

NEWS IN brief

Strong quake kills 6 in south Philippines

AFP, Manila

A powerful earthquake struck the southern Philippines yesterday, killing six people, cracking buildings and injuring dozens in a region still reeling from a previous deadly tremor. Terrified locals ran into the streets after the 6.6-magnitude quake, which hit the island of Mindanao as schools and offices opened for the day. The shaking lasted up to a minute in some areas, damaging homes and classrooms in a region where hundreds are still displaced by a quake earlier this month.

Indian boy dies after 3 days stuck in well

AFP, New Delhi

The body of a two-year-old boy trapped 26-metres (85-feet) down a well in southern India for more than three days was recovered yesterday, authorities said. Sujith Wilson was the second toddler in four months to grab nationwide attention after falling into the 30-centimetre (one-foot) diameter pipe while playing near his home in Tiruchirappalli district of Tamil Nadu state on Friday. "The body was retrieved using special equipment," a district official said.

13 militants killed in North Sinai: Egypt

AFP, Cairo

Egyptian security forces killed 13 suspected militants in a raid in the restive North Sinai, the interior ministry said yesterday. Police raided a hideout in a deserted farm house in El-Arish, provincial capital of North Sinai, triggering a shootout, the ministry said in a statement. Weapons including explosive devices, rifles and guns were found, it said, without giving the date of the operation.



People run during an attack on a camp set up by anti-government demonstrators in central Beirut, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

14 more killed in Iraq

Security forces open fire on protesters in Karbala; hundreds injured

AGENCIES

Iraq's security forces fired live ammunition early yesterday to disperse an anti-government demonstration in the southern holy city of Karbala, killing at least 14 protesters and wounding hundreds of others, medical sources said.

But Karbala's police chief denied in a statement that any protesters had been killed and said only one person died in an unrelated criminal incident, calling footage of security forces shooting at protesters on social media fabricated and designed to "incite the street".

Security officials said the violence happened in Karbala's Education Square, about two kilometres (1.2 miles) from the Imam Hussain Shrine, where demonstrators set up tents for their sit-in.

A witness said hundreds of protesters were in the encampment when live rounds were fired towards them from a passing car.

Then masked gunmen in black plainclothes arrived and started

shooting at the demonstrators, the witness said, speaking on condition of anonymity, fearing for his safety. Tents caught fire, igniting a blaze, he added.

Karbala's Governor Nassif al-Khattabi denied reports about Iraqi protester deaths. "Security forces have exercised utmost restraint," he said.

The governor accused protesters of "carrying weapons and an

PROTESTS OVER JOBS, GRAFT

Populist cleric Sadr joins protesters in Iraq's Najaf

240 died since protests broke out on Oct 1 over unemployment, corruption

internationally prohibited bomb", without elaborating, reported Al Jazeera online.

Karbala Police Chief Ahmed Zweini accused protesters of hurling petrol-bombs at security forces.

Meanwhile, populist Iraqi cleric Moqtada al-Sadr joined thousands of anti-government demonstrators yesterday in the holy city of Najaf, an

AFP correspondent said. Sadr, who has backed the protests, was spotted shortly after airport sources told AFP the militiaman-turned-leader had landed in his native Najaf from Iran.

Like the curfews, reform proposals by Prime Minister Adel Abd al-Mahdi have done little to stamp out the rallies, which are now demanding a total government overhaul.

At least 240 people have died and 8,000 left wounded since demonstrations broke out on October 1 over unemployment and corruption, before evolving into calls for government change.

In Iraq's southern cities of Hilla, Diwaniyah, Kut and Nasiriyah, most government offices remained closed yesterday for lack of staff.

Students gathered in those cities for their third day of demonstrations, ignoring orders by the higher education minister to return to class.

Parliament was set to meet again yesterday to discuss reforms, a day after it voted to dissolve provincial councils and summon Mahdi for questioning.

Dozens of clashes erupt as EU MPs visit Kashmir

Militants kill trucker; grenade attack leaves 20 hurt

AFP, Srinagar

Dozens of clashes erupted in Indian Kashmir yesterday, officials said, as a delegation of mostly far-right European lawmakers paid a contentious visit to the restive region stripped of its autonomy in August.

With a curfew in many parts of the main city, Srinagar, police fired tear gas and shotgun pellets as around 40 clashes flared across the Kashmir Valley, officials said.

It was unclear if there were any injuries.

Late Monday militants also shot dead a truck driver, the sixth such killing targeting the vital apple sector, while a grenade injured 20 people elsewhere, authorities said.

The delegation of around 30 European lawmakers -- including far-right deputies from Poland, France, Germany and Britain -- met Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday, prompted accusations that it aimed to blunt criticism of New

Delhi over Kashmir.

One MEP from Britain's centrist Liberal Democrats, Chris Davies, said the Indian government withdrew his invitation after he insisted on being able to talk to locals without a police escort.

"I am not prepared to take part in a PR stunt for the Modi government and pretend that all is well," Davies said in a statement.

The delegation included members of the nationalist, anti-immigration and eurosceptic Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, France's National Rally, the Brexit Party and Poland's Law and Justice.

Kashmir has been split between India and Pakistan since 1947, and on August 5 New Delhi revoked the special status of the part of the region that it administers.

Since then New Delhi has barred scores of its own politicians and a US senator from visiting the Himalayan region. Visits by foreign journalists are also off limits.

Former Pakistan PM Sharif fighting for his life: doctor

HC extends his bail on medical grounds

AFP, Islamabad

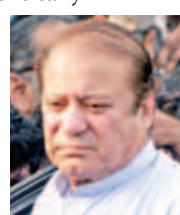
Former Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif is "critically unwell", his doctor said yesterday, days after the three-time leader now serving a prison sentence for corruption suffered a minor heart attack.

Sharif is currently in hospital in the eastern city of Lahore, where he is "critically unwell" and is "fighting the battle for his health & life," his personal physician, Adnan Khan, tweeted yesterday.

As his condition worsened, the Islamabad High Court yesterday effectively extended his bail for two months to allow him access to medical care.

Sharif remains on a "stop list", meaning he cannot leave the country for the time being.

Members of Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party meanwhile bristled at the former premier's treatment by Prime Minister Imran Khan's government, who had boasted of depriving his rival of



basic amenities in prison.

"Sharif's condition deteriorated because of Imran Khan's vengeance against the former Prime Minister. Let it be known to everyone that, God forbid, if something happens to Sharif, Khan will be responsible for the consequences," senior leader PML-N leader Ahsan Iqbal told reporters.

In addition to the minor heart attack, Sharif has a low platelet count, both of which are being further complicated by "deteriorating kidney functions", Adnan Khan said.

He said poor blood sugar and blood pressure control was taking its toll, adding that "establishing a definitive diagnosis and subsequent management poses considerable risk to #NawazSharif's fragile and unstable health".

The 69-year-old former premier, known as the "Lion of Punjab", was first taken to hospital last week when his blood platelet count dropped to dangerous levels.



Security forces push demonstrators during scuffles in front of the Presidential Palace, known as La Moneda, in Santiago, Chile, on Monday. Chilean President Sebastian Pinera unveiled a major cabinet reshuffle on Monday as he battles to find a response to more than a week of street protests that have left at least 20 people dead.

PHOTO: AFP

'Day zero' looms in S Africa

Govt imposes water restrictions as effects of climate change creep in

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa's water affairs minister on Monday urged citizens to use water sparingly as water restrictions and the effects of climate change creep in.

Intermittent water shortages have left neighbourhoods in the central and northern regions of South Africa without water over the past week as the country reels from a string of heatwaves.

"We have to immediately begin to disaster proof South Africa and South Africa's security of water," Sisulu told journalists in Johannesburg.

"We are working hard to avoid the much-dreaded Day Zero phenomenon and instead we are announcing restrictions on water usage."

South Africa has imposed water restrictions in major metros, as a cautionary measure.

In the capital Pretoria, taps ran dry last week in the suburb of Laudium as a result of dwindling supplies, infrastructure failure among other issues at the country's largest water utility and supplies, Rand water.



ensure water flows in the urban areas.

But many parts of the country including the Eastern and Northern Cape, have endured drought conditions for months, resulting in livestock deaths and failed crops.

"Climate change is a reality and it is affecting South Africa in this way," Sisulu noted.

Dam levels across the country have dropped by 10 to 60 percent compared to 2018, according to a recent report by the water department.

The company, in charge of water restrictions, said that owing to high demand it would over time have to intensify water restrictions by slowing the output from reservoirs.

Sisulu called for calm saying "there is no need to panic, but there is a need to be prudent in the way that we use water".

The earliest rains were expected in December, "so we are in for a long dry season," that would be "getting longer, more intense and more frequent," she said.

The minister will announce a water plan next month.

South Africa is a water-scarce country and it recorded the lowest annual rainfall in more than a century in 2015.

TRUMP IMPEACHMENT INQUIRY

New witness's testimony shakes White House

AFP, Washington

A new witness in the impeachment investigation of President Donald Trump rocked the White House Tuesday with testimony that he personally witnessed officials pressuring Ukraine to help Trump politically.

National Security Council Ukraine expert Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman, a decorated Iraq war veteran, was to tell the House inquiry that he twice reported concerns about improper White House efforts to get Kiev to open investigations designed to help Trump politically.

In explosive prepared testimony, Vindman said he personally listened to Trump pressure Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky in a July 25 phone call. His testimony, released late Monday, offers some of the strongest evidence yet for accusations that Trump abused his presidential powers and broke election laws to gain Kiev's support for his re-election effort next year.

Vindman says in the prepared testimony that a senior US diplomat close to Trump, ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland, was the first person he witnessed pressuring Ukraine for the investigations, in a July 10 meeting with Ukraine national security official Oleksandr Danylyuk.

"Following this meeting, there was a scheduled debriefing during which Amb. Sondland emphasized the importance that Ukraine deliver the investigations into the 2016 election, the Bidens and Burisma," he says, referring to a Ukraine energy company on whose board Biden's son Hunter sat while his father was vice president.

Vindman reported both his concerns about the July 10 meeting and the July 25 call to the chief attorney of the NSC.

POLITICAL CHAOS IN LEBANON

PM quits as crisis hits 'dead end'

REUTERS, Beirut

Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri said he would submit his resignation yesterday, declaring he had hit a "dead end" in trying to resolve a crisis unleashed by huge protests against Lebanon's ruling elite.

The Sunni politician addressed the nation in a televised address after a mob loyal to Shia Muslim groups Hezbollah and Amal attacked and destroyed a protest camp set up by anti-government demonstrators in Beirut.

Lebanon has been paralysed by the unprecedented wave of protests against the rampant corruption of the political class that has collectively led Lebanon into the worst economic crisis since the 1975-90 civil war.

"For 13 days the Lebanese people have waited for a decision for a political solution that stops the deterioration (of the economy). And I have tried, during this period, to find a way out, through which to listen to the voice of the people," Hariri said in his speech.

"It is time for us to have a big shock to face the crisis. I am going to the Baabda (presidential) palace to present the resignation of the government. To all partners in political life, our responsibility today is how we protect Lebanon and revive its economy."

The turmoil has worsened Lebanon's acute economic crisis, with financial strains leading to a scarcity of hard currency and a weakening of the pegged Lebanese pound. Lebanese government bonds tumbled on the turmoil.

The show of force in Beirut came after Hezbollah leader Sayed Hassan Nasrallah said last week roads closed by protesters should be reopened and suggested the demonstrators were financed by its foreign enemies and implementing their agenda.

Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri said he would submit his resignation yesterday, declaring he had hit a "dead end" in trying to resolve a crisis unleashed by huge protests against Lebanon's ruling elite.

The Sunni politician addressed the nation in a televised address after a mob loyal to Shia Muslim groups Hezbollah and Amal attacked and destroyed a protest camp set up by anti-government demonstrators in Beirut.

Lebanon has been paralysed by the unprecedented wave of protests against the rampant corruption of the political class that has collectively led Lebanon into the worst economic crisis since the 1975-90 civil war.

"For 13 days the Lebanese people have waited for a decision for a political solution that stops the deterioration (of the economy). And I have tried, during this period, to find a way out, through which to listen to the voice of the people," Hariri said in his speech.

"It is time for us to have a big shock to face the crisis. I am going to the Baabda (presidential) palace to present the resignation of the government. To all partners in political life, our responsibility today is how we protect Lebanon and revive its economy."

The turmoil has worsened Lebanon's acute economic crisis, with financial strains leading to a scarcity of hard currency and a weakening of the pegged Lebanese pound. Lebanese government bonds tumbled on the turmoil.

The show of force in Beirut came after Hezbollah leader Sayed Hassan Nasrallah said last week roads closed by protesters should be reopened and suggested the demonstrators were financed by its foreign enemies and implementing their agenda.

SOURCE: AFP