

International

Child drowns at sea off Greece in first fatality after Turkey opens the border

Greeks fear 'invasion' of migrants across Turkish border

KASTANIES: A child died after being pulled from the sea when a boat capsized yesterday off the Greek island of Lesbos, Greek officials said, the first reported fatality since Turkey opened its border last week to let migrants reach Europe. Separately, two Turkish security sources said a Syrian migrant had died from injuries yesterday after Greek security forces intervened to prevent migrants crossing from Turkey into Greece, but Athens branded the claim "fake news".

More than 10,000 migrants, mostly from Syria, other Middle Eastern states and Afghanistan, have reached Turkey's land borders with EU states Greece and Bulgaria since Ankara said last Thursday it would stop keeping them on its territory. Greek and Turkish police fired tear gas into crowds caught between the fences in no-man's land over the weekend. Further south, at least 1,000 migrants have reached Greece's eastern Aegean islands since Sunday morning, Greek police say.

The Greek coast guard said the boat which capsized off Lesbos had been escorted there by a Turkish vessel. Forty-six people were rescued and two children taken to hospital, one of whom could not be revived. Another dinghy with about 30 Afghans arrived on Lesbos early in the morning, a Reuters journalist reported from the island. Thirty-two others were rescued in the seas off Farmakonissi, a small island close to Turkey, the coast guard said.

"This is an invasion," Development Minister Adonis Georgiadis told Skai TV yesterday. The latest migrant surge follows Turkey's decision to stop enforcing a 2016 agreement with the European Union whereby it prevented migrants entering the bloc in return for billions of euros in aid. Turkey, already home to 3.7 million

Syrian refugees, has another million arriving on its doorstep from a new surge of fighting in northern Syria and says it cannot handle any more.

White flags

Greek officials have accused Turkey of orchestrating a coordinated effort to drive migrants across the frontier. One Greek policeman accused Turkish soldiers at the Kastanies border gate of "giving cutters" to migrants to cut holes in the fence to get through. Reuters could not independently verify the report. Migrants on the Turkish side of the border, some holding white flags, called the Greek soldiers and riot police to open the gates to let them through, saying they had kids and women. A Greek government spokesman said a video circulating on social media showing a young man with wounds to the head laid out on the ground near the border was "fake news". Two Turkish security sources said the Syrian man had died of his wounds.

"We call upon everyone to use caution when reporting news that furthers Turkish propaganda," spokesman Stelios Petsas said on Twitter.

Earlier, Petsas told reporters after a national security meeting in Athens that the migrant surge posed "an active, serious, severe and asymmetrical threat to national security".

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who has beefed up border security and warned migrants not to try to cross, will visit the frontier on Tuesday with European Council head Charles Michel and European Commission Ursula von der Leyen. Prime Minister Boyko Borissov of Bulgaria, which also shares a land border with Turkey, was due to hold talks in Ankara



KASTANIES: This picture taken from the Greek side of the Greece-Turkey border near Kastanies, shows migrants waiting on the Turkish side yesterday. —AFP

yesterday evening with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan on the migrant crisis.

Turkey's decision to open its border threatens to reverse an agreement that halted Western Europe's biggest wave of migration since World War Two, the 2015-2016 crisis when 4,000 people drowned in Aegean and more than a million reached Greece. There

are more than 40,000 migrants still living on Greece's Aegean islands in severely overcrowded camps. Erdogan, who has long accused the EU of failing to provide enough support to Turkey over the migrant crisis, took the decision after at least 33 Turkish soldiers sent to Syria to monitor a crumbling ceasefire there were killed last week. —Reuters



Large numbers of migrants trying to cross from Turkey

India MPs scuffle over deadly riots

NEW DELHI: Indian lawmakers pushed and shoved each other in parliament yesterday after opposition parties demanded the resignation of interior minister Amit Shah over the handling of deadly riots triggered by a citizenship law that excludes Muslims. Police said yesterday that at least 41 people had died in two days of Hindu-Muslim clashes in New Delhi last week, the worst communal riots in the capital in decades.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party says the law, which grants refuge to non-Muslim minorities from across south Asia, is required to protect those groups from persecution. Critics say it is discriminatory and contravenes the spirit of India's secular constitution. Hundreds of thousands of people - led by students

and Muslim groups - have been demonstrating for more than two months, amid fears that the government will also launch a population register that could leave many Muslims stateless.

A week ago, a mob of several hundred people chanting Hindu nationalist slogans torched two mosques and dozens of Muslim houses, eyewitnesses said, while nearby houses carrying Hindu symbols were left untouched. In parliament yesterday, opposition legislators shouted slogans and waved posters demanding that Shah, who controls Delhi's police and is a key ally of Modi's, step down. In Shiv Vihar, a low-income area in northeast Delhi where some of the worst violence took place, hundreds of paramilitary police patrolled deserted lanes.

"There has been a big improvement in the situation," Delhi's chief of police SN Srivastava said while touring the area, littered with burnt-out vehicles and schoolbooks. "The primary focus is to restore confidence among the people." But there was anger from those affected. "The police took us to another area but



NEW DELHI: Indian Youth Congress activists shout slogans and hold placards during a protest demanding the resignation of Home Minister Amit Shah and the police registration of a First Information Report (FIR) against Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders Kapil Mishra, Anurag Thakur and Parvesh Verma for the hate speeches over last week's sectarian riots in India's capital. —AFP

didn't even ask how we were," said Mohammed Uddin, 70, whose home was burnt by the mob. "I don't even have clothes." —Reuters

Three generations of Afghans look at Taleban's return

KABUL: Seated on a rug in their Kabul living room, three generations of men from the same family sip tea as they discuss the political changes sweeping Afghanistan. The eldest among them fought the Taleban, the middle one grew up under the shadow of their brutal regime and the youngest has never known them. Now, all three fear the arc of history will place the hardline Islamists back in power.

On Saturday, the US and the Taleban signed a deal that would see US troops begin to quit Afghanistan in return for security guarantees from the insurgents. While the US has heralded the deal as a vital step towards peace, many Afghans are deeply skeptical about what comes next. "This is not the right time for the Americans to leave," said family patriarch Abdul Salam, 68, a former mujahideen fighter who battled the

Taleban in the 1990s.

"Everything will be reversed and the country will go back to civil war like in the '90s. No one will be able to control it", he added, as he displayed a photo of himself standing alongside iconic anti-Taleban commander Ahmad Shah Massoud. The US-Taleban deal will see thousands of American troops leave Afghanistan provided the insurgents stick to key pledges, such as opening talks with the Afghan government and not letting the country become a jihadist safe haven.

But many assume the Taleban will leverage the dwindling American presence and Washington's political disengagement to fight for greater gains across Afghanistan, and eventually exert broad influence in Kabul. While raising his family in the capital in the 1990s, Salam heard the Taleban were torturing people from his home region of Panjshir, one of the few parts of Afghanistan that never fully fell to the insurgents. He decided to join the fight and moved his family to the mountainous region.

"There were no Taleban in my province," he said, as he proudly showed pictures of comrades who lost their lives



ALINGAR: Afghan Taleban militants and villagers attend a gathering as they celebrate the peace deal and their victory in the Afghan conflict on US in Afghanistan, in Alingar district of Laghman Province yesterday. —AFP

fighting the insurgents. But food in the besieged province was so scarce that the family faced starvation-eating grass at one point-and fled in 1999 to neighboring Pakistan. Two years later, Al-

Qaeda, sheltered by the Taleban, conducted the September 11 attacks on America, prompting a US-led invasion and the collapse of the religious fundamentalists' regime. —AFP

Nighat Dad, Pakistan's digital warrior battling the patriarchy

LAHORE: With her flashing rings, green-streaked hair and "Hack the patriarchy" laptop stickers, Nighat Dad is a digital warrior. But this human rights award winner and founder of Pakistan's first cyber-harassment helpline still tears up as she describes receiving calls from women afraid of being killed by male relatives for using the internet. "We sometimes find ourselves helpless... Somebody calls us and asks for help while crying that 'Please, please save my life'," she tells AFP at the offices for her non-profit Digital

Rights Foundation in the eastern city of Lahore.

Much of Pakistani society lives under the patriarchal, outdated code of so-called "honor" that systemizes the oppression of women by preventing them from, for example, choosing their own husband or working outside the home. Activists have denounced pervasive, sometimes deadly violence by men - usually male relatives - against women who break those taboos.

The situation is dire enough in the offline world. But Pakistan is only just beginning to grapple with what violent notions of honor mean for women online, in a country where internet penetration is at 22 percent and growing, but digital literacy is low. There have been examples of men attacking women for using the internet in ways that much of the rest of the world considers normal, such as publishing photos of themselves on a Facebook page.

Women are suffering

Dad formed the Digital Rights Foundation, a think tank tackling digital rights through a gender lens, in 2012, winning her recognition as one of Time magazine's next generation leaders in 2015 and a Human Rights Tulip award in 2016.

She launched the cyber-harassment helpline that same year, funding it with the 100,000 euros (\$108,000) in Tulip prize money. The idea, she says, "came out of anger" at the violence women were suffering. The helpline now receives up to 20 calls a day and the number is increasing. Callers range from celebrities to poor women in deeply conservative areas whose male relatives do not allow them to leave their homes.

Many call about the non-consensual publication of their intimate images. The issue can be damaging

enough to women in developed countries. In Pakistan, even less severe cases can see families forbidding women from attending school or forcing them into quick marriages to save their "honor", while in the most severe it can be deadly. Much of the work the helpline does is to explain to women what recourse they have.

Social media companies are playing ball, Dad says - some have even agreed to establish "escalation channels" for getting content off the internet quickly when a woman's life is in immediate danger. But she warns that community guidelines developed by such companies, usually US-based, are not appropriate in Pakistan. "I think they need to do more," Dad says. More than three years on, the Tulip money has run out. Now the helpline survives only by the grace of small grants from groups such as the Netherlands-based Digital Defenders Partnership, which supports rights activists. —AFP

India Muslims pray under armed guard after deadly riots

NEW DELHI: Muslims in India's capital held regular Friday prayers under the watch of riot police, capping a week which saw 42 killed and hundreds injured during the city's worst sectarian violence in decades. Scores of mosques in New Delhi's northeast held their first sermons since mobs armed with swords, guns and acid razed parts of the district yesterday.

The violence was triggered by protests against a citizenship law seen by many critics as anti-Muslim and part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist agenda. Paramilitary police patrolled the streets outside, still littered with broken shards of glass, stones and other debris. Dozens of volunteers stood outside the main mosque in the neighborhood of Mustafabad, home to some of the week's worst violence, urging devotees to disperse immediately after prayers.

"These are testing times. We have to be patient," said the presiding imam, after calling on his congregation to stay calm. Fear and tension were rampant through the neighborhood, with police barring Muslim worshippers from what was left of one of several mosques set ablaze by Hindu rioters yesterday.

Nearby, a group of residents in the Hindu-dominated Shiv Vihar area blocked the lane leading to one of the local mosques with the burnt-out frames of motorcycles, which they said were set alight by Muslims. "No one will be allowed to enter until the rioters are caught," they shouted at a crowd of Muslims seeking entry. "We don't want violence," said Saleem Mirza, as police told the Muslims to disperse to avoid any fresh trouble. "We want to live in peace, work for our children and live a normal life. We prayed for peace for everyone today."

India's new citizenship law has triggered months of demonstrations between anti-government demonstrators and police. At least 30 people died in protest violence last year, mainly in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. Many of the country's 200 million-strong Muslim minority fear the law - combined with a mooted citizens' register - will leave them stateless. Modi has sought to allay the fears but in recent weeks politicians from the prime minister's right-wing party have called the demonstrators "anti-nationals" and "traitors". —AFP