

NEWS IN brief

Palestinians stab 3; 1 attacker shot dead

Two Palestinians stabbed three Israelis near Jerusalem's Old City yesterday before police shot them, killing one attacker and wounding the other, police said. The incident occurred at the Old City's Jaffa Gate, a popular entrance for tourists at a time of increased visits to the Holy Land for the Christmas season. A wave of violence since the start of October has claimed the lives of 124 on the Palestinian side, 17 Israelis, an American and an Eritrean.

'Indo-Pak foreign secy talks in mid-January'

Pakistan has proposed to India middle of January for talks between the foreign secretaries of the two sides, the country's top diplomat said yesterday. The peace process between the two estranged neighbours was revived this month when external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj visited Pakistan to attend Heart of Asia Conference.

Beef lynching: 15 charged in India

Indian police yesterday formally charged 15 suspects over the mob murder of a Muslim man suspected of eating beef in late September, a case that sparked an outcry over communal intolerance. "We have filed a charge sheet against 15 persons," Daljeet Chaudhary, a senior police official from Uttar Pradesh state where the murder took place, told AFP.

Blast kills one at Istanbul airport

An overnight explosion at an airport in Istanbul killed one person and damaged three planes hundreds of meters apart, Turkish media said, triggering a security alert as authorities sought to determine if a bomb was responsible. The blast at Sabiha Gokcen, the city's second airport and located on its Asian side, occurred shortly after 2:00 am (midnight GMT), local budget carrier Pegasus said, fatally wounding a cleaner on one of its planes. No passengers were in the area at the time of the airport blast.

Tunisia extends state of emergency

Tunisia's government has extended a state of emergency imposed after a November suicide bombing, from Dec 24 to Feb 21, the presidency said in a statement on Tuesday. Tunisia first declared this state of emergency after a suicide bombing killed 12 presidential guards in an attack in the center of the capital last month. The state of emergency grants the presidency and armed forces more powers and suspends some rights.



Iraqi pro-government forces stand next to armored vehicles as they take position in al-Aramil area, south of the Anbar province's capital Ramadi, during military operations on Tuesday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Afghans battle to push back Taliban

Nato advisers sent to Helmand

Afghan forces battled yesterday to push back Taliban fighters who have overrun Sangin in Helmand province and officials denied insurgents' claims that police and administrative buildings in the district centre had fallen. Earlier Acting Defence Minister Masoom Stanekzai said reinforcements had arrived in the area where government forces were preparing operations to push back the Taliban. "The military is in position and the operation is ongoing," Stanekzai told a news conference in Kabul, adding that reinforcements would relieve troops in Sangin. The Taliban said in an online statement that the district centre of Sangin had been completely overrun with large quantities of weapons and equipment captured but army spokesman Mohammad Rasoul Zarzai dismissed the claims as "baseless". Although much attention has been focused on Sangin, fierce fighting has been underway across much of Helmand, a traditional stronghold of the Taliban and a major centre for opium that US and British troops fought for years to control. Military advisers from Britain have joined other Nato advisers in Helmand to help Afghan forces who have struggled to contain the insurgency. Nato officials say the troops sent to Helmand are not taking a direct part in combat and they have not confirmed reports that special forces were among the advisers. The Taliban said the reinforcements showed the government's desperation. "The Kabul administration cannot protect themselves without foreigners and the nation does not accept that," Qari Yousuf Ahmadi, a spokesman for Taliban, said in a statement.

'Ramadi victory within days'

Says Iraq's army chief as forces advance to capture city centre

Iraq's army chief was quoted yesterday as saying he needed only days to drive Islamic State from the city of Ramadi, whose fall in May exposed the weakness of the Baghdad government and dampened hopes of restoring control in the north and west. Iraqi troops began advancing on Tuesday in an offensive complicated by rivalries and suspicions harboured by local Sunni tribes and by Shia militia backed by Iran. US officials, concerned also by militant operations over the border in Syria, have expressed frustration at delays in seizing back the city. "In the coming days will be announced the good news of the complete liberation of Ramadi," Iraqia TV cited army chief of staff Lt General Othman al-Ghanemi as saying. Government troops are now concentrating on the last district held by the militants in the centre of Ramadi, a Sunni Muslim city on the river Euphrates some 100 km (60 miles) west of Baghdad and capital of

Anbar province. If it is captured, it will be the second major city after Tikrit to be retaken from Islamic State in Iraq. It would provide a major psychological boost to Iraqi security forces after the militant group seized a third of Iraq, a major

WAR ON IS

Eight militant commanders killed in Iraq

Saudi Arabia working to keep Syria as unified nation: king

Russia rearms Kyrgyzstan to counter militants in Central Asia

gave no casualty toll for government forces. Meanwhile, US and its allies yesterday said they have conducted 24 air strikes against IS group in Iraq and eight in Syria on Tuesday. An Iraqi TV reported that eight senior Islamic State commanders were killed in air strikes by Iraqi airforce in Anbar region. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's King Salman yesterday said his government was striving to maintain Syria as a unified nation inclusive of all sects, according to the Twitter account of the Saudi Shura Council. The king also blamed the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for the rise of militant groups in the region, saying terrorist organizations would not find fertile ground without the Syrian government's policies, the council said. As the IS menace is threatening to expand beyond Iraq and Syria, Russia yesterday said it actively rearming the armed forces of Kyrgyzstan to help it counter the threat posed by the

'Open doors to Syrian refugees'

Says Aylan Kurdi's father in Christmas message

The father of toddler Aylan Kurdi, whose lifeless body on a Turkish beach became a symbol of the refugee crisis, has made a Christmas appeal to the world to open its doors to Syrians fleeing conflict. The message, to be broadcast by Britain's Channel 4 on Christmas Day, comes after the UN refugee agency said that more than one million migrants and refugees reached Europe this year. They included over 970,000 who made the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean. Three-year-old Aylan died in September after his family, sheltering in Turkey from the war in Syria, decided to make a desperate bid to reach Greece in a flimsy inflatable boat. "My message is I'd like the whole world to open its doors to Syrians. If a person shuts a door in someone's face, this is very difficult," Abdullah Kurdi says in the video message. "When a door is opened they no longer

feel humiliated," he adds, according to a transcript released by Channel 4. **13 MORE DROWN IN THE AEGEAN** At least 13 people including seven children, drowned when their overloaded boat capsized in the Aegean, police said yesterday, the latest tragedy involving migrants seeking a better life in Europe. The small boat went down off the Greek island of Farnakonisi overnight, sending 29 people into the water, an official with the Greek port police told AFP. Meanwhile, the Czech prime minister said Germany encouraged illegal immigration to Europe with its humanitarian response to the refugee crisis, reports Reuters. "Germany has, for the time being, given precedence to the humanitarian aspects of the crisis over security issues," Bohuslav Sobotka told the Sueddeutsche Zeitung in an interview published in its yesterday's edition. "Germany sent a signal that could be seen and heard in large parts of the Middle East and North Africa," he added.



CHINA LANDSLIDE TRAGEDY

Man pulled out alive after 3 days

Rescuers scuffling through the debris of a huge three-day-old landslide discovered a young man alive in the mud yesterday, as China's cabinet announced a probe into the nation's latest industrial disaster. Tian Zeming survived for almost 72 hours on seeds and fruit that had been buried alongside him when a tide of earth and rubble from a huge waste dump crushed more than 30 buildings, rescuers were quoted as saying. "He has a very strong will to survive," the emergency team's leader told the government-run Shenzhen Special Zone Daily newspaper in the southern Chinese boom town. The 19-year-old had used a rock to tap on debris to try to attract the attention of those looking for signs of life among the sea of mud. Images from the scene showed dozens of firefighters and police thronging around a stretcher, apparently bearing the teenager to a waiting ambulance. He was confirmed to be one of the 76 listed as officially missing after the disaster, the Guangdong province fire department said on its official microblog. A second man who was also found alive in the debris early yesterday died several hours later, firefighters said. An additional body was recovered yesterday afternoon, the China Youth Daily reported, bringing the confirmed death toll to three.



A 19-year-old survivor is carried on a stretcher after being pulled out by rescuers more than 60 hours after a landslide hit an industrial park on Sunday, in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, China, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Russia remains India's main defence partner

Says Modi in Moscow
PFI, Moscow
Assuring Russia that it will remain India's "principal partner" in defence sector, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that the two strategic partners are working together for joint manufacture of advanced defence equipment in India under the Make in India initiative. "Russia has been India's foremost defence partner through decades, accounting for a majority of our defence equipment... Even in the current environment, despite India's improved access to the world market, Russia remains our principal partner," Modi told Russian news agency Itar-Taas. "Indians will never forget the Russian support that we got when we needed it the most," the PM added. India and Russia are likely to ink a number of pacts in a range of sectors including defence and nuclear energy during Modi's two-day visit here for the annual Summit level talks with President Vladimir Putin. Asserting that the Indo-Russia defence ties have been transformed "from a buyer seller relationship to one involving joint research, development and production of advanced systems" such as the BrahMos missile, Sukhoi-30 MKI aircraft and T-90 tanks, Modi said Russia has the potential to be the leading partner in the Make in India mission in defence sector. India's assurance to Russia comes at a time when it has developed a closer defence ties with the US and Russia made overtures to Pakistan in recent months for the first time.



'Sharia compliant' airline takes off in Malaysia

AL JAZEERA ONLINE
Malaysia's first "sharia-compliant" airline made its inaugural domestic flight over the weekend and it hopes to include international routes next year, a senior airline official said. Rayani Air does not allow alcohol consumption on its flights and serves only halal food, managing director Jaafar Zamhari said. "It is compulsory for our Muslim women cabin crew to wear hijab and for non-Muslim to wear a decent uniform," he added. Jaafar added there are also prayers and recitals before each flight departs. The idea for Rayani Air grew out of much-publicised complaints by conservative Muslims who believed that two major air disasters for the national Malaysia Airlines — Flight 370 that went missing in March 2014 and Flight 17 downed a few months later over Ukraine — were caused by Allah's wrath. "We are answering the call of many Malaysians who wanted an Islamic airline," Zamhari told the AP news agency.

Monkey drives bus, rams into 2 other vehicles

TNN, Bareilly
The simian menace in the city took a turn for the absurd on Monday afternoon, when a monkey got inside a parked bus, switched on the engine and took off in the second gear. The driver finally managed to regain control but not before the vehicle had hit two other buses parked nearby. The bizarrely comic sequence of events began when the driver decided to take a quick nap. While he reclined on the last row, a monkey suddenly climbed inside the driver's cabin and managed to start the engine with the ignition key that was still in its slot. The driver, waking up, rushed towards the cabin. However, the panicked animal accidentally shifted the gear to the second level before jumping out of the bus.

BJP suspends Kirti for taking on Arun Jaitley

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi
Cricketer-turned lawmaker of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party Kirti Azad was yesterday suspended by the party for publicly targeting Finance Minister Arun Jaitley with allegations of corruption in Delhi's cricket body DDCA. In a statement, the party said Azad had been suspended with immediate effect for "anti-party activities". Show cause notice had earlier been issued to Azad asking him to explain his "anti-party conduct", the party said, adding that further action will depend on his reply.

UN blames Saudi coalition for most attacks on civilians

AGENCIES
The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights told the UN Security Council on Tuesday that a Saudi-led coalition's military campaign in Yemen appeared to be responsible for a "disproportionate amount" of attacks on civilian areas. Speaking at the council's first public meeting on Yemen since the Saudi-led bombing campaign began nine months ago, Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein said he had "observed with extreme concern" heavy shelling from the ground and air in civilian areas of Yemen including the destruction of hospitals and schools, reports Reuters. He said all parties to the conflict were responsible, "although a disproportionate amount appeared to be the result of air strikes carried out by coalition forces." A Saudi-led Arab coalition intervened in Yemen's civil war in March to try to restore the government after it was toppled by Iran-allied Houthis

forces, but a mounting civilian death toll and dire humanitarian situation has alarmed human rights groups. The Independent reports The British Government signed a secret security pact with Saudi Arabia and is now attempting to prevent details of the deal from being made public. The Home Secretary Theresa May agreed to the so-called 'memorandum of understanding' with her Saudi counter-part Crown Prince Muhammad bin Nayef during a visit to the Kingdom last year. The Home Office released no details of her trip at the time or announced that the deal had been signed. The only public acknowledgement was a year later in a Foreign Office report which obliquely referenced an agreement to "modernise the Ministry of the Interior". But now following a Freedom of Information request from the Liberal Democrats, who were in Government at the time, it has emerged that the agreement is far wider than has been acknowledged.