

4 Palestinians killed on Gaza border

AFP, Jerusalem

The Israeli army said its troops shot dead four heavily armed Palestinians on the Gaza border early yesterday, alleging one of them had managed to cross and throw a grenade at soldiers.

There have been frequent clashes along the Gaza border since the Palestinians began organising regular mass protests there in March 2018.

But yesterday's exchange was unusual due to the weaponry the Israeli army said was involved on the Palestinian side.

"The terrorists were equipped with AK-47 assault rifles, RPG grenade launchers and hand grenades," an army statement said.

A spokeswoman said "the army opened fire after one of the terrorists scaled the barrier and hurled a grenade at the soldiers."

No casualties were reported in Israeli ranks.

Conriscus restated Israel's longstanding position that it holds Gaza's rulers Hamas responsible for all attacks emanating from the territory, since they control it.

A Hamas statement condemned Israel's killing of the four Palestinians as a "crime". But the Islamist rulers of the Palestinian enclave made no claim of responsibility and did not say if the four were members of its armed wing.

Palestinian sources said the four men all came from the village of Wadi al-Salqa, close to the Israeli border.

Palestinian demonstrations at the border demanding the lifting of Israel's more than decade-old blockade have often led to violence and a deadly response from the Israeli army.

At least 301 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in Gaza or the border area since March 2018, the majority during the demonstrations. Seven Israelis have also been killed.



A woman looks at riot police gathered in the Tsim Sha Tsui district of Hong Kong, yesterday. Inset, Protesters throw back tear gas cannisters fired by the police in Tai Wai in the New Territories of Hong Kong. Police in Hong Kong fired tear gas on August 10 at pro-democracy protesters who defied orders to cancel a rally and blocked intersections across the city in "hit-and-run" demonstrations.

PHOTO: AFP

TANZANIA FUEL TANKER BLAST

At least 60 killed, dozens injured

AFP, Morogoro

At least 60 people perished in Tanzania yesterday when a fuel tanker overturned and then exploded as people rushed to syphon off leaking fuel.

The deadly blast, which took place near the town of Morogoro, west of the economic capital Dar es Salaam, is the latest in a series of similar disasters in Africa.

Morogoro governor Stephen Kebwe said the bodies of 60 victims were at the morgue of the local hospital, where more than 70 people were also being treated for injuries.

He warned that the toll could rise with victims possibly trapped under the truck.

Regional police chief Willbrod Mtafungwa told reporters there was a "huge explosion" after the vehicle overturned.

Witnesses told AFP by telephone they could see charred remains of motorcycle taxis and trees scorched by the power of the explosion.

Mtafungwa said the dead were mainly drivers of the taxis known as "boda-boda" and local residents flocking to the scene for the fuel after the crash.

A video posted on social media showed dozens of people busy trying to recover fuel in yellow jerricans.

The governor said the explosion was triggered when a man tried to pull out the truck's battery, while witnesses said one of the people looting the fuel was smoking a cigarette.

Police later announced the blaze had been brought under control.

Such disasters are not uncommon in Africa. Last month, at least 45 people were killed and more than 100 injured in central Nigeria when a petrol tanker crashed and then exploded as people were trying to gather fuel.

NORTH KOREA DENUCLEARISATION DRIVE

Kim wants to resume talks

Says Trump, claims Kim apologised to him for missile tests

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump yesterday said that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un wants to resume denuclearization talks after US-South Korean war games end.

Trump tweeted that in a letter to him, Kim apologised for a recent spate of missile tests, the latest of which came at daybreak Saturday Korean time, and said they were to protest these joint military drills.

Trump said he looks "forward to seeing Kim Jong Un in the not too distant future!"

"In a letter to me sent by Kim Jong Un, he stated, very nicely, that he would like to meet and start negotiations as soon as the joint US/South Korea joint exercise are over," Trump wrote.

The exercises began Monday and are due to last another week. North Korea has said the recent short-range missile tests are designed to protest the war games.

Yesterday, Trump again seemed

to side with Kim by criticizing the exercises, which are a cornerstone of US-South Korean military cooperation.

"It was a long letter, much of it complaining about the ridiculous and expensive exercises. It was also a small apology for testing the short range missiles, and that this testing would



stop when the exercises end," Trump said.

Trump has appeared determined to secure a denuclearization agreement with North Korea ahead of next year's US presidential elections, despite faltering talks since he first met Kim in a historic ice-breaking summit in Singapore in June 2018.

Even after their abortive second summit in February, Trump has been reluctant to criticize the North Korean leader.

Trump has repeatedly talked up his close personal relationship with Kim, as his administration seeks to resume the stalled denuclearisation talks with the North.

Washington and Seoul pledged in March to scale down their joint drills in an effort to foster denuclearisation talks with Pyongyang.

In contrast to Trump's dismissal of the missile launches, others in the US administration have voiced opposition to them.

After Pyongyang's fourth launch early this week, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Washington was ready to resume talks, but that the target of the "full, final denuclearisation of North Korea" had not changed.

A senior State Department official who refused to be named told journalists last week that the missile tests were an impediment to peace.

Death toll hits 95, hundreds of thousands evacuated

REUTERS, Kochi/Bengaluru

The death toll from floods in India's states of Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra rose to 95, official figures showed yesterday, as heavy rain and landslides forced hundreds of thousands to evacuate their homes.

Seasonal monsoon rains from June to September are a crucial lifeline for agrarian Indian society, delivering 70% of the country's rainfall, but they also bring in their wake death and destruction every year.

"Our entire village under water for the last eight days but still we haven't got any assistance from the government," said farmer Prashant Lathe, 35, from a village in one of the flood-hit districts of the western state of Maharashtra.

The district has lost access to all basic amenities such as drinking water, power supply, cooking gas cylinder and petrol for running vehicles, Lathe said.

In the southwestern state of Kerala, some 42 people died and over 100,000 affected people have been evacuated, the central government's disaster management cell said, after 80 landslides hit the state in two days.

The state was opening the gates of Banasuragar dam in Wayanad district yesterday to manage water levels and avoid serious damage. Last year, more than 200 people were killed and over five million affected in one of Kerala's worst floods in 100 years.

In neighbouring Karnataka, home to India's tech hub Bengaluru, some 24 people have died in what chief minister

B.S. Yeddyurappa said on Saturday were the worst floods in 45 years. Around 1,024 villages have been inundated due to the rains, several dams were reaching their full capacity, and over 200,000 people had been evacuated, he

added. In Maharashtra, home to India's financial capital Mumbai, 29 people have died this week.

The Indian Meteorological Department said heavy to very heavy rain was likely to lash isolated areas of Kerala, parts of Karnataka and Maharashtra, and some southern states might also see extremely heavy rain yesterday.

FLOODS IN INDIA

States of Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra worst hit by flood



Jeffrey Epstein kills himself in US prison

AFP, New York

Disgraced US financier Jeffrey Epstein has committed suicide in prison while awaiting trial on charges that he trafficked girls as young as 14 for sex, US news media reported yesterday.

Epstein, a convicted sex offender who befriended numerous politicians and celebrities over the years, hanged himself in his cell at the Metropolitan Correctional Center, The New York Times and other media said, quoting officials.

His body was found around 7:30 am (1230 GMT) yesterday and taken to a hospital in New York, added the reports.

The city medical examiner's office confirmed Epstein's death but said nothing about what caused it or the time of death. It said a medical investigation has been opened.

The 66-year-old's death comes just over two weeks after he was found unconscious in his cell with marks on his neck after an apparent suicide attempt.

Prosecutors said Epstein sexually exploited dozens of underage teenagers, some as young as 14, at his homes in Manhattan and Palm Beach, Florida, between 2002 and 2005.

They claim that Epstein was "well aware that many of the victims were minors."

The girls were paid hundreds of dollars in cash to massage him, perform sexual acts and to recruit other girls, prosecutors allege.

18 killed as Typhoon Lekima slams China

AFP, Shanghai

At least 18 people were killed and 14 others missing as Typhoon Lekima lashed eastern China yesterday, downing thousands of trees and forcing more than a million people from their homes.

Waves several metres high hit the coastline as the storm made landfall in Zhejiang province, south of Shanghai.

The deaths were caused by a landslide triggered by the storm's downpours in the municipality of Wenzhou, around 400 kilometres south of Shanghai, national television station CCTV reported.

"Torrential rains caused a landslide on a mountain that blocked a river below," it said, adding that the resulting "dam" created a lake which swept downstream when it burst.

More than a million people were evacuated from their homes ahead of the storm, the official Xinhua news agency reported. Some 110,000 people were housed in shelters.

The monster storm made landfall in the early hours in Wenling City, packing winds of 187 kilometres per hour, and was expected to churn up the east coast towards Shanghai, Xinhua added.

Footage broadcast on CCTV showed a torrent of muddy water surging through the streets and emergency workers rescuing a man trapped under rubble and fallen trees.

China issued a red alert as the storm approached on Friday, before downgrading the level to orange as winds eased on Saturday morning. Lekima has been downgraded from a super typhoon to a typhoon as it headed northwards inland.



People attend a rally to demand authorities allow opposition candidates to run in the upcoming local election in Moscow, Russia yesterday. Tens of thousands of Muscovites staged Russia's biggest political protest for years yesterday, rallying to demand free city elections in spite of a government crackdown. Russian police detained 72 people in several cities during the protests.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Myanmar landslide kills 41

Rescue operations on for about 80 missing people

AFP, Mawlamyine

The death toll from a landslide triggered by monsoon rains in eastern Myanmar rose to at least 41, an official said late yesterday, as emergency workers continued for a second night their desperate search through thick mud for the scores feared missing.

A huge brown gash on the hillside marked where the deluge of mud flooded onto Ye Pyar Kone village in Mon state on Friday, wiping out 27 homes.

Search and rescue teams worked through Friday night and into late Saturday, using excavators and their bare hands to recover bodies from the deep sludge.

"The death toll has risen to 41," township administrator Zaw Moe Aung told AFP yesterday.

Some farm animals, like cows and goats, were found alive, but "there are no humans left alive," he said, adding that the search operations will push through for a second night.

So far, 47 people have been injured while officials believe that about 80 people could still be missing.

Myanmar is battered annually by a monsoon season which strikes countries across Southeast Asia, leaving tens of thousands displaced from flooded homes and setting

off deadly landslides.

Aerial pictures of Ye Pyar Kone village showed shattered remnants of rooftops and other debris from the houses strewn next to trucks knocked over by the force of the onslaught.

Its hillside temple was left inundated, leaving the pagoda's golden spire peeking out from beneath the mud.

Htay Htay Win, 32, told AFP that two of her daughters and five other relatives had still not been found.

She only survived because she had left her home minutes earlier to look at the flooding nearby.

"I heard a huge noise and turned round to see my home being hit by the mud," she said, crying.

Rescue workers yesterday continued to carry out excavated bodies wrapped in plastic to waiting ambulances, wading through pools of water and ankle-deep sludge.

Crying relatives of the missing watched on helplessly under a steady torrent of rain, as nearby floodwaters edged closer to the village.

Torrential downpours have burst riverbanks across the country while coastal communities have been warned of higher tides. Around 89,000 people have been displaced by floods in recent weeks, although many have since been able to return home, according to the UN.



Republicans ready to impose background checks: Trump

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump said Friday that fellow Republicans will set aside resistance to restricting access to firearms by supporting background checks for people buying weapons in the wake of mass shootings in Ohio and Texas.

The progress in efforts to curb the United States' free-wheeling relationship with firearms came despite talks between Trump and the head of the fierce NRA gun lobby, Wayne LaPierre.

Republicans have long resisted imposing background checks on gun buyers, a measure that the powerful NRA argues would be the thin end of the wedge, leading to ever tighter restrictions on the constitutional right to carrying weapons.

But after 31 people were shot dead in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, last

weekend -- just the latest in an ever growing list of bloodbaths carried out by men with powerful rifles -- political momentum has apparently shifted.

Trump said that Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell was "totally onboard" with background checks.

Even "hardline" gun rights supporters in the Republican party

"understand we don't want insane people, mentally ill people, bad people, dangerous people" buying firearms, Trump told reporters at the White House.

He said he'd spoken with LaPierre and had "a good

talk."

But despite describing the NRA as "phenomenal people" and insisting that no other president has been more supportive of gun rights, Trump said "we need meaningful background checks so that sick people don't get guns."



GUN VIOLENCE IN US