

INDONESIAN TODDLER DIES AFTER CHURCH ATTACK

JAKARTA: An Indonesian toddler died yesterday from injuries sustained in a suspected extremist attack on a church, with a group of militants who support the Islamic State (IS) group detained over the assault. Two-year-old Intan Olivia Marbun was among four small children hurt when an attacker wearing a T-shirt with the word "jihad" on it threw Molotov cocktails at the place of worship on Borneo island from a motorbike on Sunday.

The youngsters, aged between two and four, had been playing in the car park of the church in the city of Samarinda at the time of the attack. Local police spokesman Fajar Setiawan said Marbun suffered extensive burn injuries and respiratory problems, adding: "Unfortunately the doctors could not save the victim... she died early this morning." The other children suf-

fered less serious injuries and were still being treated in hospital but would likely be discharged soon, the spokesman said. Police arrested the suspected attacker, an Islamist militant previously jailed over a parcel bomb plot in 2011, shortly after the assault.

Yesterday they detained five more people as part of their investigation, with national police chief Tito Karnavian describing them as "old players" who also had links to the 2011 plot. All those detained including the attacker were allegedly part of the Jamaah Ansharut Daulah group, a local militant outfit that supports IS.

"Their aim is to incite violence, I urge people to remain calm," said Karnavian. Sunday's attack was just the latest on a church in recent months. In August, an Indonesian teenager who was obsessed with IS stabbed a priest in a church in



SAMARINDA, Indonesia: An Indonesian policeman stands guard outside the Okume Church after a man allegedly threw Molotov cocktails towards it in Samarinda, East Kalimantan. — AFP

the city of Medan on Sumatra island and tried to detonate a homemade bomb.

Indonesia, which has the world's biggest Muslim population, has long struggled with Islamic militancy and suffered a string of extremist attacks in the 2000s, including the 2002 Bali bombings that left 202 people dead. A sustained crackdown had weakened the most dangerous networks but IS has proved a potent new rallying cry for the country's radicals.

A suicide bombing and gun attack in the Indonesian capital Jakarta in January, claimed by IS, killed four attackers and four civilians. Religious minorities have also increasingly come under attack in recent times as the influence of hardliners has grown, with Christians, Buddhists and Muslim minorities targeted. — AFP

WIKILEAKS FOUNDER ASSANGE QUESTIONED BY PROSECUTORS

LONDON: WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was being questioned by prosecutors yesterday at the Ecuadorian embassy in London in the latest twist in the long-running legal battle over a rape allegation against him. Swedish prosecutor Ingrid Isgren, who will attend while Assange is questioned by an Ecuadorian prosecutor entered the embassy building shortly before 1000 GMT, an AFP photographer said. Assange's lawyer Per Samuelsson said the questioning, which has been delayed in the past because of diplomatic disagreements between Ecuador and Sweden, could last for several days.

A Swedish police inspector will also attend and investigators plan to take a DNA sample from Assange, subject to his agreement. The creator of the secret-spilling website has been holed up in the red-brick building behind Harrods luxury department store for more than four years. The 45-year-old Australian sought refuge in the embassy in June 2012 after Swedish prosecutors issued a European arrest warrant against him, over allegations of rape and sexual assault filed by two women who met Assange during a 2010 trip to Sweden. He denied the claims, saying they were politically motivated, and insisting his sexual encounters with the two women were consensual.

He has refused to travel to Sweden for questioning, fearing he would be extradited to the United States over WikiLeaks' release of 500,000 secret military files on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Swedish prosecutors dropped the sexual assault probe last year after the five-year statute of limitations expired. But they still want to question him about the 2010 rape allegation, which carries a 10-year statute of limitations. "It's planned to last a few days," Samuelsson said, adding that it was too early to say what might arise from the meeting or what would be made public. It will be the first time Assange has been interviewed over the matter since initial questioning by Swedish police at the time

of the allegation. Assange, speaking through his lawyer, has said he welcomes the "chance to clear his name" and hopes the investigation will subsequently close. In May, a Swedish court reaffirmed the arrest order, rejecting the finding of a UN working group that his confinement in the Ecuadorian embassy amounted to arbitrary detention.

Petition for Trump 'pardon'

In the days since the US election, supporters have launched a petition calling on President-elect Donald Trump to pardon Assange by "absolving him of any crimes alleged against him"—an apparent reference to the military leaks. The petition on the change.org website, which has gathered more than 17,700 signatures, hails Assange as a "hero" for exposing the "corruption of those who presume to rule us".

Assange's lawyer said he had made "repeated requests" for an interview with police to address the rape claim, though Ecuadorian prosecutors say a hearing scheduled for October was postponed at the Australian's request. "Julian Assange has always wanted to tell his version to the Swedish police. He wants a chance to clear his name," Samuelsson said. The legal grilling comes after WikiLeaks returned to the spotlight with the leak of tens of thousands of emails from the US Democratic Party and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's campaign in the final weeks of the race for the White House.

Assange defended the publication, denying links with Russia and claims that his website was trying to influence the US vote which saw Trump, a republican, elected. Tensions with his Ecuadorian hosts have been growing, with the leaks prompting the embassy to cut Assange's internet access, citing respect for "non-intervention" in the affairs of other states and their electoral processes. WikiLeaks released medical records in September claiming Assange's mental health was at risk if he remained any longer in the embassy. — AFP



LONDON: Protesters hold banners that read 'Free Assange' outside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London yesterday where WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was being questioned over a rape allegation against him. — AFP

LACK OF SCHOOL DRIVES GIRLS INTO ARMED GROUPS IN CONGO'S EAST

DAKAR: Girls in conflict-ravaged eastern Democratic Republic of Congo are joining armed groups because they cannot afford to go to school, while former girl soldiers struggle to return to class amid stigma from their communities, a charity said yesterday. Many girls in the region join militia groups to obtain food and money, to seek protection against violence, or because their families cannot afford to pay their school fees, according to a report by Britain-based Child Soldiers International (CSI).

Eastern Congo is plagued by dozens of armed groups that prey on locals and exploit mineral reserves. Millions died between 1996 and 2003 as a regional conflict caused hunger and disease. Around a third of all children in armed groups in the country are estimated to be girls, who are often married off to militants and are vulnerable to abuse and rape, activists say. "It is deeply shocking that, because their families cannot afford to pay school fees, some girls see joining an armed group as their only option, and decide to throw themselves in harm's way," said Isabelle Guitard, director of programs at CSI.

While primary education is free and

compulsory by law, most schools in Congo charge fees for books and uniforms, CSI said. "Despite the horrific abuse the girls go through while with armed groups, it is the rejection from their families and communities which distresses many of them the most," Guitard told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from London. While civil society groups have had some success in getting boys out of armed groups and into reintegration programs, this shame and fear of rejection back home has kept many girls in the bush, according to CSI's report.

"If we leave the group, we're going to be targeted ... so many girls accept and continue to live with their bush husband," said one of the 150 former girl soldiers interviewed by CSI. Most of these girls said going to school was the best way to regain acceptance from their communities, and that it helped them to deal with trauma suffered while with the armed groups. CSI said it was working with local partners to help former girl soldiers go back to school, provide catch-up sessions and literacy classes for those who have never been educated or who are too old to start. — Reuters



SHANGHAI: A copy of the local Chinese magazine Global People with a cover story that translates to 'Why did Trump win' is seen with a front cover portrait of US president-elect Donald Trump at a news stand in Shanghai yesterday. — AFP

IN PHONE CALL, XI TELLS TRUMP COOPERATION IS 'ONLY CHOICE'

TRUMP WILL NOT TREAT BILATERAL TRADE 'CHILDISHLY'

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping told US President-elect Donald Trump that cooperation was the only choice for relations between the world's two largest economies, with Trump saying the two had established a "clear sense of mutual respect". There has been intense speculation over the impact of Trump's win on issues facing the two countries, from global trade and climate change to the security balance in the Asia-Pacific.

Trump lambasted China throughout the US election campaign, drumming up headlines with his pledges to slap 45 percent tariffs on imported Chinese goods and to label the country a currency manipulator on his first day in office. His election has injected uncertainty into relations at a time when Beijing hopes for stability as it faces daunting reform challenges at home, slowing growth and a leadership reshuffle of its own that will put a new party elite around Xi in late 2017.

In their first interaction since the US election, Chinese state media said Xi told Trump in a telephone call yesterday that as the world's largest developing and developed economies, there were many areas where China and the

United States could cooperate. "The facts prove that cooperation is the only correct choice for China and the United States," China Central Television (CCTV) cited Xi as saying. Xi's remarks were a reiteration of phrasing typically used by Beijing to describe bilateral relations.

The two sides must "promote the two countries' economic development and global economic growth" and "push for better development going forward in China-US relations", Xi said. "During the call, the leaders established a clear sense of mutual respect for one another, and President-elect Trump stated that he believes the two leaders will have one of the strongest relationships for both countries moving forward," a statement from Trump's presidential transition office said.

The two agreed to maintain close communications and meet soon, CCTV said. Xi had congratulated Trump in a message delivered shortly after his surprise election victory last week. The Global Times, a nationalist tabloid published by the ruling Communist Party's People's Daily newspaper, said if Trump slapped China with heavy tariffs it would "paralyze" bilateral trade. "When the time comes,

large orders for Boeing planes would switch to Europe, US auto sales in China would face setbacks, Apple phones would essentially be crowded out, and US soybeans and corn would be eradicated from China," the paper said in a commentary.

"Trump, coming from a business background, is very astute. We do not believe he will treat China-US trade so childishly," China has signaled it will promote plans for regional trade integration, vowing to seek support for a Beijing-backed Asia-Pacific free trade area at a summit in Peru later this month, after Trump's win dashed hopes for the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

Trump's criticism of US allies, including Japan, for free-riding on US security guarantees, has deepened anxiety among Washington's allies about its commitment to post-war security arrangements in the face of a rising China and volatile North Korea. Trump appears to be seeking quick ways to withdraw the United States from a global accord to combat climate change, which has been billed by China and US President Barack Obama as a key area for cooperation. — Reuters

FIRST WOMAN TO FLY CHINA'S J-10 FIGHTER KILLED IN CRASH

BEIJING: The first woman to fly China's J-10 fighter plane was killed in a crash during an aerobatics training exercise, state-run media reported yesterday. Yu Xu, 30, a member of the Chinese air force's "August 1st" aerobatics display team, ejected from her aircraft during a training exercise in the northern province of Hebei at the weekend, the China Daily newspaper said. She hit the wing of another jet and was killed, it said, although her male co-pilot ejected safely and survived. "As one of only four female pilots in the country capable of flying domestically made fighter jets, her death comes as a tremendous loss to the Chinese air force," the Global Times newspaper said.

Yu, from Chongzhou in the southwestern province of Sichuan, joined the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force in 2005, reports said. She graduated from training four years later, one of the first 16 Chinese women pilots qualified to fly fighter jets, the China Daily said, and in July 2012 was the first woman to fly the J-10. Fans dubbed her the "golden peafowl", it added.

Yu was seen as a pioneering trail-blazer in a country which enshrines women's rights but where traditional values are still widespread.

Users on the Twitter-like Weibo social media service posted pictures of candles in her memory, with thousands mourning her death. "We praise her not as an individual, but for the spirit she transmitted to us, becoming the ideal vehicle for everyone's hopes," wrote one user. Others raised questions about the crash. "Rather than stirring up emotion, the most important thing is to investigate why this accident occurred, was it a problem with the design problem in the fighter, or in the rules of operation, or in inadequate training," wrote one. "Only by ascertaining the causes can we ensure it doesn't happen again."

Jumpsuits and sunglasses

Yu rose to become a flight squadron leader and according to the Global Times dreamed of becoming an astronaut. She was one of two female members of the August 1st team—named for the date of the founding of the PLA—pictured at China's premier air

show in Zhuhai two years ago. The pair strode to their fighter planes in lock-step with male pilots, all wearing identical green jumpsuits and sunglasses. At the time the China Daily newspaper quoted Wang Yan'an, deputy editor of

Aerospace Knowledge magazine, as saying: "Female pilots have learned to fly cutting-edge fighter jets in the Chinese air force. It means the air force has diversified its pilot pool and can recruit more female pilots." — AFP



ZHUHAI: Photo shows Chinese female J-10 fighter pilot Yu Xu getting ready to perform at the Airshow China in Zhuhai, south China's Guangdong province. The first woman to fly China's J-10 fighter plane was killed in a crash during an aerobatics training exercise, state-run media reported yesterday. — AFP