

# NEWS IN brief

## UN staff fired over child porn

AFP, United Nations  
Four UN employees have been fired for storing child pornography on their UN computers, while another was sacked for transporting marijuana in a UN vehicle and another for threatening to kill a UN mission head, according to a UN management report. The report, obtained by AFP on Friday, outlined some 60 cases of misconduct or possible crimes committed by some of the UN's 40,000 staff between June 2014 to July of this year. The nationalities of the accused were not disclosed.

## 21.7% turnout in first round of Egypt run-off

AFP, Cairo  
The first round run-off in Egypt's parliamentary election produced a turnout of 21.7 percent, officials announced Friday, reflecting disinterest in a vote held in the absence of any strong opposition. The tally for voting Tuesday and Wednesday, announced by the electoral commission, was even lower than the 26.6 percent for the first round ballot contested on October 18-19 in half of Egypt's provinces. The election is expected to elect lawmakers firmly backing President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.



## Modi pays tribute to Indira Gandhi

PTI, New Delhi  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday paid tributes to former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on her 31st death anniversary. "Tributes to former Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi on her death anniversary," the Prime Minister tweeted. Earlier, addressing a gathering to mark the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Mr. Modi also remembered the former Prime Minister, saying she sacrificed her life on this day and it cannot be forgotten.

## China building collapse kills 17 workers

BBC ONLINE  
A two-storey building collapsed in China's central Henan province on Friday killing 17 construction workers and injuring 23 others, state media reported. Rescue workers searched overnight pulling bodies and survivors from the debris in Beiwudu in Wuyang county. Renovation work was being carried out on the foundations of the building when the accident happened, it said.

## 11 killed as Pakistanis vote in local polls

AFP, Lahore  
Eleven people were killed when rival political parties fired on each other yesterday as Pakistanis voted in local elections seen as a referendum on the national government halfway through its term. The violence occurred in the Khairpur district of the southern province of Sindh, which held the polls along with the central Punjab province. It was not immediately clear which parties were responsible. "Eleven people were killed when two groups opened fire," police deputy inspector general Kamran Fazal told Reuters. The opposition, led by international cricket star turned politician Imran Khan, is hoping the polls will help build a national coalition that could challenge Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) party at the next general election. Pakistan's other two provinces held their local elections months ago. Khan won in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the northwest and Sharif's party and its coalition partners won in the sparsely populated western province of Baluchistan. Observers are closely watching the polls in Punjab, Pakistan's richest and most populous province and the power base of Sharif, who swept to national power in a landslide election in 2013. "PMLN has the upper hand in Punjab but it will be a strongly challenged by PTI," said political analyst Wajahat Masood, referring to Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf party. Security and the economy have improved under Sharif but the government has failed to tackle corruption or tax dodging by the wealthy, two problems that are starving social services such as schools and hospitals of cash.



Migrants and asylum seekers begin their journey on a dinghy to the Greek island of Chios from Cesme in the Turkish province of Izmir, yesterday. Despite worsening weather at the onset of winter that has made the already hazardous sea voyage from Turkey to Greece even more dangerous, a record 48,000 refugees and migrants arrived last week in Greece, the International Organization for Migration said.

## Germany seeks to slow migrant flow

BBC ONLINE  
Germany on Friday said that asylum seekers would only be able to enter the country at five points along its border with Austria to better control a mass influx. Authorities in Bavaria have complained a lack of co-ordination with Austria is hampering efforts to aid new arrivals. Many others continue to make their way via Greece, in freezing temperatures, hoping to get asylum in Germany. A spokeswoman for Germany's interior ministry told AFP news agency that the new rules on entry points would go into effect immediately. "We would like to have a more orderly procedure," she said. A senior Bavarian politician said that under the agreement, 50 migrants an hour could cross into the state at the five agreed points. Earlier this week, German Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere accused Austria of transporting refugees to the German frontier at night, leaving them there unannounced. Federal police spokesman Heinrich Onstein has said everything was being done to prevent the migrants from having to sleep outdoors. However an Austrian police spokesman dismissed such accusations as a "joke", given that Austria was receiving 11,000 people a day just at the Spielfeld crossing from Slovenia. Germany expects at least 800,000 asylum seekers this year - some estimates put it as high as 1.5 million. That is at least four times the number who arrived last year. Last Wednesday, more than 8,000 migrants arrived in Bavaria, German police said. And last weekend authorities in Passau - a major transit hub for asylum seekers - said they had been overwhelmed by a new influx of some 15,000 people who arrived from Austria.

## No let up in violence

1 more shot dead; ICC urged to probe into Israeli 'war crimes'

AGENCIES  
Israeli security forces shot and killed a Palestinian who ran at them with a knife in the occupied West Bank on Saturday, police said, as a month-long wave of violence showed no signs of abating. An Israeli police spokeswoman said that at a checkpoint in the northern West Bank a Palestinian holding a knife ran toward a security officer who called on him to stop. Since the latest unrest began on Oct 1, at least 65 Palestinians have been shot dead by Israelis. Of those, 38 were assailants armed mainly with knives, Israel said, while others were shot during violent anti-Israel protests. Many were teens. Eleven Israelis have been killed in stabbings and shootings. On Friday, the Palestinian Health Ministry said an eight-month-old baby had died in a West Bank village as result of inhaling teargas fired by the Israeli military in the area. Hospital officials told Reuters the infant had a prior health condition and that it was unclear what had caused his death. An Israeli military spokeswoman said forces confronted with stone-throwing Palestinians had

used teargas in the area, but that it was fired dozens of meters away from the home of the family and that an investigation concluded there to be no direct link to the baby's death. Palestinians say Israeli police and soldiers are using excessive force, while Israel says lethal force is justified against deadly threats. On Friday, top Palestinian officials urged the world's only permanent war crimes court to speed up a probe into allegations of Israeli abuses. "It is extremely important to expedite the process... because if Israel feels impunity, what will deter Israel from multiplying the victims?" Palestinian foreign minister Riad al-Malki said. He was speaking after handing over a new dossier to International Criminal Court chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, "making reference to the extrajudicial killings, home demolition and collective punishments." It also cited examples "in the last 40 days of Israeli aggression." Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas met Bensouda on Friday for the first time since the Palestinian Authority sparked controversy by joining the tribunal in January.



## Singapore world's healthiest country

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK  
Singapore has been named the world's healthiest country, according to a list which ranks countries using data from the United Nations, the World Bank and the World Health Organisation. The Bloomberg rankings gave each country with a population of 1 million or more a health score and a health-risk score. Each country's place was calculated by subtracting their risk score from their health score. The health score is based on factors such as life expectancy from birth and causes of death, while health-risk is based on factors which could impede health such as the proportion of young people who smoke, the number of people with raised cholesterol and the number of immunisations. Singapore came top with an overall score of 89.45 per cent, Italy ranked second healthiest with 89.07 per cent, and Australia came third with 88.33 per cent. Israel, in sixth place is the only Middle Eastern country placed in the top 10, while North and South American countries were not present in the top 20. At the other end of the scale, the African country of Swaziland was named the least healthiest country in the world, scoring an overall grade of just 0.26 per cent. African nations dominated the bottom of the list with Lesotho, Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad and Mozambique falling in the bottom 10. The word "healthy", however, is open to interpretation, the WEF stress, saying a ranking defining "healthy" by "quality of life" rather than "life expectancy" might include lower-income countries which report higher levels of life satisfaction.



A mourner kisses the body of an eight month-old Palestinian baby Ramadan Thawabtah, who died after inhaling tear gas fired by Israeli troops on Friday, during his funeral in the West Bank city of Bethlehem, yesterday. Inset, The mother of the baby gives him a final hug before his burial. PHOTO: REUTERS



## Romania mourns victims after club blaze kills 27

AFP, Bucharest  
Romania was plunged into mourning yesterday after 27 people were killed and nearly 200 injured when a fire ripped through an underground nightclub in Bucharest. Survivors spoke of the horror that unfolded when fireworks -- set off during a pre-Halloween gig by a heavy metal band -- unleashed a blaze, followed by a stampede as terrified clubbers sought the exit. As the government declared three days of national mourning Prime Minister Victor Ponta said foreigners were among the injured, including two Spanish people, an Italian and a German, authorities said. President Klaus Iohannis said there were indications that safety regulations had been

ignored at the club, and called for a swift investigation. The blaze broke out at around 11:00pm (2100 GMT) Friday at the Colectiv nightclub, where according to witnesses between 200 and 400 youngsters had gathered for a performance by rock group Goodbye to Gravity. Twenty-six people died in the club and one died in hospital, the secretary of state for the interior, Raed Arafat, said after a meeting of a national emergency committee. Of the nearly 200 injured, 146 people were hospitalised for burns, smoke inhalation and other injuries, he said. Hospital sources said 10 were in a critical condition. Witnesses described nightmarish scenes when fireworks, let off as part of a show to promote the band's new album, set fire to a pillar and part of the ceiling. The crowd panicked as thick smoke engulfed the room, prompting people to scramble to escape from the club, located in a communist-era basement. "People were fainting, they were fainting because of the smoke. It was total chaos, people were trampled," witness Victor Ionescu told local television station Antena 3. Another witness, Alin Panduru, said the fire spread "in 30 seconds".



## CATALANS' INDEPENDENCE BID Spain parties unite against 'separatists'

AFP, Madrid  
Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy said Friday the nation's main parties have reached an agreement to defend national unity as an independence drive in the wealthy region of Catalonia gets into higher gear. "The fundamentals of the agreement are done," he told a news conference after meeting opposition leaders to build a united response to a plan from Catalonia's ruling separatists to launch a process that would lead to full independence from Spain within 18 months. Pro-independence parties announced Tuesday they would pass a resolution early next month in the regional Catalan parliament calling on the chamber to announce the formal start of secession from Spain and the formation of a new republican state within 18 months. The motion calls on the regional assembly to start working on legislation within 30 days to create a separate social security system and treasury. It also says the process would not be subject to decisions made by the Spanish institutions, including the Constitutional Court. No date has yet been set for the Catalan assembly to vote on the motion. Catalans' longstanding demands for greater autonomy have intensified in recent years, in tandem with the country's economic crisis. The region of 7.5 million people has its own widely spoken language and distinct culture.

## Dozens killed in Yemen clashes

AFP, Aden  
Dozens of Yemeni Shia rebels and pro-government fighters have been killed in clashes in several southern provinces as Saudi-led coalition aircraft targeted the Iran-backed insurgents, military officials said yesterday. Fierce clashes raged in the areas of Al-Zaher and Thi al-Naem in Baida province between Huthi rebels and Popular Resistance fighters allied with forces loyal to President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, tribal sources said. The clashes overnight left 19 rebels and 14 Popular Resistance fighters dead, according to tribal and medical sources. Gun battles also flared up in Al-Madaribah in southwestern Yemen on the border between Lahj and Ta'ez provinces, leaving an unknown number of fighters killed and wounded, military sources said.



## Assad's future should not ruin Syria talks

AFP, Madrid  
UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said talks on the Syria crisis had unacceptably been taken "hostage" by the question of President Bashar al-Assad's future, in an interview with Spanish newspapers published yesterday. "It is totally unfair and unreasonable that the fate of one person takes the whole political negotiation process hostage. It is unacceptable," he said, referring to Assad. "The future of Assad must be decided by the Syrian people," he said in the interview, according to a translation of his comments in the Spanish daily El Mundo. His comments came after diplomats from 17 countries, as well as the United Nations and the European Union (EU), sought to narrow their differences over the four-year-old Syria crisis during a meeting in Vienna on Friday. The Syrian regime and the opposition were not represented. But regime allies Russia -- which has waged a month of intense air strikes against Syrian rebels -- and Iran are resisting Western and Saudi pressure to force Assad from power. "The Syrian government insists that President Assad takes part (in any transitional government)" but others, especially Western countries, say "there is no place for him," said Ban. "But because of that we have lost three years, there have been more than 250,000 dead, more than 13 million displaced within Syria... more than 50 percent of hospitals, schools and infrastructure have been destroyed. There's no time to lose," said Ban.