

# NEWSIN brief

## Libya violence kills dozens of troops

Dozens of soldiers trying to defend an airport in Libya's second city were killed and scores wounded in bombings and clashes with Islamists, the army said yesterday as the UN threatened sanctions. Libya has been sliding into chaos since longtime leader Muammar Gaddafi was toppled in an uprising three years ago, with interim authorities confronted by powerful militias that fought to oust him.

## Rousseff ahead as Brazil heads to polls

Marina Silva is losing ground in the race for the Brazilian presidency and may not even make the run-off, an opinion poll showed Thursday. The vote is on Sunday. A Datafolha poll put Rousseff in front on 40 percent of first-round voter intentions, and Silva down a point on just 24, compared to 21 for Neves, who was up one.

## EU condemns new Israeli settlements

The European Union yesterday condemned an Israeli plan to build 2,610 new settler homes in annexed east Jerusalem, calling it "highly detrimental" to diplomatic efforts for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

## British PM ahead in polls after two yrs

British Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservatives yesterday took the lead in a YouGov opinion poll for the first time since March 2012, following his party conference speech. Cameron's address on Wednesday promised tax cuts for 30 million workers if the Conservatives win the May 2015 general election and his speech was largely seen as a pitch to be returned to office.

## HIV's originated from Kinshasa in 1920s

A new genetic history of HIV shows how the pandemic almost certainly took root in the 1920s in Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo, researchers said Thursday. Assisted by train transport and the sex trade, the virus that causes AIDS then spread across the continent and eventually the world, infecting some 75 million people and killing 36 million of them. An international team of researchers reconstructed the genetic history of the HIV-1 group M pandemic, and found that the common ancestor of group M is "highly likely" to have emerged in Kinshasa around 1920. And it did because it was aided by "a 'perfect storm' of factors, including urban growth, strong railway links during Belgian colonial rule, and changes to the sex trade, combined to see HIV emerge from Kinshasa and spread across the globe" between the 1920s and 1950s, said the study in the journal Science. HIV was first identified in 1981, and the AIDS epidemic ballooned for more than a decade until antiretroviral drugs were created.



## PROTEST FOR DEMOCRACY

Policemen try to get a man to let go of a fence guarded by pro-democracy demonstrators in an occupied area of Hong Kong, yesterday. (Top, from left to right) A group of men in masks beat up a pro-democracy man who tried to stop them from removing barricades; demonstrators form a human barricade to prevent opponents; Pro-democracy demonstrators clean the occupied area of Hong Kong. Hong Kong pro-democracy protest leaders yesterday vowed to call off talks with the government unless "organised attacks" on supporters stop, as ugly and chaotic scenes broke out at previously peaceful demonstrations in the city.



PHOTO: AFP



# Australia joins coalition

Australia's cabinet yesterday authorised the deployment of special forces and military air strikes to tackle the Islamic State organisation in Iraq, Prime Minister Tony Abbott said as Kurdish fighters mounted a desperate defence of a Syrian border town besieged by Islamic State group jihadists. "Today, cabinet has authorised Australian air strikes in Iraq at the request of the Iraqi government and in support of the Iraqi government," Abbott said. "Also, subject to final legal documentation, cabinet has authorised the deployment of Australian special forces into Iraq to advise and assist Iraqi forces." About 200 troops, including special forces soldiers, arrived in mid-September in the United Arab Emirates, a staging post for military operations into the region, as part of a 600-strong deployment as Australia geared up to join the US-led campaign. They are backed by Australian air force aircraft, including F/A-18F Super Hornet jets, an E-7A Wedgetail

**FIGHT AGAINST ISIS**

Fighting intensifies over Syria Kurd town

Turkey vows to defend it at any cost

Turkish intervention would be 'aggression': Syria

Airborne Early Warning and Control aircraft, and a KC-30A multi-role tanker and transport aircraft. Meanwhile, as Kurdish fighters battled to prevent ISIS jihadists, President Bashar al-Assad's regime yesterday warned neighbouring Turkey against intervening on its soil. Huge plumes of smoke were seen rising from Kobane as its outnumbered defenders came under intense fire from jihadists who have advanced to its gates despite US-led air strikes against the militants. At least 60 mortar rounds fired by the ISIS group rained down on the Kurdish.

It said a Chechen member of the IS organisation was leading the assault on the town, which is considered a strategic prize. The fierce fighting came a day after the Turkish government won authorisation from parliament to take military action in Syria and Iraq against the jihadists, who include thousands of foreigners in their ranks. "We will do whatever we can so that Kobane does not fall," Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said, adding that about 186,000 people had flooded across the border from Syria in less than two weeks. Damascus was quick to hit back, saying the Turkish stance "represents a real aggression against a member state of the United Nations." Meanwhile, the Pentagon yesterday said aircraft from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates joined US warplanes in new bombing raids against jihadists in Syria. Coalition planes hit militant tanks, oil refineries and a training camp, it said.

# Hit extremists with 'iron hand': Top Saudi cleric

Muslim leaders must strike the enemies of Islam with "an iron hand", Saudi Arabia's top cleric said during Friday prayers, in apparent condemnation of the Islamic State jihadist group. Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz al-Sheikh's comments came after Saudi Arabia and four other Arab nations joined the United States in aerial bombardment of the ISIS militants in Syria. Speaking to Muslims from around the world in an address during the annual hajj pilgrimage, the mufti called on fellow Islamic leaders to "hit with an iron hand the enemies of Islam." The ISIS group has declared a "caliphate" straddling Syria and Iraq where they have committed a spate of atrocities including crucifixions and beheadings. "Your religion is threatened. Your security is threatened," he thundered, according to the official Saudi Press Agency. "These criminals carry out rapes, bloodshed and looting," he said, adding that "these vile



Sheikh Abdul Aziz

crimes can be considered terrorism" and their perpetrators have nothing to do with Islam. "They are tyrants," he said, warning of "their deviant ideology." The mufti spoke from Nimrah Mosque at Mount Arafat in western Saudi Arabia, home to Islam's holiest sites. The cleric added the enemies of Muslim nations are trying to spread "chaos and confusion." "And know that you are targeted by your enemies who want to tear your ranks, turn your hearts against each other and spread chaos and confusion and beware of their conspiracies," he said from the spot where Prophet Mohammed made his final sermon 14 centuries ago. In August, he urged Muslim youth not to be influenced by "calls for jihad ... on perverted principles," and he described al-Qaeda and ISIS jihadists as "enemy number one" of Islam.



Smoke rises from the besieged Syrian town of Kobani, yesterday. Inset, Syrian Kurds take cover from the rain after crossing the border between Syria and Turkey.



PHOTO: AFP

# Ukraine truce looks shaky

Ukrainian troops and pro-Russian rebels yesterday clashed around the flashpoint city of Donetsk, while trading blame over the death of a Swiss aid worker, four weeks into their shaky truce. Parliament speaker Oleksandr Turchynov accused insurgents of breaking the ceasefire "over a thousand times", while the military claimed that Russian military specialists were reinforcing rebel positions. The deadly shelling of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) office in Donetsk, which prompted a firm rebuke from UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, was an "act of terror", Kiev said, blaming rebels who control the city. However, Russia and the rebels both accused Ukrainian forces for the Red Cross worker's death. With the toll from five months of fighting standing at more than 3,200 people, the UN secretary general said he was "saddened and disturbed" about the aid worker's death. The European Union also expressed concern over the state of the ceasefire. Under the terms of a September 19 truce that followed, Kiev and the rebels are meant to withdraw heavy weapons from a 30-kilometre buffer zone along the eastern front line.



# Ghani thanks Nato troops for their sacrifice

Newly-inaugurated Afghan President Ashraf Ghani yesterday set a fresh tone in relations with Nato countries that have fought against Taliban insurgents, paying a fulsome tribute to foreign soldiers who died in battle. Hamid Karzai, who left office on Monday, caused outrage in the United States, Britain and among other allies by saying the Nato mission in Afghanistan since 2001 had caused huge suffering to Afghans and failed to bring security. But Ghani said the Nato soldiers in Afghanistan had made the world a safer place. "I want to say thank you to those families for the loss of their loved ones," Ghani said. "They stood shoulder-to-shoulder (with Afghan forces) and we will remember them." Ghani already began to reset ties with the US and Nato by signing a long-delayed agreement allowing about 12,000 foreign troops to stay on into 2015 to further train the Afghan army and police. David Cameron, who became the first world leader to hold talks with Ghani, promised continued support for Afghanistan.

# Catalans defy Spanish court in independence duel

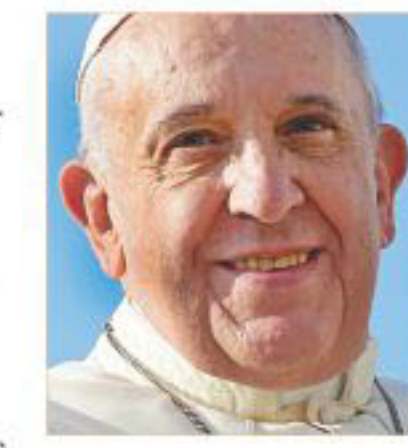
Catalan leaders yesterday forged ahead for a vote on independence, defying a court challenge by the national government in their bid to redraw the map of Spain. "We have agreed to maintain the election decree so that citizens can exercise their right to vote on November 9," the Catalan regional government spokesman Francesc Homs told reporters in Barcelona. Fired up by last month's independence referendum in Scotland -- although voters there rejected independence -- hundreds of thousands of Catalans have protested in the streets over recent weeks demanding their own vote. In another move of defiance, Catalonia's moderate conservative government formally decreed the creation of a commission to supervise the ballot, triggering a strong

response from the central government. Catalonia's president Artur Mas is walking a legal and political tightrope, under pressure from hardline separatists to push on with a potentially illegal vote, fiercely opposed by Spain's Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. Spain's opposition Socialist party also opposes independence for Catalonia but has called for a federal constitutional reform to answer Catalan demands. Proud of their distinct language and culture, many of Catalonia's 7.5 million inhabitants have long complained they get a raw deal from the government in Madrid, which decides how their taxes are spent. Catalonia formally adopted the status of a "nation" in a 2006 charter that increased its autonomy, but the Constitutional Court overruled that nationhood claim, fuelling pro-independence feeling.

# Pope, Snowden tipped for 2014 Nobel prizes

Nobel prize season starts Monday with speculation rife that the peace prize could go to US whistleblower Edward Snowden, Pakistani girls' education campaigner Malala Yousafzai, or perhaps Pope Francis. Last year, the physics prize awarded to Peter Higgs and Francois Englert for the Higgs particle was widely predicted, but Nobel pundits and bookmakers tend to focus more on who will get the prestigious peace and literature awards. This year saw a record 278 peace prize nominations and, while the list is secret, some names have been revealed by their

sponsors, including US whistleblower Edward Snowden, who was nominated by two Norwegian members of parliament. Kristian Berg Harpviken, director of the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) is one of few experts to publish an annual shortlist of likely winners, even if he has yet to predict one accurately. This year he ranked Snowden second place -- behind Pope Francis -- for exposing the extent of US electronic surveillance. However, he acknowledged that the former intelligence analyst would be a controversial choice as "many continue to see him as a traitor and a criminal". Pope Francis -- topping bookmaker Paddy Power's list with 9/4 odds -- would be another controversial choice.



AFP, Stockholm