

LANDSLIDE, FLOODS FROM RAINS 41 people killed in India, Nepal

REUTERS, KATHMANDU

A landslide and floods caused by heavy rains have killed at least 41 people in Nepal and India in the past week, officials said yesterday, as the annual monsoon season enters its final stretch after claiming hundreds of lives in South Asia.

Ten people, including four children, were killed after a landslide buried five houses in remote west Nepal on Sunday, a Home Ministry official said.

At least 269 people have died in mostly mountainous Nepal this year in landslides and floods, while another 76 people are missing. The monsoon season that began around June in South Asia ends in September.

In the western Indian state of Gujarat, 14 people have died in the last two days in various incidents related to heavy rains and flooding, said officials at the State Emergency Response Centre.

Rains in Gujarat are 20% higher than the long-period average, according to the local government.

The state's desert area of Kutch received rainfall that was 2.5 times higher than the average.

More heavy to very heavy rains are expected in several parts of the state over the next two days, according to the India Meteorological Department.

In Odisha state to the east, floods have killed at least 17 people in the past week, displaced thousands and affected more than half a million people, officials said.

Hundreds have died in the northeastern state of Assam and neighbouring Bangladesh this monsoon.



US President's senior adviser Jared Kushner, US National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien and Israeli National Security Advisor Meir Ben-Shabbat disembark a plane upon landing at Abu Dhabi International Airport, in Abu Dhabi, UAE yesterday. The direct flight from Tel Aviv marks a major step in normalising ties between Israel and the Arab country.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Japan's ruling party to hold Sept 14 leadership vote

Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party plans to hold a leadership vote on September 14 to replace Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who is stepping down due to ill health, local media reported yesterday. The new party leader will become the country's next prime minister, due to the party's parliamentary majority, with four possible candidates vying for the position. Abe, Japan's longest-serving premier, told US President Donald Trump earlier yesterday that the strengthening of their two nations' alliance would be maintained even after he leaves office, a Japanese government spokesman said. In the race to succeed Abe as the next prime minister, former Defence Minister Shigeru Ishiba is the most popular choice among the public, media opinion polls showed.

WFP warns 2.2m more Syrians risk hunger

Around 2.2 million Syrians risk joining the fast swelling ranks of the hungry and poor in war-torn Syria, the World Food Programme warned yesterday. "Without urgent help 2.2 million more could slip further into hunger and poverty," WFP said in a statement on Twitter. The UN agency said in May that a record 9.3



million people in Syria were food insecure, as spiralling prices and the novel coronavirus pandemic compound the damage of the country's nine-year war. That figure had leapt from 7.9 million six months earlier. Most of Syria's population lives in poverty, according to the United Nations, and food prices have doubled over the past year.

Indian activist lawyer fined one rupee for tweets

India's top court yesterday imposed a symbolic fine of one rupee on a prominent lawyer found guilty of criminal contempt for posts on Twitter that were critical of senior judges, which he declined to apologise for. A three-member bench of the Supreme Court said that lawyer Prashant Bhushan must pay the fine by September 15, failing which he could be imprisoned for three months and barred from practice for three years. The case sparked a debate around free speech and the judiciary's openness to criticism, with thousands of lawyers backing Bhushan and arguing that the court was being too harsh.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

India cases top global rank

US infections surpass 6m as Midwest, schools face outbreaks

REUTERS, MUMBAI

India reported 78,512 novel coronavirus infections yesterday, more than any other country but fewer than the previous day when it posted the world's biggest, single-day tally, as authorities looked to open more sectors of the economy.

On Sunday, India's total of 78,761 new cases exceeded the previous global record of 77,299 in the United States on July 16, a Reuters tally of official data showed.

The world's second-most populous country has been posting the highest single-day caseload in the world since August 7. At 3.62 million cases, India is fast catching up to the United States and Brazil in terms of total cases but it has a lower death rate.

India's coronavirus deaths went up by 971 in the past 24 hours, taking the tally to 64,469, the health ministry said.

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC



The huge numbers have got authorities worried, especially with people in rural areas largely abandoning rules aimed at stopping the spread, officials say.

Kumar Sanjay Krishna, the chief secretary of Assam, one of the worst-hit states, attributed the increasing cases to more testing, the opening of the economy and complacency.

Meanwhile, US cases of coronavirus

surpassed 6 million on Sunday as many states in the Midwest reported increasing infections, according to a Reuters tally.

Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota have recently reported record one-day increases in new cases while Montana and Idaho are seeing record numbers of currently hospitalized Covid-19 patients.

Nationally, metrics on new cases, deaths, hospitalizations and the positivity rates of tests are all declining, but there are emerging hotspots in the Midwest.

Many of the new cases in Iowa are in the counties that are home to the University of Iowa and Iowa State University, which are holding some in-person classes. Colleges and universities around the country have seen outbreaks after students returned to campus, forcing some to switch to online-only learning.

Qatar raises minimum wage for workers

Lifts curbs on changing jobs

REUTERS, DUBAI

Qatar announced changes to its labour laws on Sunday, raising the minimum wage by 25 percent to 1,000 riyals (\$275) a month and scrapping a requirement for workers to get permission from their employers to change jobs.

They are the latest in a series of labour reforms by the 2022 FIFA World Cup host which in the lead up to the tournament has faced accusations that migrant workers are exploited.

The new minimum wage, which comes into effect in six months and is 250 riyals more a month than the old one, is non-discriminatory and applies to all workers.

Companies must also provide accommodation and food or a combined monthly stipend of 800 riyals.

The removal of employer permission to change jobs is effective immediately.

"This is a huge step towards our labour reforms," labour ministry assistant undersecretary Mohammed Hassan al-Obaidly told Reuters.

"These reforms are in the best interest of Qatar, its guest workers and employers."

Companies who do not pay wages or provide adequate accommodation will face harsher penalties under the new reforms, the labour ministry said. The United Nation's labour agency hailed the changes.



People pose with a drawing depicting Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha and balloons during an event to write a letter to the sky calling for tax return, created by a pro-democracy group, after the government decided to purchase controversial submarines worth 22.5 billion dollar from China, in Bangkok, Thailand yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Fight 'splittism' in Tibet

China's Xi tells senior Communist Party officials

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

China must build an "impregnable fortress" to maintain stability in Tibet, protect national unity and educate the masses in the struggle against "splittism", President Xi Jinping told senior leaders, according to state media.

China seized control over Tibet in 1950 in what it describes as a "peaceful liberation" that helped the remote Himalayan region throw off its "feudalist" past.

But critics, led by exiled spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, say Beijing's rule amounts to "cultural genocide".

At a senior Communist Party meeting on Tibet's future governance, Xi lauded achievements made and praised front-line officials but said more efforts were needed to enrich, rejuvenate and strengthen unity in the region.

Political and ideological education needed to be strengthened in Tibet's schools in order to "plant the seeds of loving China in the depths of the hearts of every youth", Xi said in remarks published by state news agency Xinhua on Saturday.

Pledging to build a "united, prosperous, civilised, harmonious and beautiful new,

modern, socialist Tibet", Xi said China needed to strengthen the role of the Communist Party in the territory and better integrate its ethnic groups.

Tibetan Buddhism also needed to adapt to socialism and Chinese conditions, he added.

Advocacy group the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) said Xi's remarks showed Chinese rule still needed to be imposed with an "iron fist".

In emailed comments, its president, Matteo Mecacci, said, "If Tibetans really benefitted as much from Chinese leadership as Xi and other officials claim, then China wouldn't have to fear separatism and wouldn't need to subject Tibetans to political re-education."

China's policies towards Tibet have come under the spotlight again this year amid worsening ties with the United States.

In July, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the US would restrict visas for some Chinese officials involved in blocking diplomatic access to Tibet and engaging in "human rights abuses", adding that Washington supported "meaningful autonomy" for Tibet.

Girl, 3, survives terrifying kite flight

AFP, TAIPEI

A three-year-old girl in Taiwan survived being launched into the air for a terrifying half-minute flight after she was ensnared in the tail of a kite at a weekend festival.


Dramatic footage captured the girl's ordeal in Hsinchu city.

Initial excited gasps of excitement as the large pink kite took flight turned to screams of horror as onlookers realised the toddler had become entangled in the tail, and taken along for the ride.

Strong wind propelled the kite for a 31-second flight as the girl bobbed and weaved in the air.


The kite eventually came down and crowds were able to free the girl unharmed.

Hsinchu mayor Lin Chih-chien said the girl suffered some scratches to her face and was terrified by the ordeal, but otherwise unharmed.



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