

# NEWS IN brief

## 120 nations to sign climate deal in April

More than 120 countries have said they are ready to sign the UN's accord to fight global warming. French ecology minister Segolene Royal said Wednesday. Royal said the strength of support meant the climate deal clinched in Paris last year would likely be ratified in New York on April 22. Almost 200 governments reached an agreement in December which set a target of limiting global warming to "well below" 2.0 degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) compared to pre-industrial levels.

## French MPs outlaw paying for sex

French MPs have passed a law that makes it illegal to pay for sex and imposes fines of up to €3,750 (£3,027, \$4,274) for those buying sexual acts. Those convicted would also have to attend classes to learn about the conditions faced by prostitutes. It has taken more than two years to pass the controversial legislation because of differences between the two houses of parliament over the issue.

## Four 'IS fighters' arrested in Denmark

Copenhagen police yesterday said they had detained four people on suspicion of joining the Islamic State group in Syria and seized weapons and ammunition in a search linked to the arrests. All four were suspected of breaking Denmark's terrorism law while in Syria, and were arrested in the Copenhagen area, police said in a statement without giving any further information on their identities.



Kashmiri mourners react during the funeral for suspected militant Waseem Ahmed Malla in Pehlipora village in Shopian district, south of Srinagar, yesterday. Thousands of protesters clashed with police in Indian Kashmir April 7 after two militants were killed in a gun battle with government forces, the army and witnesses said. Protesters torched a police armoured vehicle as masked militants fired automatic rifles into the air in honour of the dead men, a police officer at the scene told AFP.

PHOTO: AFP

# 300 missing after IS attack in Syria

Peace talks pushed back to April 13

Some 300 Syrians were missing and feared kidnapped yesterday after the Islamic State group attacked a cement factory in an advance against government positions east of Damascus. The jihadists launched the offensive after suffering a series of setbacks at the hands of regime troops in recent weeks including the loss of the ancient city of Palmyra, which officials said residents would start returning to on Saturday. The fresh fighting came ahead of a new round of peace talks due next week in Geneva following a ceasefire between the regime and non-jihadist rebels that has allowed Syrian forces to focus on fighting IS. UN Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura yesterday said that the next round of peace talks will begin on April 13 after he completes a diplomatic tour, including stops in Damascus and Tehran. The United Nations had previously said that the negotiations in Geneva would resume on April 11 after the last round ended on March 24. After being pushed out of Palmyra on March 27, IS launched the fresh assault this week near the town of Dmeir, some 50 kilometres (30 miles) east of Damascus. An administrator at the plant confirmed that around 300 employees had been unreachable since Monday. Dmeir is divided between IS control in the east and rebel control in the west, but several key positions around it, including a military airport and a power plant, are still in government hands. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor, said the fighting was heavy but the jihadists had not managed to gain significant ground.

# Flyover tragedy God's msg to save Bengal from TMC

## Modi attacks Mamata in West Bengal election rally

Accusing West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of indulging in politics over the dead, Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday said the Kolkata flyover tragedy was "God's message" to people to save Bengal from the Trinamool Congress. "The flyover collapsed, such a big tragedy; if some chief goes what does he or she do; they try to save people, assist in rescue work. But what did Didi (Banerjee) do? The first thing she did was to declare that it was the Left Front that gave the contract (for the project). "Forget Left or right, think about those who are dying, Didi," said PM Modi referring to the March 31 Vivekananda flyover collapse in Kolkata which killed 26 people. "At least give respect to the dead; but for

Didi, it's the chair which is only visible and not the dying people. "Look at the shamelessness; it was such a massive tragedy but she started a blame game," he said, about the project which was conceived and the contract awarded during the previous Left Front regime. "I want to ask Didi, if this flyover would have been completed and while inaugurating it, would you have said the contract was given by the Left? No,



you would have taken the credit for it. Now that it has collapsed, you are blaming others. This is all part of your business of money and death," the prime minister said addressing a party rally in Madarihat in Alipurduar district. Calling the tragedy an "act of fraud", PM Modi said: "They are saying it is an act of God, but actually it is an act of fraud. "It is an act of god in the sense that it happened during election time so that people may know what kind of government she has been running. God has sent a message to the people - that today this bridge has collapsed, tomorrow she will finish off entire Bengal. God's message to you all is to save Bengal," said PM Modi appealing to the people to give one chance to the BJP in the state elections.

# Suu Kyi vows to press for political prisoners' release

Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday vowed to press for the release of political prisoners and student activists, hinting that a mass amnesty may be imminent as her government seeks to stamp its mark on power in the former junta-run nation. Suu Kyi's administration, stacked full of democracy activists who spent years incarcerated by the military, took power last week ending nearly half a century of repressive army domination. In her first statement since assuming a new broadly-defined role as state counsellor, Suu Kyi said: "I am going to try... for the immediate release of political prisoners, political activists and students facing trial related to politics". She did not provide a specific timeline in the statement, which was released on Facebook. The routine jailing of dissidents was one of the most egregious acts of the former junta, stirring international outcry and support for Suu Kyi's pro-democracy movement. While the quasi-civilian government that replaced the junta in 2011 freed hundreds of political detainees, it also oversaw the detention of scores more, particularly those involved in land and education protests. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, 90 political prisoners were in jail and more than 400 activists were facing trial as of February. The White House on Wednesday said that President Barack Obama called Myanmar's President Htin Kyaw and Suu Kyi, praising the move toward civilian-led government. Obama called the pair to offer his congratulations, as military hardliners try to limit Suu Kyi's formal role. According to the White House "the president commended Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's determined efforts, over the course of many years and at great personal cost, to achieve a peaceful transfer of power and advance national reconciliation."



# Malaysia probe finds 1MDB made 3b in murky deals

AGENCIES A Malaysian parliamentary report released yesterday said a state-owned fund linked to Prime Minister Najib Razak made more than \$3 billion in unexplained overseas payments and called for the fund's former CEO to be investigated. The report presented to parliament by its Public Accounts Committee (PAC), which has examined the affair, marked the first time an official Malaysian probe has clearly suggested misconduct and recommended action in a scandal that has deeply tainted Najib. Najib, who founded 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) in 2009, has for months battled allegations that billions were looted from the investment vehicle in a vast campaign of fraud and embezzlement stretching from the Middle East to the Caymans, reports AFP. The PAC said more than \$3 billion in unapproved overseas payments were made from 1MDB funds. It chastised the now debt-stricken company for "weaknesses" in management under the 2009-2013 tenure of former CEO Shahrol Azral Ibrahim Halmi. "As such, enforcement agencies are asked to investigate Shahrol Azral Ibrahim Halmi and anyone else related," the 106-page report said. It made no further specific recommendations on investigations and did not mention Najib, who still chairs 1MDB's advisory board. Najib, 62, and 1MDB have consistently denied wrongdoing. In a statement, Najib vowed to "act on the report's recommendations". "We must ensure that lessons are learned, and action will be taken if any evidence of wrongdoing is found," he said. He did not address the questionable payments. Meanwhile, 1MDB's board of directors released a statement repeating its assertion that all 1MDB funds "have been fully accounted for" but adding that the entire board would resign, which the committee recommended.



Najib Razak



A Palestinian girl cries as she stands outside a cave that she lived in with her family after Israeli forces destroyed its entrance in Khirbet Tana, near the West Bank city of Nablus, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS



# Nita Ambani most powerful businesswoman in Asia: Forbes

IANS, Mumbai Reliance Industries director Nita Ambani and State Bank of India chairman Arundhati Bhattacharya have been ranked top two in Forbes' 'Asia 50 Power Businesswomen 2016' list, which acknowledges the inroads women are making in the business world, despite gender inequalities. Including Ambani and Bhattacharya, eight Indian businesswomen have made the cut in the latest list who among them bring to the table representations from diverse business fields — banking, bio-tech, data analytics, textiles, pharma and even wellness and beauty. "In a country where billionaire wives tend to remain in the shadow of their husbands, Nita's rising profile in the Reliance empire is unusual and earns her a debut spot on our Power Businesswomen ranking this year," said Forbes, which also ran a separate story on her. Incidentally, a Reliance Group entity is a licensee for publishing Forbes India. "As Reliance's non-executive director, Nita has no formal operational role in the conglomerate that her husband runs as chairman and managing director. But it's no secret that 'Bhabhi' — Hindi for brother's wife — as she is called by insiders, is a power near the throne." Mukesh Ambani, her husband, is the group chairman. Among her achievements, the magazine said an accidental entry into sports made her the face of her group after Reliance spent \$112 million for a cricket team, snatching such icons as Sachin Tendulkar.

# '1 in 50 unknowingly raising others child'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK Dramatic revelations about parentage might be staples of salacious soap operas and reality TV shows, but new research has suggested that unknowingly bringing up a child who isn't yours is much more common than you might think. 1 in 50 British fathers may be unwittingly raising a child which isn't their biological offspring, the study suggests. Researchers at Leuven University in Belgium said that they decided to conduct the first ever in-depth study after being surprised and intrigued to learn that the issue has received little serious scientific consideration, despite being a concern felt by many men. The study has been published in the journal 'Trends in Ecology and Evolution'. The researchers hypothesised that 10 per cent of fathers might be affected and said they were pleasantly surprised by the low figure of 2 per cent. Researchers added that the research debunked sexist social stereotypes that heterosexual women feel an evolutionary imperative to have multiple male partners to increase fertility rates but do not inform the partners, to avoid confrontation. They said: "The observed low cuckoldry rates in contemporary and past human populations clearly challenge the well-known idea that women routinely 'shop around' for good genes by engaging in extra-pair copulations to obtain genetic benefits for their children."

# Maldives president looks to rebuild ties on India trip

AFP, New Delhi Maldives President Abdulla Yameen will meet with Narendra Modi next week, New Delhi said Thursday, the pair's first tete-a-tete since the Indian premier controversially cancelled a visit to the island nation last year. Yameen, who will be accompanied by a high-level delegation, arrives in New Delhi for the two-day visit on Sunday and will have a meeting and lunch with the Hindu nationalist prime minister on Monday. Ties between traditional allies India and the Maldives took a hit last year due to a bitter internal power struggle in the Maldives which led to the jailing of former president Mohamed Nasheed. The political turmoil prompted Modi to cancel a planned visit to the Maldives in March 2015 at the last minute, but a trip by Indian foreign minister Sushma Swaraj in October appears to have calmed tensions. "India and Maldives commemorated 50 years of diplomatic relations last year," said Vikas Swarup, the Indian foreign ministry spokesman, at a media briefing. "Both countries have historically had a close relationship both as neighbours and friends in the Indian Ocean region." India has been wary of China's growing interest in the far-flung archipelago, as Beijing builds a network of ports in the Indian Ocean dubbed the String of Pearls. In 2012, the Maldives cancelled an airport expansion deal with an Indian infrastructure firm and later gave the contract to a Chinese company, ruffling feathers in New Delhi. On Wednesday, President Yameen inaugurated construction work on the \$800-million project in the capital Male, which he said would boost economic activities. It comes despite ongoing political turmoil in the Maldives which has dented its reputation as a peaceful tourist paradise. Yameen has faced international criticism over the jailing of dissidents and political opponents including former president and now opposition leader Mohamed Nasheed.



Abdulla Yameen

# Dutch snub EU-Kiev pact in referendum

AFP, The Hague Dutch voters Wednesday rejected a key European pact with Ukraine in a people's referendum seen as a barometer of anti-EU feeling, media predictions said, dealing an embarrassing blow to the government. In a result swiftly hailed by eurosceptic groups, the Dutch news agency ANP said that with 99.8 percent of the votes counted the "No" camp had won the day with 61.1 percent. Only 38 percent voted in favour of the two-year-old treaty with Kiev. After initial doubts, ANP also projected that 32.2 percent of the electorate had turned out, meaning the ballot is valid and must be considered by the coalition government of Prime Minister Mark Rutte. Voters were asked if they supported the European Union's association agreement with Ukraine, which aims to foster better trade relations with the war-torn country and former Soviet satellite. But organisers admitted the non-binding ballot was essentially about pushing a broader anti-EU agenda. The Netherlands is now the only member in the 28-nation EU not to have ratified the Ukraine accord which has already been given the thumbs up by both the upper and lower houses of the Dutch parliament. But it remained uncertain how much of a boost it would give to campaigners pushing for a "Brexit" in Britain's June 23 referendum on whether to leave the European Union. Nor was it clear how much it would affect the EU's association agreement with Kiev which has already been ratified by the 27 other EU members and been partially implemented.