

NEWS IN brief

France foils terror attack, arrests 7

AFP, Paris
Police have broken up a terror ring plotting an attack in France after arresting seven suspects-- of French, Moroccan and Afghan origin -- in Strasbourg and Marseille, Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said yesterday. The raids were carried out overnight Saturday to Sunday in the eastern city of Strasbourg and Marseille in the south following an eight-month investigation by security services.

Yemen ceasefire ends without extension

AFP, Sanaa
A 48-hour ceasefire ended in Yemen yesterday after failing to stem violence across the country, with both sides blaming each other for deadly "violations" of the US-backed truce. The ceasefire, aimed at ending the chaos and bloodshed that has gripped Yemen since March 2015, came into effect on Saturday following the intervention of US Secretary of State John Kerry.

Four police officers shot in US cities

AFP, Washington
One policeman was shot dead and three others shot and wounded in four US cities on Sunday, coinciding with an epidemic of racially-tinged gun violence involving law enforcement. Police were shot in San Antonio, Texas, Sanibel, Florida, and in the Missouri cities of St Louis and Gladstone, local police departments said.

Lanka raises fines to tackle killer drivers

AFP, Colombo
Sri Lanka yesterday announced a sharp rise in fines for reckless driving, which kills nearly 3,000 people a year. Officials said the fine for overtaking from the wrong side -- a key cause of accidents -- would be raised to \$166, 50 times the current rate.



A man is being helped to safety following a reported airstrike on Aleppo's rebel-held district of al-Hamra on Sunday. PHOTO: AFP

Aleppo faces catastrophe

After intense air raids, regime advances on ground

AFP, Aleppo
Syrian regime forces advanced quickly in rebel-held areas of Aleppo yesterday, pressing a new offensive in defiance of international concern over the fate of the city and its residents. Both US President Barack Obama and the UN's Syria envoy expressed pessimism about the future of the city, where more than 250,000 people are besieged in the rebel-held east. More than 100 civilians have been killed in the east since the regime's latest offensive began on Tuesday, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor. A CNN report puts the number much higher at 300 including rebels and government forces.

worker facilities, there has been little sign that foreign powers or the UN can stop the fighting in Aleppo. Obama said Sunday he was "not optimistic about the short-term prospects in Syria". "Once Russia and Iran made a decision to back (Bashar al-) Assad in a brutal air campaign... it was very hard to see a way in which even a trained and committed moderate opposition could hold its ground for long periods of time," he added after he briefly met Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of Apec summit.

SYRIA WAR

Obama 'not optimistic' after Putin meet

UN warns time running out as fear for civilians grow

On Sunday, Syria's Foreign Minister Walid Muallem rebuffed a proposal from UN envoy Staffan de Mistura to halt fighting in Aleppo and allow the opposition to administer the east of the city. Under the proposal, jihadist forces would have left east Aleppo, and both sides would cease fire. The top UN diplomat warned that time was "running out" for eastern Aleppo, adding that there was concern "instead of a humanitarian or a political initiative" there would be "an acceleration of military activities" in the city and elsewhere. The UN Security Council is scheduled to meet later Monday in New York to discuss humanitarian efforts in Syria.



S KOREA SCANDAL Opposition seeks Park's impeachment

AFP, Seoul

South Korea's main opposition party yesterday voted to seek the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye after prosecutors named her a criminal suspect in a snowballing corruption case. But it remains unclear exactly when Park's opponents will formally try to start the process, a difficult and lengthy one with no guarantee about the outcome.

Members of the Democratic Party voted unanimously in favour of seeking Park's impeachment and setting up a working group to review related legal issues, its spokesman Ki Dong-Min told reporters.

"We have decided to join efforts with civic groups, other opposition parties and even members of the ruling party who want Park to be impeached," Ki said.

He said the party would formally begin the process when it sees the "biggest possibility" of parliament approving such a move.

Two smaller opposition parties have already said they will seek to remove Park. Even some members of the president's ruling conservative party have come out in favour of impeachment.

But their commitment to the process is unclear for now, partly due to fear of a political backlash if the impeachment bid fails.

On Sunday Seoul prosecutors said Park had colluded with her long-time friend Choi Soon-Sil, who is accused of coercing local firms to donate more than \$60 million and of meddling in state affairs.

Trump poised to unveil more cabinet picks

AGENCIES

US President-elect Donald Trump yesterday prepared to announce a new slate of cabinet picks some time soon, following a busy weekend of meetings with hopefuls at his golf club retreat outside New York.

The Republican billionaire-turned-world leader heaped praise on tough-talking retired Marine Corps general James "Mad Dog" Mattis, signaling he is seriously considering him as Pentagon chief.

When asked before dinner at his Trump National Golf Club in Bedminster, New Jersey if he would soon reveal new nominations, Trump told reporters: "Pretty true," confirming he had "made a couple of deals."

But Trump made the 90-minute drive back to Manhattan late Sunday after two days in Bedminster, and no new picks were revealed.

The campaign said Cristie and Trump had a "productive discussion" Sunday on law enforcement and domestic security. Others meeting Trump on Sunday included Wilbur Ross, under consideration for commerce secretary, global investor David McCormick, real estate investor Jonathan Gray and Bob Johnson, the founder of Black Entertainment Television (BET). Meanwhile, the New York Post reported that Melania Trump and son Barron will remain in New York, rather than live in the White House, at least for the time being. And in Peru, US President Barack Obama offered his successor some unsolicited counsel. "The main advice that I give to the incoming president is the United States really is an indispensable nation in our world order," Obama said as he wrapped up his final foreign trip.



Beyond Mattis, the top names on the guest list Sunday were Republican New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, who was recently ousted as the leader of Trump's transition team, former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani and immigration hardliner Kris Kobach.

The president-elect was clearly seeking to sound out people from a wide range of backgrounds, from party stalwarts to business moguls and former rivals.

Trump's picks so far include ultra-conservative Senator Jeff Sessions as attorney general, hawkish congressman Mike Pompeo as CIA director and retired lieutenant general Michael Flynn as his national security adviser.

His choice of Steve Bannon, seen as an ideologue of the ultra-conservative alt-right movement, as chief strategist has also drawn fire. But he has also moved to mend fences with moderate Republicans as he goes about building a new administration before his January 20 inauguration.

Obama however said he does not intend to become his successor's constant critic -- but reserved the right to speak out if president-elect Donald Trump or his policies breach certain "values or ideals."

"As an American citizen who cares deeply about our country, if there are issues that have less to do with the specifics of some legislative proposal or battle or go to core questions about our values and ideals, and if I think that it's necessary or helpful for me to defend those ideals, I'll examine it when it comes," Obama said.

Meanwhile, Trump's incoming White House chief of staff has refused to rule out a registry system as part of his administration's anti-terrorist strategy.

Reince Priebus said the President-elect is not planning to create a Muslim registry, despite his repeated and flippant promises throughout the campaign. But Priebus, an American attorney and Republican National Committee chairman, left the door open for some kind of vetting process.

US IN TRANSITION

Priebus refuses to rule out Muslim registry

Obama says he will speak out against Trump to defend US 'values'



Afghan men assist an injured woman to the Estiqlal Hospital after a massive suicide blast at a Shia mosque in Kabul yesterday. Inset, An injured man. The blast killed at least 27 people. PHOTO: AFP

OBAMA BIDS ADIEU TO THE WORLD STAGE

US President Barack Obama bid farewell to the world stage Sunday, pondering his legacy, offering advice to his successor and discussing his post-presidential life at the end of his final foreign tour. Obama spoke to both the American people and the world as he gave his final foreign press conference in Lima, Peru. Here are some key points from Obama's remarks:

GLOBALIZATION

Obama said an increasingly borderless world has brought "historic gains in prosperity, education and health," but acknowledged globalization had both winners and losers. "When jobs and capital can move across borders, when workers have less leverage, when wealthy corporations seem to be playing by a different set of rules, then workers and communities can be hit especially hard," he said. "That can reverberate through our politics. That's why I firmly believe one of our greatest challenges in the years ahead across our nations and within them will be to make sure that the benefits of the global economy are shared."

PRESIDENT TRUMP

He asked the world to treat the brash billionaire as he himself vowed to do: "Wait and see." He said Trump's presidency would likely be far different from his candidacy. "Once you're in the Oval Office, once you begin interacting with world leaders, once you see the complexities of the issues, that has a way of shaping your thinking," Obama said.

SYRIA

The brutal war in Syria has been the most difficult foreign policy challenge of Obama's eight years in the White House. He defended his decision not to invade the country, but warned no end to the bloodshed was in sight. "I am not optimistic about the short term



prospects in Syria," he said, blaming Russian and Iranian support for the Bashar al-Assad regime.

LEGACY

Obama voiced regret that, despite high approval ratings, he was stymied on issues like gun control, a minimum wage increase and infrastructure spending. But he defended the values of his

LIFE AFTER PRESIDENCY

Obama was clear about his first priority for post-presidential life: "Take (First Lady) Michelle on vacation." The president said he wants to "get some rest, spend time with my girls and do some writing, do some thinking." He does not plan to immediately wade back into politics. "I want to be respectful of the office and give the president-elect an opportunity to put forward his platform," he said.

PHILIPPINES

Children as young as nine could be jailed in the Philippines for certain crimes under a proposed law backed by the president, sparking concern yesterday from the United Nations and rights groups. President Rodrigo Duterte's allies have been pushing to pass laws by December that would restore the death penalty and lower the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 15 to 9. Duterte won May elections largely because of a vow to kill tens of thousands of drug dealers, also promising on the campaign trail to close a loophole in the juvenile justice system that he said allowed traffickers to use minors as narcotic couriers.

FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY

The surprise winner of the first round of France's rightwing presidential primary, conservative ex-premier Francois Fillon, was the runaway favourite to win the contest expected to decide France's next leader. Fillon, an admirer of Margaret Thatcher who has pledged deep economic reforms, pulled off a stunning upset Sunday, surging from behind to knock his former boss Nicolas Sarkozy out of the race and beat the longtime favourite, Alain Juppe, into distant second. Fillon and Juppe, also a former prime minister, will go head-to-head in a run-off on Sunday, with the winner expected to meet far-right leader Marine Le Pen in the second round of the presidential election in May. As Fillon faced immediate attacks from the left as "an ultra-conservative", former centre-right prime minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin also warned that his programme of

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Philippines law to jail 9-yr-olds!

AFP, Manila

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FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY Sarkozy knocked out of race

AFP, Paris

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As Fillon faced immediate attacks from the left as "an ultra-conservative", former centre-right prime minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin also warned that his programme of

cuts was "unworkable." "There is no chance of implementing reforms through brute force," Raffarin, an ally of Juppe, told BFM television on Monday morning.

Polls show Le Pen being beaten at the final hurdle but her rivals have warned that all bets are off in a country where anti-elite sentiment that propelled Donald Trump to the White House is also running high.

Sarkozy's defeat at the hands of his former premier Fillon, a man he once nicknamed "Mr Nobody", marked what appeared to be an ignominious end to the ex-president's forty

years in politics. His hard-right campaign and failure to enact many of his promises when in power from 2007-2012 repelled many voters in his camp. Conceding defeat for the second time in four years, an unusually humble Sarkozy said it had not been easy for his family to live with a man who "arouses so many strong feelings".

