

# NEWSIN brief

## Colombia accord wins Senate approval

AFP, Bogota

Colombia's Senate has approved a revised peace accord between the government and the FARC rebel group, taking a first step toward ratifying an agreement that was rejected by voters. The text, which was renegotiated after an earlier version was given a thumbs down in the October 2 national referendum, now must be approved by the lower house of the Colombian Congress.

## Nepal govt approves charter amendment

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's government on Tuesday approved amendments to the controversial constitution that was rushed through parliament in the wake of the 2015 earthquake, prompting deadly protests by minority groups who said it left them marginalised. "The amendments are a positive step ahead and we believe it will be passed," minister Ramesh Lekhak told AFP.

## Let women drive, urges Saudi prince

AFP, Riyadh

An outspoken billionaire Saudi prince wants an "urgent" end to his country's ban on women driving, saying overturning the law was a matter of women's rights and economic necessity. "Stop the debate: Time for women to drive," Prince Alwaleed bin Talal said on his official Twitter account. Alwaleed is an unusually outspoken member of the royal family who holds no political posts.

## India cinemas ordered to play nat'l anthem

AFP, New Delhi

All cinemas must play the national anthem before screening movies and audiences should stand for it, India's highest court ruled yesterday, drawing angry accusations of an assault on civil liberties. The Supreme Court panel said cinemas should display the national flag on the screen as the anthem was played, and that making people stand up would instil a sense of patriotism.

## Park's impeachment vote delayed

AFP, Seoul

An impeachment vote against South Korea's scandal-hit president will be postponed by at least a week, lawmakers said yesterday, after Park Geun-Hye announced she was willing to stand down early. Lawmakers from Park's own party had backed moves to impeach her this Friday, but now want the issue discussed in parliament before holding a vote, likely to be scheduled a week later.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS



## VIVA FIDEL

A military vehicle transports the ashes of Cuba's late leader Fidel Castro at the start of a three-day journey to the eastern city of Santiago, in Havana, Cuba, yesterday; the rest of the pictures show Cubans paying respect to their leader in Havana. After two days of tributes in Havana, the "caravan of freedom" which is carrying the ashes of Castro departed on a 950-kilometer trek retracing the route of the revolution's victory tour of 1959.



## Ohio attacker had 'no direct terror links'

Says US after IS claims responsibility

AFP, Washington

The Somali student who plowed his car into a crowd and slashed several people with a knife in Ohio had no ties to terror groups, Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson said yesterday. Although Abdul Razak Ali Artan professed support for radical Islamists on his Facebook page and an Islamic State-linked news agency claimed he was an IS "soldier," Johnson said the probe had not thus far revealed any direct communications between Artan and such groups. He said Artan was self-radicalised. On Monday, the Somali immigrant, a new Ohio State University student, injured 11 people before he was shot dead by a university security officer. On Tuesday the IS-linked news agency Amaq said the rampage was inspired by IS calls to action.

# Aleppo exodus grows

50,000 civilians pour out of rebel-held east as regime advances

AFP, Aleppo

More than 50,000 Syrians have joined a growing exodus of terrified civilians from east Aleppo, a monitor said yesterday, as the UN Security Council was set for emergency talks on fighting in the city. As government forces pressed an assault in the divided city, regime artillery fire killed at least 21 civilians in east Aleppo yesterday morning, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Civilians have poured out of the rebel-held east in recent days, with parents carrying children and the young pushing the old in wheelchairs or makeshift carts as they flee. Some have arrived in government-held or Kurdish-controlled territory with overstuffed suitcases and bags of their possessions, but others have come empty-handed, with only the clothes on their backs. Government forces and allied fighters have seized a third of the rebel-held east of Aleppo since they began an operation to recapture all of the

battered second city just over a fortnight ago.

UN rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al-Husseini on Wednesday said civilians in eastern Aleppo faced "a nightmare which clearly violates the most basic norms of human rights and any shred of human decency."

"Pounded by accelerating bombardment, deliberately deprived of food and

UN resolution seeking an immediate ceasefire in Aleppo, though Russia -- a staunch ally of Damascus -- was likely to veto such a proposal.

The government's advance on the ground has been accompanied by heavy bombardment, with air strikes, barrel bomb attacks and artillery fire pounding rebel-held neighbourhoods.

The monitor says nearly 300 civilians, including 33 children, have been killed in east Aleppo since the latest government assault began on November 15.

Another 48 civilians have been killed in government-held west Aleppo, according to the monitor. State news agency SANA said eight civilians including two children had been killed in rebel fire on several districts in the city's west yesterday.

Elsewhere, Syrian state media said the Israeli air force had fired two missiles at early hours that hit near Damascus without causing casualties.

Israel, which is still technically at war with Syria, has largely limited its involvement in its neighbour's five-year conflict. But it has carried out

**SYRIA WAR**

UNSC to hold emergency talks

Two Israeli missiles hit near Damascus

medical care, many of them -- including small children -- report that they are simply waiting for death," he said.

The UN Security Council is to hold an emergency meeting later yesterday on the situation, receiving a briefing from a UN humanitarian official and the UN's peace envoy Staffan de Mistura.

Syria's opposition National Coalition said it was working with France on a draft

# Plane skipped refuel stop

Says report on Colombia crash; probe launched

AFP, La Paz

The plane that crashed in Colombia killing 71 people including Brazilian footballers had skipped a scheduled refueling stop, media quoted a representative of the Bolivian airline as saying yesterday. "The plane should have refueled in Bogota," but instead bypassed the Colombian capital and headed straight for its destination Medellin, Gustavo Vargas, a representative of airline LAMIA, was quoted as saying in Bolivian newspaper Pagina Siete. "The pilot was the one who took the decision not to enter (into Bogota for refueling), because he thought the fuel would last."

players miraculously survived.

Announcing the disaster on Monday night, the aviation authority said the plane reported electrical problems just before the crash.

But a Colombian military source told AFP: "It is very suspicious that despite the impact there was no explosion. That reinforces the theory of the lack of fuel."

Brazilian media said the plane's fuel capacity may have been inferior to the amount required for the distance of its journey from Santa Cruz in Bolivia to Medellin.

Colombian media, citing investigators, said the plane may have had to wait for another flight to touch down in Medellin before it could land.

Colombian broadcaster W Radio aired a recording of what it said was the captain of another aircraft who said he had heard the pilot of the doomed plane over the radio reporting fuel problems followed by an electrical failure. British, Bolivian and Brazilian investigators headed to Colombia



# 'I will include you among them'

Duterte's threats alarm rights groups

AFP, Manila

Human rights campaigners expressed shock and defiance yesterday after Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte threatened to kill them for hindering his bloody war on drugs.

Duterte issued his warning on Monday as the death toll from his controversial crackdown climbed above 4,800, or roughly an average of 30 deaths a day since it began five months ago.

"The human rights (defenders) say I kill. If I say: 'Okay, I'll stop'. They (drug users) will multiply," Duterte said.

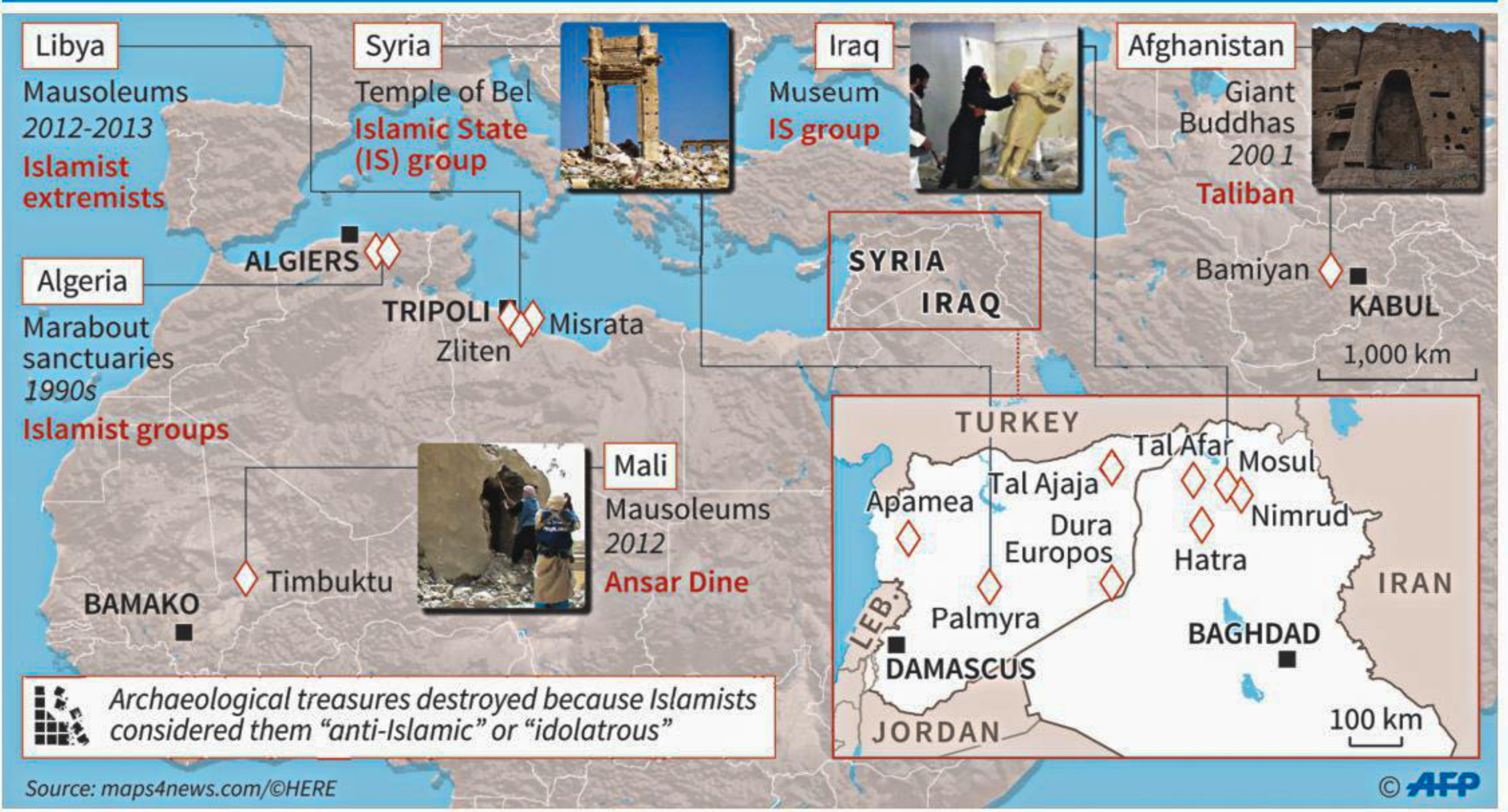
"When harvest time comes, there will be more of them who will die. Then I will include you among them because you let them multiply," he added.

Amnesty International Philippines was among a range of groups to speak out against the comments, saying it was "appalled".

The National Alliance against Killings Philippines, a newly formed coalition of rights groups, said it took the threat very seriously and called on Duterte to revoke it.

Duterte won presidential elections in May after pledging to kill tens of thousands of drug suspects, warning that otherwise the Philippines would turn into a narco-state.

# CULTURAL SITES DESTROYED BY JIHADISTS



## ETHNIC TENSIONS IN NORTHERN MYANMAR

# China offers help to end border unrest

REUTERS, Beijing

China has told Myanmar that they should work together to stabilise their shared border, in the wake of a series of attacks by ethnic armed groups on Myanmar security forces and thousands of people crossing into China to escape the violence.

The attacks this month dealt a major blow to Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi's top goal of reaching peace with ethnic minorities, while China is worried about the risk of violence in northern Myanmar spilling onto its side of the border, as it did last year, when five Chinese people were killed.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Tuesday told a visiting Myanmar delegation, led by peace commission chair Tin Myo

Win, that Beijing was worried by the deteriorating situation and repeated a call for an end to military action and for talks to resolve disputes.

"Both sides should properly use the China-Myanmar high-level diplomatic and military mechanism to jointly maintain the peace and stability of the China-Myanmar border region," a Foreign Ministry statement yesterday paraphrased Wang as saying.

The sudden escalation in fighting comes as the Myanmar government grapples with a conflict in northwestern Rakhine that has sent hundreds of Rohingya Muslims fleeing to Bangladesh, posing a new challenge to Nobel peace prize winner Suu Kyi, who swept to power last year on promises of national reconciliation.

Previous fighting along the border



# Review Myanmar's Asean membership

Urges Malaysia over Rohingya crisis

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Myanmar's membership of Asean must be reviewed because of its "ethnic cleansing" of the Rohingya Muslim minority, a senior Malaysian minister warned yesterday.

Khairy Jamaluddin said the 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations' principle of non-interference in member states' domestic affairs was void in the context of such violence.

Myanmar's army has carried out a bloody crackdown in the western state of Rakhine and thousands of Rohingya have flooded over the border into Bangladesh this month, making horrifying claims of gang rape, torture and murder at the hands of security forces.

"To Asean, we demand that Myanmar's membership in Asean be reviewed," Khairy, the youth and sports minister, told the annual gathering of the ruling party United Malays National Organisation.

"The principle of non-interference is void when there is large scale ethnic cleansing in an Asean member state."

A video highlighting the plight of the Rohingya was played during the minister's speech, local media reported.

On Tuesday, the UN's rights agency said the Rohingya may be victims of crimes against humanity, as former UN chief Kofi Annan arrived in the country for a visit that will include a trip to northern Rakhine.

Myanmar has denied allegations of abuse, saying the army is hunting "terrorists" behind raids on police posts last month.

# 'It would be disastrous'

CIA chief warns Trump against ripping up Iran deal

AFP, London

CIA director John Brennan yesterday warned that tearing up the Iran nuclear deal, as US President-elect Donald Trump promised during his election campaign, would be "disastrous".

preventing the Islamic republic from developing nuclear weapons.

But his pick to succeed Brennan as head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Mike Pompeo, is a strident critic of the agreement.

In the BBC interview, Brennan also expressed hope there would be an improvement in relations between Washington and

"I think it would be the height of folly if the next administration were to tear up that agreement," Brennan told the BBC, adding: "It would be disastrous, it really would."

He said it would be "almost unprecedented" for one administration to tear up an agreement made by a previous one.

Brennan warned "it could lead to a weapons programme inside of Iran that could lead other states in the region to embark on their own programmes, with military conflict".

Since his election, Trump has been more circumspect, not publicly discussing the international deal with Tehran aimed at

Moscow. But he warned: "I think President-elect Trump and the new administration need to be wary of Russian promises."

Trump had said he might authorise the torture of detainees, including waterboarding, to gain information, but has since said he had received advice that made him rethink his approach.

"I would counsel my successor not to go down that road any more," Brennan said.

"Without a doubt the CIA really took some body blows as a result of its experiences in the detention interrogation programme.... I think the overwhelming



Trump met with Mitt Romney on Tuesday.