

Cuba off from US terror list

AFP, Washington

The United States removed Cuba from its blacklist as a state sponsor of terrorism yesterday, in a landmark move aimed at paving the way towards normalizing ties frozen for half a

The decision means Cuba will now have better access to US banking facilities and American aid, and a ban on arms exports and sales is also lifted. It also wipes out an international stigma which Havana --

on the blacklist since 1982 -- has long contended was groundless and unfair. US President Barack Obama had notified Congress ear-

lier this year that he intended to remove Havana from the list, giving lawmakers 45 days to object, which elapsed Friday. Now Secretary of State John Kerry "has made the final

terrorism, effective today, May 29, 2015," the State Department said in a statement. "The rescission of Cuba's designation as a state sponsor

decision to rescind Cuba's designation as a state sponsor of

of terrorism reflects our assessment that Cuba meets the statutory criteria for rescission," the statement said. "While the United States has significant concerns and

disagreements with a wide range of Cuba's policies and actions, these fall outside the criteria relevant to the rescission of a state sponsor of terrorism designation." It is just the latest ground-breaking development in a fastmoving rapprochement between the Cold War foes, after

Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro agreed in December to restore relations that have languished in the doldrums since 1961. Obama has already made it easier for 12 categories of Americans to visit the communist island, no longer requiring them to apply for a license before traveling. But regular

tourism remains off-limits. US companies are now allowed to invest in Cuba's tiny but growing private sector, which emerged under modest economic reforms launched by Castro.

In March, the two countries re-established a direct telephone link and the US Treasury Department removed sanctions on some 60 individuals, shipping companies and trading firms.

So far teams from the two countries have met four times seeking to work out the terms for re-opening their embassies. Officials say the talks have made progress, but nothing concrete was announced at the last round, held in Washington a week ago, and sticking points remain.

The island is still subject to a US trade embargo put in place in 1962, which Obama has called on Congress to lift. Yesterday's decision means only Iran, Sudan and Syria remain

on the State Department's blacklist of state sponsors of terrorism. The diplomatic path has been advancing since December, and Castro and Obama also held a historic meeting in Panama in April on the sidelines of a regional summit.

Suu Kyi sidesteps eyeing political gains

AFP, Yangon

Aung San Suu Kyi was once an unassailable champion of Myanmar's powerless. But the opposition leader's refusal to speak up for a persecuted Muslim minority at the heart of a migrant crisis has cast doubt over her moral force -- and even earned a gentle rebuke from fellow Nobel laureate the Dalai Lama.

Images of hungry migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh hauled from vessels to Southeast Asian shores after months at sea have spurred calls for immediate humanitarian action to be matched by moves to address the root causes of the crisis. Attention has swung to one of the

key departure points for the migrants, strife-torn Rakhine state in western Myanmar, where tens of thousands of stateless Rohingya Muslims live in dire displacement camps desperate to leave. But as Myanmar's government

wavers between offering some assistance to stricken migrants and denying any responsibility for their exodus, international rights groups looking for a moral beacon have found little support from Suu Kyi. Her absence from the discussion

has been so conspicuous that the Dalai Lama this week urged Suu Kyi to throw her weight behind the Rohingya.

The Buddhist spiritual leader said he recognised the difficulty of her position in a nation where expressing sympathy for the Muslim group brings ready condemnation.

actor preparing to lead her opposition party into elections later this year. The Nobel laureate "has been a

huge disappointment in her continuous failure to stand up for human rights" in Myanmar, said Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director for

MIGRANT CRISIS IN SOUTH EAST ASIA



"But in spite of that I feel she can do something," he added.

Suu Kyi spent more than 15 years locked up by the former junta for her tireless campaign for democracy in Myanmar. Her personal sacrifices have won her a place among the world's most lauded peacemakers.

Yet since her release from house arrest in 2010, Suu Kyi's role has been recast from a defiant human rights defender to a hard-nosed political

While Myanmar's government carries the main responsibility for the plight of the Rohingya in the country, Robertson lamented the veteran activist's failure to use her "moral authority" to press for a better deal for them.

But just months away from the best chance of electoral victory of her political career, Suu Kyi faces pressure in the opposite direction, as public opinion inside Buddhist-

majority Myanmar hardens against a Muslim minority widely viewed as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

Championing the Rohingya "would probably be the only situation where (Suu Kyi's party) would run the risk of not winning the elections ... speaking up is not an option for her at the moment," said

Myanmar analyst Mael Raynaud.

The plight of the Rohingya, one of the world's most persecuted minorities, has worsened dramatically since 2012 when communal bloodshed left scores dead and some 140,000 people confined in miserable camps.

The violence triggered a wave of deadly anti-Muslim unrest in Myanmar and coincided with rising Buddhist nationalism that has further entrenched animosity towards the minority. Encircled by a hostile Buddhist

majority, which also restricts their travel and work, the Rohingya have taken to boats in increasing numbers headed for Malaysia. Against a backdrop of visceral

hatred towards the Rohingya and looming polls, Suu Kyi must play an "intricate game of political chess", says Peter Popham, author of a biography of the opposition leader.

Hopes for migrants after sea ordeal AFP, Bayeun

Images of the starving, desperate migrants pleading for help from their green wooden boat off Thailand caused shockwaves and focused global attention on Asia's human-trafficking

But just over a week after being rescued off Indonesia, the boat people appear on the road to recovery. AFP tracked down some of the Rohingya and Bangladeshis, and found many relaxed, dressed in fresh clothes and less gaunt and emaciated.

They were being cared for at a camp of tents and derelict buildings in Bayeun, in the staunchly Islamic province Aceh, where there has been an outpouring of sym-

pathy for the migrants. After weeks with little food and water at sea, they are now being given three meals a day and local Acehnese are bringing regular donations of clothes, toiletries and snacks.

Rohingya migrant Abdul Rasvid, 37, was pictured earlier this month looking forlorn and clutching his belly, dressed in a dirty white vest. Now in the Indonesian camp, he looked well fed and was dressed in a clean, white Tshirt, jeans and a prayer cap.

It was the same story with approximately 400 migrants on the green wooden boat which became emblematic of the migrant crisis after it was found drifting in the sea off Koh Lipe, Thailand. The Thai authorities denied the boat to land in its territory as was Malaysia. Fear grew over the fate of 400 ill-fated fortune seekers as the boat remained missing for days. Acehnese fishermen spotted the desperate migrants on May 20 and ferried them to shore, joining more than 1,000 others who have arrived in the province this month. Southeast Asian nations, particularly Myanmar, have come in for criticism for their failure to



Saudi security forces inspect the site of a suicide bombing that targeted the Shiite Al-Anoud mosque in the coastal city of Damman, yesterday. The Islamic State jihadist group claimed the suicide bombing that killed at least three people.

РНОТО: AFP



Germany open to reforms to keep UK in EU

AFP, Berlin

Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday vowed Germany would play a "constructive" role to help keep Britain in the EU and work with Prime Minister David Cameron to reform the 28-nation bloc.

Offering a warm and conciliatory tone to visiting Cameron she said Berlin was open to a compromise on London's demands.

"Where there's a will, there is a way," said Merkel, stressing that Germany would not rule out changing EU founding treaties, a tricky issue since it requires approval by all member states.

As both sides discuss a list of issues, "you cannot say that treaty change is a total impossibility," she said at a joint news conference.

Cameron, after his second-term election win this month, has vowed to push strongly for EU reforms and "a better deal for Britain" ahead of an in-out membership referendum

he has promised by 2017. Merkel said that "on the German side there is a clear hope -- and of course this

will be decided by the British people -- that Britain will stay on as a member of the European Union". Cameron was in Berlin as

part of a European charm offensive that earlier took him to The Hague, Paris and Warsaw, to sell his shopping list of proposed reforms.

These included stricter requirements for EU migrants in claiming British social welfare benefits, and for London to be able to opt out of an EU commitment to "ever closer union".

ISIS seizes key airport in Libya

Syria rebels tighten grip on Idlib; blasts at Baghdad hotels kill 9

AFP, Tripoli

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to dig a hole in the desert.

been shot in Syria.

ting' his wrongdoings.

The Islamic State jihadist group has seized control of the airport in the city of Sirte after forces of a Tripoli-based Libyan government withdrew, a spokesman said yesterday.

Mohamed al-Shami, whose government is not recognised by the international community, said its forces pulled out late Thursday from the airport which had "fallen into the hands of the ISIS organisation".

He said the forces had pulled out of the airport, which is also a military base called Gardabiya, to redeploy "as part of an operation to secure" two

areas east and west of Sirte. It was the first time that ISIS in Libya has recorded such a military gain.

Incredible brutality

A prisoner in an orange jumpsuit is forced to dig his own grave

The video released by the terror group shows the man

The heavily-choreographed footage - the latest in of a

The prisoner, whose face and upper body are covered in

Speaking in Arabic, he says he is from al-Qaryatayn, a

The captive, who gives his name as Ziad Abdel'al Abu

Tarek, is filmed walking barefoot in an orange jumpsuit across

barren land to a pick axe and shovel, before digging the grave.

A white truck pulls up behind him bearing the recognisable

black ISIS flag, and the footage then cuts to a shot of him

kneeling on the ground in front of his executioner. The video

long line of gruesome beheading videos - appears to have

cuts and bruises, is first made to speak to the camera 'admit-

town in central Syria, and describes his work as a spy.

also shows the aftermath of the barbaric killing.

suspected of being a Syrian spy using a pick axe and shovel

before he is beheaded in the latest shocking video from ISIS.

south of Sirte, hometown of late group last week. dictator Muammar Gaddafi who was ousted and killed in Libya's 2011 uprising.

In Syria, troops retreated as regime warplanes bombarded al-Qaeda-led rebel fighters yesterday, a day after the insurgents overran the last government-held city in the key northwestern province of Idlib.

Opposition forces now control the vast majority of Idlib after Al-Nusra Front and its allies in the so-called Army of Conquest overran Ariha and surrounding villages on Thursday.

It was the latest blow to loyalist forces who have been battling myriad rebel groups for four years, after the fall of the ancient city of Palmyra to

Gardabiya is located 20 kilometres the Islamic State (ISIS) extremist

Abdel Rahman said 13 regime loyalists had been executed by rebels inside Ariha, and another 18 were killed in fighting on its outskirts.

In neighbouring Iraq, government and allied paramilitary forces sought to sever the supply lines of the Islamic State group in the western province of Anbar.

Meanwhile, the toll from car bombs that ripped through the car parks of two upscale Baghdad hotels on late Thursday has risen to at least nine, officials said yesterday.

The blasts hit hotel Ishtar -- formerly a Sheraton -- and Hotel Babylon turning rows of expensive cars and SUVs into charred, twisted metal.

China has artillery in South China Sea: US brief South China Sea: US

REUTERS, Washington

The United States yesterday said that China had placed mobile artillery weapons systems on a reclaimed island in the disputed South China Sea, a development that Republican Sen John McCain called "disturbing and escalatory."

Brent Colburn, a Pentagon spokesman traveling with Defense Secretary Ash Carter, said US was aware of the weapons. In Beijing, China's foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said she had no information on the weapons.

Carter called on Wednesday for an immediate halt to land reclamation in the South China Sea and was expected to touch on the issue of maritime security and freedom of navigation again on Saturday in a speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue security conference in Singapore.

China says the islands are in sovereign Chinese territory. Asian military attaches and analysts said the placement of mobile artillery pieces appeared to be a symbol of intent, rather than any major development that could tilt any balance of power.

Buhari sworn in as

address the crisis.

Nigeria president AFP, Abuja

Muhammadu Buhari was sworn in as Nigeria's new president yesterday, vowing to tackle the country's many problems "head on", including Boko Haram, at a ceremony rich with military pomp and cultural tradition. The inauguration, before past Nigerian leaders and serving heads of state from across the continent, comes 32 years after he seized power in a military coup.

S Korea confirms 12 **MERS** cases

AFP, Seoul

South Korea confirmed five MERS cases yesterday, bringing the total number of patients infected with the potentially deadly virus to 12, including a man who defied a quarantine protocol and travelled to China, health officials said. More than 20 countries have been affected by the virus, with most cases in Saudi Arabia where more than 400 have been killed since 2012.

Child sacrifice in India! AFP, Guwahati

A suspected occultist beheaded a five-year-old boy in a ritual sacrifice in northeastern India before being lynched by angry villagers, police and relatives said yesterday. The father of the decapitated youngster said his son, Sanatan Bag, had been enticed into the home of Nanu Mirdha who then butchered him as an offering to the Hindu goddess of power, Kali, in front of a makeshift temple. After Sanatan's body was found in a pool of blood on Thursday night, villagers then turned on and killed Mirdha, according to the police chief for Assam's Sonitpur district.

pigeon over spying fears AFP, New Delhi Indian police said Friday they

India seizes

have detained a pigeon that flew into a village near the heavily militarised border with Pakistan on suspicion it was being used for espionage. Police said they had X-

rayed the bird to see whether it was carrying anything suspicious after a villager spotted a stamp under its feathers that bore Urdu script and the name of a Pakistani district. "We sent the bird to a polyclinic where X-ray

scans were done to see if there is any spy camera, transmitter or hidden chip," senior police superintendent Rakesh Kaushal told AFP by telephone. "Till now there is no

evidence to suggest it is a spy bird but so long as we are not able to decipher what is written in Urdu, we

cannot be absolutely sure." Kaushal said police had alerted intelligence services over the discovery of the pigeon in the northern

state of Punjab.



The balancing fishermen of Burma distinctive fishermen are a regular fixture. MAIL ONLINE

unusual technique when it comes to paddling their boats. Carefully balancing on one leg, wrapping

their second leg around the oar to guide the vessel through the freshwater lake. The skilled technique means the fisher-

men can stand and look out for reeds in the water and keep both hands free to handle the cumbersome nets.

Photographer David Lazar visited Inle Lake in the Taunggyi District of Shan State,

when they are 13 years old and carry on

until around 75 years old. Every day the fishermen will catch a small

The men in this region begin fishing

selection of carp using conical shaped nets which they submerge in the 10ft-deep lake. The fishermen then spear through the

small hole in the top of the net.

Inle Lake is the second-largest in Burma and the fishermen have become a real draw for visiting tourists. The people of the lake, known as Intha, live in four towns and a series Myanmar, also known as Burma, where the of tiny villages scattered along the shore.

These Burmese fishermen have mastered an