

# NEWS IN brief

### Nearly 2,000 died in hajj stampede: report

AFP, Dubai

The death toll from last month's hajj stampede has risen to at least 1,958, according to tallies given by foreign officials, making it the deadliest incident in the pilgrimage's history. Saudi Arabia has yet to provide an updated death toll after saying 769 people died in the tragedy near Makkah, home of Islam's holiest sites on September 24 stampede.

### Delhi court finds Uber driver guilty of rape

AFP, New Delhi

An Indian Uber taxi driver was convicted yesterday of raping a young female passenger in the capital last year, a case that sparked fresh fears in a city plagued by sexual violence. Uber was banned from operating in New Delhi in the aftermath of the December 5 attack, which sparked accusations it failed to conduct adequate background checks, although the ban has never been fully enforced.

### Clinton extends lead among Democrats: poll

AFP, Washington

Frontrunner Hillary Clinton has stretched her lead over fellow White House hopeful Bernie Sanders in the race for the Democratic nomination after impressing in the party's first televised debate, a poll showed yesterday. Clinton got the backing of 49 percent of respondents, up from 42 percent last month, according to the NBC/Wall Street Journal poll. Support for Sanders is down from 35 percent to 29 percent, according to the poll.

### S Lankan judge: war crimes claims 'credible'

AFP, Colombo

Allegations that Sri Lankan troops committed war crimes are "credible", a judge appointed by the island's former president has concluded in a report presented to parliament yesterday. The findings mark the first time a domestic inquiry has said there is evidence the army committed war crimes.

### Teen hacker cracks CIA head's personal email

AFP, Washington

A teenaged hacker broke into CIA Director John Brennan's personal email account and swiped sensitive files including a top-secret application for a security clearance, the New York Post reported. If true, the story will be a major embarrassment for Brennan and the Central Intelligence Agency, coming after months of intense national scrutiny of Hillary Clinton for her use of a private email server when she was secretary of state.



Palestinian demonstrators take cover as they throw stones towards Israeli security forces from behind burning tires during clashes in the West Bank town of Al-Bireh, on the northern outskirts of Ramallah, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

## Tens of thousands flee

### US, Russia sign air safety MoU; 'Moscow's air campaign kills 370'

AGENCIES

Tens of thousands have fled new regime offensives in Syria, the UN warned yesterday, as the United States and Russia signed a memorandum of understanding that establishes air safety measures so pilots from the two countries steer clear of each other as they conduct separate bombing campaigns.

The mass exodus was focused south of Syria's second city Aleppo, one of five areas where regime troops have launched renewed attacks since Russia began its air war on September 30. "Around 35,000 people are reported to have been displaced from... the southwestern outskirts of Aleppo city, following government offensives over the last few days," said Vanessa Huguenin, spokeswoman for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. She said many of the displaced were living with host families and in informal settlements in the west of the province. "People urgently need food and basic household and shelter items,"

she said. "Aid agencies are growing more and more concerned for families living outdoors as the weather is getting colder, especially overnight." Russia has carried out more than 500 air raids in support of President Bashar al-Assad's forces and a monitoring group yesterday gave the first estimate for the total number of dead in the strikes. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory

### RUSSIA-BACKED REGIME OFFENSIVES IN SYRIA

for Human Rights (SOHR) said at least 370 people had been killed, including more than 120 civilians, reports AFP. "With today's signatures, the memorandum of understanding is now in effect," Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook told reporters. "That was signed a short time ago, earlier today." Separately, Russian media reported that the memorandum had been signed by officials in Moscow and the

United States. "The memorandum contains a number of rules and restrictions aimed at preventing incidents between American and Russian plans," Deputy Defense Minister, Anatoly Antonov said, according to Ria-Novosti. Russia asked for "deconfliction" talks with the United States after Moscow began bombing Syria on September 30.

Meanwhile, US Marine General Joseph Dunford played down the chances of Russia joining the US-led air campaign against Islamic State in Iraq in the near future as he made his first trip to Iraq as top US military official.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said on Oct 1, the same day Dunford took over as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that he would welcome Russian air strikes against Islamic State militants in his country. But Dunford said US officials had since been reassured that Abadi had made no such request to Moscow, reports Reuters.

## Faith leaders call for 'zero carbon future'

AFP, Bonn

More than 150 religious leaders of different religions around the world yesterday urged UN climate negotiators in Bonn to bequeath a liveable planet to future generations.

"It is our duty to leave this Earth behind to our children and grandchildren to ensure sustainable and acceptable living conditions in future for all," they said in a statement submitted to the UN.

"We urge governments to commit to building climate resilience, phasing out fossil fuel energies and reaching zero emissions by mid-century."

The appeal comes less than two months ahead of a 195-nation climate conference in Paris tasked with beating back the threat of global warming and helping poor countries cope with its impacts.

Meanwhile, talks on a climate rescue pact got back on track yesterday after an acrimonious start to the final negotiating session.

The 195-nation discussions took a procedural detour Monday when developing countries accused rich ones of "apartheid" tactics, and claimed their core demands had been summarily excised from a blueprint.

But after a late-night sprint to reintroduce omitted passages, the G77 bloc of developing nations -- housing the vast majority of the global population -- said yesterday their key concerns were addressed.

The revised draft, expanded from 20 pages to 34, managed to "correct imbalances", South African climate envoy Nozipho Mxakato-Diseko said on the group's behalf.



## Canada's Liberals sweep to power

### Justin Trudeau topples Harper

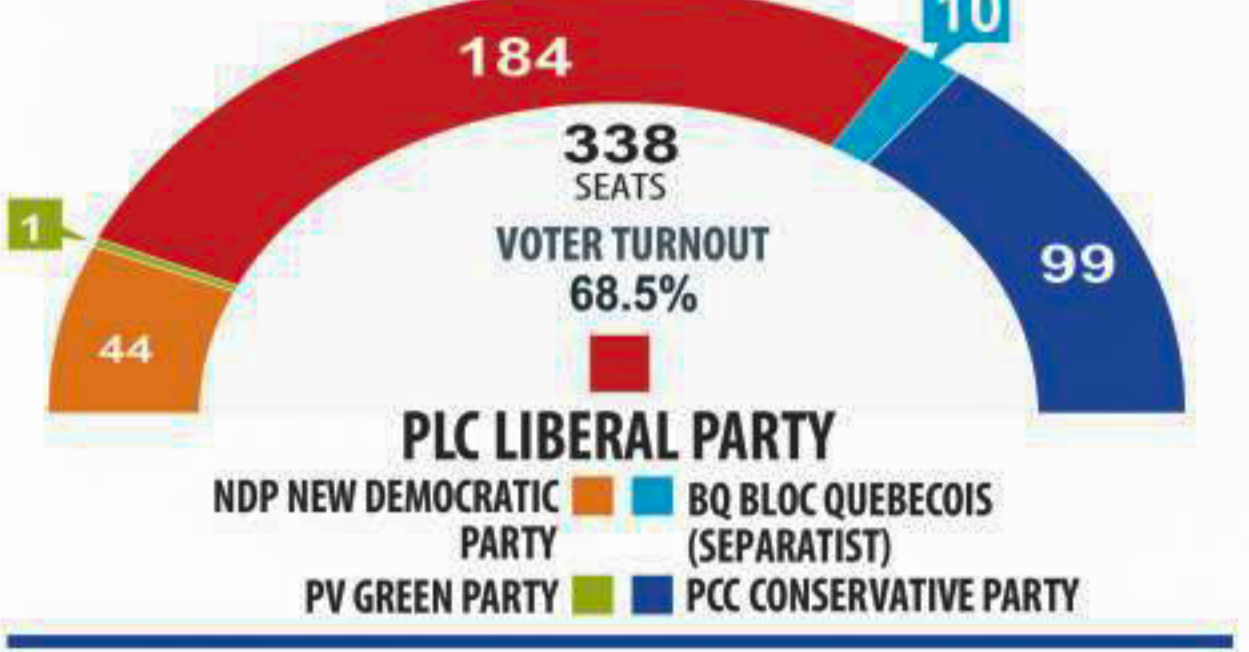
AFP, Ottawa

Canada's Liberals won a landslide general election victory Monday, with young leader Justin Trudeau ending a decade of Conservative rule with pledges to raise taxes on the rich in a struggling economy.

For many Canadians the vote was a referendum on outgoing premier Stephen Harper's management style, criticized as autocratic, and on who was better placed to put a sputtering economy back on track.

### CANADA: THE NEW PARLIAMENT

THE LIBERALS HAVE WON AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY



Besides raising taxes on the richest Canadians, Trudeau, the youthful and good-looking son of the late and beloved ex-premier Pierre Trudeau, has said he will lower them for the middle class.

Trudeau has also pledged to take in thousands of refugees from Syria and battle climate change. The 43-year-old -- who ran a combative campaign and offered up what he called a "new vision" for the nation -- would be able to form a majority government with 184 of the 338 seats in the House of Commons, according to still incomplete figures from Elections Canada.

Turnout was 68 percent, compared to 61 percent in the last election four years ago.

Public opinion had swung wildly during the hard-fought campaign, which at 11 weeks was one of the longest in Canada's history. The Liberals came from behind late in the campaign, with Trudeau promising "not just a change in government, but a better government."

## ISRAEL-PALESTINE CLASHES

### UN chief warns of 'abyss' as violence rages on

AFP, Jerusalem

UN chief Ban Ki-moon yesterday warned Israelis and Palestinians they were at a "dangerous abyss" and must act quickly to calm nearly three weeks of unrest before it spirals further out of control.

The stark comments came as the UN secretary general made an unannounced



visit to Jerusalem to try to ease tensions that have led to mounting international concern.

Violent protests and a wave of Palestinian gun, knife and car-ramming attacks against Israelis have raised fears of a full-scale Palestinian uprising.

Even as Ban visited, another stabbing and a car attack occurred in the occupied West

Bank, wounding three Israelis. Both alleged attackers were shot dead.

Fresh clashes also erupted along the Gaza Strip border, leaving one Palestinian dead from Israeli fire and five others wounded.

"My visit reflects the sense of global alarm at the dangerous escalation in violence between Israelis and Palestinians," Ban told journalists after meeting Israeli President Rivlin.

He added that "it is not too late to avoid a broader crisis" and urged renewed peace efforts, with negotiations at a standstill for more than a year.

"We must, for the future of our children, come back from this dangerous abyss, safeguard the two-state solution, and lead people back to the road toward peace."

Ban is due to meet Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu later yesterday and Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas today.

In a sign of growing international worry, US Secretary of State John Kerry will also meet Netanyahu in Germany this week and Abbas later at an unspecified location in the Middle East.

More than 40 Palestinians have been killed in the upsurge in violence that began at the start of the month, including alleged attackers. Eight Israelis have died in attacks.



## XI STARTS 4-DAY BRITAIN VISIT

Britain's Queen Elizabeth greets China's President Xi Jinping during a ceremonial welcome at Horse Guards Parade in London, Britain, yesterday. The president and his wife, Peng Liyuan, will be guests of Queen Elizabeth during their state visit to Britain. Xi started his four-day state visit in Britain yesterday as the government of Prime Minister David Cameron seeks stronger trade ties with the world's second-largest economy.

PHOTO: REUTERS



## WAR-DIVIDED KOREANS REUNITE

Nearly 400 mostly elderly and frail South Koreans held a tearful, emotionally fraught reunion yesterday with family members in North Korea, more than 60 years after they were separated by the Korean War. After crossing the heavily militarised border in a convoy of buses, the families from the South were driven to meet their relatives in North Korea's Mount Kumgang resort. Moving video footage broadcast on South Korean TV showed divided brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, step-siblings and in-laws seeking each other out among numbered tables in the resort's main hall and then collapsing into each others' arms. Millions of people were displaced by the sweep of the 1950-53 Korean conflict. The chaos and devastation separated brothers and sisters, parents and children, husbands and wives. With more than 65,000 South Koreans currently on the waiting list for a reunion spot, those who made it yesterday represented a very fortunate minority. The reunion -- only the second in the past five years -- was organised as part of an agreement the two Koreas reached in August to ease tensions that had pushed them to the brink of armed conflict.

SOURCE: AFP, SEOUL

## Sharia doesn't ask women to cover face

### Rule Pak clerics

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's top religious body has said women are not required to cover their faces, hands or feet under Islamic Sharia law, a rare judgement from the conservative council of clerics seen as "encouraging" by rights activists yesterday.

The Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), which was formed in 1962 to advise parliament on the compatibility of laws with Sharia, made the ruling during its meeting on Monday.

"It is a good sign, the clergy seems to have realised that their legitimacy is being challenged and this ruling is aimed at improving their image," Farzana Bari, a prominent women's rights activist, told AFP.

## Congress: Modi failed in his constitutional obligations

IANS, New Delhi

The Congress yesterday said Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had failed in his "constitutional and moral obligations" by not against those spreading hatred.

"The prime minister has fallen well-short of what his constitutional and moral obligations are," Congress leader Anand Sharma told the media.

Referring to the September 28 lynching of a Muslim man in Uttar Pradesh following rumours that he ate beef, Sharma said the Prime Minister broke his silence only after President Pranab Mukherjee did.

"He spoke only after the president was forced to express his serious concerns over culture, values, ethos, particularly in regard to India's pluralistic society, democracy, co-existence and tolerance," he said.

"The prime minister makes people believe he has transformed India, which he has not. He has rather not been able to preserve India. "Even constitutional guarantees

are under assault," Sharma added.

The Congress leader's comments follow the widely denounced Muslim man's lynching, the killing of rationalists and the return of awards in protest by dozens of award winning writers.

Sharma said the situation in the country was causing "grave concern" to citizens who were "feeling insecure".

He also said Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Amit Shah's reported pulling up of BJP leaders for making hate statements was "a cosmetic exercise". "But nobody is going to be fooled," he said.

Reacting to Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's criticism of vandalism, Sharma called for "tangible action against elements, organisations and forces who have smashed India's name in the international community".

He said: "Those who have a divergent viewpoint from the ruling establishment or the BJP, the RSS and Sangh Parivar are targets of direct attacks. Even eminent Indians who have protested have not been heard but they have been humiliated."

## UN attempt to decriminalise drugs foiled

BBC ONLINE

An attempt by UN officials to get countries to decriminalise the possession and use of all drugs has been foiled, the BBC can reveal.

A paper from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has been withdrawn after pressure from at least one country. The document, which was leaked, recommends that UN members consider "decriminalising drug and possession for personal consumption".

It argued "arrest and incarceration are disproportionate measures". The document was drawn up by Dr Monica Beg, chief of the HIV/AIDS section of the UNODC in Vienna. It was prepared for an international harm reduction conference currently being held in Kuala Lumpur.