

# NEWS IN brief

## IS kills US serviceman in Iraq attack

AFP, Baghdad  
The Islamic State group broke through Kurdish defences in northern Iraq yesterday and killed an American service member deployed as part of the US-led coalition against the jihadists. The jihadist attack in the north came as a sea of Shia pilgrims braved the threat of bombings by IS, which have killed dozens in recent days, to take part in a major annual religious commemoration in Baghdad.

## Iceland's First Lady linked to offshore accounts

AFP, Reykjavik  
Iceland's First Lady Dorrit Moussaieff has reportedly been named among clients of British bank HSBC with holdings in tax havens, the media outlets behind the Panama Papers and other leaks revealed yesterday. The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) found Moussaieff's name in the "Swiss Leaks" list of more than 100,000 HSBC clients with offshore holdings.

## NY Times hit by slump in ad revenues

AFP, New York  
The New York Times Co. yesterday reported a slump in advertising revenues for both print and digital, dragging the newspaper group into the red for the first quarter. The prestigious US daily posted a loss of \$8.3 million in the quarter, narrower than the \$14.3 million deficit in the same period a year ago. Overall revenues dipped 1.2 percent to \$380 million.

## Spain to hold new polls on June 26

AFP, Madrid  
Weary Spaniards will head back to the polls for the second time in six months after King Felipe yesterday called fresh elections for June 26, which surveys suggest may result in yet another hung parliament. The king signed a decree dissolving parliament in the eurozone's fourth largest economy after political parties failed to agree on a coalition to install a new government.

## Pakistan brands Trump 'ignorant'

AFP, Islamabad  
Pakistan's interior minister has launched a blistering assault on "ignorant" Donald Trump after the US presidential frontrunner vowed to free the doctor who helped track down Osama bin Laden if he wins office. Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan said the "government of Pakistan and not Donald Trump" will decide fate of Shakeel Afridi, languishing in prison five years after his fake vaccination programme helped the CIA track and kill the al-Qaeda leader.



Syrian emergency personnel extinguish the smouldering facade of the Al-Dabbeet hospital after rockets reportedly fired by rebels hit the government-controlled neighbourhood of Muhafaza in the northern city of Aleppo yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

## Moscow hopes for truce 'within hours'

Fresh fighting kills 16 in Syria's Aleppo

AFP, Moscow  
Russia said yesterday it hoped a new ceasefire could be announced within hours for Syria's battered city of Aleppo, where fresh fighting left at least 16 dead including in rocket fire on a maternity hospital. As the city was struck by some of its heaviest reported clashes in recent days, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said efforts were underway to agree a freeze in the fighting. "I am hoping that in the near future, maybe even in the next few hours, such a decision will be announced," Lavrov told reporters after talks with the UN's Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura in Moscow. Meanwhile, the UN Security Council yesterday demanded that hospitals and clinics be protected in war zones, in a resolution that draws attention to the rise in attacks on medical workers in conflicts worldwide. After a relative lull in clashes on Monday and early yesterday, rebels in eastern Aleppo fired a barrage of at least 65 rockets into government-controlled neighbourhoods, Syrian state news agency SANA reported. At least three women were killed when the rockets crashed into a maternity hospital, the agency and state television said, and another 11 killed in fire on other government-held neighbourhoods. The truce between President Bashar al-Assad's regime and non-jihadist rebel forces raised hopes for efforts to finally resolve Syria's five-year conflict. But it has all but collapsed amid renewed fighting, especially in Aleppo.

## EU 'to back' visa-free travel for Turks

AFP, Brussels

The EU will today grant conditional approval for Turks to gain visa-free access to the Schengen zone, sources told AFP, meeting one of Ankara's key demands to keep a migrant deal alive. The European Commission, the executive arm of the 28-nation EU, will say Turkey must still implement further measures in order to access the passportless Schengen area without visas by June, the sources said yesterday. Ankara has demanded visa-free travel in exchange for taking back migrants who land in Greece under a controversial deal signed in March seeking to curb the influx as Europe grapples with its biggest migrant crisis since World War II. EU member states and the European Parliament must still approve the Turkey visa plan after it clears the Commission, which is by no means a foregone conclusion

as many countries have concerns over human rights in Turkey.

"The Commission will put forward a plan to include Turkey in the list of countries exempted from visas," a European source told AFP, adding that "only 64 out of the 72 criteria are fulfilled" and that the offer, therefore, remains conditional.

Turkey has to meet a list of 72 criteria -- ranging from biometric passports to respect for human rights -- that were set when Brussels and Ankara first talked about 90-day visa-free travel to the Schengen area.

Turkey has pressed the EU to respect its promises over what Ankara regards as its big win from the deal which was signed at a summit on March 18.

But Germany and France have proposed an emergency brake -- or "snap back mechanism" -- under which it could halt visa-free travel if large numbers of Turks stay in the EU illegally or if there are a large number of



MIGRANT DEAL

## US will defend allies

Defence Secretary Ash Carter warns Russia as Nato command passes

AFP, Stuttgart

US Defence Secretary Ash Carter warned yesterday that Nato would defend its allies against Russian "aggression" as he presided over the passing of the alliance's European command to a new general.

Carter said Nato would "keep the door open for Russia" for cooperation on global security challenges if Moscow abandoned its "sabre-rattling".

"But it's up to the Kremlin to decide. We don't seek a cold, let alone hot, war with Russia. We don't seek to make Russia an enemy," he said.

"But make no mistake: we will defend our allies, the rule-based international order and the positive future it affords us."

Carter was speaking in the western German city of Stuttgart at the change of command ceremony for General Curtis Scaparrotti, commander of US forces in South Korea, to become its top commander in Europe.

Scaparrotti, who replaces US General Philip Breedlove, will have to handle the Atlantic alliance's tense relationship with Russia.

Breedlove, a US air force general, has served as Supreme Allied Commander Europe since May 2013. The post has always been held by an American.

Moscow has led a bombing campaign in support of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria and allegedly backed rebels in eastern Ukraine against forces of the Western-backed government in Kiev. Since the Ukraine conflict, Nato has established a high-speed response force complete with forward command and logistic centres in its eastern members so it can deploy much more rapidly.



## Al-Qaeda returns to Afghanistan

Joins IS, Taliban in waging jihad

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Al-Qaeda is back in Afghanistan, joining Isis and the Taliban in waging jihad. The three most prominent Islamist terrorist groups in the world are now in one violent arena and drawing the West back into a bloody conflict it had sought to leave behind.

The CIA is marking the fifth anniversary of Osama bin Laden's death five years ago by publishing, though Twitter, a rolling description of the secret mission by US special forces which killed him in Pakistan. The move is meant to mark President Barack Obama's legacy in tackling America's number one enemy and stress the part the agency played in achieving this.

But, 15 years after George W Bush declared the War on Terror following the September 11 attacks, with the specific pledge of destroying al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, Bin Laden's legacy, the organisation he founded, is once again spreading its tentacles across the country which it used as base to plot attacks abroad.

American officials had been dismissive of reports about al-Qaeda's growing presence. That changed recently with the sobering acknowledgment by Major General Jeff Buchanan, the deputy chief of US forces in the country: "If you go back to last year, there were a lot of intelligence estimates that said within Afghanistan al-Qaeda probably has 50 to 100 members, but then, just in this one camp we found more than 150. To find al-Qaeda back in Afghanistan was quite troubling."

## Pay if you want F-16s

US tells Pakistan; Aziz cautions Washington

AGENCIES

In a diplomatic coup for India that sets the stage for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US capital in June, the Obama administration on Monday announced that the US would not be financing the sale of F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan.

The administration's turnaround, by now aligning itself with the bipartisan sentiments expressed in the US Congress against giving aid to finance the deal, also signifies a change in its attitude towards Pakistan.

"...while Congress has approved the sale, key members have made clear that they object to using Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to support it. Given congressional objections, we have told the Pakistanis that they should put forward national funds for that purpose," US State Department spokesperson John Kirby said.

Meanwhile, Sartaj Aziz, Pakistan prime minister's adviser on foreign affairs, said Pakistan will acquire F-16s from elsewhere if the US does not arrange funding for the sale and cautioned the US as both countries lock horns over the purchase of the fighter jets.

Aziz said Pakistan valued the F-16s for their effectiveness, but said that they could be replaced by JF-17 Thunder jets in its anti-terrorism campaign. The adviser also expressed concern over India's growing military power and said if it isn't checked, Pakistan will be "forced to increase its strategic power" too.



A Rohingya woman grieves after a fire gutted her family's shelter in Bawdupa camp near Sittwe, Myanmar's Rakhine state capital yesterday. The fire destroyed homes of nearly 450 Rohingya Muslim families living in a camp for people displaced by 2012 communal fighting in western Myanmar. Authorities said a cooking stove caused the blaze. PHOTO: AFP

## INDIA CHOPPER SCAM 'Happy to be targeted': Rahul

TNN, New Delhi

"I am always being targeted. I am happy to be targeted," Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi said yesterday in response to allegations about his aide's role in the AgustaWestland chopper deal.

BJP MP Kirit Somaiya had alleged on Monday that Rahul and his aide Kanishka Singh were connected to Guido Haschke, one of the middlemen in the AgustaWestland scandal.

Haschke's name also comes in the Commonwealth Games (CWG) scam. In 2009, Haschke was a director at Emaar-MGF, that is promoted by Kanishka's relatives.

Kirit Somaiya had asked the CBI and the



## Messi boy flees Afghan threats

BBC ONLINE

A five-year-old Afghan boy whose image went viral after he was photographed wearing a homemade Lionel Messi shirt has fled with his family to Pakistan.

Murtaza Ahmadi's father said they had received threats of kidnap, including from a gangster demanding money. After the boy shot to fame in his shirt fashioned from a stripy blue plastic bag, the Argentine star gave him two signed jerseys and a football.

"I love Messi. He's the king," Murtaza, who hopes to meet him, told the BBC. Murtaza's father says they left their home province of Ghazni because the situation was "very risky" for him.

"A few days ago I got a call from a local gangster. He thought that since my son had received these T-shirts from Messi that maybe he also got money and asked for his share," Arif Ahmadi told the BBC.

Now the family hope Quetta will provide a chance of a better life, even though Murtaza and seven of his family members are all crammed into one room. They briefly stayed in the capital Islamabad but found it too expensive.

Meanwhile, Murtaza is keeping busy dodging camera crews and working on his football skills, hoping to meet his hero. "Messi, you know how much I like you. Now I want you to invite me so I can come and meet you," he told the BBC.



## KENYA BUILDING COLLAPSE Child rescued after four days

AFP, Nairobi

Kenyan rescuers pulled an 18-month-old toddler alive from the rubble of a six-storey building yesterday, four days after the block collapsed killing 23 people, police said.

"Good news!" Kenya Red Cross said. "A child aged about one and half years rescued alive at 0400 hours and referred to Kenyatta National Hospital."

The Red Cross said the little girl was found "in a bucket wrapped in a blanket" and was dehydrated but without visible physical injuries.

She had been there for 80 hours since the building, which was home to 150 families crammed into single rooms, collapsed on Friday night.

## Polls open in pivotal Indiana

AFP, Washington

US voters went to the polls in Indiana's presidential primaries yesterday, with Donald Trump hoping to knock out his rivals for the Republican nomination and Hillary Clinton seeking to further cement her status as the Democrats' presumptive nominee.

Voters trickled in to cast their ballots after polling stations began opening at 6:00 am, setting in motion a day of reckoning for the movement to "stop Trump" led by Texas Senator Ted Cruz.

"We have to put him away tomorrow folks," Trump told a crowd in South Bend on the eve of the vote. "The biggie is going to be in Indiana -- because if we win Indiana it's over with, folks, it's over with. And then we focus on Hillary Clinton."

A new NBC poll showed Trump 15 percentage points ahead of Cruz, fresh

evidence that the Texas senator's bid to block Trump was under threat. Clinton and her rival, Bernie Sanders, were locked in a closer race in Indiana.

The former secretary of state is already so far ahead overall that the Vermont senator's only hope now lies in the unlikely scenario of her failing to win a majority of delegates in the primaries, in which case her nomination could be contested at a Democratic convention in July.

Cruz was counting on Indiana acting as a Trump firewall, block-

ing him from receiving the 1,237 delegates necessary to secure the nomination at the Republican convention in Cleveland in July.

Trump has so far amassed 1,002 delegates, according to CNN's tally. He needs just under half of the 502 in play in the remaining 10 contests to lock in the nomination.

### RACE TO WHITE HOUSE

