



A South Korean soldier stands guard at a checkpoint on the Grand Unification Bridge which leads to the inter-Korean Kaesong Industrial Complex in North Korea in Paju, South Korea, yesterday. Inset, Anti-North Korean activists burn placards showing North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un as they protest the latest nuclear test and rocket launch by Pyongyang. Story on page 16.



PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

5-YEAR-LONG SYRIA CONFLICT

# Powers divided over ceasefire

AGENCIES

A US push for an immediate ceasefire in Syria has run into Russian opposition ahead of talks aimed at reviving stalled peace negotiations.

Russia is reportedly calling for a halt to hostilities on 1 March, but the US suspects it wants to give the Syrian army three weeks to crush rebel forces.

Russia has made a "quite specific" proposal for a ceasefire in Syria and is awaiting a US response, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said yesterday.

"We made propositions for a ceasefire that are quite specific," he said as he sat down for talks with his US counterpart John Kerry in Munich.

"We will wait for the American response before we take it to the (International Syria Support Group)."

The UN says 51,000 Syrians have fled the bombardment of the city of Aleppo by government forces, backed by Russian bombers and Iranian fighters.

"We're going to have a serious conversation about all aspects about what's happening in Syria. Obviously, at some point in time, we want to make progress on the issues of humanitarian access and ceasefire," Kerry said.

Kerry and Lavrov will host foreign ministers from the 17-nation Syria contact group later Thursday, for a meeting billed as a moment of truth for the floundering peace process.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Raad Al Hussein, called on them to ensure that talks in Geneva aimed at finding a political solution to the conflict resume as soon as possible.

The talks were suspended last week while still in the preparatory phase, with both sides blaming each other for the failure to make any progress.

One official told the Associated Press that the US could not accept Russian's proposed date because rebel forces might suffer irreversible losses in northern and southern Syria before the ceasefire took hold.

"What Russia's doing is directly enabling ISIL," Brett McGurk, President Barack Obama's special envoy to the coalition fighting the group in Syria and Iraq, told the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

The US military meanwhile described as "patently false" Russian claims that US aircraft bombed Aleppo on Wednesday. The US earlier alleged that Russian air strikes had destroyed two clinics in Aleppo - something Russian officials denied.

More than 250,000 people have died in almost five years of war in Syria. Eleven million others have fled their homes.



## Ministers for happiness, tolerance!

AFP, Dubai

The United Arab Emirates on Wednesday appointed women to the newly created posts of state ministers for happiness and tolerance, and a 22-year-old female for youth affairs.

Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum named eight women as he revealed his latest cabinet line-up of 29 ministers in a series of tweets.

Ohoud al-Roumi, who serves as director of the council of ministers' office, was appointed "minister of state for happiness". She will also keep her former post.

"Happiness is not just a wish in our country. There will be plans, projects, programmes and indices. It will be part of the job of all ministries," tweeted Sheikh

# Erdogan slams EU, UN

## Threatens to send refugees to Europe after harsh criticism

AFP, Ankara

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday threatened to send the millions of refugees in Turkey to European Union member states, as he slammed the bloc's behaviour in the migrant crisis.

In a speech that stepped up his denunciations of Western policy in the refugee crisis, Erdogan confirmed he had threatened EU leaders at a summit meeting in November that Turkey could say "goodbye" to the refugees.

"We do not have the word 'idiot' written on our foreheads. We will be patient but we will do what we have to. Don't think that the planes and the buses are there for nothing. We will do the necessary," Erdogan told a business forum in Ankara.

Greek website euro2day.gr had earlier this week reported that at the G20 summit in Antalya in November Erdogan had angrily threatened to EU Commission president Jean Claude Juncker that Turkey could send the refugees to Europe.

The website had quoted Erdogan as telling Juncker: "We can open the doors to Greece and Bulgaria anytime and put the refugees on buses."

"I am proud of what I said. We have defended the rights

of Turkey and the refugees. And we told them (the Europeans): 'sorry, we will open the doors and say 'goodbye' to the migrants'," Erdogan said in his speech Thursday.

He also lashed out at UN calls on Turkey to take in tens of thousands of Syrian refugees fleeing regime advances in the Aleppo region, saying the United Nations has spent less than half a billion dollars in the crisis.

"Shame on you! Shame on you!" said Erdogan, adding that instead the United Nations could pressure its members to take in more refugees.

"The United Nations should give advice to other countries. And then we can send the refugees to these countries," he said.

Turkey is already hosting 2.5 million refugees from Syria's civil war and hundreds of thousands from Iraq and is increasingly bitter it has been left to shoulder the burden.

Erdogan said Turkey had already spent some nine billion dollars on hosting the refugees.

The European Union has agreed to give Turkey three billion euros in financial aid for the refugees but the funds have yet to be handed to Turkey, two-and-a-half months after they were agreed.

"The three billion euros is not in our budget, where has it



## 'Criminal' attack at Saudi Arabia office kills 6

AFP, Riyadh

A man killed six employees at an education department office in Saudi Arabia yesterday, the interior ministry said, describing it as a "criminal" attack.

The attack in which two others were wounded occurred in the southern province of Jazan at about 2:00pm (1100 GMT), ministry spokesman General Mansour al-Turki told AFP.

"This is a criminal act," said Turki, adding that one suspect had been arrested.

He was unable to immediately confirm how the victims were killed but state television reported it was a shooting. The identity and motive of the suspect were unclear.

Criminal mass shootings are rare in Saudi Arabia.



Ohoud al-Roumi

Mohammed, who is also the ruler of Dubai.

The new post "will align and drive government policy to create social good and satisfaction," he said earlier.

Shamma al-Mazroui, 22, was appointed state minister for youth, while Lubna al-Qassimi, a veteran minister of international cooperation and development, was handed the new post of state minister for tolerance.

"The post of Minister of State for Tolerance has been created to promote tolerance as a fundamental value in UAE society," Sheikh Mohammed wrote when he announced the reshuffle earlier this week.

The cabinet has eight new ministers, including five women, with an average age of 38.



## STUCK IN WARZONE

A girl asks a passerby for help to pay a medical bill as her father, Shahrour, sits in his wheelchair in the Douma neighbourhood of Damascus Syria February 3, 2016. Shahrour, head of a 18-member family, had his right foot amputated at the beginning of the Syria war. He can no longer work. One son, 24, has chronic asthma and also cannot work. Medication for father and son costs about \$15 a month. The family cannot always raise that as the income of those in work varies each day. Shahrour thinks he and his family should flee their town, and also leave Syria. He knows the situation is no better outside. Nor can he afford to shoulder the financial burdens he may face outside Syria. He and his family have no option but to stay, hoping for a breakthrough.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# WAR ON ISLAMIC STATE Coalition looks to ramp up fight

AFP, Brussels

Defence ministers from the US-led coalition striking the Islamic State group met yesterday in a bid to engineer a decisive new phase in what has become a difficult fight with no end in sight.

Pentagon chief Ashton Carter convened the Brussels summit to persuade partner nations to contribute more to the campaign against the extremists, who despite 18 months of air strikes remain firmly in control of large parts of Iraq and Syria and have a growing foothold in Libya.

Further complicating the situation is Russia's own air campaign in Syria, which Moscow insists is also targeting IS, but which the West says is in fact aimed at rebels opposed to President Bashar al-Assad.

The summit marks the culmination of weeks of work for Carter, who has taken a two-pronged approach to winning broader support from coalition members.

While he has written to each one privately, he has also publicly accused some unspecified members of the 66-nation coalition of doing "nothing at all" to help the fight.

The effort has dealt some significant blows to the jihadists: the Pentagon estimates IS has lost about 40 percent of the territory it once held in Iraq, and about 10 percent in Syria.

But despite losing control of the Iraqi city of Ramadi, assaults to recapture the key IS bastions of Mosul in Iraq and its self-proclaimed capital in Syria's Raqqa are still many months away, and thousands of IS fighters have streamed into Libya.

# Ex-SS guard, 94, on trial for Auschwitz killings

BBC ONLINE

A 94-year former Nazi SS guard at the Auschwitz death camp has gone on trial in Germany over the murder of at least 170,000 people.

Prosecutors say Reinhold Hanning met Jewish prisoners as they arrived at the camp in occupied Poland and may have escorted some to the gas chambers. Hanning has admitted being a guard but denies involvement in mass murder. He is being tried in the city of Detmold, in what is likely to be one of the last cases of its kind.

Hanning is one of four elderly former Nazi guards - three men and a woman - who are due to go on trial in the coming months. The Nazis killed about 1.1m people at Auschwitz, most of them Jews.

Hanning was an SS guard at Auschwitz from 1943-44, at a time

when hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews were murdered there.

Survivors of the World War II death camp are due to testify against Hanning.

Until recently, prosecutors were required to provide evidence that defendants were directly involved in the killings.

But that changed with the 2011 conviction of John Demjanjuk, when a judge concluded that his activities as a camp worker in Nazi-occupied Poland amounted to complicity in mass murder.

Last year a German court sentenced Oskar Groening, 94, to four years in jail as an accessory to the murder of at least 300,000 people at Auschwitz. Known as the SS "book-keeper of Auschwitz", he was allegedly responsible for counting banknotes confiscated from prisoners.



Reinhold Hanning

# Pope despatches 1,000 'super-confessor' priests

BBC ONLINE

Pope Francis has sent more than 1,000 priests on a global mission to forgive grave sins that normally only he, or a top Church official, may pardon.

The Missionaries of Mercy, nicknamed the super-confessors, were given the special license for the Vatican's Jubilee year, which ends in November.

Grave sins include defiling consecrated bread and wine, violating confessional secrecy, and plotting to kill a pope.

Pope Francis has often said the Church needs to be less rigid and judgemental.

He has declared this a Holy Year of Mercy, and is using it to spread a message of forgiveness - particularly among Catholics who have strayed from the faith and are keen to return.

The priests have been selected from dioceses around the world, and are expected to carry out their special mission in countries including Burundi, Egypt, China and the United Arab Emirates. One of the priests is expected to travel among Inuit communities in the Canadian Arctic, while another one is planning to tour remote parts of Australia in a van.

# Christie, Fiorina quit race

AFP, Washington

Two more Republicans ended their White House runs Wednesday, whittling down the field as the party's remaining candidates and Democrat Hillary Clinton look to blunt the momentum of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders down south.

New Jersey Governor Chris Christie and former Hewlett-Packard chief executive Carly Fiorina both called time on their presidential bids, one day after finishing sixth and seventh, respectively, in the New Hampshire primary.

Trump and Sanders -- two political outsiders with vastly different ideologies, but who have a common campaign credo of speaking what they say is truth to power -- served notice in the Granite State on Tuesday with their resounding victories.

Sanders almost doubled Clinton's tally and Trump bested second place Ohio Governor John Kasich by almost 20 percentage points.

Both results shocked the party establishments, virtually guaranteeing bitter and drawn-out races for the Democratic and Republican nominations.

New Hampshire was the second stop in the months-long process to choose the two candidates who will vie to succeed President Barack Obama on Election Day, November 8.

"I leave the race without an ounce of regret," Christie said in a Facebook post, noting that while his message had been heard by many, it was "just not enough and that's ok."

The candidates now will go to South Carolina and Nevada, where both parties will stage nominating contests before month's end.

The upcoming votes will be crucial for Clinton who admitted in a concession speech that she had "some work to do, particularly with young people," to revitalize her campaign.

Trump also faces a tough challenge from the remaining Republican candidates.

## WHITE HOUSE BID



Chris Christie



Carly Fiorina