

# SINGAPORE PRAYS FOR FOUNDING FATHER LEE KUAN YEW

People pay their respects after placing flowers and messages outside the Singapore General Hospital where elder statesman Lee Kuan Yew remains critically ill in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in Singapore, yesterday. The health condition of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew "has worsened", the government said, as the critically ill founding leader of the city-state entered his seventh week in hospital.



PHOTO: AFP



# NEWS IN brief

## Ukraine clashes kill 3

AFP, Kiev  
Two Ukrainian soldiers and one civilian were killed in the country's rebel-held east as clashes rattled an official truce aimed at ending nearly a year of fighting, Kiev and separatists said yesterday. According to both sides, skirmishes continued to flare around Shyrokyne, a village close to the strategic port Mariupol, Kiev's largest remaining stronghold in the rebel-held east.

## 7 children killed in NY house blaze

AFP, New York  
A house fire in Brooklyn, New York, killed seven children, possibly all related, early yesterday, police said. The victims are between the ages of five and 14 and were not immediately identified, but police told AFP "it's very possible" they all belonged to the same family. Police said the cause of the blaze was under investigation.

## Pakistan releases 57 Indian fishing boats

AFP, Islamabad  
Pakistani authorities yesterday released 57 Indian fishing boats held for nearly a year as a goodwill gesture following a visit by New Delhi's top diplomat to Islamabad this month. The boats, which were being held by the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA), were towed to the two countries' maritime border before being taken over by Indian authorities, Pakistan's foreign ministry said in a statement.

## Indian forces kill two 'Kashmir rebels'

AFP, Srinagar  
Government forces in Indian Kashmir on Saturday killed two suspected rebels, a day after two other militants were shot dead in a gun battle with police. On Friday, two armed militants hijacked a private jeep and killed the driver before lobbing grenades into a police station about 20 kilometres from Samba sector before being shot dead by forces.

# HADI ON DEADLY MOSQUE ATTACKS Blasts aim to drag Yemen into 'chaos'

AFP, Aden

Yemen's embattled president said suicide bombings that killed at least 142 people at Shiite Huthi mosques were aimed at dragging the country into "chaos, violence and internal fighting".  
The Islamic State (ISIS) jihadist group claimed responsibility for Friday's attacks on two mosques in the capital Sanaa and the Huthi militia's northern stronghold of Saada. President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi has taken refuge in the southern city of Aden having escaped house arrest in the Huthi-controlled capital last month.  
In a letter to the families of the victims, which also included 351 wounded, he condemned the attacks as "terrorist, criminal and cowardly".  
"Such heinous attacks could only be done by the enemies of life," who want to drag Yemen into "chaos, violence and internal fighting," said the letter released by his office late Friday.  
"Shiite extremism, represented by the armed Huthi militia, and Sunni extremism, represented by al-Qaeda, are two sides of the same coin, who do not wish good and stability for Yemen and its people," Hadi wrote.  
The Huthis seized Sanaa in September, and have since tightened their grip on government installations, aided by forces loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

# US man shot after airport machete attack

AFP, Washington

New Orleans police shot a man three times at the Louis Armstrong International Airport Friday after he attacked border agents with a machete and wasp spray, officials said.  
The suspect, Richard White, struck one border agent with a machete, cutting her right arm, and targeted two other agents with the spray, Jefferson Parish Sheriff Newell Normand told reporters.  
A police officer shot White three times as he tried to run away, striking him in the chest, face and thigh. Newell said White was in hospital where he remained unresponsive.  
It was not clear whether White was a passenger or what his motivation was, Normand said.

# Iran nuke deal within reach, says Rohani

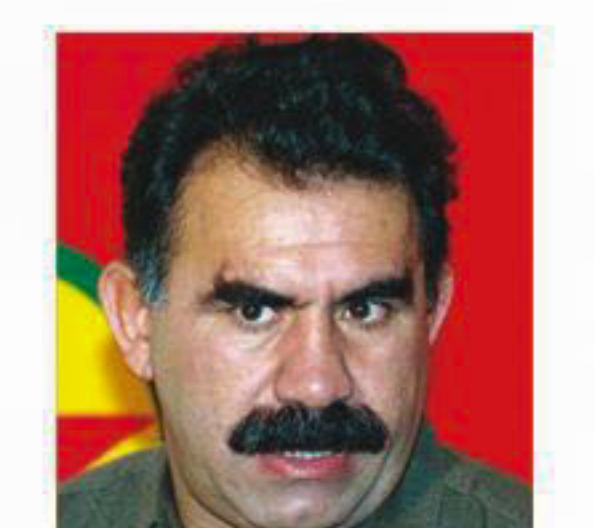
Kerry dismisses split with France, vows not to hurry

AGENCIES

A nuclear deal with international powers on Iran's nuclear program is within reach and achievable, Iranian President Hassan Rohani told reporters yesterday.  
Rohani said negotiators from both sides have found new common ground in recent days, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported.  
The president believes that "clinching a general deal is easy," according to the IRNA story, but hammering out agreements on certain details "will be a very tough and complicated job."  
Iran has been largely isolated for years for its nuclear program, one that its leaders say the country wants for peaceful purposes. Others, like the United States, have challenged that assertion and instituted strict sanctions, fearing that Tehran actu-



ally plans to develop nuclear weapons.  
After years of basic stalemates, Iranian officials and representatives of the P5+1 -- which includes Germany as well as the five permanent members of the UN Security Council in the United States, Russia, China, France and Britain -- have managed to reach short-term agreements as they try to strike a larger deal.  
The sides have been working toward that end recently in Lausanne, Switzerland, hoping to get a framework pact in place ahead of a March 31 deadline.  
Meanwhile, US Secretary of State John Kerry yesterday said that world powers were "united" in their approach to nuclear talks with Iran despite speculation of splits with France, and stressed that he would not rush into a bad deal.



# Kurdish chief urges end to Turkey revolt

AFP, Ankara

Jailed Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan yesterday called for Kurds to hold a historic congress to end a decades-long armed struggle against the Turkish authorities that has claimed tens of thousands of lives.  
In an eagerly-anticipated message for the traditional Kurdish New Year, Ocalan however stopped short of setting out a clear road map for disarmament of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) rebels as had been anticipated in some quarters.  
In the message read out by a pro-Kurdish lawmaker to hundreds of thousands of supporters in the south-eastern city of Diyarbakir, Ocalan said that the armed struggle had been "painful" and could no longer be maintained.  
He said the congress -- which would likely involve all the Kurdish political forces in Turkey -- would decide "a social and political strategy which will determine our history".  
Ocalan is serving a life sentence on the prison island of Imrali in the Sea of Marmara following his sensational arrest by Turkish agents in Kenya in 1999.  
The Turkish government welcomed the message.  
At least 40,000 people have been killed on both sides since the PKK formally began its insurgency in 1984 demanding self-rule for Turkey's Kurds who make up around 20 percent of the population.



A woman in traditional Kurdish dress flashes the "V for Victory" sign as she poses during a gathering to celebrate Newroz, the Kurdish New Year, in the southeastern Turkish city of Diyarbakir, yesterday. Newroz, which means "new day" in Kurdish and marks the first day of Spring, is also celebrated in Iran, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Albania, Bahrain, Georgia, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, as well as among various other Iranian and Turkic peoples in Iraqi Kurdistan, Syria, Lebanon, Pakistan, India, northwestern China, the Caucasus, the Crimea, and the Balkans.

PHOTO: AFP

# Boko Haram retreats from Nigeria town

Leaves mass of throat-slit corpses

REUTERS, Damasak

Soldiers from Niger and Chad who liberated the Nigerian town of Damasak from Boko Haram militants have discovered the bodies of at least 70 people, many with their throats slit, scattered under a bridge, a Reuters witness said.  
In what appeared to be an execution site for the Islamist group, the bodies were strewn beneath the concrete bridge on one of the main roads leading out of the town. At least one was decapitated.  
The bodies were partially mummified by the dry desert air, while grass has begun to grow around the corpses, suggesting that the killings had taken place some time ago.  
Boko Haram has killed thousands of people in a six-year insurgency aimed at establishing an Islamic caliphate in northeast Nigeria. Damasak was seized by the Islamist group in November but recaptured by troops from Niger and Chad on Saturday as part of a multinational effort to wipe out the militants.  
Chadian soldiers, who said the bodies were discovered on Thursday, spoke of at least 100 corpses in the area around the dry river bed. A Reuters witness was able to count at least 70.  
A strong smell of decomposition in many parts of town suggested there could be more bodies concealed there, the Reuters witness said.



# Kath Viner takes charge as The Guardian editor

AFP, London

British newspaper The Guardian announced Friday that Kath Viner, the head of its US operations, had been appointed to take over as editor-in-chief later this year. Viner becomes the 12th editor and the first woman to run the left-leaning daily in its 194-year history. She will replace Alan Rusbridger, who in 20 years as editor-in-chief has helped transform the paper from a traditional broadsheet to an international digital operation.

# MEERUT RIOTS India court clears 16 cops of killing Muslims

AFP, New Delhi

A court in New Delhi yesterday cleared all sixteen policemen accused of murdering dozens of Muslims 27 years ago in a north Indian city, a lawyer said.  
More than 40 Muslims were killed in 1987 during riots in Meerut city, some 70 kilometres northeast of New Delhi, after local armed forces picked them up for forcing a local mosque.  
The police allegedly then threw the victims into a canal.  
"They all, meaning the 16, have been acquitted. The court gave them the benefit of doubt, saying there was lack of evidence," prosecution lawyer Satish Tamta told AFP.  
The initial chargesheet was filed in 1996 naming 19 policemen for a string of offences, including murder and conspiracy. But three of the men died during trial.

# Shia militias, not ISIS, top threat to MidEast region

Says former CIA chief Gen David Petraeus

CNN ONLINE

The biggest threat to Iraq's long-term stability isn't ISIS, according to Gen David Petraeus, who led the US surge during the Iraq War.  
Instead, Petraeus said the Iran-backed Shia militias who are helping to fend off ISIS are "the foremost threat" to long-term stability in Iraq, according to an interview with the Washington Post. The comments provide the most expansive glimpse yet into how Petraeus may be helping to shape the Obama administration's strategy in Iraq as he continues to advise the National Security Council on the issue.  
Those militias, many funded and trained by Iran, have been an important part of efforts to push ISIS out of Syria, but they have also been accused of war crimes -- allegedly murdering not just ISIS fighters, but also Sunni civilians.  
"They have, to a degree, been both part of Iraq's salvation but also the most serious threat to the all-important effort of once again getting the Sunni Arab population in Iraq to feel that it has a stake in the success of Iraq rather than a stake in its failure," Petraeus told the Post. "Longer term,

Iranian-backed Shia militia could emerge as the preeminent power in the country, one that is outside the control of the government and instead answerable to Tehran."  
Petraeus' comments come as the US's strategy to defeat ISIS is facing increased scrutiny on Capitol Hill as lawmakers debate how to enshrine the US's war against ISIS into legislation formally authorizing military force.  
Lawmakers pressed the US's top national security officials during a hearing last week on the growing influence of Iran in the region and the long-term implications for security -- something Defense Secretary Ash Carter and Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen Martin Dempsey said raised legitimate concerns.  
The situation in Syria is also one Petraeus said he is "profoundly worried about." "Until it is capped, it is going to continue to spew radioactive instability and extremist ideology over the entire region," said the former CIA director. "Any strategy to stabilize the region thus needs to take into account the challenges in both Iraq and Syria. It is not sufficient to say that we'll figure them out later."



# Ebola-free Liberia reports new case

AFP, Monrovia

Liberia Friday confirmed its first new Ebola case in more than a month in a setback that hopes the country would soon be officially declared free of the deadly disease.  
The country was the hardest hit at the peak of the epidemic in west Africa and has seen more than 4,000 deaths in all, but was at an advanced stage in its recovery and was expected to be declared Ebola-free by mid-April before the latest case in the capital Monrovia.  
The World Health Organization (WHO) announced earlier this month that no new case of the deadly virus had been registered in Liberia since February 19.  
Since the outbreak began in December 2013, 24,753 people in nine countries have been infected with the virus, and 10,236 of them have died, according to the latest figures.

# Homeless man's floating home

AFP, Rio De Janeiro



Thousands of people eke out an existence living in the streets of Rio de Janeiro, a giant city racing to overhaul itself ahead of next year's Olympics.  
But sometimes, even in a city of six million with a huge gulf between rich and poor, beggars can be choosers -- at least when it comes to ensuring one has a nice view.  
Hamilton Cunha Filho, a 30-year-old from the impoverished northeast, arrived years ago but is jobless.  
Instead, he lives on a small raft constructed from assorted trash.  
His unusual, plastic-roofed dwelling affords him an unbeatable view of the spectacular Guanabara Bay with the iconic Sugarloaf Mountain behind it.

As evening falls, Hamilton lights a candle and places it carefully inside a bottle to make the raft visible and ensure passing boats do not ram him.  
A quick swim to shore allows him to wash clothes.  
With the town hall looking to clean up the city's image as South America's first ever Games loom ever larger, Hamilton found local authorities had knocked down a shoreline dwelling he had constructed from boxes placed on stones.  
So he decided to move out of reach with his new floating home.  
His raft is a cheap alternative to the soaring cost of accommodation in Rio, where roughly a third of the population live in slums known as favelas often lacking proper sanitation and other basic facilities.