

World News Roundup



Philippine marines honour guards carry the caskets containing the bodies of their colleagues killed last June 9 in Marawi, shortly after arriving at a military base in Manila on June 11. The June 9 ferocious, street-to-street gun battles with the militants saw 13 troops killed, in a dramatic surge in the toll from the conflict, Philippine military spokesmen said. (AFP)

Subcontinent

2 Pakistani officers killed

Afghan insider attack kills three US soldiers

JALALABAD, Afghanistan, June 11, (Agencies): An Afghan commando who opened fire on American troops killed three of them and wounded another, US and Afghan officials said, in an insider attack that was claimed by the Taliban.

The so-called "green-on-blue" attack on Saturday is the latest in a line of incidents where Afghan soldiers have turned their weapons on international forces they are working with.

It also comes as the Taliban ramp up their campaign against the Western-backed government in Afghanistan, and as US President Donald Trump mulls sending more troops into the lengthy conflict.

Nangarhar provincial spokesman **Attaullah Khogyani** told AFP the Afghan commando had opened fire on US troops during an operation in the volatile Achin district.

"The (Afghan) soldier was also killed in the return fire," he said.

The Pentagon said the families of the three dead soldiers were being informed.

"One US soldier was wounded and has been evacuated for medical treatment," a spokesman added. "This incident is under investigation."

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the deaths, saying the attack was carried out by an infiltrator.

Khogyani

Gunmen kill 2 police in Pakistan: Police say gunmen have shot and killed two officers and wounded two other people in a hit-and-run attack in southwestern Pakistan.

Police spokesman Shazada Farhat says two attackers on a motorcycle opened fire Sunday on a police post in Quetta, killing one officer on the spot and wounding two others before fleeing. He says one officer died on the way to hospital while the other is in critical condition. Farhat says a bystander was also wounded.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

Pakistani gets death sentence: A Pakistani man has been sentenced to death for committing blasphemy on Facebook, lawyers said Saturday, the first conviction on charges arising from social media.

Judge Shabbir Ahmad Awan handed down the verdict in Bahawalpur, around 600 kms (372 miles) south of capital Islamabad, finding Taimoor Raza guilty of insulting the prophet Mohammed, prosecutor Shafiq Qureshi told AFP.

Raza had a Facebook argument about Islam with someone who turned out to be a counter-terrorism department official, defence lawyer Rana Fida Hussain told AFP.

The official brought charges against Raza based on the comments made on the social networking site.

Hussain said his client was innocent and that he would appeal the conviction.

Pakistan ups Chinese protection: Chastened by the Islamic State's claim to have killed two kidnapped Chinese teachers, Pakistan is beefing up security around Chinese citizens streaming into the country on the back of Beijing's "Belt and Road" infrastructure splurge.

China has often urged Pakistan to improve security after pledging around \$57 billion to build power plants, railways, and roads that will cross the Himalayas to connect western China with Pakistan's Arabian Sea port of Gwadar.

Pakistani officials have outlined to Reuters extensive security plans that include thousands-strong police protection forces, tighter monitoring of Chinese nationals, and in the province of Baluchistan — where the two teachers were kidnapped on May 24 — a review of security arrangements.



In this photograph taken on June 8, an Afghan resident reads the Holy Quran in a mosque in Jalalabad. Muslims throughout the world are marking the month of Ramadan, the holiest month in the Islamic calendar during which devotees fast from dawn till dusk. (AFP)

Lat/Am

Merkel speaks against walls: German Chancellor **Angela Merkel** has said during a state visit to Mexico that countries should focus on improving life for people fleeing their homes rather than building walls.

Merkel spoke Saturday in response to a question about migration. She was speaking of Europe's handling of migrants from Africa and Syria, but coming in Mexico the parallels to US President Donald Trump's call to wall the entire US-Mexico border were unavoidable.

Merkel has been an outspoken advocate of more generous migrant policies in Europe. She says countries must work against what causes people to abandon their homes.

The US Congress denied Trump's initial request of \$2.6 billion to begin building a stretch of border wall. His first full budget requests \$1.6 billion for about 74 miles of new and replacement wall. (AP)

SC slams Temer 'snooping': Brazil's Supreme Court lashed out Saturday after a report that President **Michel Temer** had ordered the country's intelligence services to dig up dirt on the judge overseeing his corruption case.

The report in *Veja* magazine on Friday quoted an unnamed aide to Temer saying that the Brazilian Intelligence Agency, known as Abin, had been tasked with finding compromising material on Supreme Court Justice Edson Fachin.

Although the presidential palace quickly issued a statement denying the report, the Supreme Court came out with an unusually strongly worded statement of its own Saturday to denounce any pressure on its judges.

"It is inadmissible to commit a very serious crime against the Federal Supreme Court, against democracy and against liberty," said the statement signed by Chief Justice Carmen Lucia.

Describing pressure against judges as "the practice of a dictatorship," Lucia said the court "vehemently rejects spurious, unconstitutional and immoral snooping against any citizen and even more so against one of its members — even more so if aimed at embarrassing a judge." (AFP)

Rallies broken up by tear-gas: Hundreds of anti-government demonstrators marched against the Venezuelan president's planned constitutional reforms on Saturday, with some protests being broken up with tear-gas in the country's latest bout of unrest.

With Venezuelans suffering from high inflation, food shortages and soaring crime rates, plus a deepening corruption scandal,

Philippines

Duterte says didn't seek US support

Painful window on war

MARAWI, Philippines, June 11, (Agencies): From the third-story window of a barren government office building he now squats in as a refugee, **Nasir Abdul** is watching his city being destroyed.

Nearly every day for the past three weeks, the Philippine military has pounded the lakeside town of Marawi with rockets and bombs as it tries to wipe out militants linked to the Islamic State group in some of the fiercest urban combat this volatile region has seen in decades.

And on nearly every one of those days, Abdul has stood at the window and watched, unable to turn away from the deadly spectacle unfolding just a mile (a kilometer and a half) away.

As plumes of thick black smoke wafted above the city's minarets again Friday — a day of intense skirmishes in which the army lost 13 marines — Abdul stood transfixed with dozens of other displaced residents. Two helicopter gunships had just finished strafing the city, and now people were pointing toward a Vietnamese attack aircraft circling overhead.

Blasts

The plane, an OV-10 Bronco, turned and dove straight down on the city center, firing off two bombs before suddenly pulling up its nose and spiraling away. Moments later, blasts shook the city and more smoke billowed skyward.

"It feels impossible that this is happening," the 45-year-old Abdul said, as the sound of gunfire crackled in the distance. When "I see the bombings, I can't help but cry. I can't help but think what's happening to my relatives, my family, my business, my house."

Three weeks after a new alliance of Islamic militants tried to seize this town in their boldest attack yet, large chunks of downtown have been reduced to ruins. Militants remain holed up in several pockets scattered around the city center, along with at least 100 civilians, including hostages the army says are being used as human shields. There is no electricity, and most of the town's 200,000 inhabitants have fled.

The military says the death toll includes at least 138 militants, 58 government troops and 29 civilians — among them a teenager shot Friday as he sheltered inside a Marawi mosque. But the fighting is so intense, it's

impossible to fully recover bodies to get an accurate casualty toll.

"It hurts to watch because we know people are dying with every bomb," Abdul said. "We know a lot of people are buried under that rubble."

In related news, American spy planes are helping Filipino troops quell a nearly three-week siege by Muslim militants in a southern city where 13 Philippine marines were killed in the biggest single-day loss for government forces, officials said Saturday.

Surveillance
A US Navy aircraft provided surveillance for the local troops as the battle raged in Marawi on Friday, confirming the involvement of the US military in helping to end the urban insurrection at the request of the Philippine government, Philippine military officials said.

An Associated Press journalist and photographer saw a US Navy P3 Orion plane hovering in cloudy skies above Marawi on Friday. The aircraft flew above rocket-firing Philippine helicopters that struck militant positions, causing plumes of smoke to billow skyward.

"We don't have adequate surveillance equipment, so we asked the US military for assistance. It's noncombat assistance," military spokesman Brig Gen Restituto Padilla said by phone, citing a Philippine government policy that bars foreign troops from local combat.

Meanwhile, President Rodrigo Duterte said on Sunday he did not seek support from Washington to end the siege of a southern Philippines town by Islamist militants, a day after the United States said it was providing assistance at the request of the government.

Duterte told a news conference in Cagayan de Oro City, about 100 km (62 miles) from the besieged town of Marawi, that he had "never approached America" for help.

When asked about US support to fight the pro-Islamic State militants in Marawi City on the island of Mindanao, Duterte said he was "not aware of that until they arrived."

The cooperation between the long-time allies in the battle is significant because Duterte, who came to power a year ago, has taken a hostile stance towards Washington and has vowed to eject US military trainers and advisers from his country.

prosecutors.

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Maduro says the country's crisis is a US-backed conspiracy.

He has proposed July 30 as the day for voting to form the assembly; opponents insist the constitution can be changed only by a referendum.

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Africa

Aid for 7.8m to run out: Ethiopia will run out of emergency food aid for 7.8 million people hit by severe drought by the end of this month, the government and humanitarian groups said.

Successive failed rains blamed by meteorologists on fluctuations in ocean temperatures known as the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) have created a series of severe back-to-back droughts in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa region.

In Ethiopia, the number of people now critically short of food is expected to rise by at least two million by next month, according to figures compiled by the government and its humanitarian partners.

Donors, international aid groups and the government say existing food aid for the current 7.8 million will run out as funds are critically short this year with Ethiopia receiving slightly more than half of the \$930 million to meet requirements until July.

"We are in a dire situation," **John Aylieff**, the World Food Programme's representative in Ethiopia, said on Friday during a field trip to Warder in southeast Ethiopia, one of Ethiopia's hardest-hit areas. (RTRS)



Aylieff

Boko Haram food crisis: Farmers and fishermen displaced by Boko Haram violence in northeast Nigeria want to return home, saying it will help ease chronic food shortages for the remote region's starving millions.

Subsistence agriculture is a lifeline in the northeast but the eight-year Islamist insurgency has devastated activities, causing a desperate lack of food and sky-high prices.

Many farmers and fishermen have either been killed or fled to camps for the displaced, where they are dependent on food aid, or to live with friends and distant relatives.

Aid agencies say a severe funding shortfall is affecting feeding programmes, despite high levels of severe acute malnutrition and repeated warnings that famine is a possibility.

The head of the Lake Chad fishermen's union, **Labbo Tahir**, said: "No amount of food aid can adequately feed us."

"The only way out of this unending starvation is for us to return home, grow our own food and rebuild our lives," he told AFP.

Ibrahim Mammadu used to grow rice and other crops but now works as a labourer on a tomato field near the Borno state capital Maiduguri for \$13 (11.6 euros) a month. (AP)

Senegal holds Chinese boats: Senegalese authorities have detained seven Chinese trawling vessels for illegally fishing in its waters, the country's navy said on Saturday.

A Senegalese patrol boat intercepted the vessels off the coast of Senegal's southern Casamance region on Friday, naval Captain **Karim Mara**, head of the patrol mission, told Reuters by telephone.

"The trawlers were caught in the flagrant offence of fishing without authorisation in Senegalese waters," Mara said.

West Africa has some of the richest fish stocks in the world, but they are being rapidly depleted by industrial trawlers, some operating illegally.

A study in the journal *Frontiers in Marine Science* estimates West Africa's annual losses from illegal and unregulated fishing at \$2.3 billion.

Chinese fishermen, as well as employees from Guinea-Bissau and Guinea were aboard the boat, Mara said. (RTRS)

UN peacekeeper death toll rises: The death toll in a jihadist attack on UN peacekeepers in northern Mali has risen to four, the United Nations mission in the country said Saturday.

Three Guinean peacekeepers were killed Friday near their base in Kidal by a powerful group linked to al-Qaeda, and the body of a missing soldier has now been found, the MINUSMA mission said in a statement.

"The toll of victims from the terrorist operation mounted against UN peacekeepers has risen to four dead and eight wounded. The wounded have been treated at the MINUSMA hospital in Kidal and their condition is stable," the statement said.

Claiming the attack was the Group to Support Islam and Muslims, also known as Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen in Arabic, a fusion of three jihadist groups with previous Qaeda links formed in March. (AFP)

Wildcat strike continues: A wildcat strike at Sibanye Gold's Cooke operations west of Johannesburg continued on Sunday and 138 illegal miners there have been arrested since the stoppage began Tuesday, a company spokesman said.

Sibanye said the strike, which has seen 16 miners assaulted in a wave of intimidation, was triggered by worker anger at a company drive to root out illegal miners, which has included the arrest of employees for collusion and a policy that forbids food in underground operations.

Illegal gold mining has plagued South Africa for decades, with bullion pilfered from both operating and disused mines. Sibanye has vowed it will clear all illegal miners from its shafts by January 2018.

The Cooke mines have been at the centre of illicit activities at Sibanye's operations. Prior to the walkout, 101 illegal miners had been arrested this year along with 58 employees accused of collusion.

Illegal miners can spend weeks underground, which requires large amounts of food and water — which is why Sibanye has banned its employees from taking any food underground, with union agreement.

It is also why so many illegal miners have been forced to the surface since the strike began, as their source of food and water — colluding employees — was dried up, one of the inadvertent consequences of the stoppage. (RTRS)



Merkel



Temer