

Flooding, Mudslides Kill Dozens in Peru



Soldiers carry tools to use for helping neighbors cross a flooded street in Lima.

LIMA (AP) - Muddy water spilled onto streets and into homes on Thursday in a new round of unusually heavy rains that has killed at least a dozen people in Peru and now threatens flooding in the capital.

The intense rains and mudslides over the past three days have wrought havoc around the Andean nation and caught residents in Lima, a desert city of 10 million where it almost never rains, by surprise.

In one of the more dramatic incidents, stunned residents watched and took out cellphone cameras as

a woman escaped after being swept into an avalanche of mud, wood debris and farm animals about 53 kilometers (32 miles) south of downtown Lima.

Evangelina Chamorro, 32, had just dropped her two daughters at school and was feeding her pigs alongside her husband when they were pulled into a landslide.

Armando Rivera, Chamorro's husband, told RPP radio they climbed a tree but the trunk broke. They held on to each other's hands but Chamorro eventually lost his grip and got

separated.

She emerged near a bridge, lifting herself from a current of wooden planks and walking toward the shore covered head to toe in mud.

Chamorro collapsed as she reached land and was quickly carried by several men to an ambulance. She sustained only minor injuries.

Authorities said Thursday they expect the rains caused by El Nino, which generates a warming of surface waters in the eastern Pacific Ocean, to continue for another two weeks.

Germany Wants Change to NATO's Two-Percent Budget Goal

BERLIN (AFP) - Germany's defence minister called Friday for changes to the way NATO members' commitments to budget targets are assessed, in the face of bigger demands from U.S. President Donald Trump.

Just ahead of the first face-to-face talks between Chancellor Angela Merkel and Trump, the minister, Ursula von der Leyen, told AFP that the NATO target of spending two percent of GDP on defence painted an incomplete picture of actual contributions.

Von der Leyen proposed using an "activity index" that would take participation in foreign missions into account when assessing budget earmarks for defence.

Trump caused dismay in Europe when he said on the campaign trail that NATO was "obsolete" and failing to meet the challenge posed by Islamic terrorist groups.

His administration has repeatedly pressed the allies to meet a pledge to spend two percent of GDP annually on defense by



German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen.

2024.

NATO leaders, urged by then U.S. president Barack Obama, agreed the two-percent target in 2014 and reaffirmed it at a 2016 Warsaw summit to counter a more assertive Russia.

The NATO annual report said only five countries met the two-percent target -- the United States, Britain, Greece, Poland and Estonia -- while Washington still accounted for nearly 70 percent of combined alliance de-

fense spending.

Germany, whose militaristic past has led it traditionally to be reticent on defense matters, currently, spends 1.2 percent of GDP.

An increase to two percent would put Berlin's defense budget on a par with Russia's at around 65 billion euros (\$70 billion) and is politically controversial as the country heads toward a September general election.

Polish Opposition Wants Parliament Vote Against Government

WARSAW (AP) — Poland's main opposition party is seeking a parliamentary vote against the conservative government, saying it is "demolishing" the country and wants to bring it out of the European Union.

Civic Platform's leader in parliament, Slawomir Neumann, said that regardless of the vote's chances, the debate would expose what he called the harmful policies of the 17-months-old government.

Leaders of the pro-EU Civic Platform said Friday they will request a so-called constructive vote of no-confidence early next week. In theory, the vote could overturn the government of Prime Minister Beata Szydlo, but the ruling party holds has a majority of 234 seats out of 460. It was not clear whether the vote could be held during a parliament session starting Wednesday.

UK Raps White House Over 'Ridiculous' Trump Spy Claims

LONDON (AFP) - The White House will not repeat claims that British spies snoop on Donald Trump, Britain said on Friday after the UK spy agency dismissed them as "utterly ridiculous" in a rare public denial.

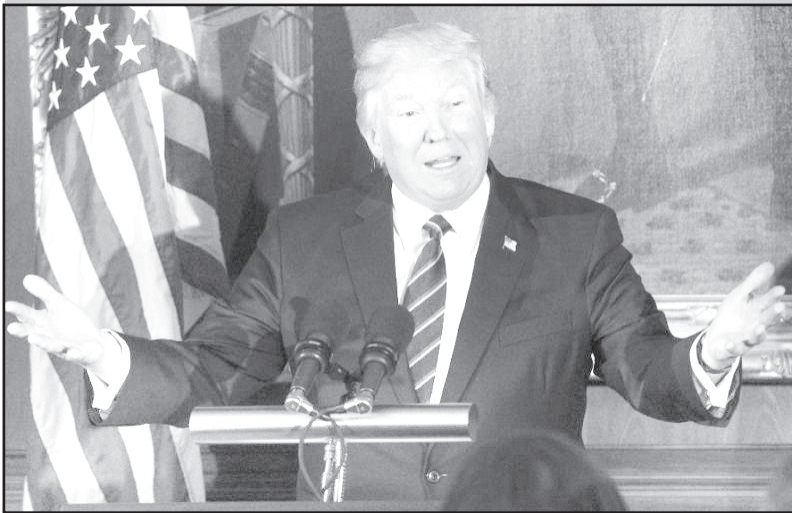
Prime Minister Theresa May's spokesman reiterated the GCHQ agency's denial of a report -- which had been repeated by the U.S. president's spokesman on Thursday -- and said the claims "should be ignored".

"We have made this clear to the administration and have received assurances that these allegations will not be repeated," the PM's

Britain and the United States -- along with Australia, Canada and New Zealand -- are part of the "Five Eyes" intelligence-sharing alliance forged from the embers of World War II.

"We have a close, special relationship with the White House and that allows us to raise concerns as and when they arise as was true in this case," he added.

Late on Thursday, a spokesman for GCHQ said: "Recent allegations made by media commentator Judge Andrew Napolitano about GCHQ being asked to conduct 'wiretapping' against the then-president elect are nonsense."



Britain's communications spy agency GCHQ has issued a rare public denial of "utterly ridiculous" claims it spied on Donald Trump.

spokesman said.

Britain's ambassador to Washington Kim Darroch spoke directly to White House press secretary Sean Spicer, although May's spokesman refused to say whether the U.S. administration had apologized.

"The fact is, within the Five Eyes pact, we cannot use each other's capabilities to circumvent our laws," May's spokesman said. "It's a situation that simply wouldn't arise."

The press office of GCHQ --, the Government Communications Headquarters -- told AFP on Friday that it was "not unusual" for the agency to make public comment but acknowledged that "perhaps the tone of it was unusual".

The electronic eavesdropping agency does not normally comment on intelligence matters, though it has stepped up its public relations in recent months, including for recruitment drives and warnings on cyber-security.

France's Fillon Fights On as Window Closes for Putting Up Alternative Candidate

PARIS (Reuters) - Scandal-hit Francois Fillon is set to be confirmed as the conservative candidate in France's presidential election on Friday as the window for putting an alternative name on the ballot paper closes.

The campaign is one of the most unpredictable in the country's history as almost 40 percent of voters have yet to make their final choice amid a topsy-turvy campaign dominated by a fraud investigation into Fillon.

Once the frontrunner, the former prime minister has fought off pressure from his The Republicans party to step aside before Friday's deadline when all presidential candidates must be formally endorsed by at least 500 elected officials.

His main rival for the party ticket, Alain Juppe, opted not to challenge him, even if theoretically he could still get 500 backers by 1800 local time (1700 GMT).

Fillon, 63, has faced down his critics and insisted he will fight on despite an Odoxa opinion poll on Friday showing that three-quarters of French voters want him to pull

out of the race.

The fraud investigation into Fillon widened on Thursday to include luxury suits he received as gifts. He was already placed under formal investigation earlier in the week on suspicion of misusing public funds linked to salaries he paid his wife and children.

Fillon, far-right leader Marine Len Pen, independent centrist Emmanuel Macron, Socialist candidate Benoit Hamon, far-left firebrand Jean-Luc Melenchon and two lesser-known candidates have already reached the endorsement target.

Another four at least could also reach the goal when the Constitutional Council publishes its final sponsors list.

It will confirm the candidates on Saturday.

Melenchon categorically ruled out on Friday quitting the election race in favour of Hamon.

Since news of the Fillon scandal emerged on January 25, he has tumbled from being the favorite to third place in opinion polls, a position that would eliminate him in the first round on April 23.

News in Brief

MOSCOW (Press TV)-Russia will shortly put afloat a second, nuclear-powered Yasen-class submarine — its strongest — in a northern port, a Russian defense source says.

The new vessel, dubbed Kazan, is a fourth-generation Russian submarine, and "is expected to be rolled out and put afloat on March 30," a Russian defense source told the Moscow-based TASS news agency.

Russian media refer to the country's fourth-generation submarines as the backbone of the Russian Navy's strategic nuclear deterrent.

OGA (Reuters) - Sirens blared and loudspeakers broadcast warnings in Japan's first civilian missile evacuation drill on Friday, conducted in a fishing town by officials wary about the threat of North Korean missiles.

The exercise comes more than a week after North Korea launched four ballistic missiles into the sea off Japan's northwest coast, with one rocket landing about 200 km (124 miles) from the town of Oga.

Friday's drill played out a scenario in which North Korea had fired a ballistic missile on the Japanese islands.

MADRID (AP) — A representative of civil society groups says the Basque separatist group ETA will complete its disarmament by April 8.

Txetx Etxevarry, a prominent figure in the French Basque community who tried to manage a disarmament effort in 2016, told Le Monde newspaper that a collective of civil society groups had received ETA's mandate.

Etxevarry confirmed to The Associated Press that an announcement would be made by ETA later on Friday, but he declined to give details of its content.

ETA announced in 2011 it was renouncing violence in its campaign for independence for the Basque regions of northern Spain and southwest France. It is blamed for over 800 deaths from 1968 to 2010.

SEOUL (AFP) - Military action by the United States against nuclear-armed North Korea is an "option on the table" if the threat from the rogue regime escalates, Washington's top diplomat Rex Tillerson said Friday.

The strong comments from the secretary of state, in Asia for his first foray into crisis management, appear to signal a sea change in American policy towards the isolated country.

Tillerson's tour comes after a missile launch last week that Pyongyang described as a drill for an attack on U.S. bases in Japan.