

Kashmir border firing kills Indian soldier

AFP, Srinagar

India yesterday accused Pakistan of killing one of its soldiers near the heavily militarised de-facto border that divides Kashmir between the South Asian rivals.

Colonel S D Goswami, a spokesman for the Indian army, said Pakistani troops had opened "unprovoked fire" Wednesday evening targeting Indian positions in Poonch sector along the Line of Control (LoC), some 200 kilometres (125 miles) southwest of the main city of Srinagar.

"Pakistani troops violated the ceasefire again during which our soldier was injured who died later," Goswami told AFP, adding that the Indian side had returned fire.

A border ceasefire agreement signed by the neighbours in 2003 has largely held, but both frequently accuse each other of breaching it.

Pakistani officials blamed Indian forces for killing four civilians on July 15 and 16, one in Kashmir itself and three near the town of Sialkot close to the border.

Earlier in July, India accused Pakistan of killing two border guards and one civilian in Kashmir.

The Himalayan region has been divided between India and Pakistan, but claimed in full by both, since the two countries gained independence from Britain in 1947.



POPULATION
India 'to pass China by 2022': UN

BBC ONLINE

A new UN study of global population trends predicts that India will overtake China to become the world's most populous nation by 2022.

The report also says that Nigeria will replace the US as the world's third most populous country by around 2050.

Africa is expected to account for more than half of the world's population growth over the next 35 years.

The current world population of 7.3 billion will reach 9.7 billion in 2050 and 11.2 billion in 2100, it predicts.

The new projection has India overtaking China's population six years earlier than previously predicted.

The reports say half of the world's population growth between 2015 and 2050 is expected to be concentrated in nine countries: India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Tanzania, the United States, Indonesia and Uganda.

The populations of 28 African countries are projected to more than double, and by 2100, 10 African countries are projected to have increased by at least a factor of five.

"The concentration of population growth in the poorest countries presents its own set of challenges, making it more difficult to eradicate poverty and inequality, to combat hunger and malnutrition," said

STATE FUNERAL FOR INDIA'S PEOPLE'S PRESIDENT

Indian soldiers carry a casket bearing the body of former Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam during his funeral ceremony at The Pei Karumbu Ground in Rameswaram; People throw rose petals on his grave; Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress Vice President Rahul Gandhi pay last respect to Dr Kalam yesterday. Kalam, considered the father of the country's missile programme, died on Monday. Popularly known as "Missile Man," Kalam led the scientific team that developed missiles able to carry India's nuclear warheads. He became a national folk hero after helping oversee nuclear tests in 1998 that solidified India's status as a nuclear weapons state. (story on page 16)



'Punjab attackers came from Pakistan'

AFP, New Delhi

Three gunmen who stormed a police station and killed seven people in northern India this week came from Pakistan, India's home minister said yesterday.

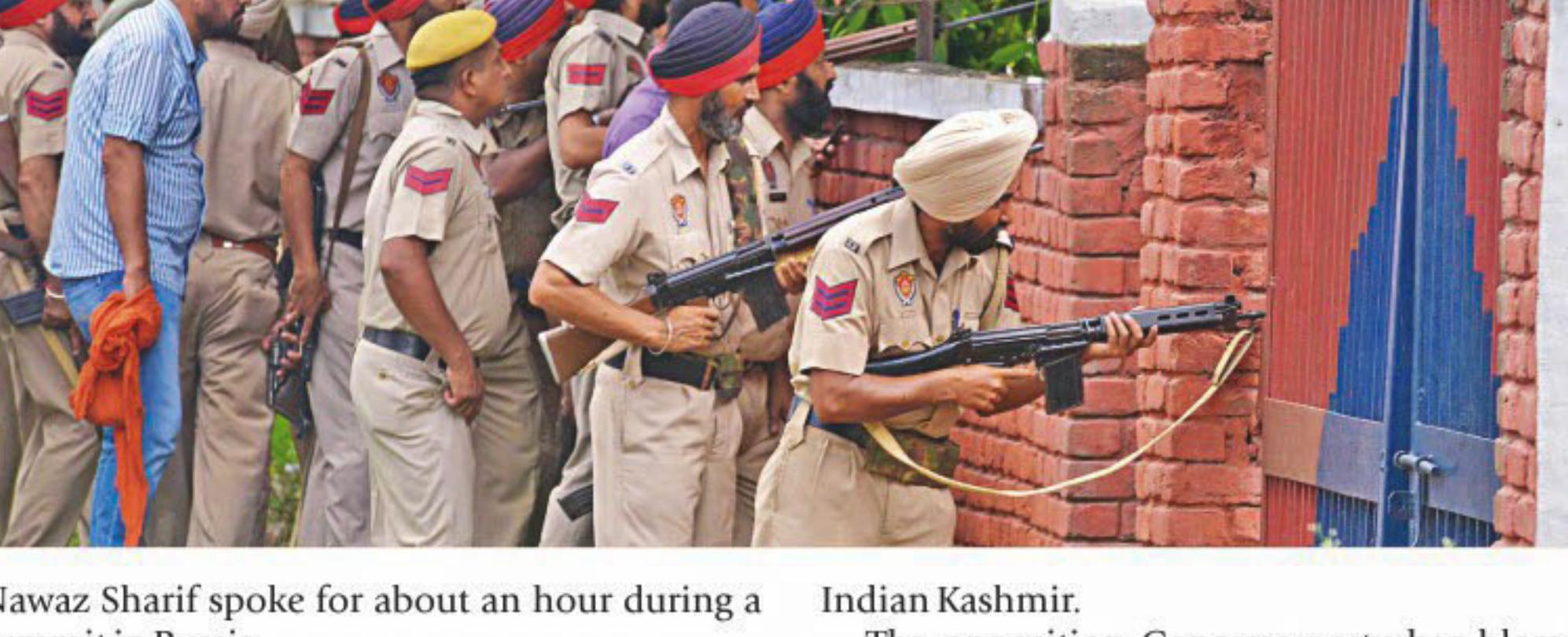
Rajnath Singh told parliament the three had crossed into Punjab state from the neighbouring country before launching their assault, which led to a gun battle with police that nearly lasted 11 hours.

"The preliminary analysis of GPS data indicated that the terrorists had infiltrated from Pakistan," Singh said in a statement that was drowned out by jeers from the opposition benches.

"I also assure the House that the government will do everything possible to prevent cross-border terrorism aimed against India."

Monday's attack was the first to hit Punjab in more than a decade and shocked the nation, although similar incidents have occurred in neighbouring Kashmir.

It came weeks after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Pakistani counterpart



Nawaz Sharif spoke for about an hour during a summit in Russia.

Their meeting raised hopes of an improvement in perennially difficult relations, but was swiftly followed by a flare-up in violence along the de facto border in divided Kashmir.

India regularly accuses Pakistan's army of providing covering fire for rebels who infiltrate across the border and then mount attacks in

Indian Kashmir.

The opposition Congress party has blamed security loopholes for the latest assault, in which four police including a senior officer were killed.

"Any effort by the enemies of our nation to undermine India's territorial integrity and security, or imperil the safety and security of our citizens will meet an effective and forceful response from our security forces," said Singh.

US 'militarising' South China Sea, says China

REUTERS, Beijing

China's Defence Ministry yesterday accused the United States of "militarizing" the South China Sea by staging patrols and joint military drills there, ramping up the rhetoric ahead of a key regional security meeting in Malaysia next week.

China has repeatedly urged Washington not to take sides in the escalating maritime dispute over the area, where the Asian giant last year stepped up its creation of artificial islands, alarming neighbors and provoking US criticism.

Washington has demanded China halt land reclamation and militarization of the disputed area and pursue a peaceful resolution according to international law.

China has been angered by US navy and air force forays through waters it claims as its

own, especially this month, when US Navy Admiral Scott Swift said he joined a routine surveillance flight.

The United States has also stepped up military contacts, including drills, with regional allies such as the Philippines, which also has claims in the South China Sea.

The United States was hyping up the "China threat" and attempting to sow discord between China and other claimant countries, Defence Ministry spokesman Yang Yujun told a news briefing.

"China is extremely concerned at the United States' pushing of the militarization of the South China Sea region," he said.

If certain US officials wanted to take civilian flights over the South China Sea to "enjoy its beauty", China had no problem with that, he said.



WHITE HOUSE RACE Trump leads Republicans

AFP, Washington

Bombastic US billionaire Donald Trump handily leads all fellow Republicans in the 2016 presidential race, a poll said yesterday.

Trump plunged into the crowded Republican nomination battle last month, and has since uttered insults about Mexican immigrants and caustic jabs at rivals that has kept campaign media attention focused squarely on the trash-talking real estate mogul.

He now leads the 17-candidate Republican field with 20 percent support, followed by conservative Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker with 13 percent and former Florida governor Jeb Bush with 10 percent, according to a survey by Quinnipiac University.

Hillary Clinton leads rival Democrats overwhelmingly with 55 percent support among Democratic voters, according to the poll. Independent Senator Bernie Sanders is second with 17 percent, while Vice President Joe Biden, who is not officially a candidate, earns 13 percent. All three lead Trump in hypothetical matchups, with Clinton the furthest ahead at 48-36 percent, according to Quinnipiac.

Landslides kill 29 in quake-hit Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

Landslides triggered by heavy rains in quake-hit Nepal killed at least 29 people yesterday, sweeping away homes and leaving more than a dozen missing.

Rescuers are still searching through rubble for around 15 more people believed missing in the western district of Kaski in the foothills of the Himalayas, around 150 kilometres (90 miles) west of the capital Kathmandu.

"The number of dead has risen to 26 in our district," said Kaski police chief Kedar Rajaure.

"Over 200 of our personnel are still working at the site to search and rescue."

Three more people, including an 83-year-old man, were killed in two landslides in the neighbouring districts of Myagdi and Baglung, according to a statement released by authorities.

Eighteen people injured in the disaster have been taken to local hospitals for treatment, Rajaure told AFP.

Scores of people die every year from flooding and landslides during the monsoon season in the Himalayan



Two weeks ago a student was killed when a landslide buried part of a school in the nearby town of Pokhara, and 35 people died last month when a landslide crushed villages in northeastern Nepal.

The monsoon rains are also hampering delivery of relief supplies to mountainous villages devastated by the massive earthquake that struck the Himalayan nation on April 25.

More than 8,800 people were killed by the quake and a

Court suspends verdict of Jazeera journalists

AFP, Cairo

An Egyptian court yesterday postponed its verdict in the retrial of three Al-Jazeera journalists accused of supporting the banned Muslim Brotherhood, in a case that has sparked a global outcry.

Australian Peter Greste, Canadian Mohamed Fahmy and Egyptian Baher Mohamed were jailed last year for "spreading false news" during their coverage of the turmoil after the army ousted Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in 2013.

Greste, who has since been deported, and Fahmy received seven years in the initial trial, while Mohamed was jailed for 10 years.

An appeals court ordered a retrial, saying the verdict lacked evidence against the three journalists working for the Doha-based network's English channel.

Yesterday, the court did not hold its much-anticipated session, with a defence lawyer saying he had been told it was postponed.

The ruling is now expected on August 2, state news agency MENA reported.

The session had been keenly awaited by rights groups and families of the defendants.

If convicted, the journalists can appeal to Egypt's Court of Cassation, which can uphold or cancel the ruling. If it cancels the verdict it will examine the case itself.



UNHCR special envoy Angelina Jolie Pitt shakes hand with Kachin ethnic refugee kid as she visits Eight Miles Palana IDP camp in Myitkyina capital city of Kachin state, Myanmar, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Myanmar frees 6,966 prisoners

BBC ONLINE

Myanmar yesterday pardoned and released 6,966 prisoners, including 210 foreigners, the government said.

The amnesties, which the information ministry says the president issued "on humanitarian grounds", come ahead of general elections in November.

It is not clear if Burmese political prisoners were among those freed.

More than 150 Chinese loggers, whose detention had angered Beijing, were among those released, Chinese state media said.

It is the latest in a series of amnesties brought about by the

government in Myanmar, also known as Burma.

President Thein Sein, who won power in 2010 in elections which saw military rule replaced with a military-backed civilian government, has pledged to release all political prisoners.

Most political prisoners in Myanmar have already been released as part of the reform process.

However, there are thought to be more than 150 political prisoners still being held, the Irrawaddy news site reported, citing the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

Those freed on Thursday included

eight former military intelligence officers who were jailed in 2004, AP news agency reported.

The 210 foreigners freed are expected to be deported, China's state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Myanmar had jailed the 155 Chinese nationals for illegal logging last week, with China's foreign ministry expressing concern over the severity of the sentences.

One-hundred-and-fifty-three of the Chinese nationals had been given life sentences, which usually last 20 years, for illegal logging, while two 17-year-old boys had been given 10-year jail terms.