

NEWS IN brief

Evacuations as cyclone slams into Tonga

Hundreds of people were evacuated from their homes in Tonga yesterday when severe tropical cyclone Ula slammed into the tiny Pacific kingdom. However, there were no casualties after Prime Minister Akilisi Pohiva declared a state of emergency before the storm hit "in order to prevent or minimise the loss of human life, illness or injury".

UN Libya envoy in Tripoli for gov't talks

The UN's envoy for Libya held talks in Tripoli Friday, seeking to encourage the administration there to commit to a national unity government that would end years of bloodshed. Martin Kobler, on a desperate diplomatic push to get Libya's two separate administrations to sign a power-sharing agreement, met Thursday with representatives of the internationally-recognised government near its headquarters in the east of the country.

Suicide bomber kills 3 in Somali capital

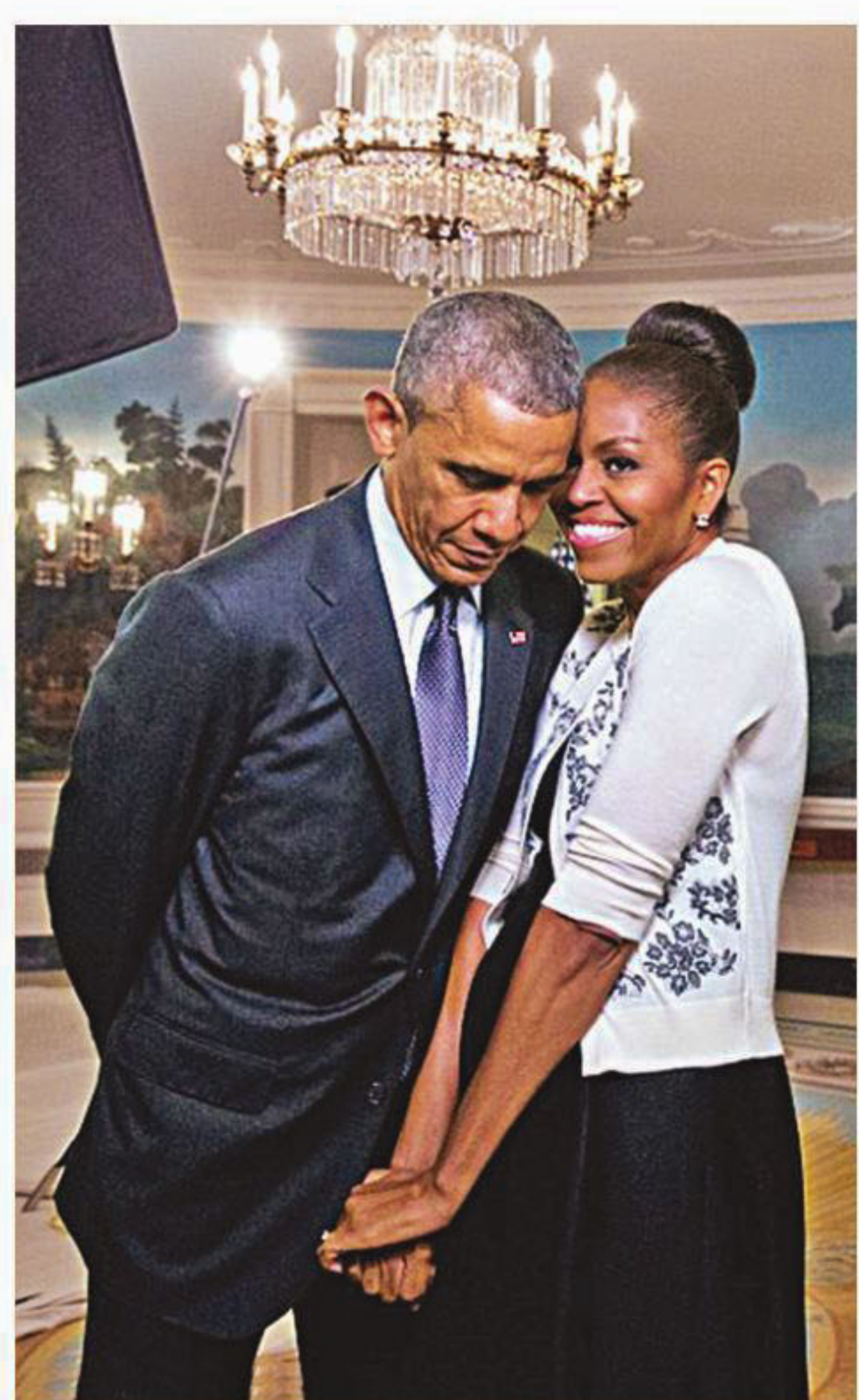
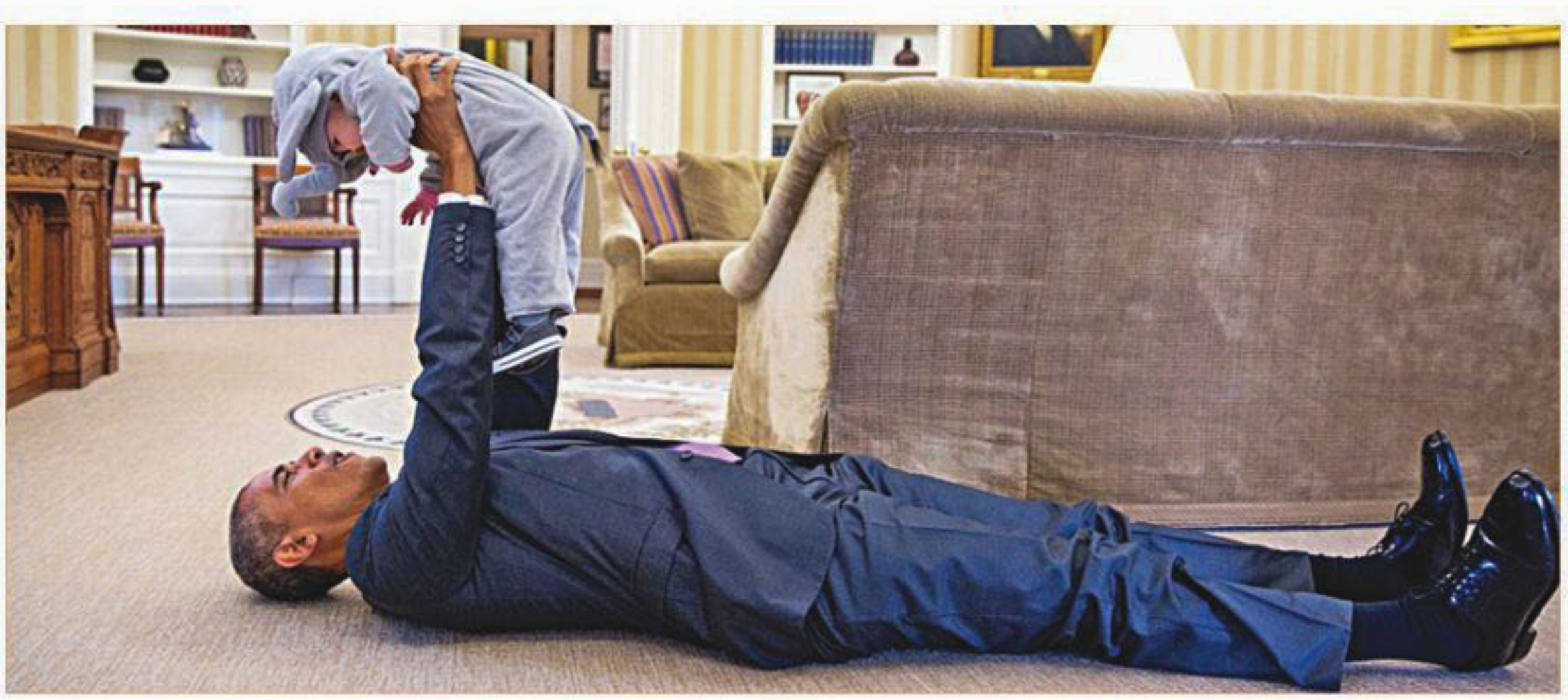
A suicide bomber attacked a popular restaurant in Mogadishu, the Somali capital, yesterday, killing himself and at least three others, Somali police said. The attacker, dressed in a business suit over a suicide vest, detonated the bomb after entering the Village Restaurant, which is opposite Somalia's National Theatre, police said.

Guatemala prison fight kills 8

A fight at an overcrowded Guatemalan prison killed at least eight prisoners and wounded 20, the country's interior minister said on Friday. An altercation between two inmates turned into a battle between rival gangs at the prison in Puerto Barrios, about 185 miles (300 km) northeast of the capital, said Interior Minister Eunice Mendizabal, who arrived at the prison after the incident.

Hunt on for Tel Aviv gunman

Israeli security forces yesterday pressed a manhunt for the gunman who killed two people and wounded seven others at a Tel Aviv pub, as the motive for the attack remained unclear. The New Year's Day shooting on busy Dizengoff Street came amid a wave of Palestinian attacks on Israelis and days after the leader of the Islamic State (IS) group threatened the Jewish state with violence.



'BEST PHOTOS' OF OBAMAS IN 2015

President Obama's official photographer has released his gallery of "best photos" of 2015. Pete Souza has compiled his annual "Year in Photographs" gallery, consisting of 100 images. The gallery paints a picture of the events that have shaped the world in the past year while also giving an insight into Obama's penultimate year as president, showing him in both private settings as well as formal state visits. Here the pictures (from top left, clockwise) show Obama playing with a child in the White House; a rare moment between the president and first lady; a bride reacts after seeing Obama (who was playing golf nearby) at her wedding.

Obama considers unilateral action on US gun violence

As he approaches the final year of his presidency, President Barack Obama intends to try and fulfil one of his outstanding policy goals by restricting access to guns. Following weeks of discussions with officials and legal advisers about how he could use his executive powers to circumvent the Republican-controlled Congress, Mr Obama will on Monday sit down with his top law officer to see how he can make it harder for "a dangerous few" to get their hands on guns. Obama tried and failed in the aftermath of the 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting in which 26 adults and children were killed, to try and tighten access to weapons. He was unable to make genuine headway in the face of opposition from Republicans and powerful lobbying groups such as the National Rifle Association (NRA). But as mass shootings have continued to play out with relentless regularity, Mr Obama has continued to look for ways to tackle gun safety, by measures such as improving background checks. Following the San Bernardino shooting in December in which 14 people were killed and more than 20



injured, the Obama administration let it be known he was looking for ways to bypass Congress, with the presumption that Republicans would block any efforts to further restrict access. Speaking during his weekly radio address, Obama said he received so many letters from parents, teachers and children about the "epidemic of gun violence" that he could not "sit around and do nothing". "The gun lobby is loud and well-organised in its defence of effortlessly available guns for anyone," he said. "The rest of us are going to have to be just as passionate and well-organised in our defence of our kids." The Associated Press said the issue of gun laws remains one of the most divisive in the United States, particularly in the wake of a the string of mass shootings.

Donald Trump becomes terrorist's poster boy

Republican presidential candidate, Donald Trump, has been featured in a new recruitment video released by Somalia-based terror group al-Shabaab. In the 52 minute-long film, distributed on Twitter on Friday by al-Kataib Media Foundation, Trump is shown announcing his call for a "complete shutdown of all Muslims entering the United States" at a rally in South Carolina, while a crowd cheers in the background. The presidential hopeful's appearance - around 11 minutes into the video - is preceded by a speech from the al-Qaeda-linked Islamic extremist Anwar al-Awlaki, who was killed in drone strike in 2011. Trump's comments have been heavily criticised by political figures around the world, including members of both the US's Republican and Democratic parties, and



his remarks have been dubbed by some as being an "jihadi recruitment tool". Hillary Clinton labelled the business magnate Isis' "best recruiter", while speaking at the Democrat candidates' third TV debate. She also claimed Trump had appeared in IS videos saying: "They [IS] are going to people showing videos of Donald Trump insulting Islam and Muslims in order to recruit more radical jihadists." Al-Shabaab is a jihadist terrorist group with links to the militant Islamist organisation al-Qaeda. The group is known for carrying out attacks around the Horn of Africa. In April, al-Shabaab killed 148 people in an attack on Garissa University College and a bus was attacked near Mandera last December by militants from the group.

Saudi coalition ends Yemen ceasefire

A Saudi-led coalition battling rebels in Yemen has said it will no longer observe a ceasefire announced last month. A statement carried on Saudi state media blamed violations by the Houthis and other allied militia. But the coalition is still "keen to create the right conditions to find a peaceful solution", the statement said. The 15 December ceasefire began at the same time as UN-brokered talks aimed at ending Yemen's conflict. Negotiations broke up days later, however, without agreement. Further talks are due later this month. Despite the truce, fierce fighting continued on the ground. The coalition's statement accused the Houthis and forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh of firing ballistic missiles at Saudi Arabia, attacking border posts and shelling civilian areas. "All this shows their lack of seriousness and disregard for civilian lives as well as their attempt to take advantage of the truce to achieve gains," it said. About 6,000 people, almost half of them civilians, have been killed since the Saudi-led coalition launched a military campaign against the Houthi rebels in March. The conflict has worsened an already dire humanitarian situation, with about four-fifths of Yemenis requiring aid.



Members from Hindu Sena, a hardline group, burn an effigy of Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, to protest against a militant attack at the Pathankot air base, in New Delhi, India, yesterday. Five gunmen and three guards were killed when unidentified militants attacked the Indian Air Force base near the Pakistan border yesterday.

IRAQ 'WAR CRIMES' British troops could face prosecution

British soldiers accused of unlawful killing and torture during the Iraq War could face prosecution, the head of an official unit probing alleged abuses said in an interview published Saturday. Former police detective Mark Warwick, who is now leading the Iraq Historic Allegations Team (IHAT) set up by the Ministry of Defence, told The Independent newspaper he believed his team had gathered enough evidence to justify charges. "There are serious allegations that we are investigating across the whole range of probe investigations, which incorporates homicide, where I feel there is significant evidence to be obtained to put a strong case before the Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA) to prosecute and charge," he said. The SPA considers criminal cases within the armed services.

Algeria buries a independence hero

Thousands of Algerians made their way to a tiny hill-top village today to pay their final respects to a man who played a crucial role in their nation's road to freedom. The road from the capital Algiers to Ait Ahmed was lined with people standing by the roadside, on bridges or leaning from their balconies, to catch a glimpse of the funeral cortege of the man after whom the village was named: former revolutionary leader Hocine Ait Ahmed, who died last week in Swiss exile, aged 89. "It's an honour for me to be here," said Zine Ait Hadda, a 21-year-old from a neighbouring village. "He fought against this corrupt, lawless regime, even when the generals threatened him." People came from across the North African country, spending the night in the village, to pay homage to a man who, after independence, founded the first major opposition party, the progressive Socialist Forces Front, and became a leading advocate of



democracy. The previous night, his coffin was at the headquarters of the party he founded: it was visited during the night by a stream of people, including the leaders of most other opposition parties and former prime ministers. Dignitaries came from Morocco and Tunisia. For the ruling elite, it was an awkward homecoming. The regime has long claimed that its legitimacy lies in the revolutionary past of the National Liberation Front. Ait Ahmed may have been a leading opposition figure, but because of his historic role, many who had ostracised him during his lifetime wanted to claim him as one of their own in his death. Ait Ahmed, the last surviving member of the original nine founders of the FLN, spent nearly 50 years in exile after denouncing what he argued was the hijacking of the ideals of the revolution by the shadowy generals who have long held the real power in the country. Ait Ahmed's last wish was to refuse the trappings of a state funeral or a burial in the El Alia Cemetery in the capital alongside other top officials. He requested a simple funeral in his birthplace. Despite this wish, the entire government showed up at the airport on Thursday when his body arrived. Rachid Halet, a member of Mr Ait Ahmed's party since 1979, said Algerians understood the role he had played. "He was a leading figure of the 20th century at every turn, yet the history books only mention him in passing," said Mr Halet. "But there are not many other Algerian politicians who can draw such a reaction in ordinary areas, from the youth."

IS attacks Iraqi army base near Ramadi

Fighters from so-called Islamic State (IS) have launched an attack on an Iraqi army base near Ramadi, just days after the city was recaptured by government troops. A military spokesman said suicide car bombers and fighters wearing explosive belts took part in the attack. The army fought back with the help of air strikes by the US-led coalition. Iraq said it had "liberated" Ramadi from IS on Sunday. The jihadist group had held the major city since May. Friday's attack is the biggest launched by IS against Iraqi forces since Ramadi's recapture.

Turkey needs Israel, says Erdogan

Turkey must accept that it needs Israel, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said yesterday, as the two countries seek to thrash out a deal on normalising ties. Nato member Turkey was a key regional ally of Israel until the two countries fell out over the deadly storming by Israeli commandos in 2010 of a Turkish aid ship, the Mavi Marmara, bound for Gaza. Erdogan further raised hackles in Israel with his sometimes inflammatory rhetoric towards the Jewish State. But the atmosphere has transformed following the revelation last month the two sides were making progress in secret talks to seek a rapprochement. "Israel is in need of a country like Turkey in the region," Erdogan said in remarks to Turkish reporters published in leading dailies Saturday. "And we too must accept that we need Israel. This is a reality in the region," said Erdogan. Ambassadors were withdrawn in the wake of the 2010 crisis and Erdogan said Turkey's three conditions for a normalisation were clear - a lifting of the Gaza blockade, compensation for the Mavi Marmara victims and an apology for the incident. Israel has already apologised and negotiations appear to have made progress on compensation, leaving the blockade on the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip the main hurdle.