

NEWSIN brief

22 killed in Indonesia floods and landslides

AFP, Mandailing Natal

At least 22 people have died and many are missing after heavy rain unleashed flash floods and landslides in western Indonesia, an official said yesterday. Heavy downpours since Wednesday triggered flooding and landslides that hit several districts on Sumatra island. At least 17 people were confirmed killed in the last three days in North Sumatra province, while five others were killed in West Sumatra, authorities said. Dozens of houses have also been destroyed.

At least 30 killed in Nigeria pipeline fire

AFP, Warri

At least 30 people were killed when a petrol pipeline caught fire and exploded in southeast Nigeria after a raid by suspected oil thieves, a survivor and officials said yesterday. The incident happened in the town of Aba on Friday when vandals burst the pipeline operated by the state-run Pipeline and Product Marketing Company. The spokesman for Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) said the victims were vandals attempting to scoop petrol from the pipeline.

IS takes hundreds from Syria camp

AFP, Beirut

Hundreds of people were taken by Islamic State group fighters from a displacement camp in east Syria during a jihadist counterattack against advancing US-backed forces, a monitor said yesterday. The jihadists raided the camp on Friday, taking "more than 100 families" including relatives of IS defectors and of jihadists killed in fighting, according to the monitor. The US-backed SDF launched a major assault on September 10 on the small stretch of the Euphrates Valley around the town of Hajin where they estimate some 3,000 jihadists are holed up.



US warns Yameen

Tells him not to undermine result

AFP, Colombo

The United States yesterday warned that action could be taken against outgoing Maldives president Abdulla Yameen if he seeks to overturn his election defeat. The warning by a US State Department spokesman came on the eve of a Maldives Supreme Court hearing on a petition by Yameen to annul the result of a September 23 presidential election which he spectacularly lost. "The US is concerned by troubling actions" by Yameen "that threaten to undermine the will of the Maldivian people, and will consider appropriate measures against anyone who undermines a peaceful transfer of power in #Maldives," deputy spokesman Robert Palladino said on Twitter. The United States had previously warned of targeted sanctions if Yameen's administration attempted to rig the September vote won by opposition figure Ibrahim Mohamed Solih. Yameen is due to hand over power on November 17 when his five-year term ends. He initially conceded defeat, but has since petitioned the Supreme Court to annul the result. The court's decision to accept Yameen's petition has raised the prospect of a fresh upheaval in the country's turbulent politics.



A marina damaged by Hurricane Michael is pictured in Mexico Beach, Florida, US, on Friday. The death toll from the hurricane has risen to at least 17 with fears it would continue to climb as search-and-rescue teams scour the debris of the Florida town that bore the brunt of the monster storm.

PHOTO: REUTERS

BLAST AT AFGHAN ELECTION RALLY

At least 14 killed, dozens injured

REUTERS, Kabul

At least 14 people were killed and 30 injured in an explosion at an election rally for a woman standing as a candidate in Afghanistan's parliamentary polls, officials said yesterday. Khalil Asir, a police spokesman in the northeast province of Takhar, said explosives were placed in a motorcycle near the rally, which was to have been addressed by the candidate, Nazifa Yousufi Bek. "So far we received a report of 14 dead and 30 injured, the victims include security officials and civilians," said Asir. No militant group immediately claimed of responsibility for the attack. Scores of people had gathered to listen to the candidate, but police said she was not at the rally at the time of the blast. Bek is one of 417 women contesting seats across the country, more than ever before, despite deadly suicide attacks on election rallies and offices apparently aimed at forcing voters to boycott the vote scheduled for Oct 20. Candidates, regardless of gender, are braving violence and opposition from social conservatives in a campaign seen as a test of the war-torn nation's democratic institutions. Five candidates, all men, have been killed in separate attacks so far. Another two have been abducted, and four others have been wounded by hardline Islamist militants, election officials said. Takhar, a province bordering Tajikistan has long been a hotbed of the Taliban insurgency. The Taliban has directed Afghans to boycott the upcoming polls.

Anwar makes political comeback

Wins by-polls with big margin, sets eye for Malaysia PM post

AFP, Port Dickson

Anwar Ibrahim won an overwhelming mandate in a parliamentary by-election yesterday, officials said, setting the stage for his return to frontline Malaysian politics and sealing the once-jailed opposition figure's remarkable resurrection. Figures released by the Election Commission showed he got more than 71 percent of the total votes cast in a seven-way contest which included a former aide who lodged the sodomy charges that landed Anwar in prison for a second time in 2014. "I am happy with the results. Allah bless us all," Anwar said after the victory, which marks the charismatic politician's stunning political comeback from prison to parliament. Winning the seat was a key requirement for Anwar to succeed 93-year-old Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who jailed his former protege and heir apparent on sodomy and corruption charges in 1998 when their relationship soured. Mahathir returned to the premiership this year after a shock election win, saying he would stay in power for only two years before handing the reins to Anwar. Anwar was in prison when he forged an unlikely



alliance with Mahathir in a bid to unseat then-prime minister Najib Razak, who had called elections for May amid massive corruption allegations. Polls opened under cloudy skies at 8:00 am (0000 GMT) and closed nine and a half hours later in the sleepy southern coastal town of Port Dickson, home to a sizeable ethnic Chinese community that has traditionally been one of Anwar's pillars of support. There had been little doubt the reformist politician would win the seat, which was vacated after a member of the ruling coalition stepped down to pave the way for Anwar's return. But he campaigned hard to secure the multi-racial constituency, promising voters development, clean government and a boost to local tourism. Political heavyweights including Mahathir have campaigned for Anwar during a comeback that was unthinkable even six months ago. The duo went onstage together at one campaign event, prompting wild cheers from supporters. After he was dumped as finance minister and jailed in the 1990s, Anwar led a reformist opposition movement while fighting to overturn his convictions. Mahathir, his mentor turned tormentor and now ally, came back from retirement to lead the Alliance of Hope coalition that won power in May.

Taliban confirm meeting with US envoy in Qatar

Say foreign troops main obstacle for peace

AFP, Kabul

A Taliban delegation has met with US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad in Qatar to discuss ending the Afghan conflict, the militant group said yesterday, the first time either side has officially confirmed talks. The direct negotiations -- a longstanding Taliban demand -- were held as Khalilzad seeks to coordinate efforts with regional countries, including Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, to convince Afghanistan's largest militant group to engage in talks. The meeting with Khalilzad and other American officials took place in Doha on Friday, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement sent to journalists. Taliban and US negotiators discussed a "peaceful end to the invasion in Afghanistan", Mujahid said, referring to the US-led intervention in 2001 that toppled the Taliban regime. But the group made clear that the presence of foreign forces in the country was a "big obstacle" to peace. Both sides "agreed to continue such meetings", he added, without providing further details. In July, the Taliban reportedly met with US officials, including Alice Wells, the senior official for the State Department's Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs. The reported July meeting followed an unprecedented ceasefire involving Afghan security forces and the Taliban in June, which fuelled hopes that fighting could be brought to an end after 17 years. But a wave of attacks by the Taliban and the Islamic State group in recent months has poured cold water on the nascent optimism for peace.



Snowstorm kills 9 climbers on Nepal peak

AFP, Kathmandu

Nine members of a South Korean climbing expedition were killed after a violent snowstorm swept them off a cliff on Nepal's Mount Gurja, one of the deadliest mountaineering accidents to hit the Himalayan nation in recent years. The bodies of eight climbers -- four South Koreans and four Nepalese guides -- were spotted near the wreckage of their camp by a rescue team Saturday morning, but strong winds were hampering the search effort. A fifth South Korean climber was initially reported missing, but officials later confirmed he was at the camp when the deadly storm hit Friday and also perished. "A mountain expedition of five South Korean nationals and four foreigners were swept off by strong winds at the base camp during their climb to Mount Gurja. (They) fell off a cliff and died," the South Korean foreign ministry said in a statement. The South Korean team had been on 7,193-metre (23,599-foot) Mount Gurja since early October, waiting for a window of good weather so they could attempt to reach the summit. Feted South Korean climber Kim Chang-ho, who in 2013 became the fastest person to summit the world's 14 highest mountains without using supplemental oxygen, was leading the expedition, according to a government-issued climbing permit seen by AFP.

PHOTO: AFP

Israel halts Gaza fuel deliveries

7 more killed in Friday's clashes

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel suspended fuel deliveries to Gaza on Friday in response to border violence which the Hamas-run health ministry said left seven Palestinians dead in the coastal enclave. The Israeli army said five were shot dead after breaking through the border fence and attacking an army post. But the Gaza health ministry said seven Palestinians were killed as thousands of protesters approached the heavily-guarded Israeli border. It said four died along the frontier east of Al-Bureij in central Gaza, two east of Gaza City and one near Rafah in southern Gaza. It said all the victims were males aged between 17 and 29. Israeli army spokesman Jonathan Conricus said around 20 Palestinians had crossed the border in an "organised attack" after an explosive device destroyed a portion of the fence. At least 205 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in Gaza since protests began on March 30. The majority were killed during border demonstrations, though others have died in airstrikes and tank shelling. One Israeli soldier has been killed over the same period.



Palestinian protesters carry a youth injured by Israeli forces at the Israel-Gaza border, east of Gaza city, on Friday.

Executed, then acquitted

Fair trial concerns plague Pakistan

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

On a brisk February night in the village of Ranjhay Khan in central Pakistan, Ghulam Qadir received a phone call: "Come and meet us," the voice said, "and we will resolve all of this." The 37-year-old television repairman had been trying for months to get justice for his young daughter, Salma. Months earlier, she had been kidnapped at gunpoint, her family said, and was only returned after Qadir managed to get an army officer, a customer at his small electrical workshop, to intervene on his behalf. Qadir went to attempt to negotiate a settlement with Akmal and his father, Abdul Qadir, both members of a rival clan. It was a trap, family members claimed. Qadir was tied up and beaten as Akmal and Abdul Qadir demanded that he stop approaching the authorities to try and have them arrested. Soon, matters escalated, as Qadir's family members arrived at the scene. Shots were fired. When the dust settled, three bodies lay on the floor: Akmal, Abdul Qadir and Salma, Ghulam Qadir's daughter. Police arrested Qadir, his brother Ghulam Sarwar and six others on murder charges. The two brothers were tried and sentenced to death in May 2005, the others were acquitted for lack of evidence. For 10 years, the Ghulam brothers waited on death row, insisting on their innocence, as their appeals made their way through Pakistan's labyrinthine justice system. Finally, on October 6, 2016, the Supreme Court declared that there had been a miscarriage of justice and that there was insufficient evidence to convict the brothers. They were acquitted, and free to go. But the Ghulam brothers had already been hanged on October 13, 2015, almost exactly a

At least 496 prisoners have been executed since 2014 and at least 4,688 people are awaiting execution.

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year earlier. Since Pakistan lifted a moratorium on executions in late 2014, following an attack on a Peshawar school that killed more than 140 schoolchildren, the country has become one of the world's most prolific executioners. At least 496 prisoners have been executed since then and at least 4,688 people awaiting execution. Pakistanis may be sentenced to death for up to 27 crimes, including murder, drug-related offences, hijacking, rape and blasphemy. The country's criminal justice system has long been challenged by several issues, from an excess of cases to insufficiently trained prosecutors, lawyers say, raising significant fair trial concerns. For Aslam, the death penalty is a justified punishment for certain types of crimes, particularly murder. He wondered, however, if it can ever be applied with confidence given the state of Pakistan's justice system. "There is no justice in this country for the poor - maybe there is for the rich," said Muhammad Aslam, 48, the Ghulam brothers' nephew. "Those that are killed, they cannot be returned to life. The law has acquitted them - but they are gone."

ALLEGED SEXUAL ABUSE OF MINORS

Pope defrocks two ex-bishops of Chile

AFP, Vatican City

Pope Francis has defrocked two Chilean former bishops for allegedly sexually abusing minors, the Vatican said yesterday after a meeting between the pontiff and Chile's president. The decision to expel former archbishop Francisco Jose Cox Huneeus and former bishop Marco Antonio Ordenes Fernandez -- the latest heads to roll in a country hit hard by the cleric abuse scandal -- is not open to appeal. Both were stripped of their priesthood "as a consequence of overt acts of abuse against minors", it said. The announcement came a day after the pope accepted the resignation of Washington DC archbishop Donald Wuerl, who has been blamed for not doing enough to deal with paedophile priests. Saturday's defrocking was "an extremely unusual, if not unprecedented" move, wrote Ines San Martin, a Vatican expert working for specialist Catholic website Crux. Defrocking is considered the Church's harshest penalty for priests, barring the offender from exercising any clerical duties at all, even in private. A total of 167 bishops, priests and lay members of the church in Chile are now under investigation for sexual crimes committed since 1960.