



UK's N Ireland minister resigns over ill-health

Indian police probe reporter after data leak story

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NEW YORK: People visit the 9/11 memorial during freezing temperatures in New York City. Much of the United States' east coast woke up to brutally cold and dangerous temperatures as the region recovers from a powerful blizzard that unleashed heavy snows and strong winds. —AFP

Brutal cold grips East Coast; airport flooded

Chaos at JFK airport with flood and storm backlog

NEW YORK: Chaos reigned at New York's flagship airport for a third consecutive day with one terminal flooded and irate passengers stranded by chronic delays blamed on brutal cold and a deadly winter storm. Arrivals were significantly disrupted into Terminal Four at John F Kennedy International Airport, where a water pipe broke, compounding chaos blamed on a "cascading series of issues." Water poured from the ceiling and the arrivals area was submerged by around three inches (eight centimeters) of water, through which a few intrepid passengers picked their way gingerly. CNN footage showed.

"What happened at JFK Airport is unacceptable," admitted Rick Cotton, executive director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which is responsible for area airports. "We will hold those responsible accountable for any shortcomings we find," he added. The incident highlighted complaints about poor infrastructure serving the US financial capital, home to 8.5 million people, with a crisis in the subway and derailments in recent years on commuter trains.

The cause of the break appeared to be "weather-related" but would be investigated, as would why the pipe had not been weather protected and whether other failures contributed to the disruption, officials said. After the pipe broke and water began flooding the terminal, power to the affected areas was shut off for safety reasons, officials said. Domestic arrivals and departures, and international departures operated with delays. A string of international flights were diverted to other airports or terminals. Terminal 4 is used by more than 30 airlines, including Air India, Delta, Egyptair, El Al, Emirates, Etihad, KLM Royal Dutch, Singapore Airlines and Virgin Atlantic.

Crazy
Temper flared for days among exhausted travelers, forced to sleep on the floor of terminals, with others stranded on planes for hours waiting to access a gate and massive delays in baggage claim. Hugo Zylberberg, a 28-year-old researcher, said while his 11-hour flight from Egypt was on time, it took an hour to find a gate, another hour at customs and then an hour and a half to wait for his luggage.

"There's still like a hundred people waiting for their luggage," he said. "I'm pretty exhausted. I'm waiting to get home. It's kind of crazy," he said. "People were starting to be pretty angry." Rajesh Varadarajan, a

41-year-old software consultant en route from India to Trinidad, whose connecting flight to the Caribbean had been delayed more than 24 hours, sat JFK cut a poor comparison to airports such as Dubai or Singapore, and newer airports in his home country. "It's far from it, because I mean just look around; there's no place to sit," he said. "Even Dunkin' Donuts is closed."

On Saturday, Terminal One was briefly closed and 94 flights cancelled and 17 diverted, as the extreme cold and storm recovery "created a cascading series of issues," said the Port Authority. The US East Coast has been gripped by days of record-breaking cold temperatures after a storm Thursday, dubbed a "bomb cyclone," which was blamed for at least 22 reported deaths. Boston, which saw some of the heaviest snow from the storm, froze with a Sunday morning low of minus two degrees Fahrenheit (minus 19 degrees Celsius) matching the previous January 7 record in 1896. Highs below freezing lingered on the East Coast as far south as North Carolina, with temperatures due to rise from today. —AFP



A string of flights diverted to other airports, terminals

Paid less than male peers, BBC editor quits, speaks out

LONDON: The BBC's China Editor Carrie Gracie has quit her post in Beijing to fight for her right to pay equality with male peers, posting an attack on what she called the "secretive and illegal BBC pay culture". Gracie's revolt is part of the fallout from pay disclosures the British broadcaster was forced to make last July, which showed that two thirds of the highest earners on air were men, and that some of them were earning far more than women in equivalent roles. Funded by a licence fee levied on TV viewers and reaching 95 percent of British adults every week, the BBC is a pillar of the nation's life, but as such it is closely scrutinized and held to exacting standards by the public and rival media.

Gracie's stand was one of the top news headlines of the day on the BBC itself and on other British media, and many prominent women from the BBC and beyond voiced their support on social media under the slogan #IStandWithCarrie. Gracie, who speaks fluent Mandarin and has reported on China for three decades, has not left the BBC. She said she was returning to her former post in the TV newsroom in London where she expected to be paid equally to men in equal jobs.

"I am not asking for more money. I believe I am very well paid already—especially as someone working for a publicly funded organization. I simply want the BBC to abide by the law and value men and women equally," she wrote on her website. Gracie said she was paid 135,000 pounds (\$182,800) a year as China editor. According to last July's disclosures, North America Editor Jon Sopel earned between 200,000 and 250,000 pounds a year, while Middle East Editor Jeremy Bowen was in the 150,000 to 200,000 bracket.

Europe editor Katya Adler, the BBC's only other female editor in foreign news, did not feature in the disclosures, meaning her pay was less than 150,000 pounds. Gracie said managers had offered to increase her pay to 180,000 pounds, but that was no solution. She rejected the rise and insisted that all four of the BBC's international editors should receive equal pay. "I was not interested in more money. I was interested in equality," she said during an interview on BBC radio. Britain enacted legislation outlawing sex discrimination in the 1970s and this was followed by an equality act in 2010, but women still earn less than men across much of the economy.

The BBC defended itself by saying its gender pay gap was below the national average and less bad than at many other organizations, adding that it was committed to wiping it out by 2020. It also said an independent audit of rank and file staff had found "no systemic discrimination against women" at the BBC. Several high-profile women seized on the Gracie story to say the problem was much bigger than the BBC and affected the whole of society. —Reuters

Pakistan's water crisis: Poisonous and running out

ISLAMABAD: Barely 15 days old, Kinza whimpers at an Islamabad hospital where she is suffering from diarrhoea and a blood infection, a tiny victim among thousands afflicted by Pakistan's severely polluted and decreasing water supplies. Cloaked in a colorful blanket, Kinza moves in slow motion, like a small doll. Her mother, Sartaj, does not understand how her daughter became so ill. "Each time I give her the bottle, I boil the water," she said.

But Sartaj and her family drink daily from a stream in their Islamabad neighborhood—one of several waterways running through the capital that are choked with filth. Boiling the water can only do so much. They are not alone. More than two-thirds of households drink bacterially contaminated water and, every year, 53,000 Pakistani children die of diarrhoea after drinking it, says UNICEF. Cases of typhoid, cholera, dysentery and hepatitis are rampant. According to the UN and Pakistani authorities, between 30 and 40 percent of diseases and deaths nationwide are linked to poor water quality.

And it is costing the developing country billions. In 2012 the World Bank, which has warned that "substantial investments are needed to improve sanitation", estimated that water pollution costs Pakistan \$5.7 billion, or nearly four percent of GDP. "Water is the number one problem for the country," says professor Javed Akram, vice chancellor at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences in Islamabad. In Lahore, Pakistan's second largest city, the situation is even worse than in Islamabad.

The Ravi River which supplies the city's 11 million or so inhabitants with drinking water also serves as a spillway to hundreds of factories upstream. River fish are eaten by locals, but "some papers show that in the fish-bones, some heavy metal contamination (is) found," says

Sohail Ali Naqvi, a project officer with the conservation group WWF. The Ravi is also used to irrigate neighboring crops, which are themselves rich in pesticides, warns Lahore environmentalist Ahmad Rafay Alam.

'Absolute scarcity'

The lack of water infrastructure is glaring. In a country where the "environment is not part of the political agenda", there are "nearly no treatment plants", warns Imran Khalid, a researcher at the Sustainable Development Policy Institute. "Those who can afford it buy bottles of water, but what about those who cannot?" he says. In Karachi, a megacity whose population could be as many as 20 million people, mafias fill the vacuum left by the creaking local network, selling the precious water they bring in by tanker trucks at high prices.

In the face of widespread indignation, Sindh along with Punjab province, together home to more than half of the country's population, have already announced measures to improve water quality, though their efficacy is yet to be seen. But Pakistan's water is not only contaminated—it is becoming scarce. Official projections show the country, whose population has increased fivefold since 1960 to some 207 million, will run dry by 2025, when they will be facing an "absolute scarcity" of water with less than 500 cubic meters available per person in Pakistan. That's just one third the water available in already parched Somalia now, according to the UN.

'Lack of education'

Pakistan, a country of massive Himalayan glaciers, monsoon rains and floods, has just three major water storage basins, compared with more than a thousand in South Africa or Canada, says Bashir Ahmad of the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council. As such any surplus is quickly lost, said Ahmad, who denounced "a lack of political vision" to counter the nationwide water crisis.

While official statistics show that 90 percent of the country's water is used for agriculture, the



ISLAMABAD: A girl fills a bottle at a water filtration plant in Islamabad. More than two-thirds of households drink bacterially contaminated water and, every year, 53,000 Pakistani children die of diarrhoea after drinking it, says UNICEF. —AFP

massive irrigation network, built decades ago by British colonists, has deteriorated. Much of its use appears to defy common sense. "We are neglecting the northern areas, where there (is) a lot of rainfall, to focus on irrigated areas like Sindh or Punjab," says Ahmad. There, in arid areas where temperatures can soar up to 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit), Pakistan grows water-intensive crops such as rice and sugar cane.

"The crisis is looming. In all urban areas, the water table is going down day by day," warns Muhammad Ashraf, chairman of the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources. Pumps draw deeper and deeper into the water table, where the arsenic content is naturally higher, he warns. An international study in August said some 50 to 60 million Pakistanis are slowly poisoning themselves with arsenic-tainted water. —AFP