



Syrian ground forces seek to gain territory

Afghan leader offers talks with Taleban 'without preconditions'

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NIPA, Papua New Guinea: People walk at the site of a landslide near the village of Ekari in Papua New Guinea's highlands region after a 7.5-magnitude earthquake. — AFP

Whole villages flattened by deadly quake

Death toll hits 20 in Papua New Guinea

SYDNEY: Whole villages were flattened and water sources spoiled by a powerful earthquake that killed at least 20 people, residents said yesterday as rescuers struggled to reach the hardest-hit areas in Papua New Guinea's remote, mountainous highlands. The magnitude 7.5 quake rocked the rugged Southern Highlands province some 560 km northwest of the capital, Port Moresby, triggering landslides, damaging mining, gas and power infrastructure, and cutting communications.

Scores of aftershocks have hampered rescue efforts and rattled nervous villagers over the past two days, including a 6.0 tremor just before 1 pm yesterday registered by the US Geological Survey. Most of the confirmed fatalities were in or around the provincial capital of Mendi and the town of Tari, according to authorities and residents contacted by Reuters. "It's massive destruction," Stanley Mamu told Reuters by telephone from Tari, 40 km from the epicenter. One

person was killed in Tari and another five were killed in a landslide in a nearby village, he said.

"There are buildings on the ground and landslides along the roads. My home was destroyed. The main sources of water were all flooded, it's dirty and brown and people can't drink that water," Mamu said. Australia has sent a C-130 military transport plane to help with aerial surveillance. The office of Australia's Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said in a statement it would likely take days before the extent of the damage was clear.

Miners and oil and gas companies were also assessing the damage, which included ensuring a 700-km gas pipeline that connects to a coastal liquefaction plant was intact before it could be reopened.

A spokesman from Papua New Guinea's National Disaster Centre said a preliminary assessment of damage was still underway as officials tried to fly by helicopter to cut-off areas. A police officer in Mendi said landslides had buried homes and blocked a river residents worried could flood the town. "We are really in deep fear," said police sergeant Naring Bongi.

"It continues to be active. We didn't sleep well and stayed awake until daybreak ... no helicopters or government officials have come to our assistance." Udaya Regmi, the head of the International Red Cross in Papua New Guinea, said disrupted communication was the most immediate hurdle, but finding clean water would likely be the most pressing need if water tanks had been destroyed.

Medical supplies, food and heavy equipment to clear landslides were also needed, said James Justin, a spokesman for provincial MP Manasseh Makiba. "The casualties have yet to be confirmed but many more than 20 people have lost their lives," he said. Earthquakes are common in Papua New Guinea, which sits on the Pacific's "Ring of Fire", a hotspot for seismic activity due to friction between tectonic plates. Part of PNG's northern coast was devastated in 1998 by a tsunami, generated by a 7.0 quake, which killed about 2,200 people. — Reuters



Highlands hardest hit, cut off by road, phone lines poor

Body odor haters likely to vote for President Trump

PARIS: People easily disgusted by body odors (BO) seem to prefer authoritarian leaders and were likelier to support Donald Trump, an unusual study into the origins of ideology suggested yesterday. The seemingly obscure link, it said, may be rooted in a deep-seated instinct to avoid disease—whether in individuals whose smell suggests they are germ-carriers, or "unfamiliar" people such as immigrants or minorities. The study results "contribute to the growing evidence that contemporary social attitudes may be rooted in basic sensory functions," the researchers wrote.

In two online surveys, the team asked people in several countries a series of questions to determine their level of "body odor disgust sensitivity" (BODS), as well as their position on the political spectrum. They were looking for signs of "right-wing authoritarianism"—which study author Marco Liuzza from Italy's Magna Graecia University summarized as an attitude "promoting aggressive policies towards groups perceived as deviant or threatening the traditional values". Analysis of the data revealed a "solid connection" between how strongly people reacted to body smells and their desire for a leader that can keep

groups of people "in their places", said co-author Jonas Olofsson of Stockholm University.

In a third test, with American participants, the researchers looked for a correlation between BODS and support for Trump—who they said "was described as having a particularly authoritarian message". The study, published in the Royal Society journal *Open Science*, was conducted when Trump and Democrat Hillary Clinton were rival candidates for the presidency. The results "showed that people who were more disgusted by smells were also more likely to vote for Donald Trump than those who were less sensitive," said Olofsson.

Current trends

"We thought that was interesting because Donald Trump talks frequently about how different people disgust him ... It fits with our hypothesis that his supporters would be more easily disgusted themselves." Disgust is a crucial survival tool that helps humans avoid potential health threats lurking in foul-smelling, rotting flesh, for example. It can also be triggered by non-infectious stimuli, including by people who "deviate" from the societal norm, whether it be physically, morally or with their sexual preferences. Smells listed in the questionnaires included breath, sweat, feet, faeces, urine and gas—the participants' own and that of strangers. Political questions tested a participant's stand on issues such as abortion, pornography, religion, and morality in general, as well as whether they intended to vote for Trump or not. — AFP

'It's a lifestyle'; US teens defend guns

SUNRISE: Reanna Frauens, a lifelong gun enthusiast and a proud member of the Markham Skeet, Trap & Sporting Clays Club, is about the same age as many of the 17 victims killed by a shooter with an assault rifle at a Florida high school about a dozen miles away. But unlike many of the survivors of the massacre, the 16-year-old sees a nascent, student-led campaign for tighter gun controls as a threat to her rights under the US Constitution. "It's a horrible tragedy, but when people start promoting gun control, I am taken aback a little bit because it's a sport, it's a lifestyle, and a lot of people don't realize that," said Frauens, a member of the National Rifle Association (NRA), the politically powerful gun-rights advocacy group.

Her concerns, similar to those voiced by other teens at the club in Sunrise, Florida, are a vivid counterpoint to the views of students who have been lobbying state and federal lawmakers for tighter restrictions on gun ownership. "We have a tradition of hunting in my family, and to hear that people want to take it away and put many restrictions on it sounds unrealistic," said Frauens, who saw any attempt to ban the kind of AR-15 semi-automatic rifle used in the school shooting as an infringement upon her Second Amendment right to bear arms. The NRA Foundation, the organization's charitable arm, has long relied on grants for shooting-related programs to build support among new generations of Americans.

A big slice of the more than \$335 million it allocated to shooting programs since 1990



OREM: A 7.62x39mm round sits next a 30 round magazine and an AK-47 with a bump stock installed at Good Guys Gun and Range in Orem, Utah. The bump stock is a device when installed allows a semi-automatic to fire at a rapid rate much like a fully automatic gun. — AFP

went to youth groups ranging from Boy Scout troops to school clubs. Nikolas Cruz, the 19-year-old accused of the killings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, belonged to one of those clubs before he was expelled from the school. The young Florida gun enthusiasts suggest it may be premature to forecast a victory for the student-led movement in turning the tide on the gun debate in America. Polls show that previous schools shootings over the last two decades failed to make younger Americans significantly more in favor of gun control than their parents or grandparents.

Attitudes toward gun control appear to have strong correlation with political affiliation and whether a person lived in a household with a firearm, not with age, said Juliana Horowitz, director of research at the Pew Research Center. "At least with the current 18 to 29 year olds, we don't see a difference in their views compared with older

Americans," said Horowitz, while conceding that things could change with the next generation. The Parkland students are attempting to break a nearly decade-old stalemate in which the proportion of Americans backing gun control, over protecting gun rights, has not budged from around 50 percent, according to Pew data.

That said, a poll on Friday by the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion, nine days after Parkland, found three-quarters of Americans believed the students would have some impact on gun reform. And 85 percent said a candidate's views on gun ownership would influence their votes in November's midterm elections. Emma Gonzalez, one of the Parkland students who formed the #NeverAgain gun control movement, surpassed one million followers on Twitter on Monday, twice as many as the NRA has. In the current atmosphere, many of the Markham club members feel like pariahs. — Reuters