

NEWSIN brief

Colombia peace deal to be signed Sept 26

Colombia's peace deal with FARC rebels will be formally signed on September 26, in a new milestone towards ending the half-century conflict, President Juan Manuel Santos said Friday. Various Latin American leaders, as well as Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, were expected to attend the ceremony in the port city on the Caribbean coast.

India gives Vietnam \$500m in defence aid

India yesterday said it is giving Vietnam half a billion dollars in credit to boost defence ties, the latest security deal between the two nations seeking to counter Beijing's muscle-flexing in the South China Sea. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made the announcement during a visit to Hanoi.

Turkey clashes kill 14

Turkish security forces suffered a bloody 24 hours after 13 soldiers and a village guard were killed in three separate incidents in the country's east and south-east, blamed on Kurdish militants. Since the collapse of a two-year ceasefire in July, Anadolu reported over 600 Turkish security force members have been killed by the PKK in renewed fighting.

Putin calls to lower Korea tensions

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday urged both sides on the Korean peninsula to calm tensions after meeting South Korean leader Park Geun-hye. Park, whose country is a stalwart US ally, said she had agreed with Putin "to further strengthen our strategic contacts aimed at resolving the North Korean nuclear problem."



President Rodrigo Duterte looks at the belongings of victims during his visit of a blast site at a market in Davao City, Philippines, yesterday. Inset, women react near the scene of the blast that killed 14.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Singapore Zika is Asian

Say scientists; Malaysia reports first locally transmitted case

Singapore yesterday reported 215 cases of Zika infections as scientists in the city-state said the virus strain comes from within Asia and was not imported from Brazil. The Ministry of Health and National Environment Agency said in a joint statement that of the 26 new cases reported yesterday, 24 were linked to a cluster in the Aljunied district where the country's first locally-transmitted cases were reported.

The eastern Malaysian state of Sabah. This comes two days after the first case on Malaysian soil was reported in a woman who is believed to have contracted it while visiting her daughter in neighbouring Singapore. A study published Friday in The Lancet Infectious Diseases journal said at least 2.6 billion people could be at risk from the virus in mosquito-ridden parts of Africa, Asia and the Pacific.



The statement did not say where the other two cases were from. A week after Singapore reported its first case of locally transmitted Zika infection, local scientists say they have completed genetic sequencing of the virus. "The analysis found that the virus belongs to the Asian lineage and likely evolved from the strain that was already circulating in Southeast Asia. The virus from these two patients was not imported from South America," the statement said. Malaysia yesterday confirmed its first locally transmitted case of Zika infection in a man living in

Zika, which is spread mainly by the Aedes mosquito, has been detected in 67 countries and territories including hard-hit Brazil. It causes only mild symptoms for most people such as fever and a rash. But pregnant women who catch it can give birth to babies with microcephaly, a deformation marked by abnormally small brains and heads. Malaysia already has struggled in recent years to control the spread of Aedes-borne dengue fever. "Zika cases are expected to increase further (in Malaysia), especially if prevention activities for Aedes are not seriously taken up by the community, individuals and other relevant agencies," the health ministry statement said.

IS affiliate blamed for Davao blast

Duterte declares 'state of lawlessness'; toll hits 14

IS' affiliate in the Philippines has claimed responsibility for a bombing that killed at least 14 people and wounded 70 more at a bustling market. President Rodrigo Duterte declared a nationwide "state of lawlessness" in the wake of the terror attack targeting his hometown of Davao, next to a hotel he frequently visits. Visiting the scene of the blast on Friday night, he said the army and police would be deployed across the country but claimed the measures did not amount to martial law. "These are extraordinary times and I'm authorised to allow the security forces of this country to do searches," Duterte added, asking the public to cooperate and be vigilant. An Abu Sayyaf spokesman, Abu Rami, claimed responsibility for the blast near the Jesuit-run Ateneo de Davao University, but Duterte said investigators were looking at the possi-

ble involvement of drug syndicates. An improvised explosive device tore through the bustling market in the heart of Davao city and close to one of its top hotels just before 11:00pm (1500 GMT) on Friday. Davao is part of the southern region of Mindanao, where Islamic militants have waged a decades-long separatist insurgency that has claimed more than 120,000 lives. Duterte has in recent weeks pursued peace talks with the two main Muslim rebel groups, which each has thousands of armed followers. Their leaders have said they want to broker a lasting peace. However the Abu Sayyaf, a much smaller and hardline group infamous for kidnapping foreigners to extract ransoms, has rejected Duterte's peace overtures. In response, Duterte deployed thousands of troops onto the small and remote island of Jolo to "destroy" the group.



Abe calls for 'new era' in Russian ties

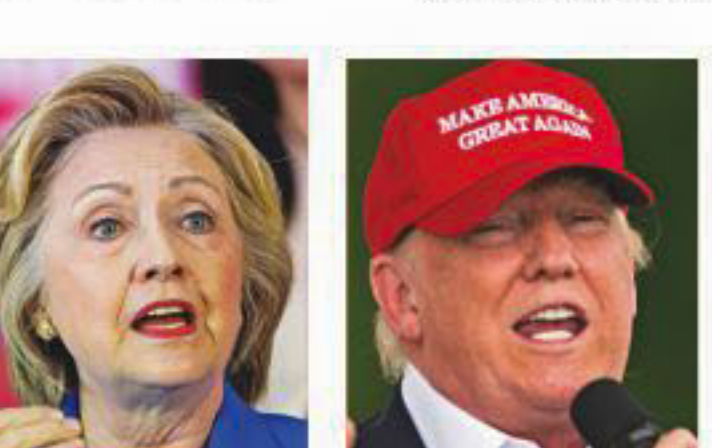
AFP, Vladivostok

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe yesterday bapped to Russian President Vladimir Putin for a new era in ties hampered by a territorial dispute dating back to WWII. "Let's put an end to this abnormal situation which has lasted 70 years, and together start to build a new epoch in Russia-Japan ties that will last the next 70 years," Abe told Putin during a speech translated into Russian after the pair met for talks in Russia's far eastern city of Vladivostok. Tokyo-Moscow relations are hamstrung by a row dating back to the end of World War II when Soviet troops seized the southernmost islands in the Pacific Kuril chain, known as the Northern Territories in Japan. The tensions have prevented the countries from signing a peace treaty formally ending wartime hostilities, hindering trade and investment ties. The two sides are now on a concerted drive to improve relations with Abe currently on his second trip to Russia this year and Putin set to visit Japan in December. Despite the warm words and clear desire to improve trade, which has been hit by sanctions slapped on Moscow by stalwart US ally Tokyo over Russia's meddling in Ukraine, there has been no major breakthrough on a deal to end the territorial dispute. In his speech yesterday to an economic forum in Vladivostok a day after holding talks with Putin, Abe also proposed to the Russian president that the two of them should meet annually in the city to try to hammer out their differences.

Trump, Clinton in 'virtual tie'

Shows latest poll; FBI releases Clinton email probe files

Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has closed in on his rival, Hillary Clinton, in the latest national tracking poll from Reuters/Ipsos. Trump trailed Clinton in all of the major polls throughout the week, but results released on Friday appear to indicate the presidential race may be much closer than once believed. The poll found that 40 per cent of likely voters support Mr Trump, while 39 per cent back Ms Clinton for the week of 26 August through 1 September. Ms Clinton's lead has declined from an eight-point lead, according to Reuters. Trump's favour among Republicans has also bounced six percentage points to 78 per cent over the past two weeks, despite controversial staff shake ups and his seemingly wavering stance on immigration. In a major policy speech on Wednesday, Trump seemed to win back enthusiasm as he vowed to deport millions of undocumented immigrants during his "first hour" as president.



But Trump still lacks the party support held by Mitt Romney in 2012, who had 85 per cent of support from Republicans at this stage in the election. The Friday poll comes amid news that the FBI released details of Clinton's interview with investigators regarding emails kept on her private servers - an issue that has plagued the Clinton campaign from the onset. Clinton has been accused of mishandling classified information while working for the State Department, but the report attributes her mismanagement of the emails to a concussion suffered in 2012. "Clinton said she received no instructions or direction regarding the preservation or production of records from State [Department] during the transition out of her role as Secretary of State in 2013," the documents read. "However, in December of 2012, Clinton suffered a concussion and then around the New Year had a blood clot," it adds. "Based on her doctor's advice, she could only work at state for a few hours a day and could not recall every briefing she received."



People react as they gather to meet a mourning motorcade and to pay the tribute to the memory of Uzbek late President Islam Karimov in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, yesterday. Karimov was buried in his home city of Samarkand yesterday, leaving behind a power vacuum in a nation that serves as a bulwark against militant Islam in Central Asia.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Dog pulled alive 9 days after quake

AFP, Rome

A golden retriever called Romeo has been pulled from the rubble of Italy's earthquake, more than nine days after he was given up for dead. Touching footage filmed by the firemen who saved him shows the shaggy dog being lifted out from under a pile of masonry that is all that remains of his owners' house. Appearing completely relaxed, Romeo slurps his first drops of water in more than 230 hours from a bottle held by one of the firemen. As it becomes clear he is unscathed, the fireman holding him puts him down. Romeo then tiptoes gracefully down the pile of rubble to be reunited with tearful owners who had given up hope of finding him alive. Romeo's owners were sleeping on the second floor of their house in the tiny village of San Lorenzo a Flaviano when the earthquake struck before dawn on August 24. They managed to get out, but Romeo, who was sleeping on the first floor, was trapped inside. The toll from the deadliest quake to hit Italy since the 2009 L'Aquila disaster now stands at 294 confirmed.

'Clouded legacy' of 'Saint Teresa'

AFP, Kolkata

As the Vatican prepares to declare Mother Teresa a saint today, in the Indian city where she rose to fame, claims of medical negligence and financial mismanagement at her care homes threaten to cloud her legacy. Pope Francis approved the canonisation of the widely beloved Roman Catholic nun last December, nearly two decades after she died in Kolkata, in whose teeming slums she devoted her life to helping the destitute and the sick. Yet criticisms of the soon-to-be Saint Teresa of Kolkata abound, with doctors and former volunteers recounting grim tales of poor sanitation, medical neglect and forced conversions of the dying. Born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu to Albanian parents in what is now Macedonia, her Missionaries of Charity homes for the dying earned her a Nobel Peace Prize and the sobriquet Saint of the Gutters. Like millions of Catholics worldwide, Gautam Lewis is excited to celebrate the canonisation of the woman he calls his "second mother", who rescued the orphan after he was struck with polio aged two. "Mother Teresa used to carry me to church every Sunday

and she personally supervised my treatment when I underwent surgeries and rehabilitation to get rid of polio," Lewis, now a pilot in London, told AFP. But Aroup Chatterjee, a British doctor born in the city formerly known as Calcutta, said that "her whole emphasis was propagation of her faith at any cost."

"To convert a dying, unconscious person is very, very low behaviour, very disgusting," the 58-year-old author of a controversial 2003 book on the nun said. "Mother Teresa did that on an industrial basis." Some former volunteers say her order glorifies pain and poverty and accuse it of delivering bare-bones care, despite receiving millions of dollars in donations. Hemley Gonzalez, who started his own NGO in Kolkata as a response to the alleged deficiencies he witnessed when volunteering at Missionaries of Charity eight years ago, calls it "a modern-day cult". Nuns washed needles with tap water before reusing them, he said, and scolded him for giving terminal patients haircuts because they were going to die anyway. Missionaries of Charity has vastly expanded since Mother Teresa's death, and now has 758 centres in 139 countries staffed by more than 5,000 nuns.



Myanmar peace summit ends

Hope lit despite no resolution passed

AFP, Naypyidaw

Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi concluded a landmark summit with ethnic rebels yesterday, calling it the first step on what promises to be a tough road to peace. The conference in the capital Naypyidaw was Suu Kyi's first big drive to end insurgencies that have rumbled across Myanmar's frontier states for nearly seven decades. No resolution emerged from the four-day summit, which gave representatives from dozens of ethnic groups a chance to air grievances and outline their political aspirations. Suu Kyi's biggest achievement was bringing new players to the table, including rebel armies that did not sign a shaky ceasefire brokered by the former military-backed government last year. However three groups still actively clashing with troops did not attend the talks, and the powerful Wa -- a heavily armed militia based near the border with China -- stormed out on day two over what the government said was a misunderstanding. "To achieve peace is very difficult," Suu Kyi told the conference hall filled with hundreds of delegates yesterday, the final day of the summit after it was decided a fifth was not needed. Suu Kyi urged all sides to "look forward" as the peace process continues.