

NEWSIN brief

Pak floods kill 36; 250,000 affected
AFP, Islamabad

Torrential rains and floods in Pakistan have left 36 dead and affected more than 250,000 people, disaster management officials said yesterday, with swollen rivers and water channels damaging hundreds of villages. Severe weather has caused havoc in the north and south of the country. Northern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, south Punjab, southwestern Baluchistan province and northeastern Kashmir region are the most affected regions, officials said.

Tunisia House passes new anti-terror law
AFP, Tunis

The Tunisian parliament adopted a new anti-terror law overnight Friday aimed at beefing up powers to confront a jihadist threat following deadly. The move follows two deadly attacks on tourism sites - a beach and hotel at Sousse in June and the Bardo Museum in Tunis in March. Under the new law, those convicted of terrorism could face the death penalty and expressions of support for terrorism are a jailable offence.



Flowing nitrogen ice glaciers seen on Pluto
REUTERS, Cape Canaveral

A stunning silhouette of Pluto taken by NASA's New Horizons spacecraft after it shot past the icy orb last week show an extensive layer of atmospheric haze, while close-up pictures of the ground reveal flows of nitrogen ice, scientists said on Friday. With surface temperatures just shy of 400 degrees below zero Fahrenheit (-235 degrees Celsius), Pluto is too cold for the ice to be made of water. Instead, Pluto's surface ice consists mostly of nitrogen. More details will come over the next year as New Horizons sends recorded data back to Earth.

Suspected Islamists kill 'at least 21' in NE Nigeria
AFP, Maiduguri

At least 21 people were killed in a new attack by suspected Islamists in a village in northeastern Borno state, causing many to flee, residents said yesterday. "The terrorists stormed Maikadiri around 9:00am and opened fire on hapless citizens," said resident Simon Templar.

80 die in Delhi daily due to air pollution
PTI, New Delhi

Government on Friday said that air pollution is killing around 80 people in Delhi every day, according to an international study released recently. In a written reply in Rajya Sabha, environment minister Prakash Javadekar said that polluted air is one of the several factors responsible for morbidity and premature deaths.



THE UNSEEN PHOTOS OF 9/11

Newly released images show former Vice President Dick Cheney and senior staff in the Emergency Operations Centre in Washington following the attacks on the Twin Towers and Pentagon in 2001. The staff, including the former Secretary of State Colin Powell (not in the pictures), National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, are shown in the secure basement. The Emergency Operations Centre is a bunker under the east wing of the White House which was built to withstand a nuclear attack. Cheney was in command when the four hijacked passenger planes crashed in New York, Virginia and Pennsylvania, killing 2,996 people. President George W Bush was visiting a school in Florida at the time of the attacks. He flew back to the White House to take control of the situation.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Turkey extends offensive Strikes ISIS in Syria, Kurdish militants in Iraq

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey's military yesterday carried out a new wave of air and artillery strikes against Islamic State (ISIS) jihadists in Syria and Kurdish militants in northern Iraq, in an escalating campaign Ankara says is aimed at rooting out terror.

The two-pronged operation against IS and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) -- two groups who are themselves bitterly opposed -- came after a week of deadly violence in Turkey the authorities blamed on both organisations.

The PKK blasted the air raids on its northern Iraq mountain stronghold, saying a fragile ceasefire that had been in place since 2013 with Ankara "no longer has any meaning".

After raids overnight, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said Turkish war planes were carrying out new daytime raids against ISIS in Syria and PKK in northern Iraq.

Meanwhile Turkish ground forces were pounding targets belonging to both groups with artillery, he added.

"No one should doubt our determination," he added. "We will not allow Turkey

to be turned into a lawless country."

The raids against ISIS, which had begun before dawn Friday, marked a major shift in policy towards the group by key Nato member Turkey, which has faced severe criticism from its Western allies for not doing enough to combat the jihadists.

But the "anti-terror" operation has now been expanded to strikes on the PKK in neighbouring Iraq, where the banned group's military forces are based.

Davutoglu's office said shelters and warehouses containing PKK weapons were hit in the northern Iraq operation, listing seven locations where the strikes had been carried out including Mount Kandil, where the PKK's military leadership is based.

Davutoglu said he had earlier Saturday spoken to Massud Barzani, the president of the Kurdish-ruled autonomous region in northern Iraq, who expressed his "solidarity" with the operation.

The violence in Turkey erupted after the killing of 32 people in a suicide bombing Monday in the Turkish town of Suruc on the Syrian border carried out by a 20-year old Turkish man linked to ISIS.

5.1-quake rocks Pak capital; 3 killed

AFP, Islamabad

At least three people were killed when a 5.1-magnitude earthquake struck northern Pakistan early yesterday, officials said.

The United States Geological Survey said the tremor struck at a relatively shallow depth of 26 kilometres with its epicentre located 15 kilometres to the northeast of Islamabad.

An official in the north-western town of Abbottabad, around 50 kilometres from Islamabad, said two women and a nine-year-old child were killed when their mud house collapsed.

The quake was felt in several cities in the provinces of eastern Punjab and north-western Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ghulam Rasul, a senior meteorologist at the Pakistan Meteorological Department, told AFP.



Greek bailout talks to start on Monday after delay

Athens officially asks for fresh IMF aid in step closer to bailout

AGENCIES

Talks between Greece and its international creditors over a new bailout package should go ahead on Monday after logistical issues that delayed meetings this week are resolved, a Greek official said yesterday.

The meetings with officials from the European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund had been expected to start on Friday but were delayed by organizational issues including the location of talks and security.

The finance ministry official said talks were now expected to get underway formally on Monday after the logistical issues were resolved.

Meanwhile, debt-crippled Greece on Friday took a step closer to a huge third international bailout by formally requesting IMF help.

The Greek government, which is seeking a three-year bailout worth up to 86 billion euros (\$94 billion) to avert financial meltdown and a chaotic exit from the eurozone,

Dozens killed as Saudi-led planes hit Taiz

REUTERS, Sanaa

A Saudi-led airstrike on Yemen's Taiz killed at least 55 people and left tens injured, Houthi-controlled news agency Saba said yesterday.

A coalition of Arab states, led by Saudi Arabia, has been bombarding Iran-allied Houthi forces in Yemen since late March in a bid to reinstate President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who has fled to Riyadh.

The Saba agency quoted a local source in Taiz as saying that the bombing targeted the Mokha area inhabited mostly by engineers and workers of a power station and some displaced families.

The number of casualties is expected to rise as rescue services are still working in the area and several of those injured and transferred to nearby hospitals are in serious condition, the source said.

Amnesty declared for Syria army deserters

REUTERS, Beirut

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad issued a decree announcing a general amnesty for military deserters who violated the country's compulsory military conscription law, state television said yesterday.

The decree, which was announced on state television, said the law that would lift legal penalties against thousands of army deserters applied to those outside and inside Syria.

The Syrian army, one of the region's largest, has been over stretched by a four-year long insurgency where it is battling on several major fronts Islamist rebels and ultra-hardline jihadist militants who have seized large swathes of territory. Many young men have fled the country or find ways to avoid conscription.

The army has been forced in recent months to withdraw from large parts of the northwestern province of Idlib in the face of an assault by a coalition of Islamist brigades and was unable to defend the desert city of Palmyra in central Syria, when it was overrun by Islamic State.

Some diplomats say the army is now focused on defending strategic areas like Damascus, Homs and strongholds of Assad's minority Alawite sect in coastal areas. With no end in sight to the war, the Syrian army's manpower shortages have surfaced in recent months by growing reliance on recruitment in loyalist militias in state-controlled provinces.

In recent weeks, the Lebanese Shia group Hezbollah has also played a more visible role in fighting radical Syrian insurgents in the battle for Qalamoun and nearby Syrian city of Zabadani, located in a mountainous region bordering Lebanon and close to the Syrian capital.



Kenyans gather yesterday near the Memorial Park in the city centre of Nairobi to watch US President's convoy; Obama lays a wreath at the Memorial Park commemorating the August 7, 1998 bombing of the US Embassy which killed more than 218 Americans and Kenyans; and the US president attends a private dinner with family members at a restaurant.

PHOTO: AFP

'Air Force One Obama'

Kenyans honor Obama with baby names

AFP, Nairobi

A batch of Kenyan newborn babies have been named in honour of US President Barack Obama's visit to the country -- with some mothers evidently hoping their offspring will be future high-flyers.

Already there are numerous young Barack Obamas living in Kogelo, the president's ancestral village, but soon after Obama touched down on Friday night two mothers in the western city of Kisumu took the unusual decision to name their sons after the president's jet, Air Force One.

"I have decided to call my baby AirForceOne Barack Obama so that we can all remember Obama's visit to Kenya because it is a huge blessing," said Lucy Akinyi Okoth, one of the mothers.

Another, Lucy Atieno, decided to simply call her boy AirForceOne.

"I have been told that it is the best aeroplane because it carries a very powerful leader of America who is also a Kenyan," she said.

The two Air Force Ones were among eight children born on Friday night at Kisumu Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Referral Hospital and named after Obama, said nurse Dolphin Akinyi.

Three girls also each got an Obama-related name. One was named Michelle after the first lady, another was called Malia, after the couple's eldest daughter, while a third was named Malia Sasha after the two Obamas girls.

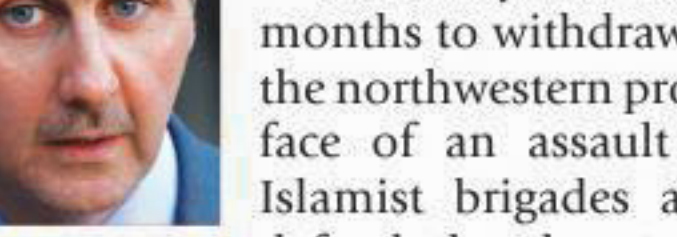
"I could not call my daughter any other name," said Wilkister Anyango, who took both Obama's daughters' names for her child.

So far there are no reports of children being named after Obama's armoured limousine, popularly known as "The Beast".

Anger as French beach closed off for Saudi Arabia king

AFP, NICE

King Salman of Saudi Arabia arrives in France yesterday for a Riviera holiday, with the closure of the beach in front of his villa incensing local residents. While the king's three-week visit with an entourage of nearly 1,000 is a boon for the local economy, the closure of a public beach for the privacy and security of the royal party -- along with illegal construction work -- has sparked anger. The king's inner circle will be put up at the family's private villa, while some 700 other members of his entourage will be accommodated at top hotels on the promenade in Cannes. Hundreds of other Saudis will be following the king on his holiday -- as is the tradition -- swelling the total number of Saudi citizens flooding into the southern French beach resorts.



Japan's new unique girl band

AGENCIES

Pop idols can come and go quicker than you can say Simon Cowell. But you can't accuse Japan's latest girl group of not having longevity. KBG84 -- a play on teeny boppers AKB48 -- have an average age of 84. The pensioners have played to sell-put crowds on a nationwide tour and have now been offered a record deal "When I first heard someone call us 'idols' I thought an idol meant someone who had lived a long life and was at the gates of heaven," pint-sized diva Tomi Menaka, 92, told AFP. "But in Tokyo they told me it was an entertainer -- which was a relief because I thought it meant I was on my way to heaven." The 33-strong group of singers and dancers hail from the island of Kohama in Okinawa and released a single called "Come on and Dance, Kohama Island", with a heart-warming video shot on the tiny honeymoon isle, which has a population of just 600. Okinawan islanders have one of the highest life expectancies in the world.



Whale massacre turns sea red

MAIL ONLINE

Their bodies lie beached on the dark shore, large slash marks penetrate the neck and sides of the whale as the blood mixes with the cold water. Known as the grindadráp, the brutal slaughtering of pilot whales in the Danish owned Faroe Islands took place on Friday. As many as 250 whales were reportedly massacred on two beaches in Bour and Tórshavn as locals used harpoons and knives to hack the all of the pilot whales to death. As the innocent whales are forced to swim towards the beaches, the locals begin the slaughter using an array of weapons, including sharp knives and harpoons. Each year, this horrendous event is carried out across the archipelago of the Faroes Island. Whilst the pilot whale may not be endangered, the level of brutality and depraved violence is shocking. The Faroese have been carrying out the annual hunt for hundreds of years, and although whaling is illegal in Denmark, it is allowed in the Faroe Islands. All the hunted whales are used for their food, with pilot whale meat and flubber being the main products used by the Faroese.

