

**Mubarak murder
retrial postponed**

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's top court yesterday began a retrial of ex-president Hosni Mubarak over the deaths of protesters during the 2011 uprising that ousted him, but postponed the hearing after a brief session. The Court of Cassation postponed the retrial to January 21. Mubarak and his two sons Alaa and Gamal were all arrested in 2011, months after the former strongman was toppled in a popular 18-day uprising.

**PKK declares end
to truce in Turkey**

AFP, Istanbul

The outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) yesterday said it has ended a unilateral truce it had declared ahead of the weekend election in Turkey. Its announcement comes after several days of Turkish air raids against the PKK in both southeastern Turkey and across the border in northern Iraq and a spate of deadly clashes.

**Botched surgery
blinds 14 in India**

AFP, Mumbai

At least 14 people in western India have lost sight in one eye after botched cataract surgeries, doctors and officials said yesterday, the latest example of poor medical care in the country. Authorities in the state of Maharashtra blamed hospital staff for failing to sterilise equipment properly and causing the blindness, following what is generally considered to be a low-risk operation.

**Taliban breakaway
faction elects leader**

AFP, Bakuwah

A breakaway faction of the Taliban has appointed Mullah Rasool as its own leader, in the first formal split in the militant movement under leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour, posing a fresh hurdle to potential peace talks. Splits emerged at the top of the Taliban following the appointment of Mullah Mansour as replacement for Mullah Omar, the movement's founding leader whose death was confirmed this summer.

**Bomb kills 5 in Lebanon
town near Syria**

AFP, Beirut

A bomb blast killed at least five people yesterday outside a Muslim clerics' meeting in the Lebanese town of Arsal on the border with Syria, a security source told AFP. Six people were also wounded in the bombing outside the office of a local council of Muslim scholars, the source added.



A girl cries during a funeral service for Nina Lushchenko, 60, a victim of the Russian MetroJet Airbus A321 crash, at a church in Velikiy Novgorod yesterday ahead of her burial. Russian airline Kogalymavia's flight 9268 crashed en route from Sharm el-Sheikh to Saint Petersburg on October 31, killing all 224 people on board.

PHOTO: AFP

**SINAI PLANE TRAGEDY
FOUR THEORIES BEHIND CRASH**

Egyptian and international experts are investigating why a Russian airliner carrying 224 people crashed in the north of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, killing all on board.



BOMB ON BOARD?

US and European security officials have said they have intelligence to suggest a bomb may have been planted by militants. On 4 November, Britain's Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond said: "We have concluded that there is a significant possibility that the crash was caused by an explosive device on board the aircraft." The UK and Ireland immediately halted flights to Sinai. An unnamed US official told the Associated Press news agency they had reached the "tentative conclusion", after intercepting communications, that an Islamic State (IS) affiliate in the Sinai peninsula had planted an explosive device on the plane. On Tuesday, US media reported that a military satellite had detected a "heat flash" over the Sinai at the time of the crash. Russian officials have already confirmed the plane broke up in mid-air.

TECHNICAL FAULT?

Egypt's Civil Aviation Minister Hossam Kamal said there had been no sign of any problems on board the flight, contradicting earlier reports that the pilot had asked to make an emergency landing after experiencing technical problems. But the Kogalymavia airline has insisted the 18-year-old plane was fully airworthy. Kogalymavia has said "external factors" were behind the crash - meaning the airline believes it was not a technical fault.

HUMAN ERROR?



The airline has said that the pilot - who reports identified as Valery Nemov - had more than 12,000 hours of flying experience, including 3,860 hours in A321s. Kogalymavia says it has ruled out "any mistake by the crew." But the aircraft's "black boxes" - the cockpit voice recorder (CVR) and the flight data recorder (FDR), both of which have been found - will provide investigators with detail on the last minutes of the flight and tell them whether any actions taken by the flight crew caused or contributed to the crash - which happened during fine weather.

SHOT DOWN BY MISSILE?

Suggestions that Flight KGL9268 was brought down by a missile fired by Islamic State militants have been met with scepticism by security experts. The jet was cruising well above the maximum range of any surface-to-air missile that the jihadists are thought to possess. Experts have also questioned the logic of why Islamic State's Sinai affiliate would risk inviting a massive international retaliation by such an action when its battle is primarily with the Egyptian state.

BBC ONLINE

**China summit
'first step' to
normalising ties
Says Taiwan leader**

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan's president yesterday defended a historic summit with China as the first step to normalising ties between the leaders, as opponents, wary over a rapprochement after decades of hostility, accused him of selling out the island.

Ma Ying-jeou will meet with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in Singapore tomorrow. Ma said the meeting was to ensure the future of cross-strait relations and would also be a chance for Taiwan to come in from the cold internationally, where few countries recognise it as a state.

It will be the first time leaders from the two sides will have met since their split at the end of a civil war

3m more expected in EU

Two more children drown off Greece coast amid angry protests

AFP, Athens

Three million migrants are expected to arrive in Europe by 2017 as they flee war and poverty in Syria and other conflict zones, with a small positive impact on the EU economy likely, the EU's executive arm said on Thursday.

The statement came as the cold Aegean Sea claimed the lives of two more migrant children early yesterday, sparking protests in Greece and the UN warned another 600,000 people could arrive by February.

The Greek coastguard said the children died off the island of Kos hours before Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and European Parliament chief Martin Schulz began a visit to neighbouring Lesbos, another migration flashpoint.

MIGRANT CRISIS

The body of a little girl has been recovered, but the search for the second victim, a six-year-old boy, is still under way.

The boy's father, who was among 14 people rescued from the stricken vessel, had told rescuers that he had been unable to save his son from drowning and had had to let his body go in order to help other passengers.

"A crime is committed in the Aegean (Sea) which must be stopped," Tsipras said after visiting one of the beaches on Lesbos where thousands of migrants and refugees, mainly from war-torn Syria, have been landing this year.



**'Pyramids are
grain storage,
not pharaohs'
tombs'**

AFP, Washington

Egypt's pyramids were built by the biblical Joseph to store grain and were not, as archaeologists believe, tombs for pharaohs, Republican presidential hopeful Ben Carson has said.

The retired neurosurgeon seeking his party's nomination for the White House made these remarks in a 1998 address at Andrews University, a school associated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to which he belongs, in a video posted Wednesday on BuzzFeed. The church is a conservative evangelical Christian one.

"My own personal theory is that Joseph built the pyramids to store grain," Carson said.

"Now all the archaeologists think that they were made for the pharaohs' graves. But, you know, it would have to be something awfully big if you stop and think about it."

In the book of Genesis, Joseph was one of the 12 sons of Jacob. He was sold by his brothers as a slave to merchants headed to Egypt. And he then becomes one of Egypt's most powerful men.

Carson and Donald Trump have been leading their party's crowded nominating race.

Carson, however, is seen by many as someone with conservative values rooted in traditional Christian beliefs, and able to appeal to the party's most conservative Christian religious base.



Syrians are seen inside a cage in Douma, the largest opposition stronghold on the outskirts of Damascus, on October 31, 2015, as it has been reported that a major rebel group is using dozens of captives, mostly captured regime troops but also civilians, in metal cages as "human shields" to dissuade regime attacks.

PHOTO: AFP

**Russian air campaign
worsened Syria war: US
Moscow says it has sent anti-aircraft systems there**

AFP, Washington

The United States said Wednesday that Russia's air war in Syria had "dangerously exacerbated" the conflict, accusing Moscow of seeking to bolster President Bashar al-Assad's regime instead of targeting jihadists. Washington's latest broadside against Russian intervention in Syria came as government troops, emboldened by Moscow's support over the past month, recaptured from the Islamic State group a key road into second city Aleppo.

Speaking to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Anne Patterson said the offensives, backed by Russian air strikes, had displaced at least 120,000 people.

"Russia's military intervention has dangerously exacerbated an already complex environment," she said.

"Moscow has cynically tried to claim that its strikes are focused on terrorists, but so far, 85 to 90 percent of Syrian strikes have hit the moderate Syrian opposition and they have killed civilians in the process," Patterson said.

SYRIA CRISIS

Meanwhile, Russian Air Force Commander Viktor Bondarev said Russia sent anti-aircraft missile systems to Syria to back up its air campaign.

"We sent there not just fighter planes, strike aircraft and helicopters but also anti-aircraft rocket systems," Bondarev told Komsomolskaya Pravda daily yesterday.

He said that Russia made the decision to bring missile systems to Syria because "we took into account every possible threat."

"There could be various force majeure situations. Let's imagine a military plane is hijacked and taken to a neighbouring country and air strikes are aimed at us. And we have to be ready for this."

Anne Patterson claimed civilians had died in Russian strikes on civil defense crews, hospitals, centers for displaced persons and ambulances.

"We know that Russia's primary intent is to preserve the regime," she said.

Regime forces launched major offensives in several parts of Syria after Russia began its intervention on September 30, with more than 1,300 air strikes carried out so far.

**Indonesia
deports wanted
Indian gangster**

AFP, Denpasar

An alleged Indian gangster nabbed on Indonesia's resort island of Bali was deported and headed to India yesterday after eluding authorities for years.

Rajendra Sadashiv Nikalje's deportation, due earlier this week, was delayed after a volcanic eruption on a nearby island forced authorities to ground all flights from Bali for two days.

The 55-year-old, known in India as Chhota Rajan, had been evading police in several countries for years, with Interpol flagging him as a wanted man back in 1995.

He was arrested in Indonesia earlier this week. Nikalje was the alleged former right-hand man of Mumbai crime kingpin Dawood Ibrahim, who is suspected of being behind the 1993 bomb blasts in the city that killed more than 250 people.

**SOUTH CHINA SEA ROW
Carter blames Beijing
for regional tension**

AFP, Aboard The USS Theodore Roosevelt

US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter yesterday visited a US aircraft carrier in the South China Sea, where he took a jab at Chinese actions that have been blamed for raising tension in the disputed waterway.

Carter flew to the USS Roosevelt -- an enormous, nuclear-powered supercarrier -- as it churned through international waters about 150-200 nautical miles south of where China is constructing artificial islands to underpin its expansive claims to the region.

"There's a lot of concern about Chinese behaviour out here," Carter said aboard the ship.

He described the vessel's presence as "a sign of the critical role that United States military power plays in what is a very consequential region for the American future".

Washington and Beijing are engaged in a big-power face-off over the Chinese island-building programme.

The US has called for a halt to any island reclamation and said freedom of navigation must be preserved. China's claims to almost all of the South China Sea are widely disputed.



'I'll be above president'

Says Suu Kyi sas election nears; urges all not to 'exaggerate' Rohingya plight

REUTERS, Yangon

Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday said she would be "above the president" if her party wins a historic election on Nov 8, defying a constitutional ban on becoming president herself.

Suu Kyi's remarks could complicate her already fraught relations with Myanmar's military, which drafted the 2008 constitution to preserve its power and effectively exclude her from leading the country.

Her National League for Democracy (NLD) party is the frontrunner in the first general election since a semi-civilian government took power in 2011 after nearly 50 years of military dictatorship.

Suu Kyu also said that the plight of the Rohingya, a persecuted Muslim minority living in the western state of Rakhine, should not be exaggerated when "our whole country is in a dramatic situation."

She has been widely criticised for not speaking out enough on the Rohingya,

thousands of whom are interned in squalid camps. However, she said the political activity of the anti-Muslim radical Buddhist group Ma Ba Tha was unconstitutional.

"If we win, and the NLD forms a government, I will be above the president. It's a very simple message," a relaxed and smiling Suu Kyi told reporters at her lakeside home in Yangon.

When asked if this arrangement violated the constitution, Suu Kyi replied: "No."

The constitution however states that the president "takes precedence over all other persons" in Myanmar.

Suu Kyi said the NLD had already chosen someone who was prepared to act as president, but would not say who it was. According to speculation in Myanmar's media, likely candidates include the speaker of lower house, an aging NLD party patron and even Suu Kyi's personal physician.

Analysts have warned of a possible rise in post-election tensions, particularly over the choice of president.

