

NEWS IN brief

Another blow for Brazilian president

REUTERS, Brasilia
The senator charged with studying President Rousseff's impeachment yesterday recommended that she be put on trial for breaking budget laws, bringing the embattled leftist leader one step closer to suspension from office. The Senate is due to vote on May 11 to try Rousseff, at which point she will be automatically suspended pending a trial that could last up to 180 days.

Nato alliance gets new supreme commander

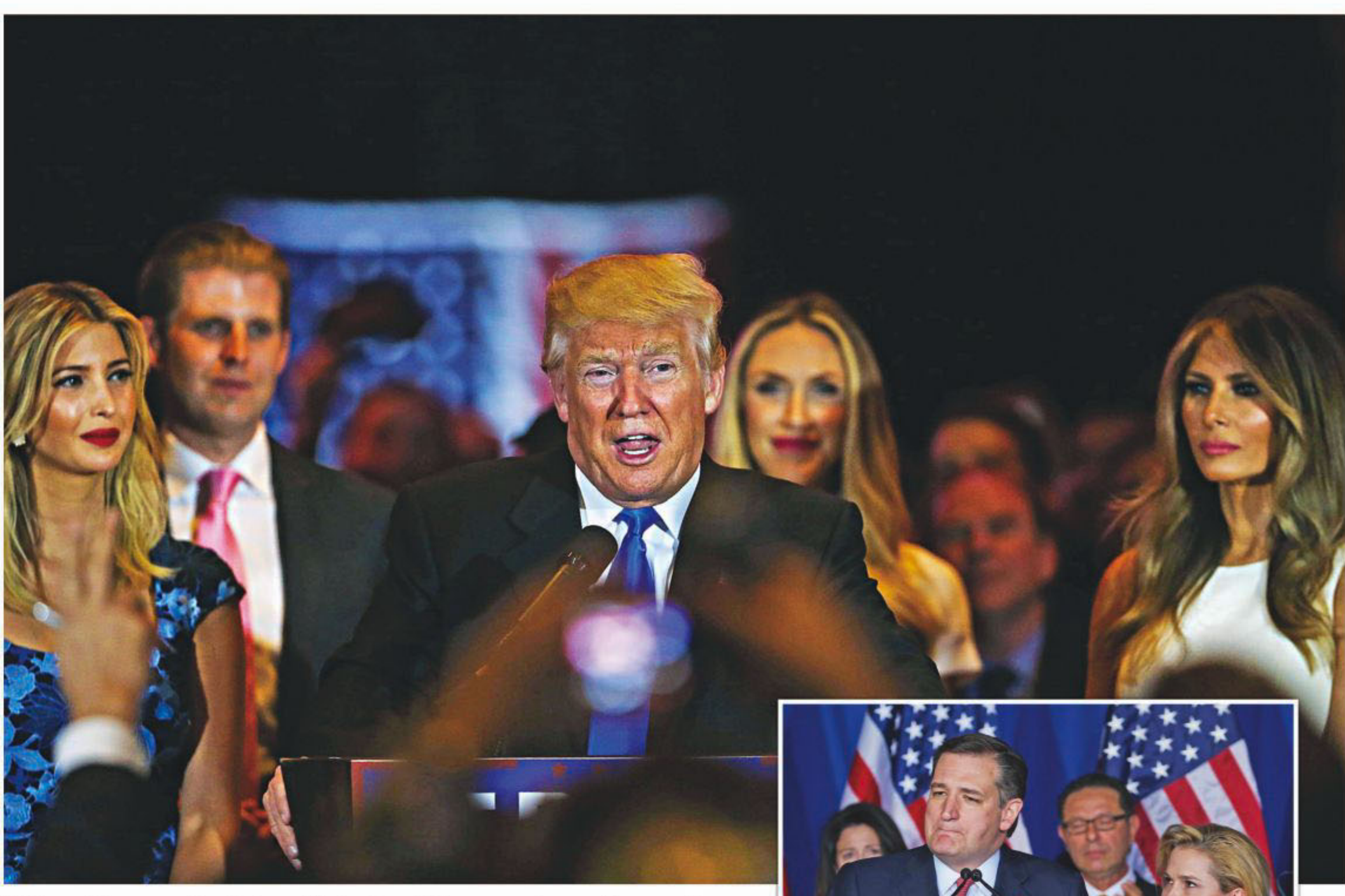
AFP, Mons
Nato's new supreme commander US General Curtis Scaparrotti said yesterday that he would "strengthen" the alliance's stance in eastern Europe against a resurgent Russia. At a handover ceremony from his predecessor Philip Breedlove, the former commander of US forces in Korea also said Nato should consider whether to provide Ukraine with weaponry as it battles pro-Russian rebels.

Yemen foes resume peace talks: UN

AFP, Kuwait City
Yemen's warring parties resumed face-to-face peace talks yesterday after a three-day break triggered by a walkout by the government delegation, the United Nations said. It is only the second round of face-to-face talks in the hard-won negotiations to end a devastating conflict that has killed more than 6,400 people.

Saudi carries out 90th execution of the year

AFP, Riyadh
Saudi Arabia executed a citizen convicted of murder yesterday taking to 90 the number of people the ultra-conservative Muslim kingdom has put to death this year. Mufreh al-Harissi was found guilty of stabbing to death a fellow Saudi during a dispute, the interior ministry said in a statement.



US Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump gestures after speaking in New York on Tuesday, following the primary win in Indiana. Inset, Republican presidential candidate, Sen Ted Cruz announces the suspension of his campaign after his defeat in Indiana. Story on page 16. PHOTO: AFP



How Trump took hold of the GOP

AFP, Washington
Billionaire Donald Trump has capitalized on his media savvy and the anti-establishment anger of Republican voters to become the first political neophyte to capture the party's White House nomination since World War II hero Dwight Eisenhower in 1952.
In 2010, the Grand Old Party had been overtaken by the insurgent Tea Party, whose mission was to upend politics as usual, ousting Republican and Democratic stalwarts in favor of fresh faces.
The party as a whole eventually embraced that message, but Trump took it to the next level -- and made that voter rage the center of his presidential run.
The Republican party machine even -- perhaps inadvertently -- directly contributed to Trump's rise.
During Barack Obama's first term, Trump championed the cause of the so-called "birther" movement, questioning whether Obama was born in the US to challenge his presidency.
"The Republican Party looked at that and thought, 'Hey, this is a way to energize our base.' In the short term they did very little to stop him," said John Hudak, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank.
"That gave Donald Trump prominence in the Republican Party, and now that prominence that it gave him is something that many people in the party are coming to regret," he told AFP.
"What he is is a reflection of a Republican Party that is addicted to short-term benefits and ignorant of long-term considerations."
When Trump declared he was running for president on June 16, 2015, it drew little attention and two-thirds of Republicans said they would never vote for him.
But three weeks later, he labeled Mexican immigrants criminals and rapists, sparking a firestorm that proved to be the lift-off of a mold-shattering campaign to "Make America

EU backs visa-free travel for Turks

Unveils new asylum rules, fines for member-states for refusing refugees

AGENCIES
The EU yesterday gave conditional backing to visa-free travel for Turks under a migrant deal and unveiled new asylum rules including fines for countries that refuse their share of refugees.

In its latest bid to tackle the biggest migration crisis since World War II, the European Commission proposed making countries pay a "solidarity contribution" of 250,000 euros (\$290,000) per refugee they decline to take.

Turkey has threatened to tear up a March agreement to take back migrants from Greece if the EU fails to keep its promise to allow nearly 80 million Turkish citizens to travel without visas to Europe.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said visa-free travel could herald a "new page" in the often troubled relations between the EU and Ankara, but warned Brussels to "stick to its promise".

European Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans said the EU's executive arm would recommend the plan so long as Ankara meets the remaining criteria by the end of June.

Turkey still has five more benchmarks to go on the EU's list of 72 -- which include biometric passports and human

rights issues -- despite making "impressive progress" in recent weeks, Timmermans said.
"There is no free ride here, and we are clear about what remains to be done," Timmermans told reporters, in response to criticism from several EU states that the deal is too soft on Turkey's rights record.

The 28 EU member states and the European Parliament must also approve

a result of which numbers of arrivals in Greece have dropped dramatically since it came into force on March 20.
The International Organization for Migration meanwhile said eighty-four migrants were missing after their inflatable dinghy sank off the Libyan coast.
The dinghy was found taking on water in rough seas after the Italian coast guard received a satellite phone call.
It diverted the merchant ship to rescue 26 survivors and bring them to Italy. A spokesperson for the coastguard said similar boats used by people smugglers could hold 100-120 people, and were usually full.
Rough seas and waves topping two metres hampered rescue efforts.
At least 800 migrants are feared to have drowned in the southern Mediterranean this year to date.

Meanwhile the Commission further announced a six-month extension of border controls in the Schengen zone, which have been reintroduced in some places as a result of the migrant crisis and recent terror attacks in Paris and Brussels.

Germany, France, Austria, Denmark and Sweden requested the extension, saying the border situation remains "extremely volatile".

Brussels hopes the asylum reform will work in tandem with the EU-Turkey deal, as

the visa scheme, which is by no means a foregone conclusion.
Under the plan, Turkish citizens would be allowed to make 90-day visits to Europe's 26-country Schengen passport-free area for business or tourism without needing a visa.

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US allies pledge to do more in war against IS

AFP, Stuttgart
A coalition of countries battling Islamic State jihadists in Syria and Iraq yesterday pledged to pour more resources into the fight, after coming under strong pressure from Washington for greater contributions.

The promise came after a meeting in Stuttgart of defence ministers from countries involved in the anti-IS coalition, during which US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter drove home the message that to deal IS a body blow, "all must do more".

Carter's call to step up the fight came a week after US President Barack Obama reiterated a long-standing demand for members of Nato to increase their defence spending to meet the alliance's target of two percent of output.

Speaking after the talks with counterparts from Australia, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, Norway and Spain, Carter said he was "confident that today's meeting will produce additional military commitments".

Besides military resources, defence ministers meeting at the US European Command's headquarters also examined their economic and political contributions to the campaign, he said.

UK to take in more unaccompanied Syrian children

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'Dozens killed' in Aleppo

US, Russia agree to extend truce to the Syrian city

AGENCIES
Dozens of people are reported to have been killed in fierce clashes between rebel groups and government forces in the divided Syrian city of Aleppo.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said rebels advanced into government-held western districts overnight but were pushed back by yesterday morning.

The battle was the most intense in Aleppo for more than a year, it added.

Russia later said attacks by jihadist militants allied to the rebels had disrupted a plan for a temporary truce that was to take effect on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, activists reported that government warplanes had carried out more than 20 air strikes in the rebel-held eastern Ghouta outside Damascus, after the regime of calm declared by the government around the capital on Saturday expired.

A surge in fighting in Aleppo in the past two weeks has killed almost 300 people.

Aid agencies say Aleppo is on the brink of humanitarian disaster. Large parts of the city have been destroyed and its infrastructure has been severely damaged, leaving civilians without water and electricity.

The UN Security Council will discuss the violence in Aleppo later yesterday.

Meanwhile, US and Russia have agreed to work with Syria's warring parties to extend a shaky truce to the city of Aleppo, the State Department said yesterday.

"Since this went into effect today at 00:01 in Damascus, we have seen an overall decrease in violence in these areas," spokesman Mark Toner said.

Once a nationwide "cessation of hostilities" is again in place, the United States and United Nations hope the warring parties will return to peace talks.

Kerry has warned that if Assad's regime does not agree to begin a political transition away from his rule by August 1, it may face unspecified "repercussions." Reports in Washington suggest that this may mean the United States or its allies in the region are stepping up military supplies and training for the rebels.

SYRIA CRISIS

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Air raids, exchange of fire raise Gaza tensions

AFP, Gaza City
Israel launched air raids on the Gaza Strip yesterday after a day of tensions along the border of the Palestinian territory whose Islamist rulers warned against an escalation.

Air strikes hit around Gaza's derelict international airport near the southern city of Rafah and in nearby farming areas, without causing any casualties, said the territory's Hamas-run interior ministry.

Israel's army said its warplanes had hit five sites operated by Hamas. The raids followed a bout of violence on the Gaza-Israel border yesterday, with exchanges of fire that put a 2014 ceasefire agreement to the test.

Israeli tanks fired into the Palestinian enclave at least twice, saying it was in response to mortar fire across the border, while the army designated an Israeli border town a closed military zone.

Earlier the Israeli army twice confirmed its tanks had fired on targets in Gaza. There were no reported casualties and no claims of responsibility for the mortar fire.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad released separate statements warning Israel against any escalation along the border.

The violence puts pressure on a ceasefire that has held since the last round of hostilities in Gaza ended in summer 2014 which killed 2,251 Palestinians, mostly civilians, and 73 Israelis, including 67 soldiers.

New crisis in Nepal as ruling coalition splits

REUTERS, Kathmandu
Nepal's embattled Prime Minister KP Oli will not resign after the main Maoist party that props up his fragile coalition said yesterday it would try to form a new government, plunging the Himalayan nation into crisis.

An aide said the 64-year-old leader, who has been in power for just eight months, would seek cross-party talks. If those fail, a no-confidence motion could follow in parliament, holding out the prospect of more uncertainty.

Oli rose to power with the backing of the Maoists after promising to resolve protests against a new constitution by southern plains dwellers and to step up efforts to rebuild homes destroyed by earthquakes last year.

Increasing public anger at Oli has led the Maoists - who waged a decade-long insurgency before joining mainstream politics in

2006 - to conclude that he was an obstacle to ending the constitutional standoff.

"Our party has decided to form the new government and we appeal to other political parties to help us resolve the outstanding political problems in the south through talks," said Narayan Kaji Shrestha, a leader of the unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist).

Shrestha said the main opposition Nepali Congress party had offered to support Maoist leader Prachanda to replace Oli. Oli's grip on power has been in question for months, but aide Bishnu Rimal said he would seek clarifications from the Maoists about their concerns.

"We invite all political parties including the Nepali Congress and the Madhesi groups to join this cabinet to make it a national government and resolve all outstanding problems," Rimal told Reuters.



Wildfire is worsening along highway 63 Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada, yesterday. Fuel shortages and heavy traffic snarled the evacuation of all 80,000 residents from the western Canadian city of Fort McMurray yesterday as a wildfire raged out of control, destroying much of one neighborhood and badly damaging others. PHOTO: REUTERS

SOUTH CHINA SEA ROW China to carry out more military drills

AGENCIES
China's military will carry out more military exercises in the South China Sea this month involving advanced warships and submarines, state news agency Xinhua said yesterday, terming the drills routine.

China claims almost all of the energy-rich waters of the South China Sea, through which more than \$5 trillion of maritime trade passes each year. The Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, Malaysia and Taiwan have overlapping claims.

Xinhua said the ships, including a new guided missile destroyer, would take part in anti-submarine, anti-missile and other exercises. It did not say exactly where the drills would take place, but noted they were routine and had been planned for this year.

China periodically announces such exercises in the South China Sea as it tries to demonstrate it is being transparent about its military deployments.

Rival countries have wrangled over territory in the South China Sea for centuries, but tension has steadily increased in recent years. Washington has criticized Beijing's building of artificial islands in the disputed Spratly archipelago, and has conducted sea and air patrols near them.



London looks set to elect Muslim mayor

AFP, London
Opposition Labour candidate Sadiq Khan had a strong lead in final polls before today's London mayoral elections, putting him on course to become the first Muslim leader of a European Union capital.

After a bad-tempered campaign, two surveys yesterday gave the son of a bus driver a lead of up to 14 points over Zac Goldsmith, his multimillionaire rival from Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservative party.

After a final rally with Cameron, Goldsmith campaigned overnight in a last-minute push for votes, meeting traders at the Billingsgate fish market and helping deliver milk at dawn in the upmarket district of Kensington.

Khan has distanced himself from a scandal over anti-Semitism in the national Labour party and has defended himself against attacks from Goldsmith for failing to condemn Muslim extremists.

There are ten other candidates to replace Conservative Boris Johnson as mayor, a position that has responsibility for transport, policing, housing and promoting economic development, but none of them have a chance.

An Opinion survey for the Evening Standard newspaper put Khan on 35 percent compared to 26 percent for Goldsmith.

His lead lengthened once second preference votes were taken into account, to 57 percent against Goldsmith's 43 percent.

A second poll, by ComRes for LBC radio and ITV London news, put Khan on 36 percent and Goldsmith on 45 percent on first preference votes, moving to 56 percent and 44 percent on second preferences.

The race for the mayoralty has been marked by negative campaigning between two very different candidates.