

# NEWS IN brief

## Yemen wedding attack toll hits 131

AFP, Sanaa  
A suspected Saudi-led coalition air strike has killed at least 131 civilians, including many women and children, at a wedding in Yemen, medical officials said yesterday. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned Monday's air raid, saying intentional attacks on civilians were considered a "serious violation of international humanitarian law".

## Sporadic clashes hit Jerusalem, West Bank

AFP, Jerusalem  
Sporadic clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians hit Jerusalem's Old City and a checkpoint outside Ramallah yesterday, with tensions heightened as Jews celebrated their Sukkot holiday. The incidents followed fresh clashes Monday at Al-Aqsa compound, where security forces fired stun grenades and Palestinians threw petrol bombs while barricading themselves inside the shrine.

## South Sudan to get war crimes court

BBC ONLINE  
The African Union says a special court will be set up to try war crimes suspects in South Sudan, which has been hit by a brutal conflict since 2013. The move is aimed at promoting an "African solution" to the conflict in the world's youngest state, which became independent in 2011, it said.

## US adds sweeping new sanctions on IS

AFP, Washington  
The United States took aim at the Islamic State jihadist group yesterday with 35 terror and sanctions designations targeting new IS affiliates, three French nationals and four Britons. The broad list also included groups and individuals from Indonesia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and other countries.



## Romanian PM survives no confidence vote

AFP, Bucharest  
Romania's embattled Prime Minister Victor Ponta survived a no-confidence vote yesterday, barely a week since the start of his trial on wide-ranging corruption charges. The 43-year-old Social Democrat leader has faced relentless calls to stand down over the graft case.



US President Barack Obama and Russia's President Vladimir Putin shake hands while posing for a photo ahead of a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the 70th session of the UN General Assembly at the United Nations headquarters on Monday in New York. PHOTO: AFP

# Obama, Putin meet on Syria

## Remain divided on Assad's fate

AFP, United Nations

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his US counterpart Barack Obama met Monday on the crisis in Syria but failed to resolve their dispute over the future role of Bashar al-Assad. In dueling speeches before the UN General Assembly, Obama branded the Syrian leader a child-killing tyrant while Putin said the world should support Assad against the Islamic State group. The Russian leader urged UN General Assembly members to unite to fight the jihadist group and warned that he plans to step up support for Assad's forces and has not ruled out air strikes. The US and Russian presidents clinked glasses and shook hands at lunch with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon after their addresses, but nothing could disguise the gulf in their positions. Putin and Obama later met for 90 minutes for talks the Russian leader dubbed "constructive and business-like" and a senior US official called a "business-like back and forth." Putin appeared pleased that Obama had agreed to Russia having a role in the debate, and said: "In my opinion there is a basis to work on shared problems together." Both leaders agreed there should be a process of political transition in Syria but, the US official added, they "fundamentally disagreed" on the role of Assad. "I think the Russians certainly understood the importance of there being a political resolution in Syria and there being a process that pursues a political resolution," the official said.

# Afghans battle to retake Taliban city

AFP, Kunduz  
Afghan troops backed by US air support launched a counter-offensive yesterday to retake Kunduz, a day after Taliban insurgents overran the strategic northern city in their biggest victory since being ousted from power in 2001. Gun battles erupted and Humvees rolled through the city as Afghan security forces, who had retreated to the outlying airport after the fall, began a counter-strike backed by reinforcements. The Taliban released a video yesterday hailing their takeover of the northern Afghan city of Kunduz with fighters showing off seized tanks and armoured cars, as they promised to enforce Islamic sharia law. The stunning fall of the provincial capital, which has sent panicked residents fleeing, dealt a major blow to Afghanistan's Nato-trained security forces and highlighted the insurgency's potential to expand beyond its rural strongholds. US forces also conducted an air strike in Kunduz province yesterday, a Nato statement said, without specifying the target. The strike was carried out to "eliminate a threat to Afghan and coalition forces", the statement added. Despite the launch of the counter-offensive, Kunduz swarmed with Taliban fighters racing stolen police vehicles and Red Cross vans. Deputy Interior Minister Ayoub Salangi said earlier that security forces were ready to retake the city.

# Germany beefs up asylum rules amid record influx

AFP, Berlin  
Germany toughened rules yesterday for asylum seekers from the Balkans as Europe struggled to cope with a record surge in migrants, with those crossing the Mediterranean exceeding the half a million mark. Berlin added Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro to a list of so-called safe origin countries, which will result in swifter deportations for asylum seekers from those conflict-free states, in a bid to free up resources to deal with claims from citizens of war-torn countries like Syria. Hungary's prime minister was preparing to defend his hard line at the UN General Assembly, as the number of migrants arriving via the Mediterranean reached nearly 515,000, according to the UN refugee agency (UNHCR). Highlighting the dangers, the Italian coastguard said late Monday that it had coordinated the rescue Monday of 1,151 migrants in 11 separate operations off the coast of Libya in north Africa. The Libyan coastguard too reported that it rescued 346 migrants yesterday. **MIGRANTS CRISIS** Hungary PM aims to meet Ban before border closure Migrant Mediterranean arrivals pass half-million mark: UN almost 100 of them women and children, found adrift on rubber boats off the country's coast. A 20-year-old Iraqi was found dead yesterday in a lorry near the French port of Calais, crushed by pallets as he tried to reach Britain.

# Climate goal closer as UN pressure builds

AFP, United Nations  
A stream of national pledges have put the planet closer to tackling climate change but there is more work to do, experts said Monday, as leaders pressed for a strong new UN accord. A week of climate events in New York ahead of the annual United Nations summit brought out new promises from governments and the private sector to slash greenhouse gas emissions blamed for Earth's rising temperatures and severe weather. The UN offers one of the last opportunities for high-level talks before the conference opens on November 30 in Paris with the aim of sealing a far-reaching new global climate agreement. French President Francois Hollande has sought to rally nations to come up with both emission cut plans and financing for the worst-hit poor countries. "I tell you here, and I tell you plainly -- if it is not (a deal) in Paris, it will be too late. It will be too late for the world," Hollande said in an address to the UN General Assembly. A UN summit in Copenhagen in 2009 set a goal of keeping temperature rises at no more than two degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) from pre-industrial times, a level that is still expected to cause growing droughts and disasters but which scientists consider comparatively manageable. Climate Interactive, a Washington-based group whose analysis is used by leading governments, said that pre-Paris plans have put the planet one degree Celsius closer to that target. The Earth is now on track for temperatures to rise 3.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels, with a range of uncertainty between 2.1 and 4.6 Celsius, said the analysis.


# EU to deploy polls observers

AFP, Brussels  
The EU said yesterday it will for the first time deploy observers in Myanmar's upcoming elections when the opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi is expected to make significant gains against the military-dominated government. "The mission confirms the European Union's continued commitment to the democratic transition of Myanmar," EU foreign affairs head Federica Mogherini said in a statement. "Elections held in a peaceful and inclusive environment will help to consolidate irreversible reforms in the country," Mogherini said. The EU monitoring mission comprises nine election analysts plus 30 long-term and 62 short-term observers, the statement said. EU diplomats and a separate mission from the European Parliament will also observe the vote, it added. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won elections in 1990 but the military rejected the results and repeatedly put her under house arrest until 2010. She won a seat in parliament in 2012 as the military eased their hold on the country but Suu Kyi cannot seek the presidency under rules which bar the position to a person who married and had children with a foreigner. The NLD has vowed to change the charter to reduce the army's role and overturn the presidency restrictions.



A Syrian man embraces his family upon their arrival with other refugees and migrants to the Greek island of Lesbos after crossing the Aegean sea from Turkey yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

# New Zealand declares new ocean reserve

AFP, Wellington  
New Zealand has unveiled plans to create a South Pacific marine sanctuary the size of France, saying it would protect one of the world's most pristine ocean environments. Prime Minister John Key said the Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary would cover an area of 620,000 square kilometres (240,000 square miles) about 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) off New Zealand's northeast coast. Announcing the plans at the United Nations in New York on Monday, Key said the Kermadec area was home to thousands of important species, including whales, dolphins, seabirds and endangered turtles. "It is one of the most geographically and geologically diverse areas in the world," he said in a statement. "It contains the world's longest underwater volcanic arc and the second deepest ocean trench at 10 kilometres deep." The sanctuary will prevent fishing and mineral exploitation in an area where scientists regularly discover new marine species. Conservation groups applauded the move, saying it added to a network of protected areas in the Pacific that now covered more than 3.5 million square kilometres.  "We congratulate the government for taking decisive action to protect this incredibly special area from mining and fishing," World Wildlife Fund New Zealand chief executive Chris Howes said. "This decision puts New Zealand back at the forefront of marine protection on the global stage."

# Catalan head indicted for calling referendum

REUTERS, Madrid  
Catalonia's Supreme Court indicted the acting head of the Catalan regional government yesterday after he pushed ahead with a referendum on independence from Spain last year despite such a vote being ruled unconstitutional by the courts. The preliminary charges of disobedience, abuse of authority and usurping authority are levelled at Artur Mas, the most visible face of Catalan separatist aspirations, just two days after his party won a regional election. Secessionist parties on Sunday secured an absolute majority in the regional parliament, although they won 48 percent of the votes cast. Mas will testify in court in October for pressing on with a non-binding referendum on independence last November after it was suspended by the Constitutional Court, backed by Spain's national government. Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's tactic over years of growing support for Catalan independence has been to stick doggedly to the letter of the law. With a general election set for December, Rajoy has ruled out the possibility of a referendum on the issue, despite polls which show most Catalans are in favour of having the choice. He argues, supported by a vast majority of Spaniards, that one part of Spain cannot decide what happens to the whole. Mas said when the proxy referendum took place on November 9 2014 that he would not be intimidated by the legal tactics of the Madrid government. He said he hoped no legal action would be taken.

# EU failing to protect journo

Says rights group  
AFP, Brussels  
The European Union has failed to tackle challenges to press freedom within its borders, notably from the headline government of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, a rights group said yesterday. The Committee to Protect Journalists said in a report that Brussels should do more to make member states defend media rights and that the EU's institutions were "poorly equipped" to take such action. "By not holding member states to account, the EU has failed to forcefully and consistently defend press freedom," the organisation said, adding that some countries "backslide on their democratic commitments."

# Saudi prince calls for regime change

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK  
A senior member of the Saudi royal family has called for a coup to replace King Salman as the country's leader, in an unprecedented call for a change to the absolute monarchy that governs the Gulf state. An unnamed Saudi prince, one of the hundreds of grandsons of the nation's founder, Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, called for the King to be removed in two letters written earlier this month, which have been posted online and read millions of times by the country's citizens. The prince also told the Guardian that his feelings are shared by other members of the royal family, who are becoming more and more opposed to the management of the country under King Salman. Speaking to the paper, he said: "The king is not in a stable condition and in reality the son of the king [Prince Mohammed bin Salman] is ruling the kingdom." The prince reportedly said that a number of his uncles would meet soon to discuss plans to replace the king. He added that the public and many senior tribal leaders have similar views, in light of Saudi Arabia's recent troubles, both at home and abroad. 