

ATTACK ON AIR BASE

9 militants killed in Pakistan

REUTERS, Islamabad

Nine Islamist militants attacked an air force training base in the central Pakistani area of Mianwali yesterday damaging three “non-operational” aircraft, the military said, adding that all assailants had been killed by security forces.

Three militants were killed before they entered the base while the others had been cornered before the clearance operation began, the military said in a statement. It did not mention any casualties amongst security personnel.

“No damage has been done to any of the Pakistan Air Force’s functional operational assets, while only some damage was done to three already phased out non-operational aircraft during the attack,” the military statement said. It earlier said a fuel tanker had also been damaged in the attack.



An injured man is brought into the Al-Shifa Hospital following the Israeli bombardment of Gaza City’s Mansura neighbourhood, in the eastern suburb of Shujaiya yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

STORM CIARAN

16 dead in Western Europe

AFP, Montemurlo

The death toll from Storm Ciaran rose to at least 16 across Western Europe on Friday, as heavy downpours and record winds brought travel chaos.

At least six people died in the central Tuscany region, Italian authorities announced on Friday, declaring a state of emergency as weather specialists reported record rainfall.

Another three people were killed off the coast of Portugal on Friday when a yacht ran aground north of Lisbon in strong swells.

In Italy, the rescue services were called out to dozens of incidents across Tuscany to help motorists stranded in flooded tunnels or hemmed in by trees brought down by the winds.

Tuscany governor Eugenio Giani said the dead in the Italy storms included an 85-year-old man found drowned on the ground floor of his house in Montemurlo, northwest of Florence.

“What happened tonight in Tuscany has a name: climate change,” Giani wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Florence mayor Dario Nardella described the situation as “critical” in the city, as the level of the Arno River continued to rise.

ISAREL-HAMAS WAR

‘Disgusted by sharp rise in hatred globally’

UN rights chief says

AFP, Geneva

The UN human rights chief yesterday denounced the “sharp rise in hatred globally” since the war between Hamas and Israel began on October 7.

Volker Turk said in a statement he was “disgusted” by the surge in cases of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and other hate-speech, both online and offline.

“The impact of this crisis... has sent shockwaves across every region, dehumanising both Palestinians and Jews,” Turk said.

“We have witnessed a sharp spike in hate speech, violence and discrimination, deepening social fractures and polarization.”

Turk said that around the world “Islamophobic and anti-Semitic harassment, attacks and hate speech have multiplied, including in the context of protests relating to the conflict.”

“I have heard from both Jews and Muslims that they don’t feel safe, and it saddens me.”

From the Americas and the Asia-Pacific to Europe and Africa, Islamophobic and anti-Semitic harassment, attacks and hate speech have multiplied, including in the context of protests relating to the conflict.

He said homes and religious buildings had been defaced with threatening symbols along with other images and messages “meant to frighten and provoke hate.”

“The torrent of hateful language being used, including on social media, is abhorrent,” Turk said. “International human rights law is clear on this. Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence is prohibited.”



The United Nations high commissioner for human rights also hit out at “inflammatory, toxic and hateful rhetoric” used by political leaders.

Turk said “evil words have been accompanied by vile deeds”, which he blamed on the “vicious language” emanating from the streets and from politicians.

Turk also voiced concern about undue restrictions on protests over the conflict, saying nations often cited risks to national security or the glorification of terrorism to justify such action.

“In some cases we have seen blanket or disproportionate restrictions on assembly

predominantly in the context of pro-Palestinian protests,” he said.

“Since 7 October, hundreds of thousands of people have exercised their rights in protests across the globe relating to the conflict that have not countenanced incitement to hatred or violence. Marches and rallies have been held to support both Israel and Palestine,” he said.

“As tensions and emotions run high, it is the law that must guide us on protecting human rights,” said the high commissioner for human rights.

“Some countries have imposed wide-ranging restrictions, often referring to risks to national security, including risks related to incitement to hatred and glorification of terrorism,” Turk added.

“States must ensure a safe and enabling space for participation and debate. They cannot unduly restrict participation and debate or critical commentary about the conflict, or expressions of solidarity with either Israelis or Palestinians.”

Noting his concern over these measures, Türk emphasised that any restrictions on rights need to be consistent with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

“Any restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly must be based on law, where specifically necessary for and proportionate to the interests of national security or public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.”

Israel’s unrelenting offensive against Hamas battled on into its fifth week with no sign of slowing yesterday, as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Arab foreign ministers in search of a diplomatic opening to ease the crisis.

4.4 million people stateless

UN says

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations said yesterday that 4.4 million people worldwide were known to be stateless, though the true figure would be significantly higher due to their relative “invisibility”. “At least 4.4 million people in 95 countries are reported to be stateless or of undetermined nationality,” the agency said in a statement. “The global figure is widely recognised to be significantly higher given the relative invisibility of stateless people in national statistical exercises.” UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, said statelessness had a “devastating impact” on those left without a nationality, as it called for more to be done to combat such exclusion. Not recognised as citizens of any country, stateless people are often deprived of human rights and access to basic services, often leaving them politically and economically marginalised and vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation and abuse, the UNHCR said. A disproportionate number of the world’s stateless people are members of minority groups, for which statelessness tends to perpetuate and worsen the discrimination and marginalisation they already face, the UNHCR said. “Though statelessness has many causes, in many instances it can be resolved through simple legislative and policy changes. I call upon states worldwide to take immediate action and ensure no one is left behind,” said UN refugees chief Filippo Grandi. The figures came as the UNHCR marked the ninth anniversary of its “IBelong” campaign on the issue.

OFFENSIVE AGAINST JUNTA

Myanmar rebels mark further gains



AFP, Yangon

Myanmar ethnic armed groups seized a handful of outposts yesterday as they pressed their offensive against the junta in the north of the country, local media reports said. Fighting has ramped up across vast swaths of Shan state near the Chinese border this week, forcing more than 23,000 people from their homes, according to the UN. The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Arakan Army (AA) say they have captured dozens of outposts and four towns and blocked vital trade routes to China. Local media reports said TNLA fighters yesterday seized two outposts controlled by pro-military militia near Lashio, the largest town in northern Shan state and home to the military’s northeastern command. The TNLA also flagged gains about four hours away at Namhkam. “We seized four outposts in total this morning, two outposts from Lashio while the other two were from Namhkam,” a TNLA member told AFP. The MNDAA said it had seized three military outposts further to the east. The junta has not commented on yesterday’s clashes but on Thursday a spokesman dismissed as “propaganda” claims that the allied ethnic armed groups had captured several towns in Shan state. The junta yesterday said the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), another ethnic armed group based in neighbouring Kachin state, had joined the attacks on its forces, and that it would retaliate. Local media reported the junta had shelled the remote town of Laiza on the Chinese border, home to the KIA’s headquarters. Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing this week vowed the military “will launch counter-attacks” against the groups. China called on Thursday for an immediate ceasefire in Shan state — where a billion-dollar rail route, part of Beijing’s Belt and Road infrastructure project, is planned. Myanmar’s borderlands are home to more than a dozen ethnic armed groups.

Zelensky denies war with Russia at ‘stalemate’

AFP, Kyiv

President Volodymyr Zelensky denied yesterday that Ukraine’s war with Russia had reached a “stalemate”, pushing back at suggestions Western leaders were lobbying for peace talks.

The sprawling frontline between the two warring sides has barely moved in almost a year, with one senior Ukrainian official warning this week that the conflict was deadlocked.

“Time has passed, people are tired... But this is not a stalemate,” Zelensky told a press conference in Kyiv with EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen.

The Ukrainian leader also rejected the idea Western countries were putting pressure on Kyiv to enter negotiations with Russia, amid reports US and EU officials had discussed what such talks would entail.

“No one among our partners is pressuring us to sit down with Russia, talk to it, and give it something,” he said.

With the war now in its 20th month and Ukraine struggling to gain ground in its counteroffensive, Zelensky has routinely met Western leaders in a bid to stave off fatigue with the conflict.

Zelensky said the war between Israel and Hamas had also drawn attention away from Ukraine, and said that this was “Russia’s goal”.

“Of course, it’s clear that the war in the Middle East, this conflict, is taking away the focus,” Zelensky said.

“We have already been in very difficult situations when there was almost no focus on Ukraine,” he said, but added: “I am absolutely sure we will overcome this challenge.”



People walk over ruins of houses in the aftermath of an earthquake at Nepal’s Jajarkot district yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Armed men spring Guinean ex-dictator from prison

AFP, Conakry

Former Guinean dictator Moussa Dadis Camara was yesterday taken from prison by a heavily armed commando during an operation that sparked heavy gunfire in the capital Conakry, a minister and lawyers say.

At least two other former officials currently on trial alongside Dadis Camara over a 2009 massacre during his presidency were also taken from the central prison, they said.

Justice Minister Aphonese Charles Wright said that at around 0500 GMT “heavily armed men” burst into the prison and “managed to leave with four (prisoners)... notably Captain Moussa Dadis Camara”.

He said that the borders had been closed. It was unclear whether Dadis Camara had escaped of his own free will.