

Philippines typhoon
toll hits 81, set to rise

AFP, Manila

The death toll in the Philippines from Typhoon Mangkhut has climbed to 81 and could hit triple digits as searchers dig through a landslide where dozens are presumed dead, authorities said yesterday. Mangkhut swamped farm fields in the north and smashed houses when it tore through with winds and heavy rains.

Trump mulling US
base in Poland

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump said Tuesday he is seriously considering a request from Poland for US troops to be permanently based in the strategically important country on Europe's flank with an "aggressive" Russia. At a press conference, Trump said Poland is offering to pay US \$2 billion to help meet the costs of the base.

'Deputy of IS leader'
gets death in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

An Iraqi court yesterday sentenced a prominent jihadist described as a deputy of Islamic State group leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to death on terrorism charges. Ismail Alwan Salman al-Ithawi was extradited from Turkey earlier this year having fled Syria as the group's self-proclaimed "caliphate" crumbled.

Car hits pedestrians
outside UK mosque

AFP, London

Police in London yesterday launched an investigation into a possible hate crime after a car hit a crowd outside a mosque, injuring three people. The collision in Cricklewood in the early hours of yesterday followed the occupants of the car allegedly directing "comments of an Islamophobic nature" at the group, police

Koreas commit to 'era of no war'

Says South's Moon as Kim agrees to 'shut down missile test sites', visit Seoul

AGENCIES

North Korea said it would close a key missile test facility in the presence of "international experts" and potentially destroy its primary nuclear complex if the United States agrees to corresponding measures, South Korean President Moon Jae-in announced in a joint press conference with Kim Jong Un yesterday.

The two leaders made the announcement on the second day of a three-day summit, their third this year, as part of efforts with the United States to contain the threat of war on the Korean Peninsula.

Speaking to the media yesterday after a brief signing ceremony, Kim and Moon vowed to bring peace to the Korean Peninsula once and for all, something they first committed to at their April summit.

"The world is going to see how this divided nation is going to bring about a new future on its own," Kim said to applause from those gathered.

The two signed a document to strengthen



South Korean President Moon Jae-in, first lady Kim Jung-sook, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his wife Ri Sol Ju visit a restaurant in Pyongyang yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

ties between the two halves of the divided peninsula, reported CNN Online.

The document stated that Kim would travel to Seoul "as soon as possible," something no North Korean leader has ever done. Kim's father, Kim Jong Il, agreed to visit Seoul, but never followed through.

Both countries' defense chiefs also signed a 17-page accord in which the two countries vowed to "cease all hostile acts against each other."

"The era of no war has started," said Moon, the first South Korean president to visit Pyongyang since 2007. "Today the North and South decided to remove all threats that can cause war from the entire Korean peninsula."

Building on a growing rapprochement, they agreed to create a facility to hold family reunions at any time, work towards joining up road and rail links, and mount a combined bid for the 2032 Olympics.

The North also agreed to "permanently close" a missile engine testing site and launch facility in Tongchang-ri "in the presence of experts from relevant nations".

Trump welcomed yesterday's declaration, tweeting that Kim had "agreed to allow Nuclear inspections, subject to final negotiations" and adding: "Very exciting!"

The Kremlin said it approved of agreements reached by Kim and Moon, describing them as effective steps towards a political settlement, reported Reuters.

But experts were sceptical.

The North -- whose ballistic missile programme is banned under UN Security Council resolutions -- has carried out several long-range rocket launches from the site, also known as Sohae, but has also used many other locations including Pyongyang airport.

Satellite pictures in August suggested workers were already dismantling an engine test stand at Sohae, reported AFP.

"Kim is playing this brilliantly: verify that I dismantle a single site that I no longer need anyway while I mass-produce the missiles the site helped me develop," said Vipin Narang of MIT.

Moon also said the North could close its Yongbyon nuclear plant if Washington takes "corresponding measures" -- a significant caveat.

China denies US polls meddling, asks for 'respect'

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday called on the United States to show "respect" in their trade dispute and rejected President Donald Trump's claims that it was meddling in the US midterm elections by taking aim at his political base.

The comments follow a combative series of tweets claiming Beijing's retaliatory tariffs on US goods were seeking to influence knife-edge midterm congressional elections in November.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang rejected the claims, saying: "Anyone who has some knowledge of China's diplomacy will know that we will not interfere in other countries' domestic affairs."

"We don't want others to interfere in our domestic politics, and we will not interfere in the domestic politics of others," Geng said at a regular press briefing.

Accusations of election meddling are especially sensitive in the US, given the political maelstrom over



Russia's alleged intervention to support Trump in the 2016 presidential vote.

The US announced Monday that it would push ahead with tariffs on \$200 billion in Chinese goods, on top of \$50 billion already targeted.

This means the additional levies will hit more than half of US goods from China -- its largest source of imports.

After China retaliated on Tuesday with duties on \$60 billion of American products, Trump accused China of trying to sway the elections.

"China has openly stated that they are actively trying to impact and change our election by attacking our farmers, ranchers and industrial workers because of their loyalty to me," Trump

Malaysia ex-PM arrested

Najib will be taken to court today to face charges over allegations that \$628m linked to 1MDB entered his personal account

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's toppled leader Najib Razak was arrested yesterday and will be charged over allegations that \$628 million linked to state investment fund 1MDB ended up in his personal bank accounts, officials said.

Allegations that Najib and his cronies looted huge sums from the investment vehicle were a major factor in the shock defeat of his long-ruling coalition in elections in May, at the hands of a reformist alliance headed by Mahathir Mohamad.

Mahathir, 93, in his second stint as premier after coming out of retirement to take on his ex-protégé Najib, has reopened probes into 1MDB that were shut down by the former government, and vowed to bring Najib to justice.

Since losing power, Najib has already been arrested and hit with seven charges related to claims he pocketed some \$10 million from a former unit of 1MDB.

However his arrest on yesterday was more significant as it related to a central allegation in the long-running scandal - that huge sums from the fund flowed into his bank accounts before a hotly contested election in 2013.

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission said in a statement that it



had detained Najib as part of its investigations into the fund and "the entry of 2.6 billion ringgit (\$628 million) into his personal account".

Najib will appear in court this afternoon where he faces several charges related to abuse of power, the anti-corruption commission said.

James Chin, a Malaysia expert from the University of Tasmania, said Najib's current arrest was "much more significant" than his previous one.

When reports about the bank transfers surfaced in 2015, they represented a turning point in the 1MDB scandal and dramatically raised pressure on Najib and his inner circle.

The attorney-general later cleared Najib of any wrongdoing, saying the money was a personal donation from the Saudi royal family, and closed down domestic investigations.

But as allegations related to wrongdoing at the fund multiplied, the leader lurched sharply to the right.

He sacked critics in government, jailed political opponents and introduced increasingly authoritarian laws that analysts said were aimed at silencing any opposition to his rule.

Najib, his family and cronies were accused of using the stolen cash to buy everything from high-end real estate in the United States to pricey artworks.

RUSSIA-TURKEY DEAL

Thousands head home in Idlib

AFP, Beirut

Thousands of residents of Syria's last major rebel bastion Idlib headed home within 48 hours of a deal being announced to avoid a government offensive to retake the province, a war monitor said yesterday.

As air strikes intensified earlier this month, the looming threat of a Russian-backed assault had prompted tens of thousands of civilians to flee areas near the front line.

But many headed home after a deal was reached between Russia and rebel supporter Turkey to create a demilitarised buffer zone along the front line, as the first step in a wider settlement, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

"Around 7,000 people have returned to their towns and villages since the announcement of the deal on Monday, especially in the southeast of Idlib and the north of (neighbouring) Hama," said Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Britain-based Observatory.

At a camp for the displaced in the town of Atme on the Turkish border on Tuesday, dozens of Syrians held up banners welcoming the agreement.

One of the demonstrators, Marhaf al-Jadou, said he was tired of running from the shelling and air strikes.

"Enough of being displaced and sitting in tents. We want to return to our homes and our children to their schools," he said.

The United Nations has given cautious backing to the Russian-Turkish agreement.

'Too weak to cry'

5m children at risk of famine in Yemen as Saudi-led coalition carries out major offensive

CNN ONLINE

British charity Save the Children has warned that 5 million children are at risk of famine in Yemen as the Saudi-led coalition carries out a major offensive on a strategic port in the country.

On Tuesday, the coalition launched a campaign to recapture the rebel Houthis-held port of Hodeidah, according to state media in the United Arab Emirates, a partner in the coalition.

Save the Children has said that damage to the port or its temporary closure would increase food and fuel costs, putting 1 million more children at risk of famine.

Save the Children International CEO Helle Thorning-Schmidt said the "nutrition crisis... has serious implications" for the country's young.

"Millions of children don't know when or if their next meal will come. In one hospital I visited in north Yemen, the babies were too weak to cry, their bodies exhausted by hunger. This could be any hospital in Yemen," Thorning-Schmidt said.



"What happens in Hodeidah has a direct impact on children and families right across Yemen. Even the smallest disruption to food, fuel and aid supplies through its vital port could mean death for hundreds of thousands of malnourished children unable to get the food they need to stay alive," she said.

The port is a "vital lifeline" for goods and aid for 80% of the country's population, the organization estimates.

Alongside the collapse of the country's currency, the Yemeni rial, the price of food has doubled in the past few days, Save the Children asserts.

The United Nations has said an assault on the port city could, in the worst scenario, could kill up to 250,000 people. Around 70% of humanitarian aid passes through the Red Sea port.

Famine is just one humanitarian crisis facing the country's beleaguered civilians. Last month, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned that the war-ravaged country is teetering on the brink of a third cholera epidemic.

More than 1.1 million suspected cholera cases have been recorded in Yemen since April 2017, according to the latest WHO figures, with more than 2,300 associated deaths.



Indian police baton-charge Kashmiri Shia Muslims as devotees defy during restrictions imposed on a Muharram procession in Srinagar yesterday. Indian authorities yesterday imposed restrictions on movement in parts of Srinagar to curtail planned Muharram processions.

PHOTO: AFP

India criminalises 'triple talaq'

Prescribes arrests, jail terms for offenders as polls near

REUTERS, New Delhi

India yesterday prescribed arrests and jail terms for offenders in a campaign to stamp out instant Muslim divorce, or "triple talaq", as Prime Minister Narendra Modi looks to woo women voters of the South Asian nation's minority community.

The Supreme Court in August last year outlawed the practice that had allowed Muslim men to divorce their wives by simply saying the word "talaq", or "divorce" in Arabic, three times.

Yesterday's move comes months ahead of general elections next year at which Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) needs to broaden its support beyond its core Hindu base.

India's cabinet approved a decree making the procedure a punishable offence, as the government had struggled to pass the law in the face of opposition in parliament, even though the practice persists, Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said.

"The instance of triple talaq has continued unabated," Prasad told a news briefing,

adding that the government had recorded 201 such divorces after the Supreme Court struck down the law.

"In a secular country like India ... gender justice was given the complete go-by."

The ordinance allows for the couple to reach a settlement if the wife wishes, Prasad said, but how much jail time it prescribed was not immediately clear.

The legislation stymied in parliament sought to make the practice a non-bailable offence, with up to three years in jail.

Prasad said there were instances of men divorcing their wives over the WhatsApp messaging app or for reasons such as their poor cooking.

Muslims constitute just 14 percent of India's population of 1.3 billion, which is 80 percent Hindu, the latest census data shows, but critics say the BJP's Hindu nationalist agenda has polarised the groups.

The BJP has struggled to change a perception that it is against minority Muslims and lower-caste people, which could cost it votes in next year's polls, Modi's food minister, Ram Vilas Paswan, told Reuters in March.

Imran in Saudi Arabia in first tour as Pak PM

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Pakistan's new prime minister Imran Khan is meeting for talks with the king of Saudi Arabia, amid speculation he will use his first official visit to request financial aid.

Comments from the former cricketer's finance minister suggested Pakistan would turn to its major allies like China and Saudi Arabia, rather than rely on another bailout from the IMF.

Khan arrived in the kingdom on Tuesday and prayed at the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, where the doors to the Prophet Muhammad's final resting place were opened in a sign of respect for the visiting dignitaries.

He then flew to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia's port city on the Red Sea, and will later dine with the Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman at a state dinner, before travelling to Abu Dhabi.

Khan bemoaned Pakistan's financial situation in his first formal address as prime minister in August, saying that "never in Pakistan's history have we faced such difficult economic circumstances". The country's fiscal deficit ballooned to 6.6 per cent of gross domestic product in the financial year to 30 June.

He announced a series of austerity measures and raised taxes for middle and higher earners, but warned he would "have to take more debt to repay our obligations" to international lenders.

Saudi Arabia loaned Pakistan \$1.5bn (£1.14bn) in 2014, just six months after Islamabad's last bailout from the IMF. The money was used to strengthen Pakistan's rupee currency.

SHRINKING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN MYANMAR

Former columnist jailed for 'abusive' posts on Suu Kyi

AFP, Yangon

A former columnist for state media has been jailed for seven years for "abusive" Facebook posts about Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi, a court official said yesterday, the latest case threatening free expression in the country.

Ngar Min Swe was sentenced for sedition on Tuesday, Yangon's Western District Court spokesman Htay Aung told AFP.

"He was convicted... for writing abusive posts on Facebook against State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, making people get the wrong impression of her," Htay Aung said.

Myanmar has already faced widespread condemnation for infringing on freedom of expression following the jailing earlier this month of two Reuters journalists who reported on the Rohingya crisis.

Ngar Min Swe worked as a columnist under the previous military-backed government. He was arrested on July 12, the same day

he posted about Suu Kyi receiving a kiss on the cheek from US President Barack Obama during his visit in 2013.

The innocuous gesture came in for criticism from a conservative Myanmar public, especially supporters of the army-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party -- like Ngar Min Swe, who took to social media to lob sexist jibes at Suu Kyi.

Independent analyst David Mathieson said the sentence is yet another example of "the strangulation of free speech" in the country.

"Myanmar is in free-fall to resurgent autocracy and imprisoning journalists for colonial-era sounding 'sedition' is yet another warning sign," Mathieson told AFP.

Meanwhile, British foreign minister Jeremy Hunt arrived in Myanmar yesterday for a busy two-day trip in which he will visit the epicentre of the Rohingya crisis and meet Aung San Suu Kyi.

