

US prison chief who oversaw botched execution **resigns**

● Christa Pike, 50, on Wednesday survived two lethal injections of pentobarbital

● Media witnesses listened to her snoring for about an hour after being administered the deadly dose

● Pike was taken to a hospital where she was "critically ill," unconscious and on a ventilator as medical staff worked to clear the pentobarbital

AFP | Washington, United States

The prison chief in the southern US state of Tennessee has resigned, the governor said Saturday, after an unprecedented botched execution left a convicted murderer on a ventilator in critical condition.

Tennessee Department of Correction Commissioner Frank Strada will leave his post this month, Governor Bill Lee said in a statement.

Christa Pike, 50, on Wednesday survived two lethal injections of pentobarbital, a drug that suppresses nervous system activity.

Media witnesses listened to her snoring for about an hour



convicted US murderer Christa Pike.

after being administered the deadly doses, and said she was alive as they were ushered out of the execution chamber viewing area at the Riverbend Maximum Security Institution in Nashville.

Pike was taken to a hospital where she was "critically ill," unconscious and on a ventilator as medical staff worked to clear the pentobarbital from her system, her lawyers said in a court filing Friday.

Lee said he thanked Strada for "his willingness to put the interests of Tennesseans first during this difficult moment."

In the same statement, Strada said: "I continue to believe the Department (of Correction) carried out its responsibilities in accordance with the established protocol."

Lee, who previously denied Pike clemency, has halted fur-

Her case had sparked debate over capital punishment for young criminals, as she was 18 when she and her boyfriend beat and killed Colleen Slemmer, 19, at a job training camp.

ther executions through the rest of the year pending a "comprehensive, third-party review."

Caustic

Pike's legal team had previously objected to the execution's IV protocol, saying it would have caused needless suffering due to her small veins and a blood condition.

Lawyer Randy Spivey has said he saw seven needles used in just Pike's left arm as execution staff tried to start an IV line, "one of which appeared to be bent when it was pulled from her arm after an unsuccessful attempt."

Medical experts had warned of needles becoming dislodged or piercing through the vein, causing lethal drugs to flow into Pike's arm instead of the bloodstream, lawyer Stephen Ferrell has said.

The court filing described

pentobarbital as a caustic substance that burns skin, tissue and veins. Upon arrival at the hospital, both of Pike's arms were "swollen, burned, and blistered," it said.

Media witnesses said Pike told execution staff after receiving the lethal injection that her arm felt like it would "burst open."

The Death Penalty Information Center, which publishes data and analysis on capital punishment in the United States, said Pike was the first inmate ever to survive "after being injected with lethal doses of execution drugs."

Her case had sparked debate over capital punishment for young criminals, as she was 18 when she and her boyfriend beat and killed Colleen Slemmer, 19, at a job training camp.

The 1995 killing gained national attention after Slemmer's body was found with a pentagram, often seen as a satanic symbol, carved in her chest.

Pike's lawyers had argued for clemency due to her young age and mental health issues at the time of Slemmer's killing. They also cited her history of childhood sexual assault and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The case had already attracted attention in the lead-up to the execution date as Pike would have been the first woman put to death by the state of Tennessee in more than 200 years.

In the United States, only 18 women have been executed since 1976, according to the Death Penalty Information Center.

Up to 500 French schools to be totally or partly closed Monday: minister



A spokeswoman for students addresses high school students during a general assembly as they gather amid a nationwide protest movement over school conditions in Saint-Denis, north of Paris

AFP | Paris, France

Up to 500 schools across France will be totally or partly closed on Monday because of a wave of student protests that has shaken the country, the education minister said.

Lessons will be "totally or partly suspended" in some "400-500" high schools as the security conditions "have not been fulfilled", said Education Minister Edouard Geffray on Sunday, adding that 24 schools had been "burned or ransacked" since the start of the movement.

He described the closures as chiefly a security precaution ahead of large-scale protests that the leaders of the move-

ment have called for Tuesday.

The teens at French high schools, known as lycées, say that their studies are being ruined by high teacher absences, overlong school days and dilapidated facilities, as well as other grievances.

Geffray said the number of schools affected on Monday would be comparable to the figure from Friday but vowed there would be a "partial, progressive return to lessons".

The movement began at a Paris school on September 17 but grew last week into nationwide protests marked in places by outbursts of violence involving teenagers and security forces, which sometimes used tear gas and batons to disperse the students.

Rare tornado rips through Australia town

AFP | Sydney, Australia

A tornado ripped through an Australian town, sending outdoor furniture flying and prompting cries of disbelief from passersby.

The tornado struck the town of Ulladulla, just over 226 kilometres (140 miles) south of Sydney, after midday on Saturday.

Videos shared on social media showed the twister sweeping through a suburban neighbourhood, as powerful wind and rain lashed homes and gardens.

Emergency crews received over a dozen calls about the twister, national broadcaster ABC said, with trees falling on



powerlines.

Local cafe owner Julius Machado told the outlet the

storm struck in "a blink of an eye".

"We had to close up early to

clean up... all glasses were broken, plates, glasses everywhere; was just a mess, big mess."

Australia's Bureau of Meteorology said the twister in such a built-up area was rare.

"It's very uncommon to see one in such a populated place," the bureau said.

"Properties were damaged and trees knocked over."

Tornadoes are relatively rare in Australia -- the Bureau of Meteorology reports around 50 take place every year.

The twister struck as swathes of eastern and southern Australia were swept by intense storms and rainfall.

Grace in the golden sands



An Arabian sand gazelle (Gazella marica) walks in the sand dunes in the Dubai suburbs

Sumatran rhino pregnancies nurse hope for endangered species' future

AFP | Jakarta, Indonesia

Two critically endangered Sumatran rhinos have become pregnant at an Indonesian sanctuary, boosting hopes for the survival of one of the world's rarest and most threatened mammals, the government said on Sunday.

Ratu, a female Sumatran rhino at the Way Kambas National Park on Sumatra island, has been pregnant with her fourth calf for 238 days -- nearly half the gestation period.

Ratu means "queen" in Indo-



nesian.

Ratu's daughter, Delilah, is more than 250 days into a pregnancy with her second calf, and both should give birth in May next year.

"The pregnancies of these two Sumatran rhinos are not only good news for Indonesia, but also for the world," Indonesian forestry ministry official Ahmad Munawir said in a statement.

"The pregnancies of the two female rhinos are part of long-term efforts to ensure the survival of the Sumatran rhino population through planned

breeding, reproductive health management, and intensive monitoring of individual animals," he added.

The ministry said the health and safety of the females were being closely monitored by a medical team, keepers, and national parks management.

"All five species of rhino face serious threats... This announcement marks a significant milestone in the fight to save this imperilled species," Nina Fascione, executive director of the International Rhino Foundation, said in a separate

statement.

"Ratu and Delilah's pregnancies represent two more individuals that can help Sumatran rhinos back from the brink of extinction."

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classifies Sumatran rhinos as critically endangered, with fewer than 80 individuals remaining in the wild.

The species is found only in Indonesia, scattered across national park areas in North Sumatra, Lampung, Bengkulu, and East Kalimantan.