

# NEWS IN brief

## 'Palestinian attacker' shot dead in Jerusalem

AFP, Jerusalem  
A man tried to stab an Israeli police officer yesterday near Jerusalem's Old City and was killed, a police spokeswoman said. On Friday, Israeli border guards shot dead a Palestinian woman who tried to ram a car into them in the West Bank, shortly after a Palestinian was killed in clashes with Israeli forces near the border with the Gaza Strip. A wave of violence since the start of October has claimed the lives of 132 people on the Palestinian side, 19 Israelis, an American and an Eritrean.

## Wildfire guts dozens of houses in Australia

AFP, Melbourne  
A bushfire which flared on Christmas Day has destroyed more than 100 homes in southern Australia, officials said yesterday. The blaze hit two towns southwest of Melbourne, Wye River and Separation Creek, where many of the 116 houses lost were believed to be holiday homes. No lives were lost in the incident.

## Arson suspected at Bill Clinton's birthplace

AFP, Washington  
Arson is suspected in a fire that broke out at former US president Bill Clinton's birthplace early Friday morning, damaging the historical site, police said. "It's pretty logical it was purposely set," J.R. Wilson, the police chief in Hope, Arkansas, told AFP. Clinton -- born in Hope on August 19, 1946 -- served in the Oval Office from 1993 to 2001.

## Sweden introduces six-hour work day

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK  
Sweden is moving to a six-hour working day in a bid to increase productivity and make people happier. Employers across the country have already made the change, according to the Science Alert website, which said the aim was to get more done in a shorter amount of time and ensure people had the energy to enjoy their private lives.

## Erdogan 'talks man out of suicide'

AFP, Istanbul  
Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan used his celebrated rhetorical skills to save a life on Friday, preventing a man from jumping off Istanbul's Bosphorus Bridge. The man had climbed over a railing on the bridge linking Europe with Asia and was threatening to kill himself. Erdogan's motorcade was crossing the bridge at the time. Television pictures showed Erdogan's staff asking the sobbing man to talk to the president. After a few moments, he was escorted to safety. The man was suffering depression due to family problems, reports said.



Iraqi counter-terrorism forces drive a tank past rubble south of the Anbar province's capital Ramadi on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

## ANOTHER LANDSLIDE HITS A MYANMAR JADE MINE Dozens feared dead

REUTERS, Yangon  
Dozens of people were feared dead in Myanmar after a landslide hit a jade mining region, workers at a local mining firm said, the second such incident in just over a month.  
The landslide took place on Friday in Hpakant in the country's northern Kachin State, a rugged region sandwiched between China and India and the heart of Myanmar's multi-billion dollar jade industry controlled by its powerful military.  
"We heard about 50 people were buried in the collapsed dump and four or five bodies were found this morning," Sai Lon, who works at a jade mining company in the area, told Reuters yesterday.  
Police in Hpakant, in Mohnyin district, said the landslide took place on Friday afternoon but that they could not confirm casualties.  
On Nov 22, a massive landslide in the same mountainous area in Kachin State killed 114 people. The area produces some of the world's highest-quality jade.  
Deaths in Myanmar's jade mines, where small time prospectors and massive firms vie for the precious stone, underscore the sector's lax safety rules and lack of accountability.

## RAMADI OPERATION Iraqi forces in fierce battles with IS

AFP, Baghdad  
Iraqi forces yesterday clashed with diehard jihadists from the Islamic State group defending the former government complex in the heart of the city of Ramadi.  
After a major push on Tuesday that broke IS defences around the city centre, government forces have been slowed by snipers, booby traps, roadside bombs and suicide attackers.  
While initial hopes of a quick victory have faded, Iraq's elite counter-terrorism service (CTS) and the army have advanced steadily through the devastated capital of Anbar province.  
They reached a key intersection in the Hoz neighbourhood home to the government complex, whose recapture would go a long way towards ensuring a full recapture of Ramadi.

## 'Pakistan, Bangladesh, India will reunite' Says BJP general secretary

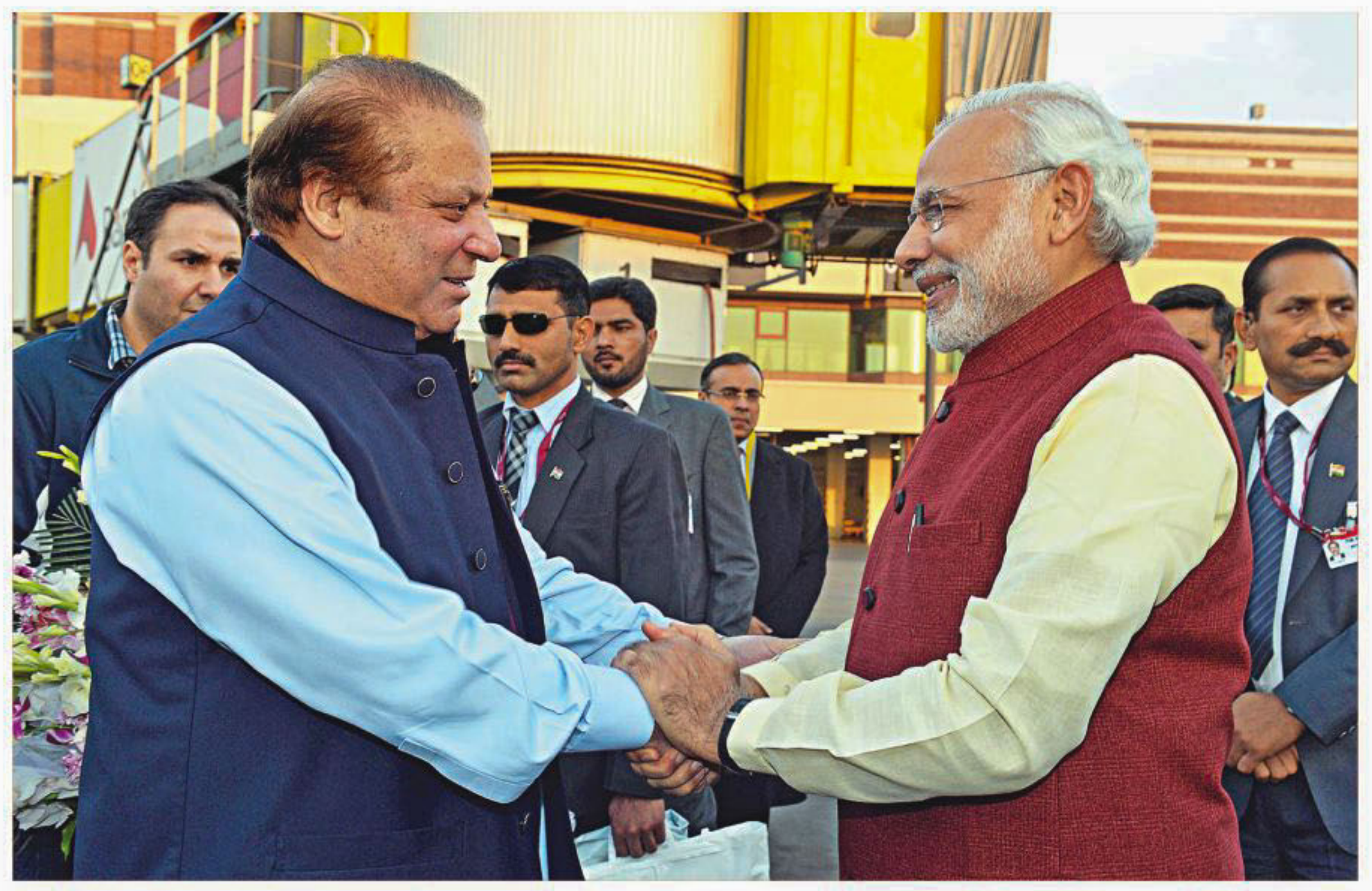
AGENCIES  
India's ruling BJP's general secretary Ram Madhav has said that parts of India - including Pakistan and Bangladesh - which were separated 60 years ago, will reunite to form "Akhand Bharat" (undivided India).  
"The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) still believes that one day these parts, which have for historical reasons separated only 60 years ago, will again, through popular goodwill, come together and Akhand Bharat will be created," Ram Madhav said in the interview to international news network Al-Jazeera.  
He also said that as an RSS member, he also holds that view.  
Ram Madhav, however, clarified that this will not happen through war, but through "popular consent".  
"That does not mean we wage war on any country, (or that) we annex any country. Without war, through popular consent, it can happen," he said.  
He also spoke about the issue of growing intolerance in India saying the returning of awards by artists and intellectuals is a bid to defame the government and in turn to demafe the image of India. He also said that the method of protest adopted by these intellectuals is wrong.  
Madhav, an RSS leader, was deputed to the BJP after the general elections last year. He played an important role in Jammu and Kashmir elections and formation of a BJP-PDP coalition government in the state.

## NEPAL QUAKE Cabinet finally clears way for rebuilding task

REUTERS, Kathmandu  
Eight months after a devastating earthquake hit Nepal, its government has finally opened the way for a reconstruction agency to spend \$4.1 billion pledged by foreign donors to help the massive number of people rendered homeless.  
Two separate earthquakes in April and May killed 9,000 people, injured more than 22,000 and damaged or destroyed nearly 900,000 houses, forcing many to live in shelters built with tarps and iron sheets, even in freezing temperatures.  
It took until September for Nepal to create the National Reconstruction Agency (NRA).  
On Saturday, a minister said that the cabinet on Friday named a chief for the agency, giving it the green light to begin its work.  
The delays were due to wrangling between political parties, which frustrated many international donors.  
Sherdhan Rai, minister for information and communication technology, said the NRA "will finalize the models for homes to be reconstructed and give financial assistance to people to rebuild their homes."  
He also said the agency "will be responsible to rebuild schools, hospitals, monuments, roads and office buildings in five years".  
UNICEF says more than 200,000 families affected by the tremors are still living in temporary shelters, at an altitude above 1,500 meters (4,920 feet) where harsh winter conditions will continue through February.  
The earthquake prompted squabbling Nepalese politicians to united and in September adopt a new constitution, which they had failed at doing for seven years.  
But the charter triggered protests by ethnic Madhesi groups who blocked key trade crossings with India, causing severe fuel shortages.

## Powerful tremor jolts Afghanistan, Pakistan 1 killed, dozens injured

AFP, Kabul  
A 6.3-magnitude earthquake centred in the Hindu Kush jolted Afghanistan and Pakistan, damaging homes and leaving dozens of people injured just two months after a killer quake rattled the same mountainous region.  
The tremor late Friday hit at a depth of 203.5 kilometres (126 miles), the US Geological Survey said, sending people fleeing shaking buildings into a bitterly cold night and prompting fears of aftershocks.  
The epicentre of the quake, which was felt as far away as New Delhi, was in the remote Afghan province of Badakhshan, close to the Pakistani and Tajik borders.  
A pregnant woman was killed when a boulder fell on her house in Peshawar and up to 50 others were left injured in the northwestern Pakistani city, officials said.  
Initial information suggested at least 45 houses were damaged in Badakhshan where communication with remote, mountainous villages is typically slow, and 12 people were injured in the Afghan province of Nangarhar.  
USGS had initially reported the quake's magnitude at 6.2.  
In October, a 7.5-magnitude quake in the same region ripped across Pakistan and Afghanistan, killing nearly 400 people and flattening buildings in rugged terrain.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (R) shakes hands with Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in Lahore on Friday. Modi made a surprise visit to Pakistan to meet Sharif, weeks after the nuclear-armed rivals decided to restart high-level peace talks. PHOTO: AFP

## 2015 IN REVIEW: A YEAR OF HOPE TOO

2015 was a pretty terrible year: Wars. Refugees. Terrorism. The list goes on. But take a step back from the headlines, and it's clear the year gone by was full of good news for hundreds of millions of people around the world. As the year ends, here are few reasons to be cheerful:

### World signs deal to save planet

The world agreed to fight climate change. Some key things to know about the Paris agreement: Every country signed on to it. It's legally binding. Supporters are calling it "the end of the era of fossil fuels." It may not do enough to achieve the stated goal of keeping global warming below 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), but many called it a giant stride in the right direction.

### One billion people out of poverty

There are half as many extremely poor people in the world as there were at the turn of the century. Unless you're a professional do-gooder, you might not have paid much attention to the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, so here's a cheat sheet: Back in 2000, world leaders set out eight ways they were going to try to fight poverty over the next 15 years. One goal was to "eradicate extreme poverty," defined as living on less than \$1.25 a day. This year, the UN reported that the number of people that poor had fallen from 1.75 billion in 1999 to 836 million today. And the percentage of people in developing countries that poor fell from 37% in 1999 to 14% now.

### Cheap Oil

The world is awash with black gold, so prices have dropped by more than a third. The value of a barrel of crude is as low as it's been since the financial crisis in 2009, and there's speculation that it could fall even lower if and when sanctions on Iran are lifted. The present price of oil is below 40 dollars.

### We are much more connected

Internet and phone access has skyrocketed. This was another Millennium Development Goal. Ten times as many people have mobile phone subscriptions now as did at the turn of the century, and Internet penetration has leapt from 6% worldwide to 43%.

### Suu Kyi wins in Myanmar

Myanmar's Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi spent nearly 18 years under house arrest, she's barred from being president because her husband was British, and the military is keeping a quarter of seats in parliament for itself -- and even so, her National League for Democracy won so many seats in parliament she looks set to be calling the shots.

## Astronaut calls wrong number from space

BBC ONLINE  
UK astronaut Tim Peake has tweeted a light-hearted apology after dialling a wrong number from space and saying to a woman on the other end of the line: "Hello, is this planet Earth?"  
Peake said on Twitter it was not intended to be a "prank call". The astronaut, a father-of-two from Chichester, West Sussex, arrived at the International Space Station (ISS) on Tuesday 15 December.  
He is spending six months conducting scientific experiments on the station.  
Earlier in the week, Peake helped two fellow crew members to conduct a space walk outside the ISS.  
Astronauts Tim Kopra and Scott Kelly, from the US space agency Nasa, went outside the ISS to fix a broken component.  
Peake, who is a former major in the Army, is the first Briton to join the crew of the ISS and is employed by the European Space Agency.  
Helen Sharman became the first British citizen to travel to space when she visited the Soviet Mir orbiting station in 1991.

