NEWS_{IN} brief

S Korea launches anti-North leaflets

AFP, Paju

South Korean activists launched tens of thousands of anti-Pyongyang leaflets into North Korea yesterday, amid heightened tensions on the divided peninsula, using a propaganda tool that usually sparks threats of reprisals. Conservative activists, including many North Korean defectors, have been carrying out leafleting exercises using giant gas-filled balloons for years.

Indonesian prison fire kills 5 inmates

AFP, Jakarta

Five inmates have died in a prison fire in Indonesia, police said yesterday, after an operation to flush out a drug kingpin sparked a violent riot. The blaze was started by angry inmates late Friday evening as police entered the prison in Bengkulu, on Sumatra island, in search of a wanted inmate, local police spokes-

Turkish warn of possible Easter attacks

man Sudarno told AFP.

AFP, Ankara

Police in Turkey have warned of possible Islamic State attacks against Jews and Christians over the Easter weekend, the staterun Anatolia news agency reported yesterday. The police issued a nationwide alert warning of possible attacks targeting churches, as well as synagogues.

4 killed in plane crash in Japan

AFP, Tokyo

A small plane with four people on board crashed to the ground at Yao airport in Osaka yesterday, leaving all four dead. Jiji Press and public broadcaster NHK said the Mooney M20c took off from Kobe airport and tried to land at Yao airport.



Supporters of Yemen's former President Ali Abdullah Saleh attend a rally marking one year of Saudi-led air strikes in Yemen's capital Sanaa, yesterday. Thousands of Yemenis rallied in the rebel-held capital to denounce the Saudi-led coalition that launched a military campaign against the country's insurgents a year ago, an AFP photographer said.

PHOTO: REUTERS

26 in Yemen REUTERS, Aden Three suicide bombers

IS blasts kill

struck security checkpoints in the southern Yemeni city of Aden on Friday, killing at least 26 people, residents and security sources said. Dozens of people were

also wounded in the attacks, for which Islamic State claimed responsibility and which coincided with the first anniversary of the start of civil war in Yemen.

In one of the blasts, an ambulance laden with explosives was detonated in front of a military checkpoint in northwestern Aden, killing about 14 soldiers

and civilians. The other two bombs hit checkpoints on the road to a base used by the Saudi-led military coalition. Security sources said at least 12 people died. It is not clear if any coalition troops were

among the dead.

Syria pushes into Palmyra amid heavy bombardment into hands' of jihadists

Pentagon to propose boosting military presence in Iraq to fight militants

AFP, Palmyra

Syrian troops backed by Russian ground and air forces yesterday pushed deeper into the Islamic State group stronghold of Palmyra, as Washington considered boosting its anti-jihadist fight in neighbouring Iraq. IS, behind a string of attacks in the West including this

week's Brussels bombings, is under growing pressure from Syrian and Iraqi military offensives to retake two key bastions in its self-proclaimed "caliph-WAR ON ISLAMIC STATE ate".

Syrian forces yesterday battled IS fighters inside Palmyra, a strategically located ancient city, under the cover of Russian and Syrian artillery fire.

After capturing the town of Al-Amiriyah on the city's northern outskirts, regime forces fought their way into Palmyra's northern and western district.

"The battle for Palmyra is in the final stages, as fighting is now inside

the city itself," a Syrian military source on the outskirts said. Drone footage released by a Russian television station shows collapsed archeological structures in the sprawling Greco-Roman old city but with the amphitheatre largely

intact. Even as clashes raged in residential neighbourhoods, the ruins remained eerily quiet, without a single fighter in sight,

AFP's correspondent said. The military source said the site was likely "rigged with explosives" and being watched by nearby IS snipers. Despite a major drawdown last week, Russian warplanes

have continued their bombing campaign around Palmyra, conducting more than 150 air strikes in recent days. IS overran the Palmyra ruins and adjacent modern city in

May 2015, sparking a global outcry and fears for the UNESCO world heritage site

> The group has since blown up UNESCO-listed temples and looted relics that dated back thousands of

known as the "Pearl of the Desert".

Government forces began their large-scale offensive to retake Palmyra earlier this month, but Saturday marked the most significant advance yet.

Elsewhere in Syria, a ceasefire in areas held by the government and non-jihadist rebels has largely held since February 27, in a boost to diplomatic efforts to end a five-year war that has

killed more than 270,000 people. Meanwhile, the Pentagon announced on Friday it will propose boosting the US military presence in Iraq, whose army said this week it had launched a long-awaited offensive to retake the key IS hub of Mosul.

Stigmatizing Muslims 'plays

Warns Obama; Pope says militants profane God's name

AGENCIES

President Barack Obama yesterday urged Americans not to stigmatize Muslims following this week's deadly attacks in Brussels, saying that doing so is "counterproductive" in the fight against radical Islam.

In his weekly media address, Obama said Muslim-Americans are "our most important partners in the nation's fight against those who would wage violent iihad.

"That's why we have to reject any attempt to stigmatize Muslim-Americans, and their enormous contributions to our country and our way of life," Obama said.

"Such attempts are

contrary to our character, to our values, and to our history as a nation built around the idea of religious freedom. It's also counterproductive," he said.

"It plays right into the hands of terrorists who want to turn us against one another -who need a reason to recruit more people to their hateful cause."

Obama made his remarks as the global community continues to reel from Tuesday's attacks in Belgium, claimed by the Islamic State group, which killed 31 dead, including two Americans, and wounded 300.

Meanwhile, Pope Francis condemned "unprecedented violence" by Islamist militants, saying at a Good Friday service that followers of religions who carried out acts of fundamentalism or terrorism were profaning God's name.

On Thursday he called the bomb attacks in Brussels that killed or

> wounded people from more than 40 countries a "gesture of war". Francis also referred to the beheading and burning of Christians in the

Middle East, and to those

forced to leave their homes. Francis condemned politicians who fuel conflict and "arms dealers who feed the cauldron of war with the innocent blood of our brothers and sisters, and give their chil-

He said Europe's reaction to the migrant crisis had been blunted by "our indifferent and anaesthetised conscience" and decried unchecked destruction of the environment.

dren bread that has been dipped in blood to

'Gaddafi plotted to kill Saudi king'

Reveals UK's Independent

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A British-based dissident is being pursued through the courts by the UK's elite crime agency over a plot to assassinate the former Saudi king in a hit ordered by the ex-Libyan leader Colonel Gaddafi, The Independent can reveal.

The National Crime Agency (NCA) has targeted Professor Mohammed al-Massari in a tax inquiry to retrieve £600,000 he is accused of receiving from the Libyans for his alleged role in the audacious plot, which he vehemently denies. The plan was to kill the former King Abdullah by firing a missile at his motorcade.

The Independent can also disclose that Scotland Yard interviewed Professor Massari in 2014 during a criminal investigation into the alleged conspiracy. Documents reveal how London - with its large community of politically connected expats - allegedly became the recruiting ground for the plot, which is said to have stemmed from a public row between the two Arab leaders at a summit.

Gaddafi ordered his intelligence chiefs to find a way of killing Abdullah after the row caught by television cameras was played across the Arab world. Libyan intelligence bosses allegedly paid hundreds of thousands of pounds to the British-based dissidents to find people inside the kingdom

to carry out the killing. Abdullah was Crown Prince at the time of the plot, but considered the most powerful figure in the kingdom as his





half-brother King Fahd was ailing. He succeed to the throne in 2005 and was in power until his death last year.

The murder plan only came to light after an American middleman, Abdurahman Alamoudi, was stopped at Heathrow airport in 2003 with \$336,000 (£238,000) in his luggage.

Alamoudi later confessed to his part in the plot as part of a plea deal and is currently serving 23 years in a US jail for illegal dealings with Libya.

The diplomatic ramifications of the case were considered so grave that the names of the two British-based dissidents were suppressed in US court papers for a decade. The secret court documents detailing their alleged involvement were only unsealed last year.

As part of a plea deal, Alamoudi gave two statements to Scotland Yard which placed Professor Massari and another London-based dissident, the surgeon Saad al-Faqih, at the heart of the conspiracy. In one of the statements, Alamoudi claimed Professor Massari secretly flew to Libya to meet Gaddafi. He also details a series of secret meetings at London restaurants and hotels where money was handed

over and details of the plot discussed. Both London-based dissidents have denied taking part in the assassination bid. They also deny meeting and taking money from Libyan officials.



Workers remove oil during a clean-up operation after oil leaked from a cargo ship owned by TS Lines Co (in background), off the shores of New Taipei City, Taiwan, yesterday. The oil spilled from the ship has contaminated 2 kilometer (1.24 miles) of water, according to local media.

Women: the Achilles heel that could doom Trump

AFP, New York

"Bimbo," "dog," "fat pig" -- Donald Trump has never minced his words about women he doesn't like, but prolific insults and personal attacks on prominent females may cost him the election.

This week America's extraordinary presidential campaign descended to new lows when the billionaire and his main challenger for the Republican nomination, Ted Cruz, escalated their bitter feud, taking to social media to clash over two unlikely figures: their wives.

Before the episode was over, Trump had tweeted a picture of his third wife, Melania, a former

model, next to an unflattering photograph of Cruz's wife, Heidi.

"The images are worth a thousand words," read the caption. Cruz, an archconservative and evangelical Christian,

reacted with fury. "Leave Heidi the hell alone," he hit back.

bully to attack my wife."

The real estate mogul posted the twee after an anti-Trump coalition unveiled a controversial campaign ad using a magazine photo of Melania posing nude in his private · jet 15 years ago.

The incident likely did little to boost Trump's ratings among women in a week when opinion polls revealed the very depth of the problem he faces

with females. Republican women have an unfa- : gins in earlier contests in the South. vorable opinion of Trump, accord-Meanwhile a survey from:

November presidential election.

accounted for 53 percent of turnout. To overcome that level of unpopularity:

percent of the white male vote, analyst said. "It is not acceptable for a big loud New York Trump denies being sexist.

Nomination Race to White House Sanders hopes to score wins in West

REUTERS, Washington

: Three states are holding Democratic presidential nominating contests yesterday where Hillary Clinton will try to expand · her lead in the contest to secure the party's nomination.

Bernie Sanders is hopeful that he could pick up wins in Washington, Alaska and Hawaii. While few public polls are · available, all three contests are being conducted with caucuses, a format that has favored the Vermont senator.

As he struggles to remain competitive, western states Thirty-nine percent of: have become must-win for Sanders, who lost by large mar-

Sanders and Clinton are competing to represent the ing to a CNN/ORC poll. Democratic Party in the Nov 8 presidential election.

Clinton leads Sanders in delegates race. She has won 1,223 Quinnipiac University found that · compared to Sanders' 920. Despite needing to win about two-60 percent of women would "defi- : thirds of the remaining delegates, Sanders has vowed to stay nitely not" vote for Trump in the in the race until the July convention in Philadelphia.

The latest Reuters/Ipsos poll shows Clinton and Sanders In the 2012 presidential election, women · are virtually tied nationally. Clinton has 47 percent of the Democratic vote, barely edging out Sanders at 46 percent.

The biggest cache of delegates up for grabs on Saturday will among women, Trump would need to win 85 · be in Washington, where the two will be competing for 118 · delegates. They will also be facing off in Alaska, where 20 delegates are at stake, and in Hawaii, which has 34 delegates.

REFUGEE CRISIS

Greece starts evacuating main camp

AFP, Idomeni

Greece has begun evacuating migrants from the main Idomeni camp on the Macedonia border, while the flow of refugees arriving on Aegean islands has slowed to a trickle, officials said yesterday.

Eight buses transported around 400 refugees from Idomeni to nearby refugee camps Friday, local police sources said.

A dozen more buses were waiting for migrants reluctant to leave the border, which has been shut down since earlier this month.

"People who have no hope or have no money, maybe they will go. But I have hope, maybe something better will happen tomorrow, maybe today," said 40-year-old Fatema Ahmed from Iraq, who has a 13-year-old son in Germany and three daughters with her in the camp.

Those persuaded to board the first buses were mainly parents with children who can no longer tolerate the difficult conditions.

A total of 11,603 people still remains at the sprawling border camp.

Giorgos Kyritsis, spokesman of the SOMP agency, which is coordinating Athens' response to the refugee crisis, said the operation to evacuate Idomeni will intensify from tomorrow.

Meanwhile, the flow of refugees arriving in Greece is slowing.

Greece on Thursday said no migrants had arrived on its Aegean islands in the previous 24 hours, for the first time since the controversial EU-Turkey deal to halt the massive influx came into force at the weekend.

On Friday, the number of new arrivals was 161, down to 78 on Saturday, according to Greek officials, while the number of migrants in Greece was 50,236.