

# NEWS IN brief

## Oil 'price rout' not over: IEA

AFP, Paris

Oil prices are expected to keep sliding well into 2015, held down by weak demand and increased shale production, the International Energy Agency said yesterday. Global prices have collapsed by some 30 percent since June, and crude futures slumped on Thursday to lows not seen since September 2010, diving well below the \$80-per-barrel mark.

## McConnell elected US Senate leader

AFP, Washington

Republican lawmakers re-elected Mitch McConnell as their leader in the US Senate on Wednesday, ensuring him the powerful role of majority leader in the new Congress that begins in January. McConnell, the 72-year-old senior senator from Kentucky, will take over from current Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid at the start of the new congressional session on January 3.

## 50% more lightning by 2100!

AFP, Washington

Lightning has the power to spark wildfires and kill, and scientists said yesterday that climate change may lead to 50 percent more of it by century's end. The report in the US journal Science is based on measurements of precipitation and cloud buoyancy, applied to 11 different climate models that estimate how warm the planet may get by 2100.

## Sterilisation deaths: Drug makers nabbed

AFP, Bilaspur

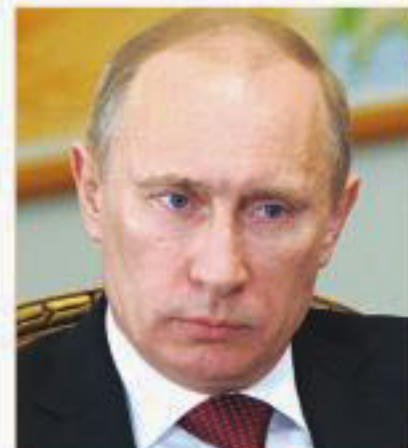
Indian police yesterday said they have arrested the head of a drug manufacturing company and his son on suspicion of destroying evidence in the case of 13 women who died after a mass sterilisation programme. The deaths have triggered widespread criticism of a govt-run programme that offers poor Indian women cash incentives to get sterilised, in what activists say are often horrible conditions.



Protesters wearing fiberglass heads depicting world leaders and dressed in lifesaver uniforms to highlight the need to halve global inequality pose on the banks of the Brisbane River ahead of the G20 Summit in Brisbane, yesterday. Brisbane will host the G20 Leadership Summit on November 15-16.

# Stop being a bully

## Australia, UK tell Putin as West, Russia rift widens over Ukraine, MH17



AFP, Brisbane

Vladimir Putin faces an icy reception at the G20 summit with Britain's David Cameron telling the Russian leader to stop bullying smaller states and Australia's Tony Abbott accusing him of trying to relive the "lost glories of tsarism".

The Russian president arrived in Brisbane late yesterday for the weekend summit of world powers at a time of heightened tension with host Australia, which has sent three ships to its northern coast after a flotilla of Russian navy vessels appeared there this week.

Prime Minister Abbott said the appearance of the four Russian vessels, which include a heavily armed cruiser and destroyer, were "part of a regrettable pattern" of growing Russian military bullishness.

Russia in turn yesterday warned France of "serious" consequences unless Paris this month delivers a warship whose handover has been delayed by the Ukraine crisis -- setting the stage for confrontation with French President Francois Hollande.

The French presidency confirmed that Hollande and Putin would hold a bilateral meeting in Brisbane tomorrow evening. It declined to comment further on the warships controversy in light of Moscow's latest intervention.

Britain's prime minister, speaking to the Australian parliament, warned Russia it faces further sanctions if it does not commit to resolving the conflict in Ukraine, calling Moscow's actions "unacceptable".

"It is a large state bullying a smaller state in Europe. We've seen the consequences of that in the past and we should learn the lessons of history and make sure we don't let it happen again," Cameron said.

Russia on Thursday dismissed the West's claims that it has been sending fresh military hardware into eastern Ukraine, which could fuel a return to all-out conflict in place of an uneasy ceasefire.

The West's relations with Moscow have grown increasingly tense since the downing of a Malaysia Airlines jet over territory controlled by pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine in July, killing 298 passengers and crew including 38 Australian citizens and residents. Kiev and the West claim the plane was blown out of the sky with a missile supplied by Russia, an allegation Moscow denies.

Abbott told Putin to "come clean and atone" for the shooting down of Flight MH17.

The European Union, the United States and Australia are among those that have imposed sanctions on Russia for what they see as Moscow's desire to redraw modern Europe's borders. Pro-Russian rebels have been fighting Ukrainian government forces since April in a war that has claimed more than 4,000 lives and driven hundreds of thousands of people from their homes.

The Australian navy said Friday it had sent a third ship to help monitor the Russian fleet that has appeared in international waters off its north coast, which also includes a tugboat and a refuelling vessel. Abbott said in a joint press conference with Cameron that Russia was "being much more assertive now than it has been for a very long time".

"Whether it's the bullying of Ukraine, whether it's the increasing Russian military aircraft flying into the airspace of Japan, European countries, whether it's the naval task group which is now in the south Pacific, Russia is being much more assertive now than it has been for a very long time," Abbott said.

# Iraq forces retake Baiji

## UK revokes jihadists' passports; UN accused ISIS of war crimes

AGENCIES

Iraqi forces yesterday recaptured the strategic oil town of Baiji in a significant victory over the Islamic State group, as the UN accused the jihadists of crimes against humanity in neighbouring Syria.

Baiji is the largest town to be retaken by government troops since ISIS-led militants overran much of Iraq's Sunni Arab heartland in June in their bid to create an Islamic "caliphate".

The northern town, which had been out of government control for months, is located near Iraq's main oil refinery on the main highway to the ISIS-held second city of Mosul.

Its recapture further isolates militants farther south in the city of Tikrit, hometown of executed dictator Saddam Hussein, although ISIS still controls large parts of Iraq as well as swathes of Syria.

"Iraqi forces were able to regain complete control of the town of Baiji," Ahmed al-Krayim, the head of the Salaheddin provincial council, told AFP.

Soldiers, police, Shiite militiamen and tribesmen were all involved in the operation to retake Baiji, and are now pushing farther north, Krayim said. Breaking through to the massive refinery would be another significant win for the government in Baghdad.

Meanwhile, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria released its first report focused squarely on ISIS crimes, presenting a horrifying picture of what life is like in areas controlled by the extremist jihadists, including massacres, beheadings, torture, sexual enslavement and forced pregnancy.

"The commanders of ISIS have acted wilfully, perpetrating these war crimes and crimes against humanity with clear intent of attacking persons with awareness of their civilian or 'hors de combat' (non-combat) status," the report said.

Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron meanwhile outlined plans to seize the passports of British jihadists to stop them from returning after fighting overseas.

Hundreds of citizens from various western countries have joined ISIS and other militant groups, raising fears that they may come home to carry out attacks.

Meanwhile, a high-level Syrian opposition official and a rebel commander have said that militant leaders from the SIS and al-Qaeda gathered at a farm house in northern Syria last week and agreed on a plan to stop fighting each other and work together against their opponents.

Such an accord could present new difficulties for Washington's strategy against the ISIS group. While warplanes from a US-led coalition strike militants from the air, the Obama administration has counted on arming "moderate" rebel factions to push them back on the ground.

The report came as American aircraft bombed the Khorasan group in Syria on Thursday, in the third attack on the al-Qaeda offshoot that is considered an immediate threat to the West, the US military's Central Command said.

The White House has said the group includes al-Qaeda operatives from Afghanistan and Pakistan who made their way to Syria. Independent experts and Syrian activists have questioned how the group has been portrayed by Washington, and have cast doubt on the distinction between Khorasan and the Al-Nusra Front.

Meanwhile, the ISIS said its leader has ordered that the organisation start minting gold, silver and copper coins for its own currency the Islamic dinar.

A website affiliated with the militant group said late on Thursday that its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, has instructed his followers to start minting the coins to "change the tyrannical monetary system" modelled on Western economies that "enslaved Muslims."

# Boko Haram seizes key Nigeria town

AFP, Kano, Nigeria

Boko Haram has seized the town of Chibok in Borno state, northeast Nigeria, from where 276 schoolgirls were kidnapped more than six months ago, a local pastor and a senator told AFP yesterday.

"Chibok was taken by Boko Haram. They are in control," said Enoch Mark, a Christian pastor whose daughter and niece are among the 219 teenagers still being held.

Mark and the senator for southern Borno, Ali Ndume, said the militants attacked at about 4:00 pm on Thursday, destroying communications masts and forcing residents to flee.

Mark said the attack on the town appeared to come after Boko Haram overran the towns of Hong and Kombi in neighbouring Adamawa state following the group's ouster from the commercial hub of Mubi.

Nigeria's government has been heavily criticised for its response to the mass abduction, its failure to free the girls as well as its apparent inability to protect its citizens.

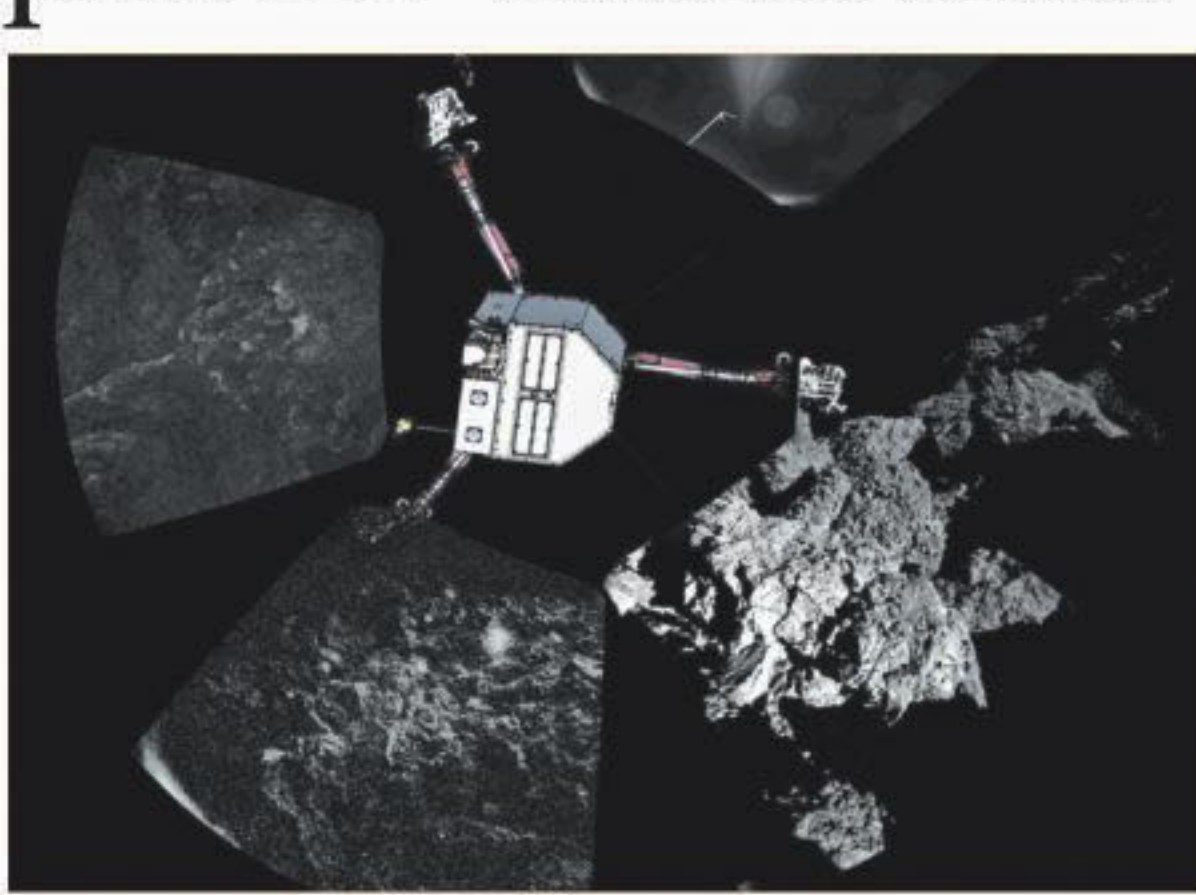
## WAR ON ISIS

ISIS, Qaeda reach accord in Syria

US bombs Qaeda offshoot Khorasan again

ISIS announces it own currency

# Future of comet probe 'uncertain'



BBC ONLINE

Robot lab Philae drilled into its host comet with just hours of battery left, but may lose power before it can transmit results of a much-anticipated attempt to probe below the surface, mission scientists said.

The European Space Agency (Esa) says the instrument is being deployed to its maximum extent, despite the risk of toppling the lander.

Scientists hope the tool will be able to capture some samples for analysis in the robot's onboard laboratories. If the battery dies, the results may not make it back to Earth.

Philae made history on Wednesday when it was dropped to the surface of 67P by Esa's Rosetta satellite - and has been returning pictures and other scientific data ever since. It covered 6.4 billion km to reach Comet 67P out near the orbit of Jupiter.

It is not known precisely where on the comet the robot is located, but the pictures it has returned indicate it is in the shadow of a cliff.

The limited sunlight the probe receives means its solar panels cannot keep the battery systems properly topped up. Engineers doubt Philae in its current position can stay powered beyond tomorrow.

The dwindling energy reserves have therefore prompted the mission team to deploy the drill now.

Although the activity is among Philae's key objectives, it is also highly risky, because the torque on the tool could destabilise the delicately placed lander.

The results of the drilling will not now be known until Rosetta comes back around and tries to re-establish the radio on Friday night.

Scientists hope the investigations of the comet can provide fresh insights on the origins of the Solar System. Comets are believed to hold materials that are largely unchanged since the formation of the planets 4.6 billion years ago.

# Israel eases Jerusalem mosque restrictions

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel eased restrictions at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque yesterday after US Secretary of State John Kerry announced agreement on steps to reduce tensions at the flashpoint compound.

The site, which is holy to Jews as well as Muslims, has been the focus of months of unrest in annexed Arab east Jerusalem, that has spread to the occupied West Bank and Arab communities across Israel, raising fears of a new Palestinian uprising.

The Palestinians have been infuriated by a far-right Jewish campaign for prayer rights at Al-Aqsa that threatens an ultra-sensitive, decades-old status quo.

The violence prompted Kerry to hold a flurry of meetings with the two sides in neighbouring Jordan on Thursday, after which he announced unspecified confidence-building measures to ease the underlying tensions.

Men of all ages were allowed entry for the main weekly Muslim prayers at Al-Aqsa for the first time in "months", Israeli police spokesman Mickey Rosenfeld told AFP.

"Firm commitments" were made to maintain the status quo at the compound, Kerry said at a press conference with Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh.

Israel and Jordan, which has custodial rights at the compound, also agreed to take steps to "de-escalate the situation" in Jerusalem and to "restore confidence".

Kerry met separately with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, who he said also committed to help calm emotions.

Netanyahu has said repeatedly that his government has no plans to change the status quo at the compound which allows Jews to visit but not pray. But his reassurances have failed to calm Palestinian anger that has also been fuelled by his government's vigorous expansion of Jewish settlements on occupied Palestinian land.



Indian schoolchildren, some of them dressed up as India's key figures, pose during a fancy dress competition for Children's Day celebrations at a school in Amritsar, yesterday. The celebration of Children's Day falls on November 14, coinciding with the birth anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister.

# US pledges 3b for UN climate fund



AFP, Brisbane

US President Barack Obama will pledge \$3 billion to a UN fund aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change in the world's poorest countries, a US official said yesterday.

"It is in our national interest to help vulnerable countries to build resilience to climate change," the administration official said as Obama headed to a G20 summit in Australia.

Obama was en route to Brisbane after visiting Myanmar and China, where on Wednesday he and President Xi Jinping announced ambitious targets on greenhouse gas emissions as part of a pact designed to breathe new life into attempts to replace the international Kyoto treaty.

Obama was expected to outline his pledge in a speech tomorrow in Brisbane on the sidelines of the G20 talks, as backers and donors involved in the UN's "Green Climate Fund" (GCF) prepare to meet in Berlin on November 20.

The US president's renewed focus on climate change threatens to upend Australia's stated focus of keeping the G20 summit confined to economic issues.

The UN-backed GCF is designed to enlist private-sector money on top of government donations, and so help poorer countries to invest in environmentally friendly technologies and build up their defences against rising sea levels and less predictable weather patterns.

At the G20 summit, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is expected to say that Japan will give up to \$1.5 billion to the Green Climate Fund, Kyodo News agency reported yesterday.

Christiana Figueres, the head of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, has called for an initial capitalisation of \$10 billion by the end of the year.

France and Germany have already pledged to contribute \$1 billion each.

The G20 meeting is the third event in an intensive week for international summitry, and comes after Obama and Xi agreed their deal to make their countries -- the world's top two polluters -- curb their emissions. China set a target for its greenhouse gas output to peak "around 2030" and Obama set a goal for the US to cut such emissions by 26-28 percent from 2005 levels by 2025.

# Gandhis adopt villages under Modi's scheme

PTI, New Delhi

Congress president Sonia Gandhi and vice-president Rahul Gandhi have adopted one village each in their respective constituencies to develop them into model villages under "Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana" launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last month.

Party sources said that while Sonia Gandhi has selected village Udwa from Jagatpur block in her parliamentary seat Raebareilly, Rahul has chosen village 'Deeh' in Jagdishpur block in Amethi constituency, an area industrialized during his father late Rajiv Gandhi's Prime Ministerial tenure.

Udwa in Jagatpur is also the birthplace of Rana Beni Madhav and has a rich historical background.

Party sources, however, said that adopting the villages does not mean endorsing the scheme launched by Modi.

Modi had launched Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana on the occasion of birth anniversary of Jai Prakash Narayan last month as was promised in his maiden Independence Day speech.

Launching the scheme, Modi had said that if nearly 800 MPs develop three village each by 2019, around 2,500 villages will be covered in the country and the initiative will change the face of the country by chain reaction.

The Centre had recently extended the deadline by one more week for adopting villages under the plan. The Prime Minister himself has adopted Jayapur village in his Parliamentary constituency Varanasi.