

# NEWSIN brief

## Nepal, India sign deal on hydropower plant

Kathmandu yesterday signed a long-delayed agreement with New Delhi to build Nepal's biggest hydropower plant in a bid to kickstart economic growth and ease crippling electricity shortages in both countries. The deal will see Indian infrastructure giant GMR construct a 900-megawatt hydropower project on Nepal's Karnali river that is forecast to generate electricity from 2021

## Obama nominates new envoy to India

President Barack Obama on Thursday nominated former State Department official Rich Verma to be the new US ambassador to India. Verma, an Indian-American and lawyer by trade, served in Obama's first term and is seen as close to the administration. That someone close to the Obama circle is being sent to India as America's top envoy suggests the administration is eager to patch up sometimes frayed ties with

## Turkey opens border to Syrian Kurds

Turkey yesterday opened up its border to thousands of Syrian Kurds fleeing clashes with Islamic State (IS) insurgents in neighbouring Syria, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said. The move came after Ankara, which is sheltering some 1.5 million refugees from the Syrian conflict, refused to take in more fearing it would not

## Iraq blasts kill at least 22

Bombings in and near the Iraqi capital and a blast in the northern city of Kirkuk killed at least 22 people yesterday, security and medical officials said. The day before, a suicide bombing, car bomb and shelling struck Shia-majority areas of northern Baghdad, killing at least 28 people and

# France strikes IS militants in Iraq US okays plan to train Syria rebels

France carried out its first air strike against the Islamic State group in Iraq yesterday, boosting US-led efforts to unite the world against the growing threat posed by the jihadists. More than a decade after Paris famously refused to back the invasion of Iraq, France became the first nation to join the US campaign of air strikes in the war-torn country. "This morning at 9:40, our Rafale planes carried out a first strike against a logistics depot of the terrorist organisation (IS)," President Francois Hollande said. His office said the target was in northeastern Iraq, without specifying exactly where, only adding: "The objective was hit and completely destroyed." French defence ministry sources said two jets dropped laser-guided GBU-12 bombs in the Mosul area. They said "a lot of ammunition", vehicles and fuel reserves were destroyed. Kurdish military spokesman Halgord Hekmat identified the location as Tal Mus, between the city of Mosul and Zumar.



France, as well as Britain, had already sent aircraft into Iraq's skies for surveillance missions. US aircraft have carried out more than 170 strikes since August 8 but President Barack Obama has been keen to build a broad international coalition. The bombing campaign was launched to protect Iraqi Kurdistan from advancing jihadists and attempt to help the autonomous region's troops retake the ground they lost. Despite broad domestic support for a tougher stance, Obama has vowed not to send "boots on the ground", fearful of dragging US forces back into the Iraqi quagmire only three years after pulling them out. On Thursday Congress backed his plan to arm rebels to take on IS in conjunction with air strikes Obama has pledged to carry out inside Syria. The Senate voted 78 to 22 to authorize the first step in Obama's move to degrade and destroy the Islamic State group which has conquered swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria. The measure now goes to the president's desk for his signature.



From top clockwise, pro-union supporters celebrate after Scottish independence referendum results are announced in Glasgow yesterday; a dejected pro-independence woman reacts to defeat in Edinburgh; and a Catalan supporter of the 'Yes' campaign holds up a banner outside the Scottish Parliament.

# Europe breathes sigh of relief

Result eases fears of a separatist domino effect, UK's exit from EU

AGENCIES

Europe breathed a sigh of relief yesterday after Scotland voted to reject independence from Britain, easing fears of a separatist domino effect on the continent and the risk of a British exit from the EU.

Many European capitals had the jitters before the vote, worrying how they would deal with an independent Scotland's place in the EU and Nato, and about the effect on nationalist movements like in Spain's Catalonia.

While the European Union had stayed officially neutral before the vote, there was clear relief in Brussels after the result that the first ever break-up of a member state was off the cards.

European Commission head Jose Manuel Barroso -- who had angered separatists earlier this year by saying an independent Scotland would find it hard to rejoin the EU -- welcomed the result as a boost for a "united, open and stronger Europe".

And while there was no explicit reference to the 2017 'In-Out' referendum on EU membership promised by British Premier David Cameron that Brussels has been watching carefully, the Scottish vote was clearly seen as reducing the risk.

"I think it reduces the risk in some ways," Simon Hix, Professor of European and Comparative Politics at the London School of Economics, told AFP.

"The next couple of years are not going to be taken up with Britain in Europe for this government, but with what to do inside Britain", he said, referring to likely political wrangling over the granting of more autonomy to both Scotland and England.

An independent Scotland would have given succour to separatist move-

SCOTTISH REFERENDUM

TURNOUT: 84.6%

44.7%  
✓ YES

55.3%  
✗ NO

SOURCE: AFP

ments across the continent, ranging from the Basque region straddling the border between Spain and France, to Flanders, Corsica, Venice and Bavaria.

The Spanish government yesterday welcomed Scotland's "No" vote, but Catalans set on breaking away from Spain pushed ahead defiantly for their own ballot on self-rule. The region's president Artur Mas said his bid to hold a vote on independence from Spain had been "strengthened" by Scotland's referendum regardless of the result and despite Madrid's fierce resistance.

"There is a wave of relief in European governments, because they had feared a European domino effect," Jeremy Dodeigne, a political scientist at the Louvain Catholic University in Belgium, told AFP.

**BALUCHISTAN DEMAND SCOTS-STYLE VOTE**

Baluch separatist leaders yesterday called on Pakistan to follow in Britain's footsteps by holding a referendum similar to Scotland's on granting independence to the insurgency-racked province.



Indian police personnel detain exiled Tibetan youth during a protest against a visit to India by Chinese President Xi Jinping, outside a hotel in New Delhi, yesterday.

# China troops withdraw from Indian border

Chinese troops have begun pulling back from the disputed border with India, sources said yesterday, as President Xi Jinping wrapped up a rare visit to New Delhi overshadowed by the stand-off at the remote frontier. The row over an alleged incursion by hundreds of Chinese troops into territory claimed by India has dominated Xi's visit, intended to reset ties between Asia's two superpowers after the election of a new Indian government this year. The two countries have long been embroiled in a bitter dispute over their border, with both sides regularly accusing soldiers of crossing over into the other's territory. As Xi arrived in India on Wednesday, reports said 1,000 Chinese soldiers had entered a disputed area in the mountainous northern Ladakh region, sparking a stand-off with Indian troops. Analysts said the reported incursions were likely timed to fire a shot across the bows of India's new Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has signaled he will take a harder line on what he termed Chinese "expansionism". A source in the Indian paramilitary forces said the situation has "de-escalated" in Chumar sector although some Chinese soldiers were still present in Demchok area of southern Ladakh. China and India fought a brief but bloody war in 1962 over the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh in the eastern Himalayas. Small incursions are common across the Line of Actual Control, the de-facto border that runs 4,000 kilometres across Ladakh. In a joint statement yesterday, the two leaders reiterated their commitment to seek a "fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution" to the festering boundary issue. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei said the two leaders had "reached an important consensus on properly handling border issues". During his visit Xi pledged greater investment from China, already India's biggest trading partner, with annual two-way commerce of more than \$65 billion. Xi, the first Chinese president to visit India in eight years, wrapped up his India visit by meeting the parliamentary speaker and Sonia Gandhi, head of the former ruling Congress Party.

# 'DEVOLUTION REVOLUTION' Scotland vote shakes up UK

Scotland was enticed to reject independence with a promise of new powers but the pledge has pushed Prime Minister David Cameron into offering the same package to England -- a move that could change the face of the United Kingdom. Cameron secured the outcome he wanted after Scots voted "No" by a clear margin in the referendum, but the messy business of delivering further devolution has now begun. In the heat of the campaign, the Conservative leader joined his Labour and Liberal Democrat colleagues in pledging new control over tax, spending and welfare to the Edinburgh parliament if Scots voted to stay in the UK. They insisted that a "No" vote was still a vote for change, and Scotland's pro-independence First Minister Alex Salmond has made clear he expects the commitment to be honoured. But the proposals have sparked concern among many English lawmakers who warned of the implications for their constituents, who they say feel increasingly marginalised. Cameron yesterday confirmed that proposals for "devo-max" in Scotland would be laid in legislation by January, although not likely implemented until after May's general election. And addressing his English supporters, he said it was only fair that other UK nations had the same powers delivered in the same time frame -- paving the way for a rapid and potentially radical decentralisation of power. The reforms would likely see Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish MPs barred from voting on issues that do not affect their constituents, such as health and education. But beyond that, the details are unclear. Ten years ago voters in northeastern England voted resoundingly against a plan to set up a regional assembly. But the mood has shifted since then and newspapers in northern England yesterday united to demand more powers for their regions in a "fair deal after so many promises were made to Scotland". Whatever the format of the new settlement, analysts say the UK is likely to change substantially. "We're moving towards a more federal version of Britain," said Tony Travers, professor of politics at the London School of Economics (LSE). Professor Malcolm Chalmers, of the RUSI defence think tank, added: "While this referendum has failed to destroy the Union, its fall-out could still destabilise it in a quite fundamental fashion." The Scottish Parliament was set up in 1999 and already controls areas like health, education and law and order, with some power over the rate of income tax. The proposed new powers would give it "almost everything except for full independence", said Emily St Denny, a politics professor at Stirling University. Salmond said he would work "constructively" with the parties in London on a new deal, but made clear he was not giving up his dream of independence -- promising yet further constitutional headaches ahead. Northern Ireland's devolved government has fewer powers than Scotland and Wales has fewer still, although legislation granting the Welsh assembly some taxation powers is currently before the British parliament. But there is no separate English parliament, an anomaly that Cameron hopes to address with his plan for "English votes for English laws".

AFP, London

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David Cameron Alex Salmond

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# Ebola threatens world peace

Says UNSC; Sierra Leone launches 3-day shutdown

UN Security Council declared the Ebola outbreak a threat to world peace and called on countries to provide urgent aid as Sierra Leone went ahead with its controversial Ebola shutdown yesterday. The 15-member council unanimously adopted a resolution on Thursday after UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon warned that the number of Ebola infections -- already more than 5,000 -- was doubling every three weeks, notably in Liberia. The epidemic has so far killed more than 2,600 people. It was only the third resolution on a public health emergency to be approved in the history of the United Nations. The council voted on measures to address the AIDS pandemic in 2000 and 2011. In its resolution, the council declared that the "unprecedented extent of the Ebola outbreak in Africa constitutes a threat to

# US Gun Violence Man kills six grandchildren

A man killed his daughter and six grandchildren, the youngest just three months old, in a mass shooting at a house in the US state of Florida on Thursday. The shooter, identified as Don Charles Spirit, 51, then killed himself, said Gilchrist County Sheriff Robert Schultz. The oldest child was age 10. Spirit had contacted emergency services saying that he was considering harming himself and others, but when police arrived at the home in the small town of Bell, his daughter and young grandchildren were all dead, police said. The grisly episode is sure to revive passionate debate about gun ownership in the United States, where 11,000 people were murdered by gun violence in 2011, according to FBI figures.



# Gordon Brown emerges as the 'saviour'

The man credited with swinging Scotland's independence referendum and saving Prime Minister David Cameron's job is ironically his predecessor, Gordon Brown, who was defeated by Cameron in the 2010 election. Tributes flooded in for the former Labour leader yesterday from the same conservative commentators who once mocked his clumsy style and simmering rivalry with Tony Blair. Twitter cartoons have even appeared likening him to the superhero Flash Gordon with the slogan: "Gordon's alive!". Brown "will be celebrated as the union's saviour," read a blog by The Economist, while the Financial Times said: "Scotland these past few weeks has been watching a politician reborn." The Daily Mail, no friend of Brown when he was in office, hailed him as a "street fighter" and said his campaigning was "stupendous", adding: "Cometh the moment... cometh the man." The jowly Scot's barnstorming speech on the final day of campaigning on Wednesday was widely shared on social media and was quickly praised as his most impassioned ever. Brown made a particularly poignant appeal to wartime patriotism in that speech and portrayed the "No" vote as positive -- something the unionist campaign had failed to do. "We fought two world wars together. There's not a cemetery in Europe that doesn't have a Scot, a Welshman, an Irish and an Englishman side by side," he said. "Voting 'No' will deliver faster, safer, better and friendlier change," he said, appearing alongside his former finance minister Alistair Darling, whose handling of the "Better Together" campaign was criticised as too negative.

# Xi or 'eleven Jinping' Indian TV sacks newsreader over China leader blunder

Pronouncing foreign leaders' names is a headache for newsreaders the world over but it proved the downfall of one Indian newscaster, who mistook the visiting Chinese president's name for the Roman numeral XI, calling him "Eleven Jinping" on air. The blunder occurred late Thursday night in a report by India's public broadcaster Doordarshan on President Xi Jinping's high-profile first state visit to India. Local news site Quartz yesterday quoted Doordarshan chief executive Jawahar Sircar as saying the newscaster had been sacked and steps had been taken to avoid a repeat of such an incident. "We've taken action plus (we are) upgrading systems," Sircar tweeted. The broadcaster did not immediately return AFP's calls for comment. Doordarshan, once the only choice for television viewers in India, has suffered a steep decline in influence since private television channels began airing in the early 1990s. The blunder is an embarrassment for the government of India's new Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who rolled out the red carpet for Xi, spending his 64th birthday hosting a dinner for the Chinese president in a luxury riverside tent in his home city Ahmedabad.