

NEWS IN brief

Cox murder suspect to be tried in Nov

AFP, London
The alleged murderer of British lawmaker Jo Cox, whose shock killing cast a cloud over the final week of Brexit campaigning, will be tried in November under anti-terrorism legislation, a judge ruled yesterday. Thomas Mair, 52, is charged with murder and possession of a firearm and the case is being heard under the "terrorism protocol".

Interpol seeking 123 human traffickers

AFP, Lyon
Interpol yesterday said it is seeking public help to track down 123 suspected human traffickers wanted around the world. The operation, known as Infra Hydra, involves 44 countries as well as the EU police agency Europol, and has already made 26 arrests and located 31 other suspects, Interpol said.

Led Zeppelin didn't steal 'Stairway' intro

AFP, Los Angeles
A US jury yesterday found that British rock group Led Zeppelin did not steal the intro to their signature track "Stairway to Heaven" from a long-defunct Los Angeles rock band. It was the culmination of a seven-day trial in the case brought by Michael Skidmore, the trustee and friend of Spirit guitarist Randy California, who long maintained he deserved credit for "Stairway" but died in 1997.

Dubai eases liquor rules for Ramadan

AP, Dubai
Dubai is breaking new ground with its decision to loosen rules prohibiting daytime alcohol sales during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, a move that reflects how much Dubai's rulers value the revenue both tourists and alcohol tax bring into this emirate. In years past, those wanting a beer or a glass of wine needed to wait until sundown.



Migrant workers supporting Myanmar Foreign Minister and State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, inset, wave to her during a meeting at the coastal fishery centre of Samut Sakhon, outside Bangkok, yesterday. Thailand is home to between two and three million migrant workers from Myanmar, many of whom perform back-breaking jobs most Thais are unwilling to do. Her visit has prompted renewed calls for better protection of migrant workers, many of whom are undocumented and whom rights groups say are vulnerable to abuse.

New missile can strike US bases

Says N Korea, rules out nuke talks

AFP, Seoul
Leader Kim Jong-Un threatened US military bases across the Pacific after North Korea's test of a powerful new missile triggered emergency UN Security Council talks late Wednesday on curbing Pyongyang's nuclear programme.

Kim, who personally monitored Wednesday's Musudan missile test, applauded a "great event" that significantly bolstered the North's pre-emptive nuclear attack capability, the official KCNA news agency reported.

"We have the sure capability to attack in an overall and practical way the Americans in the Pacific operation theatre," Kim was quoted as saying.

A Korean-language version of the same report had Kim referring to "the American bastards." The Musudan has a theoretical range of anywhere between 2,500 and 4,000 kilometres, with the upper estimate covering US military bases as far away as Guam.

After a string of failures in recent months, North Korea tested two Musudans on Wednesday, one of which flew 400 kilometres into the Sea of Japan (East Sea). KCNA said the missile had been fired at a high angle to simulate its full range, and had reached a maximum height of more than 1,400 kilometres.

Meanwhile, a top Pyongyang official said yesterday that North Korea has "no thoughts" of resuming six-party talks on its nuclear programme, despite the repeated urgings of its closest ally China.

The North quit the now-stalled negotiations aimed at curbing its nuclear weapons programme in 2009, and soon afterwards carried out its second atomic test. The talks are hosted by China, and include South Korea, the United States, Russia, and Japan.

Myanmar needs 'space' to deal with rights abuses: EU

REUTERS, Yangon
The European Union said on Wednesday Myanmar needed "space" to deal with human rights abuses in its restive northwest, adding it would respect the call by country leader Aung San Suu Kyi to avoid the term "Rohingya" to describe persecuted Muslims there.

The statement exposes a rift in the West's approach to the sensitive issue, standing in contrast with the United States, which said it would continue to use the term, citing respect for the right of communities to choose what they should be called.

Members of the 1.1 million group, who identify themselves by the term Rohingya, are seen by many Myanmar Buddhists as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. The term is a divisive issue.

"We understand that the term 'Rohingya' is emotionally charged in Myanmar and we have heard the call of the government to avoid creating tension by using polarising terminology," Roland Kobia, the EU ambassador to Myanmar, told reporters.

"So we ought to give political space to initiatives to gradually find a solution to this protracted issue."

Suu Kyi's administration last week tabled a new term for the Rohingya - "Muslim community in Rakhine State" - but the description has quickly run into opposition.

The Arakan National Party (ANP), formed by hardline Rakhine Buddhists who enjoy considerable following in the state, said the government was biased and rejected the new term.

"We consider that using the new term ... is tantamount to meaning that they are natives of Rakhine region by ignoring the original place of these Bengali people," the party said in a statement.

Tensions around the Muslim minority are rising. This week, Suu Kyi told the United Nations Human Rights investigator visiting the country that the government would not use the term because it was inflammatory.

Some 120,000 Rohingya remain displaced in squalid camps since fighting erupted in Rakhine State between Buddhists and Muslims in 2012. Thousands have fled persecution and poverty. The UN said on Monday the abuses, which include executions and torture, together may amount to crimes against humanity.

Make fair assessment of India's NSG application

Modi tells Xi as Pak president thanks China for its role

AGENCIES
As India makes a strong bid for membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday met Chinese President Xi Jinping in Tashkent and is understood to have sought China's support for it, seen as very crucial to take forward the process.

The outcome of the meeting between Modi and Xi will determine the proceedings of the NSG's two-day plenary that began in Seoul yesterday, sources said.

Briefing the media on the bilateral talks, MEA spokesperson Vikas Swarup said Prime Minister Modi urged Xi to "make a fair and objective assessment of India's application and judge it on its own merit."

"He [Modi] said China should contribute to the emerging consensus in Seoul," Swarup said. Modi arrived in Tashkent to a warm welcome as he kicked off a two-day visit to attend the annual

summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) with the aim of expanding India's engagement with the China-dominated grouping in areas of security, defence and energy.

In a special gesture, Modi was



received at the Tashkent international airport by his Uzbek counterpart Shavkat Miromirovich Mirziyoyev, reports The Hindu. Prior to his departure to Tashkent, Modi said in New Delhi that India

looked forward to a fruitful outcome of its engagement at the SCO summit.

Meanwhile, Pakistan President Mamnoon Hussain yesterday thanked Chinese President Xi Jinping for his government's support for Islamabad's bid at membership to NSG. However, Hussain's comment flies straight in the face of the Chinese position on the issue.

Hussain and Xi met on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Tashkent.

"Only granting India the membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group will shift the balance of power, Hussain said, reported Pakistani news outlet Geo TV.

China has maintained its opposition to India's NSG membership bid on the grounds that it is not a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Neither is Pakistan.



Indonesian President Joko Widodo stands on the deck of the Indonesian Navy ship KRI Imam Bonjol after chairing a limited cabinet meeting in the waters of Natuna Islands, Riau Islands province, Indonesia, yesterday.

US-backed forces clash with IS in Syria's Manbij

AFP, Beirut
US-backed Kurdish and Arab fighters yesterday advanced into the Islamic State jihadist group's bastion of Manbij in northern Syria, sparking fierce street fighting as they push to retake the city.

Backed by air strikes by the US-led coalition bombing IS in Syria and Iraq, fighters with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) alliance entered Manbij from the south, a monitoring group said.

The advance marked a major breakthrough in the battle for Manbij, once a key link on the supply route between the Turkish border and IS's de facto Syrian capital of Raqa.

The loss of the city would deal another blow to IS following a string of recent battlefield defeats, including the taking by Iraqi forces earlier this month of the centre of the Iraqi city of Fallujah.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor, said SDF forces were able to break through IS defences in Manbij a few hours after taking control of a village on the city's southwestern outskirts.

"Fierce street fighting between buildings" erupted as they entered the city, said Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman, whose group relies on a broad network of sources inside Syria to monitor the country's conflict.

He said progress was likely to be slow as SDF forces were facing booby-traps "planted by the jihadists to try to prevent the loss of the city."

Abdel Rahman said tens of thousands of civilians were trapped inside the city, though some 8,000 had been able to flee since the start of the SDF offensive on Manbij on May 31.

There were fears the jihadists would use civilians as human shields inside the city, which had a population of about 120,000 before the start of Syria's civil war in 2011.

The SDF managed to encircle the city on June 10 but its advance slowed as IS fought back, including with almost daily suicide bombings.

The jihadists have held the city since 2014, the year IS seized control of large parts of Syria and neighbouring Iraq and declared its "caliphate".



Orlando attack was about revenge, not IS

Says Omar Mateen's 'gay lover'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK
A Hispanic man who claims to have been the lover of the Orlando gunman, has said that Omar Mateen carried out his attack as an act of revenge after fearing he had been exposed to HIV.

In the aftermath of the attack on a gay nightclub that left 49 people dead and wounded another 50, there was speculation that Mateen may have been gay or bisexual. There were reports that he had visited the club more than a dozen times and had used gay dating apps.

Now, a man who has been identified only as Miguel, said he became Mateen's lover after connecting with him on Grindr, one of the dating apps. He said Mateen was a confused man, struggling with sexuality and Muslim upbringing. He said he was a heavy drinker who was attracted to Latinos but felt rejected by them.

Speaking to Univision, Miguel said that he believed that Mateen had engaged in sex acts with two Puerto Rican men, one of whom was HIV positive. While Mateen had tested negative, he feared the results were not accurate and wanted to "make them pay".

"The thing that makes me want to tell the truth is that he didn't do it for terrorism," said Miguel, his face disguised by a mask. "In my opinion he did it for revenge."

Pakistan mourns slain Sufi singer

AFP, Karachi
Thousands of Pakistanis yesterday thronged the streets of Karachi to attend the funeral of one of the country's best known Sufi musicians, who was gunned down a day earlier by Taliban militants.

The funeral prayers for Amjad Sabri, which were held on the city's major Ibn-e-Sina thoroughfare, brought together large numbers of both Sunni and Shia Muslims, men and women, with many praising his devotional music, humble lifestyle and charitable work.

He was shot dead by two gunmen riding a motorcycle on Wednesday as he drove his car to a TV studio where he was due to perform for a Ramadan show.

Eyeing Nato, Russia to deploy advanced missiles

REUTERS, Moscow
Russia is likely to deploy advanced nuclear-capable missiles in its European exclave of Kaliningrad by 2019, casting the move as a reply to a US-backed missile shield, and may one day put them in Crimea too, sources close to its military predict.

That would fuel what is already the worst standoff between Russia and the West since the Cold War and put a swathe of territory in Nato members Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in the cross-hairs.

Russia would probably have deployed the missile -- called the Iskander, the Persian name for Alexander the Great -- in Kaliningrad regardless, and the targets it will cover can be struck by longer-range Russian missiles anyway.

But Russian and Western experts say the US-backed shield, which Moscow says is aimed at blunting its own nuclear capabilities, gives the Kremlin the political cover it needs to justify something it was planning

all along. "The Russians plan to do a lot of things they have had in train for some time," said Steven Pifer, former US ambassador to Ukraine, now a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

"There's a long history in Moscow of saying what they're doing is in response to what you guys did, even though they planned it in advance."

Nato is holding a summit in Warsaw next month to decide how best to deter Russia after Moscow's lightning annexation of Ukraine's Crimea in 2014. The United States, Britain and Germany have said they will command new battalions in Poland and the Baltics to send Moscow a message.

The summit may prompt Russia to announce counter-measures, but sources close to the Russian military believe Moscow will wait until a planned Polish missile defence site opens in late 2018 to unveil a more serious response.



AUTO-RIDING AMBASSADOR

A convoy of luxury sedans sailing smoothly by as the small official flag on the cars flutters in the wind. This is often the image that comes to mind when one thinks of foreign delegates and their vehicles. Melba Priya, the Mexican Ambassador to India is the rare exception to this rule. Her official vehicle is a beautifully done up auto rickshaw. "Before becoming an ambassador, I had travelled in India and I had always travelled in an auto rickshaw. So I thought, why not?" says Ambassador Priya. Priya said her decision is also influenced by New Delhi's notorious air pollution. "This is the way that I want to contribute to the city that today is also mine. I am also a Delhite."

PHOTO: AFP