

world

Pakistan candidate gets life term in drug case days before poll

AFP | Islamabad

A candidate for the party of Pakistan's ousted former prime minister Nawaz Sharif has been jailed for life by an anti-narcotics court, just days before a general election.

Hanif Abbasi, seen as a strong candidate for the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) in Wednesday's poll, was sentenced in a rare late-night session Saturday.

Japan heatwave kills over a dozen, 12,000 rushed to hospital

AFP | Tokyo

Japan's severe heatwave killed at least 15 people and sent more than 12,000 to hospital in the first two weeks of July, official figures show as the temperature neared 40 degrees C (104 F) in many cities on Sunday.

Twelve people died of heatstroke in the week ending July 15 after three perished in the preceding week, according to latest data.

More than 9,900 people were rushed to hospital during the week to mid-July, jumping from 2,700 in the previous week, the Fire and Disaster Management Agency said.

Death toll in Vietnam flooding rises to 19

AFP | Hanoi

Flash floods in Vietnam have now claimed at least 19 lives, the government said Sunday, as residents in affected areas sought safety in higher ground.

Boasting a long coastline, tropical Vietnam is battered by floods and storms every year, with hundreds of lives lost from the annual monsoon barrage.

25 injured in Iran earthquakes

AFP | Tehran

A series of moderate earthquakes in southern and western Iran injured an estimated 25 people, state television said.

Two quakes struck a remote region near the town of Lar in the southern Hormozgan province shortly after 0500 GMT, according to the US Geological Survey.

Kabul airport attack leaves 14 dead

VP Abdul Rashid Dostum was unharmed after blast hits an area near the airport shortly after his arrival

AFP | Kabul

A suicide bomber killed at least 14 people and wounded 60 at the entrance to Kabul international airport on Sunday, officials said, as scores gathered to welcome home Afghan Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostum from exile.

Senior government officials, political leaders and supporters were leaving the airport after greeting the powerful ethnic Uzbek leader and former warlord when the explosion happened.

"This is the first time I have seen a suicide attack," one witness told AFP.

"People were collecting human flesh with their hands," he said, shaking as he spoke. "What is going on in Afghanistan?"

Dostum, clad in a Western suit and sunglasses and travelling in an armoured vehicle, was unharmed, said his spokesman Bashir Ahmad Tayanj.

Kabul Police spokesman Hashmat Stanikzai said 14 people had been killed and 60 wounded, adding that nine members of the security forces and traffic police were among the dead.

The suicide bomber was on foot, interior ministry spokesman Najib Danish said, adding



Afghan security forces help an injured colleague after a suicide attack in Kabul

that civilians, including a child, and security force members were among the casualties.

Dostum, who is linked to a catalogue of human rights abuses in Afghanistan, was mobbed like a celebrity as he left the chartered plane from Turkey, where he has lived since May 2017.

His return, which has been the subject of much speculation, comes amid violent protests in several provinces across northern Afghanistan, his traditional power base.

Thousands of Dostum's supporters have taken to the streets in recent weeks, shuttering election and government offices and blocking sections of highways to demand the release of a pro-government militia leader and call for Dostum's return.

Expectations of the return did little to quell the unrest, with protesters vowing Sunday to continue demonstrating until the burly leader of the Uzbek ethnic minority tells them otherwise.

"We don't trust the government. We will continue our protests unless General Dostum tells us to stop," Ehsanullah Qowanch, a protest leader in Faryab province, told AFP.

Qowanch also repeated calls for the release of Nezamuddin Qaisari -- a district police chief and Dostum's provincial representative in Faryab -- whose arrest earlier this month ignited the protests.

Another protester, Massoud Khan, said: "We have been on

the streets for 20 days now. We are not going to stop our protests unless our demands are met."

Observers say President Ashraf Ghani, an ethnic Pashtun, gave the green light for Dostum to come home to stabilise the north and secure Uzbek support before next year's presidential election, which he is widely expected to contest.

Dostum left Afghanistan in May 2017 after he was accused of organising the rape and torture of a political rival.



A survivor of Afghanistan's 30 years of war and known for making and breaking alliances, Dostum is the self-styled leader of the Uzbek minority in a country where ethnic loyalty has become a key force

Israel evacuates 800 White Helmets



White Helmet volunteers have rescued thousands of civilians caught up in fighting in the Syrian conflict

AFP | Amman

Israel has evacuated 800 White Helmets rescuers and their family members threatened by advancing Syrian regime forces to Jordan for resettlement in Britain, Canada and Germany, Amman said yesterday.

Founded in 2013, the Syria Civil Defence, or White Helmets, is a network of first responders which rescues the wounded in the aftermath of air strikes, shelling or explosions in rebel-held territory.

Jordan "authorised the United Nations to organise the passage of 800 Syrian citizens through Jordan to be resettled in western countries," foreign ministry spokesman Mohammed al-Kayed said.

"The government gave the permission after Britain, Germany and Canada made a legally binding undertaking to resettle them within a specified period of time due to 'a risk to their lives!'"

An Israeli government source confirmed Israel's military had rescued 800 people who were taken to Jordan.

Thai boys rescued from cave to be ordained in Buddhist ceremony

AFP | Mae Sai, Thailand

Most members of the Thai youth football team rescued from a flooded cave will have their heads shaved, don robes and be ordained in a Buddhist ceremony this week, officials said yesterday.

The "Wild Boars" are enjoying their first few days home after being discharged from hospital and speaking to the media about their harrowing ordeal inside the Tham Luang cave near the Myanmar border.

The 12 boys, aged 11 to 16, and their coach went into the cave complex on June 23 after practice and were trapped by floods from monsoon rains.

They survived on water dripping from rocks for nine days before being found emaciated on a muddy ledge by rescue divers, who helped extract the team a week later in a risky mission.

All made a speedy and surprising recovery after a week in hospital, and on their first day out they prayed for good fortune in a traditional ceremony and mourned a former Thai navy SEAL who died during the rescue efforts.



Some of the 12 Thai boys who were dramatically rescued from deep inside a cave after being trapped for more than a fortnight, bow before novice Buddhist monks during a religious ceremony at a temple in Chiang Rai

Now they will go a step further and spend time living in a monastery before returning to normal life, a common practice in Buddhist-majority countries like Thailand.

"They will ordain for nine days," Prachon Pratsakul, the Chiang Rai governor, told reporters in a briefing at the Mae Sai district office.

"There will be about 11 boys ordained as novices and one ordained as a monk which is Coach Ek," he said, referring to Ekkapol Chantawong, who has

already been in the monkhood and was said to have helped keep the boys calm inside the cave.

Praphun Khomjoi, Chiang Rai's Buddhist office chief, said that the "Wild Boars" will have their heads shaved on July 24 and attend a robe ceremony the next day.

They will then stay in different monasteries until leaving August 4.

One of the children, Adul Sam-on, will not join them as he is Christian, the governor said.