

NEWSIN brief

Texas allows concealed guns on campus

A new law has come into effect in the US state of Texas that allows students to carry concealed guns on campuses. Students aged 21 or over who have a concealed handgun permit may take guns into classrooms, under the new law. Texas has now become one of eight US states that allows students to carry guns into college buildings.

Dutch activists sue gov't for air pollution

Dutch environmentalists said yesterday they are suing the government over poor air quality, saying people's "fundamental" rights to good health were being infringed. In a lawsuit filed on Monday, the Milieudefensie group alleged "the Netherlands exceeds the legal standards for air quality and is violating fundamental human rights by doing too little to combat air pollution."

Japan warns China over aggression

Beijing risks triggering unintended conflict with Asian rivals through its aggressive stance in maritime disputes, Japan warned yesterday in an annual security assessment. China's sweeping claims over the strategic South China Sea, where it has built a series of artificial islands capable of supporting military operations despite overlapping claims from other nations, have stoked international alarm.

India appeals for help for baby rhinos

Indian wildlife officers yesterday appealed for help in caring for eight rare baby rhinos feared orphaned by recent deadly floods in the remote northeast. Rescue teams in boats have pulled the stranded rhinos from floodwaters which have hit India's famed Kaziranga National Park, home to the world's largest population of the one-horned animals.

Pope names female deacons commission

Pope Francis yesterday appointed a special commission to study the possibility of women becoming deacons in a potentially historic opening on a vexed issue for the Catholic Church. The 13-member commission, made up of seven men and six women, will study the question of female deacons and especially the history of women playing this role in the early years of the Church.



WAR ON IS IN LIBYA, SYRIA

A handout picture shows members of forces loyal to Libya's unity government taking part in the military operations against the Islamic State group in Sirte. Inset, a still image shows two men standing over a man on a bed, making him sit up as he breathes through a mask in the town Saraqeb, Idlib province, Syria. A Syrian rescue service said yesterday a helicopter dropped containers of toxic gas overnight on the town close to where a Russian military helicopter was shot down hours earlier.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

'Hillary's the devil': Trump

Republican nominee launches attack on Clinton at rowdy rally; Warren Buffett challenges Trump to release his tax returns

Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has suggested that the November election could be "rigged". He told a rally in Columbus, Ohio, that he had heard "more and more" that the contest would be unfair. He offered no immediate evidence.

At another event he called Democratic rival Hillary Clinton "the devil". Trump has come under fire from across the political divide for remarks he made about the parents of a US Muslim soldier killed in action.

On the forthcoming vote, he told supporters "I'm afraid the election is going to be rigged, I have to be honest".

He later repeated the claim on Fox News, adding "I hope the Republicans are watching closely or it's going to be taken away from us." Trump has made similar comments before in relation to the Democratic race, suggesting the party fixed its system to favour nominee Hillary Clinton over her challenger Bernie Sanders.

Meanwhile, US President Barack Obama yesterday called out Republican leaders on their continued support for their party's White House nominee Donald Trump, given some of the real estate mogul's incendiary statements.

"This isn't a situation where you have an episodic gaffe. This is daily and weekly where they are distancing themselves from statements he's making," Obama said of the party's top brass including House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senator John McCain.

"There has to be a point in which you say: 'This is not somebody I can support for president of the United States, even if he purports to be a member of my party.'"

At another rally in Pennsylvania, Trump took the unprecedented step of directly calling Clinton "the devil".

He attacked Sanders for capitulating in the Democratic race, saying he "made a deal with the devil. She's the devil."

Democrats and Republicans alike have condemned Trump for his remarks about the parents of US Army Capt Humayun Khan, who was killed by a car bomb in 2004 in Iraq, at the age of 27.

Former Republican presidential candidate John McCain became the latest senior figure in the party to criticise Trump for his attacks.

Senator McCain, a veteran of the Vietnam War, said in a strongly worded statement that Trump did not have "unfettered licence to defame the best among us".

In another development, American billionaire businessman Warren Buffett challenged Trump to release his tax returns. Trump has said that they cannot be made public until the financial authorities have completed an audit.

But Buffett said there were no rules against showing tax returns and allowing people to ask questions about them.



Erdogan accuses West of 'supporting terror'

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday accused the West of supporting "terror" and the coup plotters who tried to unseat him, in his toughest attack on Ankara's Western allies since the July 15 attempted putsch.

"Unfortunately, the West is supporting terror and standing by the coup plotters," said Erdogan in a televised speech at his presidential palace. "Those who we imagined to be friends are standing by the coup plotters and by the terrorists."

Erdogan angrily denounced the judicial authorities in Germany for not allowing him to address via video conference a rally in Cologne at the weekend in his support.

He accused Germany in the past of allowing leaders from the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) of addressing events in Germany via video conference.

Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said yesterday Turkey has taken over factories and shipyards that had been under control of the military general staff as part of a wide-

ranging shake-up of the armed forces following last month's abortive coup. Yildirim, who was speaking to members of his ruling AK Party in parliament, also said the restructuring of Turkey's armed forces would not weaken the military, but put its focus on activities essential for national security.

Meanwhile, Turkish government issued arrest warrants for 100 staff, including doctors, at the main military hospital in Ankara as part of an investigation into last month's failed coup, a Turkish official and reports said.

Police were searching the Gulhane Military Medical Academy (GATA) hospital in the capital, the private NTV television reported. It was not immediately clear if any suspects had been detained. The Turkish official, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed that detention warrants had been issued without giving any number.

Turkey blames the coup attempt on the organisation of US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen, who Ankara accuses of running a group called Fethullah Terror Organisation (FETO), charges he denied.

TURKEY FAILED COUP
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Migrant deaths this year top 4,000: IOM

Global migrant deaths have topped 4,000 in the first seven months of this year, a 26-percent increase in the fatality rate compared with the same period of 2015, the International Organization for Migration said yesterday.

The total of 4,027 migrant deaths this year includes those who perished crossing the Mediterranean as well as others who died on the North African route and at the Turkey-Syria border, according to the Geneva-based IOM.

Some 3,120 people have died since January 1 while trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea. The most deadly route has been the crossing towards Italy, which has cost 2,692 lives, followed by the routes to Greece (383) and Spain (45).

IOM raised its Mediterranean death toll yesterday after 33 more bodies were discovered in recent days off the Libyan coastal town of Sabratha.

The new IOM figures brought the number of bodies that have washed up in Sabratha to 120 over the last 10 days. Neither IOM nor Libya's coastguard -- which first reported the Sabratha deaths -- had details on whether the fatalities were caused by a single shipwreck or several accidents.

IOM spokesman Joel Millman said those who perished were likely trying to make the treacherous journey to Italy. Aside from the Mediterranean, North Africa has proven the deadliest place for migrants this year, with 342 fatalities.



A vehicle drives among trees uprooted by strong winds from Typhoon Nida in Hong Kong, China yesterday. Hundreds of flights were cancelled, schools and shops shut and the stock market closed for the day as the storm brought violent winds and torrential showers.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Sonia Gandhi launches UP poll campaign

Taking the battle to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's turf, Congress president Sonia Gandhi yesterday launched her party's campaign for the 2017 Uttar Pradesh Assembly election with a massive roadshow in Varanasi.

Thousands of Congress supporters and workers took part in the roadshow for about 8 km from the Circuit House to Englishiya Line.

The march began with Gandhi garlanding the statue of B R Ambedkar at the Circuit House and the marchers criss-crossed lanes and bylanes of the temple town.

Gandhi, who was initially travelling in a car and later moved to a vehicle with open sunroof, waved at the crowd which cheered and raised slogans against the Modi government.

She came out of her vehicle several times to accept the greetings of the cheering supporters, including groups of Muslim women. As the roadshow passed through several localities, rose petals were showered on Gandhi and her cavalcade from adjoining buildings.

Dozens of mini trucks prominently displayed posters with 27 Saal, UP Behaal (27 years of U.P.'s distress) written on them. Placards carried by hundreds of workers also had the same slogan written on them.

'For cash, free travel, favours'

FBI tech leaks information, pleads guilty to acting as agent of China

An FBI electronics technician with a top security clearance pleaded guilty on Monday to funnelling photographs of FBI documents and other sensitive information to China.

Kun Shan Chun, also known as Joey Chun, was employed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation since 1997. He pleaded guilty in federal court in Manhattan to one count of having illegally acted as an agent of a foreign government.

Authorities say Chun was rewarded with cash, free travel and other favours for himself and his family. Prosecutors in federal court in Manhattan charged Kun Shan Chun — a naturalized US citizen who goes by "Joey Chun" — with making false statements in connection with his

security clearance to cover up his connections to Chinese associates that included at least one unnamed government official.

Chun, 46, threatened American security by acting as an unauthorized agent, US Attorney Preet Bharara said in statement. Because he was an FBI employee, the threat "was all the more serious and the betrayal all the more duplicitous," the prosecutor added.

Chun, who was released after the plea, declined to speak to reporters as he left the courthouse. Defence attorney Jonathan Marvinsky said in a statement that his client "deeply regrets" what he did.

Chun is scheduled to be sentenced December 2. "The truth is that Chun loves the United States and never intended to cause it any harm," the lawyer said.

Court papers allege that after beginning work for the FBI's Computerized Central Monitoring Facility, Chun cultivated a relationship with Chinese associates seeking technological data and other information.



Pressure builds on Maduro

Venezuela okays opposition recall push first phase

Venezuela's opposition got a green light Monday to proceed with efforts to remove President Nicolas Maduro in a referendum, but the crumbling oil giant still appeared far from holding a vote.

The National Electoral Council (CNE) said the opposition had collected nearly double the requirement of 200,000 valid signatures on a petition demanding the leftist leader face a recall referendum.

But it did not set a date for the next stage in the lengthy process, in which the opposition must collect four million signatures in just three days.

And, in a boost to the Maduro camp's claims of rampant fraud, the council's chief, Tibisay Lucena, said the authorities had detected more than 1,000 apparently fraudulent signatures. The opposition blames Maduro for an economic implosion that

has seen severe food shortages, hyperinflation, violence and looting erupt in Venezuela, a once-booming country that is home to the world's largest oil reserves.

The opposition is racing to force a referendum by January 10, the cutoff date to trigger new elections -- four years into the president's six-year term.

After that date, a successful recall vote would simply transfer power to Maduro's hand-picked vice-president.

A recent poll found 64 percent of Venezuelans would vote to remove Maduro.

US Secretary of State John Kerry urged Venezuela not to stall. "The Venezuelan constitution guarantees Venezuelans the right to have their voices heard through the referendum process. And we call on Venezuela's authorities to allow this process to go forward in a timely and a fair manner," he said in Washington.

