

NEWS IN
brief

Japan typhoon death toll rises to 29
AFP, TOKYO

The death toll from a typhoon that triggered massive landslides on a Japanese island rose to 29 yesterday, as officials advised residents to take shelter in anticipation of more heavy rain.

Around 1,200 troops, firefighters and police searched for 22 island residents who remained missing after typhoon Wipha struck Oshima island, 120 kilometres south of Tokyo, on

Titanic violin bags record price
BBC ONLINE

The violin that was apparently played to calm passengers on the Titanic as the giant liner sank has sold for £900,000 at auction in Wiltshire.



It was played by band leader Wallace Hartley, who died along with 1,517 others as the ship went down. It had a guide price of £300,000.

Hartley has become part of the ship's legend after leading his fellow musicians in playing as the vessel sank, most famously the hymn Nearer My God To Thee.

Afghan tribal meeting next month
Afp, Kabul

About 3,000 Afghan tribal elders and civil leaders will gather in Kabul next month to decide whether to support a deal allowing some US troops to stay in the country after 2014, officials said yesterday.

President Hamid Karzai has said that only a loya jirga could decide an issue of Afghan national sovereignty, with legal immunity for US troops remaining a potential sticking point in

14 Laos plane crash victims identified
Afp, Pakse

Lao Airlines yesterday said it had identified almost half of the 32 bodies so far recovered after a plane carrying 49 people, many of them foreign travellers, plunged into the Mekong River.

In the country's deadliest known air disaster, all those on board died when the Lao Airlines turboprop ATR-72 plunged into the swollen waters in stormy weather on Wednesday near Pakse airport in



Philippine residents look at the ruins of the historic Holy Cross Parish Church in Maribojoc town in the central Philippine island of Bohol, that was damaged during the 7.1 magnitude quake that hit the area on Tuesday, leaving over 180 dead. Philippine rescuers yesterday called off the search for survivors.

PHOTO: AFP

Obama urges Congress to ditch politics of crisis
AFP, Washington

The US Congress must stop stumbling from crisis to crisis and join together to create jobs and get things done, President Barack Obama said yesterday in his weekly radio address.

Speaking just two days after Congress reached an 11th-hour accord to end a 16-day government shutdown and avert a debt default by extending the Treasury's authority to borrow money, the president said lawmakers have little to be proud of.

"At a time when our economy needs more growth and more jobs, the manufactured crises of these last few weeks actually harmed jobs and growth," he said.

Economists say the shutdown cost the economy billions as furloughed workers cut back on spending and tourism was sapped, among other effects.

And the provisions of the last-gasp bill already have raised fears that another round of Washington-style brinkmanship and dysfunction may not be far off.

The compromise plan hashed out in the Senate and passed by the House funds government only until January 15 and extends US borrowing authority until February 7.

"And it's understandable that your frustration with what goes on in Washington has never been higher," Obama added.

He specified three areas where his Democrats and Republicans can work together productively.

He said these were coming up with a budget that promotes both economic growth and fiscal responsibility, immigration reform to get millions of undocumented foreigners out of the underground economy and paying taxes, and a farm bill to help rural communities.

Deported Roma girl can return to France
Hollande intervenes after protests
BBC ONLINE

After days of protests, French President Francois Hollande has said a Roma girl who was removed from her school bus and deported can return to finish her studies, but that her family cannot.

Leonarda Dibrani, 15, was expelled along with her parents and five siblings earlier this month after they lost their battle for asylum in France.

The case has sparked protests by student groups across the country.

The Dibrani family left Kosovo for France five years ago and were living in Levier, in the Doubs region of eastern France. They cited discrimination in Kosovo as grounds for asylum.

An order for their expulsion was issued after they lost their battle for asylum. After two postponements, it was rescheduled for October and the father, who was detained in a different town, was expelled on 8 October.

Leonarda had stayed at a friend's overnight so was not at the family home when border police arrived to deport them.

She was instead taken away by police in front of other students while on a field trip. The whole family were flown back to Kosovo that day.

Court orders political ban for Berlusconi
AFP, Rome

A court in Milan yesterday ordered a two-year ban from parliament and elections for scandal-tainted former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi in the latest twist in his legal saga.

The ruling is part of the tax fraud case against the billionaire tycoon -- his first ever definitive criminal conviction -- in which he faces a year of community service or house arrest.

The 77-year-old Berlusconi was not present at yesterday's hearing and his defence lawyers have the right to appeal the verdict, although it was not immediately clear whether they would.

In order for the ban to come into force, it has to be approved by the Senate parliamentary chamber where Berlusconi, who has repeatedly protested his innocence in all the cases against him, has a seat.

Banishment would be a humiliation for Berlusconi, who has been in parliament ever since the media and construction magnate first entered politics in 1994 and

became a headline act.

His ejection from parliament is in any case already under discussion because of a new law approved last year against parliamentarians with criminal sentences of more than two years.

That law would also ban Berlusconi from running for office for six years although a

Senate vote is also required in that case and his lawyers have appealed to the European Court of Human Rights over the law, even though lawmakers from Berlusconi's own party had approved it.

There is concern that the ruling could re-stoke political tensions in Italy's uneasy right-left coalition that had abated since Prime Minister Enrico Letta won a confidence vote in parliament against a challenge from Berlusconi on October 2.

Italy is struggling to shake off a two-year recession that has pushed unemployment to record-high levels, forced thousands of businesses to shut and led to steep budget cuts.



Tension rises along Kashmir border
AFP, ISLAMABAD

Pakistan accused Indian troops of killing a civilian and wounding two others in "unprovoked firing" across the border yesterday as New Delhi voiced "grave concern" about the new military flare-up in disputed Kashmir.

The Himalayan region of Kashmir has been the spark of two of three wars fought by nuclear-armed India and Pakistan since their independence from Britain in 1947.

In Islamabad, a Pakistani military official said a civilian was killed and two others injured by "unprovoked firing of heavy weapons including mortars by Indian Border Security Forces" near the eastern city of Sialkot in eastern Punjab province.

On Thursday, Pakistan accused India of killing a paramilitary soldier in "unprovoked firing" across the border in the same region.

Indian foreign minister Salman Khurshid in New Delhi described the military flare-up as a "serious matter."

"This is a serious matter, a matter of great concern to India," Khurshid told India's NDTV channel as the Press Trust of India said two paramilitary soldiers of the Border Security Force (BSF) were hurt in overnight Friday attacks by Pakistani troops.

BSF troops "retaliated strongly", the national news agency report said, and added the attack was the latest in a string of five violations in the past 24 hours of a 2003 truce along Kashmir's disputed border.



Malala Yousafzai gives a copy of her book to Queen Elizabeth II during a Reception for Youth, Education and the Commonwealth at Buckingham Palace in London on Friday. The 16-year-old, who was shot by the Taliban for championing girls' rights to an education, met Queen Elizabeth at a reception for youth, education and the Commonwealth.

PHOTO: AFP

Blast at cafe kills 16 in Somalia
REUTERS, MOGADISHU

A suicide bomber killed at least 16 people yesterday in an attack on a cafe in a Somali town close to the Ethiopian border frequented by local and foreign soldiers fighting al-Qaeda-linked rebels.

Al Shabaab said it had carried out the bombing, in the town of Baladweyne, targeting troops participating in an African Union peacekeeping force fighting the Somali Islamist group.

At least 16 people were killed and 33 wounded, local politician Dahir Amin Jesow told Reuters by telephone from Baladweyne. "The death toll may rise."

Pakistan PM heads to US
AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif yesterday departed for talks in the United States, with the Afghan peace process and the prickly issue of Washington's drone campaign likely to top the agenda.

Relations between Pakistan and the US, fractious allies in the "war on terror", have been on the mend this year after

lurching from crisis to crisis in 2011 and 2012.

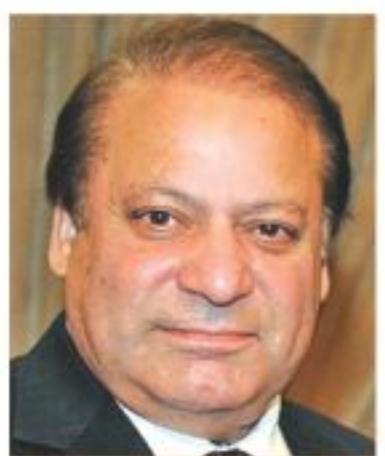
Sharif meets President Barack Obama on Wednesday with Washington keen to press the Pakistani premier to help faltering efforts to secure peace between Kabul and the Afghan Taliban.

Daniel Markey, a senior fellow at US think-tank the Council on Foreign Relations, said that since coming to power in May Sharif had impressed Washington with his willingness to be a partner.

In the past Pakistan has been accused of being unhelpful in the Afghan peace process and of maintaining links with the Taliban, whose government in the 1990s Islamabad formally recognised.

The release of Afghan Taliban prisoners from Pakistani custody, including senior rebel leader Abdul Ghani Baradar last month, had gone some way to diminish these accusations, Markey said.

He said Obama would likely appreciate any new ideas from Pakistan on how to jump-start the Afghan peace process as the United States and Nato prepare to withdraw combat troops next year.



Indian PM heads to Russia, China
AFP, New Delhi

India's Manmohan Singh embarks on one of his last major foreign trips as prime minister today, heading to Russia and China to strengthen trade ties and address a long-running border dispute.

The 81-year-old, who is expected to stand down after elections next year, will look to clinch energy, defence and other economic deals in both countries as New Delhi tries to boost trade and investment to kick-start sluggish growth.

Manmohan will also seek a breakthrough on the border dispute with China, where he will land on Tuesday, that has soured ties for decades, after the leaders of the two Asian giants pledged earlier this year to build up trust.

Manmohan, who arrives in Moscow on Sunday night, will meet President Vladimir Putin the following day with the focus on strengthening supply of weapons and military hardware to New Delhi.

India, which is spending billions of dollars upgrading its military hardware, has been Russia's top arms customer for years, but relations have frayed over delays and cost-overruns.

Both countries will be looking to seal accords on the next phase of a Russian-built nuclear power project on India's southern coast. The project is designed to help meet India's surging demand for electricity, but has been dogged by delays and protests over safety.



Libya's military police chief killed
AFP, Benghazi

Libya's military police chief, Colonel Mustapha al-Barghathi, was shot dead Friday in the restive eastern city of Benghazi in the latest assault on the restive country's fledgling security forces.

Unknown assailants gunned down Barghathi outside his home. Barghathi -- a former rebel leader in the 2011 uprising that toppled longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi -- died of head and chest wounds at the Mediterranean city's Al-Jala hospital. He was the first officer in Gaddafi's army to defect.

Later on Friday, members of the slain officer's Braghtha tribe fired rocket-propelled grenades at the home of another prominent former rebel they believed was behind the killing, according to a security source. The home was empty at the time.

Evolution theory questioned

Skull of human ancestors suggests early man was single species

AFP, Tbilisi

Georgian scientists on Friday presented a 1.8 million-year-old skull discovered in the Caucasus nation that researchers say could force a re-evaluation of current theories of human evolution.

The skull -- unearthed in the medieval town of Dmanisi some 100 kilometres southwest of the capital Tbilisi -- is the first completely preserved skull found from that period.

Along with four other skull samples uncovered at the site, it appears to show that early man was a single species with a wide range of looks rather than several distinct species.

"Today in this skull -- and the other Dmanisi samples -- we see all the features lumped together in one group that we previously thought identified different groups," David Lordkipanidze, Georgia's national museum director, told AFP after a presentation in Tbilisi on Friday.

"This is the most important thing -- we



are touching the earliest stages of genus homo and its lineage," Lordkipanidze said.

The stunningly well-preserved find -- known as Skull 5 -- has an almost-complete set of teeth and seems more elongated than a normal human skull.

The conclusions -- published in the US journal Science on Thursday -- are the result of some eight years of research carried out by Georgian and international scientists since the discovery of the skull in 2005.

The skull was found lying a few metres from where its jawbone had been discovered earlier in 2000.

The scientists behind the discovery claim the different lineages some experts have described in Africa -- such as Homo habilis and Homo rudolfensis -- were all just ancient people of the species Homo erectus who looked different from each other.

They also suggest that early members of the modern man's genus Homo, first found in Africa, soon expanded into Asia despite their small brain size.