

30 killed in Afghanistan floods

REUTERS, Kabul

At least 30 people have been killed in Afghanistan after floods caused by a heavy monsoon rain spell washed away homes, a disaster ministry official said yesterday.

Mohammad Shafi Rahimi, the ministry spokesman, said 26 of the deaths occurred in Jalrez district, 46 km (29 miles) east of Kabul, after the rain washed away hundreds of houses, most of them built of earth.

Four more people died in Kabul, and a total of over 70 were injured in both the districts, he said, adding at least 40 other people were missing.

Afghan Taliban's spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid issued a condolence message, calling on aid groups and the Kabul administration to help the bereaved families.

Last year's flooding killed dozens of people in Afghanistan.



A view shows the Transfiguration Cathedral damaged by Russian missile strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Odesa, Ukraine yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

RAINS, LANDSLIDE 14 killed in Pakistan

DAWN ONLINE

At least 14 people were killed in Pakistan rains and landslide yesterday.

Nine people were killed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province due to rain-related incidents. Emergency was declared in the province's Lower and Upper Chitral districts till August 15.

Of them two died in Swat, two in Battagram, four in Manshera, and one in Buner, according to the latest report issued by KP's Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA).

Separately, four people of the same family lost their lives while one was injured in a landslide in Gilgit Baltistan's Skardu district, Pakistan police said.

Skardu Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Raja Mirza Hasan said a family hailing from the Astore district was heading to Gilgit from Skardu when the landslide occurred.

He added that as the family was fleeing in their car for safety, they got caught in another landslide, which killed three women and a child.

SSP Hasan further said that officials could not reach the affected family immediately as the highway was blocked.

The rain continued intermittently through the day.

Ukraine regained 50 pc of Russia-seized territory

Claims Blinken; Putin says counteroffensive failed; Russian attack on Odesa kills 1, damages cathedral; Kyiv vows retaliation

REUTERS, Washington/Odesa

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that while Ukraine has reconquered half the territory that Russia initially seized in its invasion, Kyiv faced a "a very hard fight" to win back more.

"It's already taken back about 50% of what was initially seized," Blinken said in an interview to CNN yesterday.

"These are still relatively early days of the counteroffensive. It is tough," he said, adding: "It will not play out over the next week or two. We're still looking I think at several months."

Elsewhere, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Ukraine's counteroffensive "has failed" as he hosted Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko, his close ally, for talks in St Petersburg yesterday.

"There is no counteroffensive," Russian news agencies quoted Lukashenko as saying.

Putin replied: "It exists, but it has failed."

Meanwhile, a Russian air attack on Ukraine's southern port of Odesa early yesterday killed one, injured nearly 20 and badly damaged an Orthodox cathedral, Ukrainian officials said, adding the icon of the patroness of the city had been retrieved from under the rubble.

"Odesa: another night attack of the monsters," Oleh Kiper, governor of the Odesa region, said on the Telegram messaging app.

One person was killed and 19 injured, including four children, in the missile attacks that also destroyed six houses and apartment buildings. Fourteen people were hospitalised, he said.

The Spaso-Preobrazhenskyi Cathedral, or the Transfiguration Cathedral, was severely damaged,

Odesa's military administration said. Odesa's largest church building, it is located in the historic city centre, which is a UNESCO world heritage site.

The cathedral's archdeacon, Andriy Palchuk, told Reuters the missile strike had started a fire which only affected one corner of the cathedral containing non-historic religious artefacts for purchase by worshippers.

"When the right altar chapel - of the most sacred part of the cathedral - was hit, a missile piece flew through the whole cathedral and hit the area where we display icons, candles and books for purchase," he said.

Ukraine's defence ministry said the cathedral had now been "destroyed twice" - by Russian President Vladimir Putin and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin.

The early 19th-century cathedral was demolished in 1936 as part of Stalin's anti-religious campaigns and rebuilt when Ukraine gained independence from Moscow in 1991.

Parts of the building were destroyed, the floors were covered in rubble and chunks were ripped off the cathedral's ornate walls. Several local residents from the surrounding area came to assist with cleaning up the rubble.

Russia's Defence Ministry reported strikes on targets in the area but denied it had struck the cathedral and said the building had probably been hit by a Ukrainian anti-aircraft missile.

President Volodymyr Zelenskiy condemned yesterday's attack and vowed payback.

"There can be no excuse for Russian evil. As always, this evil will lose. And there will definitely be a retaliation to Russian terrorists for Odesa. They will feel this retaliation," he said on Twitter.



Top Chinese diplomat proposes talks with Japan, S Korea

REUTERS, Tokyo

Top Chinese diplomat Wang Yi proposed high-level talks between China, Japan and South Korea in a meeting with the Japanese foreign minister in Indonesia this month, Kyodo news agency reported yesterday.

The proposal is seen as signalling a willingness to resume talks among the three countries and Japan would accelerate preparations to make it happen by the end of the year, Kyodo reported, citing unidentified diplomatic sources.

US allies Japan and South Korea are wary of China's increasing military assertiveness and of growing tensions between China and the US over a range of issues including trade and self-ruled Taiwan.

China's foreign ministry did not immediately comment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo could not be reached for comment on Sunday, outside business hours.

Wang and Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi met on the sidelines of an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) meeting in Indonesia on July 14.

Greek wildfires prompt biggest evacuation

AFP, Athens

High winds forecast for yesterday were expected to hamper firefighters' battle to contain a blaze burning out of control on the Greek island of Rhodes, sparking the biggest ever fire evacuation in Greece.

The island of Rhodes is one of Greece's most popular tourist destinations, particularly with British, German and French tourists - many of whom are now being rapidly moved out of the path of the flames.

As Greece has been battered by an extended spell of extreme heat, flames have burned for nearly a week on the island.

"This is the biggest fire evacuation ever in Greece," Konstantia Dimoglidou, Greek police spokeswoman told AFP.

"We had to evacuate an area of 30,000 people."

Police said that authorities had transported some 16,000 people across land, with 3,000 evacuated by sea, and others fleeing by road or under their own transport after being told to leave the area.

German travel giant Tui said it was suspending all its inbound passenger flights to Rhodes until Tuesday but would fly in empty planes to help evacuate tourists.

Spokesperson Linda Jonczyk told AFP that Tui had some 40,000 tourists in Rhodes, of which 7,800 are affected by the fires.

The low-cost British carrier Jet2 also said it had cancelled "all flights and holidays" to the island.

One German tourist told AFP they were "saved from the fire at the last moment" after returning from the beach Saturday.

5 dead in eastern China heavy rains

REUTERS, Beijing

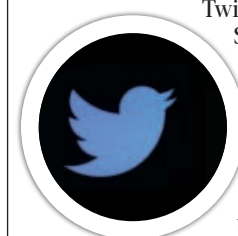
Five people died and two were missing, after heavy rain burst a river bank in a village near eastern China's Hangzhou city on Saturday, flooding houses and carrying away people and their belongings, state media reported.

Muddy water gushed through streets in a village in Dayuan township, pouring into houses and turning over cars, pictures published by the Beijing Youth Daily showed.

Almost 5,600 people were evacuated by authorities in Liaoning province, reported state broadcaster CCTV, after several cities received more than 100 millimetres of rain.

Twitter's bird could be replaced Musk hints

AFP, San Francisco



Twitter owner Elon Musk hinted late Saturday night that he may ditch the social media network's blue cartoon bird branding - and soon - for an edgier logo based on an "everything app" he has long alluded to called only X.

"Soon we shall bid adieu to the twitter brand and, gradually, all the birds," he tweeted around midnight, implying an end to the imagery from where the very word "tweet" stems.

"Like this but X," the billionaire SpaceX boss said, above a picture of the Twitter bird over a black and white marbled background.

"To embody the imperfections in us all that make us unique," he replied to the post.

"If a good enough X logo is posted tonight, we'll make (it) go live

ONE-SIDED ELECTION

Cambodia ruling party claims landslide win

REUTERS, Phnom Penh

The ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) declared a landslide victory in a one-sided election yesterday, clearing the path for a historic leadership transition and the end of the reign of one of the world's longest-serving premiers.

The contest was effectively a one-horse race, with Prime Minister Hun Sen's CPP, a political behemoth with a vast war chest, facing no viable opponent after a ruthless, years-long crackdown that has seen hundreds of its rivals flee into exile.

The CPP was leading in ballot counting late on Sunday, with a turnout of 84 percent, according to the election committee, with 8.1 million people voting in a lopsided contest between the CPP and 17 mostly obscure parties.

"We've won in a landslide ... but we can't calculate the number of seats yet," CPP spokesperson Sok Eysan said.

Self-styled strongman Hun Sen, who has ruled Cambodia for 38 years, had brushed off Western concern about the election's credibility, determined to prevent any obstacle in his carefully calibrated transition to his anointed successor and eldest son, Hun Manet.

No timeframe had been given for the handover until Thursday, when Hun Sen, 70, signalled that Western-educated military general Hun Manet "could be" prime minister next month.



A firefighting plane drops water over a wildfire burning near Asklipto, on the island of Rhodes, Greece yesterday. Inset, Tourists are sheltered in a sports hall after being evacuated following the wildfire.

PHOTO: REUTERS

4 policemen killed in Iran near Pakistan border

AFP, TEHRAN

Four Iranian policemen were killed yesterday after attackers fired on a patrol in the restive southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan near the border with Pakistan, state media reported.

"Three policemen were martyred in a terrorist attack on a police patrol unit," state news agency IRNA reported.

A fourth died later after succumbing to his wounds, state television reported.

The circumstances of the attack were not immediately clear.

Unrest in the impoverished Sistan-Baluchistan province has involved drugs-smuggling gangs, rebels from the Baluchi minority and Sunni Muslim extremist groups.

State media reported at the time that the attack was carried out by "a terrorist group that was seeking to infiltrate the country".