

NEWS IN brief

Airplane fire at Florida airport injures 15

AFP, Miami
Fifteen people were injured Thursday when an airliner caught fire while taxiing to a runway in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, authorities said. The Broward County Sheriff's Office said an engine caught fire on the Boeing 767, which was getting ready to depart for Venezuela. Officials said there were 101 people on board the plane when it caught fire.

Iraq weather halts Ramadi operation

AFP, Baghdad
Heavy rains wreaking havoc in Iraq have brought military operations to wrest the city of Ramadi back from the Islamic State group to a halt, senior army officers said yesterday. Sources said that the bad weather was an obstacle to aerial support, which around Ramadi has involved daily air strikes by the Iraqi air force and the US-led coalition.



Polish court rejects Polanski extradition

AFP, Kraków
A Polish court yesterday quashed a US bid to extradite Oscar-winning director Roman Polanski, who pleaded guilty in 1977 to raping a 13-year-old girl but left the country before sentencing. Polanski faces sentencing in US for raping Samantha Geimer after a photo shoot in Los Angeles when he was 43. He pleaded guilty at the time to unlawful sex with a minor, or statutory rape, avoiding a trial, but then fled the country fearing a hefty sentence. He now lives in France.



Refugees and migrants call for help as their boat is about to sink off the Greek island of Lesbos while crossing the Aegean sea from Turkey yesterday. Inset, Syrian Kurdish refugees react after Greek fishermen come to rescue them.



PHOTO: AFP

17 more kids drown in sea

Greek PM slams 'hypocrite EU leaders for shedding crocodile tears'

AFP, Athens
At least 17 children drowned when three boats sank en route from Turkey to Greece, officials said Friday, the latest tragedy to strike migrants braving wintry seas to seek asylum in Europe.
Nine adults also lost their lives when the boats went down, with the drownings once again highlighting the human cost as Europe struggles with its worst migrant crisis since World War II.
Although rescue officials in Greece and Turkey managed to pull another 157 people from the water, such drownings have become an almost daily occurrence as thousands of people brave high seas and wintry weather to make the crossing on flimsy, overloaded boats.
Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras yesterday said he felt "shame" over "the inability of Europe to deal effectively with this human drama".
Speaking in parliament, the left-wing Syriza leader condemned the "level of debate at a senior level, where one is speaking the back to the other" in the EU.
"Crocodile tears are being shed for the dead children on the shores of the Aegean, because dead children always arouse sorrow, but what about the children that are alive

who come in thousands and are packed on the refugee trail? Nobody cares for them," Tsipras added.
Most of the deaths occurred off the Greek islands of Kalymnos and Rhodes, where 22 people drowned, among them 13 children, when two boats went down overnight, port officials said yesterday.
In total, 138 people were rescued from the two boats, with the coastguard continuing its search for survivors.
To the north, an AFP correspondent witnessed another boat foundering off the island of Lesbos, with a group of desperate people perched on the roof screaming for help.
Another four young children, all of them Syrian, drowned when their flimsy boat heading for Lesbos capsized in bad weather, although the Turkish coastguard rescued 19 other people, the Dogan news agency reported.
The latest deaths came after 17 people drowned off Lesbos and Samos on Wednesday, 11 of them children.
Despite worsening weather at the onset of winter that has made the already hazardous sea voyage even more dangerous, a record 48,000 refugees and migrants arrived last week in Greece, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said.

MIGRANT CRISIS IN EU



Israel okays more settler homes

Abbas to meet war crimes prosecutor as unrest flares

AFP, Jerusalem
Israel has retroactively legalised some 800 homes in four settlements in the occupied West Bank, the interior ministry said.
They included 377 homes in the Yakir settlement, 187 in Itmar and 94 in Shilo in the northern West Bank, as well as 97 more in Sansana in the south of the occupied Palestinian territory, it said. The decision was taken two weeks ago, but was only reported in the Israeli press yesterday.
Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas will meet with the prosecutor of the world's only permanent war crimes court, Palestinian officials said amid a surge of fresh violence with Israel. It will be Abbas's first meeting with the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court since the Palestinian Authority sparked controversy by joining the tribunal in January.
Meanwhile, two Palestinians allegedly tried to stab Israeli police at a West Bank checkpoint yesterday, one of whom was shot dead while the other was wounded by Israeli fire, police said.
Since the beginning of the month, at least 63 Palestinians and nine Israelis have been killed in violence.

NATIONS' PLEDGE TO GLOBAL WARMING

Plans not enough for 2C goal: UN

BBC ONLINE
The UN yesterday released its assessment of national plans to limit climate change, submitted by 146 countries.
Officials say the submissions, in their current form, won't keep global temperatures from rising by more than the 2C danger threshold.
The global total of carbon emissions will continue to grow, although more slowly than over the past two decades.
However the UN report says the plans are a major step forward and the 2C goal is still "within reach".
The UN believes that these national climate plans, called Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) will form the cornerstone of a binding, global treaty on climate change that will be agreed at a conference in Paris in December.
According to the UN, the submissions now cover around 86% of global emissions; about four times the amount covered by the Kyoto Protocol, the world's first carbon cutting treaty.
Their assessment is decidedly upbeat about the plans, despite acknowledging that taken together they point to rises in global temperatures of 2.7C above the pre-industrial level.
Scientists have determined that if temperature rises exceed 2C, this will lead to significant and dangerous climate impacts, which will especially hit the world's poor.
UN climate chief, Christiana Figueres, said the plans were an excellent first step: "The INDCs have the capability of limiting the forecast temperature rise to around 2.7C by 2100, by no means enough but a lot lower than the estimated four, five, or more degrees of warming projected by many prior to the INDCs."
Observers say the 2.7C figure is a substantial improvement on 3.1C, which was the estimate when the plans were assessed last December.
A key finding of the UN reports is that the INDCs will bring down per capita emissions by 9% by 2030.
But while the rate of growth in CO2 may be declining, the overall amount of carbon in the atmosphere will continue to grow significantly over the next 15 years.
Compared to 2010 levels, the UN says that overall emissions could be up to 22% higher in 2030.
Another concern is that 25% of the total range of emissions reductions are conditional upon financial support from richer countries.

Last UK detainee in Guantanamo Bay released

AFP, London
The last British resident in Guantanamo Bay was returning to London yesterday having been released after spending over 13 years at the military prison in Cuba, Britain's foreign minister said.
"I can confirm that he is on his way back to the UK now and he will arrive in Britain later today," Philip Hammond said.
The United States accused 46-year-old Saudi national Shaker Aamer of acting as a recruiter, financier and fighter for al-Qaeda, as well as being a close associate of Osama Bin Laden, but never charged him or put him on trial.
The father-of-four, who was twice cleared for release from the camp in 2007 and 2009, denied the allegations and said he was in Afghanistan working for a charity.
Some 112 people are still being held at Guantanamo.



(From bottom, clock wise) Top diplomats of 17 nations along with representatives from EU and UN meet at the Hotel Imperial in Vienna, Austria, yesterday; a Syrian man carry a wounded after a reported airstrike by Syrian government forces on Douma; and a man mourns a loved at temporary morgue after the strike.

US: Russia no longer a superpower

PTI, Washington
Russia is no longer a superpower as its deteriorating economy is ranked "somewhere behind Spain", the White House said and stressed that Moscow's influence is limited compared to the erstwhile Soviet Union.
"Russia is no longer a superpower. Observed in the last couple of weeks that the condition of Russia's economy is weak and further deteriorating," White House press secretary Josh Earnest told reporters.
"They are now the 15th-largest economy in the world, and they rank somewhere behind Spain," he said.
Earnest said Russia does not have the kind of influence that the Soviet Union once did and it does not have the kind of economic power that the Soviet Union once was able to flex.
"Their economy is getting worse, and Russia is isolated in a significant way. Not just from countries in Europe, but, as they get further engaged in a sectarian quagmire inside of Syria, they're finding that the only friends that they have there to fight in a difficult fight with them is a floundering Syrian government and the Iranian regime," he said.
Earnest also earlier said that the US Navy scrambled four fighter jets to intercept Russian warplanes earlier this week near a US aircraft carrier operating off the Korean peninsula in the Sea of Japan.
Two Russian planes flew close to the USS Ronald Reagan, prompting the mobilisation of four FA-18s, he said.
"There were four FA-18s fired from the carrier airwing five that were launched to intercept the bombers and the US Navy aircraft did escort the Russian aircraft until they departed the area where the carrier, the USS Ronald Reagan was operating," he said.

Rockets hit Damascus market; 40 killed

AFP, Beirut
Forty people, including a child, were killed yesterday when rockets fired by Syrian government forces crashed into a market in a rebel-held area outside Damascus, a monitor said.
The deaths came as top diplomats from 17 countries, including Iran and Saudi Arabia, met for the first time in Vienna to seek a political path out of the conflict.
"There were 40 people killed and at least 100 wounded in the centre of Douma," a town on the eastern edges of the Syrian capital, Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, told AFP.
He added that one child was among the dead.
"There is still heavy fire now, with both rockets and mortars," he said, adding that the toll was expected to rise as people were still being pulled out of damaged buildings.
Rebel-held Douma lies in Eastern Ghouta, the largest opposition stronghold in Damascus province.
The Douma Coordination Committee, a local activist group, published a gruesome video of what it said was the aftermath of more than a dozen rockets smashing into the market.
Blood-soaked bodies lay crumpled underneath tables of food and other goods, as men gathered around wounded people.
Throughout Syria's brutal war, both the government and opposition forces have been condemned by rights groups for indiscriminate fire on civilian areas.
More than 250,000 people have been killed since the conflict began in March 2011.

Minor incident can spark major war

China tells US; Hague court agrees to take up Philippine's case

AFP, Beijing
China's navy chief warned his US counterpart encounters between their forces could spiral into conflict, state media reported, two days after a US destroyer sailed close to Beijing's artificial South China Sea islands.
The comments by Admiral Wu Shengli, who commands the Chinese navy, were made in a video call with US Admiral John Richardson that lasted about an hour, Beijing's official Xinhua news agency said yesterday.
They came after the USS Lassen guided missile destroyer sailed within 12 nautical miles of at least one of the land formations claimed by China in the disputed Spratly Islands chain.
Chinese authorities monitored

and warned away the vessel, but did not otherwise intervene, although Beijing later summoned the US ambassador and denounced what it called a threat to its sovereignty.
"If the US continues to carry out these kinds of dangerous, provocative acts, there could be a serious situation between frontline forces from both sides on the sea and in the air, or even a minor incident that could spark conflict," Xinhua paraphrased Wu as saying.
"I hope the US cherishes the hard-won, good situation between the Chinese and US navies and avoids similar incidents from happening again," Wu added.
An international tribunal ruled

Thursday it had the power to hear a case brought by the Philippines over disputed islands in the South China Sea, in a move likely to trigger fury in Beijing.
Manila has insisted the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which the Philippines and China have both ratified, should be used to resolve the bitter territorial row over isolated reefs and islets, which has triggered growing international alarm.
But China yesterday refused to participate in the proceedings, arguing the Permanent Court of Arbitration -- which is more than a century old and based in The Hague -- had no jurisdiction over the case.
Beijing insists it has sovereign

rights to nearly all of the South China Sea, a strategic waterway through which about a third of all the world's traded oil passes.
The disputed waters -- also claimed in part or in whole by Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Brunei -- have also become the stage for a tussle for regional dominance between Beijing and Washington, the world's two largest economic and military powers.
Tensions have mounted since China transformed reefs in the area into small islands capable of supporting military facilities, a move the US says threatens freedom of navigation.
Washington has repeatedly said it does not recognise Chinese claims to territorial waters around the artificial islands.

SOUTH CHINA SEA ROW

