



East Timor parliament OKs sea border treaty with Australia

DILI, Indonesia (AP) — East Timor’s parliament has voted in favor of ratifying a maritime boundary treaty with Australia that governs how the two countries will share billions of dollars of oil and gas riches lying beneath the Timor Sea. East Timor, one of the world’s youngest and poorest nations, and Australia, one of the richest, signed a historic treaty in March last year drawing their maritime borders, ending years of wrangling. It paves the way for development of the offshore Greater Sunrise gas field. East Timorese independence hero Xanana Gusmao said his country was losing \$5 million a month while the agreement remained unratified. He said the treaty will be ratified when Australia’s prime minister visits East Timor on August 30, the 20th anniversary of a referendum that granted independence from Indonesia.

89 safely rescued after Mumbai office building catches fire

MUMBAI, India (AP) — Firefighters rescued 89 people after a nine-story office building caught fire in Mumbai, India’s financial capital, an official said. No injuries were reported. Sixteen fire engines battled the blaze and evacuated people from the building using hydraulic platforms in the city’s Bandra area, fire official Rohan More said. The building houses the offices of a state-run telephone company. All of the 89 escaped without injuries, More said. The firefighters restricted the blaze and smoke to the third and fourth floors, where it started, More said. The cause of the fire was not immediately known. Television images showed people breaking window panes and waving to firefighters to evacuate them. A woman who was rescued told the New Delhi Television news channel that she and some others were rescued from the fourth and fifth floors of the building. A newly introduced robot, Robofire, was used to control the blaze, the Press Trust of India news agency reported, without giving details. Fires are common in India, where building laws and safety norms are often flouted by builders and residents. In February, 17 people were killed by a fire in a six-story hotel in New Delhi that started in an unauthorized rooftop kitchen.

Unexploded grenade found near ruling party office

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — An unexploded grenade was discovered next to a township office of the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) party in Yangon, Myanmar’s biggest city, police said. An officer who declined to give his name because he was not authorized to release information said police cleared away the grenade soon after it was discovered in the early morning and are investigating. He gave no other details. No one has claimed responsibility. The NLD is headed by Aung San Suu Kyi, who also heads Myanmar’s government. The party will contest a general election next year. Suu Kyi and her party hold a majority of seats in parliament, but are forced to share power under rules in the constitution imposed by a previous army-led regime. A pro-military party is the NLD’s biggest challenger, but some radical nationalists are also bitter critics of Suu Kyi. Aye Win, a local NLD official who works in the office, said police were checking security video for clues.

Women charged with violating surrogacy, trafficking laws

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — A court official says three Cambodian women have been charged with violating surrogacy and human-trafficking laws after they gave birth to babies they delivered to Chinese nationals in Vietnam. A Phnom Penh Municipal Court spokesman said the three women are being detained pending further investigation. The *Phnom Penh Post* quoted a senior anti-human trafficking police officer as saying the women were detained by Vietnamese police and returned to Cambodia after having illegally crossed into the country to deliver their children to Chinese nationals for \$8,000 per baby. They were charged in court. Cambodia’s anti-surrogacy law carries a penalty of one to six months in prison, while the human-trafficking charge is punishable by 15 to 20 years’ imprisonment.

Afghan radio station closes down following Taliban threats

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — A local radio station in eastern Afghanistan was forced to shut down after repeated threats from the area’s Taliban commander, the head of the station said. Ramez Azimi, director of the Samaa station in the city of Ghazni, the capital of eastern Ghazni province, said he received phone calls as well as written warning notes purportedly from the Taliban commander. The commander was not identified. Azimi said Taliban insurgents, who control several districts in Ghazni province, threatened them because three of the station’s 16 employees are women. The Taliban are against women’s rights to education and work. Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman, denied the insurgents had threatened Samaa. The Taliban currently control nearly half of Afghanistan and are more powerful than at any time since the October 2001 U.S.-led invasion. A local radio journalist was killed recently in neighboring Paktia province. The police said it was not immediately clear if the killing of Nader Shah, a newsreader for Radio Gardez, was linked to his work or a personal dispute. The developments came despite stepped-up efforts by the United States to find a negotiated end to the country’s nearly 18-year-long conflict, America’s longest war. Afghan talks that brought together the country’s warring sides ended recently in Qatar’s capital, Doha, with a statement that appeared to move closer to peace by laying down the outlines of a roadmap for the country’s future. Azimi told The Associated Press this is its third closure in the past four years. The station was forced to shut down twice in 2015, the first time for a month after which it reopened thanks to mediation by the elders, he said. Later that year it closed again, for nine months.



STOPGAP MEASURE. Indians stand in queues to fill vessels with drinking water from a water tanker in Chennai, the capital of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. With the government able to meet only 40% of its water requirement, millions of people are depending on water brought in tanker trucks because of an acute water shortage caused by drying lakes and depleted groundwater. (AP Photo/R. Parthibhan)

Parched manufacturing city in India brings in water by rail

By Emily Schmall
The Associated Press

JOLARPET, India — Amid the green Yelagiri hills of southern India, the train inches along the tracks, carrying what has become precious cargo: drinking water bound for Chennai, India’s parched Motor City.

Demand for water in the manufacturing and IT hub on the Bay of Bengal far outstrips supply, forcing authorities to take extreme and costly measures to serve the city’s 10 million people. And so, every day, the train sets out on a four-hour, 134-mile journey, its 50 tank cars carrying 660,000 gallons of water drawn from a dam on the Cauvery River.

The train is classic Indian *jugaad*, the Hindi word for a makeshift solution to a complicated problem.

Executive engineer K. Raju confessed this is not the best engineering solution to Chennai’s water problem. “But this is a timely way to help and that’s all. This is not a permanent solution,” he said. Building an underground pipeline that brings in water from closer areas would be better, he said.

As with other fast-growing cities in the developing world, Chennai’s water woes were years in the making.

Chennai’s population has more than tripled in three decades, with people arriving to take jobs at pharmaceutical research and development labs, auto plants, and high-tech industries. The runaway growth — combined with poor maintenance of its four reservoirs, ineffective sewage systems, and, more recently, delayed monsoon rains — has left India’s sixth-largest city high and dry. Or

nearly so. Its reservoirs are empty, and it is relying on dwindling groundwater sources and two desalination plants for the vast majority of its water. Since June, the water board in Chennai has been turning off the taps for all but a couple of hours a day.

In early July, the government of Tamil Nadu state, of which Chennai is the capital, approved a crash engineering project to bring in water by rail for the next six months at a cost of about \$94 million. Raju’s team had just 10 days to lay the necessary half-mile of pipeline and install a pumping system to put water into rail cars formerly used to carry cooking oil.

The amount of water transported is just a tiny fraction of the 130 million gallons a day that the water board delivers to its customers.

The train sets out every day at sunset, and just after midnight, it screeches into the city’s mostly deserted Villivakkam railway station, where men in hard hats and reflective vests connect blue hoses to the cars. It takes four hours for the water to be decanted into the city’s water system.

The following morning, at one of the city’s water distribution stations, Ranganathan, a longtime water truck driver in Chennai, pulls his colorfully painted vehicle underneath a big water tap, fills up his rig and begins making neighborhood deliveries. He puts in 16-hour days, with no time even to eat, he said.

“People get excited once they see our lorries,” said Ranganathan, who goes by only one name. “On days if it becomes late, people will start panicking. What to do? They are like my mother, sister, who are worried due to water scarcity, so we help.”

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Units per U.S. dollar as of 8/02	
Bangladesh Taka	84.25
Cambodian Riel	42025
China Renminbi	6.9387
Fijian Dollar	2.1354
Hong Kong Dollar	7.829
Indian Rupee	69.653
Indonesian Rupiah	14237
Iranian Rial	42025
Japanese Yen	106.62
Laos New Kip	8694.0
Malaysian Ringgit	4.155
Nepal Rupee	112.06
Pakistani Rupee	157.8
Papua N.G. Kina	3.393
Philippine Peso	51.63
Russian Ruble	65.079
Saudi Riyal	3.7509
Singapore Dollar	1.3752
South Korean Won	1202.7
Sri Lankan Rupee	176.7
Taiwan Dollar	31.444
Thai Baht	30.71
Vietnam Dong	23202