

NEWS IN brief

Indian cops kill 15 Maoist rebels

AFP, Raipur

India's security forces yesterday shot dead 15 Maoist rebels during a fierce gunbattle in a remote forested area of central India, a senior police officer said.

The area is about 600 km south of Chhattisgarh capital Raipur, and is closer to Khammam district of Andhra Pradesh.

French ministers reveal wealth

AFP, Paris

French ministers disclosed their personal wealth for the first time on Monday, in a move President Francois Hollande hopes will restore confidence in his scandal-hit Socialist government.

A total of 37 ministers and Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault published their declarations online.

17 killed in Ghana mine collapse

AFP, Accra

A gold mine collapse in central Ghana has killed 17 people who were working illegally and had been told to leave by the operator, police and an official told AFP yesterday.

Sixteen bodies were found dead at the scene, while six others were rushed to the hospital for treatment. One later died in Hospital. The west African nation of about 25 million people is one of the world's top gold exporters.

4 killed in Venezuela poll violence

REUTERS, Caracas

Violence over Venezuela's disputed presidential election has killed four people, state news agency AVN said yesterday.

It reported that two people died in Miranda state which includes part of Caracas, one in Tachira state on the border with Colombia, and another in western Zulia state, when trouble flared on Monday.

With the opposition planning more protests tomorrow, the president elect Maduro urged his supporters to demonstrate on the same days and "combat in peace" across the nation.

ASIA-PACIFIC TENSIONS China points finger at US

REUTERS, Beijing

China's defense ministry made a thinly veiled attack on the United States yesterday for increasing tensions in the Asia-Pacific by ramping up its military presence and alliances in the region, days after the top US diplomat visited Beijing.

China is uneasy with what the United States has called the "rebalancing" of forces as Washington winds down the war in Afghanistan and renews its attention further east.

China says the policy has emboldened Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam in longstanding territorial disputes with Beijing.

China faces "multiple and complicated security threats" despite its growing influence, the Ministry of Defense said in its annual white paper, adding that the US strategy meant "profound changes" for Asia.

"There are some countries which are strengthening their Asia Pacific military alliances, expanding their military presence in the region and frequently make the situation there tenser," the ministry said in the 40-page document, in a clear reference to the United States.

Such moves "do not accord with the developments of the times and are not conducive towards maintaining regional peace and stability", ministry spokesman Yang Yujun told reporters.



PHOTO: AFP



Runners run towards the finish line of the Boston Marathon as the first of the two explosions erupts on Monday. Inset, A woman kneels and prays at the scene of the blasts.

'Act of terror' strikes US Blasts at Boston marathon kill 3, injure more than 170

AFP, Boston

US investigators yesterday pledged to go "to the ends of the Earth" to find those behind the Boston Marathon bombings that killed three people and wounded more than 170, many with horrific injuries.

President Barack Obama deemed the blasts as an "act of terror."

Boston's Boylston Street, scene of the finish line carnage on Monday, remained sealed off as investigators sought leads in the worst attack in the United States since the September 11, 2001 atrocities.

While the Boston attacks were nowhere near the scale of al-Qaeda's airborne strikes on New York and Washington in 2001, they again debunked the idea that American soil is immune from the terrorism

faced abroad.

Police searched the apartment of one "person of interest" and a Saudi man remained under guard in hospital, but even Obama admitted there were no clear answers for a city in mourning.

"This was a heinous and cowardly act," Obama said at the White House.

"Any time bombs are used to target innocent civilians, it is an act of terror."

"What we don't yet know, however, is who carried out this attack or why," he said.

No suspect was in custody, but the hunt was expected to expand to other countries, police and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) officials said.

"This will be a worldwide investigation," said Rick DesLauriers, head of the FBI's Boston office.

"We will go to the ends of the Earth

to identify the subject or subjects responsible for this despicable crime," he added. "We are using full capacities of the FBI, to its fullest worldwide extent."

The two bombs, which were 13 seconds and about 100 meters apart, killed three people and injured 176, with 17 people in critical condition, Boston police commissioner told reporters.

The dead and injured were aged between two and 71 and included nine children.

Tight security was imposed across the United States.

Russian President Vladimir Putin led a chorus of global condemnation, describing the twin explosions as "barbaric." German Chancellor Angela Merkel said "nothing justifies such a malicious attack on people attending a peaceful sporting event."

Coaching made

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students to sit for monthly tests as they had not paid the coaching fees. Later in the day the school authorities retracted from their decision following intervention by the employees association of Dhaka University and allowed the students to sit for the exams.

The school, located on the DU campus, enrolled around 500 students in classes 5 to 10 - most of whom are children of DU staff.

The guardians said the school authorities have fixed monthly rates of Tk 700 for class 5, Tk 800 for classes 6 to 8, and Tk 1,000 for classes 9 and 10 students for the afterschool 90-minute extra classes.

Motirani, wife of a class four DU employee, said she is paying an extra Tk 1,700, besides Tk 650 for

tuition, per month for her two daughters. "The school authorities did not pay heed to our repeated requests to exempt our daughters from the coaching classes. The money we are paying for coaching has become a big burden."

Sujon Mahmud, a class 10 student, claimed: "I got my admit card only after paying both the tuition and coaching fees for the current month."

Other class 10 students supported his claim.

Headmaster Mizanur Rahman refuted all allegations saying the coaching is not mandatory, but the students should be coached by the well trained teachers to achieve good results.

"We witnessed good results in primary terminal and JSC examinations due to the coaching classes," he said.

Musharraf disqualified from Pakistan election

AFP, Islamabad

Pervez Musharraf was yesterday disqualified from contesting Pakistani elections next month, crushing his ambition to "save" the troubled nuclear-armed country just weeks after his return from exile.

Pakistan goes to the polls on May 11 for an election that will mark the first time a civilian government has handed over power at the ballot box after completing a full term in office in a country used to extended periods of military rule.

The Pakistan election campaign has got off to a lacklustre start and been marred by violence and Taliban threats. And yesterday, Taliban bombers killed 20 people and wounded dozens more at an Awami National Party (ANP) rally in Peshawar.

Officials disqualified Musharraf just one day after he unveiled his All Pakistan Muslim League (APML) party manifesto



at a press conference.

The retired general is on bail over the 2007 killing of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto and the 2006 death of a rebel leader from the region of Baluchistan, and for sacking judges when he imposed emergency rule in 2007.

The 69-year-old applied to run for parliament in four seats but was rejected immediately from all but the northern district of Chitral, on the Afghan border.

Lawyers appealed against his approval in Chitral and a court official said Musharraf's nomination had been thrown out on the grounds that he violated the constitution in 2007.

Musharraf's team has vowed to appeal against the decision in the Supreme Court. But commentators said Musharraf was finished, given the hostility in the Supreme Court to the man who dismissed the current chief justice in 2007.

N Korea threatens South over 'monstrous' act

AFP, Seoul

North Korea's military yesterday threatened the South with imminent "sledge-hammer" retaliation unless Seoul apologised for anti-Pyongyang protesters burning effigies of its revered leaders.

South Korea called the North's ultimatum "regrettable" and "absurd" with the defence ministry vowing a tough response to any military provocation.

The warning came a day after US Secretary of State John Kerry wrapped up a Northeast Asian tour aimed at defusing soaring military tensions on the Korean peninsula and getting China to help rein in a belligerent Pyongyang.

As North Korea marked the birth of late founding leader Kim Il-Sung on Monday -- a major national holiday -- around 40 protesters in Seoul burned portraits of Kim, his son Kim Jong-Il and grandson and current leader Kim Jong-Un.

Condemning what it described as a "thrice-cursed... monstrous criminal act", the Korean People's Army Supreme Command issued an "ultimatum" threatening immediate action if no apology was forthcoming.

"Our retaliatory action will start without any notice," it said in a statement.

Al-Badr acted on Nizami's directive

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He said members of Al-Badr [auxiliary force to then Pakistani occupation army] on Nizami's direction had tortured and killed Kobad Ali near his house in Pabna on October 14 and Pabna Zila School teacher Kasimuddin on the bank of the Ichhamoti River on June 10, 1971.

During the Liberation War, Habib used to live in Sadhupara village of Pabna district and was a Secondary School Certificate examinee. He is now 56.

The Pakistani army had invaded Pabna on April 11, said the witness, adding that he and his elder brother Shahidullah along with others had by then gone to India for guerrilla training.

On August 17, 1971, they returned home completing the training, he said.

"During the training, I came to know that Kasimuddin sir had been killed," said Habib, who

was a close friend to Kasimuddin's son Shibli.

On the midnight of August 19, 1971, Habib went to convey his condolences to Shibli and there he learnt about the details of the schoolteacher's killing.

According to Habib, Shibli told him that on June 4 his father had told him that Nizami incorporated his [Kasimuddin] name in the hit-list and that he was leaving home.

Jamaat men had caught Kasimuddin at Moslem Pramanik's Tematha area of the district, said the witness, adding, "He was then taken to Nurpur army camp and brutally tortured."

Shibli, his mother and brothers had later gone to the camp to implore the army to release Kasimuddin, said Habib, adding that at that moment Nizami was entering the camp. Shibli's mother had grabbed Nizami's leg and begged

for her husband's life.

"Tell your husband to give more training, was Nizami's reply to my mother," said Habib quoting Shibli as saying.

The witness said Kasimuddin used to give guerrilla training to the students of Pabna Zila School with dummy rifles during the non-cooperation movement.

"On June 10, 1971, he was taken to the bank of the Ichhamoti at Madhupur from the army camp. He along with two others were shot dead and buried in a mass grave at a nearby bamboo garden," Shibli had told Habib.

Shibli and his family had later visited the grave where locals told them that Nizami was present during the killing, said the witness.

On October 14, 1971, when Habib's father was returning home after Maghrib prayers, members of Al-Badr, including Azizul, Masud, Cheton and

Forkan, caught him, said Habib during his deposition yesterday.

"He was brutally killed in front of our house," he said, adding that Kobad Ali was killed for being father of a freedom fighter.

The witness had learnt about the incident three to four days' later.

Al-Badr member Azizul was caught on December 19, 1971, the witness said, adding, "On interrogation, he admitted that on direction from Al-Badr chief Nizami and Pakistani army, he [Azizul] and Al-Badr members had killed my father."

Azizul had also admitted to killing Kasimuddin on Nizami's directions. He was later handed over to police.

From April, 1971 until the day the Pakistani army had surrendered, around 45,000 to 50,000 people of Pabna had been killed by the Pakistani army, Razakar and Al-Badr, said the witness.

They had violated around 1,000 women and burnt down thousands of houses. Besides, 8 to 10 lakh people took refuge in India.

"Motiur Rahman Nizami was the president of then Islami Chhatra Sangha [student wing of Pakistani occupational force] and on his directions the Pakistani army and Al-Badr committed the killing," Habib said.

The witness said during the Liberation War freedom fighters had caught many members of Razakar and Al-Badr. "We recovered from them IDs signed by then chief of Al-Badr Motiur Rahman Nizami."

He said the Pakistani army and Al-Badr in the middle of November had cordoned off Nazirpur and Hemayetpur unions. There they had killed 175 people and buried them in a mass grave failing to capture freedom fighters.

Habib also said he had read news on Nizami and

another Jamaat leader Abdus Sobhan, who is a war crimes suspect, on Daily Sangram in 1971.

After the liberation, the details of the mass killing were published in newspapers.

Nizami, who is facing 16 war crimes charges, was produced before the tribunal yesterday.

After the deposition, defence counsel Mizanul Islam cross-examined the witness.

In response to a question, Habib said he had first seen Nizami at an election rally in 1969.

In reply to another question, he said he could not say whether Nizami had been captured on August 30, 1971.

The tribunal yesterday adjourned the case proceedings until April 18.

MOJAEHEED ALLOWED THREE WITNESSES

The International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday allowed three defence witnesses in the war

crimes case against Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed.

The tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan came up with the decision after a prosecution petition for shortening defence witnesses' list.

On August 26, 2012, defence counsels of Mojaheed had submitted a list of 1,315 defence witnesses in the case.

During the brief hearing on the petition, the tribunal asked the defence counsels, "Why will you require defence witness? Do you have any specific alibi [for which you will adduce witness]?"

Citing from the petition, prosecutor Muklesur Rahman Badal told The Daily Star that although the defence did not have any plea of alibi, they had submitted the "huge list" of witnesses to cause delay in the case.

Munshi Ahsan Kabir, one of Mojaheed's coun-

Syria issues new general amnesty

AFP, Damascus

President Bashar al-Assad declared a general amnesty yesterday as the conflict ravaging Syria showed no signs of abating, with Western and Russian differences proving unbridgeable.

Under the latest decree, troops who deserted but did not fight against the regime may be pardoned if they surrender within a month, state news agency SANA reported.

There were important exceptions to the types of crime it covers.

The amnesty is applicable to just one crime classified under the Terrorism Act, namely failing to inform the authorities about rebel activity.

Other acts such as encouraging "terrorism" and taking up arms against the regime are not covered.

On the ground, at least 87 people were killed in violence on Monday alone.

'Israel capable of attacking Iran on its own'

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's army is capable of attacking Iran on its own without foreign support, Chief of Staff Benny Gantz told public radio on the 65th anniversary of the Jewish state's foundation.

Asked in an interview if Israel's military could wage attacks "alone" -- without the support of countries such as the United States -- against the Islamic republic, Gantz replied, "Yes, absolutely."

"We have our plans and forecasts... if the time comes we'll decide" on whether to take military action against Tehran, he said.

Gantz's comments echoed statements earlier this month by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who said Israel would "at no stage... abandon our fate into the hands of other countries, even our best friends."

Israel believes the Islamic republic is working to achieve military nuclear capabilities.

It has not ruled out a military strike to prevent this happening.

sels, told the court that they required witness, as their client had been charged with superior responsibility. He, however, did not say anything about alibi.

According to legal experts, an alibi is a form of defence used in criminal procedure wherein the accused attempts to prove that he or she was in some other place at the time the alleged offence was committed. Defence usually adduce their witness to prove their alibi.

When the defence counsels sought allowance of at least seven to 10 witnesses to defend Mojaheed, the tribunal allowed three.

A total 17 prosecution witnesses including the investigation officer of the case have testified in the case.

Mojaheed was indicted on seven charges of crimes against humanity allegedly committed during the Liberation War.