

# NEWS IN brief

## IS jihadists attack key Libya oil facility

REUTERS, Benghazi  
Islamic State militants resumed shelling near the Libyan oil port of Es Sider yesterday and an oil storage tank in the port was hit by a long-range rocket causing a fire, a petroleum guards spokesman said. Guards spokesman Ali Hassi said the militants were 30-40 km from the port, which they also targeted on Monday in an attack that left seven guards dead and 25 wounded.

## China bus 'arson attack' kills 17

AFP, Beijing  
Chinese police arrested a man suspected of starting a bus fire yesterday that killed 17 people, state media reported. Flames engulfed the bus in front of a furniture store in the northern region of Ningxia. Thirty-two people were injured. State media did not mention any possible motives.

## Clinton joins Hillary's campaign trail

AFP, New York  
Bill Clinton stepped into the limelight Monday, making his first solo campaign appearance in wife Hillary's 2016 bid for the White House, calling her the most qualified US presidential candidate in decades. The 69-year-old former president went to New Hampshire in support of the former secretary of state, senator and first lady who leads national polls for the Democrats ahead of the state's voting contest next month.

## IS beheading suspect thought to be Briton

AFP, London  
Investigations into the identity of an English-speaking man who featured in an Islamic State (IS) group video are focusing on a Briton, Siddhartha Dhar, the BBC reported yesterday. Dhar was born a Hindu and ran a business renting out bouncy castles in northeast London before converting to Islam and becoming radicalised, the broadcaster said. On Sunday, IS released a video featuring a masked IS fighter killing five "spies".

## Crisis deepens in Venezuela

AFP, Caracas  
A tense struggle for control of Venezuela's legislature threatens to come to a head at a swearing-in ceremony yesterday as opposition lawmakers defy government efforts to weaken their majority. Opponents and loyalists alike of the country's Socialist leadership have rallied at their supporters to rally at the National Assembly as an opposition majority takes over for the first time in 17 years.

## INDIAN MISSION ATTACK IN AFGHANISTAN

# Siege ends after 25 long hours

AGENCIES  
Afghan special forces killed a group of insurgents holed up in a house in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif late on Monday, bringing to an end a 25-hour siege following the insurgents' attack on the nearby Indian consulate.  
The soldiers killed the three insurgents who had shut themselves into a large house near the consulate, said Abdul Razaq Qaderi, deputy police chief of Balkh province.  
He said an investigation was under way to try to identify the men and those behind the attack, which occurred on the same day gunmen attacked an Indian air base in Pathankot in the northwestern state of Punjab near the border with Pakistan.  
Eight members of the security forces were wounded in the gun battle which followed the attack on the consulate. The Indian ambassador said all the consulate staff were safe, reports Reuters.  
The attack began late on Sunday after gunmen tried unsuccessfully to break into the consulate, taking advantage of the fact that many people were watching the final of a football championship between Afghanistan and India.  
Meanwhile, a small bomb exploded near the Indian consulate in the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad yesterday, authorities said. The blast was some 200 metres from the consulate in Jalalabad, an Indian diplomatic source there told AFP. The source and Afghan authorities said no one had been injured.



## NEW MIGRANT TRAGEDY

PHOTO: AFP  
The body of a migrant lies on the shore in the Aegean coastal town of Dikili, near the western city of Izmir, Turkey, yesterday. Turkish authorities said they found the bodies of 27 migrants, at least three of them children, on the Aegean coast yesterday after a migrant boat apparently capsized as it tried to reach the Greek island of Lesbos.

# 'Terrorists were more lethal than 26/11 attackers'

India reveals more details of the siege pointing finger at Pak army

AGENCIES  
After initially refraining from blaming the country, a top government official said on Monday that the terrorists behind the Pathankot airbase attack appeared to have received training from a "professional armed force in Pakistan." The fidayeen (suicide) squad was more lethal and better trained than the 26/11 Mumbai attackers. They had enough arms and ammunition, including under barrel grenade launchers, for a sustained operation of more than 60 hours against a professional army.  
An Intelligence official told The Hindu that establishing the identity of the terrorists would be a challenge because Pakistan would certainly not own them up. Security forces inside the air base have found bodies of five terrorists. A sixth one was blown to pieces when the building he had taken refuge in was brought down with explosives on Monday. DNA samples would be preserved, he said.  
After the 26/11 Mumbai attacks,

Pakistan had refused to accept the bodies of nine Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorists killed by the security forces. The tenth terrorist, Ajmal Kasab, the only one to have been captured alive, was hanged in a Pune prison in 2013 and his body was buried on the premises.  
The UJC, an alliance of more than a



dozen pro-Pakistan militant groups based in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, had claimed responsibility for the air base attack. But Indian officials rejected that claim saying it an attempt to give it a Kashmir colour.  
Security agencies believe there were six terrorists and they were divided into two groups — one of 4 and the

other with 2 members.  
The modus operandi adopted by the terrorists speaks volumes about the precision training they have received, said the official.  
It is suspected that two terrorists might have entered the Pathankot air base before the other team of four could.  
The official said the second group entered the air base in the morning of January 1, much before an alarm was sounded to secure all vital installations.  
There are strong indications that the terrorists were assisted by a drugs racket operating along the border and the heavy arms and ammunition they used could have been dispatched from Pakistan before they themselves crossed the border.  
Meanwhile, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) registered cases for waging war against India and inciting riots on Monday, under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and Arms Act, against unknown persons, official sources said.

# Madhesis, parties form task force to end crisis

PTI, Kathmandu  
Nepal's agitating Madhesi Front and the three major parties yesterday formed a task force to find a common ground and narrow their differences over the new constitution in a bid to end the political crisis and the shortage of essential goods due to prolonged protests.  
Hridayesh Tripathi of Terai Madhes Democratic Party, Rajendra Shrestha of Federal Democratic Forum Nepal and Ram Naresh Raya, senior leader of Terai Madhes Sadhbhawana Party, are the members of the task force.  
However, Rajendra Mahato-led Sadhbhawana Party, one of the constituents of the four-party United Democratic Madhesi Front (UDMF), has not been included in the panel.  
Mahato was injured in a baton charge by police in Biratnagar last week; his party has announced fresh protest programmes, demanding apology for the attack on its chairman.  
The major political parties — Nepali Congress, CPN-UML and UCPN (Maoist) — had on Sunday proposed to the UDMF a task force to find a common ground on demands put forth by the Madhesi leaders.  
Madhesi, who share strong cultural and family bonds with Indians, demand a re-demarcation of provinces, fixing of electoral constituencies on the basis of population and proportional representation.  
The major parties have appointed Mahesh Acharya of the Nepali Congress (NC), Bhim Rawal of the CPN-UML and Krishna Bahadur Mahara of the UCPN (Maoist) to the panel.  
The Sunday talks were attended by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, NC president Sushil Koirala and UCPN-Maoist chairman Prachanda.  
The Speaker of Nepal's Parliament, Onsari Ghartimagar, on Monday gave a 72-hour deadline to register their amendment proposal on the Bill on First Amendment to the new Constitution, after the discussion on the proposed Constitution Amendment Bill concluded on Sunday.  
Life in the southern Nepal plains have been seriously hit for the past four months due to Madhesi protests against Nepal's new Constitution adopted by the Constituent Assembly on September 20.  
So far, over 50 people have died in the Madhesi-Tharu agitation, seeking changes in the constitution.

# SAUDI-IRAN TURF WAR Region may plunge into greater trouble

REUTERS, Riyadh  
The last time Saudi Arabia broke off ties with Iran, after its embassy in Tehran was stormed by protesters in 1988, it took a swing in the regional power balance in the form of Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait to heal the rift.  
It is hard to see how any lesser development could resolve the region's most bitter rivalry, which has underpinned wars and political tussles across the Middle East as Riyadh and Tehran backed opposing sides.  
Riyadh's expulsion of Iran's envoy after another storming of its Tehran embassy, this time in response to the Saudi execution of Shia Muslim cleric Nimr al-Nimr, raised the heat again, making the region's underlying conflict even harder to resolve.  
At the heart of the new crisis is Saudi Arabia's growing willingness to confront Iran and its allies militarily since King Salman took power a year ago, say diplomats, choosing with his son, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, to abandon years of backroom politics.  
Last year, Riyadh began a war in Yemen to stop an Iran-allied militia

seizing power in its southern neighbour and boosted support to Syrian rebels against Tehran's ally President Bashar al-Assad. Its execution of Nimr, while mainly driven by domestic politics, was also part of that open confrontation with Iran, according to political analysts.  
The interventions followed years of Riyadh complaining about what it regarded as unchecked Iranian aggression in the region. It has pointed to Iran's support for Shia militias and accused the country of smuggling arms to groups in Gulf countries - which Iran denies.  
"We will not allow Iran to destabilise our region. We will not allow Iran to do harm to our citizens or those of our allies and so we will react," Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir told Reuters on Monday, signalling Riyadh would not back down.  
The Saudi decisions in Syria and Yemen were also partly a response to Iran's nuclear deal with world powers, which lifted sanctions on Tehran, theoretically giving it more money and political room to pursue its regional activities.  
The new crisis has had the effect of hardening a wider confrontation between the loose-knit coalitions of allies each can



Iraqi forces 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, on Monday.

call upon in the region; some of Riyadh's allies also cut diplomatic ties with Tehran after the embassy attack, while Iran's warned of repercussions.  
After the execution of Nimr, Iran's Revolutionary Guard elite military force said a "harsh revenge" would strike Saudi's ruling Al-Saud family in the near future.  
That chain reaction may now complicate complex political talks over the formation of a government in Lebanon,

fought numerous proxy conflicts throughout the Middle East and often exchange threats and insults. But they've stopped short of direct conflict and eventually agreed to a cold reconciliation," said Karim Sadjadpour, senior associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's Middle East programme.  
But he said that Iran might seek to stoke unrest among Saudi Arabia and Bahrain's Shia communities.  
Renewed protests among Saudi and Bahraini Shia since the execution of Nimr, along with the bombing of two Sunni mosques in Iraq, may be regarded by Riyadh as evidence of Iranian incitement.  
Riyadh has itself pushed allies to cut ties with Iran and pressed Muslim bodies like the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to condemn the storming of the embassy. Theoretically, it could also ramp up support for Syrian rebel groups.  
All-out conflict is something that even hawks in Saudi Arabia and Iran would likely try to avoid. However, the new escalation between the region's main enemies shows how events can sometimes pre-empt strategic plans.  
efforts to bring Syria's warring parties to talks, stalled negotiations to end Yemen's civil war and Riyadh's rapprochement with Baghdad.  
Now there is some scope for further escalation, both in the various Middle East theatres where Iran and Saudi Arabia back opposing forces, and diplomatically as Riyadh taps Arab and Muslim channels to try to isolate Tehran, according to analysts.  
"Since 1979 the two countries have

## Bhutan waits for its prince

AFP, Paro  
In the serene grounds of Paro Ugyen Pelri Palace in the remote Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, a young couple pose for the camera, his arm resting on her growing baby bump.  
Queen Jetsun Pema, 25, and King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, 35, delighted the nation in November when they announced they were expecting their first child, a son.  
A new photograph -- the January instalment of an online calendar released by the Royal Office -- shows the expectant couple sitting in the secluded palace woods dressed in traditional bright robes.  
"This year, our happiness is immeasurable as we look forward to the birth of our prince. It is going to be a beautiful year in Bhutan," the Royal Office said in a statement.  
Known as the "last Shangri-La", Bhutan, home to just 750,000 people, famously shuns conventional measures of economic wellbeing, instead compiling a Gross National Happiness index.



## UN rights envoy for Palestine quits

AFP, Geneva  
Makarim Wibisono, the UN expert on the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories resigned Monday, complaining that Israel had never granted him access to areas he is meant to monitor.  
Wibisono, who took up the independent role in June 2014, "expressed deep regret that, throughout his mandate, Israel failed to grant him access to the Occupied Palestinian Territory", UN said in a statement.  
Meanwhile, a Palestinian stabbed and wounded a soldier in the southern West Bank yesterday before being shot dead, the army said. Since October 1, 139 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces.

## HEBDO ATTACK ANNIVERSARY Hollande unveils memorial plaques

BBC ONLINE  
French President Francois Hollande yesterday unveiled plaques to the victims of last January's jihadist attacks in Paris as anniversary commemorations begin.  
Seventeen people died in three days of attacks targeting Charlie Hebdo magazine, police and a kosher store.  
The widow of a murdered policeman is taking legal action over alleged failings by the security services.  
Ingrid Brinsolaro said threats against Charlie Hebdo had not been taken seriously enough.  
The first plaque was unveiled outside the former offices of Charlie Hebdo, where 12 people were shot dead.  
Hollande then took part in further ceremonies for a policeman killed as he chased the Charlie Hebdo attackers, and at the Jewish supermarket in eastern Paris where four shoppers died.  
After the January 2015 attacks, the supermarket killer Amedy Coulibaly was also linked to the shooting and wounding of a 32-year-old jogger in a park.  
However, the jogger has told BFMTV that he saw the gunman and he was convinced it was not Coulibaly.  
The widow of Franck Brinsolaro, the police bodyguard employed to protect Charlie Hebdo editor Stephane Charbonnier (Charb), said there had been a "flagrant lack of security" around him even though threats had been made.  
Speaking to RIL, Ingrid Brinsolaro said her husband had complained that there had not been enough resources invested, that it was impossible for him to do his job properly.  
Earlier, her lawyer, Philippe Stepniewski, filed a legal complaint with the Paris prosecutor's office, saying Brinsolaro's death was "involuntary homicide".

## PAK PM IN SRI LANKA TOUR Sharif seeks closer military ties

AFP, Colombo  
Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif called yesterday for closer military cooperation with Sri Lanka on an official visit to the island.  
Pakistan was a key supplier of arms and aircraft for Sri Lanka's military in their battle against separatist Tamil Tiger rebels during the civil war that ended in May 2009.  
In talks with President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, Sharif also expressed a desire for more naval exchanges.  
"I conveyed our desire for more frequent port calls, participation in military exercises and defence seminars and training of military personnel," Pakistan's leader said in a statement following an official welcoming ceremony.  
Sharif held talks with Wickremesinghe soon after his arrival on Monday and is due to fly back today after visiting the Buddhist pilgrim city of Kandy.  
Sri Lanka sends its military officers for higher training to both Pakistan and its arch-rival India as well as to several other countries, including the United States and China.  
The island's closest neighbour India withheld arms and ammunition during the height of Colombo's war with Tamil rebels, who have close cultural and religious links with the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu.