# NEWS<sub>IN</sub> brief

#### S Korea proposes talks with North next month AFP, Seoul

A top South Korean official offered yesterday to hold high-level talks with North Korea in January, as Pyongyang battles growing pressure over human rights

Ryoo Kihl-Jae, the South's unification minister in charge of North Korean affairs, said he was willing to meet in Seoul or the North's capital Pyongyang for the rare high-level talks.

and a cyber row with the US.

### Fire damages Swedish mosque in arson attack

REUTERS, Stockholm

Fire ripped through a Swedish mosque early yesterday in the second suspected arson attack on a Muslim center in four days in a country caught up in a fierce debate on immigra-

Firefighters extinguished the blaze in the southern town of Eslov and no one was injured, local media reported.

## Greece fails to elect president

AFP, Athens

Greece's parliament yesterday failed for a third time to elect a president, an AFP count showed, forcing early elections in the coming weeks that could see a radical left party win power.

The government candidate fell short of securing the 180 votes required, and under the constitution parliament will have to be dissolved in the next 10 days.

#### Gmail blocked in China REUTERS, Beijing

Google Inc's Gmail was blocked in China after months of disruptions to the world's biggest email service, with an anticensorship advocate suggesting the Great Firewall was to blame.

Large numbers of Gmail web addresses were cut off in China on Friday, said GreatFire.org, a China-based freedom of speech advocacy group. Users said the service was still down yesterday.

### Cameroon bombs Boko Haram positions

AFP, Yaounde

Cameroon's air force attacked Boko Haram positions in the far north of the country for the first time after the jihadists seized a military camp, the government announced.

President Paul Biya personally ordered Sunday's air strike, which forced the Boko Haram insurgents from neighbouring Nigeria to flee the camp at Assighasia,

Communications Minister Issa Tchiroma Bakary said in a statement late Sunday.



The ongoing evacuation of passengers from the burning ferry "Norman Atlantic" adrift off Albania yesterday. Rescuers battled gale-force winds and billowing smoke to get to them.

PHOTO: AFP

# 414 passengers rescued from burning Greek ferry

Five bodies removed

AGENCIES

At least five people died after a car ferry caught fire in the Adriatic Sea, Greek and Italian officials said yesterday, as survivors described a terrifying ordeal that could easily have been much more deadly.

Four bodies were recovered from the water around the stricken Norman Atlantic yesterday, a day after the body of a 62-year-old Greek man was pulled from the heaving sea.

A 24-hour evacuation operation that proved to be extremely difficult was concluded shortly after midday with the Italian navy saying only a skeleton crew of

nine men had been left on board to prepare for the boat being towed to port.

The navy said the latest numbers

indicate 414 people have been rescued from the ferry, and five bodies removed, reports AP. They and other evacuees told

how the fire triggered panic which the crew appeared ill-prepared to deal with.

One of the first passengers off in Bari told reporters he had thought he was going to die as parts of the boat became engulfed by thick ter. smoke as the ferry was travelling from Greece from Italy.

"We did not know what to do. The staff had no idea how to get

people off the boat," he said.

"The lifeboats did not work, there was only one of them in the water and none of the crew were there to help people."

The evacuation was completed nearly 36 hours after a fire broke out on the car deck and left the huge vessel drifting dangerously in high seas off the coast of Albania.

Bari prosecutor Giuseppe Volpe announced a criminal investigation which will seek to establish whether negligence contributed to the disas-

The Italian owner of the boat, Carlo Visentini, said he would cooperate fully.

The Italian navy and coastguard

worked through the night trying to get people off a boat that was being buffeted by powerful, bitingly cold winds and huge waves. The Italian-owned ship, which

was travelling from Patras in western

Greece to Ancona in Italy, started drifting because the fire put its steering system out of action. A flotilla of merchant, coastguard and military ships from Greece, Italy

and Albania were involved in the rescue efforts. Some of the rescued passengers displayed mild symptoms of hypo-

thermia but doctors treating the evacuees indicated that they were mainly dealing with shock and trauma.

## AirAsia, MH370 incidents different

AP, Singapore

The disappearance of an AirAsia passenger jet soon after takeoff inevitably brings back memories of the mystery behind Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, which disappeared nearly 10 months ago and is yet to be found.

Here are some of the differences between the two events:

#### FOUL PLAY

Authorities suspect Flight 370 was deliberately diverted by someone on board, and suspicions of foul play emerged within days of its disappearance.



There has been no suggestion that the AirAsia flight is anything but an accident, meaning the aircraft should have crashed not far from the spot where it fell off the radar. Indonesia's Transportation Ministry says its pilots asked permission to turn left and fly higher to avoid clouds three minutes before the jet was last seen on radar. That strengthens early speculation that adverse weather, or the pilot's response to it, was a factor in the accident.

#### SOUTHERN INDIAN OCEAN

Based on data "pings" from Flight 370, authorities believe the plane crashed into the southern Indian Ocean, a vast, deep, isolated stretch of water far from the last known position of the plane. The AirAsia flight was carrying enough fuel for about four hours of flying. Assuming it crashed soon after it dropped off the radar, finding it should be far easier. The Java Sea is a contained body of water, shallow, and crisscrossed by planes and ships. In normal circumstances, a plane leaves wreckage even if it enters the water largely intact. It can take several days for it to be spotted, however. On Jan. 1, 2007, an Indonesian jetliner carrying 102 people went missing on a domestic flight from Surabaya to Manado. A search effort across land and sea turned up nothing until 11 days later, when a fisherman found the plane's right horizontal stabilizer.

#### AIRLINE

COMMUNICATIONS Malaysia Airlines was severely criticised following the Flight 370 disaster for giving out contradictory and vague information. So

should mean less pressure, however.

far, that has not happened with the latest incident. The boss of AirAsia, Tony Fernandes, has tweeted about the incident and what the company is doing, drawing praise not scorn. Managing communications about the loss of the flight will become more challenging if the wreckage is not found quickly. The fact that the overwhelming majority of the passengers are Indonesians and that it was an Indonesian-registered company operating the plane



Hamas security forces take part in a parade in Gaza City yesterday, marking the sixth anniversary of the three-week Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip in which more than a thousand Palestinians were killed between the late 2008 and early 2009.

РНОТО: AFP

# Last saw son at funeral of another son

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The father of the pilot of missing AirAsia flight QZ8501 last saw his son just days ago, at the funeral of another of his sons. Captain Iriyanto's brother died of

diabetes, their father Suwarto told the BBC, saying the second tragedy to hit the family was in the hands of god.

"I want my son to come

back alive and well but if that's not meant to be, if god doesn't want that, it's in the hands of fate," he added. "My son, he's not alone on

the plane. If this is god's will then so be it."

Captain Irianto's daughter has reportedly posted a plea on social media for her father to come home safely.

Identified as Angela, she uploaded a picture of him and wrote: "Papa pulang. Kakak masih butuh papa. Kembalikan papaku. Papa pulang pa,

papa harus ketemu."

It roughly translates to: "Papa come back. I still need you. Return my papa to me. Papa come back, we have to meet."

Hopes are fading for the 162 people on board the plane, which was on its

way from Surabaya in Indonesia to Singapore when it disappeared yesterday.

As the search continued yesterday, Australian planes spotted objects in the sea that

are feared to be wreckage from the Airbus A320-200. An Indonesian official had

already warned that the aircraft was likely to be on the ocean

Henry Bambang Soelistyo, of the National Search and Rescue, said: "Based on the co-ordinates that we know, the evaluation would be that any estimated crash position is in the sea, and that the hypothesis is the plane is at the bottom of the sea.

## Interview makes \$15m online

AFP, Los Angeles

Controversial low-brow comedy "The Interview" scored more than \$15 million in online rentals and purchases, entertainment giant Sony said, following an embarrassing cyberattack and threats that led the company to pull the film from theaters.

The madcap R-rated comedy featuring Seth Rogen and James Franco revolves around the fictional assassination of North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un.

西岛河南部岛 图对 마십시오!

ERVIEW

Sony cancelled the film's release after many of the biggest US movie theater chains got cold feet following threats from hackers who also

claimed a cyberattack on Sony Studios. The White House has said the attack was orchestrated by North Korea, but Pyongyang has denied

any involvement. In the end the comedy, which received widespread publicity throughout the episode, played in some 330 independent movie houses that offered to show the film after Sony came under fire for the cancellation.

It was also made available beginning Wednesday across Google Play, YouTube Movies, Microsoft's Xbox Video.

# ISIS executes 120 for Severe storm hits trying to flee jihad

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

ISIS has executed at least 120 of its own militants in the past three months, the majority of whom were foreign fighters trying to return home, according to a Syrian monitoring group.

The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that the brutal militant group killed the jihadists - most of whom were foreign fighters - for trying to flee the territory adding that the true number could be even higher.

of the group, told The Independent: "We can confirm that 120 fighters have been killed by ISIS, but from our sources on the ground we believe that over 200 have actually been killed."

Of the 120 militants confirmed executed for "exceeding the limits in religion", 116 are believed to be foreign fighters who wanted to return home.

The monitoring group said it being held inside ISIS jails. could not confirm the ages or nationalities of the fighters, but it is known that some of them were Europeans.

The number of militants killed represents only a small percentage of

the 1,880 documented individuals ISIS has murdered since the terrorist network declared a "Caliphate" or "Islamic state" in June this year.

Over the past six months Isis has slain 1,177 civilians, including eight women and two children. The victims were shot, beheaded

or stoned to death in the Syrian

provinces of Aleppo, Deir, Ezzor, Hama, Homs, Hasakeh and Raqa. It is estimated that 930 civilians from the al-Shaitaat tribe, which is at

war with ISIS in eastern Syria, were Rami Abdurrahman, the director killed in the countryside of Deir Ezzor. As well as executing its own members and civilians, ISIS has killed 502 soldiers who were fighting for

> President Assad and 91 anti-regime combatants. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights believes the overall number killed by ISIS to be far higher than they have confirmed, as hundreds are missing still missing and detainees are

> The news comes as ISIS aggressively pursues its aims and is expanding into Egypt. It now con-

UK across Syria and Iraq.

# southern Philippines

## Three killed; Thousands flee homes

AFP, Butuan

Three people were killed, one is missing and thousands fled their homes as a tropical storm battered the southern Philippines with strong winds and heavy rain, officials said yesterday.

The storm, locally named "Seniang" and with winds of up to 80 kilometres per hour, slammed into the main southern island of Mindanao before dawn, then crossed to the central islands, the government weather station said.

In the Mindanao city of Tagum, a bus skidded off a rain-

soaked road late Sunday, leaving one passenger dead and 17 injured, said provincial police chief Senior Superintendent Samuel Gadingan.

In the mountainous town of Monkayo, a 65-year-old man drowned as he tried to cross a river while one person was killed by a tree uprooted by fierce winds in Butuan City, other officials said.

trols an area greater in size than the

Compostela town and is still missing, said regional disaster relief official Raul Villocino. Landslides were also reported in the Monkayo area but no deaths were reported, Villocino added.

In Surigao del Sur province on Mindanao, a total of 13,740 people were evacuated in eight towns, Governor Johnny Pimentel told AFP.

"The rains are very strong and there has been no let-up in the last three days," Pimentel said.

Pimentel said he declared a "state of calamity" in the province to let local authorities tap into additional funding for relief supplies.

Flood waters as deep as five feet (1.5 metres) were reported in some areas as rescuers in rubber boats rushed to aid residents trapped in their homes, he said.

The number of evacuees may rise as rivers continue to swell, he said. Winds had brought down trees and blown roofs off

shanties, he said. "This is the first time that my house was Another man was swept away while col- flooded," Agusan del Sur Vice Governor lecting coconuts on a riverbank in Santiago Cane said by phone.

## Nato defeat in Afghan war AFP, Kabul

The Taliban responded scornfully yesterday to the formal end of Nato's war in Afghanistan, describing the US-led mission as a "fire of barbarism and cruelty" that had drowned the country "in a pool of blood".

Taliban claim

The insurgent group issued the statement in English a day after Nato marked the closure of its combat mission with a low-key ceremony in Kabul, arranged in secret due to the threat of Taliban attack.

"We consider this step a clear indication of their defeat and disappointment," the Taliban said.

"America, its invading allies... along with all international arrogant organisations have been handed a clear-cut defeat in this lopsided war."

The Taliban have fought a resilient insurgency against Nato and Afghan forces for 13 years, with violence now at record levels nationwide.