

News in brief

Israeli forces kill 13 in southern Syria operation



in the Syrian village of Beit Jin left six Israeli soldiers wounded, with three of them in a serious condition.

◆ Israeli forces killed 13 people yesterday in an operation in southern Syria, the deadliest since Bashar al-Assad's fall from power nearly a year ago, which they said was targeting an Islamist group. Since an Islamist coalition overthrew longtime ruler Assad in December of last year, Israel has conducted hundreds of strikes on Syria's military arsenal as well as incursions into the country. The Israeli army said an exchange of fire in the operation to detain militants

◆ Russian President Vladimir Putin will make a state visit to India on December 4 and 5 at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Kremlin said yesterday. The two leaders will sign trade deals, "discuss all aspects" of Russian-Indian ties and also touch on regional and international issues, it said in a statement.

Putin to visit India on December 4-5: Kremlin



ICC rejects release for Philippines ex-president Duterte



where the court is based. Duterte's lawyers, appealing against an earlier refusal, had called for a "humanitarian" parole because of the state of his health..

◆ The International Criminal Court yesterday rejected a request by former Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte to be released from detention ahead of his trial on crimes against humanity during his war on drugs. Presiding judge Luz del Carmen Ibanez Carranza told a hearing that lawyers for the 80-year-old had not laid out strong enough precautions to warrant a temporary release from custody in The Hague,

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

NASA rover records first evidence of lightning on Mars



An image by Mars Perseverance rover using its onboard Right Navigation Camera (Navcam)

AFP | Paris

A NASA rover has recorded evidence of lightning on Mars for the first time, its microphone picking up the sounds of tiny "zaps" whipped up by the dust storms constantly sweeping across the planet.

Scientists have long debated whether electrical discharges could be sparking in the dusty and little-known Martian climate -- but proof has been hard to come by.

It turns out that NASA's Perseverance rover, which has been roaming the red planet since 2021, was inadvertently recording the sounds of lightning, according to a study published in Nature this week.

These are far from the thundering, kilometre-long lightning bolts we see on Earth. Instead, they are "little zaps" similar to "what you might feel in dry weather when you touch your car door and there's a bit of static electricity," lead author Baptiste Chide of France's CNRS research centre told AFP.

While low in energy, these discharges are happening "absolutely all the time -- and

everywhere" on Mars, the planetary scientist said.

The process starts when tiny grains of dust rub against each other. They become charged with electrons and release this energy in electrical arcs a few centimetres (inches) -- or even millimetres -- long, sending off an audible shock wave.

Here on Earth, dust storms and dust devils in desert areas also create electrical fields. But they rarely build up into electrical discharges.

However on Mars, "because of the very low pressure and the composition of the atmosphere, the amount of charge that needs to accumulate to generate a discharge is much smaller," Chide explained.

This phenomenon has been theorised since Mars first started to be explored -- and has been reproduced in the laboratory.

Chide said it had been "such an important issue for Martian science" that an instrument on the European Space Agency's Schiaparelli lander was dedicated to searching for it.

Unfortunately the spacecraft crashed while trying to land on Mars in 2016.

Death toll in Southeast Asia floods tops 300

Rescuers struggle to reach isolated areas as the death toll continues to climb

● Over 300 killed in Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia

● Monsoon rains, tropical storm drive severe flooding

● Rescuers struggle to reach isolated areas

AFP | Medan

Days of devastating flooding across Southeast Asia have killed more than 300 people in Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia, authorities said yesterday.

Heavy monsoon season rains paired with a tropical storm system inundated areas across the three countries, stranding residents on rooftops and cutting off entire communities.

Authorities in Indonesia were struggling to reach the worst-affected areas on Sumatra island, while authorities at a southern Thailand hospital brought in refrigerated trucks to store bodies after the morgue exceeded capacity.

In Indonesia's West Sumatra province, 53-year-old Misniati described a terrifying battle against rising floodwaters to reach her husband at home.

She said that, returning from early morning prayers at a mosque, "I noticed the street was flooded."

"I tried to run back to my house to tell my husband, and the water was already reaching my waist," she said, adding that



A woman takes a photo of a flooded mosque in Kangar in northern Malaysia's Perlis state

it was up to her chest by the time she reached home.

"We didn't sleep at all last night, we just monitored the water," said Misniati, who only uses one name.

Officials on Sumatra said flooding and landslides this week had killed at least 174 people, with nearly 80 more missing.

National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) chief Suharyanto said the toll could grow as rescuers reach isolated areas.

"There are locations that still cannot be reached... where it is indicated that there may be human victims in those areas that are unreachable," Suharyanto said.

North Sumatra police spokesman Ferry Walintukan said au-

YOU KNOW WHAT

A hospital in southern Thailand had to bring in refrigerated trucks to store bodies after its morgue exceeded capacity due to the high number of flood victims

although access to some areas and communication was still cut.

"Hopefully, the weather will clear up so we can move the helicopter to the (worst-hit) locations," he said.

In Aceh province in Sumatra's north, receding water left behind cars buried in mud almost up to their windows. An AFP journalist saw a truck carrying timber abandoned in the mud, with no sign of the driver.

More rain is forecast for much of Sumatra island, although the intensity was expected to ease, officials said.

Among the hardest-hit areas in the region is southern Thailand, where residents of Hat Yai were left clinging to rooftops awaiting rescue by boat.

thorities were focused on "evacuation and providing assistance",

Sri Lanka deploys troops as floodwaters rise, death toll hits 69

AFP | Colombo

Sri Lankan troops were racing to rescue hundreds of people marooned by rising floodwaters on Friday as weather-related deaths rose to 69, with another 34 people declared missing.

Helicopters and navy boats carried out multiple rescue operations, plucking residents from tree tops, roofs and villages cut off by floodwaters.

The Disaster Management Centre (DMC) said the toll had climbed with the recovery of more bodies in the worst affected central region, where most victims had been buried alive as mudslides hit this week.

Rain was falling across the island with some regions receiving 360 millimetres in the past 24 hours, the DMC said.

The Kelani River, which flows into the Indian Ocean near the capital Colombo, breached its banks on Friday.

V. S. A. Ratnayake, 56, said he had to leave his flooded home in Kaduwela, just outside Colombo.



People move through a flooded road after heavy rainfall in Kaduwela on the outskirts of Colombo

"I think this could be the worst flood in our area for three decades," Ratnayake told AFP. "I remember a flood in the 1990s when my house was under seven feet of water."

Another Kaduwela resident,

Kalyani, 48, who uses only one name, said she was sheltering two families whose homes were flooded.

At least 3,000 homes were damaged in mudslides and floods, and over 18,000 people

had been moved to temporary shelters.

In Anuradhapura district in the north, an Air Force Bell 212 helicopter airlifted a man who had climbed a coconut tree to escape rising waters.

The DMC said more rain was forecast, with Cyclone Ditwah likely to move away from the north towards the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu by Sunday.

'Nowhere to go'

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his condolences over the loss of life in Sri Lanka and said New Delhi was rushing aid.

"We stand ready to provide more aid and assistance as the situation evolves," Modi said on X.

DMC officials said they expected flood levels to be worse than in 2016, when 71 people were killed nationwide.

The Sirasa TV network broadcast an appeal for help from a desperate woman.