

NEWSIN brief

Militants kill three soldiers in Assam

AFP, Guwahati

Heavily armed militants ambushed an army convoy yesterday, killing three soldiers and injuring four others in India's restive northeastern state of Assam, police said. There was no immediate claim of responsibility. Police blamed the ambush on rebels belonging to a splinter group of the separatist outfit ULFA. More than 10,000 people, mostly civilians, have lost their lives to the insurgency in Assam during the past two decades.

Egypt journalist union head jailed

AFP, Cairo

An Egyptian court yesterday sentenced the head of the journalists' union and two members to two years in prison for "harbouring fugitives", allowing them to pay bail pending an appeal. Journalists Syndicate president Yahya Kallash, Gamal Abd el-Rahim and Khaled Elbalsky were charged in May with sheltering two journalists wanted over protests against the transfer of two Red Sea islands to Saudi Arabia.

Zika no longer a world health emergency

AFP, Geneva

The World Health Organization on Friday announced that the Zika virus outbreak no longer poses a world public health emergency, though it warned the epidemic remains a challenge. While Zika causes only mild symptoms in most people, pregnant women with the virus risk giving birth to babies with microcephaly -- a deformation that leads to abnormally small brains and heads.

IS executes 100-year-old cleric

AL ARABIYA ONLINE

Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis -- IS-affiliated extremist group in Egypt -- has released images purporting to show the execution of a 100-year-old man. The group killed Sheikh Sulaiman Abu Haraz accusing him of witchcraft after kidnapping him earlier. Abu Haraz, considered one of the symbolic Sufi clerics and elders of the Sinai Peninsula, was taken by the group from in front of his house in Arish city under gun point.



Talks set 2018 deadline to agree rules

REUTERS, Marrakesh

Nearly 200 nations agreed around midnight on Friday to work out the rules for a landmark 2015 global deal to tackle climate change within two years in a new sign of international support for a pact opposed by US President-elect Donald Trump.

At the end of two-week talks on global warming in Marrakesh, which were extended an extra day, many nations appealed to Trump, who has called climate change a hoax, to reconsider this threat to tear up the Paris Agreement for cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Showing determination to keep the Paris accord on track, the conference agreed to work out a rule book at the latest by December 2018.

A rule book is needed because the Paris Agreement left many details vague, such as how countries will report and monitor their national pledges to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

# Top security picks under scrutiny

## Anti-Muslim, anti-immigration hardliners spark alarm in US

AGENCIES

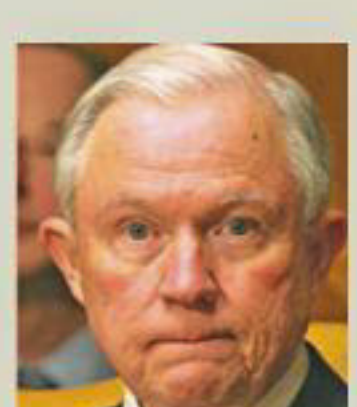
President-elect Donald Trump yesterday met with Mitt Romney, one of his most vocal Republican Party critics now considered a long-shot choice for secretary of state, after naming three polarising conservatives to fill key national security and judicial posts.

Anti-immigration Senator Jeff Sessions, one of Trump's earliest supporters during the campaign, was nominated Friday to be attorney general, signaling Trump is prepared to take his hard line on illegal immigration into the White House.

To lead the CIA, Trump tapped hawkish Congressman Mike Pompeo, a strident opponent of the Iran nuclear deal and a sharp critic of Trump's campaign rival Hillary Clinton during hearings

### US ATTORNEY GENERAL: JEFF SESSIONS

One of the earliest Republican lawmakers to support Trump's White House candidacy, Sessions opposes any path to citizenship for illegal immigrants and was an enthusiastic backer of Trump's campaign promise to build a wall on the border with Mexico. Sessions, 69, is serving his fourth term in the chamber, where he is a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee with oversight of federal courts, immigration, crime and terrorism. He was denied a federal judgeship in 1986 when a Senate panel failed to advance his nomination amid allegations he had made racially-charged remarks, which he denied.



### NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER: MICHAEL FLYNN

Flynn, 57, was an early supporter of Trump and serves as vice chairman on his transition team. A former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), he began his US Army career in 1981 and served deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq. Flynn was fired from DIA in 2014, a move he has attributed to his outspoken views about fighting Islamist militancy. He has described Islam as a "cancer" and a "political ideology", and in February tweeted that "fear of Muslims is rational." Flynn has said the United States should work more with Russia on global security issues.



### CIA DIRECTOR: MIKE POMPEO

Pompeo, 52, is a third-term congressman from Kansas who serves on the US House Select Intelligence Committee, which oversees the CIA, National Security Agency (NSA) and cyber security. Pompeo has called for a revival and expansion of a now-defunct domestic spying program to include "financial and lifestyle information" as well as phone records. He is also a strident opponent of the Iran nuclear deal and a sharp critic of Hillary Clinton during hearings into the 2012 attack on the US mission in Benghazi, Libya. Pompeo is also critical of former Edward Snowden who leaked National Security Agency information.



tenant general Michael Flynn, a top military counsel to the 70-year-old Republican billionaire-turned-world-leader, as his national security advisor.

In New York, Vice President-elect Mike Pence was booed at a performance of award-winning Broadway musical "Hamilton," whose cast made an unusual on-stage plea for the Trump administration to "uphold our American values and work on behalf of all of us."

Trump yesterday claimed Pence was "harassed" by the "very rude" cast of the group. America's next president demanded an apology from the cast over the public appeal at the end of a performance of the hit musical.

While his picks suggest he is adhering to conservative positions, Trump made efforts to send reassuring signals about stability and continuity regarding America's place in the world.

The three choices come as the president-elect works to fill key positions in his administration, which will take over from Democratic President Barack Obama on January 20.

The picks could heighten concerns abroad that the Trump administration might carry out campaign promises of banning Muslims from entering the United States or imposing more severe restrictions on migrants from

**US IN TRANSITION**

The president-elect set to meet Romney

Petraeus floated as Pentagon chief

Trump demands apology after his VP-elect booted, urged to hold American values

into the 2012 attack on the US mission in Benghazi, Libya.

The incoming commander-in-chief also appointed retired lieu-

## 'We were also registered, tagged'

### US Jewish rights leader vows to register as a Muslim

AFP, New York

The Jewish director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which campaigns against anti-Semitism and other bigotry, said Friday that he would register as a Muslim if Donald Trump establishes a database of Muslims in America.

"The day they create a registry for Muslims is the day that I register as a Muslim because of my Jewish faith, because of my commitment to our core American values, because I want this country to be as great as it always has been," Jonathan Greenblatt told AFP.

During his campaign, president-elect Trump variously called for banning all Muslim visitors to the United States, subjecting those in the country to loyalty tests and even for some to be deported.

Asked on MSNBC in November last year whether the White House should institute a database system to track Muslims in the country, Trump replied, "Oh, I would certainly implement that, absolutely."

Trump campaign attempted to walk back his pledge on Thursday, saying in a statement that the president-elect "never advocated" a registry.



However, at least two prominent Trump supporters raised the prospect again this week, including one who cited World War II-era Japanese-American internment camps as a precedent.

"We've done it based on race, we've done it based on religion, we've done it based on region," Carl Higbie, who during the campaign was spokesman for a pro-Trump "super PAC" fundraising group, said on Fox News.

"As a Jewish community, we know what happens with litmus tests," Greenblatt said. "We can remember. We have painful memories of when we ourselves were identified, registered and tagged."

Greenblatt, who previously worked in the White House as a special assistant to President Barack Obama, also criticized Trump's hiring of Stephen Bannon as his chief strategist.

The appointment ignited controversy due to Bannon's role as the head of the Breitbart News website -- a key outlet for the extreme right wing, or "alt-right," movement.

Bannon "in his own words has presided over making his former business Breitbart THE platform for the 'alt-right,' this loose-knit group of white supremacists, anti-Semites and racists," Greenblatt said.

## 'Darkness is good'

### Trump's top adviser says 'we'll govern for 50 years'

CNN ONLINE

Steve Bannon has no regrets. The ex-Breitbart executive, who serves as Trump's chief strategist for the new administration, told The Hollywood Reporter that "darkness is good."

"Dick Cheney. Darth Vader. Satan. That's power. It only helps us when they (liberals) get it wrong. When they're blind to who we are and what we're doing," he said in an interview published Friday, his first outside of Breitbart since the election.

Breitbart News, which Bannon has been associated with since its start in 2007, has been vehemently pro-Trump throughout his presidential campaign, and is also known for pushing nationalist policy positions, as well as conspiracy theories, and has been criticised as being racist, sexist and anti-Semitic.

In the interview, he denied being a "white nationalist."

"I'm a nationalist. I'm an economic nationalist," he said in the interview. "The globalists gutted the American working

class and created a middle class in Asia. The issue now is about Americans looking to not get f---ed over. If (the Trump White House delivers), we'll get 60 percent of the white vote, and 40 percent of the black and Hispanic vote and we'll govern for 50 years. That's what the Democrats missed. They were talking to these people with companies with a \$9 billion market cap employing nine people. It's not reality. They lost sight of what the world is about."

Bannon also said he wanted to scrap the establishment Republican Party and start anew with Trump's movement.

"Like (Andrew) Jackson's populism, we're going to build an entirely new political movement," he said.

He said he always knew that former Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton would lose the election.

"I knew that she couldn't close," he said. "They outspent us 10 to one, had 10 times more people and had all the media with them, but I kept saying it doesn't matter, they got it all wrong, we've got this locked."



## SEXUAL ABUSE BILL IN TURKEY

### Marry rape victims to avoid punishment!

AFP, Istanbul

A bill in Turkey that would overturn men's convictions for child sex assault if they married their victim provoked fury on Friday, with critics accusing the government of encouraging rape of minors with the proposals.

The opposition, celebrities, and even an association whose deputy chairman is the daughter of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed alarm over the move.

But the government insisted the legislation was aimed at dealing with the widespread custom of child marriages and the criticism was a crude distortion of its aim.

The measures were approved in an initial parliamentary reading on Thursday and will be voted on again in a second debate in the coming days.

In an apparent bid to soften the controversy, Prime Minister Binali Yildirim later ordered the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which introduced the bill, to hold talks with the opposition in parliament on the plan, a Turkish official said.

If passed, the law would allow the release from prison of men guilty of assaulting a minor if the act was committed without "force, threat, or any other restriction on consent" and if the aggressor "marries the victim".

The legal age of consent in Turkey is 18 but child marriage is widespread, especially in the southeast.



Tens of thousands of protesters holding candles march toward the presidential Blue House yesterday during an anti-government rally in central Seoul aimed at forcing South Korean President Park Geun-Hye to resign over a corruption scandal.

PHOTO: AFP

## PROTEST OVER CORRUPTION IN MALAYSIA

### Mahathir calls to oust PM

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Former Malaysian leader Mahathir Mohamad called for a sustained push to topple scandal-plagued Prime Minister Najib Razak as thousands rallied yesterday to demand the premier's resignation over the 1MDB corruption saga.

Malaysians clad in the yellow of the reformist Bersih campaign flooded Kuala Lumpur for the second time in 15 months to vent anger over allegations that billions of dollars were looted from state investment fund 1MDB, Najib's brainchild.

Speaking to a crowd of at least 20,000 under the shadow of the capital's giant Petronas Towers twin skyscrapers, Mahathir, 91, accused Najib of stealing public money and said Malaysia was "controlled by thieves."

"Time has come for us to topple this cruel regime. Najib is no longer suitable to be the

prime minister. He is abusing the law," Mahathir said.

Malaysia has been seized since last year by the 1MDB scandal, which has sparked investigations in several countries.

Najib, 63, and 1MDB deny wrongdoing.

But the US Justice Department -- which has filed lawsuits to seize assets it says were purchased with stolen 1MDB money -- says the fund was pillaged in an audacious campaign of fraud and theft that involved an unnamed top Malaysian official.

A Malaysian Cabinet official has since admitted that individual was Najib.

Najib last year abruptly shut down Malaysian investigations, fired the attorney general and purged ruling-party critics.

Few expect him to be toppled anytime soon. Critics say Najib is lurching toward autocracy and trampling rule of law to stifle the scandal as elections loom within 18 months.



## Indian shelling kills four Pak kids in PoK

'Indian drone grounded'

AFP, Islamabad

The Pakistani military yesterday said it had shot down an Indian drone in Kashmir, hours after four children were killed when mortar shells fired by Indian troops hit a village in the restive region.

The Indian drone had crossed 60 meters over the Line of Control (LoC) into Pakistan when it was shot down and captured by Pakistani troops, said Major General Asim Bajwa, director of the army's media wing.

Earlier in the day, the Pakistani military said Pakistani and Indian border troops had exchanged fire across the LoC in two other sectors.

## FIERCE BATTLE FOR ALEPPO IN SYRIA

### Raids hit hospitals, schools

AFP, Aleppo

Syria's government pounded rebel-held Aleppo with air strikes and artillery fire yesterday, killing 27 people and prompting Washington to condemn the "heinous actions" of Damascus and its ally Russia.

UN officials said they were "appalled" by escalating violence and urged access to east Aleppo, where more than 250,000 people have been under siege for nearly four months.

Since it began on Tuesday, the assault on the rebel-held east of Aleppo has damaged hospitals, forced schools to close, and killed nearly 100 civilians, according to a monitor.

An AFP correspondent described relentless bombardment with air strikes, mortar rounds and barrel bombs slamming into residential neighbourhoods where residents cowered at home.

"It is a catastrophic day in besieged Aleppo with unprecedented bombardment with every type of weapon," a member of the White Helmets rescue group said in a video posted on the organisation's Facebook page.

Moscow says it is not involved in the current assault on Aleppo, concentrating its firepower on opposition and jihadist forces in neighbouring Idlib instead.

The relentless bombardment forced schools in east Aleppo, many of which already operate from basements because of government attacks, to close Saturday and Sunday.

Hospitals and rescue facilities have been particularly affected, with shelling destroying one of the last medical facilities in the east on Friday. Staff were also forced to evacuate the east's only children's hospital because of repeated attacks, removing babies from incubators to transfer them.



## YEMEN WAR

### Fighting rages on despite new truce

AFP, Sanaa

Yemen rebels and loyalist forces battled Saturday around third city Ta'izz even as a 48-hour ceasefire announced by a Saudi-led coalition fighting the insurgents began following US pressure.

A few hours after the ceasefire took effect at midday (0900 GMT), fighting still raged around the flashpoint southwestern city, where violence has killed dozens this week, despite clashes subsiding on several fronts.

Clashes were heaviest in the town of Salo southeast of Ta'izz, military sources said, reporting casualties on both sides.

Near the Saudi border further north, two ballistic missiles fired by the rebels hit the coastal area of Midi killing two pro-government soldiers and wounding four, a military commander said.

Intermittent fighting was also reported in Nahm near the capital Sanaa, in Shabwa in the south and Sarwah to the east.

The ceasefire comes after US Secretary of State John Kerry this week met rebel representatives in Oman and also urged the government to come on board.