

NEWS IN  
brief

## Kim Jong-un 'to visit

## Russia'

BBC ONLINE

Russia says North Korea's leader has accepted an invitation to Moscow in May, South Korea's Yonhap reports. Kim Jong-un has not made any overseas visits since taking power in North Korea in late 2011 and all analysts had predicted a China visit first for him. If Kim Jong-un did choose to visit Moscow ahead of Beijing, the decision would be seen as a snub to Chinese President Xi Jinping.

## Militia frees Yemen leader's top aide

AFP, Sanaa

Shia militiamen yesterday freed a top aide to Yemen's president, whose kidnapping deepened the country's crippling political crisis. President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi's chief of staff Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak was handed over to a committee of mediators, 10 days after he was abducted, Hussen al-Shargabi told AFP.

## Thai 'Red Shirt' leader gets 2 yrs in jail

AFP, Bangkok

A Thai court yesterday sentenced the leader of the opposition Red Shirt movement to two years in prison for defaming a former PM Abhisit Vejjajiva, a move analysts said was the latest attack against critics of the military regime. The court convicted Jatuporn Prompan on two counts of defamation against Abhisit during speeches he made in October 2009.

## Sri Lanka reinstates impeached chief justice

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's new president yesterday restored the country's former chief justice after she was controversially impeached by the previous administration led by Mahinda Rajapakse. Lawyers welcomed Shirani Bandaranayake at the Supreme Court in Colombo, although the decision to reinstate her will likely be largely ceremonial as she is expected to step down today.

## Pak air strikes kill 76 militants

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's military said it killed 76 militants in two separate air strikes on Tuesday as part of a major offensive against the Taliban and other insurgents in a tribal region near the Afghan border. The conflict zone is off-limits to journalists, so there is no way to independently verify the number and identity of those killed.

## Three killed in anti-UN protest in Mali

AFP, Bamako

Three people were killed in northern Mali on Tuesday after a second day of demonstrations against the United Nations military mission in the restive west African nation, concurring sources said. Witnesses described a huge crowd of angry youths throwing stones and attempting to storm the MINUSMA headquarters in Gao to protest the UN taking control of a troubled area north of the city.

## Hopes fade for more AirAsia victims

AFP, Jakarta

Hopes yesterday faded of finding 92 victims still missing from an AirAsia plane crash as Indonesian search and rescue authorities said the remaining bodies could have been swept away or lost on the seabed. Flight QZ8501 went down in the Java Sea on December 28 in stormy weather with 162 people on board, during what was supposed to be a short trip from the Indonesian city of Surabaya to Singapore. So far just 70 bodies have been recovered.



A Kurdish fighter walks with his child in the center of the Syrian border town of Kobane, yesterday. Inset: A man looks at the war-ravaged town from a destroyed building. Kurds recaptured the strategic town on January 26 in a symbolic blow for the jihadists.

PHOTO: AFP

## Israel, Hezbollah in deadly clashes

UN peacekeeper among three killed; Tel Aviv accuses Iran of waging proxy war

AFP, Majidiya

Two Israeli soldiers and a Spanish UN peacekeeper were killed yesterday as Lebanon's Hezbollah and Israel exchanged fire in their most serious clashes in years.

The violence raised fears of another full-blown conflict erupting between the bitter enemies, who fought a month-long war in 2006.

The two soldiers were killed when Hezbollah fired an anti-tank missile at a military convoy in an Israel-occupied border area, the army said.

Seven other soldiers were wounded but local media said none had suffered life-threatening injuries.

Israel responded with "combined aerial and ground strikes" on southern Lebanon after the attack -- an apparent retaliation for a recent Israeli strike on the Golan Heights that killed senior Hezbollah members.

"Those behind today's attack will pay the full price," a statement quoted Israeli PM Netanyahu as

saying, accusing Iran of using Hezbollah as a proxy along Israel's northern flanks.

Lebanese security sources told AFP that Israeli forces had hit several villages along the border.

Clouds of smoke could be seen rising from Majidiya village, one of the hardest hit. There was no immediate information on casualties.

A 36-year-old Spanish corporal from the UN peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon was killed in the exchange of fire, officials said.

The 10,000-strong UNIFIL mission said it had observed six rockets fired towards Israel from southern Lebanon and that Israeli forces "returned artillery fire in the same general area".

Meanwhile, Syrian opposition figures and representatives of the regime of President Bashar al-Assad began talks in Moscow yesterday but there was little hope that they would make breakthrough in ending the country's brutal war.

The rise of Islamic State has changed the West's approach to



## Syria Talks begin in Moscow

## Jordan offers prisoner swap with ISIS

## Jihadist threatens to behead Obama

Syria and spurred hope that the warring sides might find common ground in the face of a mutual foe.

But expectations are low for the Moscow-sponsored talks -- aimed at restarting long-stalled peace negotiations to wind down the nearly four-year civil war -- as the main opposition group, the exiled National Coalition, has refused to attend.

Two previous rounds of talks in Geneva ended without success.

The United States has given its backing to the talks amid signs that Washington may be recalibrating its Syria policy to focus on the Islamic State jihadist group.

Meanwhile, Jordan yesterday offered to free a female jihadist in exchange for a Jordanian pilot held by the Islamic State group, which is threatening to execute the airman and a Japanese journalist.

"Jordan is ready to release the prisoner Sajida al-Rishawi if the Jordanian pilot is freed unharmed," Jordanian state television quoted a government spokesman as saying. It made no mention of Japanese hostage Kenji Goto.

ISIS, in a video released Tuesday, threatened to kill Kassasbeh and Goto unless Rishawi is freed within 24 hours.

Rishawi has been on death row since 2006 for her part in triple hotel bombings in Amman that killed 60 people. The pilot, Kassasbeh, was captured on December 24 after his F-16 jet crashed while on a mission against the jihadists over northern Syria.

FRESH IRAN SANCTIONS  
US Congress eases pressure

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama won breathing room Tuesday for his nuclear dialogue with Iran, as legislation calling for strict new sanctions against the Islamic republic lost some crucial support in Congress.

Senator Robert Menendez announced that he and several fellow Democrats had assured Obama they would not vote in support of new sanctions prior to March 24, shortly before a negotiations target date.

Ten senators signed on, including eight who co-sponsored the sanctions bill last year.

Under the interim agreement reached in November, representatives of the so-called P5+1 (United States, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany) and Tehran gave themselves until March 31 to reach a political agreement -- with a final deal due before July 1.

The Senate will not be in session in the final week of March. Without Democratic support, the Republican Senate majority would be unable to pass the sanctions measure.

## Rein in separatists, or face sanctions

## Ukraine, West tell Putin

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine's president yesterday appealed to Russia's Vladimir Putin and Washington threatened tougher measures should Moscow fail to rein in separatist fighters mounting a new offensive in the east of the ex-Soviet republic.

Petro Poroshenko's personal letter and US Secretary Jack Lew's warning to Putin came one day after European Union leaders unanimously backed pursuing more economic restrictions against Russia for its alleged meddling in Ukraine.

Western sanctions and a coinciding slide in the price of its vital oil exports have sent Russia into recession and seen Standard and Poor's slap a "junk" rating on Moscow's foreign currency debt.

The downgrade threatens to further alienate Western investors from Russia and assigns the economy with a failing grade not seen since the onset of Putin's 15-year rule.

Yet the pain appears to have done little to alter Putin's tough approach to his western neighbour or dent Russians' monumental trust in the Kremlin chief. A new eastern offensive has seen the separatists of the Lugansk and Donetsk regions try to link up their armies by taking over isolated pockets of land still controlled by government troops.

Poroshenko's office said the letter to Putin demanded that Moscow immediately rein in the rebel offensive and fulfil the terms of a long-ignored September peace plan it signed with Kiev and two top separatist leaders in Belarus. There was no immediate reply to Poroshenko's letter from the Kremlin.

## India sends FM to China after Obama visit

## Pakistan opposes new India-US nuclear deal

AFP, New Delhi

India's foreign minister will travel to China this weekend, New Delhi said yesterday, a day after Barack Obama ended a visit aimed at renewing US ties with the South Asian country.

Sushma Swaraj will hold three-way talks with her Chinese and Russian counterparts during the trip, her first official visit since she took office last year, the Indian foreign ministry said.

The talks follow a high-profile visit to New Delhi by the US president aimed at cementing ties between the two countries, which share an interest in curbing China's growing regional influence.

Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said they were aimed at enhancing "political trust".

India's new Prime Minister Narendra Modi is widely seen as



taking a more assertive line on China than the previous government.

But experts say he will be careful not to alienate China, whose investment he desperately needs as he tries to boost India's economy.

Obama and Modi took pains to demonstrate their personal rapport during the US president's visit.

China's state news agency Xinhua said it was a "superficial rapprochement", pointing to persistent differences on issues such as climate change.

Pakistan on Tuesday said it opposed a new nuclear deal signed between the US and India, saying it was detrimental to stability in South Asia.

The US and India in 2008 signed a landmark deal giving India access to civilian nuclear technology, but it had been held up since by US concerns over India's strict laws on liability in the event of a nuclear accident.

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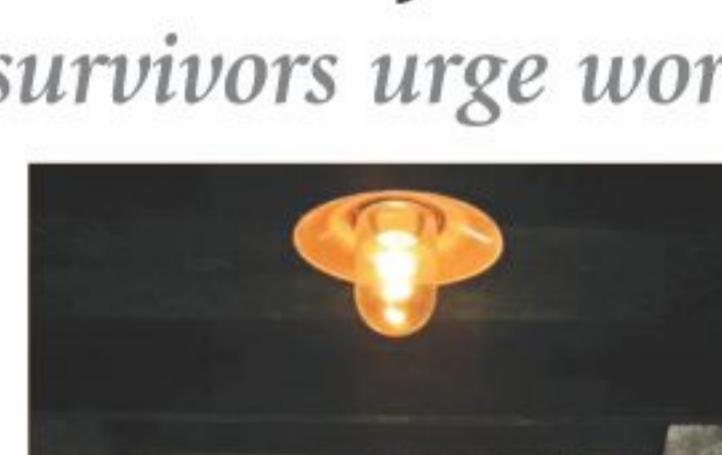
A passerby walks through snow-covered Times Square in New York. Travel bans were lifted and limited public transport resumed in New York as a powerful winter storm and strong winds dumped perilous snow across the northeastern United States on Tuesday.

that ferried Jews from across Europe to the gas chambers to lay wreaths and candles.

"I thought I'd be incinerated here, never to experience my first kiss, but somehow, a 14-year-old girl, I survived," Halina Birenbaum, who was born in Poland in 1929, told hundreds of dignitaries and fellow survivors, most of them in their eighties and nineties.

Several heads of state, including French President Francois Hollande, German President Joachim Gauck and Ukraine President Poroshenko were among a host of leaders to attend Tuesday's service in a large white tent at the entry to the camp.

The Nazis killed six million of pre-war Europe's 11 million Jews and more than half of its roughly one million Roma. Black Germans, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses and the mentally and physically disabled were also persecuted as "undesirables".



An Auschwitz gas chamber

-- a traditional Jewish ram's horn symbolising freedom -- sounded as participants prayed for the victims near the camp's red-brick entrance.

"We are in a place where civilisation collapsed," Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski told those gathered as he paid tribute to the Soviet troops who liberated the camp, where 1.1 million people, nearly all Jews, were exterminated.

"We do not want our past to be our children's future," said survivor Roman Kent, 86, his voice breaking with emotion.

The mournful wail of the "shofar"

No conspiracy theory, it's true  
Intervention in civil wars 'far more likely' in oil rich countries, finds major study

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Conspiracy theorists have long insisted that modern wars revolve around oil. Now research suggests hydrocarbons play an even bigger role in conflicts than they had suspected.

According to academics from the Universities of Portsmouth, Warwick and Essex, foreign intervention in a civil war is 100 times more likely when the afflicted country has high oil reserves than if it has none. The research is the first to confirm the role of oil as a dominant motivating factor in conflict, suggesting hydrocarbons were a major reason for the military intervention in Libya, by a coalition which included the UK, and the current US campaign against Isis in northern Iraq.

It suggests we are set for a period of low intervention because the falling oil price makes it a less valuable asset to protect.

The report's starker finding is that a third party is 100 times more likely to intervene when the country at war is a big producer and exporter of oil than when it has no reserves. "After a rigorous and systematic analysis, we found that the role of economic incentives

emerges as key factor in intervention," said co-author Dr Vincenzo Bove, of the University of Warwick. "Before the Isis forces approached the oil-rich Kurdish north of Iraq, Isis was barely mentioned in the news. But once Isis got near oil fields, the siege of Kobani in Syria became a headline and the US sent drones to strike Isis targets," he added.

The study, published in the Journal of Conflict Resolution, analysed 69 civil wars between 1945 and 1999, but did not examine foreign invasions. It noted that civil wars have made up more than 90 per cent of all armed conflicts since the Second World War and that two-thirds of these have seen a third-party intervention.

The researchers drew their conclusions after modelling the decision-making process of the third-parties' interventions. This assessed a wide range of factors such as their military power and the strength of the rebel army, as well as their demand for oil and the level of supplies in the target country. It found that the decision to intervene was dominated by the third-party's need for oil, far more than historical, geographic or ethnic ties.