

NEWSIN brief

American found dead in Egypt police cell

AFP, Cairo

An American found hanged in his police cell in the Suez Canal city of Ismailiya on Sunday was believed to have committed suicide, Egyptian security officials said.

They said the body of James Henry, 55, who told authorities he was a "retired officer", was found at noon at Ismailiya Awal police station. The US embassy in Cairo confirmed "that a US citizen prisoner in Ismailiya died from an apparent suicide."

Shorten elected as Aussie Labor leader

AFP, Sydney

Former union chief Bill Shorten was elected Australia's new Labor leader yesterday, with the party pledging to draw a line under years of infighting that saw two prime ministers toppled.

Shorten beat ex-deputy prime minister Anthony Albanese in a month-long leadership race which went to a combined vote of Labor MPs and the party's rank-and-file members for the first time in its history.

Israel halts building supplies to Gaza

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel yesterday froze shipments of building materials to the Gaza Strip after discovering an alleged "terror tunnel" into the Jewish state from the adjoining territory, a defence official said.

Inbar, spokesman for the Israeli defence ministry unit responsible for civilian affairs in the Palestinian territories, did not say how long the ban would remain in force.

Threat bars tourists from Eiffel Tower

AFP, Paris

The Eiffel Tower was evacuated yesterday and the area ringed by security forces. A police source said the action followed a threat delivered over the telephone but did not give any details. The Eiffel Tower is the world's most visited monument attracting up to 32,000 tourists daily.

Wave of blasts kills 9 in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

More than a dozen bombs exploded in Iraq yesterday, killing at least nine people and wounding more than 70 others, officials said, as the death toll for 2013 nears 5,000.

Ten car bombs and three roadside bombs hit eight different areas of Iraq, seven of them south of Baghdad. The attacks came a day after violence including a car bomb targeting shoppers in Samarra, north of Baghdad, killed a total of 16 people.



Bhagwan, a coconut-seller, reacts as he sits in front of his destroyed shop in Gopalpur, yesterday. Cyclone Phailin left a trail of destruction along India's east coast and up to 14 people dead after the biggest evacuation in the country's history helped minimise casualties.

PHOTO: AFP

Phailin wreaks havoc

14 killed in India after unprecedented precautionary measures

AFP, Bhubaneswar

Cyclone Phailin left a trail of destruction along India's east coast and at least 14 people dead yesterday, after the biggest evacuation in the country's history helped minimise casualties.

As emergency teams began assessing damage from the country's biggest cyclone in 14 years, a massive relief effort went into full swing to distribute food to an estimated one million evacuees, clear roads and help the injured.

The NDMA's vice chairman Marri Shashidhar Reddy said the cyclone was gradually weakening as it moved inland, and officials said winds were slowing to below 90 kilometres an hour.

Most of the local population spent the night huddled in shelters and public buildings as deafening winds flattened flimsy homes, uprooted trees, and sent glass and asbestos strips flying through the air.

The worst affected area, around the town of Gopalpur in Orissa where the eye of Phailin came ashore packing winds of 200 kilometres an hour, was still without power and communications were down.

Roads strewn with fallen trees were at least open, as emergency services rushed to reach people living there.

"There are 13 deaths in Orissa and one death reported in Andhra Pradesh and so we have been able to... (keep) the death toll to a bare minimum," vice chairman of the National Disaster Management Authority Marri Shashidhar Reddy told reporters.

More than 8,000 people were killed in 1999 when a cyclone hit the same region, devastating crops and livestock. The area took years to recover.

This time round, a massive evacuation operation, which officials said was the biggest in Indian history, appeared to have succeeded in minimising casualties.

"I think we have been successful in minimising the loss of precious lives," Orissa's Chief Minister told reporters.

Families, many clutching bags of possessions, or holding their children, returned to what was left of their homes to assess the damage after spending the night in the shelters.

High-sided trucks lying on their sides were witness to the strength of

the winds on the main highway south of Gopalpur, which was littered with uprooted trees and other debris.

Despite the damage, there was a general sense of relief that things could have been a lot worse in Orissa and neighbouring Andhra Pradesh.

"We were preparing for a super cyclone, but Phailin did not turn into a super cyclone," spokeswoman for the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Tripti Parule, told AFP.

Officials in Orissa said 873,000 people moved before the cyclone made landfall on Saturday evening, while at least another 100,000 were evacuated further south in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Residents were also evacuated from coastal regions of West Bengal state.

Before the storm struck, international weather experts had predicted it would be a "super cyclone", comparable to the 2005 Hurricane Katrina in the United States.

Some of the deadliest storms in history have formed in the Bay of Bengal, including one in 1970 that killed hundreds of thousands of people in Bangladesh.



NAVARATRI FESTIVAL

Thousands of Indian Hindu devotees light candles in the form of the "Aum" -- a religious symbol -- during a Maha Arti (Mass Prayer) on the eighth night of ongoing Navratri in Gandhinagar, some 30 kms from Ahmedabad, on Saturday. Navaratri is a vibrant nine night festival worship of the Mother Goddess Durga.

PHOTO: AFP

Amnesty brands AU's ICC call 'deplorable'

AFP, London

The African Union's call for the International Criminal Court to defer the crimes against humanity trials of Kenya's leadership is "deplorable", Amnesty International said yesterday.

The London-based human rights organisation said the AU, which also called for sitting heads of state to be exempt from appearing before the court in The Hague sent out the wrong message.

"This declaration sends the wrong message, that politicians on the African continent will place their political interests above those of victims of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide," said Tawanda Hondora, Amnesty's deputy director of law and policy.

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta and his deputy William Ruto have been charged with crimes against humanity for allegedly masterminding a vicious campaign of ethnic violence that left at least 1,100 dead and more than 600,000 homeless after disputed 2007 elections.

On Saturday Kenyatta attacked the ICC as the "toy of declining imperial powers".

However, Hondora said the trials should still go ahead. "Requesting the deferral of the trials of Kenyatta and Ruto would send a strong message that the victims of the post-election violence in Kenya don't matter."

"Victims of the post-election violence have waited over five years to see the cogs of justice turn after Kenya failed to deliver justice and the ICC stepped in."

SYRIA CIVIL WAR

Opposition refuses Geneva peace talks

AFP, Beirut

A key group within the Syrian opposition National Coalition yesterday said it would not attend proposed peace talks in Geneva and would quit the Coalition if it participated.

"The Syrian National Council, which is the biggest bloc in the Coalition, has taken the firm decision... not to go to Geneva, under the present circumstances (on the ground)," Council president George Sabra, told AFP.

"This means that we will not stay in the Coalition if it goes" to the peace talks in Geneva, he added.

He invoked the ongoing suffering of Syrians on the ground and said his group would not negotiate before the fall of the regime.

The international community, led by Russia and the United States, has been pushing for the Syrian regime and rebels to attend a peace conference dubbed Geneva 2 to find a political solution to the conflict.

The proposed meeting has been delayed for months, but Washington and Moscow are now talking about a potential mid-November date for the talks.

The Syrian National Council has long said it will not negotiate until President Bashar al-Assad's regime is toppled.

US-Afghan deal edges closer

AFP, Kabul

A long-delayed security deal on the future of US forces in Afghanistan is close to being completed, officials said yesterday, after marathon talks in Kabul between President Hamid Karzai and US Secretary of State John Kerry.

Both sides said that the issue of US troop immunity remained a sticking point after intense efforts to hammer out a deal that would allow between 5,000 and 10,000 US soldiers to remain in Afghanistan after 2014.

US officials travelling with Kerry said that only details of the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) had not been agreed, and that the US and Afghan teams would now review the draft document.

"From our vantage, (the visit was) positive in that we reached a basic agreement on all of the key issues," a senior US official told reporters as Kerry flew out of Kabul for London.

"The language also provides what we need in terms of assurances and guarantees for rights of self-defense, for force protec-

tion, and the jurisdiction issues."

Both Kerry and Karzai said at a press conference late Saturday that the issue of jurisdiction -- or "troop immunity" -- had not been solved, but US officials gave an upbeat assessment on the chances of the pact being signed.

"Overall, the text, we believe, is in a good place," one official told reporters.

At the press conference, Karzai said a national assembly of tribal elders would be called to discuss whether foreign soldiers could be given immunity from prosecution in Afghanistan.

Kerry said that without the issue being resolved "unfortunately there cannot be a bilateral security

agreement."

US troops still in Afghanistan after 2014 will help fight al-Qaeda remnants and train the national army.

A similar US security agreement with Iraq in 2011 collapsed over the issue of troop immunity and the US pulled its troops out of the country, which is now suffering its worst sectarian violence since 2008.



ODDLY enough



French chocolate maker Sylvain Musquar presents chocolates topped with insects to promote insects as food in his chocolaterie in Villers-les-Nancy, north-eastern France on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP



Malala says she's no Western puppet

AFP, London

Malala Yousafzai hit back at claims that she has become a figure of the West, insisting she was proud to be a Pakistani.

The 16-year-old, who was shot by the Taliban for championing girls' right to an education, claimed she retained the support of people in her homeland, and reiterated her desire to enter Pakistani politics.

Asked in a BBC television interview broadcast Sunday about some people in Pakistan thinking she was a "figure of the West" and "a Westerner now", she said: "My father says that education is neither Eastern or Western. Education is education: it's the right of everyone."

"The thing is that the people of Pakistan have supported me. They don't think of me as Western. I am a daughter of Pakistan."

'People less safe under NSA surveillance'

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

The National Security Agency whistleblower, Edward Snowden, has said that the mass surveillance programmes used by the US to tap into phone and internet connections around the world is making people less safe.

In short video clips posted by the WikiLeaks website on Friday, Snowden said that the NSA's mass surveillance, which he disclosed before fleeing to Russia, "puts us at risk of coming into conflict with our own government".

A US court has charged Snowden with violating the Espionage Act, for disclosing the programmes which he described as a "dragnet mass surveillance that puts entire populations under sort of an eye that sees everything even when it's not needed".

"They hurt our economy. They hurt our country. They limit our ability to speak and think and live and be creative, to have relation-

ships and to associate freely," Snowden said.

The videos are the first of Snowden speaking since 12 July, when the former NSA analyst was shown at a Moscow airport, pleading with Russian authorities to grant him asylum, which they did on 1 August.

Snowden said the US government was "unwilling to prosecute high officials who lied to Congress and the country on camera, but they'll stop at nothing to persecute someone who told them the truth".

In a note accompanying the videos, WikiLeaks said Snowden spoke on Wednesday in Moscow as he accepted the Sam Adams Award, named for a CIA analyst during the Vietnam War who accused the US military of deliberately underestimating the enemy's strength for political purposes, and given annually by a group of retired US national security officers.



Life of elders in a youth-based world

MAIL ONLINE

The world is aging so fast that most countries are not prepared to support their swelling numbers of elderly people, according to a global study by the United Nations and an elder rights group.

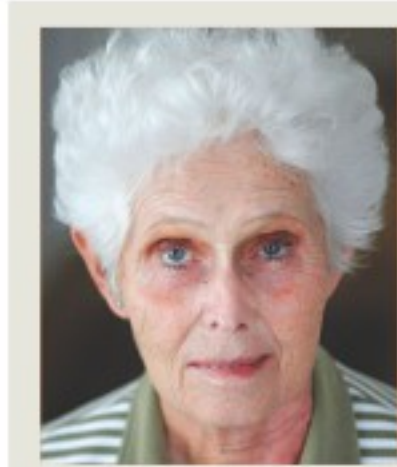
The report ranks the social and economic well-being of elders in 91 countries, with Sweden coming out on top and Afghanistan at the bottom.

By the year 2050, for the first time in history, seniors over the age of 60 will outnumber children under the age of 15.

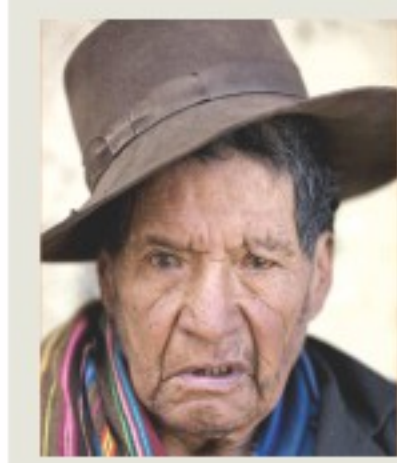
The Global AgeWatch Index (www.globalagewatch.org) was created by elder advocacy group HelpAge International and the UN Population Fund in part to address a lack of international data on the extent and impact of global aging.

The index was welcomed by elder rights advocates, who have long complained that a lack of data has thwarted their attempts to raise the issue on government agendas.

The report fits into an increasingly complex picture of aging and what it means to the world. On the one hand, the fact that people are living longer is a testament to advances in health care and nutrition, and advocates emphasize that the elderly should be seen not as a burden but as a resource.



Ingrid Foerster, 82 Sweden 'I am most afraid of losing my mental and physical independence and becoming a nursing case. The biggest problem for the elderly is living a solitary life.'



Pedro Vega Yucra, 80 Ecuador 'My biggest fear is that one day I will not have anything to eat or even the energy to work on my own. In the rural areas, we, the elderly, die and nobody notices. As you become old, no one cares.'



Mahmoud Hussein, 75 Egypt 'I'm afraid that my children will hurt me, kick me out of my house and I will die alone. The biggest problem facing elderly Egyptians is the lack of health insurance and retirement pay.'

Abdul Wasay, 75, a former cook and blacksmith spends most of his day trying to sell toothbrushes and toothpaste on a busy street corner in Kabul's main market. The job nets him just \$6 a day — barely enough

to support his wife. He can only afford to buy meat twice a month; the family relies mainly on potatoes and curried vegetables.

"It's difficult because my knees are weak and I can't really stand for a long time," he says. "But what can I do? It's even harder in winter, but I can't afford treatment."

He says many helpless older people cannot find work because they are not strong enough to do day labour, and some resort to begging.

"You have to keep working no matter how old you are — no one is rich enough to stop," he says. "Life is very difficult."

Prosperity in itself does not guarantee protection for the old. The world's rising economic powers — the so-called BRICS nations of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — rank lower in the index than some poorer countries such as Uruguay and Panama.

However, the report found, wealthy nations are in general better prepared for aging than poorer ones. Sweden, where the pension system is now 100 years old, makes the top of the list because of its social support, education and health coverage, followed by Norway, Germany, the Netherlands and Canada. The United States comes in eighth.

Still, even in an elder-friendly country like Sweden, aging is not without its challenges.