



China weighs ban on clothing that 'hurts feelings' of nation

Ukraine recaptures land near Bakhmut

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DERNA: Rescue personnel walk on a mud-covered road as they work in the aftermath of the devastating Derna flood on Sept 17, 2023. — AFP

Survivors recount Libya flood horror

'Mountain of water' swept away buildings, leaving only mud behind

DERNA: It was long past midnight when Abdel Moneim Awad al-Sheikh awoke to desperate screams from outside his home in the Libyan city of Derna, only to find his building engulfed by surging flood waters. "I took nothing but my glasses and phone and fled as the waters shook the iron doors like an earthquake," recounted the 73-year-old survivor of the deadly disaster.

He and his family managed to escape their first-floor home and rush up the stairs of the multi-storey building as the raging waters tore away the front door and swept it into the darkness. From the top floor, they watched in horror as the tsunami-like tidal wave swept away entire buildings, cars and the people inside them, washing untold numbers into the Mediterranean Sea.

The enormous flood, fueled by torrential rains on Sept 10, had broken through two upstream dams and sent a tidal wave crashing down the previously dry riverbed, or wadi, that bisects the city of 100,000. A week on, thick mud cakes the devastated building where al-Sheikh and his wife lived, along with two

of their sons and their families, in the city where the official death toll has climbed above 3,000.

Scramble onto roof

By the time they had reached the fourth floor that traumatic night, the water had temporarily begun to subside, but it was not the end of the nightmare, said al-Sheikh. Roughly 20 minutes later, "my son yelled from upstairs and said another, bigger wave, about 20 meters (66 feet) high, is coming". "We put up a wooden ladder and climbed up onto the second roof, where we stayed until after dawn."

As the sun rose over Derna, now a vast apocalyptic wasteland of shattered buildings and lives lost, a group of volunteers came to help them, most of them young men. "One of them had lost his entire family," said al-Sheikh. Amid the chaos, the true death toll remains unknown, with the health minister of divided Libya's eastern administration, Othman Abdeljalil, saying 3,283 people were confirmed dead in Derna. Libyan officials and hu-

manitarian organizations have warned that the final toll could be much higher, with thousands still missing.

'Mountain of water'

Many who survived the flood lost everything except their lives, their homes now only shells emptied of their contents. Mohamed al-Zawi, 25, recalled that "all our furniture and things were moving" as water swirled through their home. The first wave was only at pavement-level, but the second came "with strength", quickly reaching the second and then third floors of his building.

Zawi recalled seeing "a large mountain of water bringing with it cars, people, belongings ... and pouring everything out into the sea". Seated near what was once his home, the shock remains etched onto Zawi's face. "We had received warnings a day earlier that strong rains were expected and that we should remain at home, but nothing else," he said. UN experts have blamed the high death toll both on climatic factors and the legacy of Libya's war that has

weakened its critical infrastructure, early warning systems and emergency response.

'I saw death'

Zawi said that when he finally managed to come down from the roof, once the waters subsided, he saw "25 or 30 bodies" along the nearby streets. He rushed to find shrouds for them, he said, before moving on to help the search for any survivors. In the same neighborhood, Mohamed Abdelhafiz, a Lebanese national who has lived in Derna for decades, recounted that "the earth shook" that night, and he initially thought a quake had hit. "I saw death," the 50-year-old said, recalling how he had rushed out to his balcony only to find that the water had already reached it. Standing at an empty window frame, he pointed outside to the shattered city and said: "This whole area, from my house to the wadi, had three or four buildings." "Now, there is nothing. The ground is just mud, as though there were never any buildings here." — AFP

1 in 10 Japanese are older than 80: Government data

TOKYO: More than 10 percent of Japanese people have crossed 80 years or older for the first time, new official data showed, as the nation faces a rapidly greying population. Government data released on Sunday, ahead of Monday's "Respect for Aged Day" national holiday, also showed that the share of Japan's population at 65 or older expanded to a record 29.1 percent from 29.0 percent a year ago.

The level compared with second-ranked Italy's 24.5 percent and third-ranked Finland's 23.6 percent, according to the internal affairs ministry. "Japan has the highest percentage of elderly population in the world," the ministry said in a press release.

For decades, Japan has seen its population shrink and grow older as young people delay marriage and children largely due to unstable jobs and economic difficulties. As a result, Japan has seen ballooning costs for elderly care with not enough young people to fill jobs and pay for various social and welfare programs.

The ministry said that with the baby boomer population turning 75 or older, Japan's 124.4 million people are continuing to grow older. Around 12.59 million people are 80 or older while 20 million are 75 or older, it said. As a result, Japan is relying on an elderly labor force. More than nine million elderly are working, accounting for 13.6 percent of the workforce, or one in seven workers in Japan.

A quarter of all elderly in Japan have jobs, less than South Korea's 36.2 percent, but far ahead of other developing countries such as the United States at 18.6 percent, and France at 3.9 percent. More than a third of people between 70 to 74 have jobs in Japan, the data showed. By 2040, Japan's elderly population is projected to account for 34.8 percent of the population. — AFP

Tensions ease in Karabakh as aid resumes

BAKU: Tensions over Nagorno-Karabakh eased a notch on Monday as aid deliveries resumed to the breakaway territory following an agreement between Armenian separatists and authorities in Azerbaijan.

Armenia had accused Azerbaijan of fueling a humanitarian crisis in the mountainous region — internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan — by closing the sole road linking the region with Armenia. It had said the closure of the Lachin corridor, which is policed by Russian peacekeepers, had led to food and medicine shortages in the region and accused Azerbaijan of ethnic cleansing, allegations Baku has denied.

Baku has said separatists refused its proposal to reopen Lachin at the same time as the Aghdam road, which connects Nagorno-Karabakh with the rest of Azerbaijan. The months-long crisis as well as Azerbaijan's deployment of troops near Nagorno-Karabakh and along the border with Armenia had sparked fears of a fresh war between the arch-foes locked in a decades-long dispute over the region.

The "simultaneous passage of the Red Cross cars was ensured" through the Lachin corridor and the Aghdam road on Monday, Hikmet Hajiyev, foreign policy advisor to Azerbaijan's president said on social media. "The whole international community once again witnessed that there was no so-called blockade but a deliberate self-blockade, weaponization and politicization of humanitarian issues," he said.

'Sustained relief'

Separatist authorities confirmed 23 tons of wheat flour from Armenia as well as medical supplies had been delivered to Nagorno-Karabakh "thanks to the agreement reached between the Red Cross's Stepanakert branch and Russian peacekeepers." "The delivery of cargo from the Russian city of Rostov is planned by Red Cross vehicles in several days via the same routes."

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan recently said some 2,000 Russian peacekeepers were either "unable or unwilling" to control the road as part of a 2020 ceasefire deal between Baku and Yerevan. The International Committee of the Red Cross said it had managed to deliver "wheat



BAKU: Captured Armenian arms are displayed at a memorial exhibition in Baku on Sept 13, 2023. — AFP

flour and essential medical items" through the two roads thanks to "a humanitarian consensus" between regional "decision-makers".

Nagorno-Karabakh residents "urgently need sustained relief through regular humanitarian shipments," said Ariane Bauer, ICRC's regional director for Europe and Central Asia. The European Union and United States have called for the reopening of Lachin and Aghdam routes for humanitarian aid.

Azerbaijan's Armenian-populated enclave was at the center of two wars between Armenia and Azerbaijan — in 2020 and in the 1990s. Six weeks of fighting ended in autumn 2020 with a Russian-brokered truce that saw Armenia cede swathes of territory it had controlled since the 1990s. There have been frequent clashes at the two countries' shared border despite the ongoing peace talks between Baku and Yerevan under the mediation of the European Union and United States.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have said they are committed to the conflict's peaceful settlement, but the negotiations have so far failed to bring about a breakthrough. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, ethnic Armenian separatists in Karabakh broke away from Azerbaijan. The ensuing conflict claimed some 30,000 lives. — AFP

US military asks for help finding lost stealth jet

WASHINGTON: A stealth-capable US fighter jet vanished on Sunday — not from prying eyes but rather from the American military, prompting an unusual call to the public to help locate the missing multimillion-dollar plane. After what authorities labeled a "mishap," a pilot flying an F-35 in the southern state of South Carolina on Sunday afternoon ejected from the craft.

The pilot survived, but the military was left with an expensive problem: it couldn't find the jet, leading Joint Base Charleston to ask for help from local residents. "If you have any information that may help our recovery teams locate the F-35, please call the Base Defense Operations Center," a post from the base read on X, formerly known as Twitter. Base authorities said they were searching, in coordination with federal aviation regulators, around two lakes north of the city of Charleston. The planes, manufactured by Lockheed Martin, cost around \$80 million each. — AFP