

NEWS IN brief

Kerry in surprise Afghanistan visit
 AFP, Kabul
 US Secretary of State John Kerry arrived in Kabul yesterday on an unannounced visit to encourage the revival of peace talks with the Taliban and show support for Afghanistan's beleaguered unity government which he helped create 18 months ago. His visit comes as the rebel Islamist group is preparing for "decisive" battles in its upcoming spring offensive.

Qaeda ambush kills 20 Yemeni soldiers
 AFP, Marib
 Al-Qaeda militants killed at least 20 Yemeni soldiers yesterday when they ambushed their convoy in the south of the war-torn country, a military source said. The jihadists ordered the soldiers to get out of the vehicles and shot them early in the morning in the town of Ahwar, the source told AFP.

Pak court issues NBW against Musharraf
 PTI, Islamabad
 An anti-terrorism court in Pakistan has issued a non-bailable arrest warrant against former military ruler Pervez Musharraf for his failure to appear before the court in the 2007 judges' detention case. 72-year-old Musharraf, who last month flew to Dubai for purported treatment after the Supreme Court lifted bars on his foreign trips, was not present at the anti-terrorism court (ATC). Musharraf ruled from 1999 to 2008 when he stepped down.

US-Apple iPhone battle goes on
 REUTERS, New York
 The US Justice Department on Friday said it would keep fighting to force Apple Inc to open an iPhone in a New York drug case, continuing its controversial effort to require Apple and other tech companies to help law enforcement authorities circumvent encryption.



Demonstrators hold placards during a protest outside Downing Street in Whitehall, central London, Britain, yesterday. The protesters gathered there with call for tough action on tax avoidance – or British Prime Minister David Cameron's resignation. Cameron yesterday said he should have handled scrutiny of his family's tax arrangements better and promised to learn the lessons after days of negative media coverage and calls for his resignation.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

IS militants agree to free abducted Syrian workers

Russia helps to secure release of US detainee

AGENCIES
 Syrian mediators reached an agreement Friday for the release of some 300 cement workers kidnapped by the Islamic State jihadist group, a monitor said, but it was unclear exactly how many were freed.
 IS abducted the employees on Monday from Al-Badia cement factory outside the town of Dmeir, around 50 kilometres (30 miles) east of Damascus.
 Local figures from Dmeir mediated a deal with IS on Friday to let the workers go free, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The Britain-based monitor said that in effect, some 170 workers would be freed as others had already managed to escape. It also found a report of a massacre of the workers as not true.
 The Observatory later said that most of those kidnapped had finally reached their homes late Friday.
 A military source told AFP that he saw dozens of cement workers pass through a nearby regime-held military airport.
 The IS-affiliated Amaq news agency said in an online statement that it released about 300 of the workers, but that it would not free 20 men accused of belonging to a pro-

government militia.
 IS has carried out mass kidnappings in previous offensives.
 Meanwhile, Russia secured the release of a US citizen detained in war-torn Syria and has handed him over to American authorities, Moscow's foreign ministry said Friday.
 In Washington, the US State Department thanked Russia for its assistance in the case of a man who was abducted in 2012 after crossing the border from Turkey.
 In a new development, The US Air Force deployed B-52 bombers to Qatar yesterday to join the fight against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the first time they have been based in the Middle East since the end of the Gulf War in 1991.
 US Air Forces Central Command said it last flew the long-range bombers operationally in the region in May 2006 as part of the war in Afghanistan, and during a US-led military exercise in Jordan in May 2015.
 "The B-52 demonstrates our continued resolve to apply persistent pressure on Daesh and defend the region in any future contingency," said Air Force Lieutenant General Charles Brown, commander of U.S. Air Forces Central Command.

Myanmar drops charges against 200 activists

AFP, Yangon
 Myanmar authorities have dropped charges against nearly 200 political activists since Aung San Suu Kyi pledged to fight for their freedom, a senior police officer told AFP yesterday.
 The cases were dismissed Friday, he said, following Suu Kyi's announcement the day before that she was working with her new civilian-led administration to secure the release of scores of political prisoners languishing in Myanmar's jails.
 "Police have dropped 199 cases against political activists around the country as of yesterday," the officer told AFP on condition of anonymity.
 The issue has personal resonance for Suu Kyi and many in her fledgling government, which is stacked with former activists once jailed under junta rule for their pro-democracy campaigns.

N Korea 'tests ballistic missile engine'

AFP, Seoul
 North Korea yesterday said it had successfully tested an engine designed for an inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) that would "guarantee" an eventual nuclear strike on the US mainland.
 It was the latest in a series of claims by Pyongyang of significant breakthroughs in both its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes.
 Outside experts have treated a number of the claims with scepticism, suggesting the North Korean leadership is attempting to talk up its achievements ahead of a showcase ruling party congress next month.
 According to the North's official KCNA news agency, the ground engine test was ordered and personally monitored by leader Kim Jong-Un.
 As soon as Kim flagged off the test, "the engine spewed out huge flames with deafening boom", KCNA said.
 "The great success... provided a firm guarantee for mounting another form of nuclear attack upon the US imperialists and other hostile forces," Kim was quoted as saying.
 Now North Korea "can tip new type inter-continental ballistic rockets with more powerful nuclear warheads and keep any cesspool of evils in the earth including the US mainland within our striking range", he added.
 The North's top newspaper Rodong Sinmun featured photos of Kim overseeing the test on its front and second pages Saturday, and said the trial was reportedly conducted at the Sohae Space Centre.
 One picture showed Kim looking down from an observation tower as flames were seen over the horizon. Another showed flames streaming down from an engine propped up vertically.

PANAMA PAPERS

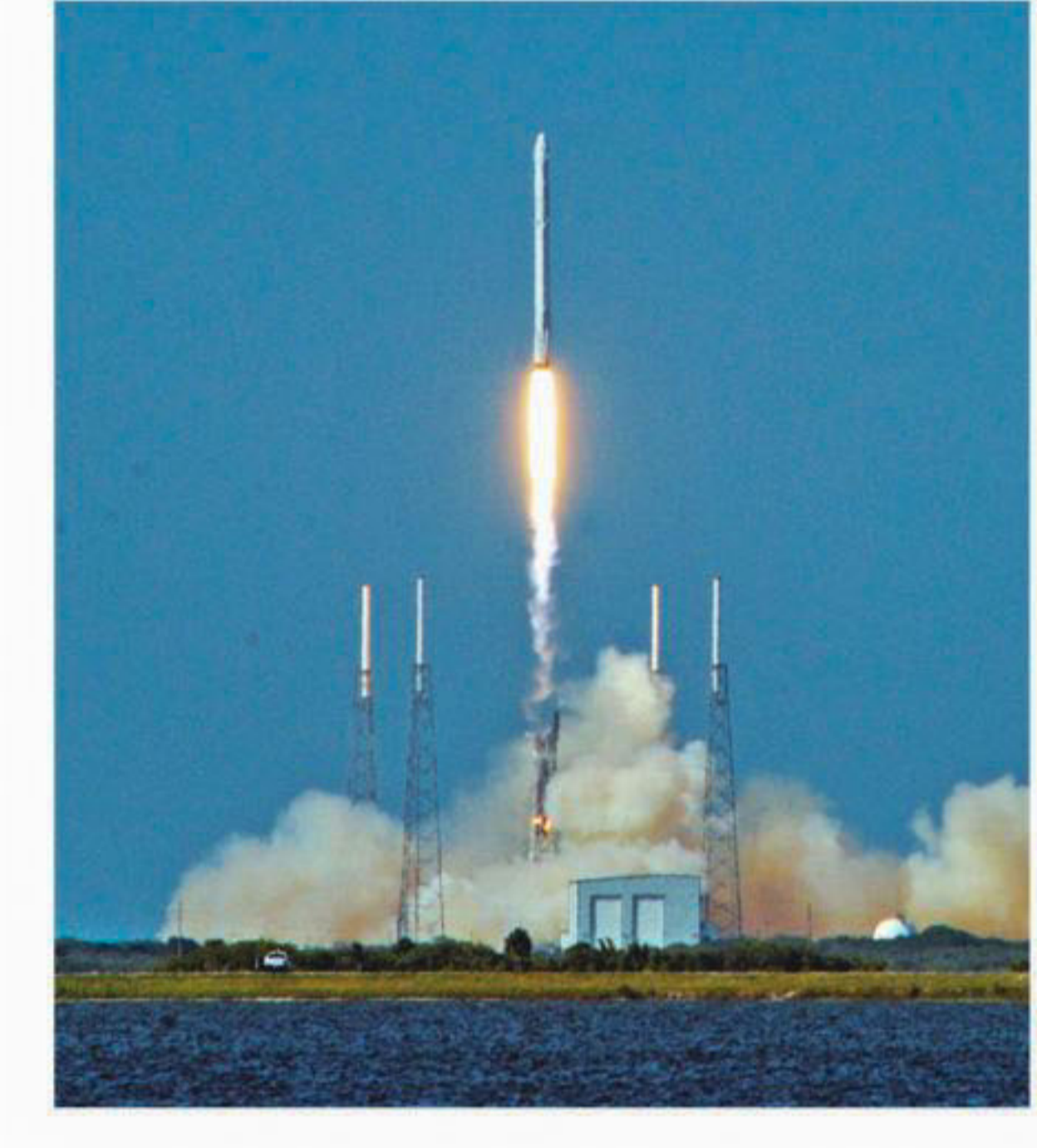
Mossack Fonseca firm raided in El Salvador

REUTERS, El Salvador
 Authorities in El Salvador on Friday raided the local offices of Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca, seizing documents and equipment, the country's attorney general's office said.
 The Panama-based law firm is at the center of an international data leak scandal that has embarrassed several world leaders and shone a spotlight on the shadowy world of offshore companies.
 Attorney General Douglas Melendez, who personally oversaw the raid, said the government decided to sweep the offices after noticing Mossack Fonseca had removed its office sign late on Thursday, which raised suspicions.
 An employee later said the company was planning to move, according to the attorney general's Twitter feed.
 The El Salvador office is not listed on Mossack Fonseca's corporate website, and officials from Mossack Fonseca in Panama were not available to comment late on Friday.
 Governments across the world have begun investigating possible financial wrongdoing by the rich and powerful after the leak of more than 11.5 million documents, dubbed the "Panama Papers," from the law firm that span four decades.
 The papers have revealed financial arrangements of prominent figures, including friends of Russian President Vladimir Putin, relatives of the prime ministers of Britain and Pakistan and of China President Xi Jinping, and the president of Ukraine.
 Founding partner Ramon Fonseca told Reuters in Panama this week that his firm, which specializes in setting up offshore companies, had broken no laws and that all its operations were legal.

BRUSSELS TERROR ATTACK

Man in hat 'found and charged'

THE NEW YORK TIMES
 The "man in the hat" who accompanied the two suicide bombers who detonated their explosives at Brussels Airport on March 22, and who was seen in a surveillance video walking away from the airport, has been identified as Mohamed Abrini, the Belgian prosecutor's office said yesterday.
 Abrini is also suspected of providing logistical help for the men who carried out the Nov. 13 attacks in Paris. He was detained on Friday in Brussels after a nearly five-month manhunt and was charged yesterday with participation in the activities of a terrorist group and terrorist murder.
 But yesterday evening, the Belgian authorities announced a major breakthrough: Abrini confessed that he was the man in the hat and thus had also been directly involved in the attacks at Brussels Airport, which killed 15 people and the two bombers.
 "After being confronted with the results of the different expert examinations, he confessed his presence at the crime scene," the prosecutor's office said in its statement. "He explained having thrown away his vest in a garbage bin and having sold his hat afterwards."
 If followed by further information, the new developments could help investigators identify any remaining members of the Islamic State's network in Belgium and France.



Space X's Falcon 9 rocket lifts off with an unmanned Dragon cargo craft from the launch platform in Cape Canaveral, Florida on Friday. After four failed bids SpaceX finally stuck the landing, powering the first stage of its Falcon 9 rocket onto an ocean platform where it touched down upright after launching cargo to space. The successful operation marked another milestone for Space Exploration Technologies in the quest to develop a cheap, reusable rocket, expanding his edge in the burgeoning commercial space launch industry.

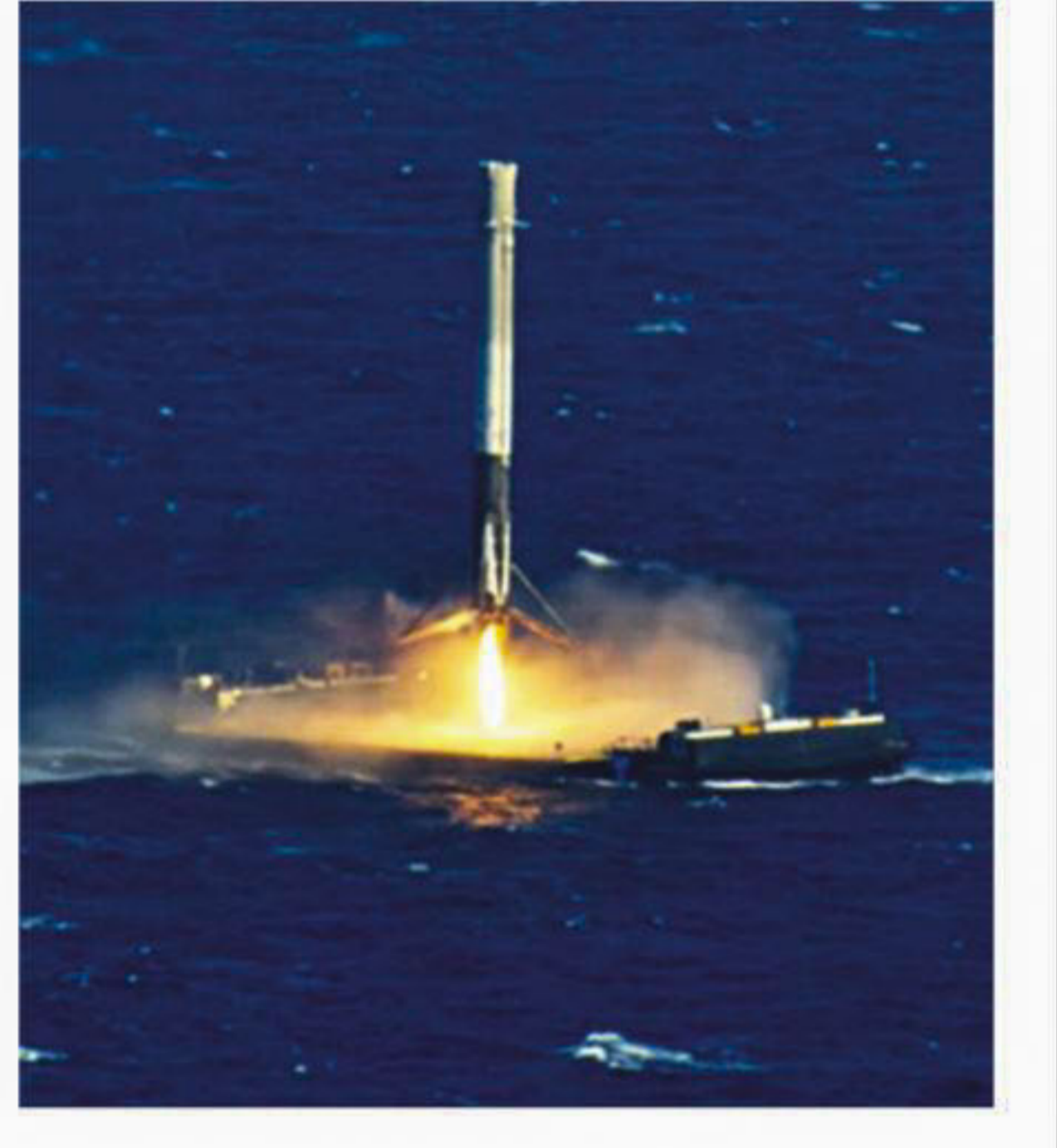


PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS



Anglican leader learns he is an illegitimate child

AFP, London
 The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby has confirmed that he is the illegitimate son of a one-time private secretary to Winston Churchill, after a newspaper reported the discovery late Friday.
 Welby, the most senior figure in the Anglican Communion consisting of some 85 million Christians globally, said the news, reported in Saturday's edition of the Daily Telegraph, had come as a "complete surprise".
 Welby had assumed that his father was Gavin Welby, a whisky salesman who died in 1977. But the Telegraph said it had found evidence suggesting that Montague Browne was actually his father, a finding it then discussed with Welby who decided to take a DNA test. The test showed a 99.9779 percent probability that they were father and son.
 Welby's mother Jane also issued a statement saying the news had come as an "almost unbelievable shock". She confirmed she had slept with Montague Browne shortly before marrying Welby, "fuelled by a large amount of alcohol on both sides".
 Montague Browne died in 2013.

Innocent US man walks free from jail after 3 decades

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK
 A man who spent more than three decades serving time for crimes he did not commit was finally released from a Virginia correctional facility.
 60-year-old Keith Allen Harward got his first taste of freedom Friday afternoon, thanking his lawyers, whom he called "heroes," and lamented the fact that his parents could not see him walk free.
 "That's the worst part about this, is my parents," said Mr Harward, holding back tears as he addressed media outside the prison. "It killed them. It devastated them." He added that he was not allowed to attend their funeral because of the sentence.
 "Somebody needs to pay for this."
 Nonetheless, Harward addressed the press with spirits high, excited that he was returning to his hometown in North Carolina.
 Harward was wrongfully convicted of murdering Jesse Perron and raping his wife near a shipyard in Newport News, Virginia, in

1982, where he was stationed as a sailor. A shipyard guard testified that he witnessed Harward enter the premises covered in blood. The female victim, however, never identified him as her attacker, according to the Associated Press.
 Expert witnesses also testified that teeth marks on the female victim's leg. The Virginia Supreme Court ruled Thursday that DNA evidence was proof of Harward's innocence.
 The Innocence Project took on Harward's case in 2014 and motioned for the court to examine DNA evidence from sperm found at the scene. The DNA profile of the sperm sample reportedly matched the profile of Jerry L. Crotty, a former shipmate of Harward's. The AP said Crotty died in an Ohio prison in 2006, where he was serving time for abduction.
 Harward is "at least the 25th person to be wrongfully [convicted] or indicted for discredited bite mark evidence," according to the Innocence Project.



Man hurls shoe at Kejriwal

THE HINDU ONLINE
 A man hurled a shoe at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal yesterday. The CM was addressing a press conference on the modalities related to the road rationing experiment when the accused, who abruptly stood up and demanded what the government was doing to curb the "sale of fake CNG stickers", hurled one of his black trainers at him.
 The shoe could, however, not connect with its intended target with the accused being overpowered and whisked off by security. The man claimed that he belonged to the Aam Aadmi Sena, a splinter group of the AAP with its origins in Punjab.

Obama says Trump, Cruz doing Democrats a 'favor'

REUTERS, San Francisco
 President Barack Obama on Friday told donors that Republican presidential candidates Donald Trump and Ted Cruz were doing Democrats a "favor" by exposing extreme views within their party on issues such as immigration and national security.
 "I actually think that Donald Trump and Ted Cruz have done us a favor," Obama said, referring to policy positions that would restrict Muslims and Mexicans from entering the country.
 Obama said Trump and Cruz, the two front-runners in the Republican nomination contest ahead of the Nov. 8 presidential election, have upset mainstream "establishment" Republicans with their insurgent campaigns.
 But he told about 100 people at the annual "signature" fundraising dinner for Nancy Pelosi, Democratic leader in the

House of Representatives, that Trump had laid bare what some in the Republican party had been saying for years.
 "He said, 'You know what? I can deliver this message with more flair, with more panache,'" Obama said.
 Speaking in an opulent two-storey atrium with marble pillars in the home of billionaire oil heirs Gordon and Ann Getty, where donors paid \$33,400 per couple to benefit the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, Obama mocked Trump.
 "In 10 months, I will no longer be president of the United States. But in 10 months, I will - contrary to Mr Trump's opinion - still be a citizen of the United States," he said, drawing laughter and cheers from the crowd.
 Trump had long raised questions about whether Obama, who was born in Hawaii, was actually born outside the United States.

