

# Syria troops press advance

## Antiquities chief says Palmyra can be restored 'in five years' with Unesco support

AFP, Damascus  
Syrian forces strengthened their hold on Palmyra yesterday and pushed forward against the Islamic State jihadist group after dealing it a major blow by retaking the ancient city.

IS overran Palmyra -- a Unesco world heritage site known as the "Pearl of the Desert" -- in May 2015 and used its ancient amphitheatre for public executions as the world watched in horror.

The extremist group blew up temples and tower tombs, as part of its campaign against pre-Islamic monuments it considers "blasphemous."

An AFP correspondent in Palmyra saw the Temple of Bel and the Arch of Triumph in pieces on Sunday, with some large stones marred by spray painted messages in support of IS.

Yesterday, army sappers continued to defuse roadside bombs and mines that IS had planted in the ancient city as it retreated.

One soldier said more than 50 bombs had already been defused as other units worked on the controlled detonation of more complex devices.

Antiquities chief Maamoun Abdulkarim said that with Unesco support, his department would need five years to restore the monuments destroyed by IS, and that a preliminary assessment showed 80 percent of the ancient site was "in good shape".

The famed Lion of Al-Lat, shattered by IS last year, could be put back together and there was not the widespread looting that had been feared, he said.

"We need to start with the damage in the citadel immediately, because it can't afford all the damage that it has suffered."

### FIGHT AGAINST IS

Government troops and allied militia, backed by Russian air and ground support, overran Palmyra on Sunday morning after nearly 10 months of IS rule.  
President Bashar al-Assad hailed the victory as "fresh proof of the efficiency of the Syrian army and its allies in fighting terrorism".  
Regime forces turned to nearby IS-held towns yesterday, including Al-Qaryatayn, southwest of Palmyra, and Sukhnah towards the northeast.  
"The army was concentrated around Al-Qaryatayn, and today (Monday) the military operations began there," a military source in Palmyra told AFP.  
"That is the next goal for the Syrian army. They also have their eyes on Sukhnah."  
The head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Rami Abdel Rahman, said the capture of Sukhnah would bring government forces to the gates of oil-rich Deir Ezzor province, an IS bastion.



Pakistani Christians light candles as they stage a rally in Lahore yesterday, for victims of a suicide bomb blast. Pakistan's army launched raids and arrested suspects after a Taliban suicide bomber targeting Christians over Easter killed 72 people including many children in a park crowded with families. (STORY ON PAGE 16)  
PHOTO: AFP



## UK is not safe after Brussels attack: Trump

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Donald Trump has said Britain and Europe are "not safe places" following the terror attacks, which killed at least 31 people in Brussels on Tuesday.  
Speaking five days after the attack, US Republican presidential front-runner said Europe has lots of "very, very severe" problems and that even America is not a safe place for Americans.  
"I don't think Brussels - England or I don't think that Europe is a safe place. No, I don't. I think there are a lot of problems in Europe that are very, very severe," he told ABC.

"When you look at Brussels, when you look at the way they've handled things from law enforcement standpoints, when you look at Paris, when you look at so many other places, no, it's not (safe)".  
The billionaire businessman spoke on American television as a series of arrests was taking place throughout Europe and intelligence agencies are working together to break down the network of people believed to be linked to the Brussels and Paris attacks.

Trump's comments were echoed by John Kerry, who told CBS American citizens should "avoid a crowded place" if they are travelling Europe. In December, Trump stirred up British politicians, claiming parts of London were "so radicalised that the police are afraid for their own lives".

## European hunt gathers pace

### Three more face terror charges as Belgium releases attacks suspect; France extends detention of terror plotter

AFP, Brussels

Belgium raised the death toll from the Brussels attacks to 35 and charged three terror suspects yesterday as police across Europe stepped up efforts to unravel an Islamic State network linked to the carnage.

Police released a new video of a third suspect in the March 22 Zaventem airport attack, the so-called "man in the hat" seen with two other suicide bombers, who escaped after his bomb failed to explode.

The sole suspect charged over attacks was released yesterday following a lack of evidence linking him to the carnage, Belgian prosecutors said.

"The indications that led to the arrest of Faycal C. were not substantiated by the ongoing inquiry. As a result, the subject has been released by the examining magistrate," the federal prosecutor's office said in a statement, without giving further details.

Announcing the new death toll, Belgian Health Minister Maggie De Block tweeted: "Four patients

deceased in hospital. Medical teams did all possible. Total victims: 35. Courage to all the families."

Prosecutors' spokeswoman Ine Van Wymersch confirmed the new death toll to reporters at the government crisis centre, adding that it did not include the three attackers.

Twenty-eight victims had been formally identified, she said.

### BRUSSELS TERROR ATTACKS



Belgian prosecutors said three men arrested at the weekend in a series of raids had been charged with participation in the activities of a terrorist group," while a fourth person had been released.

Meanwhile, a French judge has extended the detention of the main suspect in what officials

said was a foiled terror attack, a judicial source said yesterday.  
Reda Kriket, who is linked to the suspected ringleader of the Paris attacks, was arrested on Thursday in a suburb of the French capital in a raid in which police also found several assault rifles and explosives.

## 'Cuba has no need of gifts from US'

AFP, Havana

Cuba's Fidel Castro signaled continued resistance to rapprochement between Washington and Havana, writing in an opinion piece yesterday that his country "has no need of gifts" from the United States.

The former president, 89, remained out of sight during last week's historic visit to the communist island by US President Barack Obama which aimed to cement normalisation.

In his first published remarks about the visit, Castro seemed unwilling to forgive and forget more than a half-century of enmity between the two countries, declaring in the Granma newspaper that Cuba "has no need of gifts from the empire."

He made his remarks in a piece entitled "El Hermano Obama" -- "Brother Obama."

"Listening to the words of the US president could give anyone a heart attack," Castro said, in an ironic barb.

"Nobody has any illusion that the people of this noble and selfless country will surrender glory and rights and the spiritual wealth that has come through the development of education, science and culture."

Obama during last week's three-day visit -- the first by a US president in 88 years -- thrilled Cubans by calling for democracy and greater freedoms, and took part in baseball diplomacy during a match between Cuban and American professional players.

The landmark visit was spearheaded by the US president and Cuba's current leader Raul Castro, who has proven to be far more reform-minded than the revolutionary icon brother whom he succeeded as the island's president a decade ago.



## NEWS IN brief

### Taliban fire rockets at Afghan parliament

AFP, Kabul

Taliban insurgents fired a barrage of rockets at Afghanistan's newly built parliament complex in Kabul yesterday, as top security officials including the intelligence chief prepared to address the assembly. Multiple rockets smashed into the sprawling compound, blowing out windows in one building. But no one was reported hurt and the parliament session continued uninterrupted.

### S Koreans launch anti-North balloons

BBC ONLINE

South Korean activists have sent tens of thousands of leaflets across the border on helium balloons for the second time in three days, denouncing North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. Balloons carrying such messages and urging the country's citizens to defect are regularly launched by defectors, conservatives and religious groups.

### Thai data breach reveals expat details

AFP, Bangkok

The personal details of thousands of foreign nationals living in southern Thailand were briefly leaked online in what the site's developer admitted yesterday was a data breach during a test for police. The leak comes as the junta-ruled nation pushes ahead with a much publicised crackdown against foreign visa overstayers and criminals.

### Japan teen free after 'two-year kidnap'

AFP, Tokyo

A Japanese girl who vanished two years ago has returned home after escaping from the apartment of the university student who had held her captive, police and local media said yesterday. The 15-year-old disappeared in March 2014. Police said she left a note in the mailbox of the family home in Saitama north of Tokyo reading: "Please do not try to look for me."

### Taiwan arrests 41 Chinese poachers

AFP, Taipei

The Taiwanese coastguard said yesterday it had arrested 41 Chinese fishermen in possession of 15 tonnes of illicit coral reef and endangered turtles near a disputed atoll in the South China Sea. Taiwanese authorities detained the fishermen on March 22 after their 300-tonne vessel was discovered operating illegally.

## Gunman held after shooting at US Capitol

REUTERS, Washington

A police officer was shot and wounded yesterday in the US Capitol complex and the gunman captured, a source citing information from the Sergeant-at-Arms office in Congress said.

Gunshots were heard in the US Capitol Visitors Center and workers were told to shelter. There was confusion in early accounts about what occurred.

The source said the officer's wounds were not serious. A US Capitol Police officer, who asked not to be identified, said the suspected shooter was being transported to hospital. The officer did not identify or describe the suspect and he added that there were no additional suspects.

Congress is in recess, with few lawmakers in Washington but the shooting happened just a few hours after a drill for an active shooter took place at the Capitol, creating further confusion.

Cathryn Leff, a licensed therapist, tweeted that she was at the visitor's center when she heard gunshots while going through a security check point.

"That moment when it goes down. Everyone is screaming & running and you can't see where the #ShotsFired are from," tweeted Leff.



A tree that fell in high winds brought by Storm Katie lies across a car in a street in Brighton yesterday. Tens of thousands of homes were without power in northwestern France after the region was pounded overnight by winds gusting to hurricane force that also triggered flight cancellations and outages in southern England.  
PHOTO: AFP

## Cash incentives to tackle gun crime

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Cities across America are moving to copy an initiative introduced in California: paying criminals up to \$1,000 (£700) a month not to commit another gun crime.

The controversial approach launched in Richmond, a working-class suburb in north San Francisco, is claimed to have helped to reduce murder rates, some say by half.

In Richmond, the city has hired ex-convicts to mentor dozens of its most violent offenders and allows them to take unconventional steps if it means preventing the next death. For example, the mentors have coaxed inebriated teenagers threatening violence into city cars, not for a ride to jail but home to sleep it off -- sometimes with loaded firearms still in their waistbands.

The mentors have funded trips to South Africa, London and Mexico City for rival gang members in the hope that shared experiences and time away from the city would ease tensions and forge new connections.



## PATHANKOT ATTACK

### India's NIA briefs Pak probe team

PTI, New Delhi

India and Pakistan yesterday began formal discussions on investigations into the terror attack at the Pathankot IAF base, making it the first-ever visit of a joint investigation team (JIT) from the neighbouring country that included an ISI official.

The five-member Pakistani JIT is headed by chief of Punjab's counter-terrorism department (CTD) Muhammad Tahir Rai and comprises Lahore's deputy director general, Intelligence Bureau, Mohammad Azim Arshad, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) official Lt Col Tanvir Ahmed, military intelligence official Lt Col Irfan Mirza and Gujranwala CTD investigating officer, Shahid Tanveer.

The team was received at the headquarters of National Investigation Agency (NIA).

They are being given a detailed presentation on the probe done by Indian agencies so far and evidences that show that the attack was planned in Pakistan, official sources said.

## Japan opens radar station close to disputed isles

REUTERS, Yonaguni

Japan yesterday switched on a radar station in the East China Sea, giving it a permanent intelligence gathering post close to Taiwan and a group of islands disputed by Japan and China, drawing an angry response from Beijing.

The new Self Defence Force base on the island of Yonaguni is at the western extreme of a string of Japanese islands in the East China Sea, 150 km south of the disputed islands known as the Senkaku islands in Japan and the Diaoyu in China.

China has raised concerns with its neighbours and in the West with its assertive claim to most of the South China Sea where the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei have overlapping claims. Japan

has long been mired in a territorial dispute with China over the East China Sea islands.

"Until yesterday, there was no coastal observation unit west of the main Okinawa island. It was a vacuum we needed to fill," said Daigo Shiomitsu, a Ground Self Defence Force lieutenant colonel who commands the new base on Yonaguni.

"It means we can keep watch on territory surrounding Japan and respond to all situations."

Shiomitsu yesterday attended a ceremony at the base with 160 military personnel and around 50 dignitaries.

The 30-sq-km (11-sq-mile) island is home to 1,500 people, who mostly raise cattle and grow sugar cane. The Self Defence Force contingent and family members will increase the population by a fifth.

