

NEWSIN brief

1 killed, 23,000 flee as typhoon hits Philippines

AFP, Manila

A teenager was crushed to death as powerful Typhoon Koppu tore down trees and houses and unleashed landslides and floods across a wide area of the Philippines yesterday, forcing thousands to flee. At least eight other people have been reported missing and military and volunteer rescue teams were dispatched to Nueva Ecija province where rivers burst their banks and flooded several villages, authorities said.

Egyptians vote in parliamentary polls

AFP, Cairo

Egyptians trickled in to polling stations yesterday to elect a new parliament that will tighten President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's grip on power after he crushed all opposition since ousting his Islamist predecessor. The vote for the 596-member parliament will be staged in two phases ending on December 2, with Egyptians abroad casting their votes for the first round from Saturday.

Six soldiers, 20 rebels killed in Turkey clashes

AFP, Ankara

Six Turkish soldiers and about 20 Kurdish rebels have been killed in several days of clashes in eastern and southeastern Turkey, a security source said yesterday. More than 40,000 people have been killed since the PKK took up arms in 1984 demanding an independent state for Kurds.

2 teenagers arrested over Delhi toddler rape

AFP, New Delhi

India police yesterday said they have arrested two teenagers over the rape of a toddler, the latest sexual assault on a child in the capital to ignite public anger. The assault on the two-year-old, who is recovering in hospital, was the second within 24 hours after a five-year-old girl was gang-raped at a neighbour's house in east Delhi.

Exiled Tibetans vote for political leader

AFP, Dharamsala

Thousands of exiled Tibetans worldwide voted yesterday in an election for a political leader to sustain their struggle for greater freedom in China and head their exiled government. Harvard-educated Lobsang Sangay, current prime minister of the exiled government who is standing again for the top job, is the front-runner ahead of four other candidates.



A couple reacts as they arrive, with other refugees and migrants, on the Greek island of Lesbos, after crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey.

Backlog builds in Balkans

Turkey PM hails 'better approach' from EU on refugees after Merkel talks; five more die in Aegean

A column of around 40 buses packed with migrants queued to enter Croatia from Serbia yesterday, their passage to western Europe slowed by a new diversion through Slovenia as weather conditions worsen.

Many had spent the night on the buses, wrapped in warm clothes and blankets against the autumn cold. They woke to dense fog. "This part of the trip has lasted 20 hours, and we've been here for almost 12 hours," said Khair, 40, a former sales manager from the Syrian capital, Damascus. "What can we do? We're here and we have to wait."

Hungary sealed its southern border with Croatia to migrants at midnight on Friday, forcing them west to fellow EU member Slovenia, reports Reuters. Meanwhile, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu yesterday praised a "better approach" from the European Union in sharing the burden of the refugee crisis, following talks with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Istanbul. "Unfortunately Turkey was left alone by the international community in terms of burden sharing. We are very pleased there is a better approach now. The issue of sharing going forwards is very important," said Davutoglu.

Some 3,000 entered Slovenia on Saturday, en route to Austria and Germany, the favored destination of the vast majority, many of them Syrians fleeing war. But Slovenian authorities said they planned to limit the influx to around 2,500 per day in line with the country's capacity to register and accommodate them.

That threatened to create a backlog in Croatia and Serbia which in recent weeks have seen upwards of 5,000 crossing their borders every day. The Greek coastguard yesterday said five more migrants including a baby and two boys had died trying to cross the Aegean Sea from neighbouring Turkey.

MIGRANT CRISIS IN EUROPE

Iran nuclear deal enters new phase

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

The implementation of the nuclear agreement between Iran and the world powers has entered a new phase yesterday, US officials said.

According to a clause in the nuclear deal, the so-called Adoption Day was to happen 90 days after the agreement was approved by the UN Security Council, which happened on July 20.

As of yesterday, Iran is obliged under the terms of the deal to start the work of dismantling components of its nuclear programme that could be used to build nuclear weapons, according to senior US administration officials.

US President Barack Obama yesterday issued a memorandum to federal agencies to prepare for possible lifting of sanctions against Iran.

In the new phase, the US treasury department is also expected to issue some waivers for non-US businesses that want to do business in Iran. The waivers focus on banking, oil purchases, and investments in certain economic sectors, officials said.

However, none of these waivers will take effect until Iran complies with all the terms of the deal.

In another new step, the US, China, and Iran will issue a statement confirming how they will jointly redesign and rebuild the Arak nuclear reactor so that it can provide electricity, officials said.

Global crises reinforce Sino-Russian bonds

THE HINDU ONLINE

Growing tensions between the US and China over the South China Sea and the ongoing crisis in Syria are reinforcing Sino-Russian bonds, with Washington as the focal point.

Two write-ups — one in the state-run tabloid Global Times, and a commentary relayed by the People's Daily — underscore the growing rift, with serious geopolitical implications, between the Sino-Russian combine and the US.

The Global Times editorial is unusually blunt in warning the US not to test China's resolve in defending its position on the South China Sea. It pointed out that, "China may face a grave test imposed by Washington's escalation of tensions over the maritime disputes", referring to US media reports that that the country's military vessels would enter within 12 nautical miles from China's "artificial islands" in the South China Sea.



The write-up accused Washington of playing "rough against China and stress its hegemony", despite China's decision not to make a statement "about the expansion of its sovereignty due to the construction work". The daily then asserted that the "Chinese military should be ready to launch countermeasures according to Washington's level of provocation".

With the US as the common denominator, a commentary relayed by People's Daily, the government's official newspaper, backed Russia's military assertion in Syria to counter terror groups in that country. The write-up described Moscow's military involvement in Syria as "a sensible strategic move" in response to the "ineffectiveness of United States' strategic manoeuvres in the region in the past few years".

The daily observed that Russia's involvement was driven by concerns about "its own stability and security".

While offering diplomatic support, Beijing has, however, made it clear that it will not militarily involved in the conflict.



Tony Blair committed UK to Iraq war a yr before invasion

AFP, London

Former British prime minister Tony Blair was committed to joining the United States in the Iraq war a year before the 2003 invasion, documents obtained by a newspaper suggested yesterday.

The revelations focus on a memo allegedly written by former US secretary of state Colin Powell on March 28, 2002 to then president George Bush a week before the US leader's meeting with Blair at his ranch in Crawford, Texas.

"On Iraq, Blair will be with us should military operations be necessary," wrote Powell, in a document that the Mail published on its website.

"He is convinced on two points: the threat is real; and success against Saddam will yield more regional success," Powell said.

The Mail yesterday said the memo and other sensitive documents were part of a batch of secret emails held on the private server of Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton which US courts have forced her to reveal.



Palestinian students from Palestine Polytechnic University protest against Israel and throw stones towards the Jewish settlement of Beit Hagai, at the southern entrance to the occupied West Bank city of Hebron, yesterday.

Israel, US military ties back on track

Kerry to meet Abbas, Netanyahu

AGENCIES

Israel and the United States signalled they were putting disputes over the Iran nuclear deal behind them, announcing resumed talks on US defence aid for Israel as it hosted Washington's top general and a joint air force drill.

The allies had been looking to agree on a 10-year military aid package to extend the current U.S. grants to Israel worth \$3 billion annually, which are due to expire in 2017.

But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu froze those negotiations ahead of the July deal reached between Iran and world powers, which Israel deems insufficiently stringent and against which it had lobbied the US Congress.

"With the nuclear deal now moving ahead, Israel is also moving ahead, hoping to forge a common policy with the United States to address the continuing dangers posed by Iran," Ron Dermer, Israel's ambassador to the United States, said in a Facebook post.

The most senior US military officer, Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Marine General Joseph Dunford, arrived in Israel on Saturday in his first foreign trip since assuming the post on Oct 1.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State John Kerry yesterday said he would meet the Israeli and Palestinian leaders on separate trips to Germany and the Middle East after days of violence in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Israel and the Palestinian territories have been plunged in violence and unrest for more than two weeks, leaving 41 Palestinians and seven Israelis dead and raising fears of a full-scale Palestinian uprising.

BJP warns leaders over beef remarks

PEN Int'l stands in solidarity with writers over 'rising intolerance'

NDTV ONLINE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is "angry" with party leaders who made incendiary statements in the aftermath of the Dadri incident over beef rumours and party chief Amit Shah yesterday pulled up those involved.

Shah reportedly warned them against making such comments and conveyed the PM's views to them, sources said. Those summoned included Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, Union Minister Mahesh Sharma, party lawmaker Sangeet Som and controversial party leaders Sakshi Maharaj and Sanjay Baliyan. The leaders' words had triggered controversy, with 42 authors returning their Sahitya Akademi Awards, blaming the mood of "intolerance" in the country.



The leaders however maintained it was a routine engagement. Standing in solidarity with Indian authors who are protesting against "rising intolerance" in the country, PEN International — a global association of writers — has urged India to provide better protection to such individuals and safeguard free speech as guaranteed by the Constitution.

In a statement on Saturday, delegates from 73 countries participating in the 81st Congress of Pen International in Quebec City in Canada, also expressed solidarity with the writers and artists, who have returned their prestigious awards in protest. Simultaneously, PEN International president John Ralston Saul has written a letter to President Pranab Mukherjee, Modi and the Sahitya Akademi, urging the Indian government to take "immediate steps" to protect the rights of everyone, including writers and artists.

PEN International is the world's leading association of writers, working to promote literature and defend freedom of expression around the world.

SYRIA WAR

Russian strike 'kills 48 from single family'

AGENCIES

A suspected Russian air strike on a home in the countryside near the central city of Homs has killed 48 people from a single family, Syrian activists said.

The bomb shelter where the family was hiding was hit by a rocket in the western city of Homs, activists told Al Jazeera yesterday.

Meanwhile, Russia yesterday said its latest Syria strikes hit infrastructure used by rebel fighters and claimed it has information of growing strife between rebel groups opposing President Bashar al-Assad.

The defence ministry said its pilots flew 39 sorties and carried out 60 strikes in Hama, Latakia, Aleppo and Damascus provinces, slightly up on the previous day.

Moscow said it also destroyed a network of fortified tunnels in Talbiseh in Homs province used by Islamic State group jihadists to hide from the Syrian army and secretly move around the town.

Leaders fan sectarian flames

THE NEW YORK TIMES ONLINE

The Shia leaders of Iran and the Sunni rulers of Saudi Arabia traded insults over the deaths of hundreds of Iranian pilgrims near Makkah. The government of Bahrain, long criticized for repressing the country's Shia majority, expelled the Iranian ambassador, after accusing Iran of shipping arms to Bahrain and trying to foment "sectarian strife."

And a group of hard-line Sunni clerics in Saudi Arabia, fired up by Russia's intervention in Syria, issued a scathing sectarian call for holy war.

Events over the last few weeks have raised fears of an accelerating confrontation between the region's Shia and Sunni Muslims, with Saudi Arabia and Iran escalating their power struggle, extremists attacking Shia mosques in the Persian Gulf and armed conflict aggravating religious differences in Iraq, Syria and now Yemen.

But as the violence flares and crosses borders, national and religious leaders seem as eager as ever to stoke the fires, mobilizing followers using implicit or naked sectarian appeals that are transforming political conflicts into religious struggles and making the bloodshed in the region harder to contain, scholars and analysts say.

"This is unprecedented, and we don't have a road map," said Rami Khouri, a senior fellow at the Issam Fares Institute at the American University of Beirut. "When political dynamics fail, people turn back to religion. We are in this terrible moment of transition where sect is very high in

people's minds." "Radical individuals are deliberately fomenting this violence," he added. "And irresponsible governments allow it to happen."

The perils of sectarian polarization have been evident for more than a decade, since the United States-led invasion and occupation of Iraq. In the last few years, tensions have been inflamed by the war in Syria.

The latest violent turn has been "ratcheted up by the Iranian-Saudi conflict," Khouri said.

Troubling another fault line, Russia's decision to intervene in Syria alongside the government of President Bashar al-Assad, Iran and Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shia militia, brought calls for retaliation from hard-line Saudi clerics known as Salafis, but also mainstream Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which referred to Assad as a "treacherous Alawite criminal."

The Saudi clerics, in an online statement signed by 55 clerics, warned that if the "holy warriors" were defeated in Syria, Sunni nations would also fall "one after the other."

Hassan Hassan, an associate fellow at Chatham House in Britain and a co-author of "ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror," said that Russian involvement in Syria had the potential to be a "mobilizing factor" for Sunnis, and not just extremists. There are ordinary people angered by the war and convinced that the great powers, including the United States, are colluding to prop up Assad's government.

"You don't have to be a jihadist to think this is a dirty game," he said.



Bush ridicules Trump's fitness to lead military

CNN ONLINE

The long-running feud between Jeb Bush and Donald Trump escalated yet again Saturday, with the former Florida governor releasing a two-minute video on social media mocking the billionaire's fitness to be commander-in-chief.

"@RealDonaldTrump's absurd comments again raise questions on whether he possesses the judgment to be President," Bush tweeted.

The clip is the latest salvo in the Bush-Trump rivalry, which has often been marked by bitter and personal exchanges between the two prominent Republican presidential candidates. On Friday, Trump suggested Bush's brother, former President George W. Bush, shared in the blame for the 9/11 terrorist attacks because they occurred during his presidency.

