

NEWSIN brief

Multiple quakes rattle northeast China

AFP, Beijing

Multiple earthquakes hit northeast China yesterday, with a 5.5 magnitude the strongest among them causing serious damage to homes. More than 58,000 people were affected by the quakes, with 16,094 evacuated and more than 18,000 homes damaged, Jilin province communications office said on its official weibo microblog account. Some villages lost power, according to Xinhua news agency.

Tamil poet arrested in Sri Lanka

PTI, Colombo

Norwegian Tamil poet and actor VIS Jeyapalan has been arrested in Sri Lanka for violating visa regulations. Jaffna-born Jeyapalan, 79, who was in Sri Lanka on a tourist visa, was arrested on Friday at Mankulam in the country's north, police spokesman Ajith Rohana said. "He was reported to have taken part in gatherings aimed at causing communal unrest," Rohana said.

Mauritania votes despite wide boycott

AFP, Nouakchott

Mauritanians yesterday voted in nationwide elections overshadowed by a widespread boycott of opposition parties, with all eyes on the performance of an Islamist party allowed to take part for the first time. The mainly-Muslim republic, a former French colony on the west coast of the Sahara desert, is seen by the West as strategically important in the fight against al-Qaeda-linked groups within its own borders, as well in neighbouring Mali and across Africa's Sahel region.

Avalanche kills seven in Japan

AFP, Dtiolvo

Seven people died after being hit by an avalanche yesterday on a mountain in Japan's central Toyama prefecture, local police said. The seven -- four men and three women -- were climbing or skiing when the avalanche, an estimated 30 metres wide and 600 metres long, hit on a western slope of the 2,860-metre-high Mt Masago, police said.

Man killed by shark in Australia

AFP, Sydney

A surfer was killed by a shark in Western Australia yesterday when the animal attacked him after bouncing off the surfboard of another man, police said. Sharks are common in Australian waters but deadly attacks are rare, with only one of the average 15 incidents a year typically proving fatal.



LATVIA SUPER MALL TRAGEDY

People leave candles at the scene where the Maxima supermarket roof collapsed in Riga, yesterday. Latvia mourned its dead yesterday after a the roof collapse left at least 52 dead and investigators launched a criminal probe into one of Europe's most deadly building disasters. (Story on back page)

PHOTO: AFP

ROW OVER MORSI Egypt, Turkey downgrade diplomatic ties

AFP, Cairo

Egypt expelled Turkey's ambassador yesterday and Ankara downgraded relations in tit-for-tat moves that marked a further fraying of ties after the July ouster of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi. The latest row between the two US allies came after Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Thursday renewed his criticism of the "coup" that ousted Morsi and Egypt's continuing crackdown on his Islamist supporters. And Erdogan yesterday reacted to the Egyptian measures saying: "I never respect those who come to power after a coup". Cairo decided to expel Turkish ambassador Huseyin Avni Botsali, declare him persona non grata, downgrade ties to the level of charge d'affaires and not send its own ambassador back to Ankara, foreign ministry spokesman Badr Abdelatty told AFP. A ministry statement accused Turkey of "supporting... organisations seeking to create instability in the country," in a clear reference to the Muslim Brotherhood movement to which Morsi belonged. It said Ankara was also "trying to influence the international community against Egyptian interests." Turkey responded by declaring Egyptian ambassador Abdelrahman Salah El-Din as "persona non grata" and downgrading ties with Cairo" in line with the reciprocity principle that forms the basis of international relations." The Turkish foreign ministry summoned the Egyptian charge d'affaires for an explanation and said Ankara held Cairo's new military-installed authorities responsible for the current tensions.

Doubts eclipse optimism

AFP, Geneva

Negotiations between world powers and Iran over Tehran's nuclear ambitions were thrown into uncertainty yesterday after US Secretary of State John Kerry announced his imminent departure and Iran's chief negotiator expressed doubts a deal would be reached.

Amid signs that the talks in Geneva were proving difficult, Kerry's spokesman said the US's top diplomat would leave for London today for meetings with British counterpart William Hague and the Libyan prime minister.

At the same time, Iranian chief negotiator Abbas Araqchi said he doubted that Tehran and the P5+1 world powers -- comprising the United States, Britain, France, China, Russia and Germany -- could reach an accord by the end of the day.

"Intense and difficult negotiations are under way and it is not clear whether we reach an agreement tonight," Fars news agency quoted Araqchi as saying. "The dispute is over the wording."

The talks are aimed at securing a freeze on parts of Iran's nuclear programme in order to ease fears that

IRAN NUCLEAR TALKS

Tehran will develop atomic weapons, in return for modest sanctions relief.

The arrival of foreign ministers including Kerry yesterday had raised hopes, after three days of intense negotiations among lower-level officials, that a breakthrough was in sight.

Kerry had decided to join the talks "with the hope that an agreement will be reached," the State Department said on Friday.

Since their arrival however, officials from both sides have indicated that there are still considerable differences to be bridged.

"We have now entered a very difficult stage," Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif told state television, saying he would not bow to "excessive demands".

"In any agreement, (uranium) enrichment in Iran will not be suspended," Zarif said, adding that "a very difficult task" still lay ahead in clinching a deal.

Hague was also cautious yesterday morning, saying in Geneva: "They remain very difficult negotiations. I

think it is important to stress that we are not here because things are necessarily finished."

"It's not a done deal," said his German counterpart Guido Westerwelle. "We think there's a realistic chance but there is still a lot of work to do."

Mark Hibbs from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace said Kerry's imminent departure might "set a deadline and focus people's minds".

Since being elected in June, Iranian President Hassan Rohani has raised big hopes that after a decade of rising tensions over Tehran's nuclear programme, a solution might be within reach.

The six powers want Iran to stop spinning, for six months initially, some 700 of its some 19,000 thousand centrifuges that are enriching uranium to levels close to weapons-grade.

They also want Tehran to stop constructing a new reactor at Arak and to grant the International Atomic Energy Agency more intrusive inspection rights.

In return they are offering Iran minor and reversible relief from painful sanctions including unlocking several billion dollars in oil revenues and easing some trade restrictions.

Pakistan charges Laden doctor with murder

AFP, Peshawar

Authorities in northwest Pakistan have charged the doctor who helped the CIA find Osama bin Laden with murder and fraud, officials and a defence lawyer said yesterday.

"A murder and fraud case was registered against Shakeel Afridi this week after a tribal woman accused him of killing her son," a senior government official in Peshawar told AFP.

Afridi's lawyer Samiullah Afridi confirmed the charges, which come some three months after his conviction for treason was overturned.

Afridi was recruited by the CIA to run a fake vaccination programme in Abbottabad in the hope of obtaining DNA samples to identify al-Qaeda chief bin Laden, although medics never managed to gain access to the family.

The doctor was arrested after US troops killed bin Laden in the Pakistani town of Abbottabad in May 2011.

Islamabad branded the raid a violation of sovereignty, and Pakistan's relations with the US fell to an all-time low.

He was sentenced to 33 years in jail and fined \$3,500. Angry US politicians saw the sentence as retaliation for his role in bin Laden's capture.

Meanwhile, militants kidnapped 11 Pakistani teachers involved in a polio vaccination campaign for school children yesterday, officials said.



China extends air defence perimeter angering Japan

AFP, Beijing

Tokyo branded as "very dangerous" a move by Beijing Saturday to set up an "air defence identification zone" over an area that includes disputed islands controlled by Japan, but claimed by China.

In a move that raised the temperature of a bitter territorial row between the two countries, China's defence ministry said that it was setting up the zone to "guard against potential air threats".

It later scrambled air force jets, including fighter planes, to carry out a patrol mission yesterday in the newly established zone.

The outline of the zone, which is shown on the Chinese defence ministry website and a state media Twitter account (pic.twitter.com/4a2vC6PH8O), covers a wide area of the East China Sea between South Korea and Taiwan that includes airspace above the Tokyo-controlled islands known as the

Senkaku to Japan and Diaoyu to China.

Junichi Ihara, who heads the Japanese foreign ministry's Asian and Oceanian affairs bureau, lodged a protest by phone to Han Zhiqiang, minister at the Chinese Embassy in Japan, the ministry said in a statement.

He said Japan could "never accept the zone set up by China" as it includes the Tokyo-controlled islands, the statement said.

Ihara also told the Chinese side that such move by Beijing would "escalate" current bilateral tensions over the islands, branding it "very dangerous".

Japan's vice foreign minister Akitaka Saiki plans to summon the Chinese ambassador to Japan, Cheng Yonghua, as early as possible and state Japan's position on the matter, Kyodo news agency reported.

Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Yang Yujun said the establishment of the zone, which became operational yesterday morning, was aimed at safeguarding state sovereignty.



A young girl carries her sibling as she looks for water among the rubble of destroyed houses caused by super typhoon Haiyan in Tacloban, yesterday. The US military has begun scaling back its emergency relief operations in the Philippines as work shifts to recovery and rehabilitation in typhoon-hit areas, a US aid agency official said yesterday.

ODDLY enough Redefining 'jewel of my eye'



STAR DESK

Lucy Luckayanko is perhaps the only New Yorker to have an eye-stud. She spent \$3,000 on a one-minute procedure to have a heart-shaped piece of platinum inserted into the white of her right eyeball.

Doctors have done this procedure several times in Europe and Los Angeles, but this was New York's first. To perform it, Dr Chynn first injected an anesthetic into Lucy's eye. Then he made a tiny incision to "try to divide a pocket in between the sclera (the white part) and the conjunctiva (the clear part)" of her eye. Using forceps, he placed the 3.5mm platinum stud in a drop of water on Lucy's eye membrane. Since the stud is so small, it had to be floated into position. It was all over in a matter of minutes and Lucy went home with her new bejeweled eye soon after.

Lucy thinks her eye is now going to be a "conversation maker." She wants her eye to be her "unique factor."

SECURITY PACT Afghans set conditions for US deal

AFP, Kabul

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has set conditions for signing a security deal with the United States, including an end to military operations on Afghan homes and cooperation on peace and election processes, a spokesman said yesterday.

Karzai will explain the conditions to a grand assembly that will advise on whether to accept the deal in a closing speech planned for today, presidential spokesman Aimal Faizy told AFP.

After months of negotiations, Kabul and Washington this week agreed the terms of a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) which will define any American military presence in Afghanistan after US-led Nato combat troops exit at the end of 2014. Karzai has insisted that the deal would be signed after polls angering US.

Tehelka abuse victim complains of pressure CCTV footage unavailable, says police

AGENCIES

The woman who has alleged sexual assault by Tehelka Editor-in-Chief Tarun Tejpal issued a statement to The Hindu saying attempts are being made to pressurise and influence her family members.

She stated that a member of Tejpal's immediate family visited her mother's house on Friday and "demanded to know 1) who" she "was seeking legal help from and 2) what" she "wanted" as the result of "her" "complaint of sexual molestation by Tejpal".

AFP reported that the editor of the top Indian investigative news magazine -- known for its hard-hitting probes into sexual violence against women, corruption and other law-breaking -- faced police questioning yesterday over the allegations of sexual harassment in a case that has snowballed into a major scandal.

Police in the holiday state of Goa, where the woman was allegedly assaulted twice by Tejpal, began an inquiry Friday into the incident.

Tejpal announced Wednesday he was quitting his editorial functions at Tehelka for six months after the woman's complaint was leaked to the media.

She said the alleged assault took place inside a lift at a hotel where the magazine held a conference last month billed as India's premier intellectual event.

However, the Goa police yesterday said that the CCTV footage from the elevator is not available with the hotel -- even though they formally obtained CCTV footage of concerned parts of the hotel, which will be examined.



Regime air raid kills 29 in Syria

AFP, Damascus

At least 29 people were killed in Syria's northern province of Aleppo yesterday as rebels also captured a key oilfield in the east of the country, a monitoring group said.

State television, meanwhile, reported that the national reconciliation minister avoided an assassination attempt, after gunmen opened fire on his car while he was not inside.

Elsewhere, the Observatory said rebel groups including the al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Nusra Front had seized control of the key Omar oilfield in Deir Ezzor province in the east.

The Observatory said the regime loss meant it no longer controls any of Syria's eastern oilfields. The army lost the Omar facility for the first time in November 2012, but later recaptured it. Speaking to the camera, one activist said fighters had seized seven tanks.

The double life of a Hollywood producer

THE INDEPENDENT ONLINE

In the early 1980s, movie producer Arnon Milchan presided over a string of hits, collaborating with Martin Scorsese, Robert De Niro, Sergio Leone and Ridley Scott. But what his film industry friends didn't know was that while his Hollywood career flourished, Milchan was also winding down a secret double life as an arms dealer.

The mogul behind hits such as Pretty Woman, Fight Club and LA Confidential also spent about 20 years as a leading Israeli intelligence agent.

Although Milchan's clandestine career was widely known, he had never confessed to it in public until now. The Israeli investigative documentary series Uvda ("Fact") will broadcast an interview next week, in which Milchan revealed that he facilitated arms deals on behalf of Israel, beginning in the 1960s.

Milchan was born in 1944 in what was then the British Mandate for Palestine. According to the 2011 book Confidential: The Life of Secret Agent Turned Hollywood Tycoon Arnon Milchan, by Meir Doron and Joseph Gelman, he was recruited to Israel's intelligence services as a young man by its then deputy defence minister, Shimon Peres, now the Israeli president. Milchan joined the Bureau of Scientific Relations, or Lekem, which supported the country's nascent nuclear arms programme.

In an interview for the book, Peres admitted he was responsible for Milchan's recruitment.



Arnon Milchan with Angelina Jolie