



### CORRUPTION SCANDAL South Korea's Park asks for exit plan

South Korea's scandal-hit President Park Geun-Hye said yesterday she was willing to resign early and let parliament decide her fate, a move critics said was a bid to delay impending impeachment.

Park has been engulfed in allegations of influence peddling and claims that tens of millions of dollars have changed hands, sparking widespread anger across South Korea and bringing hundreds of thousands of protesters onto the streets demanding her ouster.

"I will leave the issue of my departure, including the (possible) reduction of my term in office, to a decision by the National Assembly", she said in a speech carried live on television.

"Once lawmakers come up with measures to transfer power in a way that minimises any power vacuum and chaos in governance, I will step down," she said.

Park's presidency has gone into a tailspin, with accusations that Choi Soon-Sil -- a secretive confidante dubbed "Korea's Rasputin" -- elicited more than \$60 million in payments from some of the country's top firms, including Samsung.

Park has been named as a suspect in the growing investigation, making her the first sitting president to be subjected to a criminal probe while in office.

While she retains the presidency, she cannot be charged with a criminal offence except insurrection or treason, but she could be charged once she steps down.



Members of Syrian government forces assist families, fleeing from various eastern districts of Aleppo and heading to government-controlled western Aleppo, yesterday in the government-held eastern neighbourhood of Jabal Badro, as the Syrian government offensive to recapture rebel-held Aleppo has prompted an exodus of civilians.

## 1,400 saved in Med Italy sees record migrant arrivals

AFP, Rome

Rescuers saved some 1,400 migrants off the coast of Libya on Monday as Italy announced a record number of people arriving this year after crossing the Mediterranean, authorities said.

"It was a very difficult day but thanks to the work of the units that helped out, all of the migrants were rescued," a spokesman for the Italian coast guard, which coordinates the operations, told AFP.

The unseaworthy condition of the migrant boats and the sheer number of people packed onto them make the journey dangerous even in summer, but colder months add increased risk of hypothermia and rough seas.

Italian, Irish and charity group ships, along with commercial vessels, helped rescue the migrants from 11 inflatable dinghies and two small boats.

Authorities in Italy said Monday they had recorded a record number of arrivals by sea this year, with one month still to go in 2016.

Over 171,000 migrants have arrived, which beats the previous annual record of 170,100 from 2014. The tally does not include Monday's rescues.

The vast majority of the migrants landing in Italy come from Africa and begin their sea crossings from Libya, typically paying traffickers several hundred dollars for the journey.

With Italy's neighbours having tightened their borders, the numbers being housed in reception facilities across the country have risen to an unprecedented total of over 176,000, prompting howls of protest from some local authorities.

Many migrants arrive in Italy with the intention of travelling north, often to try and reunite relatives, with Germany and Sweden among the popular destinations.

## Mosul siege develops

REUTERS, Mosul

A full siege is developing in Mosul as poor families struggle to feed themselves after prices rose sharply following the US-backed offensive on the Islamic State-held city in northern Iraq, humanitarian workers said yesterday.

Some of the poorest families are finding it hard to feed themselves while others are hoarding and hiding food as they expect prices to rise further as the battle that started six weeks ago takes hold of the city.

"Key informants are telling us that poor families are struggling to put sufficient food on their tables," UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq, Lise Grande, told Reuters. "This is very worrying."

Iraqi government and Kurdish forces surround the city from the north, east and south, while Popular Mobilisation forces - a coalition of Iranian-backed Shia groups - are trying to close in from the west.

Retail prices rose sharply last week, after Popular Mobilisation fighters cut the supply route to Mosul from the Syrian half of the self-styled caliphate, declared by Islamic State two years ago over Sunni-populated parts of Iraq and Syria.

More than a million people are still believed to

live in parts of Mosul under the control of the Islamic State fighters, who seized the largest city in northern Iraq as part of a lightning advance across a third of the country in 2014.

With the last supply route cut off, basic commodity prices in Mosul could double "in the short term", said a humanitarian worker, who declined to be identified.

Some 100,000 Iraqi government troops, Kurdish security forces and mainly Shia militiamen are participating in the assault on Mosul that began on Oct. 17, with air and ground support from a US-led international military coalition.

The capture of Mosul, Islamic State's last major urban stronghold in Iraq, is seen as crucial towards dismantling the caliphate.

Iraqi forces moving from the east have captured about a quarter of Mosul, trying to advance to the Tigris river that runs through its centre, in the biggest battle in Iraq since the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein.

"In a worst case, we envision that families who are already in trouble in Mosul will find themselves in even more acute need," Grande said. "The longer it takes to liberate Mosul, the harder conditions become for families."

## Thai parliament invites prince to become king

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's parliament yesterday invited Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn to become the next king, resolving lingering anxiety over his accession following his father's death last month.

The country has been plunged into mourning since widely revered King Bhumibol Adulyadej died on 13 October, ending a remarkable seven-decade reign and removing a key pillar of unity in a bitterly divided nation.

Yesterday's move ends a period of uncertainty sparked by the junta making the surprise announcement after Bhumibol's death that the prince had asked to delay his official proclamation so he could mourn.

"I will invite the Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn to succeed to the throne and become king of the Thai people," Pompetch Wichitcholchai,

head of the rubber stamp National Legislative Assembly said.

Lawmakers then stood up and replied: "Long live the king".

The parliamentary endorsement came after Thailand's cabinet officially submitted Vajiralongkorn's name earlier in the day.

Prawit Wongsuwan, deputy prime minister and the junta's number two, said the prince's ascension was "proceeding step-by-step" according to the country's arcane succession rules.

According to protocol, the assembly speaker will now seek a royal audience with the prince to invite him to ascend the throne, the last step before being proclaimed the new monarch.

Prawit said that would likely happen "either tomorrow or the day after".

Vajiralongkorn, 64, has been the named successor to Bhumibol for



## Modi on al-Qaeda hit list

Say Indian police; 3 militants arrested in South India

THE STATESMAN, New Delhi

Three suspected al-Qaeda operatives arrested in South India were allegedly planning to kill 22 top leaders, including Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The country was put on fresh terror alert after the three were held from Madurai in Tamil Nadu by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Monday, Indian police said yesterday.

The NIA raided several areas in the city to hunt down the suspected terrorists, who were operating an al-Qaeda cell. Interrogation revealed that the three had allegedly planned to kill the country's 22 top leaders, including Modi.

The trio had also been threatening foreign embassies across the country.

The operatives were identified as M Khareem, Asif Sultan Mohammed and Abbas Ali.

Khareem was arrested from Usmannagar while Asif Sultan Mohammed was picked up from GR Nagar and Abbas Ali from Ismailipuram, the police said. Explosive materials were also seized from them.

The police said the NIA raided several places on specific information that suspected al-Qaeda activists were operating in and around Madurai.

The agency is looking for two other suspected operatives -- Hakeem and Dawood Sulaiman -- the Madurai police said.

## MASS FRAUD ALLEGATION IN US ELECTION Experts trash Trump claim

AFP, New York

Experts and elected officials on both sides of the political aisle on Monday dismissed Donald Trump's claim that "millions" of Americans voted illegally on Election Day, as efforts expanded to organize recounts in swing states.

The Republican billionaire's victory on November 8 saw him clinch the crucial Electoral College count, which determines the presidency, but lose the popular vote to rival Hillary Clinton by more than two million ballots.

Cloistered in his Florida resort for the long Thanksgiving weekend, the 70-year-old tycoon who has never previously held elected office took to Twitter to indulge in one of his customary tweet storms.

On Sunday, before returning by private jet to New York to resume interviews with potential cabinet appointees, he claimed he would have won the popular vote if it were not for "the millions of people who voted

illegally." "Serious voter fraud in Virginia, New Hampshire and California -- so why isn't the media reporting on this? Serious bias -- big problem!" he followed up later.

Trump, who spent the campaign warning that the result might be "rigged," is now -- with his aides -- pushing back hard as the Green Party works to secure recounts in three states which Trump won: Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

The campaign of Green Party candidate Jill Stein, who won a tiny fraction of the vote in each state and where Trump beat Clinton by thousands of votes, said voters had filed recount requests in more than

100 (out of 9,163) precincts in Pennsylvania -- promising that more would follow.

The party requested a statewide recount in Wisconsin on Friday and plans to request a recount in Michigan today, the campaign said.

But observers deny any evidence of widespread fraud.



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un visits the Cuban embassy to express condolences over late Cuban leader Fidel Castro, in this photo released by North Korea's Korean Central News Agency in Pyongyang yesterday. Castro's leftist admirers in Latin America joined grieving Cubans at a massive ceremony in honour of the late communist firebrand while Western leaders shun the commemoration.

## NEWS IN brief

### Sonia admitted to hospital with fever

TNN, New Delhi

India's Congress President Sonia Gandhi was yesterday admitted to Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in Delhi as she's reportedly suffering from viral fever. Congress spokesman RS Surjewala said she will be in hospital for two days. This is the second time in three months the Congress chief has been admitted to hospital. On August 3, Sonia was admitted to the same hospital with fever, dehydration and a shoulder injury.

### Jacob Zuma survives attempted ousting

AFP, Johannesburg

South African President Jacob Zuma survived an attempt to oust him from office only after a "robust" and "difficult" debate within the ruling ANC party, an official said yesterday. Zuma has been weakened by corruption allegations, but his supporters were taken by surprise at the plot to unseat him at a weekend meeting of the African National Congress's executive committee.

## New £5 notes contain animal fat: BoE

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Vegans and vegetarians have voiced outrage after revelations that the new £5 notes contain animal fat.

The Bank of England (BoE) confirmed via Twitter on Monday that the new plastic fivers are made with tallow - a substance derived from fat and used in candles and soaps.

"There is a trace of tallow in the polymer pellets used in the base substrate of the polymer £5 notes," it confirmed.

A petition has already been launched to remove the new note - which only became legal tender in September - from circulation. At the time of writing it had been signed by more than 5,000 people.

"The new £5 notes contain animal fat in the form of tallow. This is unacceptable to millions of vegans & vegetarians in the UK. We demand that you cease to use animal products in the production of currency that we have to use," the petition read.



## People won't tolerate graft: Indian PM

PTI, New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday said the BJP's performance in parliamentary, assembly and local polls across India over the last few days illustrates that people want all-round progress and will not tolerate corruption and misgovernance.

"Over the last few days we have seen the results of various polls, parliamentary, assembly & local polls across India," Modi tweeted.

"Be it the Northeast, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat ... BJP has performed very well. I thank the people," he added.

He said these results across India "illustrate that people want all-round progress of the nation and will not tolerate corruption and misgovernance."

BJP won one Lok Sabha seat each in Assam and Madhya Pradesh besides bagging a number of assembly seats in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Arunachal Pradesh.

Referring to his home state, the Prime Minister said, "I salute people of Gujarat for continued trust in BJP. BJP's great win in local polls shows people's strong faith in development politics."

He congratulated party cadres of the state along with Chief Minister Vijay Rupani and state BJP chief Jitu Vaghani for their hard work across the state.

Modi had on Monday hailed the party's performance in local bodies polls in Maharashtra.

Modi yesterday asked BJP MPs and MLAs to submit details of their bank account transactions between November 8 and December 31 to party President Amit Shah.

November 8 was when PM Modi announced that the old Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes would be scrapped at midnight, and December 31 comes a day after the deadline for depositing demonetised notes in bank accounts.

The PM's instructions came at a BJP Parliamentary meeting, following allegations by opposition parties that the BJP had tipped off some of its own leaders ahead of



## Knife attack at Ohio State injures 11

REUTERS, Washington

A car and knife attack by an Ohio State University student that injured 11 people on Monday before the suspect was shot dead by a police officer is being investigated as a possible terror attack, a US congressman and another government source said.

The suspect, Abdul Razak Ali Artan, was shot and killed by a police officer with less than two years on the force after driving into a group of people and then jumping out of the vehicle and stabbing people with a butcher knife at the school's Columbus campus, said Monica Moll, director of public safety for Ohio State University.

The assailant was an 18-year-old immigrant from Somalia and a lawful permanent resident of the United States, two US government sources said. Ohio State University Police Chief Craig Stone told a news conference that Artan might have been as old as 20.

The officials said they could not speak on the record because of the ongoing investigation.

US Representative Adam Schiff, the ranking Democrat on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, said intelligence agencies were assisting in the investigation.

"It bears all of the hallmarks of a terror attack carried out by someone who may have been self-radicalized," Schiff said in a statement.

Another US official, who asked not to be named because of the ongoing investigation, told Reuters that US agencies are investigating the Columbus attacker's background and motivations, but cannot clearly say yet whether he had any ties to suspected militant cells or groups.