

# NEWSIN brief

## Missile from Yemen kills 3 in S Arabia

AFP, Riyadh  
Three civilians including two children have been killed in cross-border missile attacks from Yemen on a residential area in southwestern Saudi Arabia, civil defence authorities said. Eleven others were wounded when several missiles hit residential districts in the Jazan region on Thursday. More than 80 people have been killed in shelling and cross-border skirmishes in the kingdom's south since coalition operations began in Yemen.

## Kagame to run for a third term in Rwanda

AFP, Kigali  
Rwandan President Paul Kagame yesterday said he would run for a third term in line with a constitution amendment which won overwhelming backing in a referendum last month. The December 18 referendum saw voters massively approve constitutional amendments allowing Kagame, 58, to run for an exceptional third seven-year term in 2017.

## Israel to return bodies of 23 Palestinians

AFP, Jerusalem  
Israel was set to hand over yesterday the bodies of 23 Palestinians killed during recent attacks on Israel, the army said, in an apparent bid to ease tensions. Since a wave of violence erupted at the start of October, 138 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces.

## Russia sues Ukraine over \$3b debt

AFP, Moscow  
Russia's finance ministry yesterday said it was suing Ukraine for defaulting on a \$3-billion debt to Moscow, following an order by President Vladimir Putin. Ukraine announced last month it would not make the payment on its debt to Moscow after Putin vowed to sue Kiev if it failed to pay by the end of 2015.



## I wanted to be a butcher: Pope

IANS, Vatican City  
As a child, Pope Francis thought he would like to become a butcher, the pontiff told several thousand choristers from all over the world during an audience at the Vatican. "When I was a boy, I thought about becoming a butcher," Francis told around 6,000 child singers from the international Pueri Cantores children's choir on Thursday. The Argentine pontiff said he always enjoyed to see the butchers at their trade in their market stalls in Buenos Aires during his childhood.



# WORLD WELCOMES 2016

(From top, clockwise) People take part in the traditional New Year's sea plunge at Malo-Les-Bains beach in Dunkirk, northern France; an Egyptian policeman stands guard in front of the pyramids; people celebrate the arrival of 2016 in Rio, Brazil and Beijing, China. Millions welcomed in the New Year with Champagne and cheers yesterday, although tightened security put a damper on festivities in Europe where Germany and Russia evacuated stations over an imminent terror threat and a huge hotel fire sparked panic in Dubai.

PHOTO: AFP, MAIL ONLINE

# Iran-US row flares anew

### Rouhani expands missile programme, denounces possible sanctions

AGENCIES  
Iran's President Hassan Rouhani has ordered an expansion of the country's ballistic missile development programme, in a move seen as a response to possible new US sanctions against Iranian officials and businesses.

In a letter to the defense minister on Thursday, Rouhani said Iran will not accept any limitations on its missile programme, reports Al Jazeera. "Apparently, the US government is considering adding new individuals and institutions to the list of its previous oppressive sanctions," Rouhani wrote in the letter. The Wall Street Journal said Thursday the White House has delayed plans to slap new sanctions on Iran over its ballistic missile program, amid fears it could jeopardize a hard-won nuclear deal with Tehran. Quoting unnamed US officials, it

said that financial sanctions being developed by the US Treasury Department remain on the table, after the decision to delay them. At one point they were scheduled to be announced Wednesday in Washington, the newspaper said,

## MISSILE PROGRAMME

citing a notification the White House sent to Congress. The officials gave no definitive timeline for when the sanctions would be imposed, it said. Iran condemned the report, saying it has a right to develop missiles as long as they are not designed to carry nuclear warheads. In the five months since the nuclear deal was struck US officials say Iran has conducted two missile tests. The actions angered the United States and a United Nations panel, reports AFP.

The threat of new sanctions -- the nuclear deal is due to lift past measures that froze Iran out of the global financial system and crippled its oil exports -- brought already worsening relations to a head. It also came after US officials said an Iranian vessel had test-fired several rockets near three Western warships, including the USS Harry S Truman aircraft carrier. The alleged incident in the strategic Strait of Hormuz on December 26 drew denials from Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

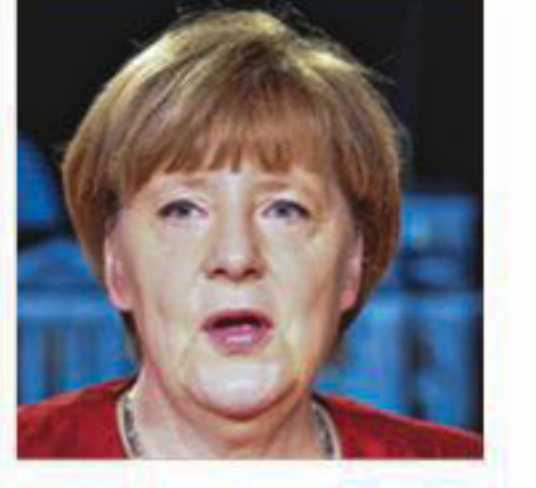
Spokesman General Ramezan Sharif accused the US of fabricating the incident as part of a "psychological operation". The Wall Street Journal first reported Wednesday that the US was preparing fresh sanctions against companies and individuals in Iran, Hong Kong and the United Arab Emirates over alleged links to Tehran's ballistic missile programme.

# Taliban launch New Year's day attack

### Targets French restaurant in Kabul

AFP, Kabul  
A Taliban suicide car bomber hit a French restaurant popular with foreigners in Kabul Friday, in a New Year's day attack that marks the latest in a series of brazen insurgent assaults.

At least four people were wounded in the attack on Le Jardin, an Afghan-owned eatery, which caused a piercingly loud explosion and left a building engulfed in flames. The attack comes a day after Afghanistan announced four-way talks in Pakistan on January 11, aimed at jump-starting peace negotiations with the resurgent Taliban. Security forces cordoned off the area and firefighters and ambulances were seen rushing to the restaurant, which sports a large garden festooned with rose bushes and is a popular hangout for foreigners. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid on Twitter claimed several foreigners had been killed and wounded in the suicide attack. Taliban insurgents routinely exaggerate the death toll in attacks on government and foreign targets. The Afghan health ministry said four people were wounded and taken to hospital for treatment, without confirming their nationality. It rejected local media reports claiming that a 10-year-old child had been killed.



# Refugee influx an opportunity for tomorrow

### Merkel tells Germans

AFP, Berlin  
Chancellor Angela Merkel stood firm on her decision to open Germany to refugees despite mounting criticism, telling citizens in her New Year's address Thursday that the record influx is "an opportunity for tomorrow". Merkel has earned praise at home and abroad for her decision to allow in a record wave of refugees, about half from war-torn Syria. But with one million asylum seekers arriving in 2015 alone, opposition and doubts are growing, including within her own conservative camp and among the population. Acknowledging the immense task of dealing with the massive influx, Merkel braced Germans for more challenges ahead and made a strong call for unity. The efforts put in to cope with the challenges would be worth it in the end because "countries have always benefitted from successful immigration, both economically and socially", she said. "I am convinced that, handled properly, today's great task presented by the influx and the integration of so many people is an opportunity for tomorrow," said Merkel. Germany took in almost 1.1 million asylum seekers this year.

# Gunman opens fire on Tel Aviv pub

### 2 killed; motive not clear yet

AFP, Tel Aviv  
Two people were killed and at least seven wounded yesterday when a gunman opened fire on a pub and nearby cafe in central Tel Aviv, but the motive was not immediately clear. The shooting came amid a recent wave of Palestinian attacks on Israelis. Medics said they had taken nine people to hospitals in Tel Aviv, with police saying two of them had been pronounced dead. "Police units searching Tel Aviv area for suspect who carried out shooting. All injured taken to Tel Aviv hospitals," police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld wrote on Twitter. An AFP reporter said patrons at the pub and cafe had been targeted, and that the sidewalk was strewn with chairs and broken glass as police forensic officers examined the scene. Witnesses said people had braved the chilly weather to sit outside on terraces at both venues, located on Dizengoff Street, a central thoroughfare of pubs, cafes and shops. Hundreds of police were scouring the area, entering buildings in the vicinity and northward, where the assailant was believed to have fled, and police helicopters buzzed overhead.



Iraqi government forces and members of Iraq's elite counter-terrorism service carry the body of a comrade during battles with Islamic State (IS) group jihadists as they try to secure all the neighbourhoods of Ramadi, the capital of Iraq's Anbar province, yesterday. Iraq declared the city of Ramadi liberated from the Islamic State group on December 28.

PHOTO: AFP

# Dubai probes cause of New Year Eve hotel fire

AFP, Dubai  
Investigators in Dubai were working yesterday to determine the cause of a spectacular fire that engulfed a 63-storey luxury hotel on New Year's Eve three hours before midnight. The huge blaze at The Address Downtown hotel erupted around 9:00pm on Thursday, sparking panic but no reports of serious injuries. Authorities went ahead with a dazzling fireworks display at the nearby Burj Khalifa -- the world's tallest skyscraper -- despite the inferno, the latest in a series of fires in recent years to hit the buildings that make up Dubai's futuristic cityscape. They said the fire is believed to have erupted from the outside of the building on its 20th floor before spreading along its whole facade. But the exact cause was not yet known. Dubai government's media office issued a civil defence statement said that the process of cooling the hotel down was "ongoing" Friday afternoon. Witnesses described scenes of panic after the fire spread, with residents screaming and some fainting as they rushed to evacuate the building. Still, authorities said only 16 people had suffered mostly minor injuries despite the presence of thousands in the area to watch the celebrations. At least 14 people were slightly injured, one was moderately injured and one person suffered a heart attack during the evacuation, they said. Heavy black smoke still billowed from several floors of the hotel early yesterday, an AFP photographer said, as firefighters continued to douse the building with water.



# Russia names Nato as threat to security

BBC ONLINE  
Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed an updated national security paper describing Nato's expansion as a threat to the country. The updated National Security Strategy signed by President Putin on Thursday is the latest in a series that are critical of Nato. In 2014 Russia announced it was altering its military doctrine to take account of the Ukraine crisis and Nato's presence in eastern Europe. Kremlin adviser Mikhail Popov said at the time that Nato's enlargement in recent years meant the alliance was getting closer to [Russian] borders and presented an "external threat" to his country.

# 'Hitler's Germany' an example of effective govt: Turkey PM

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK  
various other counties." In November, Erdogan's AKP party won a decisive victory in the Turkish parliamentary elections, cementing his grip on power. Despite his position theoretically making him above the country's party politics, he clearly played a key role in AKP's success and state broadcasters gave little airtime to any of his opponents. He has previously suggested Turkey already operates under a de facto presidential system, and said his constitutional reforms would only "finalise" the change. A senior Turkish official said that Erdogan had meant to highlight Nazi Germany as an example of how not to implement such a system. "There are good and poor examples of presidential systems and the important thing is to put checks and balances in place," the official told The Independent. "Nazi Germany, lacking proper institutional arrangements, was obviously one of the most disgraceful examples in history. That's his point."



Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan has reportedly defended his push for a presidential system of government by citing "Hitler's Germany" as an historic example. The President has pushed ahead with efforts to increase the stature of his own position, despite fears it would split the country's seat of power in two. Erdogan cut short a state visit to Saudi Arabia after the death of prominent pro-government political journalist Hasan Karakaya, and in a press conference on his return to Turkey was asked if he thought a presidential system would be possible while maintaining the unitary structure of the state. According to the T24 news portal, he replied: "Yes. There is nothing to say that you can't have a presidential system in a unitary state. There are already some examples in the world today, and also some from the past. You see it when you look at Hitler's Germany. Later you see the example again in

# BJP won't 'overuse' PM in WB polls

TNN, New Delhi  
Having learnt its lessons from the recent defeat in Bihar, BJP has decided against using too much of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a campaigner for the West Bengal assembly polls. While no BJP campaign is complete without the party's chief mascot Modi, in Bengal where BJP will contest most of the 294 seats, the PM will join the election campaign only when it reaches the peak. BJP's hopes in Bengal, where the party barely has a toehold, is limited to improving its showing over its best performance so far, which is a rise in its vote share from 6% to 17% in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls.