

NEWS IN brief

US arming Syrian Kurd militia: Turkey

AFP, Ankara
Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused the United States of sending more weapons to a Syrian Kurdish militia in defiance of Ankara's repeated insistence it is a "terrorist" organisation. In a speech in New York after attending the UN General Assembly, Erdogan said Washington was mistaken in using the YPG as an ally in the fight against IS.

UK to trigger Brexit early 2017: Johnson

AFP, London
Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said Thursday that Britain plans to trigger Article 50, the formal process for leaving the European Union, early next year. Doing so would mark the formal start of a two-year negotiation period for Britain to leave the EU following its referendum vote in June to pull out of the 28-nation bloc.

Bomb kills 3 cops in restive Thai south

AFP, Bangkok
Three police officers were killed yesterday by a roadside bomb in Thailand's far south, police said, as peace talks appear to falter in the insurgency-plagued region. The kingdom's Muslim-majority "deep south", an area bordering Malaysia, has seen near daily bombings and shootings since the most recent wave of rebellion erupted in 2004.

Palestinian 'attacker' wounded in W Bank

AFP, Jerusalem
Israeli troops yesterday shot and wounded a Palestinian who the army said was attempting to stab Israelis at a bus stop in the occupied West Bank. Violence since last October has killed 230 Palestinians, 34 Israelis, two Americans, one Jordanian, an Eritrean and a Sudanese, according to an AFP count.



Protesters walk in the streets downtown during another night of protests over the police shooting of Keith Scott in Charlotte, North Carolina, US, on Thursday. Investigators in Charlotte faced mounting pressure yesterday to release video footage of the police shooting of an African American man, after protesters defied a curfew and took to the North Carolina city's streets for a third straight night. PHOTO: REUTERS

MIGRANT TRAGEDY OFF EGYPT COAST

Toll hits 162

AFP, Cairo
Rescuers recovered at least 162 bodies from a migrant shipwreck off Egypt's coast by yesterday evening, as the search for victims entered its third day. Survivors have said up to 450 migrants were on board the overcrowded fishing vessel that was heading to Italy from Egypt when it keeled over off the port city of Rosetta on Wednesday. The military said it had rescued 163 survivors and recovery attempts were continuing. Rescuers had said search operations would focus on the boat's hold where witnesses said around 100 people had been when the vessel flipped over. Authorities have arrested four suspected people traffickers over the tragedy, the latest in what the UN refugee agency expects to be the deadliest year on record for the Mediterranean. The accident comes months after the EU border agency Frontex warned that growing numbers of Europe-bound migrants were using Egypt as a departure point for the dangerous voyage. The International Organization for Migration said most of those rescued were Egyptians but they also included Sudanese, Eritreans, a Syrian and an Ethiopian. More than 10,000 people have died attempting to cross the Mediterranean to Europe since 2014, according to the United Nations. At least 300,000 migrants have crossed the sea so far this year from various points of departure, the UN said this week.

SHIFTING ALLIANCES IN SOUTH ASIA

Pak, Russia in first military drill

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Former Cold War-era rivals Pakistan and Russia are due to hold their first ever military exercise this month, Pakistan's military said on Friday, in another sign of shifting alliances in South Asia. It also comes at a time of heightened tensions between Islamabad and nuclear-armed rival India. During the Cold War, Pakistan spent a decade helping the United States funnel arms and fighters into neighbouring Afghanistan to help insurgent groups fight Soviet soldiers following their 1979 invasion of Afghanistan. At the time, the communist Soviet Union was closely aligned with Pakistan's arch-enemy India, while the United States was a staunch supporter of Pakistan. Pakistan's top military spokesman, Lieutenant General Asim Bajwa, said a "contingent of Russian ground forces" arrived in Pakistan for a two-week exercise beginning on Saturday. About 200 military personnel from both sides would be involved in the exercises, Pakistan's Tribune Express newspaper said, citing military sources. Pakistani media last year reported Islamabad had bought four Mi-35 attack helicopters from Russia in a first

military deal of its kind between them. While ties between Russia and Pakistan are growing closer, Pakistan's relations with the United States have cooled. Washington accused Islamabad of harbouring Afghan Taliban fighters, something that Pakistan denies. The United States has also improved ties with India, which Pakistan views warily.



Pakistan's relations with its steadfast, "all-weather" ally China have developed over the past year or so with a plan for \$46 billion in Chinese investment in a road and rail energy corridor linking western China with Pakistan's Arabian Sea coast. The drill came as India and Pakistan traded angry words over an attack on an Indian army base in disputed Kashmir

that Delhi has blamed on Islamabad. 'PAKISTAN READY FOR RETALIATION' Meanwhile a report said Pakistan's armed forces have reportedly selected targets in India in case the latter decides to move first with strikes against the country. In a Geo TV report, it is stated that an operational plan has also been prepared

by the military establishment to retaliate against any possible offensive from across the border. Quoting sources placed in the defense establishment, the news report states that targets in 'war-mongering' India have been selected in case of 'aggression or surgical strikes from the enemy.'

TO COUNTER CHINA AND PAKISTAN

India buys 36 Rafale jets

AFP, New Delhi
India signed a deal Friday to buy 36 Rafale fighter jets for 7.9 billion euros (\$8.8 billion), France's biggest ever such sale, as it seeks to bolster its military against an increasingly assertive China and Pakistan. Defence experts say the aircraft, manufactured by France's Dassault, will bring a much needed boost to India's air force as it struggles to renew its Soviet-era military hardware.

India, the world's top defence importer, is conducting a \$100-billion upgrade of its military hardware, facing border disputes with its northern and western neighbours, China and Pakistan. "Rafale will significantly improve India's strike & defence capabilities," tweeted India's Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar shortly after signing the deal with his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian. Yesterday's agreement follows years of tortuous negotiations and represents a substantial reduction from the 126 planes originally mooted. It is the biggest order for the Rafale after



Egypt agreed to buy 24 of the jets in 2015 and Qatar purchased the same amount later that year. The highly versatile aircraft is currently being used for bombing missions over Syria and Iraq as part of an international campaign against the self-styled Islamic State jihadist group. It has also been deployed in the past for air strikes in Libya and Afghanistan. The first planes will be delivered in 2019 and the 36 jets will form two new squadrons of the Indian airforce, which is trying to renew its dwindling fleet of Russian MiG-21s -- dubbed "Flying Coffins" because of their poor safety record. The air force currently has around 32 squadrons, each comprising 18 aircraft, but has said it needs at least 42 to protect its northern and western borders with Pakistan and China. India has signed a number of major defence deals since Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi took power in 2014. The Rafale purchase was first mooted under the previous administration in 2012, but faced major delays and obstacles over the last four years.

1917 JEWISH HOMELAND DECLARATION

Abbas seeks UK's apology

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Britain should apologize for its 1917 declaration endorsing the founding of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and should recognize Palestine as a state, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said on Thursday. Speaking at the UN General Assembly, Abbas said that the Palestinian people had suffered greatly because of the Balfour Declaration in which Britain said it favoured the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine but that this should not undermine the rights of others living there. "We ask Great Britain, as we approach 100 years since this infamous declaration, to draw the necessary lessons and to bear its historic, legal, political, material and moral responsibility for the consequences of this declaration, including an apology to the Palestinian people for the catastrophes, misery and injustice this declaration created and to act to rectify

these disasters and remedy its consequences, including by the recognition of the state of Palestine," Abbas said. The British mission to the United Nations had no immediate comment, reports Reuters. Abbas raised the 1917 declaration - named for Arthur Balfour, then the British foreign secretary - in the context of other milestones, including the 1948 UN General Assembly resolution partitioning Palestine into two states and the 1967 war when Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, speaking a short time later at the annual gathering of world leaders, derided Abbas for focusing on the declaration. Meanwhile, a top European Court of Justice (ECJ) advisor has recommended that Hamas should be removed from the EU's terrorism blacklist. In 2014, the court ruled that the Palestinian Islamist movement should be taken off the list on technical grounds, reports Independent.



In this handout picture released by Cuban newspaper Granma, former president Fidel Castro (R) is seen during a meeting with Japanese Prime Ministro Shinzo Abe (L), in Havana, on Thursday. PHOTO: AFP



Obama to block Saudi 9/11 prosecution

AFP, Washington
Barack Obama was set to veto legislation allowing 9/11 victims to sue Saudi Arabia yesterday, risking public outrage and the first congressional override of his presidency. The White House confirmed Thursday that Obama would veto the legislation -- unanimously passed by Congress -- allowing 9/11 families to launch civil suits against Riyadh. "We believe this is a bad bill," said White House spokesman Josh Earnest. "It's why the president's going to veto it." The White House argued the legislation would undermine sovereign immunity and potentially expose US officials and service members to litigation. That technical legal argument will struggle to be heard over emotive accusations that Obama is putting relations with Saudi Arabia before 9/11 victims. Republican nominee Donald Trump has already tried to paint Obama and his would-be successor Hillary Clinton as weak on terrorism. Clinton has preemptively voiced support for congressional efforts "to secure the ability of 9/11 families and other victims of terror to hold accountable those responsible," according to Jesse Lehrich, a campaign spokesman. But with the election less than 50 days away, the Republican-led Congress will try to deal Obama a significant political blow by overriding his veto.

S Korea reveals plan to kill Kim Jong-un

CNN ONLINE
South Korea has elite troops on standby ready to assassinate Kim Jong Un if the country feels threatened by North Korean nuclear weapons, the country's defence minister revealed this week. Asked in parliament Wednesday if there was a special forces unit already assembled that could eliminate North Korean leader, Kim Jong Un, Han Min-woo said: "Yes, we do have such a plan." "South Korea has a general idea and plan to use precision missile capabilities to target the enemy's facilities in major areas as well as eliminating the enemy's leadership," he added. It has long been suspected that such a plan was in place but the minister's candid answer surprised some. South Korea has intensified its rhetoric against the leadership of North Korea since Pyongyang claimed a successful test of a nuclear warhead on September 9. This week it tested a new type of high powered rocket engine of the type that could be used for an intercontinental ballistic missile. The defence ministry has said it is planning for the worst case scenario and assumed North Korea was ready to conduct a sixth nuclear test.

Rouhani at UN calls on Saudi to cease 'divisive policies'

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Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Thursday called on regional rival Saudi Arabia to "cease and desist" from "divisive policies" if it was serious about regional peace and security. Rouhani was addressing the United Nations General Assembly the day after Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef suggested Iran should be a better neighbor in the region and not interfere in the affairs of other countries. The leading Shia Muslim power, Iran and Sunni monarchy Saudi Arabia are both fighting Sunni militants of Islamic State, which controls parts of Syria and Iraq and has supporters and sympathizers worldwide who have carried out bombings and shootings of civilians. "If the Saudi government is serious about its vision for development and regional security, it must cease and desist from divi-



Japan PM in Cuba to 'open new page' in ties

AFP, Havana
Prime Minister Shinzo Abe arrived in Cuba on Thursday for the first visit to the country by a Japanese premier, saying he wants to "open a new page" in relations. Abe met with Cuban President Raul Castro during a visit that comes after Tokyo's close ally Washington restored ties with the communist island last year. "I sincerely hope my stay here becomes an opportunity to open a new page in the relationship of friendship between both nations," Abe said in an interview published in the Cuban Communist Party's official newspaper, Granma. He also met Raul's brother and former Cuban leader Fidel Castro to discuss nuclear proliferation. The two men "discussed the complexities and hazards affecting the world and the need to strengthen efforts toward the elimination of nuclear weapons and preservation of peace," an official statement read on television said. Cuba is one of the few countries that maintains relationships with North Korea, whose nuclear ambitions are considered one of Japan's biggest security threats. Abe also called for "open dialogue" to stimulate trade and investment, development cooperation and tourism. Japan was Cuba's second-largest trading partner between 1970 and 1985, but the relationship deteriorated drastically as the Cuban economy took a hit from the breakup of the Soviet Union, the country's key ally, in the early 1990s. Trade totaled about \$35 million in 2014.