



Displaced Iraqis from the Yazidi community gathers around a fire to warm themselves at Dawodiya camp for internally displaced people in the Kurdish city of Dohuk, yesterday. Two-thirds of the hundreds of thousands of Syrian war refugees in Jordan are living in poverty, the head of the UN refugee agency warned Wednesday, calling for "massive" international aid.



## 'Cannot insult' other people's religion

Pope condemns killing in God's name

AFP, Manila

Pope Francis yesterday condemned any killing in God's name, but also insisted there were limits to freedom of speech and said other people's religion could not be insulted or mocked.

The pope made the comments in relation to attacks by Islamists on the offices of French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo last week in which 12 people died.

The killer brothers, Said and Cherif Kouachi, attacked the Charlie Hebdo staff because they were outraged over the magazine's repeated depictions of the Prophet Mohammed.

"To kill in the name of God is an absurdity," the pope told reporters aboard a plane travelling from Sri Lanka to the Philippines.

But the 78-year-old pontiff also said "each religion has its dignity" and "there are limits".

"You cannot provoke, you cannot insult other people's faith, you cannot mock it," the pontiff said.

"Freedom of speech is a right and a duty that must be displayed without offending."

The cover of the new Charlie Hebdo has sparked fresh protests in some parts of the Muslim world, where many find the depiction of the prophet highly offensive.

PHOTO: AFP

## Ebola cases declining in West Africa

BBC ONLINE

New Ebola cases in the three West African countries worst affected by the deadly outbreak of the virus are declining, weekly UN figures show.

Sierra Leone and Guinea both recorded the lowest weekly total of confirmed Ebola cases since August.

The death toll from the world's worst Ebola outbreak has reached 8,429 with 21,296 cases so far.

Earlier this month, the outgoing head of the UN team fighting Ebola, Anthony Banbury, said he believed cases of the virus would be brought down to zero by the end of 2015.

## US eases Cuba restrictions

AFP, Washington

The United States will ease travel and trade restrictions with Cuba from today, implementing last month's agreement to begin normalizing ties with the Cold War-era foe.

"Today's announcement takes us one step closer to replacing out-of-date policies that were not working and puts in place a policy that helps promote political and economic freedom for the Cuban people," Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew said yesterday.

While a US trade embargo remains in effect, the rule changes will ease restrictions on travel, raise limits on remittances, allow US banks to establish accounts in Cuban banks, facilitate telecommunications services with the island and allow exports of communications devices and supporting services.

US President Barack Obama and Cuba's President Raul Castro announced the historic agreement December 17, opening the way for a reconciliation after more than 50 years of hostile relations.

Roberta Jacobson, US assistant secretary

of state for hemispheric affairs, is leading a US delegation to Havana January 21-22 for talks on opening embassies in Havana and Washington.

Yesterday's announcement came just days after the State Department said Cuba had freed 53 prisoners, making good on a pledge to Washington.

The shift in policy, however, has come under fire from Republicans, who control both Houses of Congress, which must approve any move to lift the embargo.

Critics fault the administration for gaining little from Havana's communist leadership in the way of commitments to undertake democratic reforms.

But Obama argues that the US policy of isolating Cuba has failed, and greater trade and exchange could help foster change in an island in transition under the ageing Castros.

Among other things, they will make travel to Cuba easier for approved categories of Americans, like journalists, scholars, artists and athletes.

## France to protect all religions

Says Hollande; Germany vows to fight all kinds of extremism

AGENCIES

French President Francois Hollande yesterday vowed that his country will protect all religions, saying that Muslims are the main victims of fanaticism.

Speaking at the Arab World Institute, he said Islam was compatible with democracy and thanked Arabs for their solidarity over terrorism in Paris.

Attacks on Charlie Hebdo magazine, a Jewish supermarket, and a policeman killed 17 people last week.

Funeral ceremonies for five of the victims were held yesterday. Among them are two of Charlie Hebdo's best known cartoonists, Bernard Verlhac and Georges Wolinski.

Speaking yesterday morning, Hollande said that the French were united in the face of terror.

"French Muslims have the same rights as all other French," he said. "We

have the obligation to protect them.

"The law has to be enforced in a firm way in places of worship like churches, mosques, and synagogues."

"Anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic acts have to be condemned and punished."



Hollande said that radical Islam had fed off contradictions, poverty, inequality and conflict, and that "it is Muslims who are the first victims of fanaticism, fundamentalism and intolerance".

Hollande had declared Charlie

Hebdo magazine "reborn" after a new edition sold out in hours.

Yesterday, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu condemned the publication as an "open provocation".

In Pakistan on Thursday, lawmakers unanimously approved a resolution condemning the publication of the images, state-run TV reported.

In Germany, Chancellor Merkel addressed a special session of parliament to commemorate the victims of last week's attacks.

She said there was no place for violence and discrimination in Germany and the country would not be divided by attacks against people of any faith.

"Hate preachers, violent delinquents who act in the name of Islam, those behind them, and the intellectual arsonists of international terrorism will be rigorously fought with all legal means at the disposal of the state," she said.

## Tides are changing

Study finds sea levels rising at faster rate than predicted

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Global sea levels have risen faster than previously thought over the past century, suggesting that climate change is having a greater-than-expected impact on the rising oceans, a study has found.

A new way of estimating global sea levels since the start of the 20th Century found that the period 1900-1990 experienced a 30 per cent smaller rise than researchers had previously calculated.

This would mean that since 1990 there has been a greater-than-expected acceleration in annual sea levels, with the annual rate of increase more than doubling compared to the preceding 90 years, the scientists found.

Previous estimates suggested that the global mean sea-level rise over the 20th Century was between 1.5 and 1.8mms a year. However the new estimate, based on a revised statistical analysis of the data, suggests the annual rate was about 1.2mm between 1900 and 1990 and about 3mm per year since 1990.

"What this [study] shows is that sea-level acceleration over the past century has been greater than had been estimated by others. It's a larger problem than we initially thought," said Eric Morrow of Harvard University.

The goals of "action/2015" include an end to poverty in all its forms; ensuring fundamental rights, tackling inequality and discrimination and speeding up the transition to "100 per cent renewable energy".



A car drives during snowy conditions along the Dark Hedges tree tunnel near Ballymoney in Antrim, Northern Ireland, on Wednesday. More than 100 schools and nurseries have been shut and many roads closed as snow and wintry weather swept across the UK. Dozens of schools in Northern Ireland have also been closed because of bad weather.

PHOTO: AFP

## Extreme poverty could strike 1b

Campaign claims of catastrophe by 2030 if world leaders duck big issues

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Almost one billion more people face a life of extreme poverty if world leaders duck key decisions on inequality and climate change at two critical summits this year, according to a campaign launched on Wednesday.

An international coalition of more than 1,000 organisations warned that global poverty could rise for the first time in a generation if politicians make the wrong calls. The "action/2015" campaign will target the United Nations summit in New York in September, which will discuss a new agenda to replace the millennium development goals set in 2000, which expire this year. It is expected to include ending poverty and hunger,



improving health and education, making cities more sustainable, combating climate change and protecting oceans and forests.

The new campaign will also demand tough action to tackle man-made climate change when UN-led negotiations on a new global agreement reach a climax in Paris in December.

Research for the campaign by the

University of Denver shows that, if world leaders get it right, the number of people living in extreme poverty - less than 82p a day - could be reduced dramatically from more than one billion to 360m by 2030. By then, about 4 per cent of the global population would live in extreme poverty, down from 17 per cent today. This would make eradicating extreme poverty achievable for the first time in history.

However, if the two summits get it wrong, the number of people living in extreme poverty could increase to 1.2bn by 2030 - the first rise since 1993, and 886m higher than if strong action is taken. Under this scenario, one in three of the world's population would live on under £1.32 a day.

## US House votes to block Obama immigration plan

AFP, Washington

The US House on Wednesday defied President Barack Obama by adopting Republican measures blocking his controversial immigration reform efforts, but the bill is unlikely to survive in its current form.

Lawmakers voted 236 to 191 to fund the Department of Homeland Security through September 30, the end of fiscal year 2015.

But the bill included several amendments torpedoing the plan Obama unveiled last November, which authorized the administration to provide work permits for millions of undocumented workers.

One amendment would also freeze the program Obama launched in 2012 that currently shields some 600,000 undocumented minors from deportation.

Another would prohibit authorities from prioritizing deportation of criminals over that of other illegal immigrants who have

not committed serious crimes.

Some 11.3 million people were living illegally in the United States as of March 2013, the Pew Research Center estimated.

The White House dismissed Wednesday's vote as "political theater" and promised a presidential veto of the amended legislation, which has virtually no chance of passing the Senate where Democrats have a blocking minority.

Meanwhile, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee said on Wednesday that Republican and Democratic US lawmakers would press ahead with a plan for more sanctions on Iran, despite White House warnings that they risked derailing nuclear talks.

Lawmakers, who say they fear Obama administration negotiators may not take a hard enough line with Tehran, are also at work on a separate bill to have Congress approve any final agreement on Iran's nuclear program.



## Rough seas stop divers from reaching fuselage

AFP, Pangkalan Bun

Indonesian divers yesterday failed to reach the drowned main body of an AirAsia jet that crashed last month, as bad weather and rough seas hampered efforts to reach the remaining victims' bodies.

Flight QZ8501 went down on December 28 in stormy weather during what was supposed to be a short trip from the Indonesian city of Surabaya to Singapore, with 162 people on board.

After a lengthy search, a Singapore military vessel spotted the fuselage -- the main trunk of the plane -- at the bottom of the Java Sea on Wednesday.

So far just 50 bodies have been recovered, but authorities hope the main section will contain most of the bodies of passengers and crew.

Divers tried to reach the wreckage during the morning and again in the afternoon, but did not succeed in getting close enough to the fuselage, which is about 30 metres under water, to make an initial assessment.

Divers will go down again early on Friday, he added.

Earlier this week search teams discovered the jet's black boxes -- the flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder -- which should contain crucial information to help determine why the plane went down.

Indonesia's meteorological agency has said bad weather may have caused the crash, but only the black boxes will be able to provide definitive answers.