

# NEWSIN brief

## Egypt sets up council to oversee media

AFP, Cairo

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has approved a law to set up a council headed by his appointees that oversees the media and ensures compliance with "national security" requirements. The law, passed by parliament and published in the official gazette on Monday, mandates the council to investigate media funding and fine or revoke permits of those deemed in violation.

## Indian plane skids off runway, 15 hurt

AFP, New Delhi

An Indian plane carrying 161 passengers and crew skidded off the runway at Goa airport early yesterday, injuring 15 people. The Indian Navy, which runs the airport in western India, said it was not yet clear what caused the Jet Airways plane to veer off the runway. The incident happened at the height of the tourist season in Goa.

## IS 'summarily executed' 13 Iraqi civilians: HRW

AFP, Baghdad

Islamic State group fighters "summarily executed" 13 civilians after villagers rose up against them at the start of the Iraqi army's offensive to retake Mosul, Human Rights Watch said yesterday. The killings took place in the villages of Al-Hud and Al-Lazzagah, 50 kilometres south of Mosul on October 17, the day government forces launched the massive operation to oust the jihadists from the city.

## Six dead, 18 missing in Philippines' typhoon

AFP, Manila

At least six people are dead and 18 others missing after Typhoon Nock-Ten lashed the Philippines over the Christmas holidays, the government said yesterday. The unusually late storm first hit the eastern provinces on Christmas Day, flooding roads and farms, destroying homes and damaging ships.



## RUSSIA MILITARY JET CRASH

A woman lights a candle next to flowers and a portrait of one of the victims of a crashed military jet at a makeshift memorial in Sochi, yesterday. A handout photo, right, provided by the Russian Emergencies Ministry, shows the wreckage of the crashed military Tupolev TU-154 plane lifted from the waters of the Black Sea. Russian rescuers found the main black box from the Syria-bound plane that crashed into the Black Sea with 92 people on board, authorities said.

PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP



## Russia fumes as US eases restrictions on rebel arms

REUTERS, Moscow

Russia said yesterday that a US decision to ease restrictions on arming Syrian rebels had opened the way for deliveries of shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles, a move it said would directly threaten Russian forces in Syria.

Moscow last year launched a campaign of air strikes in Syria to help President Bashar al-Assad and his forces retake territory lost to rebels, some of whom are supported by the United States.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said the policy change easing restrictions on weapons supplies had been set out in a new US defence spending bill and that Moscow regarded the step as a hostile act.

US President Barack Obama, who has been sharply critical of Russia's intervention in Syria, signed the annual defence policy bill into law last week.

"Washington has placed its bets on supplying military aid to anti-government forces who don't differ than much from blood thirsty head choppers. Now, the possibility of supplying them with weapons, including mobile anti-aircraft complexes, has been written into this new bill,"

Zakharova said in a statement.

"In the administration of B Obama they must understand that any weapons handed over will quickly end up in the hands of jihadists," she added, saying that perhaps that was what the White House was counting on happening.

The US decision was a direct threat to the Russian air force, to other Russian military personnel, and to Russia's embassy in Damascus, said Zakharova.

"We therefore view the step as a hostile act."

### WAR IN SYRIA

Zakharova accused the Obama administration of trying to "put a mine" under the incoming administration of President-elect Donald Trump by attempting to get it to continue what she called Washington's "anti-Russian line."

The Obama administration has in recent weeks expanded the list of Russians affected by US sanctions imposed on Moscow over its actions in Ukraine.

Trump, during his election campaign, said he was keen to try to improve relations with Moscow and spoke positively about President Vladimir Putin's leadership skills.

## Saudi jailed for call to end male guardianship

AFP, Riyadh

A Saudi man has been jailed for one year for calling for an end to the Muslim kingdom's guardianship system that gives men wide controls over women, local media said yesterday.

The man, who was also fined 30,000 riyals (\$8,000) by a court in the eastern city of Dammam, was convicted of "inciting to end guardianship of women" in statements he posted on Twitter and in public posters, the Okaz daily said.

He was arrested while putting up posters in mosques in Al-Hasa district calling for an end to the globally unique system that subjects women in the ultra-conservative kingdom to male control.

During questioning, police found out that the man was also behind a wide online campaign to end the guardianship, the paper said.

## Turkey opens first trial of coup suspects

### 29 cops facing charges of disobeying orders

REUTERS, Silivri

The first trial related to Turkey's failed coup started yesterday, with 29 police officers facing charges of disobeying orders on the July night rogue soldiers attempted to overthrow the government and killed some 240 people.

Since the failed coup, more than 100,000 people have been sacked or suspended in a widespread crackdown targeting the military, police, civil service and private sector. Some 40,000 people have been arrested.

Security was tight at the courthouse in Silivri, west of Istanbul, including a heavy police presence. Reporters were not allowed to bring cameras and other equipment into the building.

The police officers are charged with disobeying orders to defend President Tayyip Erdogan's palace in Istanbul on the night of the July 15 coup, state-run Anadolu Agency said. Lawyers for the 29 defendants could not immediately be reached to say whether they would deny the charges.

During the attempted coup, rogue soldiers commandeered tanks, helicopters and

warplanes in Istanbul and Ankara and attacked parliament and other institutions.

"Everyone involved in the coup attempt must have a fair trial," Orhan Cagri Bekar, a lawyer who represents some of the victims of the coup, told reporters. "Those who are guilty must be sentenced to the heaviest punishment because this is a betrayal of the country."

Prosecutors are seeking three life sentences for 21 of the policemen and sentences of between 7-1/2 to 15 years in prison for the other eight, Anadolu said.

While yesterday's trial is the first related to the coup, it does not include the alleged ringleaders, who are due to go on trial, probably next year, in Ankara.

The government has blamed a US-based Muslim cleric, Fethullah Gulen, for orchestrating the failed coup. Gulen, a former ally of President Erdogan, has denied the charge and condemned the coup.

The government said earlier this year that a new court would be built in an Ankara district as there were no courts big enough in Turkey to handle such large numbers of defendants.

## Birthday party of the year

Thousands join Mexican teen's party after invite goes viral

AFP, San Luis Potosi

A huge crowd turned out Monday to celebrate the 15th birthday of Rubi Ibarra, a small-town Mexican girl -- though it was fewer than the 1.3 million people who said they were coming after the invitation went viral online.

Girls' 15th birthday parties are often a huge affair in Latin America, when families pull out all the stops to welcome them to womanhood.

But Rubi's "quinceanera" party took the phenomenon to a whole new level, after the invite became an offbeat internet sensation.

"We found out through social media and we said 'Let's go. Everyone is invited? Let's go,'" said Tania Rodriguez, who traveled five hours by car to attend the party held in a large field in Villa de Guadalupe, in San Luis Potosi state.

About 10,000 partygoers of all ages came to see Rubi, who danced the night

away in a bejewelled floral princess gown with a dramatic red skirt.

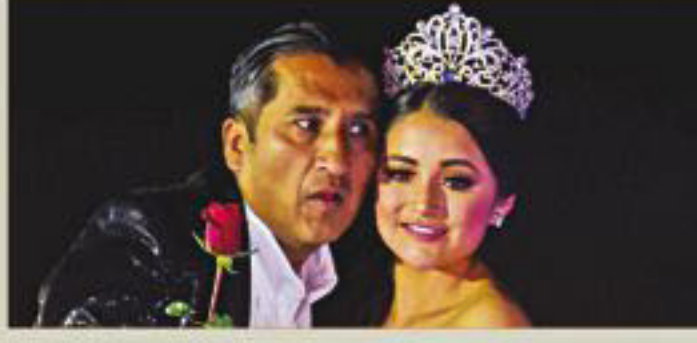
The evening featured fireworks, a banquet sponsored by a food company and a concert broadcast on a giant screen.

Rubi danced with friends, as well as the men of her family, receiving a rose from each, in keeping with tradition.

"Hi, how's it going? We would like to invite you this December 26 to our daughter Rubi Ibarra Garcia's 15th birthday party in La Joya," her dad, Crescencio, said in the video invitation that went viral.

About 1.3 million Facebook users replied that they would attend the party originally set to be in La Joya, a village of 200 people near the city of San Luis Potosi.

The family said they were originally expecting around 800 people for the party. Local authorities moved it to the large field and sent a security detail for what Mexican media were calling "the party of the year."



Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (C) places a wreath as Japanese Defence Minister Tomomi Inada (2nd R) looks on during their visit to a Japanese cemetery in Honolulu, Hawaii, one day before he visits the site of the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor during a trip intended to show a strong alliance between his country and the United States.

PHOTO: REUTERS



## RUSSIA JET CRASH Main black box found in Black Sea

AFP, Sochi

The main black box of the Syria-bound Russian military plane that crashed into the Black Sea with 92 people onboard has been found in a massive ongoing search operation, authorities said yesterday.

"The main black box was found at 5:42 am Moscow time (0242 GMT) 1,600 metres from the shore at a depth of 17 metres," the defence ministry said in a statement, later adding that the device had arrived in the Moscow region to be deciphered by experts.

The Tu-154 jet, whose passengers included more than 60 members of the internationally renowned Red Army Choir, was heading to Russia's military airbase in Syria when it went down off the coast of Sochi shortly after take-off on Sunday.

Investigators have yet to confirm the cause of the crash, but officials have said that an act of terror was not being considered as a possible explanation.

The finding of the black box comes as searchers are scrambling to recover bodies and remaining debris from the aircraft in an operation involving 192 divers, 45 vessels, 12 planes, five helicopters and 15 deep-water machines.

The defence ministry said that five plane fragments, including part of the fuselage and engine, were found overnight 30 metres (98 feet) under water at around 1,700 metres from the shore.

It told Russian news agencies that searchers had later found an additional three fragments which included landing gear and a portion of the engine.

## Enemy threat is growing

Says Taiwan as Chinese warships conduct drill in S China Sea

REUTERS, Taipei

Taiwan warned yesterday that "the threat of our enemies is growing day by day", as Chinese warships led by the country's sole aircraft carrier sailed towards the island province of Hainan through the South China Sea on a routine drill.

China has given few details of what the Soviet-built Liaoning aircraft carrier is up to, save that it is on a routine exercise. Taiwan has said the aircraft carrier skirted waters outside of its eastern air defence identification zone.

The carrier is expected to arrive at a Chinese military base on the southern Chinese island of Hainan late yesterday, Taiwan's defence ministry said.

The drill comes amid renewed tension over Taiwan, which China claims as its own and says is ineligible for state-to-state relations, following US President-elect Donald Trump's telephone call with the island's president that upset Beijing.

"The threat of our enemies is growing day by day. We should always be maintaining our combat alertness," Taiwan Defence Minister Feng Shih-kuan said. "We need to strengthen the training (of our soldiers) so that they can not only survive in battle but also destroy the

and South China Seas that rattled Japan and Taiwan. China said those exercises were also routine.

China claims most of the South China Sea, through which about \$5 trillion in ship-borne trade passes every year. Neighbours Brunei,



enemy and accomplish the mission."

Feng's remarks were given in a speech yesterday at a ministry event marking the promotion of senior military officers.

China's air force conducted long-range drills this month above the East

Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also have claims.

The Pentagon did not directly comment on the latest drill but said that the United States recognises lawful use of sea and airspace in accordance to international law.

## Row as Afghan woman pilot seeks asylum in US

AFP, Kabul

The shock announcement of Afghanistan's first woman fixed-wing pilot to seek asylum in the US has touched off a spirited national debate on the country's most vexing issues: insecurity, women's rights and mass exodus of young people.

Niloofar Rahmani, a 25-year-old pilot lionised widely as the "Afghan Top Gun" after the 1986 Tom Cruise film on flying aces, was scheduled to return to Afghanistan last week after a 15-month training course with the US air force.

But on the eve of her departure, she declared she will not be returning citing fears for her safety, triggering a storm of criticism in Afghanistan for "betraying" her nation but also garnering support from activists.

"What she said in the US was irresponsible and unexpected. She was meant to be a role model for other young Afghans," defence ministry spokesman Mohammad

Radmanesh told AFP Monday. "She has betrayed her country. It is a shame."

Rahmani became a symbol of hope for millions of Afghan women when she surfaced in the press in 2013 after becoming Afghanistan's first woman pilot since the Taliban era, dressed in tan combat boots, khaki overalls and aviator glasses.

The once-unimaginable feat last year won her the US State Department's "Women of Courage Award".

But with fame came death threats from insurgents and she routinely faced contempt from her male colleagues in a conservative nation where many still believe that a woman does not belong outside the home.

In an interview with AFP in Kabul last year, Rahmani said she always carried a pistol for her protection and though she has grown accustomed to the ogling eyes of men, she never left her airbase in uniform, lest it make her a target.

