

24 injured in gas pipeline blast in China

BEIJING, JUNE 11 /--/ A gas pipeline operated by a state-backed energy giant in southwest China's Guizhou province exploded, injuring at least 24 people, officials said today. Gas leaked from a section of the gas pipeline operated by State-controlled PetroChina in Shazi town of Qinglong county and then caused an explosion and fire about yesterday, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. No deaths have been reported. The pipeline was automatically shut down after the explosion and the fire was put out at 2:30 AM (local time) today. Of the 24 hospitalised, eight were in critical condition, but the injuries were not life threatening, the report said. The cause of the accident is under investigation, the report said, adding the search and rescue is continuing. In July last year, a similar fire caused by heavy rains and a landslide near the same section of pipeline in Shazi killed eight and injured 35. (PTI)

5,000 saplings to be planted at Nepal's Pashupatinath temple

KATHMANDU, JUNE 11 /--/ Nepal will plant 5,000 saplings in the iconic Pashupatinath temple premises with an objective of beautifying the fifth-century world heritage site with greenery. The temple is regarded as the most sacred and oldest temple of Lord Shiva (Pashupati) in Nepal. The temple is located on the banks of the Bagmati river. Minister for Culture and Tourism Rabinendra Adhikari initiated the campaign to plant saplings.

Two hundred and fifty saplings of various species including Belprata, Lohsalu, Chilame, Lapsi and Parijat were planted at Mrigasthali area of the temple, according to Pravin Dhakal, chief of the Pashupati Area Development Trust. The trust has decided to allow people to plant saplings in the Pashupati area on special occasions. The Pashupatinath temple is the holy Hindu shrine where hundreds of thousands of people from different parts of India and Nepal visit annually. (PTI)

Caretaker Pak PM, gov members violate law to declare assets

ISLAMABAD, JUNE 10 /--/ In a gross violation of law in Pakistan, the caretaker Prime Minister and members of all provincial governments have failed to disclose their assets within three days.

Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister Nasirul Mulk, who took over the office on June 1, has

India PM, Xi agreed to cherish, implement Wuhan consensus: China

BEIJING, JUNE 11 /--/ China today presented an upbeat picture of the talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping at Qingdao, saying they agreed to "cherish" the "positive momentum" generated by their Wuhan meeting and implement the "important consensus" reached at the summit. Modi and Xi on June 9 held talks on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in the port city of Qingdao. The meeting covered key aspects of the bilateral engagement, reflecting the resolve by the two countries to reset relations and bring back trust in their ties, hit by the Doklam standoff and several other thorny issues. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang during a media briefing here today said, "The two leaders exchanged views on bilateral relations and issues of mutual interests. They also reached important consensus."

"Both leaders believe that their informal summit in Wuhan played a positive role in moving forward the bilateral cooperation," he said, responding a question on Modi-Xi meeting on the sidelines of the just-concluded Qingdao summit of the SCO. "They agreed that that the positive momentum should be cher-

ished and they should implement the consensus reached in Wuhan," Geng said. They agreed to implement the consensus in areas of strategic communication and expanding people to people cooperation and move forward bilateral ties, he said. The meeting was held in cordial atmosphere just like the Wuhan informal summit and it will surely contribute to the sound development of bilateral ties, he said. The two sides also agreed to have high-level exchanges, formulate new trade goals and establish high-level people to people exchanges led by the two foreign ministries, he said.

Geng highlighted India's decision to expedite approval procedures for the Bank of China's request to set up a branch in Mumbai and agreements on exporting India's rice to China and sharing of hydrological data by Beijing with New Delhi. During the meeting, Xi and Modi agreed to hold the next informal summit in India next year besides resolving to continue efforts to ensure peace and tranquillity along the border. On the outcome of the SCO summit, Geng said it "breathed new life to the Shanghai spirit, which is mutual respect which is mutual benefit, equality consultation, respect for diverse

civilisations and pursuit of common development." In the past 17 years the SCO has been growing. This is attributed in the final analysis to the fact that the Shanghai spirit transcended the outdated concepts of clash of civilisations, cold war the mind-set. SCO pursues no isolated and exclusive clubs," he said. The summit has established new action plan. The Leaders signed and approved 17 documents, six cooperation documents, more than any previous summits of the SCO, Geng said.

The summit also achieved concrete outcomes and made plans for promoting good neighbourliness and friendship, combating three evil forces of separatism, extremism and terrorism, he said. "To implement this consensus is our priority task for the next phase. As founding member China regards SCO as a priority of its diplomacy. We will work with all member states to implement this consensus and make the SCO more efficient and more stronger and with brighter prospects," he said. The SCO was founded at a summit in Shanghai in 2001 by the presidents of Russia, China, Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. India and Pakistan became its members last year.

China withholds Hambantota Port deal's final tranche to Lanka over dispute

COLOMBO, JUNE 11 /--/ China has withheld the Hambantota Port deal's final tranche of USD 585 million to Sri Lanka due to Colombo's objection over its plan to use a man-made island for entertainment purposes, a media report said here today. In December last year, Sri Lanka handed over the control of the southern sea port of Hambantota to China on a 99-year lease for USD 1.2 billion, amid concern over Beijing's efforts to expand influence in the region.

Opposition leaders have dubbed the deal as a sell out to China. The SundayTimes reported that the last tranche of USD 585 million has been held back by China's state-owned China Merchants Port Holdings which want the land to be used for entertainment purpose.

First monsoon rains pound Rohingya camps

DHAKA, JUNE 11 /--/ The first monsoon rains have hit camps in Bangladesh housing around a million Rohingya refugees, triggering flooding and landslides but no casualties or major damage so far, officials said today. Aid agencies have been warning that the monsoon season could prompt a humanitarian catastrophe in coming months at what is the world's biggest refugee camp, sheltering people fleeing violence in Myanmar. The sites in southeastern Bangladesh are predicted to be hit by powerful cyclones and by more than 2.5 metres (eight feet) of rainfall over the coming three months of monsoon - roughly triple what Britain gets in a year. Bangladesh's meteorological office said the Cox's Bazar area where many of the refugees live in makeshift shelters on bare hillsides had 138 millimetres (5.4 inches) of rain since last evening. "Some areas like the football field areas are flooded. Some houses have been inundated with water. There have been a few landslides. The conditions are bad," UN refugee agency spokesperson Caroline Gluck told AFP.

The monsoon season "is going to be big test for everybody involved in the humanitarian response in support of the government of Bangladesh," she said. More heavy rain is forecast for coming days. Rohingya leaders told AFP the rains have already devastated some parts of the camps and turned some dirt roads into quagmires, hindering the movement of refugees and relief materials. Kamal Hossain, a Rohingya community leader, said at least five shanties were destroyed by landslides or strong winds over around 12 hours of a sustained downpour beginning last evening.

"It's just the beginning and the entire monsoon season is ahead of us. Some people have been displaced but the majority are still living under risk," said Mohammad Mohibullah, another community leader. Last year heavy rain triggered mudslides in Cox's Bazar and the nearby Chittagong Hill Tracts, killing at least 170 people. More than 100 died in landslides in the region in 2012, and two years earlier around 50 perished.

Gluck said that so far nearly 29,000 refugees have been relocated to new areas out of an estimated 200,000 people at very high risk of landslides and flood, who need to be moved to safer areas. She said that heavy flooding could also cause latrines to overflow and spread disease in the crowded camps. Around 700,000 Rohingya Muslims have poured in from Myanmar since August, fleeing an army crackdown. They joined hundreds of thousands of earlier arrivals from Myanmar and Buddhist Myanmar, where the Rohingyas are a persecuted and stateless minority. Many of the hillsides were cleared of trees to make way for shelters, making the land highly unstable.

Pak apex court wants ex-PM Sharif's trial in graft cases completed in a month

ISLAMABAD, JUNE 11 /--/ Pakistan's Supreme Court today directed an anti-corruption court to wind up within a month proceedings against ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif and his family. Three cases were launched against Sharif, 68, and his family members in September last year but his disqualification as the premier by the Supreme Court in July. The court had also set a six-month deadline to complete the cases but later extended it by two months in March and then again by a month in May, which finally ended yesterday. However, the Islamabad-based Accountability Court Judge Muhammad Bashir today requested for more time to complete the trial. Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Mian Saqib Nisar rejected Sharif's counsel Khawaja Haris' petition for completing the trial in six weeks, ordering that the final verdict in the case be announced within a month.

He also asked the trial court to proceed on daily basis and conduct hearing even on Saturdays. But, in a relief to Sharif, the court allowed him and his daughter Maryam to visit his ailing wife Kulsom Nawaz in London where she is battling a throat cancer. The Accountability Court is hearing the corruption cases against Sharif, his daughter Maryam and son-in-law captain (ret'd) Saifdar. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) had filed three cases of corruption and money laundering against Sharif, his sons - Hassan and Hussain, daughter - Maryam, son-in-law - Saifdar, and Finance Minister Ishaq Dar in the Accountability Court in Islamabad and Rawalpindi last year. The Supreme Court had disqualified Sharif last year, forcing the three-time prime minister to resign. Sharif has dismissed the corruption charges as politically motivated. The political future of Sharif, who leads the country's most powerful political family and his PML-N party, has been hanging in the balance since then. If convicted, he could be jailed.

'Earliest animal fossil footprints discovered in China'

BEIJING, JUNE 11 /--/ Researchers have discovered the earliest known animal fossil footprints in South China, dating back about 635-541 million years. Bilateralian animals such as arthropods and annelids have paired appendages and are among the most diverse animals today and in the geological past, said researchers from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in the US. They are often assumed to have appeared and radiated suddenly during the Cambrian Explosion about 541 to 501 million years ago, although it has long been suspected that their evolutionary ancestry was rooted in the Ediacaran Period. Until the current discovery, however, no fossil record of animal appendages had been found from the Ediacaran Period, according to the study published in the journal Science Advances. Researchers studied trackways and burrows discovered in the Ediacaran Shibantan Member of the Dengying Formation (635-541 million years ago) in the Yangtze Gorges area of South China. The trackways are somewhat irregular, consisting of two rows of imprints that are arranged in series or repeated groups.

The characteristics of the trackways indicate that they were produced by bilateralian animals with paired appendages that raised the animal body above the water-sediment interface. The trackways appear to be connected to burrows, suggesting that the animals may have periodically dug into sediments and microbial mats, perhaps to mine oxygen and food. These trace fossils represent some of the earliest evidence for animal appendages and extend the earliest trace fossil record of animals with appendages from the early Cambrian to the late Ediacaran Period. The body fossils of the animals that made these traces, however, have not yet been found. It is possible that such remains were never preserved. (PTI)



A young Buddhist monk plays with a dog after two hours of evening prayers at the Amarbayasgalan Monastery in the Baruunburen district, Selenge province, Mongolia.—REUTERS

12 dead, 31 wounded in Kabul gov't building attack: Health Min

KABUL, JUNE 11 /--/ At least 12 people were killed and 31 wounded when a suicide attacker blew himself up outside a government ministry in Kabul today, officials said, as employees were leaving their offices early for Ramadan. Health ministry spokesman Waheed Majroh gave the latest toll for the attack at the main gate of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. (AFP)

Lightning strikes Nepal school: 2 children killed

KATHMANDU, JUNE 11 /--/ Two children were killed and five others injured today when lightning struck their school in Nepal's western Surkhet district, police said. The deceased, aged seven, studied in class II.

The incident took place at a primary school in Chingard rural municipality, about 600 km from Kathmandu, Surkhet district police chief Uma Prasad Chaturvedi said. They were attending their classes when the lightning struck. Five students studying in class I were also injured in the incident, police added. (PTI)

Yoga & cheesecake for new mums in plush Chinese 'sitting centres'

SHANGHAI, JUNE 11 /--/ Yoga class starts shortly in the pristine massage centre is open for business and cheesecake is served on a platter of pastries and fruit. And then the muffled cry of a baby emerges down the hallway. The setting may resemble a five-star hotel, but this is a "sitting centre" on Shanghai's outskirts where mothers pay up to 70,000 yuan (\$11,000) a month to stay with their newborns. Chinese culture dictates that mothers confine themselves after giving birth, also known as a "sitting month". Such confinement was once widely practised in many areas of the world and continues to be popular in other parts of Asia. But as incomes rise in China, the sitting month no longer means being cooped up at home without bathing or visitors. "We prefer to find a professional facility to take care of our baby. We have no experience in taking care of the baby or ourselves after birth," said Yu Xueqing, 34, a first-time mother, her weeks-old son "Kangkang" lying contentedly beside her. Both appear well

looked-after at the private Lake Malaren International Postpartum Care Center in a modern building embellished with turrets and intended to mimic old northern European architecture. Mother and son are accompanied at all times by a nanny who sleeps in the same room. Numerous specialists, nurses and cooks are on hand. A photography studio captures those precious early days of life, while a "Mother's Classroom" runs lectures for new mums to learn how to care for their baby - and themselves. Dads can stay too, but usually just visit. Yu, who works for IT firm Hewlett-Packard, said the lengthy stay "liberates our family".

"I'd do it at home (take care of the baby), then the whole family can't sleep well. I can take maternity leave, but my husband needs to go to work." "Sitting month" or "Zuo Yuezi", stretches back to about 200 BC and the Han Dynasty, said Elizabeth Hui-Choi, a lecturer at Hong Kong University's School of Nursing. Empresses would be

well looked-after following childbirth, including a special diet and lifestyle to restore their "broken" body and prevent future illness, said Hui-Choi. "They believed that treating the mother well would also bring good things to the baby, and it is still believed to be that way." Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) "also plays a very important part" in how most Chinese women still think after childbirth, dictating they should eat more of certain foods, such as ginger, and cut out others such as fruit, she said. Some stop showering, washing their hair, or even brushing their teeth for the month, and won't venture outside - TCM says these can upset the baby's balance.

Yu did not wash her hair for a week, but doctors told her that was unnecessary and the centre recommends a more scientific approach that blends TCM and Western medicine. Hui-Choi, a registered midwife trained in Western medicine, said some of the old rituals are unhygienic and that studies suggest strict observance of

Mulk had taken oath as Pakistan's seventh caretaker Prime minister until general elections on July 25 to oversee the second-ever democratic transition of power in the country ruled by the powerful army for much of its life.

feel isolated, risking post-partum depression. According to the Legal Daily, a state newspaper, the number of sitting centres in China has "exploded" from dozens in 2000 to more than 4,000 in 2017. One reason is that Chinese today are not giving birth later in life - meaning grandparents are older and may not be able to help as much. And Chinese are increasingly able to afford places like the Shanghai centre, where staff fuss over every baby snuffle.

Demand has also ramped up since China became phasing out its one-child policy in 2015. Families can be too stretched with their first child to cope with a second, especially if there is no extended family to help out. Sitting centres or self-proclaimed experts in "Zuo Yuezi" are found almost anywhere that ethnic Chinese are found, including in North America, making it a big business with global reach. However in Britain, doctors recently warned about the dangers of Chinese mothers locking themselves away after