

# NEWS IN brief

## Nepal PM in week-long China visit

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's prime minister KP Sharma Oli left yesterday for a week-long visit to China aimed at deepening ties following months of frosty relations with neighbouring India. The visit comes a month after the prime minister visited India -- a traditional first overseas stop for Nepali prime ministers -- to mend ties strained by a border block-

## Students killed in Spain bus crash

BBC ONLINE

At least 14 people have been killed after a bus carrying foreign students crashed on a Spanish motorway between the cities of Barcelona and Valencia. Most of the 57 people on board the bus were students on the Erasmus programme who were returning to Barcelona after a trip to a fireworks festival.

## Pak avalanche kills 2 schoolchildren

AFP, Chitral

Pakistani rescuers yesterday found the bodies of two schoolchildren hit by an avalanche in the mountainous northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, while around nine more remain buried beneath the snow. Authorities said the chances of finding any survivors are very low.

## IS's Sinai attack death toll rises to 15

AFP, Cairo

The death toll from an attack on a police checkpoint claimed by the Islamic State jihadist group in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula has risen to 15, the interior ministry said yesterday. The ministry said a checkpoint near North Sinai's provincial capital of El-Arish was struck by mortar fire late on Saturday. Three officers and 12 policemen were killed in the attack, the ministry said in a statement yesterday.



Protesters hold placards during a protest rally against Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump in Arizona on Saturday. Hundreds protested Donald Trump in New York and blocked a major road in the southwestern state of Arizona, where a demonstrator was punched and kicked at a rally. The latest attempts by opponents to disrupt the campaign of the top US Republican White House hopeful resulted in a handful of arrests, police and witnesses said.

PHOTO: AFP

# World observes Earth Hour

AFP, Sydney

From Sydney's Opera House to New York's Empire State Building and Paris's Eiffel tower, landmarks worldwide dimmed their lights Saturday for the 10th edition of the Earth Hour campaign against climate change.

Millions of people from 178 countries and territories were expected to take part in WWF's Earth Hour this year, organisers said, with monuments and buildings such as Berlin's Brandenburg Gate plunging into darkness for 60 minutes from 8:30 pm local time.

The annual event kicked off in Sydney, where the Earth Hour idea originated in 2007.

Earth Hour's global executive director Siddharth Das said momentum towards climate action was building in the wake of the global climate talks in Paris last year.

The so-called Paris Agreement sets the goal of limiting global warming to "well below" two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) over pre-industrial levels, with a more ambitious target of 1.5 C if possible.

Das said people were experiencing the impact of climate change more now than when Earth Hour began, adding that "climate change has now become a more personal topic".

"I feel that there's a renewed vigour among individuals and governments to come together for strong climate action and to fight climate change," he said.

Das said Earth Hour organisers did not collect global statistics on the energy conserved during the 60-minute blackout, and that the event has always had symbolic intent, saying it was more a moment of global solidarity about a global problem.

## EU-TURKEY MIGRANT ACCORD Deal fails to stem flow

AFP, Lesbos

Flimsy boats packed with migrants continued to land in Greece from Turkey yesterday despite the start of a landmark deal between the European Union and Ankara to stem the massive influx.

Under the controversial deal, which came into force at midnight, all migrants landing on the Greek islands face being sent back to Turkey.

And in a grim start to an agreement designed to stop people from making a journey fraught with danger, two little girls were found drowned and two Syrian refugees died of heart attacks after the crossing. Nine more died and hundreds were rescued off Libya, the Red Crescent said, as fears grow that the shutdown of the Greek route could encourage more people to attempt the even riskier Mediterranean crossing to Italy.

On the Greek island of Lesbos, police said some 800 migrants had arrived by midday despite the EU-Turkey deal formally coming into effect.

Officials said it would take time to start sending people back, as Greece awaits thousands of European staff needed to take on the daunting task of mass repatriation.

Realistically, migrants will likely not start being returned to Turkey until April 4, according to German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

The European Commission has said the agreement, which has faced international criticism, will require the mobilisation of some 4,000 police, security staff and other personnel. France and Germany have offered to send up to 600 police and asylum experts, while Romania said that it would send 70.

Under the deal, for every Syrian among those sent back from Greece to Turkey, the EU will resettle one Syrian from the Turkish refugee camps where nearly three million people are living after fleeing their country's brutal civil war. The EU will also speed up talks on Ankara's bid to join the 28-nation bloc, double refugee aid to six billion euros, and give visa-free travel to Turks in Europe's Schengen passport-free zone by June.

The aim is to cut off a route that enabled 850,000 people to pour into Europe last year, fleeing conflict and misery in the Middle East and elsewhere.

But Amnesty International has called the deal a "historic blow to human rights," and on Saturday thousands of people marched in European cities including London, Athens, Barcelona and Amsterdam in

# Obama starts Cuba visit

AFP, Havana

US President Barack Obama flew to Cuba yesterday to bury the hatchet in a more than half-century-long Cold War conflict, but the arrest of dozens of dissidents just as his plane took off underlined the delicacy of the mission.

Abandoning generations of US attempts to cut Cuba from the outside world, the US president, First Lady Michelle Obama and their two daughters left Andrews Air Force Base for the short flight to Havana where they were spending three days.

It was not only the first visit by a sitting US president since Fidel Castro's guerrillas overthrew the US-backed government of Fulgencio Batista in 1959, but the first since President Calvin Coolidge came 88 years ago.

Seeking to leave a historic foreign policy mark in his final year in office, Obama was due to see old town Havana late yesterday, hold talks with Cuban President Raul Castro today and attend a baseball game before leaving tomorrow. He is not scheduled to meet retired president Fidel Castro, 89.

For Cubans dreaming of escaping isolation and reinvigorating their threadbare economy, the visit has created huge excitement.



Tourists pose for a picture next to the images of Cuban and US Presidents Raul Castro and Barack Obama in Havana, Cuba on Saturday.

"A president of the United States in Cuba arriving in Havana on his Air Force One," wrote popular Cuban writer Leonardo Padura on the CafeGuarte blog.

"Never in my dreams or nightmares could we have imagined that we'd see such a thing."

Dissidents called for "radical change" on the eve of the visit, but the Castro government warned that lectures on democracy would be "absolutely off the table."

Obama will meet members of Cuba's beleaguered opposition and on Tuesday will give a speech at the National Theater carried

live on Cuban television.

The United States spent decades trying to topple Cuba's communist government. Washington attempted economic strangulation, the failed 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, and CIA assassination plots against Fidel Castro -- including the legendary, but unproven story of sending him an exploding cigar.

Although a decades-long US economic embargo remains in place -- and can only be removed by the Republican-controlled Congress -- large cracks in the sanctions regime are appearing. Earlier, US group Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide it had signed three hotel deals in Cuba, a first for any hospitality company since the revolution of 1959.



Women cry for the victims of the plane crash at the Rostov-on-Don airport entrance, yesterday.

# Flight recorders 'badly damaged'

REUTERS, Moscow

The flight recorders from a passenger jet which crashed in southern Russia killing all 62 people on board are badly damaged and could take up to a month to decode, Russia's airline regulator said yesterday.

The Boeing 737-800 aircraft, operated by Dubai-based budget carrier Flydubai, crashed on its second attempt to land at Russia's Rostov-on-Don airport in the early hours of Saturday morning. Most of those on board were Russian.

"The received recorders are badly damaged mechanically," Russia's Interstate Aviation Committee (IAC) said in a statement on its website, alongside a photo of a crumpled recorder.

RIA news agency cited an IAC official as saying it could take one month to decode information from it.

Under international aviation rules, the investigation will be led by Russia's air safety investigation agency with representatives from the United States, where the jet was made, and the United Arab Emirates, where the airline is based.

In Rostov-on-Don yesterday, Russian workers continued to search the crash site in temperatures of minus 5 Celsius, sifting through snow-covered debris strewn across the airfield.

Officials said on Saturday it was too early to determine the cause of the crash, but officials have suggested it could have been caused by pilot error, a technical problem or strong winds at the airport.

## PLANE CRASH IN RUSSIA



Flight data recorder of the crashed Flight FZ981.

## ISTANBUL SUICIDE BLAST

# Turkey blames IS jihadist

AFP, Istanbul

A Turkish jihadist with links to the Islamic State carried out the suicide bombing that killed four foreigners on a major shopping street in Istanbul, Interior Minister Efken Ala said yesterday.

Ala named the bomber as Mehmet Ozturk from Gaziantep, a southeastern city on Turkey's border with Syria.

Three Israelis and one Iranian were killed, and 39 people injured, when the bomber blew himself up Saturday on Istiklal Caddesi, a bustling pedestrian street and popular meeting spot in the heart of the city.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.



Police officers detain after throwing on the ground a Kurdish man while people run away as Turkish riot policemen use rubber bullet to prevent people from gathering for Newroz celebration in Istanbul, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

# 'Paris suspect may have planned more attacks'

REUTERS, Brussels

The prime surviving suspect in the Paris attacks may have been plotting more operations with the help of a weapons cache and a network of associates, Belgium's foreign minister said yesterday.

Didier Reynders, speaking two days after the capture of Salah Abdeslam, said the suspect's first statement to a magistrate in Brussels suggested further attacks were planned.

"He was ready to restart something from Brussels," Reynders told a think-tank event. "That is maybe the reality, because we have found a lot of heavy weapons and we have seen a new network around him."

Reynders said Belgium and France had so far found around 30 people involved in the gun and bomb attacks that killed 130 people on Nov. 13 in bars, a sports stadium and a concert hall in the French capital.



Salah Abdeslam

through for authorities investigating the deadliest militant strikes in Europe since 2004. Islamic State has claimed responsibility.

The 26-year-old French national told a Belgian magistrate on Saturday he had planned to take part in the stadium attack. The admission was disclosed to reporters by the lead French investigator, Francois Molins.

Abdeslam, who was shot in the leg and caught by police in Brussels after an intense four-month manhunt, spent his first night in a high security prison in the northwestern Belgian city of Bruges. He is due to appear before a judge in Brussels on Wednesday.

Belgian prosecutors have charged Abdeslam and a man arrested with him with "participation in terrorist murder". Abdeslam's lawyer said his client admitted being in Paris during the attacks but would fight extradition to France.

# London 'preparing for 10 terror attacks'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Police in London have reportedly been ordered to prepare for as many as 10 terror attacks happening at once across the capital, in a dramatic escalation of the capital's readiness in the wake of the Paris shootings.

Quoting a Government minister with knowledge of the proposals for enhanced security, the Sunday Times reported that police had made cracking down on firearms a top priority.

It comes after an alleged gang of gunrunners appeared in court charged with smuggling an "evil" shipment of 22 Czech-made assault rifles and nine sub-machine guns into Britain from Eastern Europe.

The National Crime Agency (NCA), which was critical in the operation to arrest the suspects in that case, had reportedly been given new orders amid fears of a Paris-style attack involving terrorists returning from Syria using heavy weaponry.

The unnamed minister was quoted as saying: "We used to plan for three simultaneous attacks but Paris has shown that you need to be ready for more than that."

"We are ready if someone tries with seven, eight, nine, ten." According to the Sunday Times, army regiments outside London were also on standby to help the capital in the event of a major coordinated incident.

# Exiled Tibetans vote to elect new leader

AFP, Dharamsala

Tens of thousands of exiled Tibetans yesterday voted for a new leader tasked with sustaining their struggle for greater autonomy in the Chinese-ruled province as the Dalai Lama retreats from the political frontline.

While Tibetans from across the world were geared up to vote, those in the picturesque Indian hill town of Dharamsala where the Dalai Lama lives started lining up at booths at 9:00 am to elect the next leader of the government-in-exile.

The post of prime minister in exile was a low-profile role before the 80-year-old Tibetan spiritual leader devolved power in an attempt to lessen his own totemic status and foster a democratic setup to keep Tibet's freedom movement alive after his death.

The Dalai Lama announced his decision in March 2011, just days before the election of the incumbent prime minister -- or Sikyong -- Lobsang Sangay, who is standing again.

Both Sangay and his one remaining opponent, Penpa Tsering, 49, favour the "middle way" approach of the Dalai Lama that advocates seeking greater autonomy for Tibet peacefully.

In all, 88,000 Tibetans in 13 countries from Australia to the United States were registered to cast ballots for a prime minister and the 44-member parliament-in-exile. The results are expected on April 27.

Whoever prevails can expect to remain in the shadow of the Dalai Lama, a Nobel peace laureate who remains the most potent rallying point for Tibetans, both in exile and in their homeland.