

# NEWSIN brief

## Netanyahu's cabinet passes House hurdle

AFP, Jerusalem

The Israeli parliament late Thursday narrowly approved Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new government. The new administration marks a shift to the right and looks likely to complicate Netanyahu's fraught relationships with the Palestinians and with US President Barack Obama.

## US, Cuba embassy talks on Thursday

AFP, Washington

American and Cuban officials will meet on May 21 to discuss reopening embassies and tackle broader migration, security and environmental issues, the US State Department said Thursday. The US top official for Latin America, Roberta Jacobson, will host a team from the Cuban government led by Havana's director of US affairs, Josefin Vidal.

## Small drone puts White House on lockdown

AFP, Washington

The White House was briefly put on lockdown Thursday as the Secret Service detained an individual for flying a small drone in an adjacent park. President Barack Obama was not in the residence at the time. The operator was later identified by the United States Park Police as Ryan MacDonald, 39, of Vacaville, California.

## 30 killed as China bus plunges over cliff

AFP, Beijing

Thirty people died yesterday when a bus apparently plunged off a cliff in China, officials said, in the latest deadly traffic incident in the country. The accident in Chunhua county, in the northern province of Shaanxi, killed 25 people on the scene with another five dying later from their injuries, local authorities said on a verified microblog account.

## McCain turns down Ukraine advisor role

AFP, Kiev

Republican US Senator John McCain has turned down a post as advisor to Ukraine's pro-Western President Petro Poroshenko, saying constitutional constraints prohibited him from accepting. McCain, who has pressed Washington to send lethal weapons to war-torn Ukraine, rejected the offer to join an advisory council aimed at building global support for Ukraine citing his obligations as a US senator.

## Luxembourg PM to marry gay partner

AFP, Luxembourg

Luxembourg Prime Minister Xavier Bettel is to wed his gay partner yesterday, becoming the first European Union leader to enter into a same-sex marriage, a symbol of growing social change across the continent. Bettel, 42, a centre-right politician who became premier in 2013, will marry Gauthier Destenay, a Belgian architect, just months after the conservative Roman Catholic duchy legalised gay weddings.

## Pak air strikes kill 17 militants

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani air strikes killed at least 17 militants in the country's restive tribal areas bordering Afghanistan yesterday, security officials said, part of a major operation against the Taliban. The air force jets targeted militants' hideouts on the edge of the Afghan border in the thick mountainous forests in the Wareka Mandi area of Shawal district in North Waziristan tribal region.



A group of rescued migrants, mostly Rohingya from Myanmar and Bangladesh, rest on their arrival at the new confinement area in the fishing town of Kuala Langsa in Aceh province, yesterday. About 900 Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants made it to shore in Indonesia and Thailand yesterday, as Myanmar undermined calls for a coordinated response to Southeast Asia's human-trafficking crisis by threatening to boycott a planned summit. (Story on page 1)

PHOTO: AFP

## Nepal Quake Wreckage of missing US chopper found

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's army yesterday discovered the wreckage of a US military helicopter that went missing with eight people on board in the earthquake-devastated country near the Chinese border, with fears of no survivors, officials said. Major General Binoj Basnet said the helicopter, which disappeared on Tuesday while delivering aid in mountainous areas, had been located in a remote forest around 70 kilometres northeast of Kathmandu. Army helicopters and hundreds of US and Nepalese ground troops had been deployed to scour the mountainous terrain where the US chopper disappeared on the same day that a second major earthquake hit the country. The US military said earlier that the UH-1Y Huey was carrying six US Marines and two soldiers from the Nepalese army when it went missing during a relief flight in the mountainous east of the country.

# EU firms up plans to tackle smugglers; more rescued

AFP, Antalya

The European Union firmed up plans to crack down on people smugglers in the Mediterranean on Thursday as Italy said another 2,000 migrants were rescued at sea.

Germany said it was confident of winning UN Security Council approval for an ambitious EU naval military operation, part of a wider plan to stem the flow of people risking their lives to reach Europe from the shores of North Africa.

In an effort to destroy the human traffickers' "business model", the EU wants to be able to identify, intercept and possibly destroy the smugglers' boats in Libyan waters, something that would require a United Nations resolution.

Speaking on the sidelines of a meeting of Nato foreign ministers in the Turkish city of Antalya, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said he expected such approval to be forthcoming.

Steinmeier's comments indicate that the bloc does not fear obstacles from veto-wielding non-EU permanent Security Council members Russia and China on the issue. More than 5,000 migrants, many



escaping civil war in Syria, have died over the past 18 months while trying to cross the Mediterranean, often on flimsy rubber dinghies or fishing boats. Recent good weather and calm sea conditions have prompted a surge in the

number of people attempting the perilous journey, and the Italian coastguard on Thursday said around 2,000 more migrants had been rescued from a number of boats since Wednesday.

The EU's proposed naval mission, called EU Navfor Med, already received initial blessing on Wednesday from the 28 member states of the bloc in Brussels, ahead of a meeting of foreign and defence ministers on Monday, diplomatic sources told AFP.

The formal decision to create the mission should be taken at Monday's meeting with ministers then expected to ask the European military authorities to set it up, the sources added. It should then be launched at an EU summit in June.

Leading countries in the EU -- Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain -- have already promised to deploy warships in the mission to tackle the smugglers in the Mediterranean.

# Coup bid fails in Burundi

## Leaders arrested or on run; president returns to place

AFP, Bujumbura

An attempt to overthrow Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza ended in failure yesterday as coup leaders admitted defeat and were arrested or forced to go on the run from loyalist troops.

General Godefroid Niyombare, who launched the coup in the central African nation earlier in the week, told AFP by telephone that he wanted to give himself up, while other top generals were arrested.

The dramatic end to the coup attempt ended 48 hours of uncertainty over who controlled the small, landlocked and impoverished nation, which has been gripped by a political crisis over Nkurunziza's controversial bid to stand for a third consecutive term in office.

Tensions have not ended, however, with anti-Nkurunziza demonstrators returning to the streets and police firing shots to disperse them.

"We have decided to surrender," Niyombare said in a telephone interview, admitting his coup attempt had come to an end. "I hope they won't kill us."



Pierre Nkurunziza

A senior police official said Niyombare was still on the run, but that three other pro-coup generals had been detained. The loyalist police official also insisted those in detention were still alive, and that the state intended to put them on trial.

Nkurunziza -- who was abroad when the coup was declared -- meanwhile returned yesterday to the capital Bujumbura, from where he was expected to address the nation.

Nkurunziza was in neighbouring Tanzania for regional talks on Wednesday when the coup was launched, in a culmination of weeks of violent street protests over his bid to cling to power.

Opposition and rights groups insist that it is unconstitutional for Nkurunziza, who has been in office since 2005, to run for more than two terms. The president, however, argues his first term did not count as he was elected by parliament, not directly by the people.

Nkurunziza, a former rebel leader from the Hutu majority and born-again Christian, believes he ascended to the presidency with divine backing.

# 'The thrill is gone'

## World mourns the king of blues

AFP, New York

Blues legend B B King, whose crisp but powerful guitar licks made him among the instrument's greatest masters and a towering influence over generations of musicians, has died at 89.

An impoverished son of a Mississippi sharecropper who turned into one of music's iconic figures for a half century, King passed away late Thursday, his official website said in a brief statement that cited one of his most famous songs -- "The Thrill is Gone."

"The blues has lost its king, and America has lost a legend," said President Barack Obama, who recalled once being persuaded to sing "Sweet Home Chicago" at the White House with King.

"B B may be gone, but that thrill will be with us forever. And there's going to be one killer blues session in heaven tonight," Obama said.

Artists across genres credited King as one of the defining forces in 20th-century music -- and recalled his famous geniality.

"There are not many left that play it in the pure way that



And there's going to be one killer blues session in heaven tonight - Barack Obama

BB did," said rock-blues guitarist Eric Clapton. Lenny Kravitz, a younger star guitarist and singer, said of King on Twitter: "Anyone could play a thousand notes and never say what you said in one."

The Canadian singer Bryan Adams called King "one of the best blues guitarists ever, maybe the best. He could do more on one note than anyone."

Born in poverty as Riley B King, the future legend started to work the cotton fields at age seven but found his life transformed when a plantation owner gave him a guitar at 12.

King helped shape the modern blues -- a narrative-driven, often melancholy genre, with roots in African American spirituals, that emerged fully during Emancipation from slavery. But King also managed to bring the blues to a white and international audience, setting in motion the direction of rock.

His guitar playing focused not on speed or on sweeping chords but instead on well-chosen, sharp single notes.

In 2003, Rolling Stone magazine ranked him the third greatest guitar legend, after Jimi Hendrix and Duane Allman and just ahead of Eric Clapton.

# El Nino to cause scorching heat in Asia: Report

REUTERS, New York

The El Niño climate phenomenon is almost certain to last through the Northern Hemisphere summer, the US weather forecaster said, raising the chance of heavy rain in the southern United States as well as South America, and scorching heat in Asia that could devastate crops of thirsty food staples like rice.

In its monthly report released on Thursday, the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center (CPC) said El Niño, a phenomenon which warms sea-surface temperatures in the Pacific, will likely last through the end of the year.

A strong El Nino last appeared in 2009-2010 and resulted in significant spikes in sugar, cocoa and wheat prices.



# ISIS THREATENS PALMYRA

A file picture taken on March 14, 2014 shows a partial view of the ancient oasis city of Palmyra, 215 kilometres northeast of Damascus. Islamic State group fighters advanced to the gates of Palmyra, a UNESCO world heritage site featuring Roman colonnades and an impressive necropolis on Thursday, raising fears the Syrian world heritage site could face destruction of the kind the jihadists have already wreaked in Iraq.

PHOTO: AFP

# ISIS seizes govt HQ in Ramadi

## Jihadists' chief urges Muslims to move to 'caliphate'

AFP, Baghdad

Islamic State fighters took over the main government compound in the western Iraqi city of Ramadi yesterday, giving them nearly full control over Anbar's provincial capital, the group and officials said.

The jihadists seized the government complex at around 2:00 pm and raised the ISIS's black flag, capping an offensive launched on Thursday, a police officer said.

A senior tribal leader in charge of the coordination of local fighters with regular government forces also confirmed the government complex had fallen.

Earlier, the leader of the Islamic State group Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on Thursday urged Muslims to emigrate to his self-proclaimed "caliphate", in the jihadist supremo's first audio recording in six months.

"And we call upon every Muslim in every place to perform hijrah (emigration) to the Islamic State or fight in his land wherever that may be," he said.

The voice reading the half-hour speech appeared to match previous audio recordings of Baghdadi, the latest of which was released in mid-November.

As did his previous speech, the audio tape recording released on Thursday comes a few days after media reports that he might have been seriously wounded in a strike by the US-led coalition bombing ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

"O Muslims, Islam was never for a day the religion of peace. Islam is the religion of war," he said, calling for mass mobilisation on the battlefield.

Baghdadi also lashed out at Saudi Arabia's rulers, accusing them of launching their air campaign against the Shiite Huthi rebels in Yemen only to please the West.



# Obama offers Gulf allies 'ironclad' security pledge

AFP, Camp David

President Barack Obama tried to reassure America's Gulf allies Thursday that engaging with Iran would not come at their expense, at a Camp David summit that proved short on concrete outcomes.

Pledging to counter external threats to Gulf states amid Iran's growing role in the region, Obama said his security commitment to the decades-old allies was "ironclad."

He said the United States was prepared to help "deter and confront an external threat to any GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) state's territorial integrity."

But behind the warm words, there remains deep unease. Around the table, Obama faced the tough task of convincing skeptical emirs, princes and sheikhs that his ambition to reach a nuclear deal with Tehran will not come at their expense.

Iran stands to regain in excess of \$100 billion in blocked cash if sanctions are lifted -- cash the Gulf states believe could help fund the Islamic republic's "destabilizing" activities in the region.

But Obama also insisted that close security ties with Gulf nations were not designed to box in Iran.