

NEWS IN brief

Australia migrant law approved
 The Australian parliament has approved changes to immigration laws that include reintroducing controversial temporary visas for refugees.
 The bill will allow refugees to live and work in Australia for three to five years, but denies them permanent protection. It was passed by 34 votes to 32 in the senate and later backed by MPs.
 Australia currently detains all asylum seekers who arrive by boat, holding them in offshore processing camps. It says that those found to be refugees will not be permanently resettled in Australia, under tough new policies aimed at ending the flow of boats.
 It also has a backlog of cases - about 30,000 - relating to asylum seekers who arrived before the current policies were put in place. Those people live in detention camps or in the community under bridging visas that do not allow them to work.

17 dead as militants storm Kashmir army camp
 Militants hurling grenades stormed an army camp yesterday in Indian Kashmir and killed 11 security officials, police said, ratcheting up violence in the Muslim-majority region which is voting in state elections.
 Six of the attackers also died in the shootout at the sprawling army camp in Uri, near the heavily militarised Line of Control (LoC) dividing the disputed Himalayan territory between India and Pakistan, an Indian police official told AFP.

Ukraine needs a real ceasefire: Kiev
 Ukraine's foreign minister said yesterday that his war-torn country needed a "real" ceasefire, a day after Ukraine and pro-Russian rebels agreed to halt fire starting on December 9.
 Ukraine needs "a ceasefire not in name, but ceasefire in substance," Pavlo Klimkin told reporters in Switzerland on the sidelines of a meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) focused on the crisis in his country.

ISIS closes in on east Syria air base
 Islamic State group jihadists are closing in on the government-held Deir Ezzor air base in eastern Syria, nearly surrounding its beleaguered garrison, a monitoring group said yesterday.
 ISIS fighters seized the village of Al-Jaffrah, adjacent to the base, leaving it surrounded except for a narrow corridor to the west, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.
 ISIS forces control most of Deir Ezzor province, but half of its capital remains in government hands, along with the military airport.
 The oil-rich province lies between ISIS-controlled Raqa province and the Iraqi border, and is a key prize for the jihadist group, which declared an Islamic "caliphate" straddling the two countries in June.
 ISIS launched a renewed assault on the military airport earlier this week. The fighting has killed at least 30 government troops and militia, as well as 27 ISIS fighters, over the past 48 hours, the Observatory said.
 Two of those killed on the government side were captured and beheaded, the Britain-based group said.
 Further east, at least 15 jihadists were killed in a US-led coalition air strike on an ISIS convoy near the Albu Kamal crossing on the border with Iraq, it added.
 Meanwhile, Germany jailed a jihadist militant for three years and nine months yesterday in the country's first trial of a recruit of the Islamic State group fighting in Syria and Iraq.
 Kreshnik Berisha, 20, born near the financial capital Frankfurt to a family from Kosovo, was found guilty of membership in a foreign terrorist organisation, said presiding judge Thomas Lageber.
 He avoided a heavier sentence because of his confession and his voluntary decision to leave the ISIS, the court said.

Block HK govt, not roads
 A founder of Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement branded the occupation of the city's main roads as "high-risk" yesterday, urging protesters to turn to new methods of civil disobedience to push for electoral reform.
 Benny Tai, one of the three founders of the Occupy Central with Love and Peace movement, said the movement has now run its course and warned that protesters now risk further violent clashes with police if they stay in their camps.
 "Occupation is now a high-risk, low-return business," he said in an editorial in the New York Times, arguing that campaigners should instead turn to "acts of noncooperation" such as refusing to pay taxes.
 "The occupation has won over as many Hong Kongers as it ever will, and we should consider new ways to convince the public that fighting for full democracy is in their interest."
 Campaigners have camped out on Hong Kong's streets for more than two months to demand fully free elections for the southern Chinese city's leadership.

India's Modi named 'Asian of the Year'
 India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi is The Straits Times Asian of the Year 2014.
 The editors of the paper picked the development focused Indian leader, who fashioned an impressive election victory for his party in the national election that ended in May, from a rich field of contesting names.
 Last year's award was shared by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and China's President Xi Jinping. The inaugural award, in 2012, went to Myanmar's Thein Sein.
 The Straits Times' choice of Modi as Asian of the Year was based on several factors. Politically and socially, he has energised India with his stirring calls for a development focus and "toilets before temples".
 On the economy, his call for a Make in India campaign, if pursued to its logical conclusion with a friendlier investment climate and less rigid labour norms, could help fire up the growth engines of the US\$2 trillion economy and provide welcome ballast to the region when China, the No. 1 Asian economy, is slowing and Japan, the No. 2, is in recession.
 "Economists project that as early as next year, India could pick up the growth baton from China. Given its huge market, its travellers who fill up hotel rooms and cruise ship cabins from Singapore to Sydney, its hunger for capital goods and commodities, a resurgent India will be a boon for the region and the world," the editors said in their citation.

Millions evacuate as typhoon bears down on Philippines
 Millions of people in the Philippines sought shelter in churches, schools and other makeshift evacuation centres yesterday as Typhoon Hagupit bore down on the disaster-weary nation.
 The storm, which would be the strongest to hit the Southeast Asian archipelago this year, is expected to impact more than half the nation including communities devastated by Super Typhoon Haiyan last year.
 Authorities said Hagupit is expected to make a landfall on Saturday night or Sunday.

No water in Maldives' capital
 Water was cut off to more than 100,000 residents in the Maldives' capital because of a fire in the city's water treatment plant, a minister said yesterday.
 Government Minister Mohamed Shareef said the government has declared a crisis situation and appealed to India, Sri Lanka and China and the United States for help.
 The capital is located on a low-lying island in the Indian Ocean that has no natural water source and depends entirely on treated sea water.
 The government provided bottled drinking water free of charge but the people struggled without enough water for washing.
 Rajeev Shahare, India's envoy to the archipelago nation said water will be brought in large planes in five flights yesterday and an offshore patrol vessel in the ocean with a water treating facility has been diverted to the Maldives.
 Much of the capital was still without drinking water yesterday afternoon and local media reported that angry residents fought and attacked shops that had rationed mineral water, while hotels in the capital said supplies were rapidly running out.
 Shareef said it may take days to resume operations in the treatment plant because destroyed parts need to be brought in from abroad, reports AP.
 Security forces were distributing water free of charge on the island, which measures just one square-mile (two square kilometres) and houses some 120,000 residents.
 But activists said only those able to produce a Maldivian identity card were eligible for the free supplies, meaning thousands of migrant workers from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka would be left out, reports AFP.

Obama to name Carter as defence secretary
 US President Barack Obama will name a former Pentagon deputy chief, Ashton Carter, to be his new defence secretary, a White House official said.
 If confirmed, Carter would replace Chuck Hagel who announced his resignation last month. Carter served as deputy defence secretary under Leon Panetta from October 2011 to December 2013.
 Obama will make the announcement later yesterday, joined by both Carter and Hagel, a White House official said on condition of anonymity.
 Carter, 60, has gained a reputation as an expert on hi-tech weapons and military budgets, portraying himself as a reformer intent on making the vast Pentagon bureaucracy more efficient.
 But he has less experience overseeing war strategy and has never served in uniform, unlike Hagel, who was wounded in the Vietnam War.
 Officials privately said Hagel was forced out after losing the confidence of the White House, as the United States wages an air war against Islamic State jihadists in Iraq and Syria.
 Carter will inherit a tense relationship between the US military and the White House that is unlikely to ease even with a fresh face at the helm of the Pentagon, experts said.
 Carter, a policy wonk with degrees in medieval history and theoretical physics, is a bona fide defense expert. But he is also a blunt-talking figure who could collide with what his predecessors have called the White House's tendency for "micro-management."

Help hunt economic fugitives
 China has asked the United States to help it track down more than 100 people suspected of corruption and who China believes are in the United States, a US official said yesterday.
 The official, who declined to be identified because of the sensitivity of the matter, said those on the list had Chinese names but it was not clear if they were all Chinese nationals.
 "The majority of them are related to crimes of corruption or economic malfeasance," he said. "The list is not precisely clear in terms of the details of the nature of the crimes, the evidence or the whereabouts" of the accused.
 Chinese law enforcement authorities have not provided sufficient evidence or background information for US police to track down the suspects in most cases, he said.

FREE SURGERY CAMP
 At least 60 patients have lost their eyesight after an operation at an eye camp organised by an NGO in Gurdaspur district, civil and medical authorities said yesterday.
 While 16 persons belonged to villages of Amritsar the rest were from Gurdaspur district. All of them were admitted to city ENT hospitals of Amritsar and Gurdaspur.
 Confirming the incident, Deputy Commissioner Amritsar, Ravi Bhagat, said here yesterday that the 16 affected patients admitted to the city ENT Hospital are under the supervision of Assistant Professor Karamjit Singh. Dr Singh said that all of them have permanently lost their vision.
 Bhagat said that a high-level inquiry has been ordered to find the doctors who performed the operations at the camp.
 Giving details, Civil Surgeon Amritsar, Rajiv Bhalla, said all the patients were operated at an eye camp in Ghuman village of Gurdaspur district around ten days ago.
 The incident emerged when all the 16 patients, who belonged to Amritsar, approached Deputy Commissioner Bhagat to lodge a complaint against the NGO and doctors concerned.
 Bhalla said, "It was found that there were a total of 60 patients and sixteen of them were from Amritsar."

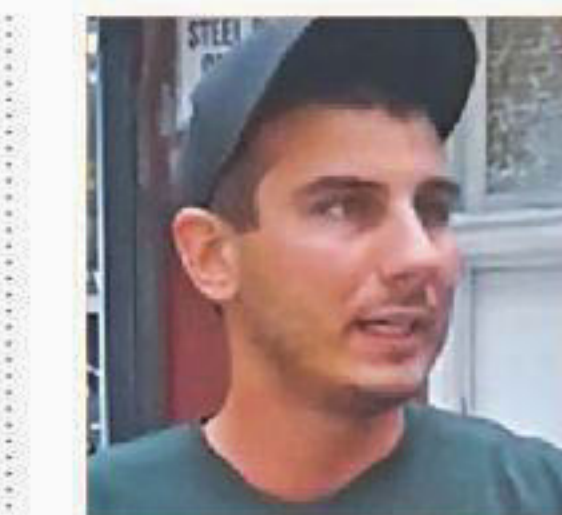
Scientist's Nobel medal fetches \$4.75 mn
 The Nobel Prize medal of celebrated American geneticist James Watson sold for \$4.75 million in just minutes at auction on Thursday in New York.
 The sale, the first of a Nobel Prize by a living laureate, was considerably more than the \$2.5-\$3.5 million estimate, the auction house Christie's said.
 Watson was awarded the prize in 1962 for discovering the double-helix structure of DNA nine years earlier - one of the 20th century's most important scientific findings.
 But the 86-year-old's reputation took a major hit after he questioned the intelligence of black people - comments for which he subsequently apologized - and he has been shunned ever since by some in the scientific community.
 Made of 23-karat gold, the medal features the profile of Swedish chemist and inventor Alfred Nobel.
 Christie's also sold Watson's handwritten notes for his speech during the Nobel banquet on December 10, 1962. Valued at \$300,000-\$400,000, the fives pages went under the hammer for \$365,000.
 Watson had also participated in the Nobel conference. A corrected, 46-page manuscript valued at \$200,000-\$300,000 sold for \$245,000.
 The author of numerous scientific volumes, Watson intends to donate a portion of the proceeds to the University of Chicago, where he studied, Clare College at the University of Cambridge, where he worked.



These pictures show demonstrators took to the streets of New York for the second consecutive night Thursday to condemn a grand jury's decision not to indict a white police officer over the July 17 death of Eric Garner. (Story on page 16)



PHOTO: AFP



He's a 'model officer'

Say defenders of cop involved in Garner death

CNN ONLINE

Conflicting portraits have emerged of the police officer at the center of the controversy surrounding the death of Eric Garner in Staten Island during an attempted arrest in July.

Defenders of Officer Daniel Pantaleo say he is an upstanding former Boy Scout with few complaints against him. Critics say he should have been indicted for his role in Garner's death and point to two lawsuits against him as signs that his record as an officer is tarnished.

Police union officials describe him in glowing terms, saying he is no hot-head.

"He's a model of what we want a police officer to be," said Patrick Lynch, president of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association. "He's a mature, mature police officer, motivated by serving the community. He literally is an Eagle Scout."

Pantaleo has had "very few citizen complaints" against him over the course of more than 300 arrests, according to union spokesman Albert O'Leary.

But court records show he has been sued at least twice, both times on allegations of false arrest and unlawful imprisonment.

One suit was brought by two men from Staten Island, Darren Collins and Tommy Rice, who alleged that Pantaleo arrested them in 2012 on baseless charges, and humiliated them in public.

The other suit, filed this year, has not yet been resolved.

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AFP, Beirut

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In this photograph taken on Thursday, police officials and security personnel distribute bottles of water to residents after a fire at a desalination plant affected water supplies in Male.

PHOTO: AFP

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FREE SURGERY CAMP

60 patients lose eyesight in Punjab

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Bhalla said, "It was found that there were a total of 60 patients and sixteen of them were from Amritsar."

Rest were from Gurdaspur district. He said that cataract surgery in the eye camp was performed under "severe unhygienic condition" whereupon eyes of all the 60 patients were found damaged permanently.

Bhalla said that before organising the eye camp, mandatory permission was required from the district Administration and Civil Surgeons of Gurdaspur and Amritsar but all



the norms were not followed.

Bhalla also said that all the affected patients were above the age of 60 with poor economical condition. They are being provided free medical treatment in the ENT hospital of Amritsar and Gurdaspur.

The incident comes days after 11 women died and 34 were reported critical after undergoing "faulty" sterilisation surgeries at a government-organised family planning camp in Bilaspur district of Chhattisgarh.

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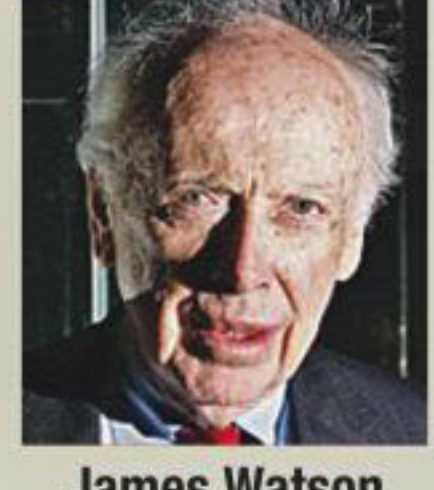
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