

# NEWSIN brief

## Israel okays 98 West Bank settler homes

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel has approved the construction of 98 settler homes in the occupied West Bank and an industrial zone near Palestinian political capital Ramallah, the watchdog Peace Now said on Saturday. Israeli settlements in east Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank are viewed as illegal under international law.

## Dozens hurt in cafe gas blast in Spain

AFP, Madrid

Some 90 people were injured, five of them seriously, in a gas explosion at a cafe in the southern Spanish town of Velez, rescue services said yesterday. Saturday evening's blast sparked panic as hordes of people gathered in the town for a local festival. Most of the injured suffered cuts from flying debris or bruising from falls as they fled in confusion.

## Pak boat caught off Gujarat coast: India

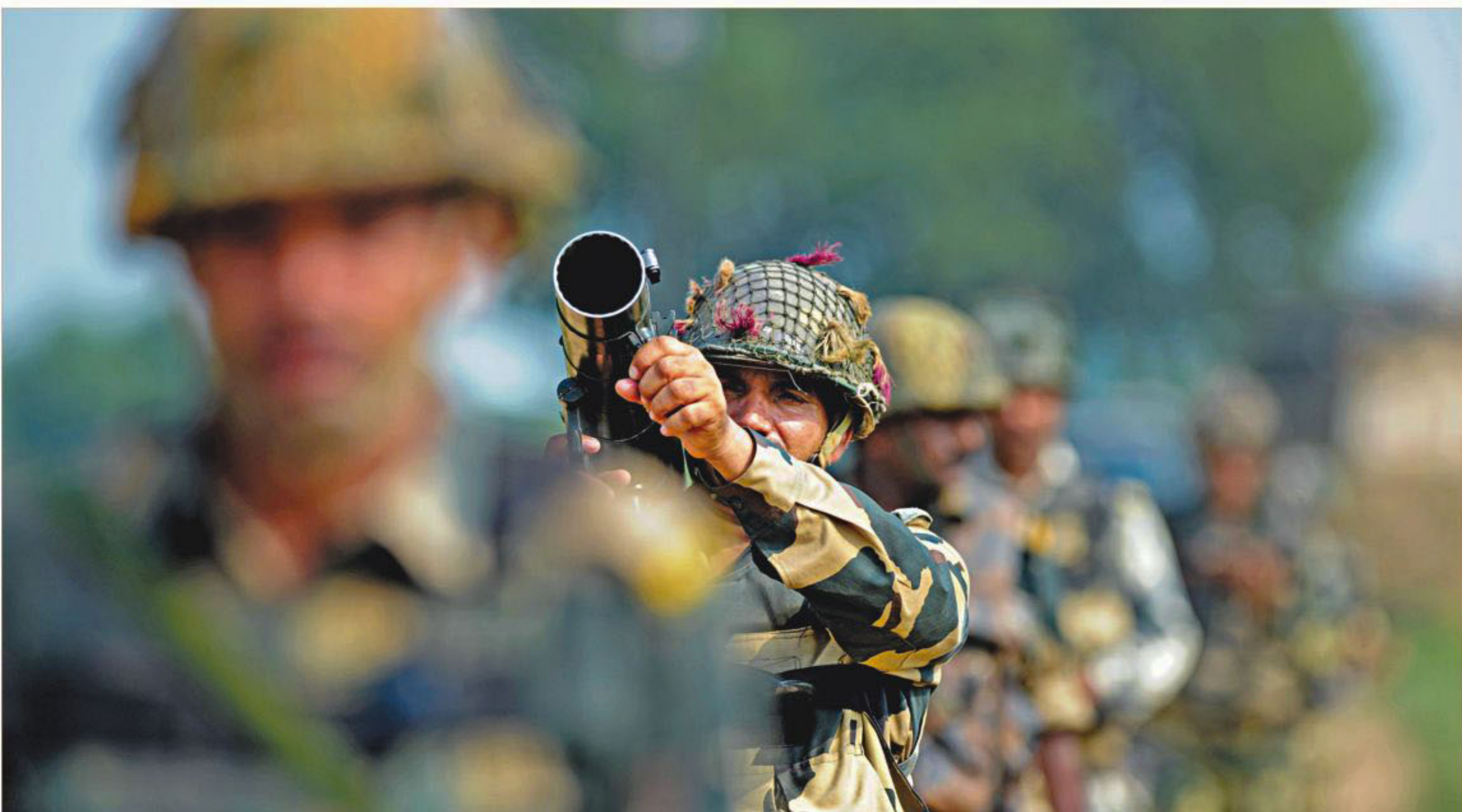
PTI, Ahmedabad

A Pakistani boat with nine persons on board was apprehended yesterday off Gujarat coast by the Indian Coast Guard. Preliminary information indicated those on board were Pakistani fishermen. Further investigation is on and the apprehended Pakistanis along with the boat are being taken to Porbandar for further probe.

## 18 dead as forces battle IS in Sirte

AFP, Tripoli

Eight Libyan pro-government fighters and at least 10 Islamic State group jihadists died in clashes yesterday as some jihadists tried to flee their besieged stronghold, the unity government said. Forces have cornered the group in Sirte, the birthplace of ousted dictator Moamer Kadhafi, since launching an offensive on May 12.



Indian Border Security Force (BSF) soldiers take up positions at an outpost along a fence at the India-Pakistan border in RS Pora south-west of Jammu, yesterday. India has evacuated thousands of people near the Pakistani border in Punjab state following surgical strikes on militant posts across the border, which provoked furious charges of "naked aggression" from Pakistan.

PHOTO: AFP

# UN laments 'living hell'

Russian raids intensifies as Syria army advances in Aleppo

AFP, Aleppo

Syrian regime forces advanced yesterday in Aleppo after Russia unleashed dozens of air strikes, as the UN's top aid official decried the "living hell" suffered by residents in the city's rebel-held east.

The devastating five-year war in Syria has ravaged second city Aleppo, once the country's economic hub but now torn apart by fighting between government troops and rebel forces.

The army of President Bashar al-Assad announced a major push on September 22 to capture Aleppo's opposition-held east and has gained ground in the city with the help of ally Moscow.

Dozens of air strikes pounded multiple battlefronts in the devastated city on Sunday, AFP's correspondent said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Russian raids "helped regime forces to advance in the north of the city," where they reached the outskirts of the opposition-held Al-Heluk district.

If loyalist fighters seize Al-Heluk, Bustan al-Basha and Sakhr -- all rebel-controlled neighbourhoods in Aleppo's north -- they will confine opposition factions to a small section of the city's southeast.

Assad's Russian-backed military campaign in Aleppo has sparked international outrage after a series of air strikes on civilian infrastructure, including most recently on the largest hospital in the city's east.

Two barrel bombs hit the M10 hospital on Saturday, according to the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS), which supports the facility.

United Nations aid chief Stephen O'Brien fiercely criticised the attack and yesterday called for immediate action to end the "living hell" of civilians in Aleppo's east.

O'Brien said the latest indiscriminate bombings subjected residents to "a level of savagery that no human should have to endure."



## ALEPPO OFFENSIVE

Syria's armed forces yesterday called on rebel fighters in east Aleppo to abandon their positions "and let civilians live their normal lives."

"The Russian and Syrian armies will secure safe passage and aid" to any opposition fighters that defect, said the statement, distributed on Syrian state news agency SANA.

Also yesterday, Russian strikes in the central Syrian province of Hama killed six members of a rebel group that has received US backing, according to the Observatory.

"The clock is ticking. Stop the carnage now," he added.

On Saturday, European Parliament president Martin Schulz called the hospital bombing a "war crime", tweeting that the international community "must unite to prevent (the) city's annihilation".

French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said "the systematic targeting of structures and health workers is particularly unjustifiable".

## Colombians vote on peace deal

AFP, Bogota

Colombians yesterday voted in a referendum on whether to ratify a historic peace accord to end a 52-year war between the state and the communist FARC rebels.

The accord will effectively end what is seen as the last major armed conflict in the Western Hemisphere. The war has killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions.

The government of Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos says it has no Plan B if voters reject the accord -- but polls indicate it will pass by a wide margin.

Around 35 million of Colombia's 48 million people were eligible to vote.

The deal signed on October 26 by Santos and FARC leader Rodrigo Londono, known as "Timochenko," calls for the rebels to disarm and convert into a political group.

## COMPETITIVE NARRATIVES OVER 'SURGICAL STRIKES'

# Pak army flies in int'l media to LoC

## India hints at releasing raid footage

AGENCIES

Pakistani military officials point to an Indian army post high on a forested ridge along the Line of Control dividing Kashmir, insisting any incursions are impossible, after skirmishes ignited dangerous tensions between the nuclear rivals.

The army took the rare step of flying international media to the de facto border to make its case in a battle of competing narratives, after India said its commandos penetrated up to three kilometres into Pakistan on anti-militant raids.

The media visit came Saturday as India's army chief Dalbir Singh congratulated commandos involved in what New Delhi has described as "surgical strikes" to take out terrorist launchpads after a deadly attack on an Indian army base last month.

Responding to a query on doubts raised by Pakistan over the operation alleging that India has not released the footage of the operation, Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh said, "Just wait and watch". Indian media, just after the strikes, reported that the army captured video footages of the operation and will release them when needed.

Pakistan has flatly denied the claim, saying two of its soldiers were killed but only in cross-border fire of the kind that commonly violates a 2003 ceasefire on the LoC.

The helicopter tour took journalists to sectors just two kilometres from the dividing line, and near the locations



India said it targeted in assaults on four militant camps. Pak army spokesman Lieutenant General Asim Bajwa told reporters that no "signature of any surgical strike" could be found which meant that there was no reality in the Indian claims.

It was not possible to verify the general's claims, though villagers who spoke with a second AFP reporter in the area independent of the military-guided trip were also incredulous.

Sardar Javed, a 37-year-old journalist for Kashmiri newspapers and a resident of Tatta Pani sector, which lies just west of India-controlled Poonch sector where one of the strikes was said to have been carried out, said he had seen no evidence of a raid.

"I'm not saying it's not true because that's the army line. It's because I'm from the LoC and I'm a local journalist. News spreads fast around here and people get to know whatever happens," he said.

Mountainous Kashmir is seen as one of the world's most dangerous flashpoints, where Indian and Pakistani soldiers watch one another across valleys divided by barbed wire and land mines. The bitter neighbours agreed on the de facto border in 1972, but both claim the territory in full. Two of their three wars have been fought over the Himalayan region.

Some Pakistani observers say the vaunted raids are an attempt to shift the focus and allow India to escape scrutiny over its actions in Kashmir where violence since June has killed more than 80 people.

## CONFRONTATION WITH POLICE

# 50 feared killed in Ethiopia stampede

REUTERS, Addis Ababa

Police in Ethiopia's Oromiya region fired teargas and warning shots yesterday to disperse anti-government protesters at a religious festival, triggering a stampede that the opposition party said killed at least 50 people.

The government did not give a precise death toll resulting from chaotic scenes during the annual festival where some people chanted slogans against the government and waved a rebel group's flag. But it said "lives were lost" and that several were injured.

Sporadic protests have erupted in Oromiya in the last two years, initially sparked by a land row but increasingly turning more broadly against the government. Since late 2015, scores of protesters have been killed in clashes with police.

These developments highlight tensions in the country where the government has delivered stellar economic growth rates but faced criticism from opponents and rights group that it has trampled on political freedoms.

Thousands of people had gathered for the annual Irreecha festival of thanksgiving in the town of Bishoftu, about 40 km (25 miles) south of the capital Addis Ababa.

Crowds chanted "we need freedom" and "we need justice", preventing community elders, deemed close to the government, from delivering their speeches at the festival.



Anti-Conservative protesters with a placards join others in Eastside City Park in Birmingham, central England, yesterday after a protest march on the first day of the Conservative party annual conference being held at Birmingham's International Convention Centre.

PHOTO: AFP

## SECRET MISSION IN SYRIA

# Turkey sends 1,000 more special troops

AGENCIES

While international focus is on the devastating bombing going on in Aleppo, another offensive is taking place, much of it in the shadows, which could be a game-changer in Syria's bloody civil war.

The Turkish military, with armour, air-power and troops on the ground -- a thousand of them special forces -- are moving deeper into Syria, along with Syrian opposition fighters, setting up a "security zone" across the border, reports Independent.

Operation Euphrates Shield has been marked for Ankara by increasing acrimony with Washington and warming of relations with Moscow. The Turkish forces have attacked Kurdish fighters who are America's key allies in the fight against IS, while Russia, busy securing Aleppo for ally Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, has given tacit approval for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's actions in northern Syria.

Turkey's parliament on Saturday overwhelmingly approved a one-year extension of an existing mandate to use Turkish troops abroad in Syria and Iraq.

The mandate was first approved by parliament in October 2014 and was renewed for another year in September 2015, reports AFP.

It allows military action in Turkey's two southern neighbours against IS and other groups deemed by Ankara to be terror organisations. According to the state-run Anadolu news agency, the new mandate will run until October 30, 2017.

In his speech marking the opening of parliament, Erdogan said the initial goal of the Syria operation was to create a "safe area free of terror organisations" some 5,000 square kilometres in size.

# India ratifies Paris climate change pact

AFP, New Delhi

India, the world's third biggest carbon emitter, ratified the Paris agreement on climate change yesterday on the birthday of the country's famously ascetic independence leader Mahatma Gandhi.

India, with a population of 1.3 billion people, is the latest big polluter to formally sign onto the historic accord which now takes a major step towards becoming reality.

The accord, sealed last December in Paris, needs ratification from 55 countries that account for at least 52 percent of the planet's greenhouse gas emissions responsible for climate change.

With India's move, a total of 62 countries accounting for almost 52 percent of emissions have now ratified the agree-

ment to commit to take action to stem the planet's rising temperatures.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced last month that October 2, a national holiday, had been chosen as the ratification date because freedom fighter Gandhi had lived his life with a low-carbon footprint.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon and others have voiced confidence the accord will come into force by the end of the year, after a string of nations joined up, including the United States and

China, the two largest emitters. EU environment ministers also agreed last week to fast-track the ratification.

The accord requires all countries to devise plans to achieve the goal of keeping the rise of temperatures within two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.



PARIS2015  
UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE  
COP21-CMP11

## ANTI-MIGRANT VOTE

# Low turnout voids 'No' win in Hungary

AFP, Budapest

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban suffered a blow yesterday in his referendum against the EU's migrant quota plan after a low turnout, according to the first polls from the ruling Fidesz party.

A whopping 95 percent of voters supported Orban's 'No' camp, but only 45 percent of the eight-million-strong electorate cast their ballots, making the vote invalid, reports said.

Orban's right-wing government had urged voters to spurn the EU's quota plan, which aims to share migrants around the 28 member states without the consent of national parliaments.

# 9/11 widow files lawsuit against Saudi Arabia

CNN ONLINE

Stephanie DeSimone was two months pregnant when her husband, Navy Cmdr Patrick Dunn, was killed at the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

Now, 15 years later -- and two days after Congress legally paved the way -- she's filed a lawsuit against Saudi Arabia, claiming the kingdom is partially responsible for his death.

In court documents filed Friday in Washington, D.C., DeSimone alleges Saudi Arabia provided material support to al Qaeda for more than a decade and was aware of the terror group's plan to attack the US.

"Absent the support provided by the Kingdom, al Qaeda would not have possessed the capacity to conceive, plan, and execute the September 11th attacks," the documents say. The lawsuit alleges that the plaintiffs -- which include DeSimone's daughter --

suffered "severe and permanent personal injuries" and are seeking unspecified compensation.

The documents go on to allege Saudi Arabia, through agents and purported charities, provided al Qaeda members with financial and other logistical support to carry out the attacks.

Messages left Saturday with the Saudi embassy in Washington were not immediately returned.

The lawsuit comes just days after Congress voted to override President Barack Obama's veto of the Justice Against Sponsors of

Terrorism Act, which allows Americans to sue a foreign state for acts of terrorism.

Earlier this year, the US released portions of a formerly classified Congressional report showing some of the 9/11 hijackers were in contact with and received support from individuals likely connected to the Saudi government.

