

News in brief

Death toll in India temple collapse rises to 36



The death toll after a floor collapsed at a Hindu temple in India had risen to 36 yesterday after rescuers discovered the body of the last person still missing, police said. Dozens of worshippers celebrating a major religious holiday plunged into the stepwell -- a stair-lined communal water source -- on Thursday after the floor covering it collapsed in the central city of Indore. "Seventeen people were rescued yesterday. Thirty-six bodies have been recovered," senior police officer Manish Kapoor said. Women, children and an 18-month-old baby were among those standing on the grill covering the well when it buckled and gave way, plunging them into about 7.5 metres (25 feet) of water.

Six people from two families -- one of Romanian descent with Canadian passports, the other from India -- were found dead in a marsh near the Canada-US border after trying to cross illegally into the United States, police said yesterday.

Romanian, Indian families found dead crossing into US from Canada



Their bodies were found Thursday near a capsized boat belonging to a missing man from the Akwesasne Mohawk community, local deputy police chief Lee-Ann O'Brien told a news conference. O'Brien added that a second infant whose passport was recovered from one of the bodies appears to also be missing and police dive teams were continuing to search.

Thai firefighters battle forest blaze



Hundreds of Thai firefighters and soldiers battled a forest blaze less than 100 kilometres (60 miles) from Bangkok as the kingdom grapples with air pollution that has made more than 1.7 million people ill already this year. The fire has affected at least 800,000 square metres (200 acres) of forest across three hills in Nakhon Nayok province, to the northeast of the Thai capital, with two districts declared emergency zones.

The blaze comes as Thailand grapples with a spike in pollution caused in part by agricultural burning that has seen the air in some northern cities rank among the dirtiest and most hazardous in the world this week.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

James Bond's latest mission: to save King Charles III's coronation



Screen grab from a footage featured during the Opening Ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games shows British actor Daniel Craig (L) playing James Bond escorting Britain's Queen Elizabeth II (2nd L) through the corridors of Buckingham Palace

AFP | London



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CHARLIE HIGSON

Legendary spy James Bond faces a race against time to save King Charles III's upcoming coronation in a new story to be released ahead of the May 6 ceremony, it was revealed yesterday.

Author, actor and comedian Charlie Higson has been commissioned to write the book, in which Bond has to thwart plans to disrupt the coronation ceremony, according to Ian Fleming Publications.

Higson, 64, has already written five books in the "Young Bond" series, which follows the future secret agent during his school days.

"On His Majesty's Secret Service" is due for publication on May 4, and comes 60 years after the publication of Bond creator Ian Fleming's tenth novel, "On Her Majesty's Secret Service".

"When Ian Fleming Publications came to me with the idea of writing an adult Bond story a little more than a month ago I was thrilled -- until I realised it had to be ready for the cor-

onation in May," said Higson. "Getting it written and turned around in such a short space of time was going to be as tense and heart-pounding as any Bond mission. Although, of course, nobody would actually be shooting at me."

"Fleming famously wrote fast, and I channelled that energy. And now it's so exciting for me to finally enter the world of grown-up Bond."

Higson promised fans the usual cocktail of "sex, violence, cars, a colourful villain with a nasty henchman, and of course, Bond himself."

Trump 'ready to fight'

Trump, accused for role in hush-money payment before 2016 election, is the first form

Donald Trump expected to be arraigned next week

AFP | Washington



Former US President Donald Trump speaks during a 2024 election campaign rally in Waco, Texas

Following his historic indictment on criminal charges, Donald Trump was preparing yesterday to go where no former US president has gone before -- a prosecutor's office to be booked, fingerprinted and have his mugshot taken.

Trump's pending arrest, expected on Tuesday, throws a political grenade into the 2024 presidential race, in which the 76-year-old real estate tycoon is hoping to return to the White House.

Pressed by reporters yesterday, President Joe Biden repeatedly declined to address the fate of the Republican candidate he defeated in the 2020 election and could potentially face again in November of next year.

"I have no comment on Trump," Biden said.

A New York grand jury indicted Trump on Thursday over a

\$130,000 hush-money payment made to a porn star to buy her silence during his 2016 campaign.

Trump has denied any wrongdoing and accused the Manhattan district attorney who brought the charges, Alvin Bragg, a Democrat, of waging a "political witch-hunt" to derail his new White House bid.

Trump's lawyers said the former president, who is currently at his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida, would surrender to New York authorities on Tuesday to

face the charges, which remain under seal.

Extra security has been deployed for days around the downtown Manhattan courthouse where Trump is expected to be booked and arraigned before a judge.

"The president will not be put in handcuffs," said Joe Tacopina, one of Trump's attorneys, but "I'm sure they'll try to make sure they get some joy out of this by parading him."

Trump would plead not guilty

**YOU KNOW WHAT**

Top Republicans have rallied around the former president who remains the favourite to win the party's 2024 presidential nomination despite potential legal troubles that extend beyond the New York indictment

and there was "zero" chance he would accept a plea deal, Tacopina told NBC's "Today" show. "It's not going to happen. There's no crime."

Trump was initially "shocked" at the indictment, his attorney said, but "he's now in the posture that he's ready to fight this."

In predicting his indictment, Trump called for protests and warned that it could lead to "potential death and destruction" for the country.

At least 11 killed in Pakistan Ramadan donation stampede

AFP | Karachi



Police officers stands next to footwear of victims following a stampede that occurred during a Ramadan alms distribution for people in need

At least 11 people were killed in a crowd crush in Pakistan's southern city of Karachi Friday as a Ramadan alms donation sparked a stampede in the inflation-hit nation, police said.

Pakistan has been wracked by economic turmoil for months, with the rupee crumbling and staple food prices shooting up nearly 50 percent as the country battles a balance of payments crisis which has forced it into bail-out talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Fida Janwari, a senior police officer in western Karachi's Baldia Town neighbourhood, said the stampede happened

when needy women with children flocked to a factory distributing alms.

"Panic struck and people started running," he told AFP. A local administration official

said 600 to 700 people were corralled in a small industrial compound.

"When they opened the main gate, all the people rushed in," added 22-year-old Fatima Noor, whose sister died in the crush.

The bodies of six women and three children were brought to the Abbasi Shaheed state hospital, spokesman Muhammad Farrukh said.

An official for the Rescue NGO told AFP an additional two bodies were sent to another hospital, and police surgeon Sum-maiya Syed Tariq confirmed the total toll of 11 late Friday.

Asma Ahmed, 30, said her grandmother and niece were among the dead.

Pirates kidnap six crew from Danish ship off West Africa

AFP | Copenhagen



Liberian-flagged oil tanker, Monjasa Reformer, owned by Monjasa, and technically managed by Montec Ship Management

Pirates who seized a Danish oil tanker off Congo last week have kidnapped six crew and abandoned ship, the French navy said yesterday.

The Monjasa Reformer had 16 sailors when it was boarded by pirates on March 25.

The remaining crew were rescued by a French naval ship. They said "six crew members had been kidnapped by the pirates", the French navy said in a statement.

The Liberian-flagged tanker was found on Thursday off the coast of Sao Tome and Principe in the Gulf of Guinea.

It had been spotted by a drone from the French patrol boat Premier Maitre L'Her, deployed as part France's anti-piracy mis-

sion Corymbe, the French defence ministry said.

The pirates' boat, which was alongside the tanker during a first flyover, was not there later.

The French navy said three

of the remaining crew members had received "minor injuries" and had received treatment.

In an earlier statement, ship-owner Monjasa said "the pirates had abandoned the vessel

**YOU KNOW WHAT**

Pirates have long been a risk in the Gulf of Guinea -- a major shipping route stretching 5,700 kilometres from Senegal to Angola, with Nigerian gangs carrying out most attacks

and brought a part of the crew members with them," without specifying their number or nationalities.