

World News Roundup

Subcontinent

Pak to deploy 371,388 troops

'Hope' for Afghan peace talks — US

KABUL, July 10, (Agencies): US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Monday there was "now hope" for peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, during an unannounced visit to Kabul.

Pompeo's first visit to Afghanistan since he was sworn in as America's top diplomat in April came amid renewed optimism for peace in the war-weary country following last month's unprecedented ceasefire by the Taliban and the government.

"An element of the progress is the capacity that we now have to believe that there is now hope," Pompeo told a joint press conference with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani.



Pompeo

"Many of the Taliban now see that they can't win on the ground militarily. That's very deeply connected to President Trump's strategy," he said, referring to Trump's much-vaunted South Asia policy announced last August.

But he added: "Make no mistake, there's still a great deal of work to do."

Pompeo's visit to the Afghan capital follows a ceasefire during Eid, when the Islamic holiday was marked by spontaneous street celebrations involving Afghan security forces and Taliban militants.

Fighters on both sides expressed a deep fatigue with the grinding conflict, raising hopes that an end to hostilities was possible after 17 years of war that began with the US-led invasion in 2001 that ousted the Taliban from power.

But the insurgents refused the government's request to extend their three-day ceasefire, launching attacks that have seen scores killed or injured.

US-backed Ghani, who is under international pressure to ensure credible parliamentary elections are held in October ahead of next year's presidential vote, has been leading the push for peace talks.

Ghani thanked Pompeo for US support, hailing Trump's strategy as a "game changer" in the conflict. Meanwhile, a suicide attacker blew himself up near an Afghan security forces vehicle on Tuesday, killing at least 12 people, mostly civilians, officials said, in the latest deadly violence to rock the country.

The explosion in the eastern city of Jalalabad also left at least five people wounded and set a nearby petrol station alight, the provincial governor's spokesman Attaullah Khogyani told AFP.

Some of the victims were brought to hospital with severe burns, health director Najibullah Kamawal said, confirming the casualty toll.

"I saw a big ball of fire that threw people away. The people were burning," Esmatullah, who witnessed the incident, told AFP.

WhatsApp tips to spot fake news: WhatsApp took out full-page advertisements in Indian newspapers Tuesday offering "easy tips" to identify fact from fiction after a slew of recent murders spurred by hoaxes shared on its platform.

The Facebook-owned messaging service has been under immense pressure to curb the spread of misinformation in India after the lynching of more than 20 people accused of child abduction in the last two months.

Most recently a mob surrounded and killed five men in Maharashtra state denounced as child kidnappers, a pernicious rumour blamed for similar murders in at least 11 Indian states.

WhatsApp said it was "horrified" by the violence and promised swift action but Indian authorities have accused the social media giant of acting irresponsibly in its largest market.

The slick adverts in leading English and Hindi language newspapers, entitled "together we can fight false information", listed 10 tips for users seeking to sort truth from rumour.

"Do not pay attention to the number of times you receive the message. Just because a message is shared many times, does not make it true," offer one of the tidbits of advice.

2 rebels, teen killed: Government forces fired at protesters Tuesday in Indian-controlled Kashmir, killing a teenage boy and wounding nearly two dozen more who had been trying to reach the site of a gunbattle in which soldiers killed two rebels, police and residents said.

Hundreds of villagers, shouting slogans eulogizing militants and demanding an end to Indian rule over the disputed region, threw stones at Indian troops in a bid to help rebels who were trapped in a civilian home in a neighborhood of southern Shopian area, police said. Counterinsurgency police and soldiers cordoned the area following intelligence that militants were hiding there, police said.

As the rebels and soldiers fought, government forces also fired bullets, shotgun pellets and tear gas at the protesters who tried to reach the gunbattle site. Nearly two dozen civilians were injured in the clashes.

One among the two critically injured later died in a hospital.

Officials said two rebels were killed and a military officer and a second soldier were injured in the fighting.

Pak to deploy 371,388 troops: Pakistan's army spokesman says the military will deploy more than 371,000 security forces to polling stations to ensure free, fair and transparent national elections on July 25.

Maj Gen Asif Ghafoor told reporters Tuesday the military will not be directly involved in the voting process.

He said the army decided to deploy 371,388 troops at the request of the country's elections oversight body to ensure order during the election.

Ghafoor asked people to vote for the candidates or parties of their choice without any fear.

His comments come days after former prime minister Nawaz Sharif accused a spy agency of pressuring one of his candidates to change his political loyalty. Ghafoor says there is no truth to the allegation.

Meanwhile, Pakistan opposition leader Imran Khan, a former cricket star who hopes to become the next prime minister, unveiled his party's manifesto Monday ahead of this month's parliamentary elections.

Khan is promising 10 million new jobs and better health and education facilities if he wins the July 25 vote. Titled "Road to New Pakistan," the manifesto is similar to other ambitious past pledges by political parties that were never realized.



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo speaks to coalition forces at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan on July 9. Pompeo is on a trip traveling to North Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Abu Dhabi and Brussels. (AFP)



In this photo provided by Malacanang Presidential Photographers Division, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte (right), gestures to show respect to Filipino Archbishop Romulo Valles (left), President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, during their meeting at the Malacanang presidential palace in Manila, Philippines on July 9. (AP)



This photo tweeted by Elon Musk shows efforts underway to rescue trapped members of a youth soccer team from a flooded cave in northern Thailand. Musk tweeted early on July 10, he has visited the cave and has left a mini-submarine there for future use. (AP)

Asia

Duterte wants term cut: The Philippine president wants a draft of a new constitution shifting the country into a federal system to require the election of a new leader before that change to cut short his presidency, his spokesman said Monday.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said a committee, which submitted the 114-page draft federal constitution to President Rodrigo Duterte on Monday, agreed to his request and would rewrite a provision.

There has been speculation that the proposed constitution is designed to allow the 73-year-old Duterte, who has faced growing criticism over his bloody anti-drug campaign and human rights record, to cling to power beyond the end of his six-year term in 2022.

"It's to remove all suspicions and I am tired, ready to give it to somebody else," Roque quoted the president as saying, adding that Duterte was ready to step down as early as next year if the overhaul of the country's political system is approved.

Duterte has argued that federalism would be key to ending a decades-long rebellion by Muslim guerrillas, who have demanded their own autonomous region in the country's south.

Left-wing groups and nationalists, however, have long been wary that opening the constitution, which was ratified a year after the 1986 ouster of dictator Ferdinand Marcos, to changes could endanger democracy and safeguards against a return to authoritarian rule. (AP)

Switzerland probes 6: Switzerland is investigating six people on suspicion of bribing foreign officials and other offences, as part of a money laundering investigation into Malaysian state fund IMDB, the Swiss

Thailand

18-day ordeal in cave ends

All 12 boys, coach rescued

MAE SAI, Thailand, July 10, (AP): A daring rescue mission in the treacherous confines of a flooded cave in northern Thailand has saved all 12 boys and their soccer coach who were trapped deep within the labyrinth, ending a grueling 18-day ordeal that claimed the life of an experienced volunteer diver and riveted people around the world.

Thailand's Navy SEALs, who were central to the rescue effort, said on their Facebook page that the remaining four boys and their 25-year-old coach were all brought out safely Tuesday. Eight of the boys were rescued by a team of Thai and international divers on Sunday and Monday.

"We are not sure if this is a miracle, a science, or what. All the thirteen Wild Boars are now out of the cave," the SEALs said, referring to the name of the boys' soccer team. "Everyone is safe."

They said they were waiting for a medic and three SEALs who had stayed with the boys in their dark refuge deep inside the cave complex to come out.

Cheers erupted at a local government office where dozens of volunteers and journalists were awaiting news of whether the intricate and high-risk rescue mission had succeeded. Helicopters taking the boys to a hospital roared overhead.

People on the street cheered and clapped when ambulances ferrying the boys arrived at the hospital in Chiang Rai city.

Payap Maiming, 40, who helped

cue workers and journalists, said a "miracle" had happened.

"I'm happy for Thais all over the country, for the people of Mae Sai, and actually just everyone in the world because every news channel has presented this story and this is what we have been waiting for," she said. Mae Sai is the district where the cave is located, in the northern part of Chiang Rai province, near the border with Myanmar.

"It's really a miracle," Payap said. "It's hope and faith that has brought us this success."

The plight of the boys and their coach has captivated Thailand and much of the world — from the heart-sinking news that they were missing to the first flickering video of the huddle of anxious yet smiling boys when they were found 10 days later by a pair of British divers. They were trapped in the

Tham Luan Nang Non cave on June 23, when they were exploring it after a soccer practice and it became flooded by monsoon rains.

Each of the boys, ages 11 to 16 and with no diving experience, was guided out by a pair of divers in three days of intricate and high-stakes operations.

The route, in some places just a crawl space, had oxygen canisters positioned at regular intervals to refresh each team's air supply.

Highlighting the dangers, a former Thai navy SEAL died Friday while replenishing the canisters.

Cave diving experts had warned it was potentially too risky to dive the youngsters out.

attorney general's office said on Tuesday. Former Malaysian prime minister Najib



Roque



Najib

Razak is not one of the "public officials under accusation", the statement said. It was issued after Swiss Attorney General Michael Lauber met with his Malaysian counterpart Tommy Thomas in Kuala Lumpur.

Malaysia Development Berhad, or IMDB as it is known, is at the centre of money laundering investigations in at least six countries, including Switzerland, Malaysia and the United States.

The US Department of Justice has said an estimated \$4.5 billion was misappropriated from IMDB, a fund founded by Najib. Najib, prime minister until a shock May 9 election loss, was arrested and charged

last week by Malaysian authorities for abuse of power and criminal breach of trust in connection with transactions linked to SRC International, a former unit of IMDB.

Najib pleaded not guilty to all the charges and was released on bail. He has consistently denied any wrongdoing in relation to IMDB. (RTRS)

China eyes Pacific summit: China is planning a summit of Pacific island leaders in November. Papua New Guinea has revealed, as New Zealand warned Tuesday Beijing was attempting to fill a "vacuum" in the long-neglected region.

President Xi Jinping wants to hold the meeting ahead of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Port Moresby from Nov 12-18.

"(I) invite you to attend a Pacific Island leaders' meeting with the President of China, His Excellency Xi Jinping, during his state visit to Papua New Guinea in the days before the APEC Leaders' Meeting," PNG Prime Minister Peter O'Neill said in an address to the Fiji parliament in Suva on Monday.

O'Neill did not detail the meeting's agenda but the fact that Xi is seeking a sit-down with the region's small island nations will draw attention in Canberra, Wellington and beyond.

Australia and New Zealand have long regarded Oceania as their backyard but China has become increasingly assertive in the region over the past decade.

Australia's Lowy Institute think-tank estimates China provided US\$1.78 billion in aid, including concessional loans, to Pacific countries between 2006-16.

The region is also home to a cluster of Taiwan's few remaining diplomatic allies after Chinese efforts in recent years have whittled down the number of countries that continue to recognise the self-ruled island. (AFP)

New Zealand nurses strike: New Zealand nurses are planning to strike on Thursday for the first time in 30 years after rejecting a pay rise offer, creating a political and fiscal test for the new government.

More than 30,000 nurses will strike for 24 hours after weeks of failed negotiations, their union said, after rejecting a government offer of a NZ\$520-million (\$356-million) package to lift wages roughly 3 percent and add staff.

The strike will disrupt health services nationwide and force all non-urgent treatment to be postponed, Winston Peters, the acting prime minister of the Labour-led government, said on Tuesday.

"This government is committed to working with nurses to address their concerns but we can't fix everything in one pay round," he added. "Their frustration and anger has built up over many years."

The stand-off with its traditional union support base comes nine months after Labour formed a coalition government, promising to pour money into social services and rein in inequality, rising despite years of strong growth.

But it found money stretched in its first budget in May, as it balanced investing in much needed infrastructure with a self-imposed rule to pay down debt and insulate economy from the risk of a shock.

Business confidence has slumped to its lowest in seven years, and there are fears that Labour's policies, such as a raise in the minimum wage, are leading employers to hold off on investment. (RTRS)

Brazilian charged for killing ex-GF: Authorities in Rio de Janeiro have charged a Brazilian man with killing his ex-girlfriend in Australia.

The Rio police department said Monday that Mario Marcelo Ferreira dos Santos Santoro has been formally indicted for the killing of Cecilia Muller Haddad in late April. He was arrested Saturday in the city's Botafogo neighborhood, hiding in a relative's home.

Police have 30 days following his arrest to gather more evidence against dos Santos Santoro before prosecutors present the case for trial.

Police say he is suspected of strangling Haddad, whose body was found April 29 in Sydney's Lane Cove River.

Authorities say evidence indicates the suspect fled to Brazil immediately after the killing. (AP)

Reporters to face Myanmar trial: Two Reuters reporters accused of breaking Myanmar's draconian secrecy law during their reporting of a Rohingya massacre must face trial, a judge said Monday, in a ruling swiftly decried as a "black day" for press freedom in the country.

Myanmar nationals Wa Lone, 32, and Kyaw Soe Oo, 28, were arrested in December and accused of possessing leaked sensitive material linked to security operations in crisis-hit Rakhine state.

The pair, who have been held in custody for nearly seven months of pre-trial hearings, were both "charged under the State Secrets Act", Judge Ye Lwin told the court in Yangon, setting a first court date for July 16.

If convicted the two could face up to 14 years in prison under the colonial-era law. Reuters says the pair are innocent and were simply doing their job by reporting on a massacre of Rohingya Muslims in September, and has urged the court to dismiss the case.

But Judge Ye Lwin decided the prosecution had shown enough proof that the men were "collecting evidence" from state officials to allow the case to proceed to trial.

The legal action against them has been lambasted by rights groups and foreign observers as an assault on media freedom and an effort to stifle reporting on the Rohingya crisis.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and free speech group Article 19 condemned Monday's ruling.

"This is a black day for press freedom in Myanmar," said Tirana Hassan, Amnesty International's director of crisis response, labelling the court decision "farfetched" and "politically motivated".

Article 19 said the decision underscores Myanmar's "wide-ranging efforts to obstruct reporting on the Rakhine state crisis and to whitewash human rights violations by authorities". (AFP)