

NEWS IN brief

Guatemala landslide toll climbs to 69

At least 69 people were killed when massive mudslides buried scores of homes on the outskirts of Guatemala's capital city, officials said Saturday, as the death toll continued to climb. An estimated 300 people were still missing, two days after the landslides suddenly hit, raising the prospect that the number of people who perished in the disaster could rise much higher.

Iran nuke review panel says deal flawed

A panel of Iranian lawmakers said yesterday that the inspections regime underpinning the country's nuclear deal with world powers represented a security threat, but the agreement should go ahead anyway. The 15-member committee spent weeks reviewing the text of the July 14 agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), for what it said could be breaches of negotiators' "red lines".

Malaysia shuts schools as smog worsens

Malaysian authorities yesterday ordered most of the country's schools shut for two days because of possible health risks posed by the thick haze from Indonesian forest fires. The education ministry said all schools, except a handful in outlying areas, must close their doors today and tomorrow.

Egyptian policemen shot dead by IS in Sinai

Two Egyptian policemen have been shot dead in the bastion of the Islamic State group in the Sinai Peninsula, the interior ministry said, in an attack claimed by the jihadists yesterday. "A police captain and a policeman died of their wounds after unknown assailants shot them" late Saturday in the North Sinai provincial capital El-Arish, the ministry said in a statement.

Pope Francis asserts marriage is forever

Pope Francis opened a divisive meeting of the world's bishops on family issues yesterday by forcefully asserting that marriage is an indissoluble bond between man and woman. But he said the church doesn't judge and must "seek out and care for hurting couples with the balm of acceptance and mercy."

Oregon shooting survivor escaped by playing dead

A teenager survived a mass shooting at an Oregon college because the gunman believed she was dead, her father said. Randy Scroggins said the attacker ignored his daughter Lacey because she was covered by the body and blood of another victim. Instead of the gunman shot dead another student. Nine people were killed in the shooting at a community college in Oregon. The gunman, Chris Harper Mercer, 26, shot himself dead after exchanging fire with police. The victims ranged in age from 18 to 67. Eight were students while the oldest was a teacher. Scroggins, a pastor, said his daughter told him Mercer had spared one student to deliver a message to the authorities.



A French fireman phones as he stands near an upended car in the street after flooding caused by torrential rain in Cannes, France yesterday. Inset, police officers carry a victim's body in Mandelieu-la-Napoule, southeastern France, after flooding along the French riviera killed 16 people. PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP



AFGHAN HOSPITAL ATTACK Obama pledges probe into fatal airstrike

MSF denies any combatants were in the hospital, leaves Kunduz

US President Barack Obama has promised a full investigation into an apparent US air strike on an Afghan hospital that killed 19 people, a bombing which the UN said could amount to a war crime. "The Department of Defence has launched a full investigation, and we will await the results of that inquiry before making a definitive judgement as to the circumstances of this tragedy," Obama said. Medical charity MSF yesterday said it has withdrawn staff from the embattled Afghan city of Kunduz, a day after an apparent US bombing raid on its hospital which the UN said could amount to a war crime. Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said 19 people were killed, some of whom burned to death in their beds as the bombardment continued for more than an hour, even after



US and Afghan authorities were informed the hospital had been hit. The medical charity condemned the bombings as "abhorrent and a grave violation of international law", demanding answers from US-led Nato forces in Afghanistan. The air raid came days after Taliban fighters seized control of the strategic northern city of Kunduz, in their most spectacular victory since being toppled from power by a US-led coalition in 2001. The defence ministry in Kabul said "a group of armed terrorists... were using the hospital building as a position to target Afghan forces and civilians". MSF has denied any combatants were in the hospital. The charity said that despite frantic calls to military officials in Kabul and Washington, the main building housing the intensive care unit and emergency rooms was "repeatedly, very precisely" hit almost every 15 minutes for more than an hour.

Russia bombs 10 IS targets in Syria

Kremlin's action a terrible mistake: British PM

Russian planes have flown 20 sorties in Syria and struck 10 Islamic State targets in the past 24 hours, the country's defence ministry said in a statement yesterday. Russia has said it would step up its air strikes in Syria, escalating a military intervention which Moscow launched on Wednesday to weaken Islamic State militants, but which Western powers say aims to support President Bashar al-Assad. "As a result of our air strikes on Islamic State targets, we have managed to disrupt their control system, the terrorist organisation's supply lines, and also caused significant damage to the infrastructure used to prepare acts of terror," the ministry said. British Prime Minister David Cameron said Russia was "backing the butcher Assad, which is a terrible mistake for them and for the world. It is going to make the region more unstable, it will lead to further radicalisation and increase terrorism." Meanwhile, President Bashar al-Assad said Syria, Russia, Iran and Iraq were united in battling terrorism and were likely to succeed, but warned that the cost of failure would be devastating for the Middle East. The four nations would achieve "practical results", unlike a US-led international coalition whose year-long campaign of air strikes against Islamic State militants in Syria and Iraq had seen an expansion of violence, Assad was quoted yesterday as telling Iranian television in an interview.

Nepal's big 3 parties unite against India

India's belated bid for a role in Nepal's constitution-making process has united the landlocked nation's top mainstream parties as never before. Shedding their inherent differences, Nepali Congress (NC), considered closest to New Delhi, Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) and Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (UCPN-M) have stood rock solid in their resistance to India's efforts to customize their country's new constitution to its requirements. These three parties have an overwhelming majority in the 601-member constituent assembly. New Delhi is sympathetic to the demands of Madhesis (Maithili, Bhojpur, Avadhi, Hindi and Urdu-speaking people) for more representation and autonomy. "Delhi seems to have lost much of its goodwill in the rest of Nepal by supporting only one section of the population. The Nepali people will take a long time to get over this," rned a Nepali diplomat. Prior to this, NC, founded in Kolkata in 1946, had never been in conflict with India. It had rather been party to almost all treaties and agreements with New Delhi that Communists found loaded in favour of India. On the contrary, CPN-UML and UCPN-M take to the streets against India at the drop of a hat.



A man carries a woman as her folded wheelchair is pictured on the ground, after they reached with other refugees and migrants aboard dinghies off the Greek island of Lesbos, crossing the Aegean sea from Turkey yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Platform Pathshala Indian policeman strikes unique deal with slum kids

A Delhi Police constable has started a 'platform pathshala' at Delhi's Nizamuddin Railway Station after striking an unique 'deal' with children from the slums: "Study for an hour and you can sell your papads". Nine-year-old Satya and other children who stay at a slum in the Sarai Kale Khan area were regularly driven away by policemen -- till they met Constable Dharamvir Singh four months ago. Singh, who has been in the police force for 23 years, said he was moved by the circumstances of these children, who were forced to earn their bread at an age when they should be going to school. So he decided to give them basic education at his duty station. Now, the children drop by at the Constable's duty station in their free time, during which he teaches them numbers, alphabets and basic. Singh said the children can now utilise their free time studying rather than fighting with each other and getting into other wrong habits. He said he wanted to instil in them an interest in education so they can hopefully be put into good schools in future.



200 migrants rescued off Spanish coast

Almost 200 migrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa were rescued overnight as they tried to reach southern Spain in makeshift vessels, Spanish coastal rescue officials said yesterday. "Maritime rescue services picked up 188 people from seven craft," a spokesman told AFP. A Red Cross spokesman told AFP that 103 Algerians, half of them minors, were aboard five craft off the southern port of Almeria. Two other vessels were crammed with 85 sub-Saharan Africans. In this latter group, one craft was intercepted off Spain's Alboran island and the other off the Andalusian coast, opposite the northern Moroccan port city of Al-Hoceima.

In Australia, seeds of radicalism sown early

"We're punching above our weight," Greg Barton, Chair in Global Islamic Politics at the Alfred Deakin Institute said of Australia's Islamic extremist activity. Belying a population of 24 million, with just 2 percent Muslim, and the vast geographical distance between Australia and the Middle East, the disturbing trend of disaffected and violent Muslim teens in a nation known for social stability is perplexing. The government's emphasis on dealing with national security issues and policing is a critical issue, however, says Anne Aly, associate professor at Curtin University. "A lot of countries look at it more primarily as a social issue, with national security implications and so the primary efforts have been in building community resilience and working with communities, rather than dealing with law enforcement," Anne said. The Australian government's focus on national security and the war on terror to tackle Islamic extremism, rather than social cohesion and inclusion, has helped create an environment for radicalised Muslim youth to emerge in disproportionate numbers, experts say. Authorities in Australia are grappling with a rise in violence perpetrated by teenagers at home as well as battling to halt the flow of those who are attempting to travel to Syria to fight with Islamic extremists. The murder of a police accountant in Sydney on Friday by a boy of Iraqi-Kurdish descent is the latest in a spate of attacks linked to Islamic extremism. Farhad Khalil Mohammad Jabar, 15, was shot and killed by police at the scene.



Israelis killed in Jerusalem attacks

Palestinians banned from Old City; UN chief appeals for calm in West Bank

Israel took the rare and drastic step of barring Palestinians from Jerusalem's Old City yesterday as tensions mounted following attacks that killed two Israelis and wounded a child. The restrictions will be in place for two days, with only Israelis, tourists, residents of the area, business owners and students allowed, police said. Worship at the sensitive Al-Aqsa mosque compound will be limited to men aged 50 and above. There will be no age restrictions on women, and worshippers will be allowed to enter through one specific gate. The Palestinian government denounced "Israeli escalation" after the announcement of the ban, which Israel Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan called unprecedented. Police fired stun grenades and rubber bullets to disperse protesters at one gate, an AFP journalist reported. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon yesterday warned of a dangerous escalation in Jerusalem and the West Bank following attacks and appealed for calm. Ban strongly condemned the violence that left two Israeli men dead in the Old City, triggering clashes overnight that left scores injured. The usually bustling alleyways of the walled Old City were mostly quiet yesterday morning, with stores closed and hundreds of police guarding entrances. Some shops began gradually opening later in the day. The attacks late Saturday and early yesterday came with Israeli security forces already on alert after recent clashes at the Al-Aqsa compound and surrounding Old City, as well as



AFP Israeli photographer is roughed up by an Israeli policeman during a demonstration in Old City.

the murder in the West Bank of a Jewish settler couple in front of their young children. On Saturday night, a Palestinian said to be an Islamist militant killed two Israeli men and wounded a woman and a toddler in a knife and gun attack in the Old City. Police shot dead the attacker. In a separate incident early yesterday, a 19-year-old Palestinian stabbed and wounded a passerby in west Jerusalem before being shot dead by police while fleeing. There were clashes elsewhere overnight and on yesterday, and the Red Crescent reported 77 Palestinians wounded from both live rounds and rubber bullets. Another 139 had been treated for tear gas inhalation and six for injuries sustained in beatings by soldiers or Jewish settlers, a Red Crescent spokeswoman said. Clashes broke out in areas including Jenin in the West Bank, where Israeli soldiers raided a refugee camp to arrest a Hamas official, and the east Jerusalem neighbourhood of Issawiya, where the attacker in yesterday morning's stabbing, identified as Fadi Alloun, was from.

MYANMAR POLLS Radical monk endorses ruling party

Myanmar's firebrand Buddhist monk Wirathu has openly endorsed President Thein Sein's ruling party in the Nov 8 general election, saying Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition party was "full of themselves" and unlikely to win the vote. Hardline monks will push for laws banning Muslim dress and other Muslim customs, Wirathu told Reuters yesterday before a rally held by thousands of members of the radical Buddhist group Ma Ba Tha. The remarks could stoke religious tension, already high in Myanmar after Ma Ba Tha played a big role in securing passage of four so-called Protection of Race and Religion Laws seen as



targeting women and the country's Muslim minority. The group has emerged as a force ahead of the poll, criticizing Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), which opposed the four laws. "NLD people are so full of themselves," Wirathu, 47, who is a leading ultra-nationalist member of Ma Ba Tha, but does not run the organization, said in an interview. "They don't have a high chance of winning in elections." Experts say pressure on the NLD can translate into support for the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).