

# NEWS IN brief

## No UN inspection of military sites: Iran

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei yesterday ruled out allowing nuclear inspectors to visit military sites or to question scientists, state media reported. The United States as well as Britain, China, France, Russia and Germany are in the midst of negotiations with Tehran to finalise a deal by June 30 that would prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, in exchange for an easing of crippling eco-

## Sri Lanka war crimes probe to start in June

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena yesterday said a local investigation into allegations of war crimes committed during the island's separatist conflict that ended in 2009 would begin by June, vowing to prosecute anyone found guilty. The UN has been investigating possible war crimes for more than a year. In February, however, the UN postponed its report at Colombo's request to allow more time for Sri Lanka to complete

## Pak imam jailed for 5 years for hate speech

A court in Pakistan has jailed an Imam or prayer leader for five years for inciting hate against a rival Shia sect, officials said yesterday. Maulana Abubakar a prayer leader was arrested in February in Kasur district, Punjab, for making a speech against the minority sect, a prosecutor told AFP. Sectarian violence -- in particular by Sunni hardliners against Shias, who make up roughly 20 percent of Pakistan's 200 million people -- has claimed thousands of lives in the coun-

## Zambia lifts ban on hunting of big cats

Zambia has lifted a ban on the hunting of big cats that was imposed over allegations of corruption in the awarding of government hunting concessions, officials said yesterday. The decision removes the last remaining restriction of a total ban on hunting introduced in January 2013 and gradually lifted since last August after the government said it was losing too much revenue. Zambia has around 4,000 lions and

## Jayalitha to be sworn in on May 23

AIADMK chief Jayalitha will be sworn in as chief minister of Tamil Nadu on May 23, a day after her MLAs meet and elect her as the party legislature leader. She is likely to be sworn in by governor K Rosiah at a ceremony to be held in the Centenary auditorium of

## 26/11 case: Pak court summons 7 witnesses

A Pakistani anti-terrorism court holding the trial of the seven Mumbai attack accused, including mastermind Zaki-ur Rehman Lakhvi, yesterday summoned seven witnesses for the next hearing after the case record was finally submitted to it. Lakhvi and six other accused - Abdul Wajid, Mazhar Iqbal, Hamad Amin Sadiq, Shahid Jameel Riaz, Jamil Ahmed and Younis Anjum - have been charged with planning and executing the Mumbai attack in November, 2008 that



(From left, clockwise) Iraqi residents from the city of Ramadi, who fled their homes as ISIS militants tightened their siege on the last government positions in the capital of Anbar province, wait to cross Bzeibez bridge, on the southwestern frontier of Baghdad, yesterday; Syrian men gestures as they remove bodies from under the rubble of buildings following a reported barrel bomb attack by government forces on the Qadi Askar district of the northern Syrian city of Aleppo, yesterday.



## NEPAL TRAGEDY USGS predicts stronger quakes this week

The United States Geological Survey (USGS) yesterday said that though probability of future aftershocks in Nepal was lower than its forecast for previous week, stronger tremors for the week could not be ruled out. "Within the week of May 20 to May 26, the USGS estimates that the chance of at least one magnitude of 5 to 6 is about 40% and up to three such events are likely to occur," the US body said in its latest weekly advisory for Nepal. Chances of aftershocks of magnitude 6 to 7 or higher were much less. The earthquake on April and several strong aftershocks since then, the most notable of them occurring on May 12, have killed over 8,600 people and injured over 21,000 in central-eastern parts of Nepal. A visiting geologist, Dr Roger Bilham of University of Colorado in Boulder, US, said that since the recent earthquake in Nepal did not rupture, chances of stringer aftershocks could not be ruled out. "The recent earthquake in Nepal was strange; the rupture should have occurred and released energy, but it didn't," Dr Bilham said at a talk program in the capital. Meanwhile, Nepal imposed a two-month moratorium on the start of new building projects and limited current construction to two storeys after recent deadly earthquakes destroyed nearly half a million homes. Officials said the move would give authorities time to review building standards in the wake of a 7.8-magnitude quake on April 25 and a smaller one last week that reduced much of the capital Kathmandu to rubble. Other rural areas were also left in ruins by the two

# Palmyra falls under ISIS control

### Two-thousand-year-old heritage site at stake

Islamic State militants have taken near complete control of the Syrian city of Palmyra, home to some of the world's most magnificent ancient ruins. There are fears that the militants will destroy the ruins, which Unesco has designated a World Heritage site. Government troops have almost entirely withdrawn from the city following an IS advance, BBC reported quoting eyewitnesses. IS militants have demolished several ancient sites that pre-date Islam in Iraq, including Hatra and Nimrud. Activists earlier said the group controlled much of north Tadmur, the modern town adjoining the ancient site of Palmyra, after overcoming militias loyal to President Bashar al-Assad. Hundreds of Palmyra's statues have been moved to safety but large monuments from the ancient parts of the city

could not be moved. "This is the entire world's battle," said Syria's head of antiquities Maamoun Abdul Karim. Rising out of the desert, Palmyra contains the monumental ruins of a great city that was one of the most

**PALMYRA, THE PEARL OF THE DESERT**

A wealthy city in the 1st-3rd century on the route linking Persia, India and China with the Roman Empire

Unique art and architecture uniting Greco-Roman forms with Persian and local influences

Rediscovery of the ruins in the 17th-18th century fostered a revival of classical architecture in the West

important cultural centres of the ancient world, according to Unesco, the UN's cultural agency. The site, most of which dates back to the 1st and 2nd Century when the region was under Roman rule, is dominated by a grand, colonnaded

street. Unesco's Director-General Irina Bokova said she was "deeply concerned" by the situation. "The fighting is putting at risk one of the most significant sites in the Middle East, and its civilian population," she said in a statement. Palmyra and Tadmur are situated in a strategically important area on the road between the capital, Damascus, and the contested eastern city of Deir al-Zour, and close to gas fields. The world's focus is on the ruins and IS has taken pleasure in devastating and destroying similarly priceless, pre-Islamic archaeological treasures in Iraq, condemning them as idolatrous, says BBC Arab affairs analyst, Sebastian Usher. A US-led coalition has carried out air strikes on the jihadist group's positions since September 2014.

# AFTERMATH OF THE FALL OF RAMADI US mulls enhanced support for Sunnis

The United States said it is considering accelerating the training and equipping of Iraqi tribal forces to fight the Islamic State group after the fall of the city of Ramadi. The jihadists' capture of city was their most significant victory since mid-2014 when they conquered swathes of land, sparking a US-led air campaign to support Baghdad. Besides the more than 3,000 air strikes carried out so far, Washington has supported a deep reform of Iraq's army and offered training to Sunni tribal fighters to retake their own provinces. But that approach failed to prevent the fall of Ramadi, where militias backed by US arch-foe Iran will now take the lead in any counter-attack and reinforce their influence in Iraq. US President Barack Obama huddled Tuesday with his national security team at the White House but signalled no change of tack, despite mounting calls for a more decisive approach. There was no suggestion, however, that weapons would be sent directly to tribal fighters opposed to ISIS in Anbar province, of which Ramadi is the capital, instead of via the central government in Baghdad. After the capital of Iraq's largest province fell to IS, Abadi had no choice but to call in the Shiite-dominated Popular Mobilisation (Hashed al-Shaabi) forces.

# Netanyahu halts controversial Israel bus 'segregation' plan

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday ordered the suspension of a controversial ban on Palestinians riding the same buses as Jewish settlers when returning from Israel to the West Bank. The announcement came hours after the three-month pilot project approved by Defence Minister Moshe Yaalon began. The ban was immediately attacked by rights groups and the opposition, who denounced it as an "unprecedented" move that heaped unnecessary humiliation on the Palestinians and would ultimately damage Israel. Adding to tensions, a Palestinian driver rammed his car into two border policemen in annexed east Jerusalem, moderately injuring them, before he was shot dead by another officer, the Israeli authorities said. A defence ministry official told AFP earlier that the bus ban would require Palestinians who work in Israel to return home by the same crossing without taking buses used by Israeli residents of the occupied West Bank.

Tens of thousands of Palestinians travel each day to work in Israel, mainly in the construction business, using travel permits each time they cross. Such a ban, which has been demanded by settler groups for years on security grounds, would have significantly extended the Palestinians' commute time. But the move was quickly stopped by Netanyahu, an official in his bureau told AFP. Under the measure, Palestinian commuters' outward journey would remain unchanged but for their return trip they would have to board special Palestinian-only buses, which would drop them off at the same checkpoint where they crossed. They would cross the checkpoint on foot, then make their own way home. Before, they were able to catch any buses returning to the West Bank, serving both Palestinian commuters and settlers. Official figures provided by COGAT, the defence ministry unit which manages civilian affairs in the West Bank, show there are 52,000 Palestinians from the West Bank with a permit to work in Israel.



Protestors opposed to the Burundian president Pierre Nkurunziza's third term in office gather by a burning barricade during a demonstration in the Cibitoke neighborhood of Bujumbura, yesterday. Burundian security forces fired shots and tear gas in battles with protesters, the latest violence in weeks of anti-government demonstrations, as the presidency delayed elections by over a week.



# Endangered rhino killed for \$350,000

A US hunter who paid \$350,000 to kill a black rhinoceros in Namibia successfully shot the animal on Monday, saying that his actions would help protect the critically-endangered species. Corey Knowlton, from Texas, downed the rhino with a high-powered rifle after a three-day hunt through the bush with government officials on hand to ensure he killed the correct animal. Knowlton, 36, won the right to shoot the rhino at an auction in Dallas in early 2014 -- attracting fierce criticism from many conservationists. Since 2012, Namibia has sold five licences to kill individual rhinos, saying the money is used to fund conservation projects and anti-poaching protection. The only rhinos selected for the hunts are old ones and that pose a threat to younger rhinos.

# ISIS rakes in \$1m per day in extortion

The Islamic State rakes in over \$1 million per day in extortion and taxation and the dreaded terror group has enough assets to cover its expenses despite falling oil prices, according to a media report. The group minimizes costs by looting military equipment, appropriating land and infrastructure and paying relatively low salaries, a report in the New York Times said citing analysts at the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit organization that researches public policy. According to the analysis, the terror group collected over \$1.2 billion in 2014. The breakdown states that the Islamic State raked in \$600 million from extortion and taxation, \$500 million from robbing state-owned Iraq banks and only \$100 million from oil infrastructure.

# Shunned by all, migrants welcomed in Aceh

From rescuing migrants at sea to donating all they can, residents of Indonesia's Aceh province are warmly welcoming hundreds of desperate fellow Muslims who have fled their homelands -- a contrast to the rejection they face elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Around 1,800 Rohingya and Bangladeshi boatpeople have landed in Aceh in recent days, abandoned by people-smugglers after their boat journeys to Malaysia were disrupted by a Thai crackdown on long-established routes. Migrants have also arrived in Malaysia and Thailand after being dumped by smugglers. Thousands more are still believed to be stranded at sea with little food and water. The governments of Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand have insisted on turning back seaworthy vessels, sparking outrage. Many in Aceh, the only part of Indonesia that implements Islamic sharia law, are dismayed by the national government's policy and have opened their arms to those who have made it to shore. "They need our help. We saw that

they are in a terrible condition, thirsty, hungry and neglected," 18-year-old student Cut Haya told AFP in Langsa, where hundreds of migrants are being housed in temporary shelters. "As human beings, we have to help them, especially because they are our Muslim brothers and sisters." There has been an outpouring of public sympathy for the migrants, particularly the Rohingya, who are fleeing state-sanctioned persecution in their native Myanmar. There has been a constant stream of Langsa residents bringing donations to the shelters in the small fishing town, with volunteers helping gather everything from eggs and noodles to basic toiletries and clothing. In nearby fields, impromptu games

of soccer and tug of war between locals and children from the camps have provided a brief escape for the young migrants from the misery of their situation. Many get their first taste of Acehese hospitality even before making it to shore -- many of the arrivals have been rescued by local fishermen. The latest batch came ashore early yesterday, with fishermen saving more than 400 from two boats off the coast. But while the migrants wait indefinitely for refugee claims to be assessed -- a process the International Organization for Migration (IOM) says could take months -- attention is shifting to the others who could still be floating at sea. A rally Tuesday attended by 100 people in the provincial capital Banda Aceh saw community groups demand more be done to save those still on the water, instead of turning them away. "Back when the tsunami hit Aceh, people from all over the world came here to help us, regardless of race, ethnicity and religion," activist Muhammad Hamza told the rally. "Now it is time we show humanity by helping the Rohingya."