

# ISIS bigger threat than al-Qaeda: FBI chief

Carter in Iraq for talks on war against the militants

AP, Aspen

The Islamic State group's effort to inspire troubled Americans to violence has become more of a terror threat to the US than an external attack by al-Qaeda, the FBI director said Wednesday.

FBI Director James Comey told an audience at the Aspen Security Forum that the Islamic State group, which has proclaimed a caliphate in parts of Syria and Iraq, has influenced a significant but unknown number of Americans through a year-long campaign on social media urging Muslims who can't travel to the Middle East to "kill where you are."

Twitter handles affiliated with the group have more than 21,000 English-language followers worldwide, he said, thousands of whom may be US residents. The FBI has arrested a significant number of people over the last eight weeks who had been radicalised, Comey said, without specifying a number.

Asked if the threat from the Islamic State group had eclipsed that of the rival organisation that attacked the US on September 11, 2001, Comey said, "Yes." Intelligence officials last year were saying

they worry most about a mass casualty attack against a US airliner by al-Qaeda's Yemen affiliate, or by the Khorasan Group, a cadre of al-Qaeda operatives in Syria.

But Comey said Wednesday the threat from the Khorasan Group has been "significantly diminished" by US military strikes.



Carter



Comey

The Pentagon on Tuesday announced that it had killed the Khorasan Group's leader, Muhsin al-Fadhli, in a July 8 airstrike in Syria.

Meanwhile, Pentagon chief Ashton Carter yesterday flew to Baghdad for talks on Iraq's war against the Islamic State group.

Carter was to meet Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and Sunni Arab tribal leaders from Anbar, the province where much of the



PHOTO: AFP

Relatives of one of two police officers killed, mourn during their funeral procession yesterday, in Sanliurfa, after they were found shot dead at their home in the Turkish town of Ceylanpinar on the border with Syria. The military wing of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) on Wednesday said it had killed the two officers as a reprisal for a suicide bombing blamed on Islamic State jihadists, that killed 32 activists near the Syrian border.



## Maldives to allow foreigners to own land

AFP, Colombo

Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen yesterday approved a law allowing foreign ownership of land for the first time, triggering concern over a possible landgrab by China in the strategic Indian Ocean region.

Dozens of foreign companies already run luxury resorts on islands that they lease from the government of the honeymoon islands for a maximum of 99 years. The new law would allow foreigners who invest more than \$1 billion to own land in perpetuity, provided 70 percent of it is reclaimed from the Indian Ocean. Lawmakers voted on Wednesday for the bill which easily passed after a brief debate, with 70 members in favour and 14 against, the assembly said in a statement.

But opposition MPs expressed fears that the move could clear the way for the Chinese to set up bases in the Maldives, which straddle vital international east-west shipping routes. Regional superpower India is already wary of increased Chinese involvement in the area, which it considers to be within its sphere of influence.

## US 'aiding' Boko Haram with arms ban

Says Nigeria leader

BBC ONLINE

The US has "aided and abetted" the Boko Haram Islamist militant group by refusing to provide weapons to Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari said on Wednesday.

A US law prevents the government from selling arms to countries which fail to tackle human rights abuses.

Buhari met President Barack Obama in Washington on Monday to seek further assistance.

Boko Haram has killed some 10,000 people since 2009 and has also kidnapped hundreds of girls and women.

The US has previously promised some \$5m (£3.2m) in military assistance to the regional coalition helping to fight Boko Haram, which has pledged allegiance to Islamic State.

However, Buhari heavily criticised the US, especially the Leahy Law, which links military sales to human rights.

The Nigerian military did "not possess the appropriate weapons and technology which we could have had if the so-called human rights violations had not been an obstacle," he told the United States Institute of Peace on Wednesday.

"Unwittingly, and I dare say unintentionally, the application of the Leahy Law Amendment by the United States government has aided and abetted the Boko Haram terrorists."

In the latest suspected Boko Haram attack, at least 29 people were killed in bomb blasts at two bus stations in the north-eastern city of Gombe on Wednesday. At least 11 people were earlier killed in the Cameroonian town of Maroua, just over the border from Gombe.

## Scandals threaten Modi's 'scam-free' govt pledge

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's bold promise of a squeaky clean government is under threat just over 12 months after his landslide election victory, with a string of scandals erupting across the country.

Two months ago, Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) celebrated their first year in office, trumpeting initiatives introduced to reform Asia's third largest economy and proclaiming the government scam free.

But just weeks later, embarrassing allegations ensnared Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj along with the chief ministers of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh where the right-wing BJP rules at the state level.

Analysts say the government's credibility risks damage after it pledged an honest and efficient administration, to attract much-needed foreign investment and win over voters enraged about endemic corruption.

Graft scandals plagued the previous Congress-led government, resulting in policy paralysis and the worst economic slowdown since the 1980s.

The latest allegations also threaten Modi's critical land, taxation and other legislative reforms, with this week's new session of parliament erupting in chaos over opposition demands for Swaraj and the chief ministers to resign.

"These scams that have broken out have really lowered the image of the BJP-led government," said Satish Misra, a senior fellow with the Delhi-based Observer Research Foundation

think tank. "BJP leaders celebrated their first year with a lot of pomp and show, saying 'we have no scams, we are incorruptible'. But in the 13th month, there were scams breaking out everywhere," Misra told AFP.

The government has staunchly resisted calls to sack Swaraj over her role in helping corruption-hit former cricket boss Lalit Modi obtain a

passport in the UK.

The BJP has stood behind Rajasthan chief minister Vasundhara Raje, under fire for allegedly supporting Lalit Modi's UK immigration application while he was under investigation back in India for graft.

But it is also under pressure over Shivraj Singh Chouhan, chief minister of Madhya Pradesh state, where thousands of people are alleged to have

bribed officials and politicians in return for jobs or places in training institutes. India's top court has ordered a federal investigation into the so-called Vyapam scam after a spate of recent deaths fuelled claims of a mass cover-up by the Chouhan government.

The opposition says dozens of people associated with the scam, including witnesses, have died but state authorities say there is little evidence to



Sushma



Vasundhara



Smriti



Shivraj



## Kenya to close airspace for Obama

BBC ONLINE

Kenya will close its airspace for a 50-minute window ahead of US President Barack Obama's arrival in the capital Nairobi today, the country's civil aviation authority (KCAA) says. A ban on planes flying lower than 20,000 feet will remain in place in Nairobi for the duration of Obama's three-day visit, it says. Some US media have criticised the KCAA for revealing Obama's travel plans. The US issued a travel warning for Kenya in July ahead of the visit. The global entrepreneurship summit in Nairobi this weekend, which Obama is due to address, could provide "a target for terrorists", the US State Department said in a statement. Kenyans are preparing for significant disruption after police announced major road closures in Nairobi from today. Kenyan airspace will also be closed for a further 40 minutes on Sunday when President Obama leaves for neighbouring Ethiopia.

## Boat tragedy kills at least 18 in Egypt

AFP, Cairo

A cargo ship collided with a boat on the Nile carrying people celebrating an engagement, leaving at least 18 dead, Egyptian police said yesterday as divers searched for missing passengers.

The captain of the cargo boat and his assistants were arrested following the accident late Wednesday in the Waraq district north of Cairo, the authorities said.

A police general on the scene told AFP that 18 corpses had been retrieved. Police and medics had earlier said 21 people were killed. Five survivors were plucked from the river but an unknown number were still missing, the police general said.

Family and friends of a young couple had hired the boat to celebrate their engagement. It was not clear whether the couple were among the dead.

The captain has been detained for four days along with three of his assistants on suspicion of manslaughter, the official MENA news agency reported.

## Street View enters Mongolia

AFP, Ulan Bator

After recording images of towns and cities across the world, Google's Street View service launched on Thursday in a less likely location — the vast, sparsely-populated Asian country of Mongolia. The US technology giant used a horse-drawn sled to carry its image capturing camera to remote locations including Lake Khovsgol, Asia's second-largest body of fresh water. To capture the expanses of the Gobi desert, a trekker carried the camera in a backpack, Google said as it launched the service in the Mongolian capital Ulan Bator. Slightly larger than a basketball, Google's camera contains 15 individual fixed-focus lenses that simultaneously capture a 360 degree image roughly every three metres.

With a population of only three million and a territory over twice the size of France, Mongolia is the least densely populated country in the world. Many Mongolians still have a nomadic lifestyle with elements inherited from 13th century conqueror Genghis Khan, whose empire was the largest in history by territorial size.



AFP, Ulan Bator

## White House finalizing plan to close Guantanamo prison

AFP, Washington

The White House is in the "final stages" of drafting a plan to close the contentious Guantanamo Bay prison and will submit it for review by lawmakers, spokesman Josh Earnest said yesterday.

President Barack Obama made the closure of the controversial prison in Cuba a priority when he took office in 2009, but the plan has faced numerous setbacks, including Congress blocking the transfer of detainees to US prisons.

"The administration is in fact in the final stages of drafting a plan to safely and responsibly (close) the prison at Guantanamo Bay and to present that to Congress," Earnest said.

"That has been something that our national security officials have been working on for quite some time, primarily because it is a priority of the president."

The broader US naval base at Guantanamo in southeastern Cuba is also opposed by the Cuban government, with which the United States just restored diplomatic relations. Cuba says the United States is illegally occupying its land.

Washington has slowly been sending Guantanamo prisoners back to their home countries or to third countries, something that needs to continue if the facility is to shut, Earnest said.

The military prison opened in January of 2002 shortly after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States. After reaching a peak of 680 prisoners in 2003, there are 116 inmates remaining.

## NEWS IN brief

### Obama invites Sharif to visit US

PTI, Islamabad

US President Barack Obama has invited Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif for an official visit, a move seen here as mark of support for his policies, particularly efforts to improve ties with neighbours including India. An official of the Prime Minister's Office told PTI that Obama has invited Sharif for a trip towards end of October.

### Yakub Memon seeks stay of execution

AFP, New Delhi

Yakub Memon, who was convicted for plotting the 1993 Mumbai bomb attacks that killed hundreds, yesterday lodged a last-ditch challenge with India's top court, claiming his death warrant had been issued before all legal avenues to appeal were exhausted. The Supreme Court on Tuesday rejected a final appeal by Memon paving the way for his execution next week after more than two decades in jail.



### Astronauts reach Int'l Space Station

AFP, Moscow

Astronauts from Russia, Japan and the United States yesterday docked successfully with the International Space Station after a two-month delay. The Soyuz TMA 17M rocket — carrying cosmonaut Oleg Kononenko, US astronaut Kjell Lindgren and Kimiya Yui of Japan — blasted off from the Baikour cosmodrome on schedule after a two-month delay caused by the failure of a Russian rocket during an unmanned resupply mission.

### 'Iran executions Unprecedented'

BBC ONLINE

There has been an "unprecedented spike" in the number of executions in Iran, Amnesty International has warned. The rights group said it believed 694 people were killed between 1 January and 15 July, almost three times the figure acknowledged by the authorities. It said Iran executed at least 743 people in 2014.

### Israel troops kills another Palestinian

AFP, Hebron

Israeli troops shot dead a Palestinian during an arrest operation in the occupied West Bank yesterday, a hospital official said, the second killing within 24 hours. Falah Abu Maria, 50, was shot in the chest in the village of Beit Omar near Hebron. Troops came to arrest Falah's son Mohammed who also received gunshot wound.