

REGIONAL SUMMIT SCO

Imran Khan to be invited to India

NDTV ONLINE

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan will be invited to India to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) heads of government meeting when New Delhi hosts it later this year, the government said yesterday. According to the government, all eight members and four observer states of SCO will be invited for the regional summit.

“India will be hosting the heads of government summit later this year. As per established practice and procedure, all eight members and four observer states and other international dialogue partners will be invited... all eight members will be invited,” Foreign Ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said this evening.

The SCO is a China-led eight-member economic and security bloc to which India and Pakistan were admitted in 2017. The group was founded in 2001



by Russia, China, Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Imran Khan had attended the SCO summit in Kyrgyzstan's capital Bishkek last June, during which PM Modi had said countries sponsoring, aiding and supporting terrorism must be held accountable, in a stern message directed at Pakistan.

Underscoring the aim of the SCO to strengthen cooperation in the fight against terrorism, PM Modi had also called for a global conference to combat it.

The government's announcement yesterday came hours after Pakistan's efforts to raise Jammu and Kashmir at the UNSC through China failed.



Dozens of residents ride a boat going to their homes near the erupting Taal Volcano to rescue the animals they left behind, in Talisay, Batangas, Philippines yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

PAK WEAPONS PROGRAM

US indicts five for running network

AFP, Washington

Five men have been indicted in the United States for allegedly running an international network that purchased US products for Pakistan's nuclear weapons program.

“The defendants smuggled US origin goods to entities that have been designated for years as threats to US national security for their ties to Pakistan's weapons programs,” assistant attorney general John Demers said in a statement.

The five, who live outside the United States and have not been apprehended, were indicted by a grand jury in October, the Justice Department said. The indictment was unsealed on Wednesday and arrest warrants are pending.

The five were accused of operating a front company called “Business World” in Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

They were identified as Muhammad Kamran Wali, 41, of Pakistan, Muhammad Ahsan Wali, 48, and Haji Wali Muhammad Sheikh, 82, both of Mississauga, Ontario, Ashraf Khan Muhammad of Hong Kong, and Ahmed Waheed, 52, of Ilford, England.

They were charged with conspiring to violate the International Emergency Economic Powers Act and the Export Control Reform Act.

“The alleged behavior of these five individuals presented more than a violation of US export laws,” said Jason Molina, a special agent with the Department of Homeland Security.

“It posed a potential threat to the national security interests of the United States and to the delicate balance of power among nations within the region.”

According to the indictment, between September 2014 and October 2019, the five procured US goods without export licenses for Pakistan's Advanced Engineering Research Organization and the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission.

China-led Pak bid flops again

India slams the move, asks Islamabad to focus on addressing issues like sheltering terrorists

NDTV ONLINE

Pakistan's efforts to raise Jammu and Kashmir at the UN Security Council through China crumbled once again on Wednesday as most members of the top world body said it was not the place to discuss the issue, sources told NDTV yesterday.

India slammed the move, asking Islamabad to focus on addressing issues like sheltering terrorists to improve relations with New Delhi.

“Pakistan's practice of using false pretences to distract from addressing the malaise that afflicts it, has run its course today,” India's Permanent Representative to the UN Syed Akbaruddin told NDTV.

Earlier on Wednesday, Pakistan's “all-weather ally” China made the fresh pitch to raise the Kashmir issue under “other matters” during closed consultations in the Security Council Consultations Room.

“We once again saw an effort made by one member state of the UN, fail in plain view of all others,” Mr Akbaruddin told news agency PTI.

“We are happy that neither alarmist scenario painted by the representatives of Pakistan nor any of the baseless allegations made repeatedly by representatives of Pakistan in the UN fora were found to be credible today,” Mr Akbaruddin.

Sources said Wednesday's talks at

UNSC MEETING ON KASHMIR

Top European diplomat said the issue should be resolved bilaterally

J&K govt orders opening of 400 internet kiosks in Valley

the Security Council were “informal”. A European official, heading into the Security Council meeting, described the discussions to be “low key”, PTI reported.

A top European diplomat said the issue should be resolved bilaterally and it was a “domestic affair”.

Coming out of the meeting, Chinese Ambassador Zhang Jun said: “We had a

meeting on Jammu and Kashmir. And I'm sure you all know that Foreign Minister of Pakistan wrote letters to the Security Council asking the Security Council to pay attention to the current situation in Jammu and Kashmir.”

When asked if the meeting advanced anything, he said: “I am sure the meeting will be helping both parties to understand the risk of further escalation and will encourage them to approach to each other and to have dialogue and to seek means, to seek solutions through dialogue. I think that will be helpful”.

The latest move by China was the third such attempt since August when the special status granted to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the constitution was scrapped by the government and the state was bifurcated into two union territories.

Meanwhile, J&K government has asked the Kashmir division to open 400 internet kiosks in addition to the existing 844 e-terminals and 69 special special counters providing broadband facility to essential service providers and tourism facilities.

‘Over my dead body’

Mamata draws battlelines over NPR

NDTV ONLINE

Bengal will skip the Centre's meeting on National Population Register, which will be held in Delhi on January 17. Making the announcement in Kolkata on Wednesday, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said, “Let them (the Centre) pull my government down if they like”.

Mamata, one of the fiercest critics of the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was the first to stop the process of National Population Register in her state through a formal order and said if the BJP wishes to implement National Registry of Citizens in Bengal, it can happen “over my dead body”.

Last week, she underscored her stance, calling herself the guard of citizens' rights.

“As your guard, if anyone comes to snatch your rights, they will have to do it over my dead body. Not before that. It is not going to be easy. Don't fear fake rumours, conspiracies,” she said while speaking at a public meeting in South 24 Parganas district.

The National Population Register



was expected to do the groundwork for the National Register of Citizens, the big government initiative that has been rolled out in Assam. The government said procedure is meant to flush out illegal migrants from the country, but critics have said that it is skewed against the Muslims.

In December, the Union cabinet approved a proposal to update the NPR that will be conducted in every state except Assam. But following widespread protests over the NRC and contentious citizens' list, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah said there is no talk of countrywide NRC as of now.

Two days ago, 20 opposition parties met in Delhi and decided that Chief Ministers who have refused to allow National Register of Citizens and the citizenship law in their states must suspend the process of National Population Register.

The NPR has already been put on hold in Kerala. Chief Ministers of the Congress-ruled states have also declared that they would not implement it.

Taliban show ‘willingness’ to reduce Afghan violence

Says Pak FM Shah Mehmood Qureshi

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's foreign minister yesterday said the Taliban has shown “a willingness” to reduce violence in war-torn Afghanistan after more than 18 years fighting the US, sparking speculation that a potential breakthrough in talks with the Americans may be near.

Negotiations between the Taliban and the US have repeatedly stalled, with Washington calling on the insurgent group to reduce violence before they can resume.

“Today, positive progress has been made, the Taliban have shown their willingness to reduce the violence, which was a demand... it's a step towards the peace agreement,” said Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi in a video statement.

He gave no further details.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the official Taliban spokesman, told AFP the Taliban was looking into the comments.

The Taliban and the US were on the brink of announcing a withdrawal deal in September last year when President Donald

Trump abruptly declared the process “dead”, citing Taliban violence.

Talks were later restarted between the two sides in December in Qatar, but were paused following an attack near the Bagram military base in Afghanistan.

Islamabad has helped facilitate the talks between the militants and Washington in Qatar over the past year, seeking an agreement that would pave the way for a US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in return for various security promises from the insurgents.

Pakistan was one of only three countries to recognise the Taliban regime, and its shadowy military establishment -- particularly the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) -- is widely believed to back the bloody insurgency in Afghanistan.

Islamabad denies the accusation.

Any agreement with the Taliban is expected to have two main pillars -- an American withdrawal from Afghanistan and a commitment by the insurgents not to offer sanctuary to jihadists.



A demonstrator shouts slogans during a protest against a new citizenship law, in the old quarters of Delhi, India yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

US TROOPS PRESENCE

Time running out on S Korea, US talks: envoy

AFP, Seoul

Washington has compromised in its demands that South Korea should pay billions of dollars towards US troop presence and it was Seoul's turn to reciprocate before time ran out, the American ambassador said yesterday.

The two allies are in a security alliance and Washington stations 28,500 troops in South Korea to defend it from the nuclear-armed North, which invaded in 1950.

They are a key part of US forces' deployment in Asia, but the Trump administration has been insisting Seoul pay more towards their costs.

The initial US demand was around \$5 billion a year -- a more than fivefold increase on the roughly \$900 million paid in 2019 -- provoking consternation in Seoul.

The latest round of negotiations concluded without an agreement in Washington on Wednesday.

US negotiators had “adjusted our position, our top line number”, said Ambassador Harry Harris. “We are now waiting for the Korean side to do the same.”

“South Korea as an equal partner in the preservation of peace on the peninsula, and its position as the 12th largest economy in the entire world, can and should do more.”

Time was “of the essence”, he told reporters in a group interview at his residence in the centre of Seoul.

Around 10,000 South Koreans working for United States Forces Korea (USFK) are paid from funds from last year's deal and when they run out, they will have to be put on furlough, he said. “That notice is going to go out soon.”

‘One country, two systems’ can continue beyond 2047: HK leader

REUTERS, Hong Kong

The principle that ensures Hong Kong enjoys freedoms unavailable in mainland China can continue beyond its 2047 expiry date as long as the city's youngsters do not destroy it with “temporary misunderstandings,” Chief Executive Carrie Lam said yesterday.

The Chinese-ruled city, roiled by months of pro-democracy protests fuelled by perceptions that Beijing is tightening its grip, was handed over to China by Britain in 1997 under a “one country, two systems” framework valid for at least 50 years.

Beijing denies meddling there, says it is committed to the principle, and blames the West for fomenting unrest.

The handover agreement states that the Asian financial hub is part of Communist-ruled China, but is assured freedoms such as those of expression and assembly, plus a

different institutional framework, including an independent judiciary.

The protests escalated in June over a now-dead bill that would have allowed suspects to be extradited to the mainland for trial in courts controlled by the Communist Party, but have since evolved into a broader



pro-democracy movement.

“There is enough reason to believe ‘one country, two systems’ ... will not change after 2047,” Lam said in her first appearance in the city's Legislative Council this year.

She said the understanding and the implementation of the principle

required maintaining the “foundation of one country” and respecting the difference “of two systems.”

Lam urged the city's youngsters, which have been at the forefront of the often-violent protests, to not violate the principle because of “temporary misunderstandings.”

“The scenario they worry about today may be triggered by their own hand,” Lam said.

Hong Kong's protest movement is supported by 59% of city residents polled in a survey conducted for Reuters by the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute in December. Only 17% expressed support for seeking independence from China.

Almost 9 in 10 of the respondents aged 18-20 say they support the protests.

Lam also rejected allegations of police brutality, which have been another source of anger in the protests.

Japan confirms first case of coronavirus infection

AFP, Tokyo

A case of the mystery respiratory infection related to the potentially deadly SARS virus, which first emerged in China, has been confirmed in Japan, authorities said yesterday.

It appears to be only the second time the novel coronavirus has been detected outside China, after the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed a case in Thailand.

Japan's health ministry said a man who had visited Wuhan, the apparent epicentre of the outbreak, was hospitalised on January 10, four days after his return to Japan. He reported having a persistent fever.

Tests on the patient, who was released from hospital on Wednesday, confirmed he was suffering from the new virus.

“This is the first domestic discovery of a pneumonia case related to the new coronavirus,” the ministry said in a statement.

“We will continue active epidemiological research while also coordinating efforts

with the World Health Organization and related agencies to conduct a risk assessment,” it added.

The outbreak has caused alarm because the new virus is from the same family as SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), which killed 349 people in mainland China and 299 in Hong Kong in 2002 and 2003.

Authorities in Wuhan said a seafood market was the centre of the outbreak. It was closed on January 1.

The man hospitalised in Japan said he had not visited the market however, leaving it unclear how he contracted the virus.

The health ministry urged people who develop a cough or fever after visiting Wuhan to wear a surgical mask and “swiftly visit a medical institution”.

On Wednesday Chinese authorities said the virus may have been spread between family members, opening the possibility of human-to-human transmission.

The woman diagnosed in Thailand, who is in a stable condition, also said she had not visited the Wuhan seafood market.