

NEWS IN brief

Carson surges to fore in US Republican race

Step aside, Donald Trump. The brash billionaire must now share frontrunner status in the US Republican presidential nominations battle with retired neurosurgeon and fellow political outsider Ben Carson, fresh polling showed yesterday. Trump leads with 24 percent support compared with Carson's 23, according to a Quinnipiac poll, with Florida Senator Marco Rubio next at 14 percent followed by Texas Senator Ted Cruz with 13 percent. Jeb Bush was languishing at four percent.



US-China tension simmers

US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said he would visit an American aircraft carrier in the South China Sea yesterday as US-Chinese tensions over the waterway escalate. Speaking after a regional summit yesterday, Carter said he would fly out to the nuclear-powered USS Theodore Roosevelt, which "is conducting routine operations while transiting the South China Sea". Carter's visit could increase discord between Washington and Beijing over Chinese claims to virtually the entire Sea, and its attempts to reinforce those claims by turning reefs and tiny islets into full-fledged islands through reclamation. Last week Washington pressed its right to freedom of navigation by sending the guided missile destroyer USS Lassen to within 12 nautical miles of at least one of the artificial islets in the Spratlys chain, angering China. Earlier, Carter attended an Asia-Pacific defence ministers' meeting in Malaysia that ended on a sour note as the United States and China butted heads over whether a final joint statement should mention the South China Sea. "We could not reach a consensus on a

joint declaration," Malaysian Defence Minister Hishammuddin Hussein told reporters. Carter said he had gone into the summit with "no expectation" there would be an agreement. That illustrates "the level of concern that was reflected in the conversation about activities in the South China Sea", he said, "no statement is better than one that avoids the important issue of China's reclamation and militarisation in the South China Sea". China's claims to almost all the waterway are widely disputed. Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei and Taiwan also have various claims, some overlapping, though none are as extensive as Beijing's. "We urge all claimants to permanently halt land reclamation, stop the construction of new facilities and cease further militarisation of disputed maritime features," Carter said. The Sea has long been viewed as a potential flashpoint, and the Chinese island-building has heightened fears of conflict. The work includes runways and other large-scale development, making the islands potentially capable of hosting military personnel and hardware. The US official stressed that the Roosevelt would be far from any of the reclaimed Chinese "islands" at the time of Carter's visit, and the ship was not conducting the sort of freedom of navigation cruise performed by the USS Lassen. Carter will be joined on the visit by Hishammuddin. They are expected to spend

SOUTH CHINA SEA ROW
US defence chief to visit aircraft carrier in the disputed water
Asean defence chiefs fail to agree on joint statement

Palestinian hunger striker to be freed

Israel is to free a Palestinian detainee who survived a two-month hunger strike later yesterday after holding him for a year without trial, the prison service said. Mohammed Allan was arrested in November 2014 and held under a measure known as administrative detention, which allows imprisonment without trial for six-month periods renewable indefinitely.

Top diplomats set for Ukraine meet

Top diplomats from Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France will meet tomorrow in Berlin for fresh talks on the conflict plaguing eastern Ukraine, a German foreign ministry spokeswoman said yesterday. The conflict has claimed more than 8,000 lives over the past 18 months.

Erdogan eyes executive presidency in Turkey

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday called for a new constitution that would give him greater powers, despite opposition fears it could lead to authoritarian rule. The strongman of Turkish politics for more than a decade, Erdogan has long been pushing for a new constitution to transform his post into a powerful US-style executive presidency.

Trudeau sworn in as Canada PM

Justin Trudeau was sworn in yesterday as Canada's 23rd prime minister before a packed, flag-waving crowd, almost 50 years after his father took on the job. The 43-year-old former French teacher won the October 19 election by a landslide and bringing an end to nine years of Tory rule.



A female Palestinian demonstrator throws stones at members of the Israeli security forces during clashes in the centre of the West Bank city of Hebron, yesterday. A Palestinian driver ran over and injured an Israeli border policeman near Hebron yesterday and was then killed by Israeli forces, police said. Nine Israelis, 70 Palestinians have been killed since the new round of violence erupted nearly a month ago.

EU REFUGEE QUOTA PLAN First batch leaves Greece

The first refugees left Greece yesterday under the second phase of a troubled European Union relocation plan as the number of people entering Europe illegally reached 800,000. And Sweden -- a top destination for many asylum-seekers -- asked for EU help to relocate some of the migrants it has taken in as it struggles with record numbers of new arrivals. Thirty refugees were given a VIP sendoff from Athens airport before flying to Luxembourg where they will begin a new life. They are the first to be relocated from Greece under plans, fiercely contested by some states, to share out nearly 160,000 migrants whose arrival has left frontline states swamped. At the airport, Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras said the six Syrian and Iraqi families were making "a trip to hope... It's a drop in the ocean, but we hope the drop will become a stream and then a river of humanity." His remarks came after Fabrice Leggeri, head of the EU's Frontier border agency said 800,000 people had entered the EU illegally this year telling Germany's Bild newspaper the influx had probably not "reached its peak". The need for a solution to Europe's worst migration crisis since World War II is becoming increasingly urgent, with at least 80 people -- many of them children -- dying in the last week while trying to cross the sea from Turkey to Greece. The relocation scheme was got under way in Italy on October 9 after a bitter debate that split the 28-nation bloc along east-west lines, dividing older EU members from former Soviet bloc nations.

Romania PM quits after nightclub fire

Romania's embattled Prime Minister Victor Ponta, mired in a corruption scandal, resigned yesterday following a deadly nightclub blaze, a day after more than 20,000 people rallied in Bucharest to demand he step down. The 43-year-old announced his resignation on television, saying it was right that top officials took responsibility for Friday's tragedy at the Colectiv disco in Bucharest, which left 32 dead and nearly 200 injured. Ponta, Romania's premier since 2012, had faced weeks of intense pressure to quit after going on trial in September facing charges of fraud, tax evasion and money laundering. "I am stepping down as prime minister," he said. "I hope the government's resignation will satisfy the people who came out in the streets." The Social Democrat added: "I have to acknowledge the legitimate anger of the people." President Klaus Iohannis must now name an interim prime minister before launching talks with political parties about forming a new government. Demonstrators massed on Tuesday evening in Bucharest's Victory Square, the seat of government, calling for Ponta's resignation and that of his interior minister, Gabriel Oprea. Three of the nightclub's bosses were arrested on Monday on suspicion of manslaughter over the fire, which officials and witnesses have blamed on a failure to follow safety regulations. The tragedy shocked Romania and prompted Iohannis -- Ponta's bitter political rival -- to call for fundamental change in a society riven by corruption.



700 journos killed in 10 years: experts

Only one offender convicted. More than 700 journalists have been killed over the past decade for bringing news and information to the public but the sad part is that only one in just 10 cases of the 700 killings has led to any conviction of those responsible, experts have said. According to professor Jackie Harrison, joint head of the University of Sheffield's department of journalism studies, the deliberate targeting of reporters is relatively new and raises questions about press safety and the impunity of those who attack them. "The way in which journalism is seen in different parts of the world has changed," said Harrison. "Journalists used to be more protected, but what's happening now is that they are deliberately being targeted - and it's about information control," he lamented in a university statement. Journalists themselves are getting killed because people are trying to silence them. "You can just be in the wrong place at the wrong time, but what is relatively new is this singling out of journalists. These are attacks on freedom of expression and the public right to know," he informed.

Taiwan, China leaders to hold historic summit

The presidents of China and Taiwan will meet this weekend in Singapore with a handshake that will mark a seismic shift in a relationship frozen in enmity since 1949. When Taiwan's leader Ma Ying-jeou meets his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping it will be an unprecedented official stamp on a seven-year rapprochement that has seen the launch of direct flights, trade deals and a tourism boom as the two sides have forged previously unthinkable ties. Their split at the end of a civil war on the mainland in 1949 was the start of decades of hostility as self-ruled Taiwan forged its own identity and developed into a democracy, while Beijing insisted it was still part of its territory to be reunited by force if necessary.

FORBES WORLD POWER RANKING Vladimir Putin tops again Merkel unseats Obama from second spot

Barack Obama yesterday became the first sitting US president to slide out of the top two power rankings as published by Forbes, beaten not just by Vladimir Putin but also Angela Merkel. The magazine published its seventh annual ranking just weeks after Putin opened a new front in the Syria war by conducting air strikes, then Putin hosted Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Moscow. "As Obama enters the final year of his presidency, it's clear his influence is shrinking, and it's a bigger struggle than ever to get things done," Forbes wrote. "At home, his approval ratings are perpetually stuck under 50 percent; abroad, he's outshined by Merkel in Europe, and outmaneuvered by Putin in the Middle East." In August, Putin's domestic approval rating soared to 87 percent, the highest level in six years, according to an independent polling center. Despite international sanctions imposed after Moscow annexed Crimea and over the conflict in Ukraine, Putin has made the US and Nato look weak, and helped rebuild Russian influence abroad, Forbes said. The German chancellor, jumped up three places to grab the second spot, last year occupied by Obama. Pope Francis was number four and Chinese leader Xi Jinping number five, falling two spots from last year. The 2015 list ranks 73 power-brokers among 7.3 billion people on the planet. Among the eight newcomers were Saudi Arabia's new monarch, King Salman, number 14, and US presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump at number 58 and 72 respectively. Thirty on the list come from the United States, eight come from China, and four



INTOLERANCE ROW SRK should go to Pakistan, says BJP MP

Controversial Bharatiya Janata Party MP Yogi Adityanath yesterday compared Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan with Pakistani terrorist Hafiz Saeed, the mastermind of Mumbai carnage, over his "extreme intolerance" comment. Hitting out at the actor two days after he added his voice to the protest by the intelligentsia against the 'climate of intolerance', Adityanath also suggested that he go to Pakistan. On Tuesday, senior BJP leader Kailash Vijayvargiya triggered a controversy when he painted Shah Rukh as an "anti-nationalist." In a series of tweets, he said the actor's "soul" is in Pakistan though he lived in India.

Depression didn't kill Robin Williams, says his widow

She added: "This was a very unique case and I pray to God that it will shed some light on Lewy bodies for the millions of people and their loved ones who are suffering with it. Because we didn't know. He didn't know." Susan Williams said the actor and comedian had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, a progressive movement disorder, only a few months before his death, but that a coroner's report found signs of Lewy body dementia, a difficult-to-diagnose condition that afflicts 1.4 million people worldwide and leads to a decline in thinking and reasoning abilities. That may have contributed to the anxiety and depression for which he was treated in his final months, and probably played a role in his suicide by hanging, aged 63, in August 2014.



Factory collapses in Pakistan 18 killed; scores wounded

At least 18 people were killed and up to 150 trapped yesterday when a factory collapsed near the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore, officials said, adding to a number of industrial disasters to hit the South Asian nation. Rescue workers digging for survivors with construction equipment have recovered 75 injured people so far, said Mohammad Usman, a senior local government official who was on the scene. Eighteen dead bodies have also been found, he said. Around 150 people were feared trapped under the rubble after the building collapsed, said rescue worker Kashif Nazir at the scene. No part of the four-storey building remained standing after the disaster, and hundreds of rescue workers were carefully picking through piles of concrete and bricks to find survivors. The scene was flying urban search-and-rescue teams to the military, said a military spokesman in a text message. The factory, located at an industrial site about 20 km (12 miles) south of the city, manufactured shopping bags. It was not clear what caused the collapse, though construction work had been going on there.

Jet 'slowed suddenly before plunging at 300mph'

The Russian jet which crashed in Sinai on Saturday reached 31,000ft before abruptly slowing down and then plummeting towards the ground at 300mph, new data reveal. Revised figures from flight-tracking website FlightRadar24 offer new insight into the final 26 seconds of the Metrojet Airbus 321's journey, and add to mounting evidence suggesting it broke up at high altitude. The data are consistent with a sudden, catastrophic incident effectively stopping the plane in its tracks -- but still cannot tell us whether mechanical error, a bomb on board or an external impact was the cause. According to the final information sent out by the plane's transponders, the plane reached its target cruising altitude then, at 6.13am local time, its groundspeed suddenly dropped. After that moment the plane starts to drop, first gradually and then increasingly quickly as forward speed slows. Over the next 26 seconds, its direction of travel appears to waver before, at 26,000ft, the transponder data cuts out. All 224 people on board the flight bound for Saint Petersburg, mainly Russian tourists, were killed. Amid the plane crash mystery, a bombing claimed by the Islamic State group yesterday killed at least four policemen in Sinai. Investigators continued yesterday analysing data from the black boxes of the plane, a charter flight operated by Russian airline

RUSSIAN PLANE CRASH

