

# NEWSIN brief

## Next Iran nuke talks on Jan 18: EU

REUTERS, Brussels  
Iran and six world powers will hold talks on Tehran's disputed nuclear program in Geneva on Jan. 18, the European Union said yesterday. The six powers - the United States, China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany - and Iran "will continue negotiations in Geneva on 18 January with a view to making further progress towards a long-term comprehensive solution on the nuclear issue," an EU statement said.

## Suicide blast hits Turkey tourist hub

AFP, Istanbul  
An outlawed Turkish Marxist group yesterday claimed responsibility for a strike by a female suicide bomber on the heart of Istanbul's tourist district, raising fears of a wave of radical attacks one week after it hit police guarding a palace in the city. The female bomber, a young woman in her 20s, killed herself and a policeman early Tuesday evening after walking into the police station in Istanbul's Sultanahmet district.

## Washed utensils in hotel: Smriti Irani

IANAS, New Delhi  
Stressing the dignity of labour, HRD minister Smriti Irani on Tuesday told a conference of state education ministers here that she had washed utensils 15 years back at a hotel in Mumbai. She referred to Prime Minister's Narendra Modi's emphasis on giving importance to skills and said no one should feel inferior on being a plumber or a mechanic.

## World's shortest intl flight unveiled

AFP, Vienna  
Passengers travelling on a new flight offered by Austrian budget airline Fly Niki from April will hardly have time to sip a coffee between take-off and landing. The flight between Vienna and Bratislava, which lie just about 50 kilometres apart, will last about 20 minutes, the airline said, claiming that this would be the world's shortest flight between two countries.

## Kurds kill 24 jihadists in Kobane

AFP, Beirut  
At least 24 Islamic State jihadists were killed in clashes with Kurdish fighters Tuesday in the Syrian town of Kobane, where a battle has raged for almost four months, a monitoring group said. Seven YPG fighters were also killed as well as two civilians who died in ISIS raids, said the Britain-based group.

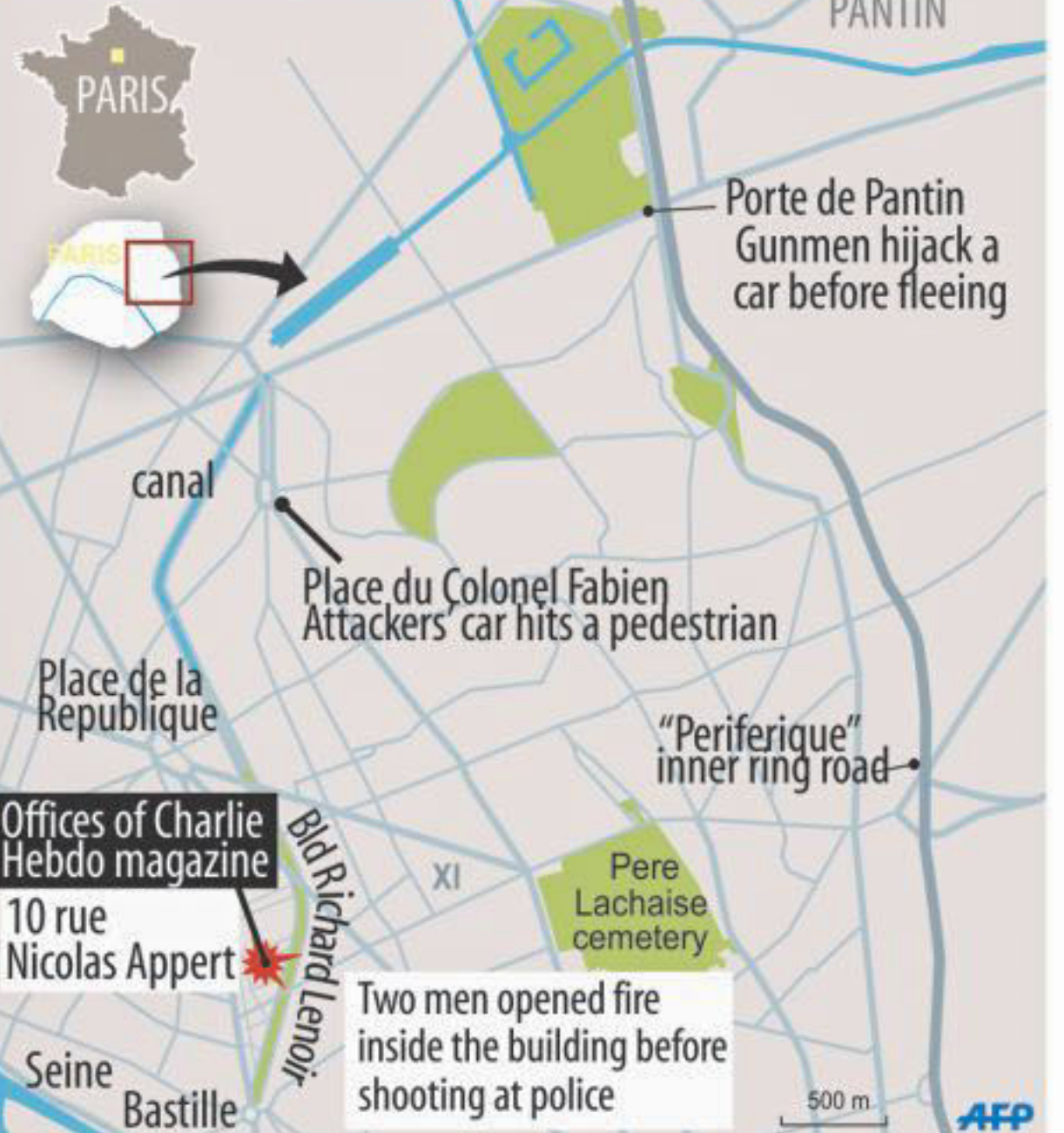


# TERROR STRIKES PARIS

From top left, Soldiers patrol in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris as the capital was placed under the highest alert status after heavily armed gunmen shouting Islamist slogans stormed French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo and shot dead at least 12 people in the deadliest attack in France in four decades; Firefighters carry an injured man on a stretcher from the shooting scene; AFP journalists hold placard reading "I am Charlie" as they hold a minute of silence in protest of the killing; And a man holds a drawing during a gathering at the Place de la Republique (Republic square) in Paris, yesterday.



## DEADLY ATTACK ON FRENCH MAGAZINE



## RECENT TERROR ATTACKS

In AUSTRALIA on December 15-16, 2014, two hostages and an extremist Iranian-born gunman, Man Haron Monis, are killed in a 16-hour siege involving 17 hostages that ends when police storm a the Lindt Chocolate cafe in central Sydney.

In CANADA on October 23, 2014 a soldier is fatally shot near parliament in the capital Ottawa. His attacker, Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, who is shot dead when he attempts to storm parliament itself, was on a terror watch list. The incident comes a day after another attacker, Martin Rouleau Couture, ran over a soldier in Montreal, killing him before being shot dead by police in turn.

In BRITAIN on May 22, 2013, soldier Lee Rigby, 25, is hacked to death by two Britons of Nigerian descent near an army barracks in the southeast of the capital. Witnesses say the attackers encouraged them to film the scene as they shouted "Allah akbar" before being injured and arrested by the police.

In the UNITED STATES on April 15, 2013, two handmade bombs placed near the finish line of the Boston marathon and detonated 12 seconds apart kill three people and wound 264.

In FRANCE on March 11 and 19, 2012, Mohamed Merah, 23, shoots three soldiers dead in Toulouse and Montauban, southern France, before killing three students and a teacher at a Jewish school in Toulouse.

# World condemns 'barbaric' attack

AFP, London  
The UN Security Council yesterday led global condemnation of the "terrorist" shooting at French magazine Charlie Hebdo which left 12 people dead, in a shocking attack on freedom of speech in Europe.  
US President Barack Obama and Queen Elizabeth II also offered their condolences to those affected, after masked men armed with Kalashnikov automatic rifles opened fire at the Paris offices of the satirical weekly.  
Pope Francis said there could be no justification for "the horrible attack that plunged the city of Paris into mourning".  
The Committee to Protect Journalists said the shooting was a "brazen assault on free expression in the heart of Europe", while Reporters Without Borders called it a "black day".  
On social media, people across the world showed their solidarity with the publication by posting the hashtag

#JeSuisCharlie -- "I am Charlie".  
French President Francois Hollande condemned as a "terrorist attack" the massacre at the publication, which has been in confrontation for years with Islamists who accused it of attacking their religion.  
His characterisation of the incident was echoed by the 15-member UN Security Council, which condemned the "barbaric and cowardly terrorist attack".  
"Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims of this terrorist attack and the people of France at this difficult time," Obama said.  
In Rome, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi went to the French embassy to declare: "We are all French, because we think freedom is the only 'raison d'etre' of Europe and European citizens."  
UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said the "horrendous, unjustifiable and cold-blooded crime" was "meant to divide. We must not fall into that trap".

British Prime Minister David Cameron said the attack was "sickening", while German Chancellor Angela Merkel called it "despicable", sentiments reflected across European capitals.  
In a rare statement on international events, Queen Elizabeth offered her "sincere condolences" to those affected by the attack.  
There was also condemnation from Russian President Vladimir Putin, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the Chinese foreign ministry among others.  
Al-Azhar, Sunni Islam's most prestigious centre of learning, called the attack "criminal" and said "Islam denounces any violence", while the Arab League also condemned the attack.  
Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said his country condemned all forms of "terror", but said terrorism and increasing Islamophobia in Europe were "interconnected".

## Palestinians fulfill ICC dream

AFP, United Nations  
UN chief Ban Ki-moon has accepted the request by Palestine to join the International Criminal Court, a move that would open the way for war crimes complaints against Israel.  
The decision grants the Hague-based ICC jurisdiction to open cases starting April 1 on serious crimes committed in the Palestinian territories, despite fierce opposition from Israel and the United States.  
Ban notified states that are party to the ICC of the decision late Tuesday, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric told AFP.  
"The secretary-general has ascertained that the instruments received were in due and proper form before accepting them for deposit," a UN statement read.  
Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas signed requests to join the ICC and 16 other conventions on December 31, a day after the Security Council failed to adopt a resolution paving the way to full statehood.  
Israel has retaliated by freezing some \$127 million in tax revenue due to the Palestinian Authority and has vowed to take other steps in response to the move.  
The United States has criticized the ICC membership bid as counterproductive and the US Congress is threatening to withhold \$440 million in aid.

## Lankans vote for president today

AFP, Colombo  
Nearly six years after Sri Lanka's army destroyed the Tamil Tigers, their ghosts are haunting a bitterly fought presidential election as the embattled incumbent seeks to boost his share of the vote.  
The Tamil Tigers terrorised Sri Lanka for decades with their trademark suicide bombings and high-profile assassinations before suffering a spectacular defeat in May 2009, ending a civil war that had claimed 100,000 lives.  
President Mahinda Rajapakse took credit for the no-holds-barred military offensive that all but wiped out the rebels, and won a landslide re-election victory the following year.  
But as the post-war gloss begins to wear off, the president has hinted darkly at a Tiger resurgence if he is not returned to power when the country goes to the polls today.  
Analysts say he is hoping the prospect of a resurgence may be enough to dissuade voters from ditching their strongman president.  
"The president thinks that the LTTE factor will influence the Sinhalese to vote for him," rights activist Jehan Perera told AFP.  
"There is so much propaganda it will be difficult for people to figure out what is the truth and what is not," said Perera, head of the Colombo-based National Peace Council.  
Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's election commission yesterday said it is investigating claims that troops are being deployed in the Tamil-dominated north.  
Wanni was part of the war zone where Tamil separatists fought the army in a decades-long conflict that ended only five years ago.  
Both local and international poll monitors have expressed fears that authorities could try to prevent Tamils from voting after the main Tamil political party backed opposition candidate Maithripala Sirisena.  
He is now seeking an unprecedented third term, although allegations of rampant corruption and a failure to bring about reconciliation between the Tamils and the majority Sinhalese population have dented his popularity.  
Tamils voting as a bloc today could emerge kingmakers in the likely event of the majority Sinhalese vote splitting down the middle between Rajapakse and Sirisena, who are both Sinhalese.



# Two most earth-like planets found



MAIL ONLINE  
Eight new planets have been discovered in the 'Goldilocks' zone of their stars, orbiting at a distance where oceans and life could exist.  
The discovery doubles the number of small planets less than twice the diameter of Earth which are believed to be in the habitable zone of their parent stars.  
Among these eight, astronomers say there are two that are the most similar to Earth of any known exoplanets to date.  
The two most Earth-like planets, known as Kepler-438b and Kepler-442b, both orbit red dwarf stars that are smaller and cooler than the sun.  
To be in the habitable zone, also known as the 'Goldilocks zone', a planet must be not too hot or too cold and receive roughly as much sunlight as Earth.  
Kepler-438b receives about 40 per cent more light than the Earth giving it a 70 per cent probability of having a habitable zone orbit.  
The other star gets about two-thirds as much light as Earth and is 97 per cent likely to be in the habitable zone.

# Pakistan president signs terror bills into law

2 more terrorists executed; Lakhvi to remain in jail  
AGENCIES  
Pakistan's President Mamnoon Hussain yesterday signed the 21st Constitutional Amendment Bill of 2015 as well as the Pakistan Army Act 1952 Amendment into law at the Presidency.  
Both bills were approved in the Parliament on Tuesday.  
The Parliament had adopted the 21st Constitutional Amendment Bill and 'The Pakistan Army amendment Bill 2015' unopposed after 247 Members of National Assembly along with the Senate voted in favour of the laws aimed to set up constitutionally protected military courts to try civilian terror suspects.  
Speaking in the Senate yesterday, Pak Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had spoken as to why it was necessary to pass the amendment bill.  
"This bill is about military courts trying hardcore terrorists who kill Pakistanis...this is an important day for Pakistan when the nation decided that terrorists will be taken out from the roots," he had said.  
Meanwhile, Pakistan yesterday hanged two men sentenced to death by an anti-terrorism court, taking the number of executions to nine since the country lifted a moratorium on capital punishment after last month's Taliban school massacre.  
The attack on December 16 left 150 people dead, the vast majority of them children.  
The convicts, Ghulam Shabbir and Ahmed Ali (alias Sheesh Naag), were reportedly members of banned sectarian militant outfit Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.  
They were hanged in the southern city of Multan early yesterday.  
In another development, Lashkar operations commander Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, the 2008 Mumbai terror attack mastermind, would continue to remain in jail, said Pakistan supreme Court yesterday overturned the high court order granting bail to Lakhvi.

## Blast kills 30 at Yemen police academy

AFP, Sanaa  
A car bomb blast tore through dozens of Yemenis lined up at a police academy in Sanaa yesterday, killing more than 30 in the latest attack highlighting the country's growing instability.  
Official news agency Saba quoted the interior ministry as saying at least 31 people had died and dozens were wounded in what it described as the "terrorist bombing" targeting potential police recruits.  
The charred remains of the dead, mostly young men, were piled on the sidewalk outside the academy alongside blood-soaked documents they had been carrying.

# 'New' US Congress convenes

Obama, Republicans clash on first day setting the tone  
AFP, Washington  
US President Barack Obama and his Republican rivals who took control of Congress yesterday immediately clashed over the controversial Keystone pipeline project, setting the tone for a bruising two years on Capitol Hill.  
The new Republican leadership sought quick victories, pledging to approve the construction of the pipeline from Canada to refineries on the US Gulf Coast, as they moved to counter Obama's Democratic agenda ahead of the 2016 presidential election.  
But the White House threw a monkey wrench into the plans, saying Obama -- who has held up the mega-project for years, citing environmental concerns -- would veto the measure.  
Republicans -- who now control both the Senate and House of Representatives -- say Keystone is a job generator. The House is set to vote Friday on the project.  
The new leadership in the Senate, which flipped to a 54-46 Republican majority Tuesday following November elections, has said it has enough votes to pass the bill. A Senate vote has not yet been scheduled.  
Canadian firm TransCanada first proposed the pipeline in 2008, and Ottawa strongly backs the project.  
On Tuesday, new and returning lawmakers in both chambers, including a record number of women and the first black Republican woman elected to the House, were sworn in for the 114th Congress.  
"We'll begin this endeavor on common ground," said House speaker John Boehner shortly after he was re-elected to a third term.  
But he quickly dismissed Obama as "hopelessly out of touch" for threatening a Keystone veto.  
The White House, perhaps eager to hit the reset button with Republican leaders, announced a meeting next Tuesday with congressional leaders from both parties.  
For the final two years of Obama's presidency, Republicans will enjoy their broadest congressional majority since 1930.  
The party is keen to avoid much of the political crisis of the last four years, including a crippling government shutdown in 2013, with incoming Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell urging his Republicans to tone down their hostile rhetoric and not appear "scary" to Americans in the run-up to 2016.