

World News Roundup

Subcontinent

Sharif ignites firestorm

Violent storms in India kill at least 86 people

NEW DELHI, May 14, (Agencies): Indian authorities Under the Prime Minister of Narendra Modi said Monday at least 86 people have been killed and over 100 injured in a fresh wave of violent sandstorms and thunderstorms that battered vast swathes of the country.

Winds of over 100 kms (60 miles) per hour struck parts of north, east and southern India late Sunday, uprooting trees, electricity pylons and damaging houses, officials from federal and state disaster management agencies said.

The fatalities came just 10 days after a sandstorm left more than 134 dead -- most of them in Agra, the city of the Taj Mahal.

Hail, wind and thunderstorms brought down walls, trees and power pylons in Uttar Pradesh state, killing 48 people, T.P. Gupta of the state disaster management department told AFP.

Eight people also drowned in the state's Barabanki district after their boat capsized in a river due to strong winds.



Modi

Gupta said 80 people were injured by the gusts that flattened nearly 40 houses across India's most populous state.

The country has been gripped by a freak weather system since the beginning of May, with many parts of the country experiencing extreme conditions.

Similar storms hit the region every year but this year has been the deadliest in decades.

In the eastern state of West Bengal 14 people were killed Sunday after lightning struck a house in the state capital Kolkata, including four children as thunderstorms separately ravaged several localities.

Lightning bolts killed twelve people in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, while two people died in both Bihar state and the Indian capital New Delhi.

Indira Gandhi International Airport was closed for more than two hours because of the winds, with 70 flights diverted.

Andhra Pradesh had also been hit by more than 40,000 lightning bolts on May 1, killing 14 people in a matter of hours.

**Finmin stable after kidney transplant:** Indian Finance Minister Arun Jaitley was stable on Monday after undergoing a kidney transplant, his hospital said in a statement.

Jaitley, who had largely worked from home over the past month, was admitted to the All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in the Indian capital on Saturday.

"The surgery has been successful. Both the recipient and donor are stable and recovering well," the hospital said. Jaitley could be out of action for about a month following surgery, a finance ministry official said. Jaitley, 65, is a prominent member of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. In 2014 he had a gastric bypass operation to keep his diabetes in check.

Last month, he cancelled trips to London and Washington because of ill-health.

**Sharif ignites firestorm with interview:** Former Pakistan prime minister Nawaz Sharif has sparked a firestorm at home and in India after suggesting Pakistani militants were behind the 2008 Mumbai attacks, with the National Security Council slamming his remarks on Monday.

The former premier approached what is largely seen as a red line in the country by touching on criticism of Pakistan's armed forces, especially their alleged use of proxies in India, in the interview with Dawn newspaper published over the weekend.

"Militant organisations are active. Call them non-state actors, should we allow them to cross the border and kill 150 people in Mumbai? Explain it to me. Why can't we complete the trial?" Sharif told Pakistan's leading English daily, referring to stalled court cases against several suspects.

The Mumbai attacks left 166 people dead and brought India and Pakistan to the brink of war.

**10 die in Bangladesh stampede:** A stampede on Monday by thousands of poor villagers outside the home of a businessman distributing alms ahead of Ramadan killed at least 10 women and injured about 50 people, police in southeast Bangladesh said.

It is a custom for devout Muslims to donate money or goods to the poor before or during the holy fasting month of Ramadan, which is expected to begin on Wednesday or Thursday this week.

The stampede began after people jostled to collect clothes and other items at the residence of the owner of a steel mill, said police official Rafiqul Alam in the district of Chittagong, about 260 kms (165 miles) from Dhaka, the capital.

"There were 10,000 to 12,000 people, mostly women and trying to push to each other to collect alms ahead of other and that led stampede," he told Reuters. The injured were treated at a nearby hospital and allowed to go, police said.

**Blasts and gun battle hit Jalalabad:** Afghan security forces battled for hours against a group of attackers who stormed a government building in the eastern city of Jalalabad on Sunday after a coordinated assault that killed at least 15 people and wounded 42, local officials said.

A car bomb was detonated at the entrance to the state accounts office before a group of about six attackers armed with machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades rushed the building, the officials said. There were multiple blasts as they fought off security forces in a gun battle that lasted much of the day.

Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, in a busy area of the city with many other official buildings nearby, including a school in which about 1,000 girls were trapped as the fighting raged.

It was the latest in a series of high-profile attacks that have killed and wounded hundreds of civilians in Afghanistan this year and put heavy pressure on the Western-backed government of President Ashraf Ghani.



Kashmiri government teachers shout anti-government slogans inside a police vehicle after being detained by Indian police during a protest against the government in Srinagar on May 14. Police used water cannons and detained dozens of government teachers as they demanded a hike in salaries and regularisation of their jobs. (AFP)



In this picture taken on May 13, women show pictures of their missing relatives at a protest rally in Karachi. The PTM came to prominence in February after the killing of a young social media star in Karachi, unleashed festering anger at authorities over the alleged targeting of Pashtuns in the country's long war on militancy. (AFP)

Asia

**Net closes on Malaysia's Najib:** The net tightened on toppled Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak as the new government on Monday placed on leave a controversial figure seen as his protector in a multi-billion-dollar graft scandal.

Najib's Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition last week suffered a shock defeat to an alliance of parties headed by the elderly Mahathir Mohamad, ending the corruption-ridden regime's six decades in power.

Voters turned out en masse to oust Najib, angered at rising living costs, divisive racial politics in the Muslim-majority country and allegations of endemic graft among the country's ruling elite.

The 92-year-old Mahathir — who ruled Malaysia for two decades until 2003, and came out of retirement to take on Najib — is now the world's oldest elected leader.

He officially got down to work as prime minister Monday, holding meetings with top civil servants and receiving his first official visitor, Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah.

Najib became a hugely unpopular figure over his alleged involvement in plundering huge sums from Malaysian sovereign fund

Indonesia

Shocking new terror modus operandi

'Terror families' behind suicide attacks

SURABAYA, Indonesia, May 14, (AFP): Their middle-class life, with talk of holidays and a love of pets, held no clues to the dark plan Dita Oepriyanto and his wife put in motion as they led their four children to their deaths.

Oepriyanto, 48, spouse Puji Kuswati and the kids — including two girls aged nine and 12 — all died on Sunday in coordinated strikes on churches in the country's second-biggest city Surabaya.

To neighbours, the family was devoutly religious with an upstanding father who sold herbal medicine.

"He was once the head of the neighbourhood unit. I met him almost everyday at a mosque near his house," Taufik Gani, 60, told newspaper Koran Tempo.

Online photos bearing 43-year-old Kuswati's name show what appears to be the family smiling back at the camera, the two youngest girls in matching red hijab head scarves and holding flowers.

Kuswati had over 250 friends on a Facebook account packed with pictures of nature, river rafting and the family

cats. She also said she was a fan of a local heavy metal band. Her last Facebook post was made in 2014. Kuswati and her daughters are now Indonesia's first known female suicide bombers.

Two other families connected to the family and a local extremist network have been implicated in another series of explosions, that left most of them dead.

Taken together they reveal a shocking new terror modus operandi in the world's biggest Muslim-majority country: whole families of suicide bombers.

Shift

That is a shift from when radical group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) — behind attacks including the 2002 Bali bombing that killed over 200 — was synonymous with terrorism in Indonesia.

"The involvement of women is new, especially with children," said Nava Nuraniyah, an analyst at the Jakarta-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict.

"During the JI (Jemaah Islamiyah) era it was forbidden to use women" in attacks.

IS by contrast has welcomed female fighters into its fold, and the attraction of using women, including young girls, in attacks is obvious, Nuraniyah added.

"Women are always seen as peaceful, so security guards are also more relaxed towards women as well," she said.

"There are tactical benefits." On Sunday morning, Kuswati and her two daughters, who were wearing niqab face veils and had bombs strapped to their waists, walked onto the grounds of the Kristen Indonesia Diponegoro Church and blew themselves up.

They had been dropped off by Oepriyanto who then drove a bomb-laden car into the Surabaya Centre Pentecostal Church. Indonesian authorities have named Oepriyanto as the local cell leader of extremist network Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), which has pledged allegiance to IS.

His sons rode a motorcycle into Santa Maria church where they detonated explosives they were carrying, dying instantly.

IMDB in a sophisticated fraud that is now being investigated in several countries.

The US State Department alleges that at least \$4.5 billion were looted from the fund, and funnelled to the United States where it was used to buy everything from artwork to high-end real estate and a luxury yacht. (AFP)

Ex-Politburo member loses bid:

Vietnam's highest-ranking official jailed in decades lost his bid on Monday to set aside

a 13-year sentence for financial irregularities when he was chairman of state energy firm Petrovietnam, his lawyer said.

A court in the communist-ruled country upheld the sentence for former Politburo member Dinh La Thang, 57, who was arrested and tried in a crackdown on graft, mismanagement and nepotism that felled many high-profile officials.

The Hanoi People's High Court rejected an appeal by Thang against a January trial verdict that held him guilty of "economic mismanage-

ment" at a coal-fired power plant overseen by Petrovietnam.

"I am very disappointed with the result of the trial because they didn't look carefully into all the details I presented," the lawyer, Dao Huu Dang, told Reuters by telephone.

State media this month blamed losses of 120 billion dong (\$5.3 million) on Thang, saying he illegally assigned an incompetent subsidiary of the company to build the plant, instead of finding a competent contractor by a tender process. (RTRS)

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