

# NEWS IN brief

## Turkish strikes kill 24 PKK militants

REUTERS, Diyarbakir  
Turkish warplanes struck Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) targets in northern Iraq and killed 24 PKK fighters in southeast Turkey on Thursday, the army said, as the militants launched a car bomb attack on a military installation killing three security force members and wounded 24.

## Russia to deploy missiles on Kuril islands

AFP, Moscow  
Russia will deploy a range of coastal missile systems on the far-eastern Kuril islands, claimed by Japan, as part of its military build-up in the region, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said yesterday.

## Saudi journo jailed 5 years over tweets

AFP, Dubai  
A Saudi journalist has been sentenced to five years in prison over tweets deemed insulting to the kingdom's rulers, Amnesty International said yesterday. Alaa Brinji, who has reportedly already served two years behind bars, was found guilty on Thursday of a list of charges including "insulting the rulers (and) inciting public opinion," the rights group said.

## Corbyn trumps UK PM in leadership ratings

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK  
Britain's Jeremy Corbyn has overtaken David Cameron in leadership satisfaction ratings in the aftermath of last week's budget. According to the latest Ipsos MORI polling, the Labour leader's ratings improved a net 10 points, while the Prime Minister's fell a net ten points. Corbyn is now on net -11 while Cameron is on net -25 with the pollster.



(From left, clockwise) An agent of a bomb squad unit and a robot stand next to a suspicious object at a tramway station in Schaarbeek suburb, Brussels, yesterday during a bomb alert; a suspected terrorist is being detained from there; and people are being evacuated from the station. Story on page 16.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

## UN atomic chief warns on 'nuke terrorism'

AFP, Vienna  
The world needs to do more to prevent "nuclear terrorism", the head of the UN atomic watchdog has warned ahead of an important summit and in the wake of the Brussels terror attacks.  
"Terrorism is spreading and the possibility of using nuclear material cannot be excluded," International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Yukiya Amano told AFP in an interview late Thursday.  
"Member states need to have sustained interest in strengthening nuclear security," he said. "The countries which do not recognise the danger of nuclear terrorism is the biggest problem."  
Amano's comments came before a summit of around 50 leaders in Washington on March 31-April 1 on ensuring that nuclear material in the world's roughly 1,000 atomic facilities are secured.  
Highlighting the risks, in December Belgian police investigating the November 13 Paris terror attacks found 10 hours of video of the comings and goings of a senior Belgian nuclear official.  
The material, filmed by a camera in bushes outside the official's home, was reportedly found at the property of Mohamed Bakkali, incarcerated in Belgium for his links to the Paris attackers.  
One Belgian newspaper reported that the device was collected by none other than brothers Ibrahim and Khalid El Bakraoui -- two of the suicide bombers in this week's Brussels attacks.  
The Washington summit is part of a process begun by US President Barack Obama in a speech in Prague in 2009 and follows similar gatherings in Seoul in 2012 and The Hague in 2014.

# US strike kills IS's number two

### Syrian forces retake Palmyra citadel from jihadists; US, Russia agree to speed up peace efforts

AFP, Damascus  
The Islamic State group suffered a double setback in Syria yesterday as army troops recaptured the ancient citadel in Palmyra and the Pentagon said the jihadists' second-in-command was killed in a US raid.  
"We are systematically eliminating ISIL's cabinet," Carter told reporters, referring also to the killing early in the month of Omar al-Shishani, the man known as "Omar the Chechen," who was effectively IS's defense minister.  
The latest killing "will hamper the ability for them to conduct operations inside and outside of Iraq and Syria," Carter said of Abd ar-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli, referring to him as Haji Imam. He said al-Qaduli served as the group's finance minister and had been behind some foreign plots.  
The US Justice Department had offered a bounty of up to \$7 million for information leading to al-Qaduli.  
"Our campaign plan is first and foremost to collapse ISIL's parent tumor in Iraq and Syria, focusing on the power centers in Raqqa and Mosul," he said.  
Carter said local forces supported by

the US-led coalition had "severed the main artery between Syria and northern Iraq," making it "much harder for ISIL's leaders and forces to travel between Raqqa and Mosul."

Secretary of State John Kerry and Russia's President Vladimir Putin agreed to intensify the drive for a political settlement in Syria.  
The army has also cut off the main Palmyra-Deir Ezzor highway leading to the

listed temples and looted relics that dated back thousands of years, and murdered the former antiquities chief in Palmyra, Khaled al-Asaad. Built in the 13th century, the citadel is Palmyra's main Islamic-era monument.  
Palmyra's full recapture would be a major strategic and symbolic victory for President Bashar al-Assad, since whoever holds it also controls the vast desert extending from central Syria to the Iraqi border.  
The Islamic State group was also under mounting pressure yesterday as Iraqi forces began an offensive against the jihadist stronghold of Mosul.  
The fighting came as the latest round of peace talks aimed at ending Syria's five-year war, which has left more than 270,000 people dead, came to a close.  
Kerry and Putin, who back different sides in Syria's war, agreed at a rare meeting in Moscow to push for a political settlement, but the future of Assad remains a sticking point. Unless Assad agrees to step down, there are concerns that the Syrian opposition could drop out of peace negotiations, which UN envoy Staffan de Mistura said he was aiming to restart on April 9.

## WAR ON ISLAMIC STATE MILITANTS



The ancient Palmyra city



Mustafa al-Qaduli

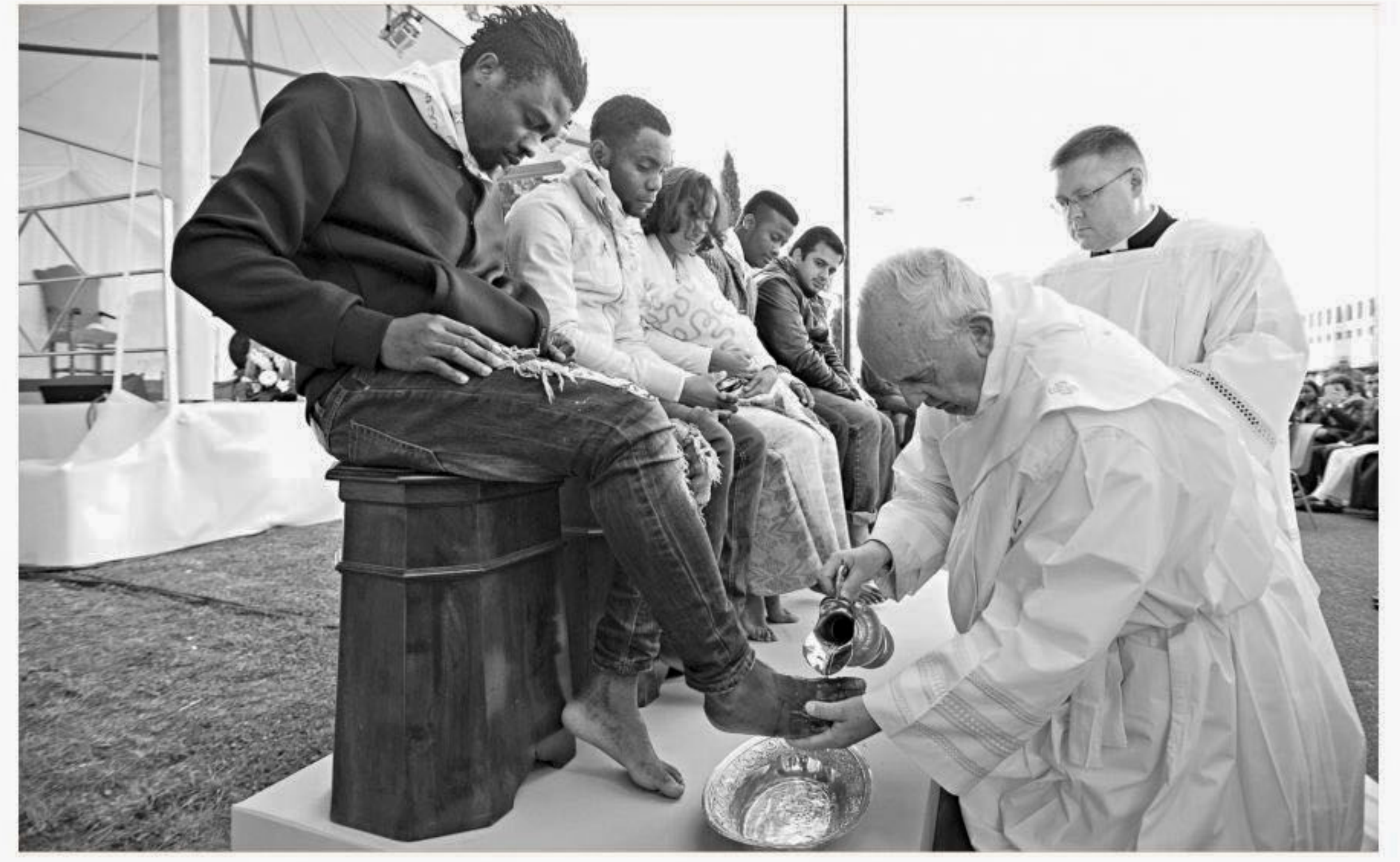
The fresh gains in Palmyra by Syrian troops backed by allied militia and Russian warplanes came nearly a year after IS overran the Unesco world heritage site, sparking global concern.  
The regime advance came after US

Iraqi border, a report said citing a military source.  
The jihadist group had taken over the citadel on May 23 last year and raised its notorious black and white flag over it.  
The group has since blown up Unesco-

# When Suu Kyi lost her cool in a BBC interview

MAIL ONLINE  
She is a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and a beacon of saintly integrity in the West who remained under house arrest for 15 years in her native Burma.  
However, there is another side to Burmese politician Aung San Suu Kyi that sits at odds with her iconic image.  
After the BBC Today presenter Mishal Husain gave Suu Kyi a rough ride during a BBC interview, Suu Kyi lost her composure and was heard to mutter angrily off-air: "No one told me I was going to be interviewed by a Muslim."  
The spat between the two prominent and famously elegant Asian women has only just emerged, and followed a heated interview with the 70-year-old president of Myanmar's National League for Democracy on the Today programme,

according to a new book, The Lady And The Generals: Aung San Suu Kyi And Burma's Struggle For Freedom, by Peter Popham.  
Suu Kyi's equivocal attitude towards the violence suffered by Burma's Muslim minority has alarmed even her most dedicated fans. When she was repeatedly asked by Husain to condemn anti-Islamic sentiment and the wave of mob-led massacres of Muslims in Myanmar, she declined to do so. "I think there are many, many Buddhists who have also left the country for various reasons," she replied. "This is a result of our sufferings under a dictatorial regime."  
Much of the country's huge Buddhist majority dislikes its small Muslim community with a passion, so it is thought Suu Kyi did not want to alienate her supporters.



In this handout picture released by the Vatican Press Office, Pope Francis performs the foot-washing ritual at the Castelnuovo di Porto refugees center near Rome on March 24, 2016. Pope Francis washed the feet of 11 young asylum seekers and a worker at their reception centre to highlight the need for the international community to provide shelter to refugees.

# 'I am one of the lost Chibok girls'

Says suicide bomber detained in Cameroon  
REUTERS, Yaounde  
A suspected suicide bomber intercepted in northern Cameroon on Friday before she could blow herself up claimed to be one of 219 schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram in the Nigerian town of Chibok in 2014, military and local government sources said.  
Two girls carrying explosives were stopped by local self-defence forces in the village of Limani, in an area of northern Cameroon that has been the target of frequent suicide bombings in recent months.  
They were then handed over to Cameroonian soldiers belonging to a multinational force set up to take on Boko Haram.  
In a high-profile attack that sparked a global outcry, Boko Haram militants raided the school in April 2014 while the girls were taking exams. They loaded 270 of them onto trucks, though around 50 escaped shortly afterwards.  
"One of them indeed declared that she is one of the Chibok hostages. She is around 15. We are now verifying, because on the Nigerian side they have the names and photos of these girls," said local government administrator Raymond Roksdoo.  
Two military sources, who asked not to be identified as they were not authorised to speak to the press, also confirmed that the girl had claimed to have been one of the Chibok abductees.  
Former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan was criticised for his slow reaction to the Chibok abductions, seen by many as indicative of his response to Boko Haram, which at its strongest held large swathes of northeastern Nigeria.

# Trump, Cruz spat gets ugly over wives

AFP, Washington  
Donald Trump and his main challenger for the Republican presidential nomination, Ted Cruz, have escalated their bitter feud, taking to social media to clash over two unlikely figures: their wives.  
An anti-Trump political group unveiled a controversial campaign ad ahead of Tuesday's votes in Arizona and Utah that uses a photograph of Trump's wife Melania lying provocatively in his custom-fitted jet, naked and handcuffed to a briefcase.  
"Meet Melania Trump, your next first lady," read the online ad, posted on Facebook by the group Make America Awesome. "Or, you could support Ted Cruz on Tuesday."  
Melania Trump, 45, is a Slovenian-American jewelry designer and former model. The use of the image, from a GQ magazine photo shoot in 2000 when she was Melania Knauss and not yet married to Trump, angered the billionaire real estate magnate.  
"Lyn' Ted Cruz just used a picture of Melania from a GQ shoot in

his ad. Be careful, Lyn' Ted, or I will spill the beans on your wife!" Trump posted to his seven million Twitter followers on Tuesday.  
Cruz wasted no time firing back. "Pic of your wife not from us," Cruz tweeted. "Donald, if you try to attack Heidi, you're more of a coward than I thought. #classless."  
The said individual has no link with the Government since his premature retirement from the Indian Navy," the spokesman said in a statement. "We have sought consular access to him."  
Tensions are already high between the nuclear-armed nations after India blamed Pakistan-based militants for a January attack on an Indian air base, in which seven military personnel were killed.  
RAW is India's Research and Analysis Wing, the country's main external intelligence agency. Pakistan believes that India is supporting separatists in the resource-rich Baluchistan province, as well as militants fighting the state from the lawless tribal areas. It also sees India as fuelling strife in the volatile city of Karachi.



Heidi Cruz Melania Trump

# Pakistan 'captures Indian spy'

Summons envoy to protest  
REUTERS, Islamabad  
Pakistan made an official protest to India after detaining a man it says is an Indian spy who illegally entered the country and was captured on Thursday in the violence-plagued province of Baluchistan.  
India's foreign ministry spokesman confirmed that Pakistan's foreign secretary had taken up the matter with the Indian High Commissioner in Islamabad but denied the man is a spy.  
"The said individual has no link with the Government since his premature retirement from the Indian Navy," the spokesman said in a statement. "We have sought consular access to him."  
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# 'ESPIONAGE AND REVEALING STATE SECRETS' Turkey takes journalists' trial behind closed doors

AFP, Istanbul  
Two Turkish journalists went on trial in Istanbul yesterday facing possible life terms on hugely controversial espionage charges, with the court immediately banning the public from a case seen as a test of press freedom under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.  
Can Dundar, editor-in-chief of leading opposition daily Cumhuriyet, and Erdem Gul, his Ankara bureau chief, are charged with espionage and revealing state secrets over a story accusing the government of seeking to illicitly deliver arms to rebels in Syria.  
The judge on Friday ordered the trial to be held behind closed doors, granting a request by the prosecution which cited security concerns around the highly controversial case.  
Around 200 supporters chanting "You will not silence press freedom" applauded the reporters as they arrived at the courthouse for the start of the trial.  
"We are here to defend journalism," Dundar, 54, told reporters. "We will defend

journalism and the right of the public to be told the truth."  
Cumhuriyet's report sparked a furore when it was published in May, fuelling speculation about Turkey's role in the Syrian conflict and its alleged ties to Islamist groups in the country.



Erdogan reacted furiously to the allegations, personally warning Dundar he would "pay a heavy price".  
Dundar and Gul were arrested in November and held in pre-trial detention for three months before being released in February on the orders of the Constitutional Court, which ruled their right to free speech had been violated.