

# 'TERROR ATTACK' IN IVORY COAST

## Gunmen kill 16 at beach resort

Heavily-armed gunmen went on a shooting rampage in the Ivory Coast resort of Grand-Bassam yesterday, killing 16 people and leaving bodies strewn on the beach in the first attack of its kind in the country.

Al-Qaeda's North African affiliate claimed the deadly attack, US-based monitors said.

"By the grace of Allah and His granting of success, three heroes from the knights of Qaedat al-Jihad in the Islamic Maghreb were able to storm the tourist resort 'Grand Bassam,' situated east of the city of Abidjan, in Ivory Coast," the SITE Intelligence Group quoted al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb as saying in a post.

President Alassane Ouattara said 14 civilians and two special forces troops were killed in the strike that targeted three hotels in the former French colonial capital, a resort town popular with Western expatriates. Six gunmen were also killed in the attack, he added.

French President Francois Hollande said at least one French national was among the victims.

The assailants, who were "heavily armed and wearing balaclavas, fired at guests at the L'Etoile du Sud, a large hotel which was full of expats in the current heatwave," another witness told AFP.

West African nations have scrambled to boost security in the wake of jihadist attacks in recent months in the capitals of Mali and Burkina Faso.

Yesterday's attack also bore grim similarities to the Islamist gun and grenade assault on a Tunisian beach resort last June, which left 37 foreign holidaymakers dead.

Analysts have voiced fears that Islamist attacks could spread further into West Africa to countries such as Ivory Coast and Senegal, and the recently-concluded Flintlock exercise, which groups African, US and European troops, focused on the need to counter jihadism.



Emergency workers work at the explosion site in Ankara, Turkey, yesterday. Inset, Rescuers carry a victim on a stretcher at the scene of the blast. At least 27 people were killed and 75 others wounded in a blast in the heart of the Turkish capital Ankara, local media reported, speaking of an attack. Story on page 16.

# REFUGEE POLICY



## Merkel suffers polls drubbing

Chancellor Angela Merkel's party suffered a major setback in key state polls Sunday over the German leader's liberal refugee policy, while the right-wing populist AfD scooped up support from angry voters.

Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) lost in two out of three states in regional elections, scoring a historic low in its stronghold Baden-Wuerttemberg where it came in after the Greens, according to estimates published by public broadcasters ARD and ZDF shortly after voting closed at 1700 GMT.

The populist Alternative for Germany (AfD), which had caused a storm by suggesting police may have to shoot at migrants to stop them entering the country, recorded double-digit support in the first elections they have stood for in all three regions.

AfD is projected to garner as much as 21.8 percent of the vote in the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt -- making it the second biggest political force there after the CDU.

The elections, which also included polls in the southwestern region of Rhineland-Palatinate, are the biggest since Germany registered a record influx of refugees, and are largely regarded as a referendum on Merkel's decision to open the country's doors to people fleeing war.

With 1.1 million asylum seekers arriving in 2015 alone, Merkel's policy has polarised the country.

Despite facing intense pressure to change course and shut Germany's doors, Merkel has resolutely refused to impose a cap on arrivals, insisting instead on common European action that includes distributing refugees among the EU's 28 member states.

# NEWS IN brief

## Army, Qaeda clash kills 19 in Yemen

At least 17 suspected al-Qaeda members and two policemen have been killed in two days of clashes in Yemen's Aden, security sources said yesterday. More than 6,100 people have died -- half of them civilians -- since the coalition launched air strikes against the Shiite rebels and their allies in March 2015, according to the UN.

## Pakistan torrential rains leave 28 dead

The death toll from torrential rain in Pakistan rose to 28 yesterday after more homes collapsed in the southwest and northwest, officials said. They said 17 people lost their lives over the past three days in the southwestern province of Baluchistan, while six died in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in the northwest and five in adjacent tribal areas. House collapses accounted for most of the fatalities.

## Myanmar army frees 46 child soldiers

Myanmar's powerful military released 46 child soldiers from service, state media reported yesterday, the latest move towards ending a scourge that has long beset the nation. The military are committed to ending the recruitment and use of children in its "Tatmadaw" army following a June 2012 pact with the UN. But progress has been slow.

# UN-LED SYRIA PEACE TALKS IN GENEVA

## Pressure mounts on regime

### West issues warning; opposition says Assad must go, dead or alive

AFP, Geneva

The United States and France warned the Syrian regime on Sunday against trying to disrupt the fragile ceasefire as the warning sides prepared for fresh peace talks to end the brutal five-year conflict.

The UN-brokered indirect negotiations are due to start Monday in Geneva, the latest international push to try to end a war that has killed more than 270,000 people and forced millions from their homes.

After talks with European allies in Paris, US Secretary of State John Kerry hit out at comments by his Syrian counterpart that removing President Bashar al-Assad would cross a "red line" in the negotiations.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault went further, describing Walid Muallem's comments as a "provocation" and a "bad sign" for the attempts to find peace.

The Syria opposition HNC has repeatedly called for Assad's departure as a prerequisite for any deal.

"We believe that the transitional period should start with the fall, or death, of Bashar al-Assad," chief opposition negotiator Mohammad Alloush told AFP in a joint interview in Geneva.

"It cannot start with the presence of the regime, or the head of this regime still in power."

Kerry warned Syria and its allies Russia and Iran against "testing boundaries" or lessening their compliance with a fragile February 27 truce brokered by Washington and Moscow that has largely held despite each side accusing the other of violations.

While analysts say much has changed since the last round of talks collapsed in February, the fate of Assad and the holding of elections with 18 months remain huge obstacles to peace.

Kerry urged Russian President Vladimir Putin to bring the Syrian regime into line. Kerry however hailed the fact that the ceasefire had led to a reduction of violence of up to 90 percent.

Kerry said the coalition had pushed the Islamic State jihadist group out of 20 percent of the territory it once controlled in Syria and that 600 IS fighters had been killed in the last three weeks.

Syrian government negotiator Bashar al-Jaafari yesterday arrived in Geneva, where delegates from the main opposition group, the High Negotiations Committee (HNC), are already preparing.

UN peace envoy Staffan de Mistura has said the Geneva meetings, opening on the eve of the fifth anniversary of the start of the conflict in March 2011, would not last more than 10 days.

In the latest violence to threaten the ceasefire, Al-Qaeda fighters and allied jihadists clashed with a rebel faction known as Division 13 overnight in northwestern Syria after storming its weapons depot, the group said.

## Obama compares IS to the Joker

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

US president Barack Obama has compared insurgent group IS to comic book villain the Joker from Batman.

In an interview with The Atlantic, president Obama's advisors recalled him using the 2008 Batman film The Dark Knight as an analogy to explain why the US had to tackle the problem of IS, stating that as he understood it, Isis was Heath Ledger's character 'the Joker'.

"There's a scene in the beginning in which the gang leaders of Gotham are meeting," the magazine reported that the president told his advisors. "These are men who had the city divided up. They were thugs, but there was a kind of order. Everyone had his turf."

"And then the Joker comes in and lights the whole city on fire. Isis is the Joker. It has the capacity to set the whole region on fire. That's why we have to fight it."

President Obama added that the group was a threat 'to everyone in the world' stating that without intervention, things could be 'like the 1930s again'.



Opponents of the Brazilian government take part in a protest demanding the resignation of President Dilma Rousseff at the Esplanada dos Ministerios in Brasilia, yesterday. Hundreds of thousands of Brazilians angered by a giant corruption scandal and the crumbling economy flooded the streets yesterday to call for removal of Rousseff.

## 'I'm just the messenger'

### Trump defiant after violence, loses two primaries

REUTERS, Washington

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump refused to take responsibility yesterday for clashes that have erupted at his campaign events, saying he was not inciting violence but giving voice to the anger of his supporters.

The real estate tycoon used a round of television appearances to beat back furious criticism from Republican rivals and Democrats alike that he was encouraging discord with divisive language disparaging Muslims and immigrants.

"I don't accept responsibility. I do not condone violence in any shape," Trump said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

The tension at his rallies, Trump said, came from people being "sick and tired" of American leadership that has cost them jobs through international trade deals, failed to defeat Islamic State terrorism and treats military veterans poorly.

"The people are angry at that - they're not angry about something I'm saying. I'm just the messenger," Trump said.

On Saturday, Trump suffered heavy defeats in Republican caucuses in Washington DC and Wyoming.

The disturbances at his campaigns erupted days before the next five presidential nominating contests on Tuesday, which could cement the New York billionaire's lead over Republican rivals US Senators Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio and John Kasich.

President Barack Obama on Saturday said candidates should not resort to "insults" and "certainly not violence against other Americans".



## RSS changes with changing world

### Abandons trademark shorts

AFP, New Delhi

A hardline Indian Hindu movement yesterday announced it was abandoning its trademark khaki shorts to try to modernise the dress code, 91 years after adopting the austere military-style uniform.

Foot soldiers of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) are often seen after dawn across India engaged in physical drills and uttering religious chants -- dressed in pleated shorts, white shirts and black hats.

But RSS general secretary Suresh Bhaiyyaji Joshi acknowledged the organisation, the ideological fountainhead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party, must keep in step with a modern, changing world.

The RSS styles itself as a cultural organisation devoted to protecting India's Hindu culture. But critics accuse it of being an anti-Muslim pseudo-fascist organisation. The RSS has been banned three times since its inception in 1925, including after a former member assassinated Mahatma Gandhi in 1948.

## Erdogan threatens top court's 'existence' over journo release

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has threatened his country's top court for releasing two journalists detained on charges of attempting to overthrow the government.

The court's future is in doubt if it were to make another such ruling, he said. "I hope the Constitutional Court will not try to repeat this in a way that would call into question its existence and its legitimacy", President Erdoğan said, according to AFP.

The Constitutional Court released newspaper Cumhuriyet's editor-in-chief Can Dündar and Ankara bureau chief Erdem Gül in February. It ruled that keeping the two men in pre-trial detention was a violation of their rights and freedom of expression.

The pair still face trial on March 25 on charges of revealing state secrets and attempting to overthrow the government, after Cumhuriyet published claims in May that Turkey tried to deliver weapons to Islamist rebels in Syria.

Prosecutors have reportedly demanded multiple life sentences for the journalists.

Erdoğan said the Constitutional Court's decision to release the men was "against the country and against its people".

Immediately after the court's ruling in February, Erdoğan said, "I do not abide by the decision or respect it. The media should not have unlimited freedom. There is no absolute freedom anywhere in world media either."

The journalists' prosecution comes during a crackdown on press freedom by Erdoğan's increasingly authoritarian government.

Turkey's largest newspaper, Zaman, was taken over by government administrators last week. Its editor and chief columnist were fired, and its staff were told to expect "a change in editorial policy".



## Egypt minister sacked after prophet remark

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's Prime Minister Sharif Ismail yesterday sacked the justice minister after he said in a television interview that he would arrest even "a prophet", a statement from the premier's office said.

Ahmed al-Zind sparked outrage on social media after his remarks on Friday that he would imprison anyone "even if it's a prophet". Upon realising what he had said, Zind immediately stopped and said: "I ask for forgiveness from God." He later clarified in a separate interview that his remark was a mere "slip of the tongue".

On Sunday, Ismail's office said Zind had been removed.

## At last, human Go champ beats AI

AFP, Seoul

A South Korean Go grandmaster on Sunday scored his first win over a Google-developed supercomputer, in a surprise victory after three humiliating defeats in a high-profile showdown between man and machine.

Lee Se-Dol thrashed AlphaGo after a nail-biting match that lasted for nearly five hours -- the fourth of the best-of-five series in which the computer clinched a 3-0 victory on Saturday.

Lee struggled in the early phase of the fourth match but gained a lead towards the end, eventually prompting AlphaGo to resign.

The 33-year-old is one of the greatest players in modern history of the ancient board game, with 18 international titles to his name -- the second most in the world.

"I couldn't be happier today...this victory is priceless. I wouldn't trade it for the world," a smiling Lee said after the match to cheers and applause from the audience.

Lee earlier predicted a landslide victory over Artificial Intelligence (AI) but was later forced to concede that the AlphaGo was "too strong".