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India finds wreckage of plane missing with 13 on board



The missing An-32 took off from Assam's Jorhat at 12.25 pm on Monday. (File Photo)

New Delhi, India

Indian authorities yesterday spotted the wreckage of a plane missing with 13 air force personnel aboard after days of searching a remote mountainous region close to China.

The Soviet-built AN-32 plane, carrying eight crew and five passengers, disappeared from radar on June 3 in the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, prompting a frantic search by the Indian Air Force (IAF) and ground teams.

"The wreckage of the missing #An32 was spotted today... at an approximate elevation of 12,000 ft by the #IAF Mi-17 Helicopter undertaking search

in the expanded search zone," the IAF said on Twitter.

"Efforts are now continuing to establish the status of occupants & establish survivors."

Desperate authorities last week announced a cash reward of 550,000 rupees (\$8,000) for any information about the plane.

They also urged village chiefs to organise search parties to scour the Mechuka jungle in the mountainous region.

The twin-engine plane lost contact with ground control 35 minutes after taking off.

In 2016, another AN-32 -- flying from Chennai to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands -- went missing above the Bay of Bengal. It had 29 people aboard and was never found.

Notre-Dame of Paris to celebrate first mass since fire



Cathedral's rector, Msgr. Patrick Chauvet with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and historic monument architect Philippe Villeneuve, in Notre-Dame Cathedral

● **The mass -- led by Archbishop of Paris Michel Aupetit -- will be celebrated on a very small scale late Saturday**

Paris, France

The Notre-Dame cathedral will host its first mass this weekend since a fire ravaged the Paris landmark almost two months ago, the city's diocese said yesterday.

The mass -- led by Archbishop of Paris Michel Aupetit -- will be celebrated on a very small scale late Saturday, the diocese said.

It will take place in a "side chapel with a restricted number of people, for obvious security reasons," it said.

Just 20 people are expected to take part, including priests and canons from the cathedral.

The event will be broadcast live by a French television channel so that Christians from all over France can participate, the diocese added.

The date has been chosen as it is the anniversary of the consecration of the cathedral's altar, which is celebrated every year on June 16.

President Emmanuel Macron has set an ambitious target of five years for restoring the Notre-Dame, which was gutted by a fire on April 15 that felled its steeple.

The diocese is awaiting a response from the French authorities over whether it can re-open the parvis -- the open space in front of the cathedral -- to the public.

If the authorities approve the plan, the idea is to celebrate the evening prayers on the parvis, the diocese said.

A temporary structure could be erected there to host worshippers while the cathedral is rebuilt.

Sudan protesters keep up civil disobedience

Khartoum, Sudan

A protest strike kept businesses shut and residents indoors in the Sudanese capital yesterday as a top US diplomat prepared a visit to press the ruling generals to halt a bloody crackdown.

Protest leaders stepped up the pressure on the generals by announcing they would soon release a list of members for a new ruling body -- the key point of dispute between the two sides.

Most shops and businesses remained closed on the third day of a civil disobedience campaign launched by protest leaders after a crackdown on a weeks-long sit-in left dozens dead on June 3.

Public buses were operating in some parts of the capital, but Khartoum's main business and commercial districts were shut down, an AFP correspondent reported.

Paramilitaries of the Rapid Support Forces -- accused by witnesses, protesters and human rights groups of having played the lead role in the June 3 crackdown -- patrolled several districts of the city in their trademark pickup trucks fitted with heavy machine guns.

Fewer people were on the streets than usual.

"In the last three days, we have lost a lot of money," said Ibrahim Omar, an employee at a tour firm. Travel agencies have been hit hard by a nationwide internet blackout on Monday.



Sudanese soldiers stand guard a street in Khartoum

"We cannot do anything. We are not doing any international flight bookings. I hope it does not continue like this," Omar said.

Generals lost 'legitimacy'

But protesters say their shutdown is already successful.

"This shows clearly what we can do, and also in a peaceful way," said Ishraga Mohamed.

"Such a campaign does not lead to killing people and at the same time puts pressure on the military council. We will continue with it until our goal is achieved," she told AFP.

Protest leaders vowed to name a new ruling body to replace the generals.

Since toppling longtime President Omar al-Bashir on April 11, the generals have resist-

ed demonstrators' demands, backed by Western and most African governments, to make way for a civilian-led transition.

US call to stop attacks

The US assistant secretary of state for African affairs, Tibor Nagy, plans to meet both the generals and protest leaders in Khartoum, the State Department said.

He is to leave on the trip on Wednesday and also visit Addis Ababa to discuss the Sudan crisis with Ethiopian leaders and the African Union.

"He will call for a cessation of attacks against civilians and urge parties to work toward creating an enabling environment" for talks to resume, the State Department said on Monday.

Sri Lanka MPs defy president to resume Easter attack probe

Colombo, Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's parliament yesterday defied President Maithripala Sirisena and resumed an investigation into security lapses surrounding the Easter suicide bombings that killed 258 people, officials said.

The Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) began hearing testimony from Muslim leaders who claimed they repeatedly alerted the authorities to dangerous radicalisation, a parliamentary official said.

President Sirisena last week asked his coalition cabinet to halt the hearings, which have already revealed senior police and security officials directly under him had ignored repeated intelligence warnings.

Sirisena sacked his intelligence chief over the weekend after he told the hearing that the April 21 attacks could have been avoided if police had been allowed to arrest the ringleader as early as last year.

An Islamic State-inspired local jihadist group has been blamed for the suicide attacks against three churches and three luxury hotels. Among the dead were 45 foreign nationals, while nearly 500 people were injured.

Since the attacks, the country has been under a state of emergency which gives sweeping powers to the police and security forces to arrest and detain suspects for long periods of time.

Temple helps 'extinct' turtle back to life

● **Good Earth has identified 18 other temple ponds in the area which could also be used for similar initiatives**

Hajo, India

The black softshell turtle is officially extinct in the wild, but a centuries-old Indian temple and its nature-loving caretaker are helping the creature make a tentative comeback.

The northeastern state of Assam was once rich in freshwater turtles, but habitat loss and over-exploitation -- they were once a popular local food -- have massively depleted their population.

The black softshell turtle was declared extinct in the wild in 2002 by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, while the Indian softshell turtle and the Indian peacock softshell turtle are classified as vulnerable. But all the while, the pond of the Hayagriva Madhav temple in the Hajo pilgrimage centre has provided a safe haven, thanks to the sacred status of turtles protecting them from



The black softshell turtle was declared extinct in the wild in 2002 by the International Union for Conservation of Nature

“The population of the turtle in Assam has gone down by a great extent. So we thought we needed to intervene and do something to save the species from extinction”

JAYADITYA PURKAYASTHA, FROM CONSERVATION GROUP GOOD EARTH

harm.

"There are plenty of turtles in the temple pond," said Jayaditya

Purkayastha, from conservation group Good Earth.

The group has teamed up with the temple authorities in a breeding programme.

"The population of the turtle in Assam has gone down by a great extent. So we thought we needed to intervene and do something to save the species from extinction," he said.

In January his organisation's first batch of 35 turtle hatchlings, including 16 black softshells hand-reared at the temple, was released into a nearby wild-life sanctuary.

A key figure is the caretaker of the temple pond, Pranab Malakar, who long before envi-

ronmentalists became involved took a keen interest in the turtles' wellbeing.

"I used to take care of them as I like them. Later, after I became associated with Good Earth, it became my responsibility," he said.

"No one harms them here as they are incarnations of Lord Vishnu (a Hindu deity). I was born and grew up here. We have been seeing the turtles since our childhood. People respect them," he said.

Malakar collects eggs laid by the turtles on the sandy banks of the pond -- a new concrete bank had to be demolished a few years ago -- and gingerly puts them into an incubator.

The project has been so successful that Good Earth has identified 18 other temple ponds in the area which could also be used for similar initiatives.

For one thing, some of the hundreds of daily visitors to the temple outside Guwahati throw bread and other food to the turtles -- which they clearly like.

"This has triggered some biological changes among the turtles in the pond. They have also lost their natural tendency of hunting for food," Purkayastha said.