

# US Senate rejects gun control bills

AFP, Washington

The Republican-controlled US Senate rejected four competing gun control measures Monday just days after the Orlando club massacre, highlighting the partisan feuding over an issue set to resonate during a heated presidential election year.

With a month to go before Republicans and Democrats formally nominate their White House hopefuls, lawmakers failed to compromise on one of the most sensitive hot-button issues in America.

Even as they sought to appear keen to take action following the deadliest mass shooting in US history that left 49 dead at a gay nightclub in Orlando a week ago, Republicans and Democrats voted down four amendments -- two from each party -- that would have limited some gun purchases, including those by suspected terrorists.

The two Democratic texts sought to bar those on FBI watchlists or no-fly lists from buying firearms, and to strengthen criminal and mental health background checks for those seeking to purchase firearms at gun shows and on the Internet.

Republicans are opposed to those measures -- in general, they oppose any effort to limit gun rights, saying they are protected by the US Constitution's Second Amendment.

They proposed a 72-hour waiting period for those on FBI watchlists seeking to buy weapons, so that the government has time to seek a court order to block the sale if need be.

The second Republican proposal aimed to improve the background check system. Democrats rejected both GOP measures.

The Senate voted on similar measures in the wake of the December 2012 Connecticut school massacre and the San



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi performs yoga during World Yoga Day in Chandigarh, India, yesterday. Modi described yoga as a "people's mass movement" as he took to the mat yesterday along with millions of others in India and overseas to celebrate the ancient practice.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# NSG open to non-NPT nations: China

AGENCIES

After months of banging on that India cannot join the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) because it hasn't signed the non-proliferation treaty (NPT), China did a huge about-turn on Monday saying the door is open for new members who haven't signed that treaty.

"The door is open for the admission of the non-NPT members. It is never closed. It is open. But the members of the NSG should stay focused on whether the criteria should be changed and whether non-NPT members should be admitted into the NSG," Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying told reporters at a media briefing yesterday.

Hua was repeating -- almost verbatim -- what India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said on Sunday. The Indian minister said China is not opposed to India's entry into the NSG but is only focused on criteria procedure to the elite nuclear club.

"The Chinese side understood India's need to develop nuclear energy," Hua said. She was referring to Indian Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar's visit to China last week, where he expressed New Delhi's wish to join the NSG.

"The door is open. The room is there. We never said we are against who (a country). We did not target any country, India or Pakistan," Hua said.

Beijing is using Pakistan's non-starter position with the NSG -- as Pakistan, too, hasn't signed the NPT and is a notorious proliferator -- to block India's application by saying that it would either support NSG entry for both India and Pakistan, or for none of them.

The NSG is a body concerned with reducing nuclear proliferation by controlling the export and re-transfer of materials used to make weapons. The NPT is an international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons

# More than 700 doctors killed in Syria war: UN

AFP, Geneva

Attacks on hospitals since Syria's war broke out five years ago have left more than 700 doctors and medical workers dead, many of them in air strikes, UN investigators said yesterday.

The UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria also condemned horrific violations by jihadists and voiced concern that al-Qaeda-affiliated militants may have recruited hundreds of children into their ranks.

Commission chief Paulo Pinheiro told the UN Human Rights Council that widespread, targeted aerial attacks on hospitals and clinics across Syria "have resulted in scores of civilian deaths, including much-needed medical workers."

Pinheiro said attacks on medical facilities made access to health care in the violence-wracked country extremely difficult -- and in some areas completely impossible.

Since March 2011, Syria's conflict has left more than 280,000 people dead and forced half the population to flee their homes.

The report came as a car bomb outside a

Syrian refugee camp in Jordan killed six soldiers yesterday in a remote desert area where hundreds have been held for screening for suspected jihadist links.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility but Jordan is part of the US-led coalition fighting the Islamic State (IS) group in neighbouring Syria and Iraq, and has been targeted by jihadists before.

On the field, the Islamic State jihadist group expelled Syrian regime troops Monday from the northern province of Raqa in a lightning counter-offensive that killed 40 regime forces, a monitoring group said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the jihadists' attack was launched late on Sunday following a regime offensive into the IS stronghold of Raqa on June 3 that advanced around 20 kilometres toward the town of Tabqa.

It said the jihadists had sent hundreds of reinforcements from their de facto capital of Raqa city to defend Tabqa, which has a dam and an air base.

# 25 killed in ammo store explosion in Libya

BBC ONLINE

At least 25 people have been killed and dozens injured in an explosion at an ammunition store in the western Libyan town of Garabulli.

Local officials said the store was in a camp controlled by an armed militia from the city of Misrata, but the group had left after clashing with residents.

The explosion reportedly happened as residents entered the camp but it is not yet clear what triggered the blast.

Garabulli is about 50km (30 miles) east of Tripoli and 140km west of Misrata.

"The number of casualties is rising and we are working hard to transfer them to nearest hospitals," Mohamed Assayed, a local official, told the Reuters news agency.

# British man charged in US after bid to 'kill Trump'

AFP, Los Angeles

A 19-year-old British man has been charged for trying to grab a police officer's gun at a Donald Trump rally in Las Vegas in an apparent bid to kill the presumptive Republican presidential nominee.

According to a complaint filed in federal court in Nevada, Michael Sandford tried to disarm the officer at Saturday's rally at the Mystere Theatre in the Treasure Island Casino before being overpowered.

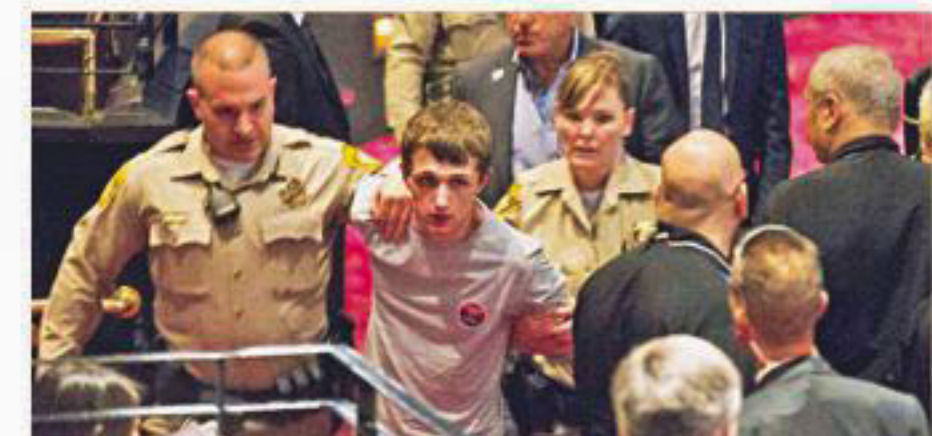
It said the young man told a Secret Service agent after his arrest that he had driven from California to Las Vegas "to kill Trump," and had been to a range a day earlier to learn to shoot as he had never fired a gun before.

"Sandford acknowledged that he would likely only be able to fire one to two rounds and stated he was convinced he would be killed by law enforcement during his attempt on Trump's life," the complaint said.

It added that Sandford told investigators he had purchased tickets for a rally in Phoenix, where he "would try again to kill Trump" in the event his plan in Las Vegas failed.

Video of his arrest carried by US media show a skinny man with short brown hair and a grey T-shirt being quickly escorted out of the rally by police officers with his hands behind his back.

The prosecutor's office said Sandford was ordered held without bond, as he was considered dangerous and represented a flight risk. Britain's Foreign Office is



"providing assistance" in the case, a spokesman said.

Sandford allegedly told the Secret Service that he had been plotting to kill Trump for about a year and finally decided to act on Saturday, as "he finally felt confident to do it."

"Sandford further stated that if he were on the street tomorrow, he would try this again," according to the complaint.



# ICC jails Congo warlord over war crimes

AFP, The Hague

Judges at the International Criminal Court yesterday sentenced former Congolese vice president Jean-Pierre Bemba to 18 years in jail for a series of brutal rapes and murders in Central African Republic over a decade ago.

"The chamber sentences Mr Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo to a total of 18 years of imprisonment," said Judge Sylvia Steiner, ruling the former militia leader had failed to exercise control over his private army sent into CAR in late October 2002 where they carried out "sadistic" rapes, murders and pillaging of "particular cruelty."

Bemba is the highest-level official to be sentenced by the ICC after being convicted in March on five charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The atrocities were carried out by Bemba's private army, the Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC), when he sent them into neighbouring CAR in late October 2002 to put down a coup against then president Ange-Felix Patasse.

They unleashed a five-month campaign of terror aimed at squashing any resistance to Patasse's rule. Prosecutors had called for a sentence of at least 25 years at the end of Bemba's lengthy trial which opened in November 2010.



Campaigners from the "Vote Remain" group hand out stickers, flyers and posters in Oxford Circus, central London, yesterday. With two days to go until Britain goes to the polls in a Brexit referendum, the result remains too close to call.

PHOTO: AFP

# Man with 'suicide belt' triggers Brussels alert

REUTERS, Brussels

A man who said he was wearing a bomb belt rigged to explode by remote control caused a major scare in a Brussels commercial district on Tuesday before police found the device contained only salt and biscuits, officials said.

The Belgian capital of 1.2 million people remains on edge under a high security alert three months after three Islamic State suicide bombers blew themselves up at Brussels Airport and in a metro train, killing 32 people.

On Tuesday, Brussels police detained a man near the bustling City2 shopping centre after he announced that he was strapped with explosives that would be set off remotely. The area was sealed off while bomb experts checked the man's belt.

The man, born in 1990 and identified as J.B., had called police himself to say he had been kidnapped and forced to don an explosives belt. It proved to be a false alarm.

"J.B. is known to police, also because of mental problems," a Brussels prosecutors spokeswoman said.

The man remained in police custody but had to be freed within 24 hours unless a judge approved a request from prosecutors to place him under formal arrest and to be examined by a psychiatrist.

In 2014 J.B. told police he had been ordered to go to Syria to join Islamist militants fighting in the civil war there, an incident that remains under investigation, prosecutors said.

# Bank staff spanked for poor work

AFP, Beijing

Footage of Chinese bank staff being spanked for poor performance at a training session has gone viral, triggering public anger and the suspension of the bank's boss, reports said yesterday.

The video showed eight employees -- four men and four women -- lined up on a stage and being asked by a man why they came last in a competition.

After getting answers including "failing to exceed myself" and "lack of cohesion", he shouted: "Get your butts ready!" and proceeded to beat them several times with what appeared to be a thick wooden paddle.

One woman who tried to protect her posterior with her hands was ordered to remove them, yelling when she was hit.

Some Chinese reports cited employees of the Changzhi Zhangze Rural Commercial Bank, who declined to be named, saying that other trainees had their hair shaved as punishment.

The video sparked an outpouring of public fury after it was posted online late Sunday.

The trainer "must be sick" one user wrote on China's Twitter-like Weibo, saying the workers and bank only had an employer-employee relationship. "They are not slaves in ancient times."

The Beijing Times reported yesterday that top officials including the chairman and the Communist Party chief of the bank, a rural lender in Changzhi in the northern province of Shanxi, had been suspended for "failing to conduct proper checks on the training programme".

# EU extends sanctions on Russia

REUTERS, Brussels

The European Union's Brussels envoys yesterday agreed to extend until the end of January the energy, financial and defence sanctions on Russia over the conflict in Ukraine, diplomatic sources said.

After more than two years of sanctions slapped over Moscow's annexation of Crimea from Kiev, the EU is planning a broader review of its policy vis-à-vis Russia in the second half of this year.

The German foreign minister and the Italian prime minister are among a growing chorus of politicians pushing for sanctions relief. In April, the French parliament approved a non-binding resolution calling for the lifting of EU sanctions.

# Egypt court halts Red Sea islands' transfer to Saudis

BBC ONLINE

An Egyptian judge has quashed a government decision to hand back two Red Sea islands to Saudi Arabia.

Egypt's President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi announced the return of Tiran and Sanafir islands in April, during a visit by Saudi Arabia's King Salman.

More than 150 people were jailed in connection with protests over the deal, though many were later acquitted or had their sentences reduced on appeal.

Tuesday's verdict is not final and could be overturned by a higher court.

Tiran and Sanafir are uninhabited islands, situated at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba, a strategically important part of the Red Sea that is bordered by Israel, Jordan,

Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

President Sisi's decision in April to cede control of them sparked widespread unrest and criticism. King Salman had announced a multi-billion dollar aid package to Egypt from Saudi Arabia on his visit, leading some to accuse Sisi of "selling" the islands.

He was forced to defend the move, saying Tiran and Sanafir had always belonged to Saudi Arabia.

Egyptian troops have been stationed on the islands since 1950 at the request of Saudi Arabia. Critics, though, object to the way Sisi has handed

them back, saying it is unconstitutional.

On Tuesday, Egypt's State Council, an administrative court which oversees lawsuits filed against the government, quashed Sisi's decision by issuing a verdict annulling a maritime borders agreement.



# NEWSIN brief

## Iraq retakes 2 Falluja districts from IS

REUTERS, Baghdad

Iraq's armed forces pressed on with their offensive to retake the city of Falluja from Islamic State yesterday, dislodging the militants from two eastern districts. A military statement said the elite counter-terrorism forces took the northeastern Shurta police district while units from Baghdad operations command recaptured the Askari military neighbourhood.

## Taliban kidnap 25 on Afghan highway

AFP, Kandahar

Taliban yesterday kidnapped around two dozen people after pulling them off buses in southern Afghanistan, officials said. The pre-dawn incident in Washar district of Helmand province comes a day after militants killed more than 20 people, including 14 Nepali security guards, in a wave of violence across the country.

## 50 Saudis detained over 'haircuts'

AFP, Riyadh

Fifty young men have been arrested in Saudi Arabia for haircuts, necklaces and other adornments considered un-Islamic. The suspects were detained during a Ramadan crackdown in the western Saudi city of Makkah, according to Saudi news website Sabq. "They were handed over to the department of criminal investigations," said Sabq.