

# NEWSIN brief

## Burqa ban upheld in France

AFP, Versailles

A French court yesterday convicted a young woman for wearing a full-face Islamic veil in public and threw out her bid to have the country's controversial burqa ban declared unconstitutional. Cassandra Belin, 20, was given a one-month suspended prison sentence for the clash with the police and a 150-euro

## Venezuelan beauty queen killed in robbery

AFP, Caracas

Former beauty queen turned soap opera star Monica Spear was found shot to death with her husband in their car on a road-side in Venezuela, local media reported Tuesday. Spear's five-year-old daughter was found alive in the car Monday night and was in stable condition, Venezuelan authorities said. Local press reports, citing police sources, said the couple were shot dead, apparently by robbers, after their car broke down. Spear was named Miss Venezuela in 2004.



Monica Spear

## 9 killed as fire guts train near Mumbai

AFP, Dahanu

Fire tore through an Indian train full of sleeping passengers yesterday, killing nine people and forcing survivors to break open doors to escape, officials and a witness said. The blaze raced through three carriages shortly after the train left Mumbai for the northern city of Dehradun.

## US chopper crash on UK coast kills 4

CNN ONLINE

Four US Air Force personnel died after a military helicopter crashed Tuesday evening near Cley, on the North Sea coast of England, authorities said. A news release from police in Norfolk said a US Air Force Pave Hawk HH-60G helicopter from a British base in Lakenheath had crashed and the four people

# Rebels 'seize' ISIS HQ in Syria city

## Chinese ship joins int'l effort to remove chemical arms

AGENCIES

Islamist rebel brigades are reported to have seized the headquarters of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said it was not clear what had happened to the jihadists who had been at the former hospital in the Qadi Askar area.

A video posted online showed rivals proclaiming their victory there.

Recent days have seen fierce fighting in several Syrian towns between the al-Qaeda affiliate and other rebel groups.

More than 270 people, including 46 civilians, have been killed in the worst rebel-on-rebel violence since the uprising in Syria began in March 2011, according to the Syrian Observatory, a UK-based activist group.

The clashes erupted on Friday when rivals launched what appeared to a series of co-ordinated strikes against ISIS in northern and eastern Syria. The offensive was backed by the National Coalition.

The bodies of several men who appeared to have been executed were also found at the hospital.

Al-Nusra is believed to have been created in mid-2011 with the help of a jihadist militant umbrella group in Iraq that includes al-Qaeda, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI).

Meanwhile, a Chinese ship arrived to escort ships picking up chemical weapons materials from Syria on Tuesday, China's state-run Xinhua news agency reported yesterday.

The frigate Yancheng is working closely with other ships from Russia and Europe, the agency reported, citing a Beijing Foreign Ministry statement.

The international effort to dismantle Syria's chemical weapons program reached a milestone Tuesday when a Danish commercial ship picked up the first batch of important chemical materials, the group overseeing the work said.

The ship will remain at sea until more chemical materials are made available at the Latakia port for pickup. The chemicals eventually will be taken to locations outside Syria for destruction, the group said.

Tuesday's move comes a week after a deadline for the first chemical materials to leave Syria. Syria's chemical weapons are targeted for removal and elimination by the end of June.

## Morsi absence delays murder trial till Feb 1

AFP, Cairo

An Egyptian court yesterday adjourned the murder trial of deposed president Mohamed Morsi to February 1, citing "weather conditions" that prevented the Islamist's transport to court from prison.

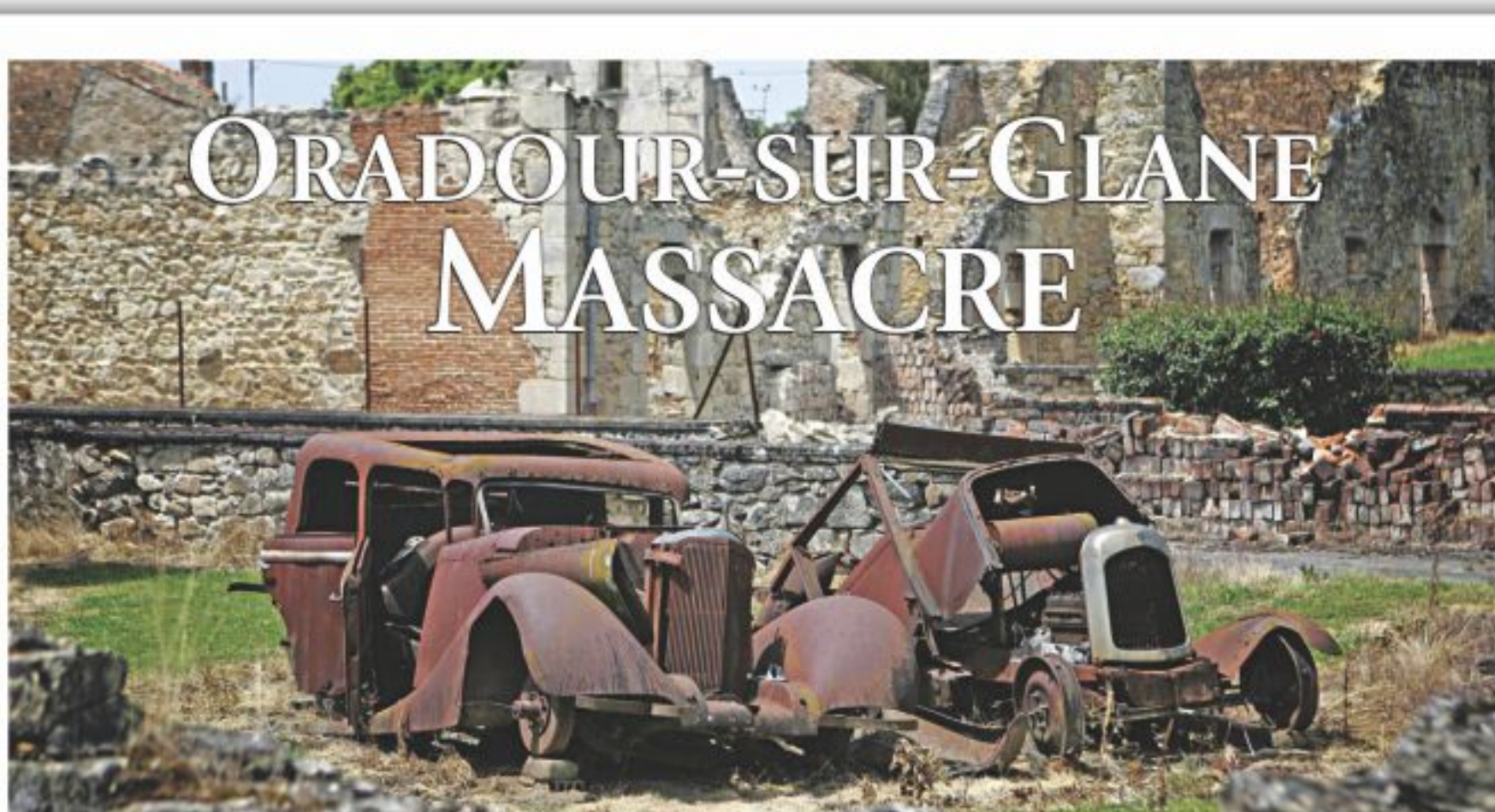
It had been scheduled as the second hearing in Morsi's trial, after an initial court appearance in November in which he denounced the tribunal and insisted he was still the country's president.

Morsi, who was toppled by the military in July, is accused of inciting the killings of opposition protesters in December 2012 outside the presidential palace.

Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood in a statement said the minister's excuse was "risible" and accused authorities of holding him in an undisclosed location. One of Morsi's lawyers told AFP he had not been allowed visits to the ousted leader for a month.

Morsi's trial is seen as a test for Egypt's new authorities, who have come under fire for heavy-handedness.

With more than 1,000 people killed since Morsi's overthrow and thousands of Islamists arrested, the chances of political reconciliation in the Arab world's most populous nation are ever more remote.



A photo taken on June 10, 2006 shows the remains of cars at the partially destroyed village of Oradour-sur-Glane, south-western France, where German SS Nazi troops massacred 642 people on June 10, 1944. The ruins of the village have been preserved just as they were after the massacre.

PHOTO: AFP

# German man charged over WWII atrocities in France

BBC ONLINE

An 88-year-old German man has been charged with involvement in one of the most infamous World War II massacres.

The charges relate to Oradour-sur-Glane in central France, where 642 people were murdered by SS troops in 1944.

Many were herded into a local church into which hand grenades were thrown before it was set on fire.

Prosecutors in Dortmund said the man had been charged over the murder of 25 people and with aiding and abetting the murder of several hundred.

The ruins of the village have been preserved just as they were after the massacre, as a permanent memorial. French leader General Charles de Gaulle said it should be a reminder of the cruelty of the Nazi occupation.

Some 60 soldiers were brought to trial in the 1950s. Twenty of them were

convicted but all were later released.

German investigators said last year they had opened a new inquiry into the massacre.

On Wednesday, the regional court in Cologne said: "The prosecutor's office in Dortmund has charged an 88-year-old from Cologne over the murder of 25 people committed by a group, and with aiding and abetting the murder of several hundred people."

The man was named in documents as Werner C, a former member of an SS armoured division.

His lawyer, Rainer Pohlen, told the Associated Press news agency his client was at the village but had nothing to do with the massacre.

On 10 June 1944, a detachment of SS troops had surrounded the tiny hamlet in the Limousin region.

Most of the victims were women and children. The men had been locked in a barn. Machine-gunners shot at their legs, then

## MASSIVE GRAFT SCAM EU expresses 'concern' at Turkey events

AFP, Brussels

The EU executive yesterday voiced concern about developments in Turkey and urged that any investigation into a massive graft scandal embroiling the government remain transparent and impartial.

The Turkish government has fired more than 700 police officers since mid-December as part of a mass purge launched in response to the corruption scandal rocking Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Asked to respond to events in Turkey, European Commission spokesman Olivier Bailly said "recent steps" in the country were "a cause of concern".

"We urge Turkey, as a candidate country committed to the political criteria of accession, including the application of the rule of law, to take all the necessary measures to ensure that allegations of wrongdoing are addressed without discrimination or preference in a transparent and impartial manner," said a Commission statement.

In the latest wave of sackings, Ankara on Thursday fired 16 police chiefs, a day after 350 police officers were fired in the capital Ankara.



An aerial view taken from a commercial plane captures Chicago and Lake Michigan on Tuesday. After days of an Arctic chill, the United States woke up to a break in the weather yesterday.

PHOTO: MAIL ONLINE

## SOUTH SUDAN CRISIS No breakthrough in peace talks

AFP, Juba

South Sudan's government and rebels were locked in fierce battles across the country yesterday, as peace talks taking place in neighbouring Ethiopia appeared to flounder.

A rebel spokesman indicated that there would be no imminent truce in the country unless the government freed a group of alleged coup plotters detained after the fighting began more than three weeks ago.

Military officials from both sides meanwhile said that a major battle for control of Bor, capital of Jonglei State and situated just north of the capital Juba, was still raging.

Fighting was also taking place in the oil-producing Upper Nile State, while the rebels said more troops previously based in Juba had defected from the government side and could launch an assault on the capital.

The spokesman for the national army, Philip Aguer, only confirmed that fighting continued to rage around Bor.

The fighting began on December 15 as a clash between army units loyal to South Sudan's President Salva Kiir and those loyal to ex-vice president Riek Machar, and has escalated into war between government troops and a loose alliance of ethnic militia forces and mutinous army commanders.

Thousands of people have already been killed, UN officials say, while more than 200,000 have fled their homes -- many of them seeking protection from overstretched UN peacekeepers amid a wave of ethnic violence pitting members of Kiir's Dinka tribe against Machar's Nuer

# Gates flays Obama over Afghan war

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Strained relations between the White House and its military leaders have been laid bare by former US defense secretary Robert Gates, who accuses President Barack Obama and his top civilian advisers of lacking faith in their own strategy for conducting the war in Afghanistan.

In a forthcoming memoir leaked to the New York Times and Washington Post that threatens to exacerbate current criticism of US policy in Afghanistan and Iraq, Gates -- who was first appointed to his post by former President George W Bush -- reveals, in a series of swipes that are surprisingly combative coming from such a senior former official, problems between the White House and the Pentagon that have made for troubling relations at the very highest levels.

"All too early in the administration," adds Gates, "suspicion and distrust of senior military officers by senior White House officials -- including the president and vice-president -- became a big problem for me as I tried to manage the relationship between the commander in chief and his military leaders."

Perhaps most damagingly, he also alleges that Obama did not believe in his own strategy for ending the war in Afghanistan.

"The president doesn't trust his commander, can't stand Karzai, doesn't believe in his own strategy, and doesn't consider the war to be his. For him, it's all about getting out," writes Gates.

Obama's policies toward both Afghanistan and Iraq are under fresh scrutiny this month, as Karzai has refused to sign a deal to retain a US military presence after the bulk of troops are withdrawn this year, and Iraq has faced renewed al-Qaeda militancy.

Gates, who is the only person to have served as defense secretary in both a Democratic and a Republican administration, contrasts the attitudes of two former bosses towards the military in ways that may provide ammunition to Obama's critics, while at the same time heartening supporters anxious about Pentagon influence on policy-making.

"The relationship between senior military leaders and their civilian commander in chief is often tense, and that was certainly my experience under both Bush and Obama," he concludes in the WSJ. "Bush was willing to disagree with his senior military advisers, but he never (to my knowledge) questioned their motives or mistrusted them personally. Obama was respectful of senior officers and always heard them out, but he often disagreed with them and was deeply suspicious of their actions and recommendations."



## Kejriwal refuses security after office attack

BJP blamed

NDTV ONLINE

Arvind Kejriwal said he or his Aam Aadmi Party would not reconsider their refusal to take security after an attack yesterday morning on the party's office that AAP leader Prashant Bhushan has blamed on the BJP.

A case has been registered in Ghaziabad and one person has been arrested for the attack.

The attackers, carrying flags of 'Hindu Raksha Dal', entered the AAP office near the chief minister's home, threw stones and broke windows with sticks.

One of the attackers said they were protesting Bhushan's remarks suggesting a referendum in Kashmir on whether the people want the army for internal security. The AAP leader withdrew those remarks after much criticism.

Bhushan said the same group attacked him at his office in 2011, and its leader, Tejinder Bagga, is a BJP activist.

Asked whether the vandalism warrants a rethink on his refusal to take any security, Kejriwal said, "I will not take security, not even for the party office."

# Arctic air eases grip on much of the US

AGENCIES

An arctic blast eased its grip on much of the US yesterday, with winds calming and the weather warming slightly a day after temperature records some more than a century-old shattered up and down the Eastern Seaboard.

The big chill started in the Midwest over the weekend, caused by a kink in the "polar vortex," the strong winds that circulate around the North Pole. The icy air covered about half the country by Tuesday, but it was moving north, returning more normal and warmer weather to most of the country.

In the Midwest and East, where brutal polar air has lingered over the past few days, temperatures climbed but were still expected to be below freezing.

In a phenomenon that forecasters said is actually not all that unusual, all 50 states saw freezing temperatures at some point Tuesday.

That included Hawaii, where it was -7°C atop Mauna Kea, a dormant volcano and across the Midwest and East, which felt temperatures colder than much of Antarctica. Over 190 million people were affected by the

polar vortex by the end of the day.

It was 1 degree (-17 Celsius) in Reading, Pa., and 2 (-17 Celsius) in Trenton, New Jersey. New York City plummeted to 4 degrees (-15 Celsius); the old record for the date was 6 (-14 Celsius), set in 1896.

Hell, Michigan, quite literally froze over when temperatures dropped to -26°C, although this was overshadowed by weather in Embarrass, Minnesota, where residents experienced the lowest temperature of all: -37°C.

With the bitter cold slowing baggage handling and aircraft refueling, airlines were forced to cancel more than 2,700 flights in the US, bringing the four-day total to more than 11,000.

Across the South, records were shattered in Birmingham, Alabama, when temperatures dipped to a low of -14°C, breaking the record of -11.7°C set in 1970. Atlanta also saw a record low of -14.5°C, 25 degrees lower than is average for this time of year.

Authorities have reported at least 21 deaths related to the cold conditions since the big freeze first began to set in on Sunday. Forecasters have predicted mercury will rise

## Women smokers: India ranks no 2

TNN, London

Indian women have now figured right on top in an infamous list - smoking.

In a shocking trend, India has now more female smokers - over 12.1 million - than any country except the United States. In 2012, female smoking prevalence was 3.2%, which is virtually unchanged since 1980.

Smokers in India consumed an average of 8.2 cigarettes per day as tobacco claims a million lives every year in the country.

In 2012, 967 million people smoked

every day globally compared with 721 million in 1980.

Around three in 10 men (31%) and one in 20 women (6%) now smoke daily compared with four in 10 men (41%) and one in 10 women (10%) in 1980.

These are the findings of the study "Smoking Prevalence and Cigarette Consumption in 187 countries, 1980-2012," which was published on January 8 in the Journal of the American Medical Association. The number of cigarettes smoked annually has grown to more than 6 trillion.



Devyani Khobragade

## Stop commercial activities

### India asks US embassy as diplomatic row continues

PTI, New Delhi

In further retaliatory steps over the arrest of diplomat Devyani Khobragade, India has asked the US to "discontinue" commercial activities being undertaken from its embassy premises in New Delhi by January 16.

India's action comes ahead of the January 13 deadline for the indictment in New York of Khobragade, deputy consul general in New York, on visa fraud charges.

Acting tough, the government has asked the embassy to stop commercial activities undertaken under the aegis of the American Community Support Association (ACSA), including restaurant/bar, video club, bowling alley, swimming pool, sports field, beauty parlour and gym.

The US has also been asked to provide the tax returns filed by it with Indian authorities for commercial activities which are afforded through ACSA to non-diplomatic persons, including private American citizens and their families, government sources said.

Indian authorities have cited the provision of such commercial facilities to non-diplomats as a violation of Article 41(3) of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961. The convention states that "the premises of the mission must not be used in any manner incompatible with the functions of the mission as laid down in the present convention or by other rules of general international law or by any special agreements