

Last month was hottest May in history: US

AFP, Miami

Last month marked the hottest May in modern history, continuing a troubling trend of rising global temperatures, US government scientists said yesterday.

"This was the warmest May on record," said Derek Arndt, chief of the monitoring branch at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Centers for Environmental Information, during a conference call with reporters.

When global air and sea surface temperatures were averaged, May was 1.57 degrees Fahrenheit (0.87 Celsius) warmer than the 20th century average, said the NOAA monthly report.

The temperatures were the highest for May in the 1880-2015 period, "surpassing the previous record set last year in 2014 by 0.14 Fahrenheit (0.08 Celsius)," said the NOAA report.

One quarter of the United States is experiencing drought, primarily in California and nearby West Coast states but also in parts of the northeast and New York.

The monthly figures for May continue an upward climb for temperatures since the start of the year, when the planet's land and ocean surfaces have been 1.53 Fahrenheit (0.85 Celsius) above the 20th century average.

"This was the highest for January-May in the 1880-2015 record, surpassing the previous record set in 2010 by 0.16 Fahrenheit (0.09 Celsius)," NOAA said.

Last year was the hottest on record, the US agency has said.



Syrian refugees flash the victory sign as they sit aboard a dinghy carrying heading to the island of Lesbos early yesterday. Some 48,000 migrants and refugees have landed on Greek shores so far this year, compared to 34,000 arrivals during all of 2014, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

Kerry greets Muslims on eve of Ramadan

PTI, Washington

US Secretary of State John Kerry greeted Muslims across the globe on the occasion of Ramadan describing it as a season for heightened reflection, worship, compassion, and community. "For Muslims everywhere, this special month provides spiritual nourishment and reinforces appreciation for the universal value, and values of humanity," Kerry said. "As the holy month of Ramadan begins, I wish all Muslims a joyful Ramadan."

Thailand confirms first MERS case

AFP, Bangkok

Thai health officials yesterday said a 75-year-old man from Qatar was confirmed to have MERS, the country's first case after a deadly outbreak of the virus hit South Korea. Earlier yesterday WHO chief Margaret Chan had expressed guarded optimism over South Korea's ability to contain the MERS outbreak, saying it was now "on a very good footing" after an initially slow response to the

FB CEO donates \$5m to immigrants

CNN ONLINE

Mark Zuckerberg made a donation of \$5 million to a college fund for undocumented immigrants. The Facebook CEO and his wife, Priscilla Chan, gave the money to the "I'm In" campaign launched by TheDream.us, a national scholarship fund for undocumented immigrants. Zuckerberg wrote on his Facebook page that he sees the fund's efforts as an important step in educating marginalized

South Korean MPs approve new premier

AP, Seoul

South Korea's ruling party-controlled legislation on Thursday approved President Park Geun-hye's choice for prime minister, ending a lengthy merry-go-round at the country's No 2 job caused by political wrangling and corruption scandals. The National Assembly on Thursday approved the appointment of Hwang Kyo-ahn by a vote of 156-120. Two lawmakers abstained.

Global raids seize huge wildlife contraband

AFP, The Hague

Global police have seized "huge amounts" of wildlife contraband, including some 12 tonnes of ivory, as well as rhino horn and whale bones, in a massive operation across 62 countries, Europol said yesterday. Eight suspected kingpins arrested included a Chinese national involved in Namibia's biggest rhino horn smuggling case and a notorious elephant poacher

Hong Kong lawmakers reject 'fake democracy' package

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong lawmakers yesterday rejected a Beijing-backed electoral reform package derided as "fake democracy" during mass protests last year, leaving the city in deadlock over how its leader should be chosen.

The government's electoral roadmap would have given all residents the right to vote for the chief executive for the first time in 2017, but only able to choose from candidates vetted by a Beijing loyalist committee.

In an unprecedented rebuke, the proposal was voted down by 28 votes to eight, with the majority of pro-government lawmakers walking out of the legislative chamber without casting their ballots as defeat loomed.

"This result is not what we want to see," Beijing's foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang said after the vote, which required support from two-thirds of the assembly's 70 lawmakers to pass.

He added that China wanted to "press ahead with the democratic development of Hong Kong" in the interests of stability and prosperity in the former British colony.

But analysts agreed that Beijing was unlikely to alter its stance on the vetting of candidates, and authorities in Hong Kong have said the political reform debate is now off the table for 2017.

That means the next chief executive will be chosen by a 1,200-strong pro-Beijing committee, as was the unpopular current leader, Leung Chun-ying.

"I, the government and millions of Hong Kong people are naturally disappointed," Leung said after the vote, accusing the democrats of denying residents the opportunity to choose a leader.

Leung added it was time for the community to "move on" and focus on other issues.

Pro-democracy lawmakers did not cast their defeat of the vote as a victory, with some saying that it was just the beginning of a long battle.



Suu Kyi says Rohingya issue needs careful handling

AFP, Washington

In rare comments on Myanmar's persecuted Rohingya Muslims, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi urged caution on granting citizenship to minorities, saying the sensitive issue must be addressed "very, very carefully."

The Myanmar government is reviewing citizenship status and "should go about it very quickly and very transparently and then decide what the next steps in the process should be," she told The Washington Post.

But in an interview published online late Tuesday, Suu Kyi dodged a direct question on whether the Rohingya -- who have triggered international outcry as they flee the country on rickety boats in their thousands -- should be given citizenship.

"The protection of rights of minorities is an issue which should be addressed very, very carefully and as quickly and effectively as possible, and I'm not sure the government is doing enough about it," she said.

"It is such a sensitive issue, and there are so many racial and religious groups, that whatever we do to one group may have an impact on other groups as well," she stressed.

"So this is an extremely complex situation, and not some-

thing that can be resolved overnight."

The plight of the Rohingya, one of the world's most persecuted minorities, has worsened dramatically since 2012, when communal bloodshed left scores dead and some 140,000 people confined in miserable camps in Rakhine state.

The violence triggered a wave of deadly anti-Muslim unrest in Myanmar and coincided with rising Buddhist nationalism that has further entrenched animosity toward the minority widely viewed as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

In recent months, images of starving, desperate migrants hauled from vessels to Southeast Asian shores have spurred calls for immediate humanitarian action.

But pro-democracy icon and Nobel peace laureate Suu Kyi, who became a beacon of hope during decades of house arrest under the military junta, has been accused of failing to speak up for the country's powerless as she campaigns for elections due in November.

"We have many minorities in this country, and I'm always talking up for the right of minorities and peace and harmony, and for equality," she told the Post, speaking after a landmark visit to China.



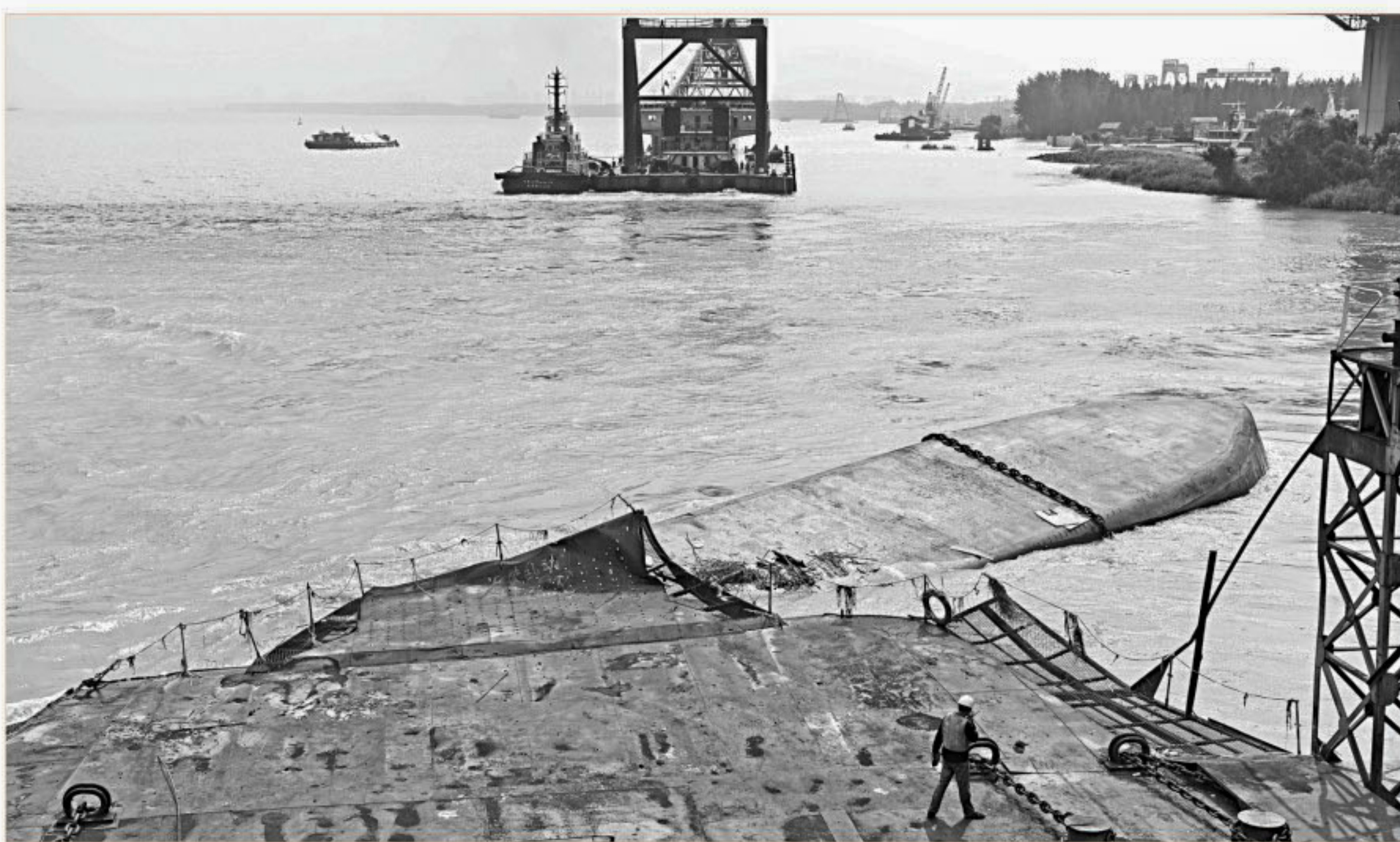
Pakistan releases 113 Indian fishermen

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan yesterday released 113 Indian fishermen after a similar gesture by New Delhi was announced to mark the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

The fishermen, who had been kept in a Karachi jail for nine months to a year, were put on a train bound for the eastern border city of Lahore from where they will cross back to their home country.

The release of the fishermen followed Indian PM Narendra Modi's phone call to Nawaz Sharif on Tuesday, offering Ramadan wishes and announcing the release of detained fishermen in an apparent icebreaking move after recent provocative comments heightened bilateral tensions.



A rescue worker walks towards a Chinese cargo ship after it capsized on the Yangtze river near the eastern city of Nanjing in east China's Jiangsu province yesterday, with casualties remaining unknown, according to state media. The incident follows modern China's worst shipping disaster on June 1, when 442 people died after a cruise ship also capsized on the Yangtze but in the central province of Hubei.

PHOTO: AFP

Indian money in Swiss banks falls by over 10pc

PTI, Zurich

Money held by Indians in Swiss banks fell by over 10 per cent last year to 1.8 billion Swiss franc (about Rs 12,615 crore), amid an enhanced clampdown against the famed secrecy wall of Switzerland's banking system by Indian and other governments.

The funds held by Indians with banks in Switzerland fell by CHF 215 million to CHF 1,815 million (1.98 billion in the US dollar terms), from 2,030 million Swiss franc, as per the latest data released today by the country's central banking authority SNB (Swiss National Bank).

This is the second lowest amount of funds held by Indians in the Swiss banks and follows an increase of over 40 per cent in the previous year, 2013.

In contrast, the money held in Swiss banks by their foreign clients from across the world surprisingly rose during 2014 to 1.5 trillion Swiss franc (\$1.6 trillion or Rs 103 lakh crore), from about Rs 90 lakh crore at the end of 2013 -- the record low level so far.

During 2012, the Indians' money in Swiss banks had fallen by over one-third to its lowest ever level of 1.42 billion Swiss franc (Rs. 8,530 crore).

The latest data from Zurich-based SNB comes at a time when Switzerland has begun sharing foreign client details after submission of evidence of wrongdoing by India and other foreign countries.

Final UN shelter in Gaza closes, many remain homeless

AFP, Gaza City

The UN has closed the last remaining shelter for Palestinians displaced in last summer's war in Gaza, a spokesman said yesterday, with families seeking temporary accommodation elsewhere.

The July-August conflict between Israel and Islamist movement Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, left 100,000 Gazans homeless and forced many to seek refuge in schools belonging to the UN's Palestinian refugee agency, UNRWA.

"Some 30 families left the shelter of the Bahrain school (in western Gaza City), where up to 1,100 displaced people had been living," UNRWA spokesman Adnan Abu Hasna told AFP.

It was the final UN building being used as a shelter for those displaced in the war, he said.

The United Nations has stressed the need for its schools being used as shelters to be able to function fully as educational institutions.

UNRWA gave between \$800 and \$1000 (700-875 euros) to each family to be spent on temporary accommodation for several months, Abu Hasna said.

He said that the amount of money the agency could continue giving families would "depend on donor support."

Reconstruction of the tens of thousands of homes destroyed during the war has not yet begun, although repairs have been made to a number of partially damaged buildings, UNRWA says.

Gazans who lost their homes are either staying with relatives, in temporary accommodation such as apartments, or living under makeshift canvas tents in the ruins of their bombed-out houses.

At the height of the conflict, some 300,000 displaced Palestinians were sheltering in some 91 UN schools, several of which were hit by Israeli strikes.

Israel maintains it needed to target those facilities because Palestinian militants were using the areas to store weapons and fire rockets.

The war killed 2,200 Palestinians, mostly civilians, and 73 on the Israeli side, 67 of them soldiers.

The international community has called for an end to Israel's blockade of Gaza, now in its ninth year, which puts tight restrictions on the entry of building material through the goods crossing the Jewish state controls.

Israel says it fears building material could be used by Hamas to build weapons and attack tunnels.

4 moderate tremors jolt Nepal

PTI, Kathmandu

Four moderate earthquakes with magnitudes between 4 and 5.2 jolted Nepal early on Wednesday, taking the total number of aftershocks to 320 after the devastating earthquake struck the country on April 25.

The first aftershock of 4.4 magnitude was recorded at 5.58am with epicenter at Ramkot, 7 kilometers west of the capital Kathmandu.

The aftershock was strong enough to get people out of their houses.

A 5.2 magnitude tremor recorded at 6.14am with epicenter at Sindhupalchowk district was shortly followed by another aftershock of magnitude 4 with epicenter in the same area.

The fourth tremor of 5.1 magnitude was recorded at 8am with epicenter at Sindhupalchowk-Tibet border area.

'UNDUE FAVOUR TO LALIT MODI' Congress questions Modi's silence, says he too is liable

TNN, New Delhi

Congress yesterday questioned Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's continued "silence" in the Laligate and asked him to come out of his "meditation" and answer the nation as he too is "liable".

"It is ordinance raj. All mantras have become tantris. The prime minister knows everything. But he is unaware when external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj was talking to UK authorities on Lalit Modi's travel documents," Congress spokesman Tom Vadakkan told reporters in Delhi.

"That means, there was consent of the Prime Minister (for granting travel documents to Lalit Modi)...he is liable. Prime Minister Modi should come out of political Vipassana, and keep truth before the nation," Tom Vadakkan said.

Asked about reports of scam-tainted former IPL chief Lalit Modi hosting Congress leaders Shashi Tharoor and Rajiv Shukla too, Vadakkan said they did not hold any official post unlike Rajasthan chief

minister Vasundhara Raje and hence, there was no quid pro quo.

According to media reports, ex-IPL chief had hosted Tharoor, Shukla and Raje at a Mumbai hotel in 2010. Raje was the leader of opposition in Rajasthan assembly then.

"Now it has come to fore that the then leader of opposition in Rajasthan, who is the chief minister now, her bills were paid by IPL. Those who are against us will say Tharoor was there, Shukla was there, (NCP chief Sharad) Pawar was there, but they were not leader of opposition. In Raje's case, it is proved there was quid pro quo," he claimed.

Meanwhile, Indian law minister yesterday sought to drag the Congress into the controversy raging over some of its key leaders' questionable links with Lalit Modi, saying the former IPL boss committed all offences during the UPA rule but it took no action against him.

He insisted that Swaraj supported Modi, accused of laundering money to the tune of over Rs 700 crore, due to "humanitarian concern" over the health of his wife.



ISI held Osama prisoner for 6 years: Report

PTI, London

Pakistan's ISI had held Osama bin Laden prisoner for nearly six years in Abbottabad and handed him over to the US in a staged raid, a media report said on Wednesday in new controversial account of the al-Qaeda chief's death.

Pulitzer Prize-winning American investigative journalist Seymour Hersh has already termed the official US account of the raid and Osama's killings as "a fairy tale."

The BBC report by Jane Corbin, who has investigated al-Qaeda and Osama for nearly two decades, claims there was a conspiracy at the highest levels of the US and Pakistani government to assassinate him. Citing Hersh, the report says the ISI was holding Osama prisoner for nearly six years in the garrison town of Abbottabad and just handed him over to the Americans in a staged raid.