Taliban attack Afghan city of Kunduz
KUNDUZ, Afghanistan — Taliban insurgents launched an assault on Kunduz yesterday, triggering intense fighting and forcing residents to hide in their homes, one year after the militants briefly took control of the northern Afghan city.

Government helicopters were targeting gunmen from the air in a bid to repel the attack, a day before President Ashraf Ghani is to meet world leaders at a major donors conference in Brussels.

“The people of Kunduz are panicked and trying to flee but they are caught in the middle of fighting,” Ghulam Rabbani, Kunduz provincial council member, said.

Indonesian jailed over failed terror plots
JAKARTA — An Indonesian militant was jailed for six years yesterday in a series of failed plots hatched under the guidance of an Indonesian jihadist fighting with the Islamic State Group in Syria.

Arif Hidayatullah pleaded to assassinate Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahja Purnama, an ethnic Chinese Christian, and to blast a Jewish community centre and a mosque used by members of the Muslim Shia minority, a court heard.

The 31-year-old, who was detained last December on the outskirts of Jakarta, did not carry out any of his plans because he was not confident his homemade bombs were ready.

The Jakarta court heard he concocted the plots under the guidance of fellow Indonesian militant fighting with IS, who has been linked to several botched attacks in his homeland, from a plot to fire a rocket at Singapore to a suicide attack on a police station.

Japan probes dozens of hospital deaths
Tokyo — Japanese police are probing the deaths of 46 patients on the same floor of a hospital where a pair of elderly men were fatally poisoned, reports said yesterday.

An autopsy on the two men who died at the hospital in Yokohama determined they were caused by a chemical found in disinfectant, public broadcaster NHK and other media reported earlier.

Police reportedly suspect the chemical was injected into intravenous drips that were administered to the two 88-year-old victims, Sozo Nishikawa and Nobuo Yamaki. The men both died last month.

But the probe has grown with authorities looking at how almost four dozen others died at the hospital since early July, although some were already seriously ill.

Hospital staff reportedly found puncture marks in 10 intravenous bags stored near the nursing station on the same floor.

Big crop of Singapore babies in 2015
SINGAPORE — According to population figures, there were 33,728 births in 2015, a number that eclipsed the 33,238 births in 2012, a year of the Sheep.

A mix of factors — the SG50 feel-good factor, more parental perks, and demographics — resulted in a significant spike in the number in the last 13 years, according to population experts.

There were 33,725 citizens-born, the highest number in the last 13 years, according to population figures released last week.

This is the first time in about two decades that the number of dragon babies has been overshadowed by those born in other years, based on available population statistics.

Bangladesh foreign murder trial date set
DHAKA — A Bangladeshi court yesterday sentenced a Japanese man in Bangladesh a year ago will take place on Friday, a court in the northern Rangpur District announced yesterday.

Kunio Hoshi, 66, was shot by unidentified attackers on a motorcycle in Katchi Aluli village in Rangpur on December 11 last year.

The agricultural worker was reportedly shot in the chest after he had shaken hands with another man while walking in the street.

The defendant had been arrested in Rangpur in May, 2015, and had rented a plot of land from a local resident with the aim of growing grass to be used as animal fodder.

Following his death, he was buried in Rangpur 10 days later, while he was still lying in a hospital bed with injuries sustained from the Japanese Embassy in Dhaka. — Agencies

NEW DELHI — India, the world’s third biggest carbon emitter, ratified the Paris agreement to cut emissions on the day by the birthday of the country’s famously averse in-dependence leader Mahatma Gandhi.

India, with a population of 1.3 billion people, is the latest polluter to formally sign onto the historic accord which now takes a major step towards becoming reality.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced last month October 2, a national holi-day, had been chosen as the “environment memorial day” freedom fighter Gandhi had lived his life with a low-carbon footprint.

“India’s leadership builds on the continued strong political momentum from Paris for urgent global action on cli-mate change,” Ban said in a statement.

“Action on climate change is crucial for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and creating a more prosperous, equitable and livable future for all people,” US President Barack Obama also commented India’s move, writing on Twitter that “Gandhiji believed in a Green India. In joining the Paris Agreement, @narendramodi & the Indian people carry on that legacy.”

France also welcomed India’s ratification of the agreement.

French Environment Minister Segolene Royal said it would allow the accord to come into effect in record time.”

And the Elysee Palace “hailed” Delhi’s move.

“This decision, following that of the European environ-ment ministers, brings us close to the Paris accord coming into effect by the end of the year,”

EU environment ministers agreed last week to fast-track the ratification.

The accord requires all countries to devise plans to achieve the goal of keeping the rise of temperatures within two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

Environmentalists wel-comed Sunday’s move, but urged China to work to phase out heavily-polluting coal, which it relies on heavily for electricity.

“India is one the very few large economies that has not made any promises of phasing out coal,” said Joydeep Gupta, director of the “third pole” website which focuses on environmental issues. — AFP

India ratifies Paris climate pact
World’s third biggest carbon emitter officially approves deal

FUKUOKA, Japan — A draft outcome document was intro-duced and discussed during a press conference organised by the UN-Habitat – a United Nations human settlement programme – in Fukuoka, Japan last week.

The document, which is expected to be adopted in the upcoming UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development – Habitat III in Quito, Ecuador during 17-20 October, aims to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable develop-ment, assess up-to-date ac-complishments, address pov-erty and identify new and emerging urban challenges.

It outlines some 169 targets and 17 goals, designed to be the successor of UN’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to make cities and human settlements inclu-sive, safe, resilient and sus-tainable.

Key sustainable develop-ment goals include plans to ensure access for all to ad-equate and affordable hous-ing, to improve transport sys-tems, enhance human settle-ment planning, expand public space across human settle-ments and make them more resilient in the face of natural disasters. Cities and human settlements are encouraged to adopt and implement policies and plan to improve resource efficiency, and adapt to and mitigate the adverse effects of global climate change.

The document stresses the importance of local gov-ernmental and social bodies, especially in the area of pov-erty reduction, fighting in-equality, improving water sources and sanitation as well as promote responsible com-mumption and production.

The UN programme also encourages cities to build and develop their own goals as well as emphasise synergies across different sectors.

At the conference, journal-ists from eight Asian countries presented and discussed nu-merous urbanisation issues in their respective cities and countries. Key issues con-stituted of overpopulation, in-frastructure inefficiency, de-gradation of living environ-ments in developing coun-tries such as Mongolia, India and Vietnam and the aging population in older countries such as Japan and Korea.

H-III, along with its prede-cessors H-I and H-II, will con-trIBUTE towards the UN’s New Urban Agenda that view cit-ies as a force of global devel-opment and find answers to the challenge of how to man-age the urbanisation process to improve citizens’ lives.

The United Nations Gen-eral Assembly convened the Habitat I Conference in Vancouver, Canada, in 1976, as governments began to recognise the need for sus-tainable human settlements and the consequences of rapid urbanisation, especially in the developing world.

The Vancouver commit-ments were reconfirmed 20 years later in 1996, at the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul, Turkey, World lead-ers adopted the Habitat Agenda and created a global plan of ac-tion for adequate shelter for all, with the notion of sustain-able human settlements driv-ing development in an urbanising world.

During the last four de-cades, the world has witnessed the greatest and fastest migra-tion of people into cities and towns in human history. From just 0.9 billion people living in cities across the world in 1900 (20 per cent of the glo-bal population at the time) by 2000 the number of city-dwellers had risen to 3.5 bil-lion (50 per cent). By 2050, an estimated 7 billion people, or 70 per cent of the world’s population, will reside in cit-ies.

Habitat III is one of the first United Nations global summits after the adoption of the 2010 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. It offers countries an opportunity to discuss the important chal-lenge of how cities, towns, and villages are planned and man-aged, in order to fulfill their role as drivers of sustainable development, and hence shape the implementation of new global development goals.

— VNS

UN releases human settlement draft

Journalsists during a panel discussion at the press conference. — Photo courtesy of organiser

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