

## 'External influence' caused plane crash

Blames Russian airline; No 'direct evidence' of terrorism found: US intelligence chief

AFP, Moscow

The Russian passenger jet that crashed in Egypt killing all 224 people on board came down due to "external" factors, the airline said yesterday, as relatives began identifying their loved ones in Saint Petersburg.

Senior Kogalymavia executive Alexander Smirnov said that "no technical failures" could account for why the Airbus 321 would have broken up in mid-air, as investigators have said happened.

"The only explanation is some kind of external action," Smirnov told a news conference in Moscow, without elaborating, adding that the doomed jet was in "excellent technical condition".

Both Cairo and Moscow have played down the claim from Egypt's Islamic State branch that it brought down the aircraft flown by Kogalymavia between holiday destination Sharm el-Sheikh and Russia's second largest city on Saturday.

Meanwhile, US Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said yesterday he knew of no "direct evidence" that terrorism was to blame for the weekend plane crash of a Russian passenger plane in Egypt.

Speaking at a Washington defense summit, Clapper said it was "unlikely" that the Islamic State group had the capacity to carry out such an attack, but added "I wouldn't rule it out."

"We don't have any direct evidence of a terrorist element yet," he said.

Investigators are examining all possible causes as they comb the remote crash site in the Sinai peninsula as part of an Egyptian-led probe into the disaster that also involves experts from Russia, Airbus, and Ireland, where the aircraft was registered.

President Vladimir Putin described the crash, Russia's worst air disaster, as a "huge tragedy" in his first comment since Saturday's catastrophe at a meeting with the country's transport minister yesterday.

"Without any doubt everything must be done to create an objective picture of events so that we know what happened and can react accordingly," Putin said.

The Kremlin said the Russian president did not intend to visit the relatives for the time being.



Russian Ministry for Emergency Situations employees prepare to load the bodies of air crash victims at St Petersburg airport yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Nepalese activists gather on a bridge near the Nepal-India border at Birgunj in Kathmandu as anger over a new constitution boiled over yesterday. An Indian national was killed when Nepalese police fired into a crowd of protesters who were trying to block a border checkpoint.

PHOTO: AFP

## Turkey returns to single-party rule

Erdogan calls on world to respect result after AKP vote sweep

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey's Justice and Development Party was gearing up yesterday to head a single-party government after a stunning election turnaround that strengthens the hand of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan but raises concerns about the future of the divided country.

The conservative Islamic-leaning AKP reclaimed the majority it lost just five months ago, confounding opinion polls that had predicted another hung parliament.

Emboldened by the landslide win, Erdogan said the people of Turkey had voted for "stability" after renewed conflict with Kurdish rebels and a wave of bloody jihadist attacks.

Turkish stocks and the lira soared on the results, which ended the political uncertainty stoked by the inconclusive June vote, but many were wary of further polarisation under a more powerful AKP.

"The will of the nation has shown itself in favour of stability," Erdogan told reporters at an Istanbul mosque.

He called for Turks to "remain united" and said the entire world should respect the result.

The European Union, which has often raised concerns about rights and freedoms in the Muslim-majority state, said the vote showed the "strong commitment of the Turkish people to democratic processes".

But the main opposition Cumhuriyet newspaper labelled it a "victory of fear". Its columnist Can Dundar said society was now split in two: "Those who are ready to die for Erdogan and those who cannot stand him anymore have been torn apart."

Meanwhile, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) charged in a damning report yesterday that Turkey's election was marred by a media crackdown, violence and other security concerns.

## Tensions continue to flare in Israel

Palestinian killed after stabbing attempt

AP, Jerusalem

Israeli troops shot dead a Palestinian who they say tried to stab a soldier in the West Bank yesterday, in the latest such incident in more than a month of violence. Palestinian officials said he was 16 years old.

The military said the incident was the third attempted stabbing near the checkpoint between the West Bank and Israel in recent weeks. After soldiers approached two Palestinians at a gas station, one attempted to stab a soldier with a knife before the soldiers shot him, the army said.

Forces treated the wounded Palestinian at the scene, the army said, but he died of his wounds. The other Palestinian was arrested. The official Palestinian news agency Wafa said he was wounded in the incident.

A series of Palestinian attacks linked to tensions over a sensitive Jerusalem holy site began in mid-September. In addition to the near-daily attacks, violent demonstrations have erupted in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, with Palestinian stone-throwers clashing with Israeli troops.

Eleven Israelis have been killed in Palestinian attacks, mostly stabbings. Sixty-nine Palestinians have died by Israeli fire, including 43 who Israel says were involved in attacks or attempted attacks.

## Four refugees drown off Greek island

Record migrants crossed Med in Oct

AGENCIES

Four refugees drowned and another six were missing off the Greek island of Farnakonisi after their boat sank, the Greek coastguard said yesterday.

Four people were rescued, the coastguard said in a statement. The vessel the migrants were travelling on sank in an unknown location north of the island, said.

Eleven people, including six infants, drowned on Sunday when their boat capsized off the island of Samos, trapping them in the cabin, reports Reuters.

The toll from drowning among thousands of refugees making the short but dangerous crossing from Turkey to Greece's outlying eastern islands has risen in recent weeks from the onset of colder weather. There were near-gale force winds blowing in the Aegean at the weekend.

More than 218,000 migrants and refugees crossed the Mediterranean to Europe in October -- a monthly record and more than during the whole of 2014, the United Nations said yesterday.

"Last month was a record month for arrivals," UN refugee agency spokesman Adrian Edwards told AFP, pointing out that "arrivals in October paralleled the entire 2014."

In October, 218,394 people made the perilous crossing -- all but 8,000 of them landing in Greece -- compared to 216,054 Mediterranean arrivals during all of last year, UN figures show.

The soaring numbers of arrivals last month brought to over 744,000 the number of people who have made the journey so far this year, reports AFP.

## NEWS IN brief

China editor sacked for party criticism

BBC ONLINE

The editor of Chinese state newspaper Xinjiang Daily has been criticised for not following official policy. The official Communist Party watchdog also promised to prosecute Zhao Xinwei for "serious discipline breaches", which generally refers to corruption.

13 UN hostages freed in South Sudan

AFP, Juba

Thirteen United Nations workers in South Sudan kidnapped by rebels have been safely freed a week after their abduction, the UN said yesterday. Around 100 rebel fighters, who have been battling the government for almost two years, seized 31 members of the UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan last week.

WWII bomb discovered at German airport

AFP, Berlin

A World War II bomb was destroyed in a controlled explosion yesterday at the main international airport in the western German city of Duesseldorf, briefly halting air traffic. Flights at the hub, Germany's third busiest in terms of passengers, were interrupted for an hour in the morning while the 125-kilogramme bomb was neutralised, the airport said in a statement.

Kuwait court jails 5 over IS fundraising

AFP, Kuwait City

A lower court in Kuwait yesterday sentenced five men to 10 years in jail each for raising funds for the Islamic State jihadist group. Three of those convicted were Kuwaiti citizens, according to the court ruling.

MYANMAR ELECTION

## UN chief hits out at 'hate speech'

AFP, Yangon

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon hit out yesterday at "extreme elements" in Myanmar who are sowing hate speech and bigotry towards religious minorities, days before the country votes in landmark elections.

Myanmar heads to the polls next Sunday in what observers are hoping will be the fairest election for decades as the nation slowly shakes off almost a half-century of brutal military rule.

But the vote is taking place against a rising tide of anti-Muslim sentiment, spear-headed by a small but increasingly influential movement of hardline Buddhist nationalist monks. In a statement put out by his office, Ban Ki-moon said he had "deep concern" about "the continuous resort to hate speech, the incitement of communal animosities and the abuse of religion for political purposes resorted to by extreme elements among the majority community in Myanmar".

Ban also called on voters to reject politicians who espoused discriminatory policies when they went to the ballot box.

"He urges all concerned in Myanmar to eschew any kind of pressure, intimidation, dissemination of hatred or violence against individuals or organizations based on their ethnic identity, gender, religious persuasion or political views," the statement said.

## Two-child policy not valid until March

Says Chinese government

BBC ONLINE

China's top family planning body has warned couples that they must continue to obey the country's one-child policy until the law changes in March.

On Thursday, the government announced it would relax the rules to allow all couples to have two children.

It said the decision was made because of China's rapidly ageing population and to help support the economy.

However, officials have stressed that the one-child policy will continue to be enforced until the law is changed.

China's controversial one-child policy was introduced nationally in 1979 to slow the population growth rate, and is estimated to have prevented about 400 million births.

Though there were exceptions to the policy, most couples who violated it faced punishment, from fines and the loss of employment to forced abortions.

On Friday, a local official was quoted as

saying that women pregnant with a second child would no longer be punished, suggesting that the new policy was already effective.

However, on Sunday, the National Health and Family Planning Commission said that local officials should continue to implement existing family planning laws until the two-child policy was ratified by lawmakers in March.

"The two-child policy must be implemented in accordance with the law," an official with the commission said in a statement (in Chinese).

Until the new law was adopted, local officials "must seriously enforce existing policies" and "must not act of their own accord", the statement added.

The government estimates that 90 million couples will be eligible for the new two-child policy.

Correspondents say that despite the relaxation of the rules, many couples may opt to have only one child, as one-child families have become the social norm.



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan is greeted by his supporters during his visit to the Eyup Sultan mosque in Istanbul, Turkey yesterday. Erdogan's AKP regains majority in stunning election comeback.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Saudi prince charged with drug bust

AFP, Beirut

Lebanese authorities yesterday charged a Saudi prince and nine others with drug trafficking, a week after they were caught in a record drug bust, a judicial source told AFP.

Saudi prince Abdel Mohsen Bin Walid Bin Abdulaziz and four others were detained by airport security on October 26 after nearly two tons of Captagon capsules and cocaine were found waiting to be loaded onto their private plane at Beirut airport.

A public prosecutor "has charged 10 people, including five arrested individuals -- a Saudi prince and Saudi nationals... with smuggling and selling the drug Captagon," the judicial source said.

Five individuals still at large were included in the charges, including three Lebanese and two Saudi nationals, the source added.

## UN body says Anwar's detention illegal

Calls for immediate release of Malaysian opposition leader

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

A UN body has determined that former Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim has been jailed in violation of international law and called for his immediate release, according to a copy of the opinion released yesterday by his family.

Anwar, 68, was jailed in February for five years after being convicted for sodomising a male aide. He denies the charge, calling it a frame-up by Malaysia's long-ruling government to cripple a resurgent opposition.

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that Anwar was denied a fair trial and that the charges were pursued for political reasons, according to the document released by the family.

"The Working Group considers that the adequate remedy would be to release Mr Ibrahim immediately, and ensure that his political rights that were removed based on his arbitrary detention be reinstated," said the opinion dated September 15.

The group said it would refer its findings to the "Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment for appropriate action."

Anwar's lawyer Sivarasa Rasiah said he does not expect Anwar to be freed despite the pressure from the UN.

"Realistically, I don't think the Malaysian government will release him. But it must regard this statement as a strong condemnation from the UN itself for keeping Anwar in jail," he said.



## ROW OVER CHARTER

Nepal police fire at protesters

Indian man killed

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal police yesterday fired into a crowd of protesters trying to block a key border checkpoint and killed an Indian civilian as anger over a new constitution boiled over.

The violence came hours after police forcibly broke up the blockade in the southern town of Birgunj on the border with India that has led to crippling fuel shortages and cut off access to other vital supplies in the landlocked Himalayan nation.

"Police warned the protesters to disperse but they did not listen, compelling security forces to open fire," said Nepal police spokesman Kamal Singh Bam.

"An Indian national was wounded and died after being taken to hospital." Four police were injured in clashes at the checkpoint in Birgunj, Bam told AFP.

Bam could not confirm if any other civilians were wounded. A local party leader involved in the protests said seven people had been hurt, including a 11-year-old boy struck by a rubber bullet.

"When police fired rubber bullets at the demonstrators, one hit the child on the head, leaving him bleeding," said Shiva Patel, general secretary of the regional Sadbhawana party.

Earlier, police used batons to disperse ethnic minority protesters angered by Nepal's new constitution, which they say will leave them politically marginalised.

Patel said hundreds more protesters had arrived at the scene after police beat up demonstrators and burned down their tents to force an end to the blockade that began on September 24.

"We were outnumbered then but now hundreds more have descended on the bridge and blocked it again," he said.