

NEWS IN

brief

3 killed in US spa shooting

AFP, Brookfield, Wisconsin

A gunman burst into a day spa where his estranged wife worked in the mid western US state of Wisconsin and opened fire Sunday, killing three people and injuring four others, police said.

The suspect -- identified as 45-year-old Radcliffe Haughton -- was later found dead at the scene in Brookfield, a suburb of the city of Milwaukee, police told AFP.

Leftists oppose Bo Xilai removal

BBC ONLINE

A group of Chinese leftists yesterday wrote an open letter asking parliament not to expel disgraced leader Bo Xilai.

The letter, signed by more than 300 academics and former officials, was carried on the left-wing Chinese-language website Red China.

It said the move was legally questionable and politically motivated.

China's leftists are a small but vocal group to whom Bo's populist policies appealed.

Attack on Turkey press condemned

REUTERS, Istanbul

Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's government has waged one of the world's biggest crack-downs on press freedom in recent years, jailing more journalists than Iran, China or Eritrea, a leading media watchdog said yesterday.

The damning report from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) added to a chorus of criticism from the European Union and rights groups of the EU-candidate country's mass detention of reporters, most of whom are kept in detention while their cases are dealt with.

Seoul blocks propaganda

AFP, Paju, South Korea

South Korean police yesterday blocked activists from sending anti-Pyongyang leaflets across the border with North Korea, which had threatened to respond with a "merciless" military strike.

The decision to shut down the propaganda exercise was an unusual one and reflected, analysts said, Seoul's desire to avoid any destabilising clash ahead of South Korea's presidential election in December.

Battles flare as crisis deepens in Lebanon

REUTERS, Beirut

The Lebanese army promised decisive action to quell unrest linked to the Syria conflict as gunbattles flared in the capital Beirut and elsewhere yesterday after the assassination of a senior intelligence officer last week.

The army command urged political leaders to be cautious in their public statements so as not to inflame passions further.

It issued the warning after troops and gunmen exchanged fire in Beirut's southern suburbs, wounding five people, while protesters blocked roads with burning tyres.

In the northern city of Tripoli, four people were killed, including a 9-year-old girl, and 12 wounded in clashes overnight and in the morning, security and medical sources said.

The violence heightened fears that the civil war in Syria next door was spreading



A member of Hezbollah group

into Lebanon, upsetting its delicate political balance and threatening to usher in a new era of bloodshed between Lebanese allies and opponents of President Bashar al-Assad.

Lebanon has been boiling since Friday after Brigadier General Wissam al-Hassan, an intelligence chief opposed to the Syrian leadership, was assassinated in a car bombing.

Many politicians have accused Syria of being behind the killing and angry protesters tried to storm the government palace after Hassan's funeral on Sunday.

Opposition leaders want Prime Minister Najib Mikati to resign, saying he is too close to Assad and his Lebanese militant ally Hezbollah, which is part of Mikati's government.

Troops in full combat gear and armoured personnel carriers guarded traffic intersections and government offices yesterday.

China to strengthen communist rule

REUTERS, Beijing

China's ruling Communist Party will discuss a proposal to amend its constitution at its congress in early November, state media said yesterday, a move aimed at strengthening one-party rule over the next five years.

State news agency Xinhua did not elaborate on what the amendments could be, though they have previously formed the guiding principles on which major policy decisions such as moving China in the direction of a market economy have been based.

"The meeting stressed the importance of making a draft amendment to the CPC (Communist Party of China) Constitution that conforms to the needs of the CPC's theoretic innovation, practice and development and will also promote the CPC's work and strengthen its construction," Xinhua said, citing a statement from the meeting of the politburo.

The party "constitution" is less a legal document and more an organisational guide and compilation of the ideological justifications.

LA Times endorses Obama for second term

AFP, Los Angeles

A major US newspaper, The Los Angeles Times, yesterday endorsed President Barack Obama for a second term in the White House, saying he has brought "steady leadership" to the office.

The paper also warned that Republican challenger Romney would exacerbate the economic situation in the country "by spending extravagantly on defence."

It was referring to the wars that George W Bush launched in Afghanistan and Iraq.

'Slim' hope of Syria truce as fighting rages

AFP, Damascus

Hopes of a truce being implemented in war-torn Syria during this week's Muslim Eid holidays are "slim," the Arab League said yesterday, as heavy fighting rocked Damascus and the northern city of Aleppo.

UN-Arab League peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi had on Sunday indicated a favourable response to his appeal to both sides of the Syrian conflict to observe a truce during the four-day Eid al-Adha holiday, which begins on Friday.

But Arab League deputy secretary general Ahmed Ben Helli told AFP yesterday that there is little chance of such a truce coming into effect.

Castro ends rumours, appears in public

AFP, Havana



Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro has reappeared in public, meeting at a Havana hotel with a Venezuelan politician -- quashing swirling rumors that the former leader was on his death bed.

Castro -- who led Communist Cuba for almost five decades before illness sidelined him -- "is very well," Venezuela's former vice president Elias Jaua said Sunday after meeting the bearded revolutionary icon.

The 86-year-old Castro "is very well, very lucid," Jaua, a loyal supporter of leftist Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, whose government keeps the cash-strapped Cuban regime afloat with cut-rate oil and aid -- told reporters.

After the five-hour meeting Saturday, Castro accompanied Jaua back to the posh Hotel Nacional, where the visitor was staying, and then posed wearing a straw farmer's hat for pictures with hotel staff.

"We are going to have Fidel with us for a long time," said hotel manager Antonio Martinez, who posed with Castro for a picture, in which Jaua also flashes a broad smile.

Obama, Romney face off in final debate

AFP, Boca Raton, Florida



US President Barack Obama and his Republican challenger Mitt Romney Tuesday face off in their third and final debate, with polls showing them dead even in their race for the White House.

The showdown focusing on foreign policy is being held in the critical toss-up state of Florida just 15 days before the election and promises to be among the most watched 90 minutes of the entire 2012 campaign.

Upping the stakes, a new NBC/Wall Street Journal poll released on the eve of the duel showed the rivals in a dead heat, with 47 percent each among likely voters.

"This debate will be a big one," said Dan Gelber, a former state senator from Miami Beach who is working with the Obama campaign. "We have a lot of communities here that care about foreign policy, especially in South Florida, whether it's the Jewish community, the Cuban community, the Haitian community or the Hispanic community across the state."

The president and his Republican rival will no doubt trade blows over security shortcomings in Libya; how to contain Iran; the roiling crisis in Syria; a rising China; and ending the Afghan war.

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