

# NEWSIN brief

## Catalonia vows to begin seceding from Spain

AFP, Madrid  
Catalonia's president vowed yesterday to begin seceding from Spain if pro-independence parties win a majority of seats -- not votes -- in regional parliament elections set for later this month. Catalonia's main pro-independence parties have agreed for the first time to run on a single unified list dubbed "Together for the Yes" in the September 27 regional vote.

## Ebola death: S Leone village quarantined

AFP, Freetown  
A village of almost 1,000 people has been placed in quarantine in Sierra Leone after the death of a 67-year-old woman from Ebola, officials said yesterday. The three-week lockdown comes after officials announced on Tuesday that the food trader had died in Sella Kafia village in the northern district of Kambia, after being sick for up to 10 days without the authorities' knowledge.

## 17 killed in clashes in Tajikistan

AFP, Dushanbe  
Eight police officers and nine alleged militants were killed in two shootouts in Tajikistan yesterday that the government blamed on a deputy defence minister and the country's moderate Islamic opposition. An armed group killed four police in an early morning shootout on the outskirts of the capital Dushanbe and a further four policemen were killed in a shootout in the town of Vahdat just outside the capital, said the interior ministry.

## Morocco votes in test for Islamist gov

AFP, Rabat  
Moroccans began voting yesterday in local elections seen as a test for the ruling Islamists, who swept to power nearly four years ago after Arab Spring protests that prompted reforms by the monarchy. About 15 million Moroccans were eligible to vote in the municipal and regional polls, considered a gauge of the popularity of Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane and his government, a year ahead of a general election.

## 22 Emirati soldiers killed in Yemen: UAE

AFP, Abu Dhabi  
The UAE yesterday announced the deaths of 22 soldiers deployed in Yemen as part of a Saudi-led coalition battling rebels, with Yemeni military sources blaming an "accidental explosion". The United Arab Emirates armed forces, in a statement carried by state news agency WAM, did not disclose the circumstances of what was its highest casualty toll of the operation against Shiite Huthi insurgents.



Hundreds of migrants walk on the Elisabet Bridge after leaving the transit zone of the Budapest main train station, yesterday intending on walking to the Austrian border. Inset, relatives mourn during the funeral of two Syrian toddlers, including three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, who drowned with their mother as they were trying to reach Greece, at the Syrian border town of Kobani.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

# Migrants leave station on foot for Austria

AFP, Budapest  
More than 1,000 migrants stranded for days at Budapest's main train station left the building yesterday, intent on walking to the Austrian border, according to an AFP journalist on the scene. The huge crowd included people in wheelchairs and on crutches, as well as parents carrying children on their shoulders, all prepared to march 175 kilometres to the border. Police watched the silent migrants walk through the Hungarian capital but did not intervene, the AFP correspondent said. Prime Minister David Cameron said yesterday Britain will take in thousands more Syrian refugees amid growing pressure at home and abroad to address the crisis. "Given the scale of the crisis and the suffering of the people, today I can announce that we will do more, providing resettlement for thousands

more Syrian refugees," he told reporters on a visit to Lisbon. Europe is facing a historic "moment of truth" over the huge influx of refugees and migrants arriving in EU countries, the European Commission's vice-president Frans Timmermans said Thursday.

**DEVELOPMENTS**  
Britain to take thousands more Syrian refugees  
At least 30 migrants feared drowned off Libya  
Hungary parliament introduces emergency anti-migration laws

Speaking on Kos, one of several Greek islands struggling to cope as thousands of people arrive from Turkey, Timmermans warned that if the EU fails to help refugees, Europe will be left to "the xenophobes, the extremists, who will destroy it." At least 30 migrants are feared to have drowned off Libya after their dinghy began to sink, the International Organisation for

Migration (IOM) said yesterday. Some 91 survivors rescued by the Italian coastguard on Thursday said the boat had been carrying between 120 and 140 people when it began to deflate, sparking panic and tipping some people overboard. Hungary's parliament yesterday introduced emergency anti-migration laws, in a tough response to the record number of refugees and migrants crossing the EU member's border as they try to reach western Europe. The new measures include three-year jail terms for people climbing over the newly built razor wire fence on the border with Serbia, as well as new border "transit zones" to hold asylum seekers while their applications are being processed. Meanwhile, refugees on the Greek island of Kos were attacked in the early hours of yesterday by "thugs" with bats, telling them to "go back to their countries", rights group Amnesty International said.

## Sirisena swears in new Lanka unity gov

AFP, Colombo  
Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena appointed members of a new unity government yesterday, a day after parliament endorsed the move as part of efforts to address ethnic reconciliation after decades of war. President Sirisena gave most portfolios in the 43-member cabinet to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP), which won the August 17 general elections but fell short of an absolute majority. The rest were given to Sirisena's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the country's second biggest party, who it will govern with in coalition. The SLFP was in opposition until the most recent election.

# BOKO HARAM UPRISING Over 2.1 m people displaced in Nigeria

AFP, Abuja  
Mounting attacks by Nigeria's ferocious Boko Haram Islamists have sent more than 2.1 million people fleeing their homes in northeast Nigeria, the International Organization for Migration said yesterday. Revising sharply upwards its previous estimate of 1.5 million, the Geneva-based IOM agency attributed the increase to a very recent spike in Boko Haram's six-year insurgency. But the state-run National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) said other factors were at play, such as unrelenting communal strife and the return of Nigerians who had previously fled the country. Newly-elected President Muhammadu Buhari, who completes his first 100 days in office this weekend, has promised to do far better than the previous administration in wiping out the feared Islamist insurgents. But more than 1,000 people have died in Boko Haram attacks since May 29 when Buhari came to power. "The recent spike in attacks by insurgents triggered the increase," the IOM said, referring to the stepped up attacks. But the hike was also due "to improved access to previously inaccessible areas of Borno state, where the IDP population is now well over 1.6 million." The IOM said the new figure covered internally displaced people (IDPs) in the northeastern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe as well as the central state of Nassarawa and Abuja. It urged the government as well as the international community to step in quickly as many were in dire need of food and shelter.



"Many IDPs, especially in host communities, have yet to receive basic items including food and shelter," said Enira Krdzalic, IOM Nigeria Chief of Mission. "It is very important for the authorities and for humanitarian partners to speed up the delivery of adequate assistance to these people," she added. Attacks by Boko Haram, seeking to impose a strict Islamic system in northern Nigeria, have killed at least 15,000 people since 2009, with the group's campaign also waged across Nigeria's borders. In recent weeks suicide bombers, many of them women, have staged attacks in Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad. The IOM said the majority of those displaced (92%) now live in host communities while the remainder live in camps or camp-like sites. But Manzo Ezekiel, spokesman for the state-run NEMA, said the agency was already aware of the increase in IDPs and denied this was solely due to the upsurge in Boko Haram attacks.

# Iran deal supports US military option

Says Pentagon chief  
AFP, Washington  
US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter offered assurances yesterday that the Iran nuclear deal will leave Washington with a "more effective" military option if that becomes necessary. Carter defended the agreement in an opinion piece in USA Today, arguing it would lead to a more durable outcome. But the Pentagon chief said the military option was still on the table and, if called for, such action would be "more effective" as a result of the agreement. World powers and Iran struck the landmark deal in July after years of negotiations to address Western concerns that Tehran was developing a nuclear bomb. "Its implementation will block the pathways Iran could take to build a nuclear bomb. That long-term outcome is more durable than one a military strike would bring about," Carter wrote. "While I am responsible for that alternative and know that it would be effective at setting back Iran's nuclear program, it would do so with potentially serious second- and third-order repercussions, and the likely need to repeat attacks once Iran sought to rebuild its capability." But Carter argued the deal also made the option of military action by the US against Iran stronger going forward.



A foreign suspect in Thailand shrine bombing, identified by the ruling junta as Adem Karadag (C), is escorted by soldiers as he arrives to be questioned by police officers at Bangkok's Metropolitan Police Station yesterday. Thai police said the two men detained over the deadly Bangkok attack last month were unlikely to be the main bombing suspect as they hunt for a further seven people in connection with the crime.

## Nepal cop shot dead in anti-charter protest

AFP, Kathmandu  
A Nepali policeman was shot dead yesterday in the latest round of clashes to hit the country's southern plains as protests intensify against a proposed new constitution. The officer died when around 300 demonstrators clashed with police in western Bardiya district, a local official told AFP. "A police constable was hit by a bullet on his right leg during the clashes, he died while undergoing treatment," said district chief Binod Bahadur Kunwar. "We believe the bullet was fired by someone amongst the demonstrators. We are investigating right now," Kunwar told AFP. Anger has been building for weeks in southern Nepal after lawmakers struck a breakthrough deal on a new charter, spurred by April's devastating earthquake. Plans to divide the Himalayan nation into seven provinces have sparked fury among historically marginalised communities including the Madhesi and Tharu ethnic minorities, who say the new internal borders will limit their political representation. Tharu protesters in Bardiya, 350 kilometres west of Kathmandu, clashed with police, who responded with tear gas to disperse the crowd. Security forces have shot dead 10 protesters since violence broke out last month, while eight police officers and an 18-month-old boy were killed during clashes in southwestern Nepal last week. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon this week called for an end to the violence and urged lawmakers to hold talks with protesters. Work on a new national constitution began in 2008, two years after the end of the Maoist insurgency that left an estimated 16,000 people dead and brought down the 240-year-old Hindu monarchy.

# Don't impose your choices on kids

Modi tells parents on the eve of Teachers Day  
PTI, New Delhi  
On the eve of Teachers Day, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday engaged in a candid interaction with students across the country during which he gave tips on how to ignite their minds, improve oratory and advised parents not to impose choices on children. The Prime Minister also underscored the need for having good people in politics to take the country to greater heights. Addressing students and later replying to their questions via video conferencing in the second such initiative, Modi said he has issued direction to replace 'Character certificates' with Aptitude certificates which will reflect the personality of the students when they leave schools. A relaxed Modi responded to a range of questions including his school days and dress sense during his 105-minute interaction with 800 students and 60 teachers from schools in Delhi who participated in the event at the Manekshaw auditorium here. Students from nine other states joined the programme through video conference. The Prime Minister spoke highly about the role of teachers in nation-building and said he interacts with students on the occasion of Teachers' Day as students are their identity.



# ISIS blows up tower tombs in Syria's Palmyra

AFP, Damascus  
Islamic State group jihadists have blown up several of ancient Palmyra's famed tower tombs as they press their demolition of the Unesco-listed world heritage site, Syria's antiquities chief said yesterday. Antiquities director Maamun Abdulkarim told AFP that among at least seven tombs destroyed were the three best preserved and most treasured funerary towers, including the famed Tower of Elahbel. "We received reports 10 days ago but we've just confirmed the news," he said. "We obtained satellite images from the US-based Syrian Heritage Initiative, taken on September 2." ISIS has carried out a sustained campaign of destruction against heritage sites in areas under its control in Syria and Iraq, and in mid-August beheaded the 82-year-old former antiquities chief in Palmyra. News of the demolition of the tower tombs which date back to the first century AD comes after the jihadists' destruction of the ancient shrine of Baal Shamin and the 2,000-year-old Temple of Bel, regarded as Palmyra's masterpiece. The whole of Palmyra, including the four cemeteries outside the walls of the ancient city, has been listed as a world heritage site by Unesco since 1980. In its listing, the UN agency singles out the tower tombs as the "oldest and most distinctive" of Palmyra's funerary monuments -- "tall multi-storey sandstone buildings belonging to the richest families". "On the fronts of those that survive, foremost among them the Tower of Elahbel, there is an arch with sarcophagus halfway up, which in ancient times supported a reclining statue," it says.



# UN weighs S Sudan arms embargo

AFP, United Nations  
UN Security Council diplomats went behind closed doors yesterday to discuss continued fighting in South Sudan and weigh whether to impose an arms embargo and sanctions. The 15-member council was meeting at the request of the United States after Secretary of State John Kerry warned President Salva Kiir to respect an oft-broken ceasefire. Under a peace agreement signed by Kiir and rebel leader Riek Machar, a ceasefire was due to enter into force last weekend but fighting has continued in Upper Nile state. British Ambassador Matthew Rycroft told reporters that "the council will need to respond" to the violations of the peace accord, the latest in a string of agreements aimed at ending the 20-month war. The world's youngest nation, South Sudan descended into bloodshed in December 2013 when Kiir accused Machar, then his deputy, of planning a coup. The violence has left tens of thousands of people dead and the impoverished country split along ethnic lines. The United States has presented a draft UN resolution imposing an arms embargo and targeted sanctions on individuals who block provisions of the peace accord, but the measure has yet to come up for a vote. The text calls for the arms embargo to take effect on Sunday along with a travel ban and an assets freeze on "individuals, including the senior political leaders of the government of South Sudan, as well as individuals or entities that violate the terms of the ceasefire."