

NEWSIN brief

France adopts tough anti-terror law

France's lower house of parliament on Tuesday overwhelmingly approved a new counter-terrorism bill. It will allow the authorities to confine suspected jihadist sympathisers to their neighbourhoods, close places of worship accused of condoning terror and carry out more on-the-spot identity checks -- all without the prior approval of a judge.

Indian cross-border firing kills 2 in Pakistan

Two civilians were killed and two others wounded after Indian troops fired into Pakistani Kashmir yesterday, officials said, causing Islamabad to summon its neighbour's envoy in protest at an alleged rise in cross-border violence. The latest incident at the frontier between the nuclear-armed rivals took place in a village in Abbaspur sector on the Line of Control, the de facto border dividing Kashmir between Pakistan and India.

34 gets life in jail over Erdogan death plot

A Turkish court yesterday handed life sentences to 34 people for plotting to assassinate President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at a luxury Aegean hotel during last year's failed coup. The group includes former brigadier general Gokhan Sahin Sonmezates who was accused of directing the plot.

Cats kill 1m birds a day in Australia

Feral and pet cats kill more than one million birds in Australia every day, new research showed yesterday, with the staggering slaughter driving the decline of many species. The study, published in the journal Biological Conservation, estimated that wild cats wiped out 316 million every year, while pets killed 61 million annually.



Shia Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and Iraqi army drive armoured vehicles on the outskirts of Hawija, yesterday. Inset, Displaced people flee their homes in Hawija. Iraqi forces launched a final assault yesterday to capture Hawija, one of two pockets of territory in Iraq still under Islamic State control, entering the town's outskirts after several hours of fighting, military commanders said.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Kim Jong-Un 'very rational' actor: CIA

North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un is a rational politician and the US needs to understand that to deal with the nuclear-armed country, a top Central Intelligence Agency Korea expert said yesterday. "Beyond the bluster, Kim Jong-Un is a rational actor," said Yong Suk Lee, the deputy assistant director of the CIA's Korea Mission Center. "We have a tendency in this country to underestimate his conservatism." "He wants to rule for a long time and die in his own bed," Lee said at a conference on the CIA at George Washington University. US politicians including President Donald Trump have repeatedly painted Pyongyang's strongman as irrational and "crazy." But Lee said Kim's focus is to stay in power, as shown by the brutal murder in Malaysia in February of his half brother Kim Jong-Nam, which has been blamed on Pyongyang agents. "All politics is local," he said of the North Korean milieu. The country's long history of being surrounded by greater powers, too, means that the country is constantly on the defensive, and its leaders play that up. "North Korea is a political organism that thrives on confrontation," Lee said. But Kim's fierce defense of his position and his combativeness against Washington does not mean he will act irrationally now that he has the capacity to fire a nuclear tipped missile at the United States. "Waking up and deciding to nuke Los Angeles is not in his interest to survive," he said.

Mattis backs Iran deal

Says US admin backs Tillerson's diplomacy on N Korea

President Donald Trump's respected defense secretary Jim Mattis added his heavyweight support to retaining the Iran nuclear deal Tuesday, as more hawkish voices pushed for tougher action against Tehran. The Pentagon chief also tried to clear up doubts about the US administration's North Korea strategy, backing Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's effort to find a diplomatic solution to the nuclear standoff.



Under US law, Trump must write to Congress every 90 days to certify whether or not the White House believes Iran is keeping to its side of the bargain and whether or not the US should continue to waive sanctions. Decertifying Iran's compliance would not necessarily signal the end of the 2015 accord, as long as the US Congress does not rush to reimpose the sanctions waived under the agreement. But as the latest deadline day approaches on October 15, Washington's warring foreign policy camps are deeply divided, and bombarding Trump's White House with

wildly varying advice. Trump -- who told reporters last month he had reached a decision, but would not say what course of action he intends to take -- has appeared publicly to side with foreign policy hawks like his UN ambassador Nikki Haley. On Tuesday, Trump's Pentagon chief told lawmakers the deal remains in the US national interest. Mattis was also clear about his stand on how to solve North Korea crisis. Mattis put his support behind Tillerson two days after Trump appeared to undermine his top diplomat by saying was "wasting his time" by maintaining contacts with Kim Jong-Un's regime. "The international community... is focused on the destabilizing threat posed by North Korea and Kim Jong-Un's relentless pursuit of nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities," he said. "The Defense Department supports fully Secretary Tillerson's efforts to find a diplomatic solution but remains focused on defense of the United States and our allies."

'He's the love of my life'

Bartender's compassion for dying man earns praise

A Las Vegas bartender held the hand of a young Canadian man as he died and then stayed with him for hours after promising his girlfriend and mother she would not leave his side. Heather Gooze was being praised for her act of compassion toward a stranger in the midst of the carnage at Sunday night's concert on the Las Vegas Strip. "I would hope somebody would do it for me," Gooze, 43, told CBS This Morning. "I would hope that they wouldn't let me be alone." The shooter Stephen Paddock, a 64-year-old gambler and retired accountant, opened fire on the concert goers from a nearby hotel killing 58 people and wounding more than 500. The motive of his act is yet unknown to the police. His girlfriend Marilou Danley, 62, returned to the United States and was met by FBI agents eager to hear whatever she might know about the motive behind the worst mass shooting in US history. She was in the Philippines when Paddock opened fire on the Las Vegas strip. Authorities are also investigating reports that while she was in the Philippines, Paddock wired her \$100,000. Gooze said she was working the bar at a VIP tent at the Route 91 Harvest Festival when gunfire erupted. Hundreds of people suddenly came crashing through the bar, which was located near an exit, and she began to assist two wounded men.

LAS VEGAS MASS SHOOTING
No motive found yet; shooter's girlfriend back in US, to be grilled by FBI



Jordan McIllood

One of them was Jordan McIllood, a 23-year-old apprentice mechanic from Maple Ridge, British Columbia, who was attending the show with his girlfriend, Amber Bereza. He had been shot in the stomach and separated from his girlfriend in the panic that ensued when the gunman opened fire from the 32nd floor of a nearby hotel. "His fingers were kind of wrapped on my hand," Gooze told CBS. "His hand kind of squeezed a little bit and then just like, went loose." A man who was with Gooze answered McIllood's phone when it rang and obtained numbers for his girlfriend and his mother. Gooze spoke to his girlfriend, who was locked down at the Tropicana hotel. "She said 'Be honest with me, like what's going on?'" Gooze recalled for CBS. "And I said 'He didn't make it.' She said to me 'He's the love of my life, like, are you sure?'" "I said 'Yes.'" Gooze promised Bereza she would remain by his side and made the same vow to McIllood's mother after being put in touch with her. She stayed there for about four hours. Gooze's Facebook page was inundated with hundreds of tributes on Tuesday from Canadians and others. "As a Canadian I want to thank you for being there for Jordan. It was the most selfless caring thing anyone could ever do," wrote Megan Nicole Hill of Barrie, Ontario.

Iran, Turkey vow to halt Iraqi Kurds' secession

Erdogan visits Iran as ties warm amid shared fears

The presidents of Iran and Turkey vowed during talks in Tehran yesterday to work closely together to prevent the disintegration of Iraq and Syria and to oppose the Iraqi Kurds' drive for independence. Shia Muslim Iran and mainly Sunni Muslim Turkey, a Nato member, have traditionally had cool relations but both have been alarmed by the Iraqi Kurds' vote for independence in a Sept 25 referendum, fearing it will stoke separatism among their own Kurdish populations. "We want security and stability in the Middle East ... The independence referendum in Iraq's Kurdistan is a sectarian plot by foreign countries and is rejected by Tehran and Ankara," Iran's President Hassan

Rouhani said, according to state TV. "We will not accept a change of borders under any circumstances." Iran and Turkey have already threatened to join Baghdad in imposing economic sanctions on Iraqi Kurdistan and have launched joint military exercises with Iraqi troops on their borders with the separatist region. Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan, who is on a one-day trip to Tehran that will also include talks with Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said Ankara was considering taking further measures against Iraqi Kurdistan. Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region announced on Tuesday it was calling presidential and parliamentary elections for Nov 1. Baghdad has responded with further punitive measures.



A young woman hugs a fireman as others queue to lay flowers on ballot boxes used during the Catalan independence referendum in Pineda de Mar, during a general strike in Catalonia on Tuesday. Inset, A woman wrapped in a Catalan pro-independence 'Estelada' flag listens to Spain's King Felipe VI address to the nation. PHOTO: AFP

WAR IN SYRIA

Regime ousts IS from all of Hama province

The Syrian army and allied fighters drove the Islamic State group from their last positions in the central province of Hama yesterday after heavy fighting, a monitor said. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor of the war, said IS was no longer present anywhere in the province for the first time in three years. The army, backed by ally Russia, launched a campaign against IS in Hama in early September, capturing some 50 villages and the strategic town of Uqayribat, the Observatory said. "On Wednesday, regime forces managed to take control of all the last remaining villages in the hands of Daesh (IS) in eastern Hama province after more than a month of fierce clashes between the two sides," Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman said. The monitor said more than 400 IS fighters and nearly 190 Syrian soldiers and allied militiamen had been killed in the fighting, reported AFP. There was no immediate announcement in Syrian state media, but the Al-Watan newspaper, which is close to the government, reported that "the army has taken complete control of eastern Hama province." Meanwhile, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov yesterday accused the US and its allies of orchestrating "deadly provocations" against Russian troops in Syria. Moscow has complained about what it says are suspiciously friendly ties between US-backed militias, US special forces, and Islamic State in Syria, and accused Washington of trying to slow the advance of the Syrian army, reported Reuters.

US backs India on OBOR

Mattis says China's prestigious corridor crosses 'disputed' territory

The Trump administration on Tuesday threw its weight behind India's opposition to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), saying it passes through a disputed territory and no country should put itself into a position of dictating the Belt and Road initiative.



roads, and no one nation should put itself into a position of dictating 'one belt, one road'," Mattis told members of the Senate Armed Services Committee during a Congressional hearing. "That said, the 'One Belt One Road' also goes through disputed territory, and I think, that in itself shows the vulnerability of trying to establish that sort of a dictate," Mattis said apparently referring to India's position on CPEC. Mattis was responding to a question from Senator Charles Peters over OBOR and China's policy in this regard. "The One Belt One Road strategy seeks to secure China's control over both the continental and the maritime interest, in their eventual hope of dominating Eurasia and exploiting natural resources there, things that are certainly at odds with US policy. So what role do you see China playing in Afghanistan, and particularly related to their One Belt One Road," Peters had asked.

NEPAL ELECTION

Maoists form alliance with CPN-UML

Nepal's Maoist party yesterday announced an alliance with the Communist Party Nepal-Union Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), the largest communist bloc, ahead of key elections seen as the final step in the Himalayan nation's post-war transition to a federal democracy. The two parties, with a third smaller partner, have agreed a tie up for general elections later this year, and plan to unify as a single communist party following the polls. The Maoists have dominated Nepal's politics for more than 20 years after waging a decade-long insurgency that claimed more than 16,000 lives.

CRACKDOWN IN CAMBODIA

Half of opposition fled abroad: MP

Nearly half of Cambodia's opposition parliamentarians have fled abroad in the past month to escape a government crackdown that has battered their party with legal cases ahead of crunch polls, an MP said yesterday. The exodus further imperils the prospects of a party that poses the only viable challenge at the ballot box to premier Hun Sen, who has clung on to power for 32 years. The strongman has smothered dissent in the lead-up to the 2018 national election and is accused of picking off his critics through a series of dubious court cases. The crackdown was ramped up last month when opposition leader Kem Sokha was thrown into a remote jail on treason charges, a dramatic arrest that sent fear rippling through the embattled opposition movement. Since then, more than 20 opposition politicians have fled the country, MP Mao Monyvann said of his Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), which has 55 members of parliament. "Now there are only a few more than 10 (MPs) still in the country," he told AFP, with others having fled before Kem Sokha's arrest. Many have left for the US or European countries where they have family or dual citizenship.