

# NEWS IN brief

## Ehud Barak sued in US over flotilla raid

AFP, Los Angeles  
The family of a US citizen who was killed during a raid by Israeli troops in 2010 on a Gaza-bound flotilla are suing former Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak, claiming unlawful death and torture. Dogan, a US citizen born in New York, was among nine people killed in the raid on six Turkish boats that had been attempting to break Israel's blockade of Gaza.

## Pope to host Rouhani at Vatican

AFP, Vatican City  
Iranian President Hassan Rouhani will visit Pope Francis on November 14, the Vatican announced yesterday in the latest sign of relatively warm relations between the Holy See and the Islamic Republic. Rouhani will call at the Vatican as part of an official trip to Italy, which has led European attempts to rebuild trade and investment ties with Tehran following the July nuclear

## 'Worst haze in a decade' blankets South Thailand

AFP, Bangkok  
Dense haze from Indonesian forest fires has caused some of the worst pollution in southern Thailand for a decade, officials said yesterday, cancelling flights in an area popular with tourists. For nearly two months, thousands of fires caused by slash-and-burn farming have choked vast expanses of Southeast Asia, causing rates of respiratory illnesses to soar, schools to close and scores of flights and some international events to be cancelled.

## Pakistani air strikes kill 21 militants

AFP, Islamabad  
Pakistan's military yesterday said it had killed 21 militants in air strikes in a restive northwestern tribal area bordering Afghanistan. The strikes were carried out late yesterday in the Rajgal and Tirah areas of the lawless Khyber tribal district, where Taliban militant and local Islamist groups are active.

## Turkish teen detained for 'insulting' Erdogan

AFP, Ankara  
A 15-year-old schoolboy has been detained by police in Turkey for allegedly "insulting" President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, local media reports said yesterday. The teenager, identified by the initials UE, spent Wednesday night in a police station after being stopped by officers outside an Internet cafe, Cihan news agency said. The agency did not give details of the boy's alleged "insult".



Civilians fleeing the recent fightings in their area sit at the back of a pickup truck with their belongings in the southern countryside of Aleppo, Syria on Thursday. Fighting in Syria has displaced 35,000 people from Hader and Zerbe on the southwestern outskirts of the city of Aleppo in the past few days, the UN said on Monday. PHOTO: REUTERS

## US slams Assad's Russia visit

AFP, Moscow  
The White House issued a scathing attack on Russia's "red carpet" welcome for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad yesterday, accusing Moscow of impeding progress towards a political transition by propping up the strongman. Assad met Vladimir Putin in Moscow on Tuesday and thanked his Russian counterpart for launching airstrikes against his opponents in Syria, with both leaders also agreeing during talks that political steps must follow military operations. White House Deputy Press Secretary Eric Schultz told journalists the United States viewed "the red carpet welcome for Assad, who has used chemical weapons against his own people, as at odds with the stated goal by the Russians for a political transition in Syria."

operations at the end of the day a long-term settlement can be achieved on the basis of a political process with the participation of all political forces, ethnic and religious groups," the Russian president said. Meanwhile, a group of EU countries signed an agreement to counter "foreign terrorist fighters" yesterday, making it an international crime to travel abroad -- or even plan a trip -- to join militant groups. "For the first time in international law, we have an instrument that criminalises early preparations for acts of terror. It is the vital, missing piece of the jigsaw," said Thorbjorn Jagland, secretary general of the 47-member Council of Europe, which drew up the new law. Analysis firm IHS Jane's said yesterday a major increase in violence by the Islamic State group saw over 1,000 attacks and nearly 3,000 deaths worldwide in the past three months. The London-based analysis firm recorded 1,086 IS attacks, causing a total of 2,978 civilian and government fatalities -- a huge 65.3 percent increase in the average daily killings by the group compared to the previous three

**WAR ON ISLAMIC STATE**  
Europe moves to thwart recruitment of 'foreign terrorists'.  
Report says IS launched 1000 attacks, killed 3000 in past 3 months.

Moscow's actions in the war-torn Middle-Eastern state were "counterproductive", he added. Putin had emphasised during Assad's visit that Syrians should decide their country's fate. "Based on positive results in military

## Pak PM Sharif meets Obama

### US set to sell new fighter jets to Pakistan amid worrying nuke report

AGENCIES  
President Barack Obama yesterday pressed Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on ties with the Taliban, nuclear safety and a range of other fraught issues during a meet at the White House. Despite efforts to smooth divisions behind handshakes, smiles and items of agreement, long-standing security concerns are likely to dominate the Oval Office discussions. Islamabad's ties with the Afghan Taliban, support for terror groups that target India and the United States and its rapidly growing nuclear arsenal are seen by Washington as monumental security headaches. The meeting comes as the White House increasingly shifts its focus in South Asia to Pakistan's bitter rival India. But Pakistan remains a key player in the region. Obama recently announced that US troops would be staying in Afghanistan longer than he had promised, but the White House is keen to get



the Taliban to the negotiating table. The US sees Pakistan as one of the few sources of influence over the extremists, and analysts say Washington will use the four-day trip to urge the prime minister to keep pushing for a new round of talks. If cooperation is not forthcoming, it is likely to result in growing calls for Washington to limit the transfer of weapons and funds to Islamabad. Washington has also pressed Pakistan to crack down on radical groups like the Haqqani network and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Meanwhile, the Obama administra-

tion is preparing to sell eight new F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan, senior US officials said, an overture intended to bolster a tenuous partnership despite persistent concerns about Islamabad's ties to elements of the Taliban and quickly expanding nuclear arsenal. Obama, like President George W. Bush before him, is trying to balance pressure on Pakistan with signs that Washington still considers it a vital ally. The Federation of American Scientists, a leading US group that monitors the spread of nuclear weapons, published a report on Wednesday that shows that Pakistan has expanded its arsenal to between 110 and 130 warheads, up from a range of 90 to 110 four years ago. While those figures show a steady but expected increase, the group estimated that by 2025 the figure would rise to 220 to 250 warheads. That would make Pakistan the world's fifth largest nuclear power, behind the United States, Russia, China and France, but ahead of Britain, which is shrinking its arsenal.

## India beef lynching incident premeditated, finds probe

BBC ONLINE  
A commission of inquiry in India has concluded that the lynching of a man over rumours he kept and consumed beef was premeditated and not spontaneous. A panel from the National Commission for Minorities visited the village of Bisada, near Delhi, where Mohammad Akhlaq, a Muslim, was beaten to death. It said a Hindu temple had been used to plan the attack. Government ministers from the Hindu nationalist BJP have said the incident was a spontaneous expression of anger. In recent weeks three Muslim men have been killed by Hindus accusing them of eating or smuggling beef. Mr Akhlaq's killing sparked furious debate about religious tolerance, with some criticising Prime Minister Narendra Modi for not condemning the attack sooner. Two weeks later he called it "sad and undesirable". Mr Akhlaq, a farm worker in the state of

Uttar Pradesh, was asleep next to his son last month when a mob burst in wielding sticks, swords and pistols. The villagers accused the nine-member family of having slaughtered and consumed a cow. Mr Akhlaq and his son were beaten with bricks, kicked and stabbed repeatedly. Hindus consider cows to be sacred, and for many, eating beef is taboo. Some meat found in the fridge was held to be proof that beef had been eaten. Later, tests confirmed it was goat meat. The team of investigators concluded in its report that the mob violence against Mr Akhlaq and his family had been planned and a Hindu temple was used "to exhort people of one community to attack a hapless family". Khan said an announcement by the temple that beef had been found provoked the assault. The ability of so many people to amass within minutes "at a time when most villagers claimed they were asleep, seems to point to some premeditated planning," the report said.



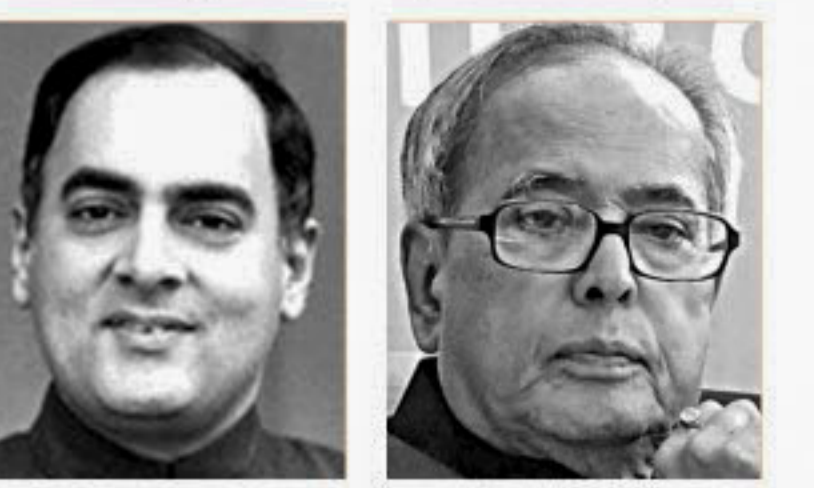
Residents use a makeshift raft to wade through a flooded street in Calumpit, Bulacan province, yesterday. The death toll from a ferocious typhoon in the Philippines climbed to 54 on Thursday, as home-wrecking floods shifted downstream to coastal villages, displacing tens of thousands of residents. PHOTO: AFP

## 'Pranab was tipped to be Indian PM' Says former Indira Gandhi aide in his book 'The Chinar Leaves'

PTI, New Delhi  
Pranab Mukherjee was favoured by late President R Venkataraman to be the Prime Minister after the fall of VP Singh government in 1990 but Rajiv Gandhi thought otherwise. This has come to light in a book entitled, "The Chinar Leaves", written by veteran Congress leader and close aide of the Gandhi family M L Fotedar, who claims that when he met President Venkataraman to discuss the political situation in the wake of V P Singh's resignation in 1990, the President told him emphatically that Rajiv should support Mukherjee. "I met President Venkataraman and discussed the political situation with him. I told him that under the present circumstances only the Congress party could take along with it every section of society and provide a strong and stable government. I requested him to invite Rajivji to head the next government as he was the leader of the single largest party in the Lok Sabha. On this the President

directed me, with an emphasis of authority, that I may put it to Rajiv Gandhi that if he supported Mr Pranab Mukherjee to be Prime Minister, he (the President) would administer the oath of office to him that same evening," Fotedar says in his book. The HarperCollins publication, due for release soon, also highlights how Mukherjee along with P V Narasimha Rao and Venkataraman were once considered by Indira Gandhi as those who could take over the Congress party after her until of course she decided to bring her son Rajiv into politics as her political heir. Fotedar, currently member of the Congress Working Committee,

writes that then President Venkataraman's personal choice for the PM's position left him surprised and he took time to recover his poise to ask the President, "Sir, how can that be done?". Hearing this, the President said again with an aura of authority that he should inform Rajiv about his choice. "He (President Venkataraman), again with that aura of authority, said that I must know that the President had the power to appoint a Prime Minister. He asked me to inform Rajiv Gandhi that he should convey his response to the President directly when he met him later that day. He also expressed caution against choosing Chandra Shekhar and made some adverse remarks about him. "I came back and reported the developments to Rajivji, who was also astounded by RV's stand. The Congress party was running out of options and Rajivji ultimately took the controversial decision of supporting Chandra Shekhar from outside," Fotedar recalls in his book.



## AIR POLLUTION New Delhi holds first car-free day

AFP, New Delhi  
The Indian capital held its first "car-free day" yesterday to try to improve New Delhi's notoriously filthy air, but motorists were seen ignoring signs to keep off the roads. Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal flagged off the initiative by cycling along what would normally be one of the city's busiest roads, flanked by a couple of hundred bureaucrats and bicycle enthusiasts. Around 8.5 million vehicles ply the city's roads, which are considered highly unsafe for both pedestrians and cyclists. Authorities have been criticised for failing to curb pollution, in a city ranked by the World Health Organization as having the worst air quality in the world.

## An example of communal harmony Tripura Muslims celebrate Durga Puja

PTI, Agartala  
Setting an example of communal harmony, several Durga pujas are being organised by the Muslim community in Tripura. The big budget puja of the 'Blood Drop' club in the Sonamura sub-division of Sipahijala district was held under the guidance of a Muslim president of the puja committee. "In this Hindu majority area, they have elected me as president of the Puja Committee for the past three consecutive years. From my childhood I have been involved with the Durga puja because I have never felt that it is for the Hindus only. We organise the puja, eat and share the joy jointly," said Basirudding Bhuyan, President of the Puja Committee. "Even your question comes unusual to me,

because I have never faced such query in my locality that how a Muslim could be a puja committee president," he said. Bijoy Roy, a member of the club said, "you would find many Durga pujas are being funded or organised by the Muslims in this sub-division, because we take the puja as sarbajanin, (for all) and not for the Hindus only." Muslims constitute eight percent of the total population in the state and they mostly live in this sub-division. At Durgapur village in this sub-division where Muslims constitute 90 percent of the population, the community actively participated in the puja in making idols, building pandals, besides funding, said Subodh Nama, a puja organizer. "In Durga puja we do not make any communal or religious division," said Jalilur Rehman, a local advocate.



Hindu devotees immerse an idol of goddess Durga in Shimla yesterday, at the end of the Durga Puja festival. PHOTO: AFP