

ISIS: 47% Americans back ground troops

AFP, Washington

The American public has grown more supportive of the US fight against the Islamic State group, with 47 percent backing ground troops against the jihadists, according to a survey released Tuesday. 49 percent opposed sending US ground troops. Four months ago, 39 percent favored the idea while 55 percent were against.

Notorious Indian gangster jailed for life

BBC ONLINE

A court in India's Mumbai city yesterday sentenced gangster Abu Salem, a key associate of crime lord Dawood Ibrahim, to life in prison for a 20-year-old murder. Salem was convicted earlier in the month for the March 1995 killing of builder Pradeep Jain, who was shot outside his Mumbai home in a property dispute. There are at least another 25 cases of murder, extortion and kidnapping registered against him.

Former UN climate chief in hospital

AFP, New Delhi

Rajendra Pachauri, who quit this week as head of the UN's climate science panel following sexual harassment claims, is recovering in a New Delhi hospital from a heart problem, his lawyer said yesterday. Pachauri, 74, resigned on Tuesday as chairman of the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in the wake of the claims made by the 29-year-old researcher at TERI.

Missing UK girls in Syria: British police

AFP, London

Three teenage girls from London feared to have run off to join the Islamic State (ISIS) group are believed to have crossed from Turkey into Syria, British police said Tuesday. Close friends Kadiza Sultana, 16, and 15-year-olds Shamima Begum and Amira Abase, boarded a flight from London Gatwick to Istanbul last Tuesday.

Obama vetoes Keystone XL pipeline

REUTERS, Washington

President Barack Obama on Tuesday, as promised, swiftly vetoed a Republican bill approving the Keystone XL oil pipeline, leaving the long-debated project in limbo for another indefinite period. The TransCanada Corp pipeline would carry 830,000 barrels a day of mostly Canadian oil sands crude to Nebraska en route to refineries and ports along the US Gulf. It has been pending for more than six years.

Anti-PM poem puts Miss Turkey in trouble

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A former model and Miss Turkey could face up to two years for social media posts that prosecutors have deemed to be critical of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Buyuksarac was detained last month for sharing a satirical poem on her Instagram account. She denies insulting Erdogan. She becomes the latest figure to face trial for insulting Erdogan, amid fear the country is lurching toward authoritarian rule.

Scores killed

AFP, Kabul

Avalanches triggered by heavy snow have killed more than 100 people in mountainous areas of northern Afghanistan, officials said yesterday, as rescuers battled to save dozens more trapped in the snow. Almost all of the victims were in Panjshir province, approximately 150 kilometres north of the capital Kabul, acting governor Abdul Rahman Kabiri told AFP. The avalanches came after two days of heavy snow destroyed more than 100 homes in the province and blocked main roads, making it difficult for rescue workers to reach the stricken villages. "Ordinary people and government employees are using shovels and bare hands to rescue those who are still trapped under the snow," Kabiri said, warning that the toll could rise without emergency help. "We have gathered 300 people to help with the rescue, but we don't have the equipment we need," he added. As temperatures plunged well below freezing, workers continued to toil into the night to rescue at least 28 people still believed to be trapped in their houses buried under the snow. Around 30 people were also suffering from frostbite and other injuries after being rescued, the acting governor said. "We will continue the rescue operation throughout the night," Kabiri added. One hundred have been killed in Panjshir province, while a further 11 people lost their



lives in the provinces of Bamyan, Badghis, Nangarhar and Laghman, officials said. Abdul Rahman Kalantari, head of disaster response at the Afghan Red Crescent Society, confirmed the heavy death toll and said they had already dispatched health teams to Panjshir. President Ashraf Ghani in a statement expressed his sorrow at the deaths and said he had ordered Afghan authorities to provide urgent assistance to those affected. Earlier in the day, Mohammad Aslam Sayas, the deputy head of the Afghan disaster management authority, said rescue teams were being dispatched to areas affected by the snowfall. Deadly avalanches are common in Afghanistan's mountainous areas in winter. One in the remote far northeast in 2012 left 145 people missing, presumed dead. In 2010, another avalanche killed 165 people in the high-altitude Salang Pass, which runs through the Hindu Kush mountain range that connects capital Kabul to the north.

ISIS erases 'history' in Mosul

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

ISIS militants have reportedly ransacked Mosul library, burning over a hundred thousand rare manuscripts and documents spanning centuries of human learning. Initial reports said approximately 8,000 books were destroyed by the extremist group. However, AL RAI's chief international correspondent Elijah J Magnier told The Independent that a Mosul library official believes as many as 112,709 manuscripts and books, some of which were registered on a UNESCO rarities list, are among those lost. Mosul Public Library's director Ghanim al-Ta'an said Isis militants then demolished the building using explosive devices. "People tried to prevent the terrorist group elements from burning the library, but failed," a local source told

IraqiNews.com.

Other reports indicated that ISIS militants later broke into the library and constructed a huge pyre of scientific and cultural texts as university students watched in horror. Among the documents believed lost are a collection of Iraqi newspapers from the beginning of the 20 century, maps, books and collections from the Ottoman period. A University of Mosul history professor told the Associated Press extremists began destroying the library - established in 1921 and symbolic of the birth of modern Iraq - earlier this month. He claimed ISIS members had inflicted particularly severe damage to the Sunni Muslim library, the library of the 265-year-old Latin Church and Monastery of the Dominican Fathers and the Mosul Museum Library - which contained manuscripts dating back to 5000BC.



A convoy of pro-Russian forces drives away, as agreed in a ceasefire deal, from the frontline near the eastern Ukrainian city of Starobeshevo in Donetsk region, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

MYSTERY DRONE ON PARIS SKY

Three Al-Jazeera journos arrested

BBC ONLINE

Three al-Jazeera journalists were arrested yesterday for the alleged illegal flying of a drone in Paris after being spotted by police in the Bois de Boulogne area. A spokesman for prosecutors said there was "no relationship for the moment" between the arrests and mysterious drone flights over the city at night. Drones flew over the Eiffel Tower and other landmarks five times for a second night running on Tuesday. Flying drones over the French capital is banned by law, and the latest sightings come at a time of heightened vigilance following last month's jihadist attacks. The offense carries a maximum one-year prison sentence and a €75,000 (£55,000; \$85,000) fine. A judicial source told AFP news agency of the three people arrested: "The first was piloting the drone, the second was filming and the third was watching." The names and nationalities of the journalists have not been released. Al-Jazeera is a Qatar-based satellite TV channel. Unidentified drones have been spotted across the country in the past year, most recently over the presidential palace and a bay in Brittany that houses nuclear submarines, as well as over nuclear power plants. The French authorities have opened an inquiry into the flights but government spokesman Stephane Le Foll has dismissed them as a security concern.

Mosque torched near Bethlehem

in hate crime

AFP, Bethlehem

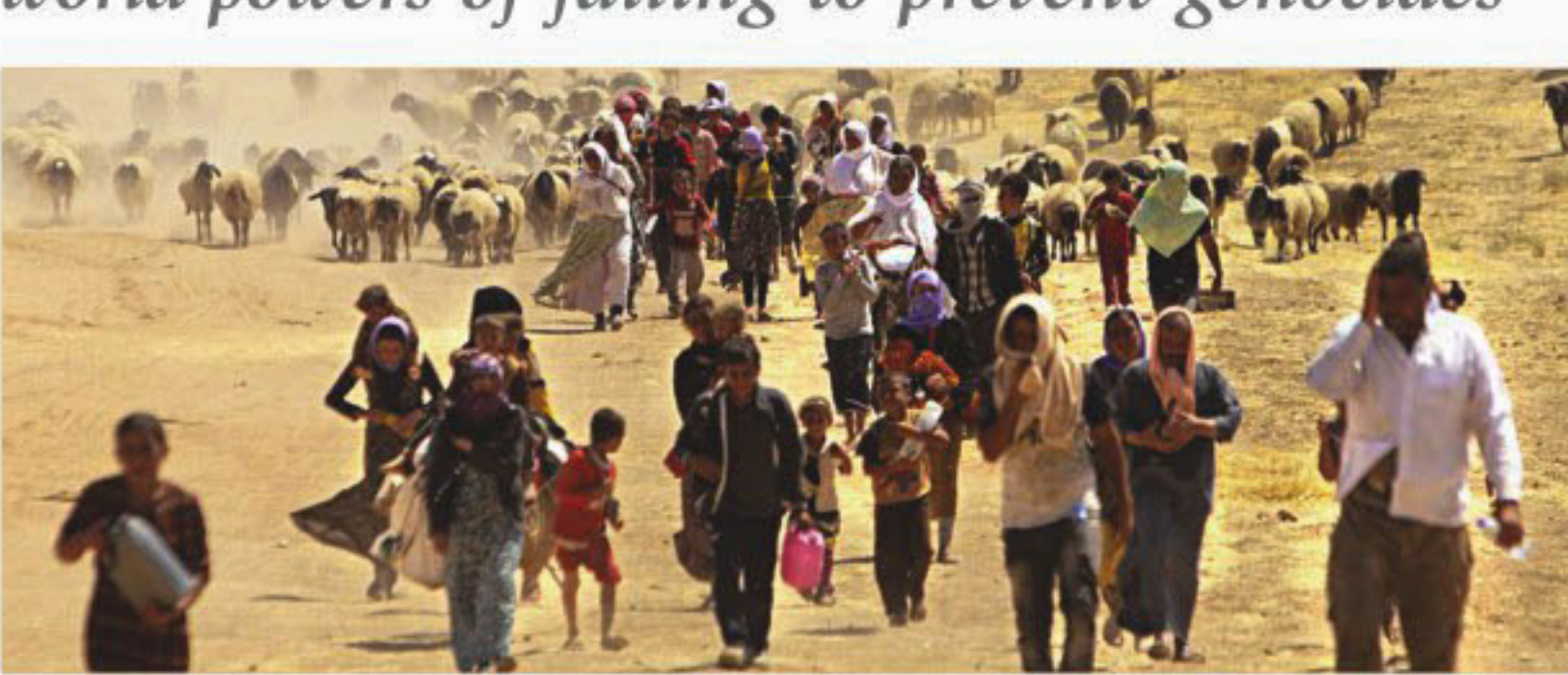
A West Bank mosque was set alight in a village near Bethlehem Tuesday with anti-Arab slogans in Hebrew sprayed on a nearby wall, Palestinian witnesses said. The fire was discovered in the mosque in Jaba village at around 4:00am. Villagers managed to put it out but there was some damage to the building. On a nearby wall, the perpetrators had sprayed the word "revenge" and other slogans in Hebrew alongside a Star of David. The attack and accompanying graffiti bore the hallmarks of a so-called "price tag" attack -- a euphemism for nationally motivated hate crime by Jewish extremists which generally targets Palestinians or Arab Israelis.

Surrender UN veto powers

Urges Amnesty accusing world powers of failing to prevent genocides

BBC ONLINE

Amnesty International yesterday urged the five permanent members of the UN Security Council to give up their power of veto in cases where atrocities are being committed. In its annual report, the rights group said the global response to an array of catastrophes in 2014 had been shameful. Amnesty's report said that 2014 had led to one of the worst refugee crises in history, with four million Syrians displaced by war and thousands of migrants dying in the Mediterranean. The group criticised the response of European leaders to the crisis. The outlook for 2015 was bleak, it added. Saying that 2014 had been a catastrophic year for victims of conflict and violence, Amnesty said world leaders needed to act immediately to confront the changing nature of armed conflict. Salil Shetty, the organisation's secretary general, said in a statement that the United Nations Security Council had "miserably failed" to protect civilians. Instead, the council's five permanent members - the UK, China, France, Russia and the US - had used their veto to "promote their political self-interest or geopolitical interest above the interest of protecting civilians," Shetty said. Part of the solution would be those



countries surrendering their Security Council veto on issues related to mass killing and genocide, Amnesty added. Last year, the veto was only used twice in the UN Security Council. In March, Russia vetoed a resolution condemning as illegal a referendum on the status of Crimea and in May Russia and China blocked a resolution condemning Syria. But many draft resolutions proposing tough action to deal with crises never reach the voting stage because they would almost certainly be vetoed. Amnesty also used its report to urge governments to adhere to a worldwide agreement on arms. **BARREL BOMBS KEEP FALLING ON SYRIANS** Meanwhile, Human Rights Watch accused Syrian government of dropping barrel bombs on hundreds of sites last year, violating a UN Security

Council resolution. The group said it had documented at least 450 locations targeted in the southern province of Deraa and another 1,000 in Aleppo in the north alone. Barrel bombs are large cylindrical containers filled with explosive. In an interview with the BBC two weeks ago, President Bashar al-Assad denied his forces used barrel bombs. But Human Rights Watch said evidence it had collected through analysing satellite images, photographs, videos and witness accounts contradicted Assad's assertion. HRW says the attacks had a "devastating impact on civilians, killing or injuring thousands of people". On Sunday, the Syrian Network for Human Rights reported separately that 6,163 civilians, including 1,892 children and 1,720 women, had been killed in

US issues travel warning for Pakistan

IAANS, Washington

The US has warned its citizens to defer non-essential travel to Pakistan due to a threat posed by foreign and local militants throughout the country. The US continues to provide consular services for all its citizens in Pakistan, Geo news reported a statement from the state department. "The US consulate general in Peshawar no longer offers consular services and the US consulate general in Lahore remains temporarily closed for public services," added the statement. Travel warnings have also been issued for Americans in Saudi Arabia and Algeria.

Ceasefire 'takes hold' in Ukraine

No deaths reported in last 24 hours

AFP, Kiev

A UN-backed ceasefire showed signs of taking hold in Ukraine on Wednesday, but tensions remained high after the US accused Russia of "lies" and Britain ordered a small troop deployment to train Kiev's forces. Russia in turn has warned it could cut off gas supplies to Ukraine by the weekend -- and, by extension, to parts of the European Union. For the first time since the European-brokered truce was imposed February 15, no deaths were reported in Ukraine's war zone by either side for the past 24 hours. Rebels insisted they were withdrawing artillery, rocket launchers and tanks from some areas, and journalists saw a column of howitzer guns being driven along a road near the separatist stronghold of Donetsk. Kiev says it will not carry out an arms pull-back until a full and "comprehensive" ceasefire is observed and has accused Russia of continuing to send military hardware to rebels. British Prime Minister David Cameron separately announced his country was sending up to 75 soldiers to Ukraine on a "training mission", with some leaving for Kiev this week. He said they would not be sent to the conflict zone.



AAP pledges free water, cheap power

AFP, New Delhi

New Delhi's new chief minister Arvind Kejriwal yesterday announced his government will halve power bills and provide free water to poorer households after his anti-corruption party won a landslide election this month. Households in the Indian capital consuming less than 20,000 litres of water per month will pay nothing from March 1, while those using less than 400 units of electricity will see their bills halved, the party's deputy chief minister told a news conference. "We did what we said. Have halved the power rates and made water free... will also fulfil other promises, just keep giving us your support," Kejriwal said on Twitter in Hindi. The populist policies are the first since Kejriwal won power and fulfil pledges he made during the election campaign to help millions of struggling families in the Indian capital make ends meet. Kejriwal's government estimates the measures will cost about \$270 million annually, but did not detail how they will be paid for. Kejriwal's upstart Aam Aadmi (Common Man) Party, or AAP, trounced Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the polls, handing the premier his first defeat since storming to victory at last year's general election.

Ex-president's arrest on terror charges will deepen crisis

Warns Transparency International after India, US voice concern

AFP, Colombo

A political crisis in the Maldives will deepen unless parties hold emergency talks following the arrest of ex-president Mohamed Nasheed on terrorism charges, an anti-corruption watchdog said yesterday. The Maldivian branch of Transparency International also urged all sides to uphold the law ahead of a protest rally against Nasheed's detention planned for Friday in the upmarket holiday destination's capital Male. "Transparency Maldives fears that if the rising political tensions are not resolved peacefully and within the constitutional remit, the political situation of the country may deteriorate further," the group said in a statement. Nasheed, the country's first democratically elected leader who was forced to step down three years ago, was denied bail on Monday after being

arrested on what critics have labelled trumped-up charges. Britain, the former colonial power, urged its citizens to remain vigilant and avoid large crowds ahead of the

POLITICAL INTOLERANCE IN MALDIVES



rally being organised by Nasheed's Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). The Maldives is a major tourist attraction, but political unrest has dented its image as a peaceful island paradise in recent years. MDP spokesman Hamid Abdul

Ghafoor said the planned protest was an attempt to press for Nasheed's release and draw attention to the government's crackdown on dissent. The United States and regional power India have voiced concern over the arrest of Nasheed who was forcibly dragged into court on Monday and denied legal access and medical treatment. Nasheed is being prosecuted under anti-terror laws over his 2012 arrest of a judge accused of corruption when he was president. The arrest led to street protests which culminated in a police and military mutiny that forced Nasheed to resign in February 2012. Charges against Nasheed were dropped on February 16, but he was re-prosecuted on Sunday amid growing opposition to the government of President Abdulla Yameen. Yameen's spokesman on Tuesday denied the move was politically motivated, saying the matter was being handled "according to the law".