

22 killed in South Korea rain, flood

AFP, Seoul

At least 22 people have died and 14 are missing after heavy rain caused flooding and landslides in South Korea, said officials yesterday, with thousands more ordered to evacuate their homes.

South Korea is at the peak of its summer monsoon season and there has been heavy rainfall for the last three days, triggering widespread flooding and landslides, and causing a major dam to overflow.

The majority of the casualties -- including 16 dead and nine missing -- were from North Gyeongsang province, largely due to massive landslides in the mountainous area that engulfed houses with people inside.

In the most severely affected areas, "entire houses were swept away whole", one emergency responder told the Yonhap News Agency.



Saint-Kitts-and-Nevis-flagged bulker TK Majestic, carrying grain under the UN's Black Sea Grain Initiative, waits in the southern anchorage of the Bosphorus in Istanbul, Turkey yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

CROSSBORDER ATTACKS

Pak army threatens response

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's army said on Friday it was seriously concerned that militants had found safe havens in neighbouring Afghanistan and threatened to take an "effective response" two days after 12 of its soldiers died in two attacks.

Nine soldiers died after Islamist fighters stormed an army base in Pakistan's southern Balochistan province, which borders Afghanistan and Iran, and three more were killed in an exchange of fire in the area on Wednesday.

The army has "serious concerns on the safe havens and liberty of action available to TTP in Afghanistan," it said, referring to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan militant umbrella group.

"Such attacks are intolerable and would elicit effective response from the security forces of Pakistan," it said, without spelling out who it might target with its response.

"The involvement of Afghan nationals in acts of terrorism in Pakistan is another important concern that needs to be addressed," it added.

The foreign ministry of Afghanistan's Taliban administration did not respond.

Record heatwaves sweep the world

REUTERS, Rome

Record heat is forecast around the world from the United States, where tens of millions are battling dangerously high temperatures, to Europe and Japan, in the latest example of the threat from global warming.

Italy faces weekend predictions of historic highs with the health ministry issuing a red alert for 16 cities including Rome, Bologna and Florence.

The meteo centre warned Italians to prepare for "the most intense heatwave of the summer and also one of the most intense of all time".

The thermometer is likely to hit 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) in Rome by Monday and even 43C on Tuesday, smashing the record 40.5C set in August 2007.

The islands of Sicily and Sardinia could wilt under temperatures as high as 48C, the European Space Agency warned -- "potentially the hottest temperatures ever recorded in Europe".

Greece is also roasting.

"Parts of the country could see highs as much as 44C on Saturday," according to the national weather service EMY. The central city of Thebes sweated under 44.2C on Friday.

The Acropolis, Athens's top tourist attraction, closed for a second day straight yesterday during the hottest hours with 41C expected, as did several parks in the capital.

Regions of France, Germany, Spain and Poland are also baking in searing temperatures.

Parts of eastern Japan are also expected to reach 38 to 39C today and tomorrow, with the meteorological agency warning temperatures could hit previous records.

Meanwhile the northern city of Akita saw more rain in half a day than is typical for the whole month of July, Japan's national broadcaster NHK reported. The downpours also triggered at least one landslide, forcing 9,000 people to evacuate their homes.

Torrential rains described by the meteorological agency as the "heaviest rain ever experienced" have also hit southern Japan in recent weeks, leaving at

least 11 people dead.

Relentless monsoon rains have reportedly killed at least 90 people in northern India, after burning heat.

The Yamuna river running through the New Delhi has reached a record high of 208.66 metres, more than a metre over the flood top set in 1978, threatening low-lying neighbourhoods in the megacity of more than 20 million people.

Major flooding and landslides are common during India's monsoons, but experts say climate change is increasing their frequency and severity.

Americans are watching as a powerful heatwave has stretches from California to Texas, with its peak expected this weekend.

In Arizona, one of the hardest-hit states, residents face a daily endurance marathon against the sun.

State capital Phoenix was to record its 15th straight day above 109F (43C) on Friday, according to the National Weather Services.

Authorities have been sounding the alarm, advising people to avoid outdoor activities in the daytime and to be wary of dehydration.

The Las Vegas weather service warned that assuming high temperatures naturally come with the area's desert climate was "a DANGEROUS mindset! This heatwave is NOT typical desert heat".

"Now the most intense period is beginning," it added, as the weekend arrived with record highs threatening on Sunday.

California's Death Valley, one of the hottest places on Earth, is also likely to register new peaks today, with the mercury possibly rising to 130F (54C).

Southern California is fighting numerous wildfires, including one in Riverside County that has burned over 3,000 acres (1,214 hectares) and prompted evacuation orders.

Morocco may be used to hot weather, but it was slated for above-average temperatures this weekend with highs of 47C in some provinces -- more typical of August than July -- sparking concerns for water shortages, the meteorological service said.

Water-scarce Jordan was forced to dump 214 tonnes of water on a wildfire that broke out in the Ajloun forest in the north amid a heatwave, the army said.

Meet 'halfway' on border issue

China's top diplomat calls on India

AFP, Beijing

China's top diplomat urged India to focus on "common interests" and meet China "halfway" to defuse border tensions between Asia's most populous neighbours, the Chinese foreign ministry said yesterday.

"China and India's common interests clearly outweigh their differences," Wang Yi told Indian foreign minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, when the two met Friday on the sidelines of Southeast Asian talks in Jakarta, the Chinese foreign ministry said in a statement.

"The two sides should support each other, rather than... suspect each other," Wang added.

"It is hoped that the Indian side will meet China halfway and find a solution to the border issue that is acceptable to both sides," Wang said.

The two countries have agreed to hold the next round of military commander-level talks on the border issue "as soon as possible", the ministry statement said.

Despite frosty relations, China is India's second-largest trade partner.

In 2020, India sought to limit investments from China.

South Korea to 'expand scale' of aid to Ukraine

President Yoon says in surprise visit to Kyiv

AFP, KYIV, Moscow

South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol pledged yesterday to "expand the scale" of his country's humanitarian and non-lethal military assistance to Ukraine, in his first visit to the war-torn country.

The world's ninth-largest arms exporter, South Korea has a long-standing policy to not supply lethal weapons to active conflict zones.

Seoul "will expand the scale of supplies from last year, when we provided materials such as helmets and bullet-proof vests", Yoon said.

Yoon added that humanitarian aid would be increased to \$150 million in 2023, from \$100 million last year.

He made the announcement at a joint press conference with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

"Thank you for the meaningful talks. Thank you for your strong support," Zelensky said at the joint briefing.

Belarus said Friday that instructors from the Russian mercenary force Wagner were training its troops, following weeks of uncertainty about the future of the group after its failed mutiny in Russia.

The Belarusian defence ministry appeared to confirm Friday that at least some Wagner fighters had arrived.

"Near Asipovichy, units of territorial defence troops are undergoing training," the defence ministry said in a statement.

40 DAYS IN AMAZON

4 indigenous kids leave hospital

AFP, Bogota

Four Indigenous children who survived 40 days in the Colombian Amazon have been released from a military hospital after a monthlong stay, authorities said Friday, adding that the siblings were doing "very well."

Lesly (13), Soleiny (9), Tien Noriel (5) and baby Cristin (1) were the only survivors after the small plane they were flying in crashed in the jungle.

The four were discharged on Thursday night, said the Colombian Family Welfare Institute, which will temporarily take custody of the children.

"They have recovered... weight, they are actually very well," institute director Astrid Caceres said.

THAI PM RACE

Pita to withdraw if loses next vote

AFP, Bangkok



The liberal frontrunner to become Thailand's next prime minister said yesterday he would withdraw his candidacy if parliament did not endorse him next week, after military-appointed lawmakers foiled his first attempt.

The Harvard-educated millionaire's campaign to lead the next government was knocked back Thursday by senators in parliament who consider his pledge to reform strict royal defamation laws a red line.

The legislature holds its second ballot for a new prime minister on Wednesday, and Pita said he would support a candidate from coalition partner Pheu Thai if he again failed to win the needed votes.

Sudan mediation to resume in Saudi

War enters 4th month

AFP, Wad Madani

Sudanese army representatives have returned to Jeddah in Saudi Arabia for talks with their paramilitary foes, a government source said yesterday as the war between rival generals entered its fourth month.

"A delegation of the armed forces has returned to Jeddah to resume negotiations with Rapid Support Forces (RSF) rebels," the source told AFP on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to media.

The RSF has made no comment on returning to the talks in Jeddah, which Saudi and US mediators adjourned last month after a series of repeatedly violated ceasefires.

On April 15, a power struggle between army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy, RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, burst into all-out war, claiming at least 3,000 lives and displacing more than three million people.

The delegation in Saudi Arabia signals a return to diplomatic efforts by the army, after it boycotted talks last week in Ethiopia hosted by east African regional bloc IGAD.

Khartoum's foreign ministry had objected to Kenyan President William Ruto's leadership of the IGAD quartet, accusing Nairobi of siding with the RSF.

Before the Jeddah talks were suspended, US mediators had grown increasingly frustrated with both sides' reluctance to work towards a sustained truce.



Monsoon clouds loom over the overflowing river Yamuna, in New Delhi, India yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NKOREA THREAT

SKorea seeks China's 'constructive role'

REUTERS, Seoul

South Korea's Foreign Minister Park Jin on Friday called on China to play a "constructive role" in curbing North Korea's threats, after Pyongyang launched an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) this week.

The remarks were made during a meeting with Chinese top diplomat Wang Yi on the sidelines of ASEAN meeting in Jakarta, where Park "strongly denounced" North Korea's ICBM launch.

It is a common interest of Seoul and Beijing for North Korea to stop provocations and return to dialogue, his office said.

"Minister Park ... stressed that it was more important than ever for the Chinese side to play a constructive role for the peace and stability of the Korean peninsula," Seoul's foreign ministry said.