

World News Roundup

Subcontinent

PTI gains ground

Court upholds power of Delhi's opp'n chief

NEW DELHI, July 5, (RTRS): India's Supreme Court upheld the powers of the chief minister of Delhi on Wednesday in a win for his political party embroiled in a protracted fight with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government that has compounded the capital city's problems.

Under India's political system, Delhi has a unique position in which the federal government controls the state police and oversees land issues while the local government is in charge of the general upkeep of the capital of some 19 million people.

But Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party has sought more powers and operational autonomy to govern the city ever since it beat Modi's party in a stunning election upset in the capital three years ago.



Kejriwal

It accused Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party of trying to interfere in Delhi's governance through the federally appointed Lieutenant Governor.

On Wednesday, the Supreme Court said the real power lies with the elected government of Delhi and that the Lieutenant Governor, who acts as the representative of the federal government, cannot be making decisions and must be working

harmoniously with the state.

"Lieutenant Governor cannot act independently unless where the Constitution allows. L-G cannot be an obstructionist, he must take advice from the Council of Ministers," India's Chief Justice Dipak Misra said.

Delhi is one of the world's most polluted cities and authorities have struggled to reduce the risk to residents each winter when the smog gets worse. The city, which draws tens of thousands of migrants from neighbouring states, also has high crime rates, especially against women.

The local government and Modi's administration have traded blame for Delhi's mounting problems. Kejriwal says he needs authority over the police to be able to maintain law and order.

He said on Twitter the court verdict was "a big victory for the people of Delhi" and a "big victory for democracy".

"If Modi government had not withdrawn the powers of elected government through illegal orders, precious three years would have been saved," Kejriwal said on Twitter.

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Imran Khan's party gains ground: The Pakistani opposition party led by former cricket star Imran Khan is gaining ground in opinion polls ahead of a July 25 general election, with one survey showing it pulling ahead of the ruling party and another showing it only slightly behind.

A survey by Pulse Consultant showed Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI, or Pakistan Justice Movement) ahead with the support of 30 percent of respondents nationwide, compared to 27 percent for its main rival, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) was at 17 percent.

A separate nationwide poll by Gallup Pakistan had PML-N on top with 26 percent, PTI with 25 percent and the PPP at 16 percent.

Both polls were commissioned by Pakistan's Jang Media Group and were published on Wednesday in its affiliated newspaper, The News. They each surveyed about 3,000 people, with a margin of error of 1.6 percent for the Pulse survey and 2-3 percent for Gallup.

The new polls indicate a swing towards Khan's party compared to similar nationwide polls in 2017, which put the PML-N 8-9 percentage points ahead of PTI.

Khan's political fortunes have improved since PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif was removed as prime minister by the Supreme Court last year over undeclared assets.

Sharif, who was disqualified from politics for life, now faces a verdict in an anti-corruption court on Friday along with his daughter Maryam, who is running for parliament. The case, which concerns the purchase of luxury apartments in London, could see Sharif jailed and Maryam disqualified.

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What next for Afghan capital?: The aging Ariana Afghan Airlines Boeing 727 took off from Islamabad with about 10 passengers, myself included, huddled near the exits, bound for war-torn Kabul months after the 2001 fall of the Taliban.

The Afghan capital had been consigned to rubble by rocket-propelled grenades and artillery fire, first in fighting between mujahideen warriors and the Soviets after their invasion in 1979, and then between different mujahideen factions.

The airport was fringed with burnt-out fighter planes and scores of people, a skewer in each hand, scouring the tarmac for landmines. Someone put a ladder up against the fuselage, opened a flap, poured in some liquid and threw the empty can over his shoulder.

Fast forward 16 years, or four World Cups.

I fly in from Dubai, sipping red wine as we descend into Kabul, a city transformed from rubble into a bustling capital, though still visibly plagued by the escalating war with Taliban insurgents.

The centre of the city is a heavily protected zone of concrete fortresses, razor wire and well-protected checkpoints. The ruins of an office building near the presidential palace bear witness to a massive bomb last year that killed 150 people.

But in other areas, such as in the west of the city, shining blocks of flats have replaced the debris, behind lines of stalls and shops selling fresh vegetables, smart phones, fashion and kitchenware and the all-important building materials.

The memory of women bowed by the all-enveloping burqa, enforced under Taliban rule, trudging past destroyed homes is also fading amid talk of possible further Taliban ceasefires, upcoming elections, the national cricket team's first "Test" match against India — and the World Cup.

So what next for the fast-growing capital, sitting up against the khaki mountains of the Hindu Kush? An unprecedented three-day ceasefire by the Taliban over last month's Eid al-Fitr festive period brought them roaming into the capital for hugs and selfies and raised hopes for a longer peace.

"You can't ignore the Taliban," Sharifi said. "But there are red lines. If they come back and join the political process, we will be there with our art. People can't just keep killing." The tailor agreed.

"If the Taliban come back, it will be with a new government, not like before," he said. "We will have a good future if there is no fighting."



People wade along a flooded street after heavy rain in Agartala in India's northeast Tripura state on July 5. (AFP)

Thailand

49 missing after boat capsizes

Rain threatens boys in cave

MAE SAI, Thailand, July 5, (Agencies): Thai rescuers on Thursday said they may be prodded into a complex extraction of 12 boys and their football coach from a flooded cave if forecast rains hammer the mountainside and jeopardise the rescue mission.

Thirteen sets of diving equipment have been prepared for the team, who have endured 12 nights underground in the Tham Luang cave complex in northern Thailand, a saga that has transfixed a nation and united Thais in prayers for their safe return.

Water is being pumped out from the deluged cave round-the-clock, reducing the flooding by one centimetre an hour.

But with rain forecast to begin on Friday, the Chiang Rai provincial governor helming the unprecedented rescue effort conceded the mission was now "a race against the water".

"Our biggest concern is the weather. We are calculating how much time we have if it rains, how many hours and days," Narongsak Osotanakorn told reporters, without providing further details.

In a sign of increased urgency, Narongsak said medics and Thai Navy SEAL divers are assessing whether the boys are fit and well enough to be taken out early — apparently softening his insistence on Wednesday that "no risk" will be taken with the evacuation.

The prospect of the stranded "Wild Boar" team diving out is fraught with risk.

It takes seasoned cave diving experts around six hours to reach the muddy ledge where the boys are sheltering around four kilometres (2.4 miles) into the cave.

Many of the youngsters — who are aged between 11-16 — are unable to swim and none have diving experience.

Three days after contact was made with the group, Thai Navy SEAL ex-

perts continued to teach them the basics of diving.

But the areas where diving is still necessary are tight and may require the boys to swim through murky waters unaccompanied.

The looming rains have further tweaked anxiety among relatives of the trapped team, who on Wednesday appeared smiling, wrapped in foil blankets and in good health in video footage circulated by the Thai Navy.

"Yesterday I felt hopeful ... today I heard the rain is coming," said Sunida Wongsukchan, great aunt of one of the boys Ekkarat Wongsukchan, 14, who goes by the nickname "Bew".

"I'm very worried."

Strategy

In a two-pronged strategy, rescuers are also hunting for a chimney down to the boys, creating a potential second option for evacuation in the event heavy rains force their hand.

They have enlisted the help of bird's nest collectors from southern Thailand attuned to finding hidden holes on forested cliffside.

Authorities still hope they can manage any fresh deluge, with high-powered pumps draining 128 million litres (34 million gallons) of water so far from the cave in a round-the-clock effort.

"We are draining as much as we can," said Khao Khieupakdi, a Bangkok disaster prevention official, who like scores of other specialists has been seconded to northern Thailand.

Water has been cleared from the entrance to a rescue base camp in "chamber three" inside the cave, but onward sections towards the boys remain impassable without diving, he said.

"I am concerned as the forecast said is for more rain."

Officials have ruminated on the possibility of the boys remaining in the cave until the monsoon season passes

in three or four months.

But that option is a last resort and may have to be taken off the table if flooding worsens.

Concerns for the mental and physical health of the boys are also mounting after a prolonged ordeal in the dark, claustrophobic cave complex.

Experts say the risk of psychological damage is high for youngsters trapped in traumatic conditions, while the lack of light may cause confusion.

British cave divers found the emaciated and dishevelled group on Monday, huddled on a muddy shelf with flood waters lapping ominously below, after nine days missing.

Several Thai Navy divers and medics are staying with them and the video footage showed the group in seemingly good spirits.

"They cannot do anything ... they have to save energy," said Major General Bancha Duriyaphan.

Also:

BANGKOK: Forty nine people are missing after a boat carrying 97 people, including Chinese tourists and Thai crew, capsized in rough seas off Thailand's tourist island of Phuket, the Thai navy said on Thursday.

Thailand is in the middle of its monsoon season which brings with it adverse weather conditions.

"Right now we are still looking for 49 people. We have helped 48 people from the capsized boat. We have sent boats to help," Rear Admiral Somnuk Prempramote, commander of the Royal Thai Navy Region 3.

"They were all wearing life jackets," he added.

The boat was one of three to encounter difficulties at sea in the area on Thursday, the navy said. Another two boats, including a yacht carrying 39 people, also capsized but its passengers have been brought to safety.



Family members pray before a shrine in Tham Luang cave area as rescue operations continue for the 12 boys and their coach trapped at the cave at Khun Nam Nang Non Forest Park in the Mae Sai district of Chiang Rai province on July 5. (AFP)



Dureza



Dotcom

Asia

Manila wants rebels 'encamped':

The Philippine government will demand that peace talks with communist rebels shift from Europe to the Philippines and the insurgents are encamped in designated areas during the negotiations to peacefully settle one of Asia's longest-raging insurgencies.

Presidential adviser Jesus Dureza said Thursday that New People's Army guerrillas would also be asked to stop collecting so-called "revolutionary tax" from companies and demanding to be part of a future coalition government.

President Rodrigo Duterte's conditions were finalized in a meeting with top military and police officials late Wednesday. They're seen as likely to be rejected by the guerrillas, who fear that holding talks in Manila would expose them — including their Europe-exiled leaders — to military surveillance and harassment.

The low-level, rural-based rebellion, which has raged since 1969, has left about 40,000 combatants and civilians dead, hampered security and economic development in the impoverished countryside for nearly half a century. The military estimates that about 3,900 Marxist insurgents continue to wage the insurgency. (AP)

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Indonesia arrests Aceh gov:

Indonesia's anti-corruption agency has arrested the governor of Aceh province over accusations that he took illegal fees for projects funded from more than \$500 million of state funds, the latest high-profile target in a battle on graft.

Irawandi Yusuf, a former separatist rebel, became the first directly elected governor of the northwestern province after a peace deal to end years of conflict was signed with Jakarta in the wake of the devastating 2004 tsunami.

Yusuf, who escaped from a jail where he had been serving a sentence for treason after it flooded during the tsunami, was reelected in 2017 for a second term as governor.

The province has a high level of

autonomy and is the only Indonesian area to use Islamic law.

The governor had been named a suspect, along with two businessmen and another official, said agency official Basaria Panjaitan. (RTRS)

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Vietnam arrests 7 'terrorists':

Police in Vietnam have arrested seven people

over the "terrorist" bombing of a police station in Ho Chi Minh City last month that injured three people, police said on Thursday.

The incident, in which two small explosive devices were detonated, followed protests by thousands of people in several cities against government plans to lease new economic zones to foreign



This handout picture taken on July 3, and released on July 5, by Indonesia's National Search and Rescue Agency (Basarnas) shows a rescue team member (center), and fishermen searching for passengers of a ferry after it ran aground off the coast of Selayar Island, in South Sulawesi province. Nearly three dozen people have died after a ferry ran aground off the coast of Indonesia, according to an updated official toll on July 4, the latest deadly maritime accident in the Southeast Asian archipelago. (AFP)

investors. "This is a terrorist case against the people's government," Ho Chi Minh City police said in a statement on their official website.

"The police arrested seven people and seized 10 kg of explosives."

Four of those arrested face "terrorist" charges, and three have been charged with trading in explosives, they added.

Police seized eight more bombs, they said. Pictures alongside the statement showed confiscated bomb-making materials and ammunition, they added. (RTRS)

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Dotcom loses legal bid: Flamboyant internet entrepreneur Kim Dotcom and three of his former colleagues have lost their latest bid to avoid extradition to the US to face criminal charges.

New Zealand's Court of Appeal on Thursday upheld earlier court rulings that found the men were eligible to be handed over to US authorities.

Dotcom's lawyer Ira Rothken said they were disappointed with the judgment and planned to file an appeal with New Zealand's Supreme Court.

"As people will know, I am prepared to fight to get justice, whether it is for me or others," Dotcom said in a statement.

The latest decision comes more than six years after US authorities shut down Dotcom's file-sharing website Megaupload and filed charges of conspiracy, racketeering and money laundering against the men. If found guilty, they could face decades in prison. (AP)