

# NEWSIN brief

## Taliban suicide attack on Afghan bank kills 10

AFP, Kandahar  
Taliban militants detonated a suicide bomb and stormed a bank in southern Afghanistan yesterday, killing five police and five civilians as the country endures a rise in violence as US-led Nato troops pull out. The attackers forced their way inside after a bomb exploded at the entrance of the Kabul Bank branch in Lashkar Gah, the capital of the insurgency-racked province of Helmand.

## 15 schoolgirls killed in Yemen car bomb

AFP, Sanaa  
Fifteen schoolgirls were killed in Yemen when their bus was caught up in a car bomb attack targeting a Shiite militia leader by suspected Al-Qaeda militants on Tuesday, officials said.

Another 10 people also died in the blast outside the home of Abdallah Idriss, a leader of the Shiite rebels known as Huthis, in the flashpoint town of Rada in central Yemen, a security source said.

## Japan nuke watchdog okays more reactors

AFP, Tokyo  
Japan's nuclear watchdog yesterday gave the green light to restarting two more atomic reactors, days after pro-nuclear Prime Minister Shinzo Abe swept to election victory.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) said it believed the two units at Takahama nuclear power plant in central Fukui prefecture met toughened safety standards introduced after the tsunami-sparked disaster at Fukushima in 2011.

## UK troops mistreated Iraq detainees

AFP, London  
British inquiry yesterday ruled that UK troops mistreated nine Iraqi detainees in violation of the Geneva Convention following a fierce battle in 2004.

The report said that some soldiers had used "tactical questioning" techniques like food and sleep deprivation with their prisoners and took "tasteless trophies", like photos with detainees.

## One million facing hunger in Ebola-hit countries: UN

AFP, Paris  
Border closures, quarantines and crop losses in West African nations battling the Ebola virus could lead to as many as one million people going hungry, UN food agencies said yesterday. The deadly haemorrhagic fever that has killed 6,800 people has severely disrupted daily life in the worst-hit nations of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, the latter two of which have gone so far as to ban Christmas celebrations.



Clockwise from left: Mourners carry the coffin of a victim during a funeral ceremony in Peshawar. A Pakistani soldier walks amidst the debris in the school which came under attack by Taliban militants the previous day. Pakistani journalists hold placards during a protest against the attack in Karachi.



## Myanmar plans to overhaul court system

AFP, Yangon  
Myanmar yesterday announced plans to reform its graft-plagued judicial system, a move met with scepticism by lawyers and activists long used to red tape and poor access to justice during the junta era. Courts across the country, which have long been viewed as a corruption-riddled arm of the army-dominated government, are to be modernised and committed to "integrity, independence and the rule of law, according to the new three-year plan unveiled by the Supreme Court.

In the report, Supreme Court chief justice Htun Htun Oo said peace and prosperity could only be achieved once "the eternal principles of justice, liberty and equality" have been enhanced.

The 2015 to 2017 judicial roadmap lays out priorities for the court system as part of wider reforms under a quasi-civilian regime that have shaken the country out of isolation over the last three years.

Much of the judicial system remains cloaked in mystery, with almost no public or media access to trials or basic case information.

A 2013 report from the International Commission of Jurists said that while some barriers preventing lawyers from practising had been lifted by the new government, significant restrictions remained and "systemic corruption" continued to affect every aspect of their careers.

The Supreme Court report recommends media training for court staff, public information counters, case management courses for judges and a satisfaction survey as part of the strategy to drag the judiciary into a new age.

But lawyers used to battling through the country's labyrinthine bureaucracy remained unconvinced, saying previous plans to overhaul the legal system have swiftly unravelled.

# Nawaz removes moratorium on death penalty

DAWN ONLINE

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif yesterday approved the removal of moratorium on death penalty after the carnage in Peshawar killed 141 people.

Addressing an All Parties Conference (APC) in Peshawar, the premier announced that the moratorium on death penalty, which was imposed under international pressure, has been lifted.

"The prime minister has abolished the moratorium on death penalty in terrorism-related cases," an official from Nawaz's office said.

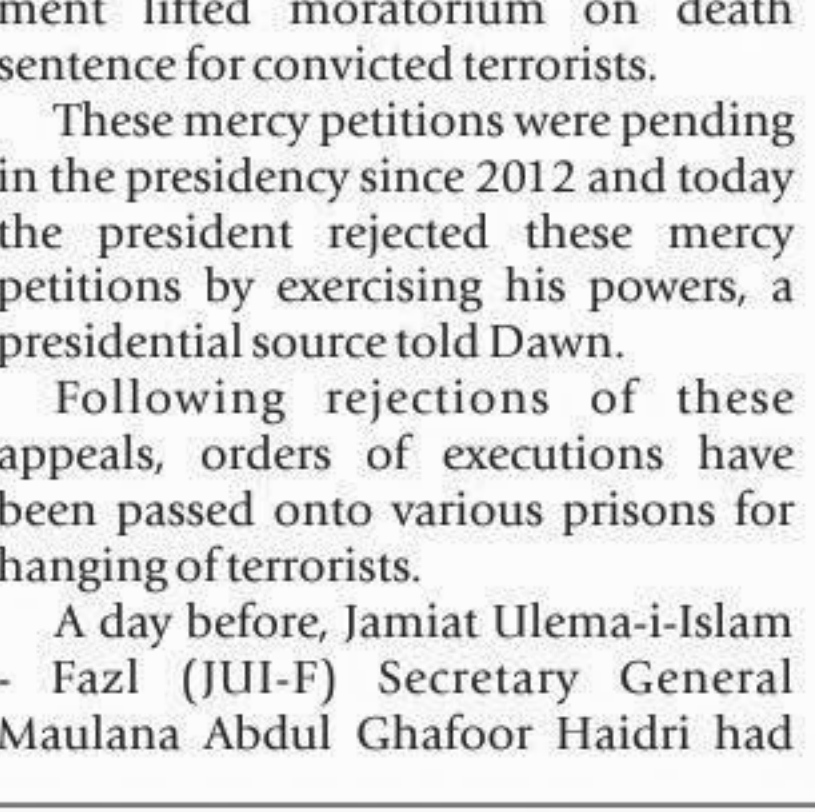
Soon after resuming office, the newly-elected government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had said it wanted to reinstate the death penalty in a bid to crack down on criminals and militants.

In this respect, the government had decided to hang four convicts on death row in August last year. However, a temporary stay was ordered on these executions following objections from Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari and rights groups.

President Mamnoon Hussain has turned down mercy petitions of eight convicted terrorists after the govern-

## THE PAKISTANI TALIBAN TEHREEK-E-TALIBAN (TTP)

AFFILIATION: CLOSE TO AL-QAEDA STATUS: TERRORIST GROUP (US)



- 2007 Declares a holy war on the Pakistani government 2012 October 9
- 2012 October 9 Behind the shooting of Malala Yousafzai, 2014 Nobel Peace laureate
- 2013 November TTP leader, Hakimullah Mehsud, killed by a US drone strike. Current chief: Mullah Fazlullah
- 2014 June The Pakistani army launches a vast offensive against the TTP in North Waziristan
- September Creation of a dissident faction called Jamaat ul-Ahrar
- 16 December Claims responsibility for Peshawar school attack

ment lifted moratorium on death sentence for convicted terrorists.

These mercy petitions were pending in the presidency since 2012 and today the president rejected these mercy petitions by exercising his powers, a presidential source told Dawn.

Following rejections of these appeals, orders of executions have been passed onto various prisons for hanging of terrorists.

A day before, Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam - Fazl (JUI-F) Secretary General Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haidri had

said in a press conference that a moratorium on death penalty was encouraging terrorists and had limited counter-terrorism actions in the country.

Maulana Haidri, who is Minister of State for Postal Services, had said that the state had no right to suspend the death penalty.

"Only a victim's kin has the right to pardon the killer with or without taking compensation. This is an Islamic way of justice and being an ideological state Pakistan should have Islamic laws," he had said.

# Indian states asked to strengthen security

PTI, New Delhi

In the wake of the terror attack on a school in Peshawar, the Centre yesterday asked all states to beef up security particularly in educational institutions.

"An advisory has been issued to the State Governments," India's Home Minister Rajnath Singh told reporters outside Parliament House.

He was responding to queries about steps taken by the government to ensure security of schools in the wake of terror strike on a Peshawar school.

Though the Minister did not elaborate, officials in the Home Ministry had said that the guidelines for schools will include asking them to prepare an escape plan for children in case of a terror attack, how to prevent hostage situation, how to raise alarm and shut doors and gates in case of an emergency.

"The earlier advisory was issued by the Home Ministry in 2010 to prominent schools and institutions after the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack accused David Coleman Headley was arrested in the US. We will revisit the advisory and send it afresh considering the present situation," a Home Ministry official said.

The assault on an army-run school is the deadliest terror attack in Pakistan's history. It brought international condemnation as well as promises of a stern crackdown on militants from political and military leaders.

Schools, colleges, offices and markets were closed yesterday across Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan, the north-western province of which Peshawar is the capital and which has suffered the worst of the TTP's bloody seven-year insurgency.



Rajnath Singh



Rescue workers carry an injured man out from the debris after a five-storey residential building collapsed in Nairobi yesterday. The building is reported to have collapsed at about 3:00am and most of the tenants are said to be students of the Technical University of Kenya. A Kenyan rescue official says a number of people are feared trapped or dead.

# Australia orders siege probe

AFP, Sydney

Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott yesterday ordered an urgent enquiry into why a deranged Islamic gunman was not under surveillance and how he obtained citizenship, as security was stepped up after a fatal cafe siege.

Iranian-born Man Haron Monis, 50, had a history of extremism and violence and was on bail for a string of charges, including sexual offences and abetting the murder of his ex-wife.

Last month he posted a message in Arabic on his website pledging allegiance to "the Caliph of the Muslims", which some have interpreted to mean the Islamic State militant group.

Yet he was allowed to roam free and take 17 hostages at a cafe in the heart of Sydney on Monday, unfurling an Islamic flag during a 16-hour siege which left him and two innocent victims dead. Six others were wounded.

The gunman, whom Abbott called "a madman", was well known to both state and federal police and the domestic spy agency ASIO, but was not on any Australian

counter-terrorism watch lists.

"I certainly want answers to those sorts of questions and there was incredulity around the National Security Committee of the Cabinet yesterday when we were briefed on the details of his record," Abbott said.

The threshold for placing someone on a watch list boils down to whether they are regarded as being at risk of committing violence against innocent people.

Officials in Tehran said Tuesday that they had repeatedly warned Australia about Monis, including suggesting that he be put under surveillance, but that their recommendations were ignored.

"Despite several notifications to the Australian government regarding his criminal background, no attention was paid," Ebrahim Rahimpour, Iran's deputy foreign minister for Asia and Oceania affairs, told state television.

Abbott said the review, due to report in late January, would examine Monis' arrival in Australia from Iran in 1996, the decision to grant him asylum and citizenship, what information agencies had about him and how it was shared.

# Iran sees more steps ahead in nuke talks

REUTERS, Dubai

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said yesterday nuclear talks with major powers were being conducted in a good atmosphere, "good steps" had been taken and more would follow.

US and Iranian diplomats began a two-day meeting in Geneva on Monday to pave the way for resuming broader negotiations involving Iran and six world powers there yesterday.

The discussions were proceeding "in a good atmosphere," Zarif said on state television. "Good steps have been taken and more will be taken. I think the world needs this settlement, in light of challenges facing us, like the threat of terrorism. It is in everyone's interest."

The talks are aimed at ending a 12-year-old dispute over Iran's nuclear goals that has wrought heavy economic sanctions on the Islamic Republic and fears of a new Middle East war unless the dispute can be settled diplomatically soon.

In apparent criticism of Gulf Arab states, long nervous about Iran's nuclear program, Zarif added: "I wish our other neighbors would follow Turkey's example and help in finding a solution to the nuclear issue. Our nuclear program is to no one's detriment, they shouldn't be worried... Turkey has all along supported our right to peaceful nuclear activities."

Zarif was speaking at a televised news conference with visiting Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.

Iran, the United States, France, Germany, Britain, China and Russia failed to strike a long-term deal by a self-imposed Nov. 24 deadline, so extended the talks for seven more months to address what they call complex technical details.

# I may be the last

Says Dalai Lama

BBC ONLINE

Exiled Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama has said he realises that he may be the last to hold the title.

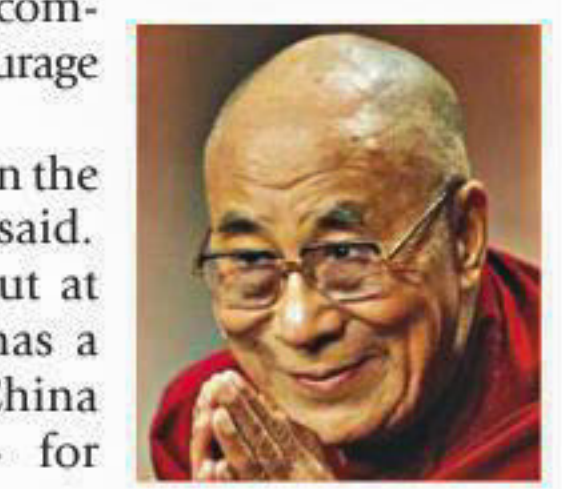
But he told the BBC it would be better that the centuries-old tradition ceased "at the time of a popular Dalai Lama".

The Dalai Lama suggested the UK had taken a soft line with China over Hong Kong's recent student-led pro-democracy protests for financial reasons.

He also said the international community needed to do more to encourage democracy in China.

"China very much wants to join the mainstream world economy," he said. "They should be welcome, but at the same time the free world has a moral responsibility to bring China into mainstream democracy - for China's own interests."

The Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959 after Chinese troops crushed an attempted uprising in Tibet.



# Rwandan genocide court shuts after 20 years

AFP, Arusha

After two decades of work and 61 convictions at a cost of nearly \$2 billion, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda shuts up shop amid criticism but at least with some justice served.

The Tanzanian-based and United Nations-backed ICTR, set up in late 1994 to try the alleged masterminds behind Rwanda's genocide, is ending its work, with only its appeals chamber staying open for one final trial after December 31.

In the end, the court "did its job," admits Bonaventure Higaniro, the guardian of the genocide memorial at Kamonyi, a massacre site some 36 kilometres south of Rwandan capital Kigali.

Kamonyi's mayor Jean-Paul Akayesu was sentenced to life imprisonment for genocide and crimes against humanity in 1998, and is serving his sentence in Mali.

"It would have been better that he was tried here... because here people knew him and could give more information," said Higaniro. But he admits that, without the ICTR, the ex-mayor -- who fled to Zambia after the genocide -- and many other kingpins of the killing would not have not been

arrested and so would have escaped justice. "Those who tried to flee, the ICTR put its hand on them and found them.... The court did its job," he said.

The closure comes on the 20th anniversary of the genocide, which saw at least 800,000 people, overwhelmingly ethnic Tutsis, murdered by Hutu extremists.

In two decades, the tribunal has indicted 92 people, mostly senior political or military officers at the time of the genocide. Of those, 61 were convicted, including seven who are still waiting for their appeal.

Critics say the court's justice has been painfully slow, incredibly expensive at a cost of \$2 billion (1.6 billion euros) and, being geographically far removed from the victims on the ground, it lacked an understanding of context.

While the tribunal's contribution to fighting impunity is clear, it has been criticised for lacking any mechanism for victim reparations and failing to prosecute alleged crimes by those on the other side of the conflict.

Rwanda opposed the ICTR's mandate, which also covered possible crimes committed by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in 1994. The then-rebel Tutsi group is now Rwanda's ruling party, led by President Paul Kagame.



A white beluga wears a Santa hat to attract visitors at the Hakkeijima Sea Paradise aquarium in Yokohama, suburban Tokyo yesterday. Christmas attractions will be held till Christmas Day.