

News in brief

9 dead, 3 missing in north China flash flood: state media



A flash flood in Inner Mongolia killed nine people and left three missing

Chinese state media said yesterday. A group of 13 people were camping outdoors in Inner Mongolia's Urat Rear Banner when a flash flood occurred around 10 pm (1400 GMT) on Saturday, state news agency Xinhua said. As of yesterday afternoon, one person had been rescued and over 700 workers were "urgently" searching for the missing.

Xinhua added. The Ministry of Emergency Management has ordered full-scale rescue efforts, verification of the status of the missing, and dispatched a working group to the scene, state broadcaster CCTV said.

Israel said yesterday it targeted an energy infrastructure site in Yemen's capital Sanaa, linked to the Iran-backed Huthi rebels behind repeated attacks on Israel during the Gaza war.

A military statement said Israeli forces "struck... deep inside Yemen, targeting an energy infrastructure site that served the Huthi terrorist regime" in the area of the rebel-held capital, without naming the site. The Huthis' Al-Masirah TV, citing a civil defence source, reported "an aggression targeting the Haziz power station" south of the city.

Israel says targeted Huthi energy site in Yemen



Syrian president says unifying country 'should not be with blood'



Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa has said the battle to unify his country after years of civil war "should not be with blood", rejecting any partition and accusing Israel of meddling in the south.

His remarks, released by state TV yesterday, came as hundreds demonstrated in south Syria's Suweida province, denouncing sectarian violence last month and calling for the right to self-determination for the Druze-majority province.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

Trump gives Putin 'peace letter' from wife Melania



US President Donald Trump greets Russian President Vladimir Putin
AFP | London

US President Donald Trump handed Vladimir Putin a special item at their Alaska summit: a letter written by his wife, First Lady Melania Trump, pleading for the Russian leader to make peace in the name of children.

The first lady's office on Saturday reposted a Fox News article on X containing the short letter, a day after Trump and Putin failed to find a breakthrough at their high-stakes meeting.

Putin read the "peace letter" immediately after Trump handed it to him, while delegations from both sides looked on, according to Fox News.

"In today's world, some children are forced to carry a quiet laughter, untouched by the darkness around them," read the letter, which was signed by the first lady and did not mention Ukraine by name.

"Mr Putin, you can single-handedly restore their melodic laughter," it added. "In protecting the innocence of these

children, you will do more than serve Russia alone -- you serve humanity itself."

"Such a bold idea transcends all human division, and you, Mr Putin, are fit to implement this vision with a stroke of the pen today," the letter read. "It is time."

In July, the US president had said that his wife, who was born in Slovenia, had helped change his thinking about Putin.

"I go home, I tell the first lady, 'you know, I spoke to Vladimir today, we had a wonderful conversation,'" Trump said.

"And she said, 'Oh really? Another city was just hit.'"

Trump attempted a rapprochement with Putin shortly after starting his second term, having campaigned on a pledge to end the Ukraine war within 24 hours.

During the early months of his new term, he largely directed anger at Ukraine for the lack of a deal, but gradually began expressing frustration that Putin continued his attacks on Ukraine.

Hopes for survivors wane as floods bury Pakistan villages

Over 340 killed and scores missing as torrential monsoon rains trigger deadly landslides

344 people killed nationwide

208 deaths in Buner district

150+ villagers still missing

AFP | Karachi

Pakistani rescuers dug homes out from under massive boulders yesterday as they searched for survivors of flash floods that killed at least 344 people, with more than 150 still missing.

Torrential rains across the country since Thursday have caused flooding, rising waters and landslides that have swept away entire villages and left many residents trapped in the rubble.

Most of the deaths, 317, were reported in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where monsoon rains that are only expected to intensify in the days ahead drove flooding and landslides that collapsed houses.

More than 150 people are missing in hardest-hit Buner district, where at least 208 people were killed and "10 to 12 entire villages" were partially buried, officials said.

"They could be trapped under the rubble of their homes or swept away by floodwaters," said Asfandyar Khattak, head of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Provincial Disaster Management Authority.

"Separately, in Shangla district, dozens of people are also reported missing," Khattak added.

The spokesman for the province's rescue agency told AFP that around 2,000 rescue workers were involved across nine districts, where rain was still hampering efforts.

"The operation to rescue people trapped under debris is ongoing," said Bilal Ahmad Faizi.

"The chances of those buried



People gather near a damaged vehicle and scattered debris after the road washed out following a flash flood in Mingora, the main city of Swat Valley, in monsoon-hit northern Pakistan's mountainous Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province

YOU KNOW WHAT

A traumatized grave digger buried 29 victims in two days—including six children—before quitting, saying each grave felt like he was burying his own child

under the debris surviving are very slim," he added.

Journalists in Buner saw half-buried vehicles and belongings lying strewn in the sludge, with mud covering houses and shops.

After days without power, the electricity supply was restored yesterday afternoon.

A grave digger, Qaiser Ali Shah, said he dug 29 burial places in the last two days.

They could be trapped under the rubble of their homes or swept away by floodwaters. Separately, in Shangla district, dozens of people are also reported missing

ASFANDYAR KHATTAK, HEAD OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA'S PROVINCIAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

"I have also dug six graves for children. With each grave, it felt as though I was digging it for my own child," he said.

"For the first time, my body simply refused to carry me through. That's why today I apologise and said I cannot do this work anymore."

Flooded roads hampered the movement of rescue vehicles, as a few villagers worked to cut fallen trees to clear the way after the water receded.

"Our belongings are scattered, ruined and are in bad shape," shopkeeper Noor Muhammad

said as he used a shovel to remove mud.

"The shops have been destroyed along with everything else. Even the little money people had has been washed away," he added.

The provincial government has declared the severely affected mountainous districts of Buner, Bajaur, Swat, Shangla, Mansehra and Battagram as disaster-hit areas.

"We were trapped in our homes and could not get out," another Buner resident, Syed Wahab Bacha, said.

"Our entire poor community has been affected... This road was our only path, and it too has been washed away," he added.

Mass funerals

On Saturday, hundreds gathered for mass funerals, where bodies wrapped in blood-stained white shawls were laid out on the village ground.

Fallen trees and straw debris were scattered across nearby fields, while residents shovelled mud out of their homes.

Iraq starts work on IS mass grave thought to contain thousands

AFP | Baghdad

Iraqi authorities have begun excavating the site of a mass grave believed to contain thousands of victims of the Islamic State (IS) group near Mosul city, the project's director said yesterday.

The first phase, which was launched on August 10, includes surface-level excavation at the Khasfa site, director Ahmed al-Assadi said.

The team has reportedly unearthed human skulls buried in the sand.

Khasfa is located near Mosul, where IS had established the capital of their self-declared "caliphate" before being defeated in Iraq in late 2017.

Assadi said that there were no precise figures for the numbers



An aerial view shows the Khasfa site near the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, where authorities have begun excavating a mass grave

of victims buried there -- one of dozens of mass graves IS left behind in Iraq -- but a UN report

from 2018 said Khasfa was likely the country's largest.

Official estimates put the num-

ber of bodies buried at the site at at least 4,000, with the possibility of thousands more.

The project director said the victims buried there include "soldiers executed by IS", members of the Yazidi minority and residents of Mosul.

Exhuming the bodies from Khasfa is particularly difficult, Assadi said, as underground sulphur water makes the earth very porous.

The water may have also eroded the human remains, complicating DNA identification of victims, he added.

Assadi said further studies will be required before his team can dig deeper and exhume bodies at the site -- a sinkhole about 150-metre (nearly 500-foot) deep and 110-metre wide.