

NEWSIN brief

Intruder ran through White House floor

REUTERS, Washington

The man who breached security at the White House this month raced through several rooms on the main floor, penetrating farther into the building than previously disclosed, a Republican congressman said on Monday. The suspect, Omar Gonzalez, 42, a decorated Iraqi war veteran, was charged with unlawfully entering a restricted building or grounds while carrying a deadly or dangerous weapon. Officials said he was carrying a knife when he jumped the White House fence and entered the executive mansion on Sept. 19.

Russian troops still in Ukraine: Nato

AFP, Brussels

Russia still has hundreds of troops in Ukraine despite a "significant" force withdrawal made since Kiev and pro-Russian rebels agreed a ceasefire earlier this month, Nato said yesterday. After the pullback, "hundreds of Russian troops, including special forces, still remain inside Ukraine," Nato spokesman Jay Janzen said, adding that no further reduction had been seen in the past week and that some 20,000 soldiers were still deployed near the Ukrainian border.

Catalonia fights on for independence vote

AFP, Barcelona

Catalan leaders launched a legal battle yesterday to get their drive for a referendum on independence from Spain back on track after a court suspended it. Angry separatists in the region planned protests after Spain's Constitutional Court halted the plan to hold the vote on November 9. The speaker of the wealthy northeastern region's parliament, Nuria de Gispert, said the assembly would demand that the court "immediately lift" its suspension of the referendum.

Thailand to give tourists 'safety' wristbands

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand yesterday announced plans to give tourists wristbands carrying their personal details, as the kingdom falls under intense scrutiny over visitor safety following the murder of two British holidaymakers. "If anything happens to them we will then know their names, nationality and hotel," said Arnuparp Gaesornsuwan, director general of the Department of Tourism told AFP.

Japan volcano eruption intensifies

BBC ONLINE

Efforts to recover the bodies of at least 24 climbers have been suspended again after the eruption on Japan's Mount Ontake intensified. A BBC correspondent near the mountain yesterday said the volcano was shooting out even more ash, smoke and rocks than before. At least 36 people are thought to have died in Saturday's unexpected eruption. Dozens of other people were injured in the incident on the mountain, which is about 200km (125 miles) west of Tokyo. Hundreds of firefighters, police and troops have been involved in search operations. Twelve bodies have been recovered so far. Another 24 are reported to be on the mountain, including five more located on Monday. Japanese authorities only declare fatalities once the body has been examined by a doctor.

Hong Kong protesters prepare for the long haul

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Tens of thousands of pro-democracy protesters extended a blockade of Hong Kong streets yesterday, stockpiling supplies and erecting makeshift barricades ahead of what some fear may be a push by police to clear the roads before Chinese National Day. Riot police shot pepper spray and tear gas at protesters at the weekend, but by yesterday evening they had almost completely withdrawn from the downtown Admiralty district except for an area around the government headquarters. On the eve of today's anniversary of the Communist Party's foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, crowds poured into central districts of the Asian financial hub, near where National Day festivities are scheduled to take place. Rumours have rippled through crowds of protesters that police could be preparing to move in again, as the government has vowed to go ahead with celebrations. "Many powerful people from the



PHOTO: AFP

A pro Hong Kong government protestor (L) speaks to a crowd of pro-democracy activists in the Kowloon of Hong Kong yesterday.

mainland will come to Hong Kong. The Hong Kong government won't want them to see this, so the police must do something," Sui-ying Cheng, 18, a freshman at Hong Kong University's School of Professional and Continuing Education, said of the National Day holiday. "We are not scared. We will stay

here tonight. Tonight is the most important," she said. Student leaders have given Hong Kong leader Leung Chun-ying an ultimatum to come out and address the protesters before midnight yesterday, threatening to escalate action in the next few days to occupy more government facilities, buildings and

public roads if he fails to do so. The protesters, mostly students, are demanding full democracy and have called on Leung to step down after Beijing ruled a month ago that it would vet candidates wishing to run for Hong Kong's leadership in 2017. While Leung has said Beijing would not back down in the face of protests it has branded illegal, he also said Hong Kong police would be able to maintain security without help from People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops from the mainland. "When a problem arises in Hong Kong, our police force should be able to solve it. We don't need to ask to deploy the PLA," Beijing-backed Leung told reporters at a briefing yesterday. The protests are widely expected to escalate today to coincide with National Day celebrations. "I don't know what the police or government will do to me, but I am 100 percent sure I need to come out (tonight)," said Ken To, the 35-year-old manager of a restaurant in the densely packed Mong Kok residential district.

Obama makes pitch for affections of Modi govt

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama yesterday hailed the "energy" and "determination" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, flexing the symbolism of his office to make a strong pitch for the affections of the new Indian government. Modi meanwhile told Obama that he hoped for an agreement "soon" to free up a major global trade facilitation agreement, blocked by the government in New Delhi over concerns its food subsidies to the poor could face legal challenges. The US sees its relationship with India as crucial to Obama's strategy of rebalancing US diplomatic weight towards Asia and believes that democratic synergies between Washington and New Delhi make them a natural fit. Yet several spats have disrupted ties in recent months and there have been doubts expressed over whether Modi shares Washington's hopes for the relationship. Modi and Obama first met in a private dinner for their



delegations in the ornate Blue Room in the White House late on Monday, after the Indian leader arrived in Washington fresh from a triumphant welcome from the Indian diaspora in New York.

White House chefs served up crisp halibut in ginger carrot sauce, though Modi had given advance notice he would not eat as he is in the middle of an annual religious fast. Yesterday, Modi re-staged his arrival for the cameras, driving in a black sports utility vehicle with US and Indian flags flying from the fenders, up to the West Wing of the White House through a US military color guard. Modi's warm welcome struck a sharp contrast to his previous treatment by Washington, which refused him a visa in 2005 on human rights grounds over anti-Muslim riots in his home state of Gujarat. Modi denies wrongdoing and was never charged over the violence that killed more than 1,000 people. Both sides used his debut visit as Indian leader to stress togetherness and common goals: Obama and Modi wrote a joint article for the Washington Post on Tuesday and traveled together after their talks to pay homage at a memorial to civil rights leader Martin Luther King in Washington. Obama told reporters he was impressed with the "energy and determination" Modi has shown in tackling India's challenges and opportunities since he took office in May.

Tamil film industry fasts for Jayalalithaa

AGENCIES

Southern India's film industry launched an eight-hour fast yesterday to rally support for political leader Jayalalithaa Jayaram, who was jailed for four years following a lengthy corruption case. Some 3,000 directors, actors, producers and others were taking part in the hunger strike for the ex-film star turned politician, while the industry itself shut down for the day throughout Tamil Nadu state. "We decided not to have any film shootings, editing, dubbing or movie screenings across Tamil Nadu from 9:00am to 5:00pm today," said Diamond Babu, a public relations officer in the Tamil-language film industry. "This is a peaceful hunger strike without any protest to show our sympathy, love and affection to (former) chief minister," Babu told AFP. Known as "Ammam" (Mother) to her supporters, Jayalalithaa was jailed on Saturday in the southern city of Bangalore for illegally

amassing wealth -- including gold, properties, hundreds of pairs of shoes and thousands of saris -- in a case that started 18 years ago. A special Bench of the Karnataka High Court will hear today, the bail application of AIADMK general secretary Jayalalithaa, convicted in the disproportionate wealth case by a Special Court in Bangalore on September 27. On yesterday morning, the court had adjourned the matter to October 6 after government lawyer Bhavani Singh, who was the Special Public Prosecutor (SPP) in the Special Court that convicted Jayalalithaa, informed the judge that he had not received an official communication on his appointment as the SPP for the appeal as well. Subsequently, Jayalalithaa's lawyers moved an application before the High Court Registry for an urgent hearing today, which was accepted. The bail application and the appeal against the trial court order will be taken up at 10:30 am today.



Iran rejects Israel PM accusations

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday rejected as baseless accusations levelled by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that it poses a greater threat to the world than the Islamic State jihadist group. Speaking on Monday at the UN General Assembly, Netanyahu said that "to defeat ISIS and leave Iran as a threshold nuclear state power is to win the battle and lose the war". Netanyahu also described the IS jihadists who have captured chunks of territory in Iraq and Syria and Hamas, the Islamist militant movement that largely controls Gaza, as "branches of the same poisonous tree". Iran's deputy ambassador to the United Nations, Khodadad Seifi, dismissed the accusations as part of Israel's campaign to undermine negotiations on his country's nuclear programme. "The remarks made by the Israeli regime's premier include baseless allegations against the Islamic Republic of Iran and are basically made with the aim of... justifying the crimes the regime recently committed against Palestinian civilians," said Khodadad, quoted by Fars news agency. Israel and militants in Gaza fought a devastating 50-day war in July and August that killed 2,100 people in the Palestinian enclave and left 73 dead on the Israeli side. Iran, which does not recognise Israel's existence, supports Gaza militants by providing them the technology needed to make the rockets to fire on the Jewish state.



A man carries a bird in a cage as Syrian Kurdish people arrive at the border between Syria and Turkey after several mortars hit both side in the southeastern town of Suruc, in the Sanliurfa province on Monday.

Afghanistan and US sign troop pact

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan and the United States yesterday signed a deal to allow some US troops to stay in the country next year, signalling that new President Ashraf Ghani intends to mend frayed ties with Washington. Hamid Karzai, who stepped down as president on Monday, refused to sign the deal in a disagreement that symbolised the breakdown of Afghan-US relations after the optimism of 2001 when the Taliban were ousted from power. Afghan National Security Adviser Hanif Atmar and US Ambassador James Cunningham inked the document at a ceremony in the presidential palace in Kabul as Ghani stood behind the pair looking on. "The signing sends the message that President Ghani fulfils his commitments. He promised it would be signed the day after inauguration," Daoud Sultanzyo, a senior aide of Ghani's, told AFP before the ceremony. "It shows the president's commitment to the Afghan security forces and confidence in our future relationship with the US. We are replacing uncertainty with certainty." US State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said the deal would "enable Afghanistan, the United States and the international community to maintain the partnership we've established to ensure Afghanistan maintains and extends the gains of the past decade." US-led Nato combat troops are due to withdraw by the end of this year, lending added urgency to reaching an agreement on a residual force.

ISIS could become 'world's first truly terrorist state': Theresa May

THE INDEPENDENT ONLINE

ISIS could acquire nuclear and biological weapons to launch attacks on Britain, the UK Home Secretary warned yesterday as she set out new measures to clamp down on extremist groups. In a speech to the Tory party conference that concentrated almost entirely on the threat from terrorism at home and abroad, Theresa May warned that the jihadist group could become the "world's first truly terrorist state" in Iraq and Syria. "If [ISIS] succeed in firmly consolidating their grip on the land they occupy in Syria and Iraq, we will see the world's first truly terrorist state established within a few hours flying time of our country," she said. "We will see terrorists given the space to plot attacks against us, train their men and women, and devise new methods to kill indiscriminately." "We will see the risk, often prophesied but thank God not yet fulfilled, that with the capability of a state behind them, the terrorists will acquire chemical, biologi-

cal or even nuclear weapons to attack us. "We must not flinch. We must not shy away from our responsibility. We must not drift towards danger and insecurity. While we still have the chance, we must act to destroy them." In a bid to counter the threat of



home-grown terrorism, May said the next Tory manifesto would include a renewed commitment to the Communications Data Bill -- the so-called "snoopers' charter". The measure, first championed by May two years ago, would have required phone and internet companies to main-

tain records of people's internet, email and mobile phone activity -- though not the content of the calls or messages. It was finally abandoned after running into strong resistance from the Liberal Democrats, a roadblock which May slammed yesterday as "outrageously irresponsible". She told the conference: "The lesson of history tells us that when our enemies say they want to attack us, they mean it. "Innocent people are in danger right now. If we do not act, we risk sleepwalking into a society in which crime can no longer be investigated and terrorists can plot their murderous schemes uninterrupted. "We have to give the police and the security services the powers they need to keep us safe, and that is what the next Conservative government will do." She warned there had been a "rapid and dangerous" decline in communicative ability to access online communications, with the police forced to abandon 20 investigations, including 13 in which a child was at risk of harm.

EARTH'S WILDLIFE 'halves in 40 years'

THE INDEPENDENT ONLINE

The world's wildlife population is less than half the size it was just four decades ago, with unsustainable human consumption and damage from climate change destroying valuable habitats at a faster rate than previously thought, a new report has warned. The number of vertebrates, which make up the bulk of Earth's visible animals, has divided by 52 percent over the past 40 years. Biodiversity loss has now reached "critical levels", the report warns. But some populations of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians have suffered much bigger losses, with fresh water species declining by 76 percent since 1974, according to the Living Planet Report by the conservation campaign group WWF. WWF-UK's chief executive, David Nussbaum, said: "The scale of the destruction highlighted in this report should act as a wake-up call for us all. We all -- politicians, business and people --

have an interest, and a responsibility, to act to ensure we protect what we all value: a healthy future for both people and nature." Humans are cutting down trees more quickly than they can regrow, harvesting more fish than the oceans can restock, pumping water from our rivers and aquifers faster than rainfall can replenish them, and emitting more carbon than the oceans and forests can absorb, he added. Professor Ken Norris, director of science at the Zoological Society of London, said: "The scale of biodiversity loss and damage to the very ecosystems that are essential to our existence is alarming. "This damage is a consequence of the way we choose to live. Although the report shows the situation is critical, there is still hope." The overall decline is far worse than previously thought. The last report in WWF's biennial series in 2012 recorded a 30 percent drop in the previous four decades.