

Plane carrying 18 people missing in Nepal

Rescuers in Nepal yesterday scrambled to find a Nepal Airlines plane carrying 18 people that went missing in the country's mountainous west, officials said.

The plane with 15 passengers and three crew on board lost contact with air traffic controllers shortly after taking off from the popular tourist town of Pokhara, airline officials and police said.

"The Nepal Airlines plane with 14 (adult) passengers took off from Pokhara airport at 1.30 pm and disappeared 15 minutes later," Nepal police spokesman Ganesh KC told AFP.

A total of 18 people were on board, the 14 adult passengers, plus one infant and three crew, an airline spokesman said.

"One of the passengers is from Denmark," spokesman Ram Hari Sharma told AFP. The rest of those on board are from Nepal.

Heavy rain was hampering efforts to search for the plane, with two helicopters forced to turn back because of bad weather, Bimlesh Lal Karna, chief air traffic controller at the country's largest airport in Kathmandu, said.

"The weather was not bad at the time the plane went missing... It worsened later on," Karna told AFP.

The incident again raises concerns about the Himalayan nation's aviation sector, which has come under fire from international authorities after a series of fatal accidents.

The European Union in December blacklisted all the country's airlines and banned them from flying to the EU.

Nepal, which counts tourism as a major contributor to its economy, has suffered a number of air crashes in recent years, which have usually been attributed to inexperienced pilots, poor management and maintenance.



VENEZUELA PROTESTS



Thousand of anti-government students lie on the ground during a protest in front of the Venezuelan Judiciary building in Caracas on Saturday. *Inset*, An anti-government student holding a Venezuelan flag stands in front of a water cannon. Supporters and opponents of Venezuela's leftist government staged rival rallies in Caracas Saturday amid spiraling discontent at the country's stubborn inflation and shortage of basic goods.

PHOTO: AFP

Protesters end sit-in in Ukraine

AFP, Kiev

Protesters in Kiev vacated city hall yesterday after occupying the building for over two months as part of anti-government unrest sweeping Ukraine, in a highly symbolic gesture ahead of a new mass protest.

The building in Kiev's city centre had been bustling with activity day and night since it became the "head-quarters of the revolution" after protesters trying to oust President Viktor Yanukovich stormed it in December, but yesterday morning it stood eerily empty.

The evacuation was authorised in return for a last-minute concession on Friday which saw the authorities release all those detained in the unrest.

But it caused consternation among some protesters. The opposition still has a host of demands that have not been met, including a major reform of the constitution to reduce presidential powers in favour of the government and parliament.

Blast targets Egypt tourist bus; 3 killed

AFP, Cairo

A bomb tore through a bus carrying sightseers near an Egyptian resort town bordering Israel yesterday, killing at least three tourists and wounding 14, police said.

The bus was carrying 33 tourists near the south Sinai resort town of Taba when it was hit by the blast, police officials said.

A spokesman for the Israel Airports Authority, which is responsible for border security, told AFP that the Taba crossing had been closed in the wake of the blast.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

Militants in the restive peninsula have waged a deadly insurgency against the military and police since the overthrow of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in July.

Scores of policemen and soldiers have been killed in bombings in Sinai and the Nile Delta, but yesterday's blast is the first targeting tourists since Morsi was deposed.

The unrest has severely hit tourism, a vital earner in Egypt, which has been targeted sporadically by militants over the past two decades.

SPYING CHARGES AGAINST MORSI

Third trial adjourned after stormy start

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's deposed president Mohamed Morsi charged he was being muzzled in a sound-proof dock at the start of his trial on espionage charges yesterday, as his defence lawyers staged a protest walk-out.

The court adjourned the trial, the third for the Islamist since his July 3 ouster, to February 23 to allow the lawyers' syndicate to appoint new lawyers.

Morsi, who has shouted that he was Egypt's legitimate and elected president in hearings of other trials against him, said the court was trying to silence him.

"We are in a farce, all this because you are afraid of me. You are afraid that the president speaks," Morsi cried out.

"If this farce continues, don't come to the court," Morsi told his defence.

Mohamed Selim al-Awa, a member of the defence team, told AFP: "We have withdrawn until the court removes the glass cage, we will not get in the room today."

Morsi and 35 others, including leaders of his Muslim Brotherhood, are accused of espionage "for the international organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood, its military wing and Hamas movement."

If found guilty, the defendants could face the death penalty. Morsi, who was Egypt's first democratically elected and civilian president, is already on trial for alleged involvement in the killing of opposition protesters in December 2012.

He is separately being tried on charges linked to a jailbreak during the 2011 uprising that toppled strongman Hosni Mubarak. The ousted leader also faces trial for "insulting the judiciary". A date for that has yet to be set.

Blast hits train in Pakistan; 7 killed

AFP, Karachi

A bomb targeting a passenger train in southern Pakistan killed at least seven people and wounded more than 30 yesterday, officials said, the latest in a series of attacks this year.

The bomb went off near Unar station, 450 kilometres northwest of Karachi, and badly damaged several carriages.

Officials said the Khushhal Khan Khattak express was travelling to Peshawar from Karachi when it was hit by the blast, which injured more than 30 people and damaged hundreds of metres of track.

No outfit claimed responsibility of the attack yet.

Pakistan has endured a bloody start to the year with 114 people killed in attacks in January, according to an AFP tally.

On January 29 Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif announced talks with the Pakistani Taliban to "give peace another chance", but some 60 more people have died in Islamist-linked violence since then.

Three carriages were derailed yesterday and two of them were severely damaged by the force of the explosion.

The government says more than 40,000 people have been killed in violence since 2001, when Pakistan allied itself with the US-led "war on terror".

NEWSIN brief

200 feared trapped in SA mine

AFP, Johannesburg

Over 200 workers were feared trapped inside an illegal gold mine in South Africa, emergency rescuers said yesterday.

The workers went down on Saturday into the mine, which has been dug illegally behind a cricket stadium in the Benoni district east of Johannesburg. They failed to come out after a boulder fell and blocked their way, municipal rescuers said.

Britain braces for more floods

AFP, London

Sodden communities along the River Thames braced for more floods yesterday, as Britain counted the cost of a storm that claimed several lives and left tens of thousands of homes without power.

At least three people were killed in separate incidents in Ireland, Britain and the English Channel after violent winds and heavy rain swept in from the Atlantic on Friday. Pulling down power lines and disrupting transport networks across the region, the storm brought fresh misery to flood-hit communities in Britain, parts of which are suffering their wettest start to the year for 250 years.

Scots EU bid difficult: Barroso

AFP, London

It will be "difficult, if not impossible" for an independent Scotland to become a member of the EU if it votes to break away from Britain, European Commission president Jose Manuel Barroso warned yesterday. Scots will head to the polls to vote on their independence on September 18.

Iraqi Shia cleric Sadr quits politics

AFP, Najaf

Powerful Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, leader of a major political movement and a key figure in post-Saddam Iraq, has announced his exit from politics two months before elections. The decision, if confirmed as permanent, brings to a close a political career that began with his fierce opposition to the US military presence in Iraq, and has spanned more than a decade.

Ahead of legislative elections in April, Sadr's movement currently holds six cabinet posts as well as 40 seats in the 325-



A resident cleans up heavy ashfall which damaged houses and farms in Malang, East Java yesterday following the volcanic eruption of Mount Kelud in East Java on February 13. Three Indonesian airports reopened February 15 while four others remained closed, officials said, after a volcanic eruption killed four people and forced mass evacuations.

PHOTO: AFP

SNOW STORM

Twelve killed, flights grounded in Japan

AFP, Tokyo

A severe snowstorm sweeping across Japan has killed 12 people and left more than 1,650 injured, Japanese media reported yesterday, as the extreme weather sparked widespread transport chaos.

At least a dozen people have died in snow-related incidents in seven prefectures after the storm broke records, with Tokyo blanketed in 27 centimetres of snow, according to Kyodo news agency.

A further 2,150 people have been evacuated from their homes over fears the weight of the snow would cause their houses to collapse, public broadcaster NHK said.

At least 800 cars are stuck on a hillside trunk road in Japan and other roads nearby after they were hit by the snowstorm, officials said.

More than 100 flights were grounded Friday and Saturday and several major rail services were disrupted.

The storm is now moving northward and is expected to strengthen by today, Japan's meteorological agency said, warning of heavy snow, blizzards and avalanches as well as high waves in eastern and northern Japan.

Bhutto lashes out at 'stone-age' Taliban

AFP, Karachi

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the son of Pakistan's assassinated premier Benazir Bhutto, slammed the Taliban for trying to drag the country back to a "stone-age era", as peace talks between the government and militants continued.

Addressing a gathering during the closing ceremony of a two-week cultural festival in his home province of Sindh, Bilawal yesterday also urged the country to rise up against militants' threats.

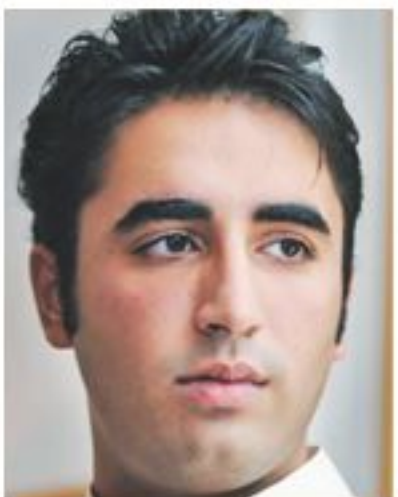
"The Taliban want to impose the law of terror in the country, but I want to tell them, if you have to live in Pakistan you will have to follow its constitution," he said.

"We don't accept the law of terrorists," he added. "Some people are trying to bring back the stone-age era in the country in the name of Islam."

Landmark peace talks between the Pakistan government and the Taliban aimed at ending a seven-year insurgency continued into their second week but critics have voiced scepticism while a fresh wave of violent attacks has also undermined the discussions.

Bilawal, who has spoken in favour of military action against the Taliban in the past, said he believed the talks were unlikely to bear fruit.

The Taliban's demands include the nationwide imposition of sharia law and an end to US drone strikes, conditions the government and army are



LOK SABHA POLLS AAP announces first list of candidates

TNN, New Delhi

AAP yesterday announced its first list of 20 candidates for Lok Sabha elections. Prominent among them are social activist Medha Patkar, Anjali Damania, Yogendra Yadav and Kumar Vishwas.

The Aam Aadmi Party has decided to field Ashutosh against Kapil Sibal. Mukul Tripathi will be contesting against external affairs minister Salman Khurshid, and Kumar Vishwas will be pitted against Rahul Gandhi.

Meanwhile, Arvind Kejriwal yesterday took a swipe at BJP and Congress, questioning their stand on gas pricing issue and their ties with industrialists Mukesh Ambani and Adani.

World must act on climate change

Kerry warns of bleak future if actions not taken

AFP, Jakarta

US Secretary of State John Kerry yesterday issued a clarion call for nations to do to more to combat climate change, calling it "the world's largest weapon of mass destruction".

In a keynote speech, one of a series planned in different countries throughout the year, Kerry sought to make both a moral and economic argument for greater urgency in cutting greenhouse gases.

He warned that low-lying Asian nations and their rich ecosystems were particularly at peril from rising sea levels.

Talking to a crowd of Indonesian agriculture, energy and marine students, he said the country and Southeast Asia were "on the frontlines of climate change".

The secretary of state, long a passionate advocate of the need to protect the environment, arrived in Indonesia late Saturday for bilateral meetings as part of an Asian tour, which has also taken him to South Korea and China.



ODDLY enough

Adultery key to happy marriage!

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Allowing your partner to sleep with other people could be the key to a happy marriage, psychologists have claimed.

"Outsourcing" areas of the marriage such as sex to other suitors could make a relationship work in the long run, they argue.

For marriages in which the passion and



intimacy has gone, Eli Finkel, from the department of psychology at Northwestern University in Illinois, advises embarking on an agreed "non-monogamous" relationship.

"It may be that your spouse is a terrific source of social support and intellectual stimulation but you haven't had sex more than twice a year for the last five years and neither of you thinks that's adequate," he told The Telegraph.

"So you could say, that's one of the needs I am going to fulfil elsewhere. I don't recommend cheating, but an openly consensual non-monogamous relationship, that may very well be functional."