

NEWSIN brief

Nemtsov suspect likely confessed 'under torture'

AFP, Moscow

Zaur Dadayev, a former Chechen police officer, who admitted taking part in the murder of Russian opposition activist Boris Nemtsov "likely confessed under torture", a member of the Kremlin's human rights council told AFP yesterday. The shooting of Nemtsov, a former deputy prime minister and top Putin critic, just yards from the Kremlin was the highest-profile killing of an opposition leader during Putin's fifteen years in charge.

Merkel won't attend Moscow WWII Victory Day parade

AFP, Berlin

German Chancellor Angela Merkel won't attend a May 9 Victory Day parade in Moscow but will visit the Russian capital a day later, her office said yesterday, amid tensions over the Ukraine conflict. Merkel has declined an invitation to attend the Red Square commemoration marking 70 years since the capitulation of Nazi Germany to Soviet forces, a government spokesman said.

Pakistan soldiers raid MQM's Karachi HQ

BBC ONLINE

Security forces yesterday raided the Karachi headquarters of Pakistan's fourth biggest political party, detaining "hardcore criminals" and seizing arms. Col Tahir Mahmood said troops acted on information that the Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) was hiding criminals. The MQM, which has urged a national protest, has long been accused of using violence and intimidation to control Karachi - claims it denies.

Nagaland Lynching: Report claims no rape

TNN, New Delhi

The Indian Union home ministry received report from Nagaland government claiming that the deceased, Syed Sarif Khan, did not rape sexual assault survivor and that the sex between him and the victim was consensual. The accused paid Rs 5000 to the victim after two sexual encounters, the report says. The report says this conclusion is based on the statement of the deceased before he was lynched.

11 feared dead as US army chopper crashes

BBC ONLINE

A search is under way in the US after an army helicopter crashed in Florida leaving its crew of seven marines and four soldiers missing. The crash happened near Pensacola during a night training exercise at Eglin Air Force Base. Sources told the BBC the aircraft was a UH-60 helicopter or Black Hawk.

'Iran reducing women to baby-making machines'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The Iranian authorities have been accused of trying to turn women into "baby-making machines" with a series of strict new measures designed to boost the nation's fertility rate. According to Amnesty International, two laws are being considered by the Iranian parliament that would "set the rights of women and girls in Iran back by decades". Voluntary sterilisation - vasectomies - would be banned under the first of the new laws, dubbed the "Bill to Increase Fertility Rates and Prevent Population Decline". It is believed to be the second-most common method of contraception in Iran. The law would also actively block access to information about contraception, which Amnesty said would result in more unwanted pregnancies and dangerous illegal abortions. The measure would make it even harder for women to get contraceptives, three years after Iran quietly shelved its only state-funded family planning programme. Amnesty's director for the Middle East and North Africa, Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, said: "The authorities are promoting a dangerous culture in which women are stripped of key rights and viewed as baby-making machines rather than human beings with fundamental rights to make choices about their own bodies and lives. A second law addresses women's right to work, as well as providing financial incentives to judges who reject divorce proceedings even in cases of domestic violence. Amnesty's report, released yesterday, said the bill would force certain hiring employers to prioritise men with children, married men without children and then married women with children (in that order) ahead of women who have not given birth.



JAPAN MARKS TRIPLE-DISASTER ANNIVERSARY

Clockwise from left, Candles placed to form the date of the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster is displayed yesterday during a memorial event to mourn the victims of the disaster in Ishinomaki, Miyagi prefecture; people offer a silent prayer for victims of the disaster. Japan yesterday marked the fourth anniversary of the quake-tsunami disaster that swept away thousands of people and sparked a nuclear crisis, a tragedy that has left visible scars on the landscape and continues to wreak misery for many.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

DIPLOMATIC SPAT Saudi recalls ambassador from Sweden

REUTERS, Stockholm

Saudi Arabia has recalled its ambassador to Sweden after a diplomatic row between the two countries, Sweden's foreign ministry said yesterday. "We have received information that Saudi Arabia has called its ambassador home," Erik Boman, spokesman for Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom, said. He said the reason given for the action was Sweden's criticism of Saudi Arabia's record on human rights and democracy. On Wednesday, Sweden said it would cancel a long-standing defense cooperation agreement with Saudi Arabia. That followed Saudi Arabia's decision to block a speech due to be given by Wallstrom to the League of Arab States earlier this week.

Battle rages for Tikrit

Militants attacks Ramadi, launches major offensive along Syria-Turkey border

AGENCIES

Iraqi forces entered a district of Tikrit yesterday, stepping up an offensive launched 10 days ago to wrest the northern city back from jihadists, army officers said. The Islamic State (ISIS) jihadist group hit back with coordinated bomb attacks on government-held areas of the western city of Ramadi, killing at least 10 people, police and hospital sources said. A major general told AFP on condition of anonymity that government forces were battling "to cleanse the neighbourhood of Qadisiyah" in Tikrit. "We were able to control Tikrit military hospital, which is close to the centre of the city," the hometown of executed dictator Saddam Hussein, he said. "But we are engaging in a very delicate battle because we are not facing fighters on the ground, we are facing booby-trapped terrain and sniper fire. Our movement is slow," the officer said. In a possible response to the fight-

ing north of Baghdad, militants in the Islamic State stronghold of Anbar west of the capital launched 13 suicide car bomb attacks on army and security positions in the provincial capital of Ramadi, reported Reuters. The government has for months been fighting off ISIS militants who control most neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Ramadi and regularly attack security forces in more central districts. Some officials suggested the number of car bombs may have been even higher but added that ISIS failed to gain any ground. Also on the front foot in Syria, the jihadists launched a "huge assault" yesterday to try to capture a strategic town on the border with Turkey, leaving dozens dead, a monitoring group said. The assault focused on Ras al-Ain

and the ISIS seized control of a nearby village, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman said the offensive was a pre-emptive strike against Kurdish militia who were planning to attack the ISIS-held town of Tal Abyad farther west. Tal Abyad is an Arab and Kurdish town in the Syrian province of Raqa used by ISIS jihadists as a gateway from Turkey. Foreign jihadists have flocked to Syria, often crossing over from Turkey. Kurdish fighters are also locked in clashes with ISIS around the strategic town of Tal Tamr, just southeast of Ras al-Ain, which lies near a key road link to the jihadists' Iraqi bastion of Mosul. ISIS has seized large parts of Syria and neighbouring Iraq and imposed a harsh interpretation of Islamic law. The US-led coalition said Tuesday that forces fighting ISIS have cut critical communication and supply lines used by the extremists between Syria and Iraq after a two-week operation.

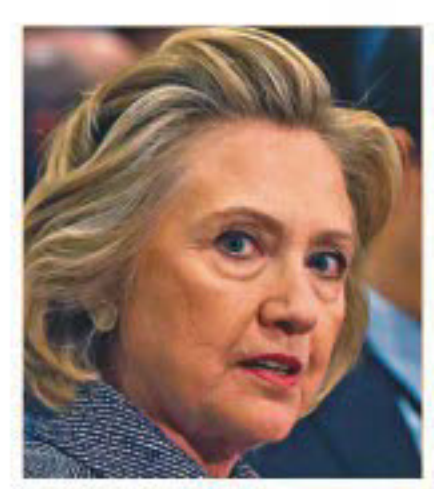
WAR ON ISIS

Used personal email account for convenience, says Hillary

REUTERS, New York

Hillary Clinton, under attack for using a personal email address to conduct US State Department business, defended the practice on Tuesday as a matter of "convenience," but her comments failed to calm critics, who accused her of secrecy. Holding her first news conference since leaving her administration post two years ago, Clinton conceded she wished she had used a government email address as secretary of state but said she violated no rules and did not send classified material through the private account. Hillary, the presumed front-runner for the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination, has come under fire for using an email server from her New York-area home and a personal account as the top US diplomat. Critics raised concerns that the arrangement allowed her to hide important facts about her tenure and put her correspondence at security risk. "I opted for convenience to use my per-

sonal email account, which was allowed by the State Department, because I thought it would be easier to carry just one device for my work and for my personal emails instead of two," a self-assured Clinton told more than 200 reporters crowded into a UN corridor. "Looking back, it would've been better if I'd simply used a second email account and carried a second phone." Hillary said she had provided all her emails that were work-related to the State Department and did not keep personal emails on subjects such as yoga routines, her mother's funeral arrangements or her daughter's wedding plans. But she also said the private server contained communications from her and her husband, an apparent contradiction to her statement that emails had been deleted. The prospect of numerous email deletions and her argument of "convenience" gave more fodder to Republican critics who accused her of continuing secretive practices that they say characterized the Clinton family and President Bill Clinton's eight years in office.



Iraqi pro-government fighters celebrate as they advance into Tikrit during a military operation to regain the city from the Islamic state group, yesterday. Inset, A resident welcomes a relative who belongs to militias known as Hashid Shaabi, in the town of al-Alam after it was freed by the Iraqi forces.

Powerful blast kills four in Manipur

AFP, Guwahati

A powerful bomb blast struck a crowded marketplace in India's restive northeast yesterday killing four people and injuring another 15, officials said. The blast shook the heart of Imphal, state capital of Manipur, which borders Myanmar -- an area that has been plagued by separatist violence for decades. "Most of the victims were either shoppers or vendors," senior state police official A.K. Singh told AFP by phone from Imphal, adding that "a powerful IED (improvised explosive device) was planted". "The injured have been shifted to the local medical college hospital, with at least six of them having serious multiple injuries," Singh said. Hospital officials said four bodies had been recovered from the blast site. No rebel group has claimed responsibility for the attack and it was not immediately clear what the motive was. The remote state has long been affected by insurgent violence and is home to dozens of tribal groups and small guerrilla armies fighting New Delhi's rule. They often compete against each other in turf wars for dominance in the state. Meanwhile, a newly elected sarpanch and a villager were hacked to death by suspected Maoists in Sukma district of south Chhattisgarh yesterday.



House for sale with free wife

AFP, Sleman

An advert for a house in Indonesia has gone viral online after the woman selling it offered to throw in an unusual extra feature for free — herself for marriage. The internet ad reads for the most part like a regular house listing, saying that the single-storey property has two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a parking space and a fish pond. But it also proposes to buyers a "rare offer" — "when you buy this house, you can ask the owner to marry you", alongside a picture of Wina Lia, a 40-year-old widow and beauty salon owner, leaning against a car in front of the house. The ad said that terms and conditions apply, and notes the offer is "for serious buyers and non-negotiable". The house in Sleman, on the island of Java, is on the market for 999 million rupiah (about \$75,000). The mother of two explained that she had asked a friend who was a property agent to help her find a buyer — and in the process a husband — but she had expected him to pass on the news to a limited number of people, not put an ad online. She added that there was only one potential buyer, who had visited on Wednesday, but refused to give further details.

Russia 'can deploy nuke weapons in Crimea'

Withdraws from European arms treaty; Nato 'disappointed'

AGENCIES

Russia has said that it has the right to deploy nuclear weapons to Crimea, a year after Vladimir Putin seized the territory from Ukraine following a referendum. Home to the strategic Black Sea port city of Sevastopol, which already housed Russia's fleet before the Ukrainian crisis erupted at the start of 2014, Crimea is significantly nearer central Europe than any nuclear base Russia is thought to control. "I don't know if there are nuclear weapons there now," a Russian foreign ministry official told the Interfax news agency yesterday. "I don't know about any plans, but in principle Russia can do it," said Mikhail Ulyanov, who is the head of the ministry's department on arms control. The comments come at a highly sensitive time for international relations around the Black Sea, after Nato members Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey joined four other alliance states in a multinational naval exercise there on Tuesday. The US, Canada, Germany and Italy also took part in the military drills, including an American flagship, the guided missile cruiser USS Vicksburg. And it comes as Russia becomes increasingly bold in stating the details of how it took Crimea, an act still deemed illegal by most international bodies. Meanwhile, Nato head Jens Stoltenberg yesterday said he was "disappointed" by Russia's decision to quit the landmark Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe as arms control efforts remained important to all sides. President Vladimir Putin suspended Russia's participation in the CFE in 2007, charging that US deployments violated its terms. On Tuesday Moscow said it would no longer take part in the CFE's consultative committee's work in Vienna. The CFE was finalised in 1990 at the end of the Cold War and set limits on the numbers of troops and military equipment that Nato and the then Russian-led Warsaw Pact could deploy in Europe. The collapse of the Soviet Union made many of its provisions redundant but the treaty remained a keystone arms control achievement, helping stabilise relations with Russia in the post-Communist turmoil of the 1990s.

Motorway thieves steal French jewels

AFP, Avallon

A group of "battle-hardened" armed thieves attacked two heavily guarded vans carrying jewels at a French motorway toll in the dead of night, making off with a haul worth some nine million euros (\$11 million), police said yesterday. Security forces were working to find those behind the heist, which took place around midnight on a motorway in the Yonne district some 200 southeast of Paris, searching within a large perimeter around the area and under the watch of air support. A police source, who wished to remain anonymous, said there were around 15 robbers, all "heavily armed and battle-hardened." No one was hurt in the holdup and the Avallon toll booth itself was not damaged, prosecutors and the firm managing the motorway said, gesturing the work of professionals. The vans were found burnt and abandoned in a field not far from the toll station, and it was as yet unclear exactly how the assault unfolded. Attacks on armoured vehicles carrying jewels or cash often require special equipment such as explosives or assault rifles, and while they occurred regularly at the beginning of the 2000s in France, they have dwindled in recent years.

