

# NEWS IN brief

## Rouhani allies win Iran parliament polls

Reformist and moderate Iranian politicians allied with President Hassan Rouhani won second round parliamentary elections, preliminary results said yesterday, capping a remarkable comeback after years of isolation. The result is also an implicit public vote of confidence for Rouhani, who won a landslide election victory in 2013 and went on to clinch a historic deal with world powers over Tehran's nuclear programme that lifted sanctions.

## Building collapses in Mumbai; 6 killed

A three-storey building collapsed in Mumbai yesterday afternoon, killing six people and trapping many others, civic officials said. Many people are still feared trapped under the rubble, the fire brigade official said, adding the structure housed a beer bar and a factory, among others.

## Afghan forces launch push against Taliban

Government forces have launched operations against the Taliban in 18 provinces of Afghanistan as fighting has intensified since the start of the insurgents' spring offensive this month, the ministry of defence said yesterday. Eighty anti-government fighters, including nine from Islamic State have been killed over the past 24 hours in the east, while six soldiers have been killed, a defence ministry statement said.

## 26 migrants rescued off Libya

An Italian cargo ship rescued 26 migrants from a flimsy boat that was sinking off the coast of Libya but there are fears more may be missing, the Italian coastguard said yesterday. The nationalities of the migrants were not immediately known.

# PROTEST AGAINST POLITICAL DEADLOCK IN IRAQ

## Green Zone stormed

### Parliament ransacked; blast kills 23 pilgrims

Thousands of angry protesters broke into Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone yesterday and stormed the Iraqi parliament building after lawmakers again failed to approve new ministers. Jubilant supporters of Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr invaded the main session hall, shouting slogans glorifying their leader and claiming that they had rooted out corruption. The Iraqi capital was already on high alert for a major Shia pilgrimage, participants in which were targeted in a bombing that killed 23 yesterday, but extra security measures were taken after protesters stormed the Green Zone. Besides the parliament compound, the restricted area in central Baghdad houses the presidential palace, the prime minister's office and several embassies, including those of the United States and Britain. Protesters attached cables to the tops of heavy concrete blast walls that surround the Green Zone, pulling them down to create an opening, an AFP journalist said. They then headed to parliament, where some rampaged through the building and broke into offices, while other protesters shouted "peacefully, peacefully" and tried to contain the destruction, another AFP reporter said. Security forces were present but did not try to prevent the demonstrators from entering the parliament building, the reporter said.

Protesters pulled barbed wire across a road leading to one of the exits of the Green Zone, effectively preventing some scared lawmakers from fleeing the chaos. They also attacked and damaged several vehicles they believed belonged to lawmakers. Inside the main hall where lawmakers gathered, protesters sat in the MPs' seats taking "selfies" and shouting slogans. The Green Zone unrest kicked off as Sadr

ended a news conference in the holy Shia city of Najaf during which he condemned the political deadlock. He had threatened to have his supporters storm the Green Zone last month, but did not order them to enter the area in his yesterday's address. Key government posts have for years been shared out based on political and sectarian quotas, a practice demonstrators want to end. Abadi's efforts to change the system have been opposed by powerful political parties that rely on control of ministries for patronage and funds.



## IS executes more than 4,000 in Syria

IS is believed to have executed more than 4,000 people in less than two years for 'offences' including sodomy and apostasy in Syria. Monitors compiled the list of atrocities dating back to the declaration of the so-called Islamic State in June 2014, showing regular beheadings, shootings, stonings and other methods of murder, including throwing people off buildings and setting them on fire. The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said that by the end of the 22nd month of the "caliphate", 4,144 people had been executed. Civilians including women and children were among those killed, as are hundreds of IS' own members and enemy fighters from Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's army and opposition rebel groups. Analysts say the displays of brutality are part of propaganda attempts by IS to terrorise the West and its enemies.

# Aleppo bleeds on

## Residents flee death from above as 'truce' takes place elsewhere

Terrified residents fled a new wave of air strikes on rebel-held areas of Syria's second city Aleppo yesterday, as a "freeze" in fighting held on two other fronts. Aleppo was left out of the temporary US-Russian brokered truce, which appeared intact in the regime stronghold of Latakia as well as Damascus and the nearby rebel bastion of Eastern Ghouta. In Aleppo's rebel-held east, dozens of civilians left the battered district of Bustan al-Qasr early yesterday morning, an AFP correspondent said. Once Syria's economic hub, Aleppo and its surrounding countryside have suffered some of the worst fighting in a conflict that has killed more than 270,000 people and displaced millions. Aleppo has been divided between regime control in the west and rebel control in the east since 2012. More than 246 civilians have died in shelling, rocket fire and air strikes in both sides of the city since April 22, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor said. At least six civilians died in rebel-controlled areas yesterday, including Bab al-Nairab and Bustan al-Qasr districts, the civil defence said. The few people out on the streets in the city's east watched the sky anxiously for regime aircraft, running for shelter when one launched a new raid. On other fronts, fighting halted at 1:00am yesterday (2200 GMT Friday) in a "freeze" set to last for 24 hours in Damascus and Eastern Ghouta, and 72 hours in Latakia. In the face of international pressure to halt the air strikes in Aleppo, Russia yesterday said it would not ask the Syrian regime to halt air raids, as it believes they are helping to combat jihadist groups, Moscow's foreign ministry said.

# INDIA DROUGHT

## Bihar bans daytime cooking

With sizzling temperatures claiming more than 300 lives this month in India, officials have banned daytime cooking in some parts of the drought-stricken country in a bid to prevent accidental fires that have killed nearly 80 more people. "We call this the fire season in Bihar," Vyas, a state disaster management official who goes by one name, said. "Strong, westerly winds stoke fires which spread easily and cause great damage." The eastern state of Bihar this week took the unprecedented step of forbidding any cooking between 9am and 6pm, after accidental fires exacerbated by dry, hot and windy weather swept through shantytowns and thatched-roof houses in villages and killed 79 people. People were instead told to cook at night. Among those who died were 10 children and five adults killed in a fire sparked during a Hindu prayer ceremony in Bihar's Aurangabad district last week. Hoping to prevent more fires, officials have also banned the burning of spent crops and religious fire rituals. Anyone defying the ban risks up to two years in jail, the Times of India reported. Much of India is reeling under a weeks-long heat wave and severe drought conditions that have decimated crops, killed livestock and affected at least 330 million Indians - many of them left without enough water for their daily needs. Rivers, lakes and dams have dried up in parts of the western states of Maharashtra and Gujarat and overall officials say that groundwater reservoirs are at just 22 percent capacity. In some areas, the situation is so bad the government has sent tankers of water for emergency relief. Monsoon rains are still weeks away, expected to start only in June.



Protesters push over a barricade as they demonstrate against US Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump in California; a protester is being arrested; two women cover the mouth of a Trump pinata during the protest outside the Hyatt Regency Hotel where Trump was speaking. Hundreds of protesters jostled with police in riot gear outside the California hotel where Republican presidential frontrunner Donald Trump was to give a speech, forcing the candidate to duck into a back entrance.



# Left wing protesters clash with far-right in Germany

### Hundreds arrested; AfD party set to adopt an anti-Islamic manifesto

German riot police yesterday arrested some 400 protesters as clashes erupted outside a meeting of the right-wing populist AfD party, which is set to adopt an anti-Islamic manifesto amid a rise in European anti-migrant groups. Left-wing demonstrators burned tyres and threw firecrackers as they tried to prevent delegates of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party from getting into the congress in the western city of Stuttgart. The AfD meeting comes a week after the far-right Freedom Party's Norbert Hofer sent shock waves through Austria's political establishment by winning the first round of a presidential ballot. Heavily-armoured riot police used tear gas to hold off protesters, many dressed in black and masking their faces, as officers escorted AfD members into the congress hall. "No rights for Nazi propaganda," cried one group of protesters, who threw fire-

# 78pc voting in 5th phase of WB polls

Amid tight security, over 78 per cent of the around 1.24 crore electorate braved the sweltering heat to cast their votes for 53 constituencies in the fifth and penultimate phase of the West Bengal assembly polls yesterday. Stray incidents of violence were reported. Since 7:00am, when polling began, large queues of voters were seen outside almost all the booths for 31 constituencies in South 24 Parganas and 18 in Hooghly districts besides four in South Kolkata. CPI(M) and Congress accused the ruling Trinamool Congress of intimidating voters and election agents. On the other hand, Trinamool leaders including Lok Sabha member Abhishek Banerjee alleged "excesses" by the central security forces. Nearly 1.24 crore voters across 14,642 polling stations, including 77 auxiliary booths, were eligible to decide the fate of 349 candidates - 43 of them female. All eyes were on south Kolkata's Bhabanipur, where Mamata Banerjee - seeking re-election - is facing a challenge from Left Front-backed Congress nominee Deepa Dasmunshi and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's grandnephew Chandra Kumar Bose of the BJP. After yesterday's polls, elections have been held in 269 of the 294 constituencies in the state. The remaining 25 will vote in the sixth and final phase on May 5.

# China bars US aircraft carrier from entering Hong Kong

China has denied a request for a US carrier strike group led by the USS John C Stennis to visit to Hong Kong, the US Defense Department said on Friday, amid heightened tensions over China's territorial claims in the South China Sea. A Pentagon spokesman, Commander Bill Urban, said a US warship, the USS Blue Ridge, was currently in Hong Kong on a port visit and the US expected that to continue. Urban said the request for the Hong Kong visit by the carrier and its accompanying vessels, which have been patrolling the South China Sea, was recently denied, despite a "long track record of successful port visits to Hong Kong." A US Navy official, who did not want to be identified, said the Chinese Foreign Ministry's commissioner in Hong Kong conveyed Beijing's denial of visit, saying it

was "not convenient" at this time. China's Foreign Ministry, in a statement sent to Reuters yesterday, did not directly provide a reason for the denial. The nuclear-powered Stennis has been conducting patrols in the South China Sea, which China claims most of and where Beijing has sparked US and regional concerns by building artificial islands to bolster its claims. US Defense Secretary Ash Carter visited the Stennis while it transited the South China Sea on April 15 to underscore US concerns about the need to maintain freedom of navigation in the face of Chinese moves. While aboard the Stennis, Carter dismissed China's characterization of a more robust US military presence in the region as being the cause of heightened tensions. Washington has in turn accused China of militarizing its outposts in the South China Sea by building airstrips and other facilities.



Illegal stockpiles of elephant tusks, ivory figurines and rhinoceros horns are burning at the Nairobi National Park, yesterday. Kenyan yesterday set fire to the world's biggest ivory stockpile, after demanding a total ban on ivory and rhino horn. On the black market, such a quantity of ivory could sell for over \$100 million, and the rhino horn could raise as much as \$80 million. PHOTO: AFP



Indian President Pranab Mukherjee (centre L) receives an official Maori welcome or powhiri with Maori elder Lewis Moeau (centre R) during a welcoming ceremony at Government House in Auckland, yesterday. Mukherjee is in New Zealand for a three-day official visit. PHOTO: AFP



Kenyan security forces and emergency personnel look for survivors under the rubble of a collapsed building in Nairobi, yesterday. Torrential rainstorms in the Kenyan capital have left at least 17 people dead, police said, including at least 10 crushed when a six-storey building collapsed, as rescue teams shifted rubble in a desperate search for survivors. PHOTO: AFP