: AFP

## Thailand PM in court over abuse of power

CNN ONLINE

Thailand's prime minister has appeared before the Constitutional Court in Bangkok to defend herself against allegations of abuse of power.

The complaint was filed by senators who said Yingluck Shinawatra's party benefited from improperly transferring her national security chief in 2011.

Yingluck could be removed from office and banned from politics for five years if found guilty.

The decision is expected today, the court said after the hearing.

The prime minister's supporters believe the top courts are biased against her and the case is an attempt by the elite to force her from office.

The BBC's Jonathan Head in Bangkok says if the Constitutional Court also bans enough of her cabinet to disable her caretaker administration, her ministers have warned there will be chaos, with large-scale protests by pro-government red-shirts a certainty.



## FEARS OF WAR RISE IN UKRAINE

# Russia dismisses new peace push

AFP, Slavyansk

Russia yesterday rejected a new peace initiative for Ukraine as fears of open war mounted over the ex-Soviet republic, whose troops are waging an increasingly deadly offensive against pro-Moscow rebels.

Kiev announced the death toll from an assault on a rebel-held flashpoint town in the east had climbed over 34 yesterday.

"We are not very far from a military confrontation in Ukraine," said German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier in an interview to European newspapers.

The West, which is threatening to broaden sanctions on Russia over the worsening crisis, sees a May 25 presidential poll in Ukraine as crucial to hauling the country back from the brink.

The Swiss presidency chairing the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe yesterday urged a suspension of hostilities for that election to take place.

Ukraine's foreign minister, Andriy Deshchych, appealed to 30 of his counterparts assembled in Vienna to help "eliminate the external threats and provocations supported by Russia" to ensure the election goes ahead.

But Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, also at the Vienna meeting of the Council of Europe, said

holding the vote during the current violence would be "unusual". President Vladimir Putin's spokesman has been more blunt, calling it "absurd".

The diplomatic impasse came as Ukraine spiralled into deeper violence.

Nearly 90 people have died in less than a week: half around the eastern town of Slavyansk, held by rebels since early April; and half in the southern port city of Odessa, where clashes culminated in a deadly inferno last Friday. Most killed have been pro-Russian fighters and activists.

Putin has so far held off ordering an invasion to "protect" Ukraine's Russian-speaking population, keeping an estimated 40,000 troops on the border for the past two months. And the Kremlin claims to be receiving "thousands" of calls for help from eastern Ukraine.

Kiev and its Western backers see Moscow's main aim as making sure Ukraine's east holds a planned "referendum" for independence on Sunday, and sabotaging all possibility of the nationwide presidential election two weeks later.

With those deadlines ticking closer, Ukraine's authorities are stepping up their offensive to crush rebels holed up in Slavyansk, a town of more than 110,000 people that is the epicentre of the insurgency.

## US called to save Nigerian schoolgirls

AFP, Kano

Calls for the United States to help find and free hundreds of schoolgirls kidnapped in Nigeria are mounting after Boko Haram claimed the abduction and threatened to sell the girls as "slaves".

State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf condemned the abduction as "despicable" and said Washington was standing by to assist "in any way we think that is appropriate".

However, she declined to outline specific US help and dismissed suggestions that the US would deploy military assets on the ground.



## Why you should care

### Terrorism isn't isolated

Just imagine if 276 girls had been kidnapped in the United States - the response would be mass outrage and a forceful demand for a response.

### Consider its ties to al Qaeda

How closely related Boko Haram is to al Qaeda is hard to define, but the United States says it has links.

### The inhumane treatment of children concerns us all

"I abducted your girls. I will sell them in the market, by Allah," said a man claiming to be Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau in the video first obtained by Agence France-Presse. If the claim proves true, the 276 teen girls could become child brides or sex slaves.

### The parents' hands are tied

Any parent can only imagine the horror of a child getting kidnapped. Now multiply that by 276 and add the fear of a volatile terrorist group.

### What happens in Nigeria has deeper repercussions

Nigeria boasts Africa's largest economy. But internal problems can have a ripple effect far and wide.

### The Nigerian response has been feeble

Two days after the kidnappings, the Nigerian military said all but eight of the girls were free. That turned out to be untrue, prompting the father of one of the abducted girls to say the government had gone from using "blatant propaganda" to telling "blatant lies."

### This can't be business as usual

With a World Economic Forum set to begin today in the capital city of Abuja, the Nigerian government is under mounting pressure to

## SNOOPGATE Woman 'thankful' for surveillance

NDTV, Online

In a move that offers a new advantage to the BJP and its prime ministerial candidate, Narendra Modi, a young woman has told the Indian Supreme Court that she is "thankful" that the Gujarat police was assigned to tail her, and urged the judges to block investigations to determine whether the surveillance was legal and ordered by Modi.

"Snoopgate" is pivoted around allegations that secretly-recorded phone conversations reveal that as Gujarat Chief Minister, Modi tasked his close aide Amit Shah, to ensure the woman was spied upon by top police officers.

## Modi Will Run a Bully Government

### Says Salman Rushdie

PTI, New York

India-born author Salman Rushdie has expressed concern that under Narendra Modi, India will have "a fairly bullying government" and attacks on freedom of expression could worsen if the BJP comes to power.

"I am pretty concerned about a Modi-run government. The indications that it would be a fairly bullying government are already there. We have already seen journalists and writers being bullied and (the BJP) has not taken power yet," Rushdie told PTI during a session on the importance of freedom of expression at the 10th annual PEN World Voices Festival in New York.

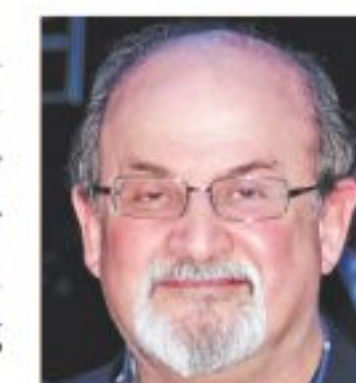
"You already see even more worryingly a kind of self-censorship setting in, people worry that they are going to be bullied and

therefore try not to do anything that will attract the wrath of the 'Modistas,'" he said, voicing his thoughts on an India with Modi as its leader.

Rushdie said there has never been a politician "quite like Narendra Modi in India" and given the high likelihood of the BJP winning the national elections and Modi becoming India's next prime minister, "we have to see whether the experience of office serves to moderate him".

During his address at the literary festival's opening, Rushdie described Modi as a "highly divisive figure" and a "hardliner's hardliner" and voiced concern that the attacks on freedom of expression and literary works could worsen in an India run by BJP.

He said for India, democracy should not mean just conducting free and fair elections but also ensuring free speech rights to its



## TEHELKA RAPE CASE

# Robert de Niro replies to Goa Police questionnaire

THE HINDU ONLINE

Hollywood actor Robert de Niro has sent a reply to Goa Police, which had sought information in connection with the alleged rape and sexual assault case against Tehelka co-founder Tarun Tejpal.

"Robert de Niro has replied to the questionnaire forwarded to him by the Crime Branch through his attorney," Goa Deputy Inspector General of Police OP Mishra told The Hindu in Panaji yesterday.

Investigating Officer Sunita Sawant of the Crime Branch of Goa police has officially received the reply, he added.

The reply of Hollywood actor becomes crucial as an application moved by the prosecution before the fast track court in Panaji under section 173(8) of

the CrPC, seeking time to include the response of a "witness outside the country" in the supplementary charge sheet is scheduled to come up for hearing on May 13.

The actor's attorneys Harvey & Hackett from New York in their reply have confirmed his presence at the ThinkFest event held at a five star hotel in Goa in early November last year for four days, Mishra said.

Mishra declined to divulge any further details.

Tejpal has been accused in the charge sheet of sexually assaulting the junior woman colleague twice in the lift of the five-star hotel over a period of two days when they had gone to drop the Hollywood actor and his daughter to their suit in the hotel.



## BJP wants PM questioned in 2G scam case

PTI, New Delhi

The BJP yesterday demanded that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh be questioned by the CBI in the 2G spectrum case after former Telecom Minister A Raja told a court that every decision was allegedly taken with the PM's "concurrence".

Describing Raja's deposition in the court as "shocking", BJP spokesperson Prakash Javadekar said, "Now CBI must interrogate the PM on 2G issues as the matter is in court and the probe will not be completed if PM is not interrogated. Now it is clear that PM is also involved in the scam."

Raja, a key accused facing trial in the 2G spectrum case, yesterday said that all actions were taken with the PM's "concurrence" and not "unilaterally".

Javadekar said, "It is very serious revelation of former Telecom Minister A Raja in the CBI court. While answering thousands of questions he has made it very categorically clear that every decision about 2G was taken after PM okayed it."

He said the PM owes an answer to the nation on the issue.

## UKRAINE CRISIS IN brief

### Lavrov downplays prospects for second Ukraine conference

AFP, Vienna

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov yesterday downplayed prospects for a second Geneva peace conference on Ukraine, calling instead for a joint East-West push for national dialogue.

Lavrov said such a gathering would achieve little as long as an April 17 agreement from the first Geneva talks has not been implemented, and while separatists are excluded from the process.

### US official slams Russia's 'wilful violation' of Ukraine

AFP, Hong Kong

Russia's "wilful violation" of Ukraine's sovereignty has global implications and has hindered its ability to help develop the Asia-Pacific region, a senior US official said yesterday.

The United States has fiercely criticised Russia for the annexation, and for what it describes as Moscow's support for pro-Russian separatists who have occupied key buildings in eastern Ukraine.

### Russia to reinforce Crimea fleet

AFP, Moscow

Russia plans to reinforce its Black Sea Fleet based in Crimea, which it annexed from Ukraine in March, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said yesterday.

New air defence units will also be opened at the fleet's bases, the minister said.

### Russia trying to disrupt Ukraine election: Hague

AFP, Vienna

British Foreign Minister William Hague accused Russia of trying to disrupt Ukraine's planned presidential election, as he arrived yesterday for a Council of Europe meeting due to focus on the Ukraine crisis.

Ukraine's presidential election is set to take place on May 25 but Moscow has called the vote "absurd", while separatists in Ukraine are preparing their own independence referendum on Sunday.

### 'Chaos and risk of civil war' if no Ukraine vote: Hollande

AFP, Paris

French President Francois Hollande warned yesterday that Ukraine risked descending into chaos and civil war if the presidential election planned for May 25 is not held.

He said it was in Moscow's interests for the vote to take place "because it does not want to be seen as a country that wants to prevent another country, in this

## Foreign Policy difficult confronting neighbours: Modi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Bharatiya Janata Party's prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi said in an interview published on Monday that foreign policy cannot be conducted by having a confrontational approach with neighbouring countries.

"We don't want to be confrontational with any country. Foreign policy cannot be conducted by having a confrontational approach with neighbours or for that matter with any other country", he told The Times of India in an interview.

India has "to conduct its foreign policy with all countries, and specially our neighbours, with a sense of trust and mutual cooperation", Modi said adding, "however, supremacy of national interest has to be one of the basic planks of foreign policy".

Modi said "relations cannot be improved as long as there is a trust deficit and to bridge the trust deficit, mere talk cannot place concrete action".

He said India "continues to face the onslaught of terrorism emanating out of the soil of Pakistan. The first step in building any meaningful relation with Pakistan has to be Pakistan taking effective and demonstrable action against the terror networks operating from its soil."

Asked if he would be mindful of the fact that the Pakistan army calls the shots when it comes to relations with India, Modi said "...pragmatic foreign policy has to be guided by an understanding of the ground realities. However, I think the people in Pakistan increasingly want to