

## Floods kill 18 Chennai patients

Fresh rains heighten fear of more flooding

Rescue helicopters were grounded yesterday by renewed rains that spread fear in the flood-struck Indian city of Chennai, while the death of 18 patients at a private hospital added to the official toll of 280 confirmed killed in the disaster.

Waters that had started to recede rose again after a new cloudburst that sent residents running for shelter under trees and in shop-fronts. Parts of the flat, coastal city remained under up to eight feet of water for a fourth day.

In one of the most shocking incidents, 18 patients in the intensive care unit of the MIOT International hospital died after floods took out generators running life-support systems, Prithvi Mohandas, a doctor at the hospital, told reporters.

Tamil Nadu's health secretary confirmed the deaths but said the cause needed to be investigated, reports The Hindu.

Despite combined rescue efforts by the military and civilian emergency services, help had yet to reach many areas and city-dwellers grew impatient as it emerged that authorities had released water from brimming lakes without much warning.

Many residents have spent days stranded on rooftops since more than 345 mm of rain fell over 24 hours on Dec 1, the most since the British ruled the city then known as Madras 100 years ago, reports Reuters.

The government restored some commercial flights to a naval air base near the city of six million, but the main airport remained closed and completely awash. Car factories that export around the world were also shut.

# Germany joins Syria action

Parliament agrees to deploy 1,200 troops, reconnaissance jets

AFP, Berlin

Lawmakers yesterday approved plans for Germany to take on a direct role in the battle against the Islamic State group in Syria, answering France's appeal for help after the deadly Paris attacks.

Parliament agreed to the mandate for the deployment of Tornado reconnaissance jets, a frigate and up to 1,200 troops by an overwhelming majority of 445 votes in favour and 146 against.

The green light for the mission that could become Germany's biggest deployment abroad comes three weeks after jihadists killed 130 people in a series of attacks in Paris.

The atrocities prompted France to invoke a clause requiring EU states to provide military assistance to wipe out the IS group in Iraq and Syria.

Welcoming the German parliament's decision, French President Francois Hollande said it is "another example of the solidarity between France and Germany."

He yesterday arrived on France's Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier to meet air crews launching strikes on Islamic State jihadists in Syria and Iraq,

an AFP journalist said

A broad coalition of 60 countries has been battling IS since August 2014, although involvement in Syria has been more limited with some Western nations wary of how military action could actually end up serving President Bashar al-Assad's regime, which they view as no longer legitimate.

But reticence seemed to have melted



away following the Paris attacks, with Britain becoming the latest country to join the US-led bombing campaign over Syria on Thursday, striking an IS-held oil field.

After repeatedly ruling out the use of "boots on the ground", US President Barack Obama also agreed to send as many as 100 special forces to Iraq, with a mandate to carry out raids inside Syria.

In the Netherlands, which has been bombarding the IS in Iraq, the government too is coming under pressure to widen the aerial campaign to Syria.

Even in Germany, where there has traditionally been reluctance to engage in military missions abroad, the government's decision to take direct action in Syria has been largely met with support.

The package approved by parliament includes six Tornado aircraft which have no offensive fighter capability and are specialised in air-to-ground reconnaissance. A German frigate will be deployed to protect the Charles de Gaulle, from which French fighter jets are carrying out bombing runs, and the tanker aircraft could refuel them mid-air to extend their range.

A date has not been set for the deployment which is estimated to cost 134 million euros (\$142 million).

Meanwhile, a Paris bar where five people were killed in the jihadist attacks became the first to re-open yesterday, with customers defiantly returning to the site where black-clad gunmen sprayed bullets at terrified evening drinkers.

## Deploying ground forces 'hostile act'

Says Iraqi PM after US deploys troops

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq considers any country sending ground combat forces into its territory a "hostile act" and has not requested such a deployment, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said Thursday.

The US has announced that it will deploy around 100 special forces personnel to Iraq to fight the Islamic State jihadist group here and in neighbouring Syria, while two American senators have proposed tripling the number of US troops in the country.

Iraq "will consider any country sending ground combat forces a hostile act and will deal with it on this basis," Abadi said in a statement.

Baghdad "did not request any side... to send ground forces to Iraq," he said.

It is Abadi's strongest statement yet on the issue of ground combat forces, after he previously said that Iraq did not need them.

It was unclear how or if his remarks would impact the planned US deployment, part of efforts to combat IS, which overran large parts of Iraq last year.

The presence of American ground forces is a contentious issue in Iraq, where the United States fought a nearly nine-year war, and it is politically expedient for Abadi to distance himself from the deployment.

Colonel Steve Warren, the spokesman for the US-led anti-IS coalition, said Wednesday that the new deployment had been discussed with Abadi "for weeks".

## NEWS IN brief



### Now, Pakistan demands Koh-i-Noor

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A petition demanding the return of the Koh-i-Noor diamond has been filed in a Pakistan court, reports say. The 105-carat diamond is currently a part of Britain's crown jewels and is expected to be worth £100m. It is believed that the diamond was taken by the British when the East India Company annexed the region of Punjab in 1849. The news comes weeks after an Indian pressure group instructed lawyers to begin legal proceedings in London's High Court.

### Australia passes anti-terrorism law

AFP, Sydney

Australia's parliament has passed legislation to strip dual nationals of their citizenship if they are convicted of terrorism offences or found to have fought with banned groups overseas, despite concerns about deporting jihadists. Attorney-General George Brandis said the Australian Citizenship Amendment (Allegiance to Australia) Bill, passed late Thursday, updated existing law to reflect "the new age of terrorism".

### Corbyn passes key first election test

AFP, Oldham

British opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn passed a key electoral test yesterday when his Labour party won its first parliamentary seat in a by-election of Oldham West and Royton constituency since he took the helm in September. The win bolsters the embattled leader of Britain's main opposition amid mounting talk of a leadership challenge.



### US opens all combat roles to women

REUTERS, Washington

The US military will let women serve in all combat roles, Defense Secretary Ash Carter said on Thursday in a historic move striking down gender barriers in the armed forces. President Barack Obama called the move a "historic step forward," saying it would "make our military even stronger." Women already serve in combat roles for the armed forces of a few developed nations, including Canada and Israel, but officials have said demand from women for such jobs in most NATO countries is very low.



(From left, clockwise) An Indian man carries gas canisters through floodwaters on a street in Chennai; a rescue helicopter lifts a man off a roof of apartment buildings; and a man walks past wrecked cars damaged by floodwaters in Chennai, yesterday. Thousands of rescuers are racing to evacuate victims of the Tamil Nadu flooding, which has claimed nearly 300 lives since November 9.



PHOTO: AFP

## 'Do we have any other options?'

Kiribati envisages floating islands in 'crazy' climate plan

AFP, Le Bourget

Giant floating islands, castle-like sea walls and mass migration are among some of the "crazy" plans the leader of Kiribati has to save his low-lying Pacific nation from global warming-induced oblivion.

Scientists warn rising sea levels caused by climate change will submerge many islands around the world and the 33 of Kiribati, barely two metres (6.5 feet) above sea level, could be among the first.

Kiribati President Anote Tong is in Paris this week to try to convince negotiators at a UN conference who are aiming to forge an historic pact to tame global warming that they must unite behind the best possible deal.

But, fearing powerful nations will continue rampant coal burning and other activities that release heat-trapping greenhouse gases, Tong is preparing for the worst.

"I'm sure you think I'm crazy, but we've got a crazy situation," Tong told AFP in an exclusive interview on the sidelines of the conference, as he outlined some of the contingency plans for Kiribati's 100,000 people.

Among those strategies is the construction of floating islands, anchored to the sea, that could sustain up to 30,000 people for a century.

Engineers from a major Japanese construction company have travelled to the remote islands, which lie about halfway between Australia and Hawaii, to promote their seemingly science-fiction concept.

"The question is: do we have any other options," Tong responded when asked if creating the world's first floating nation was a serious proposal.

In reality, the floating islands -- complete with skyscrapers and resort facilities -- would cost hundreds of billions of dollars, and Tong understands they will not become reality anytime soon, if at all.

For quicker and less expensive alternatives, Tong has reached out to experts from the Netherlands, United Arab Emirates and South Korea for help in fortifying the existing islands against the sea's inexorable rise.

Among the options are constructing sea walls, as well as "land reclamation" and the building of artificial islands using sand dredged from the seabed.

"Our people cannot live on water, we have to stay above the water," Tong said.

But even those options cost hundreds of millions of dollars, impossibly expensive without outside help for a nation with annual economic output of about \$200 million. So Tong is also pushing ahead with a plan of "migration with dignity", training his people who mostly have lived simple fishing lifestyles.

"We need to get them prepared, educated, qualified to international standards, so they can begin the process of moving today, as a matter of choice, not to be struggling at the last moment to be getting out," he said.



## 'World must embrace nuke power to save planet'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The world has no little or no chance of escaping dangerous climate change if political leaders and environmental groups fail to embrace nuclear power as a source of low-carbon energy, leading scientists have told the climate conference in Paris.

Renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power offer too little, too late, and the anti-nuclear stance of some countries and almost all environmentalists will only drive many nations towards burning more coal, oil and gas, they warned.

"There is a sense of urgency. We need to reduce carbon emissions now and cannot wait for something to appear in the near future.

Nuclear power can be done safely, and with a relatively small environmental footprint," said Ken Caldeira of the Carnegie Institution for Science in Washington DC.

"We need to think about building a new nuclear power station somewhere in the world at the rate of about one a week if we

are to meet future energy demands without burning more fossil fuel...it's not an option to wait until we have renewables," he said.

Professor Caldeira made the appeal alongside James Hansen, former head of the Nasa Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York, Tom Wigley, a climate scientist at the University of Adelaide in Australia, and Kerry Emanuel, professor of atmospheric sciences at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

"The dangers of fossil fuels are staring us in the face. So for us to say we won't use all the tools [such as nuclear energy] to solve the problem is crazy. Nuclear, especially next-generation nuclear, has tremendous potential to be part of the solution to climate change," Dr Hansen said.

Dr Caldeira said that the biggest risk of expanding nuclear power around the world is the proliferation of nuclear material that could be used for military purposes, but that this can be addressed with appropriate regulation and safeguards.



## Fossil fuel subsidies exceed climate aid 40 to 1: study

REUTERS, Toronto

Wealthy nations spend 40 times as much money subsidizing fossil fuel production as they contribute to the Green Climate Fund to help poor countries adapt to global warming, a research group said in a study released on Thursday.

Eight industrialised nations - Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States - spend a combined \$80 billion a year on public support for fossil fuel production, but have pledged only about \$2 billion a year to the Green Climate Fund, Oil Change International said.

"Eliminating fossil fuel subsidies could be a massive double win," Alex Doukas, the group's senior campaigner, said in a statement on the research analysis.

"It would stop a huge waste of public money that's driving the climate crisis, while at the same time freeing up money that can help poor countries adapt to the impacts of climate change and make the shift to renewable energy."

The research was released during negotiations between 195 nations in Paris over a new climate deal, expected to lead to an agreement next week.

Developing nations have been calling for more support from wealthy countries so that they can produce clean energy, accelerate their economic growth and reduce poverty while keeping carbon emissions in check.

## Firebomb kills 16 at Cairo nightclub

AFP, Cairo

Assailants attacked a Cairo nightclub yesterday with petrol bombs, killing at least 16 people in the ensuing blaze, following an apparent dispute with the staff, the interior ministry said.

Police were hunting for the perpetrators of the pre-dawn attack on the El-Sayad club and restaurant.

"Sixteen people were killed and three wounded in the fire that broke out in a nightclub in the Agouza district after Molotov cocktails were thrown at the establishment," an interior ministry statement said.

"The preliminary investigation conducted by the security services found that there was a dispute between employees and other people who then launched fire bombs at the nightclub in revenge," it said.

A security source said the attack followed an argument between employees and a group of youths who frequented the establishment.

A thick cloud of smoke was seen billowing from the club after the attack. Firefighters extinguished the blaze before it could spread to neighbouring buildings.

The disaster is likely to renew concerns about safety standards in the country, where dozens have died in blazes in recent years. In July, 26 people were killed when a fire tore through a three-storey furniture factory north of Cairo.

## 4 Palestinians killed in anti-Israeli attacks

AP, Jerusalem

Four Palestinians wounded several Israeli soldiers in separate attacks yesterday before they were shot and killed by Israeli forces, the military said, the latest violence in more than two months of almost daily Palestinian assaults against civilians and soldiers.

In yesterday's assaults, three Palestinians stabbed Israeli soldiers in two separate incidents and later, a Palestinian rammed his car into troops at an army post in the West Bank, wounding two soldiers before he was shot dead. Since the violence erupted, 19 Israelis have been killed in Palestinian attacks. At least 106 Palestinians have also died.

## China pledges \$60b for African development

AFP, Johannesburg

Chinese President Xi Jinping announced \$60 billion of assistance and loans for Africa at a summit in Johannesburg yesterday, signalling China's commitment to the continent despite a recent fall in investment.

Xi said that China has decided "to provide a total of \$60 billion of funding support that includes \$5 billion of grants in zero interest loans (and) \$35 billion in preferential facility and export credit loans and concessional loans."

In a slew of pledges at his speech opening the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), he also announced drought aid for the continent.

"China is greatly concerned about the poor harvest caused by El Nino in many African countries and will provide one billion renminbi yuan (\$156 million) worth of emergency food aid to the affected countries," he said.

The two-day FOCAC meeting is the second time China has brought together African leaders since the forum was launched in Beijing in 2000.

Since then, China's trade with Africa has overtaken that of the traditional partners, Europe and the United States.

A fall in mineral prices has hit African countries who relied on Chinese demand, with large lay-offs by mining companies in resource-rich countries such as Zambia and South Africa.

"We are keen to explore cooperation with China to ensure the long term viability of African mining," South Africa President Jacob Zuma told the summit.

"This is important in light of the declining demand for commodities."

Mugabe, who addressed the summit's opening session as chair of African Union, lavished praise on the Chinese leader.

"We say he is a god-sent person," Mugabe said.



Xi Jinping