

'India's entry will break Indo-Pak nuke balance'

TNN, Beijing

Acknowledging that India is "inching closer" to get membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, Chinese official media yesterday said if New Delhi is admitted into the elite grouping, "nuclear balance" between India and Pakistan will be broken.

Stating that India's entry into Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) will "shake strategic balance in South Asia and even cast a cloud over peace and stability in the entire Asia-Pacific region", an article in the state-run 'Global Times' however said China could support India's inclusion in the 48 member nuclear club if it "played by rules".

"New Delhi seems to have inched closer to NSG membership after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi gained backing from the US, Swiss and Mexico in its bid to join the elite nuclear club earlier this month," the article said mentioning for the first time India's progress in getting support from Mexico and Switzerland.

"Becoming a member of the NSG, a bloc that governs civilian nuclear trade worldwide, will grant India global acceptance as a legitimate nuclear power," said the article titled "Beijing could support India's NSG accession path if it plays by rules".

A commentary in the same daily on June 14 had said that India's admission into NSG would "jeopardise" China's national interest and touch a "raw nerve" in Pakistan.

"If it joins the group, New Delhi will be able to import civilian nuclear technology and fuels from the international market more conveniently, while saving its domestic nuclear materials for military use," said the article in the Global Times, a tabloid daily which is part of the ruling Communist Party of China group of publications headed by People's Daily.

NSG MEMBERSHIP BID



Written by Fu Xiaoliang research fellow with the State-run think tank China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, the article a second in as many days by the same daily highlights China's strident and vocal opposition to India's entry into NSG and concerns that its all-weather ally Pakistan will be left behind because "entry into the NSG will make it (India) a 'legitimate nuclear power'."



Buddhist monks and followers gather inside the Wat Phra Dhammakaya temple complex in anticipation of a planned police raid, in Pathum Thani province, north of Bangkok, Thailand, yesterday. The long simmering spat between investigators and temple is the latest clash to reveal bitter political ruptures at the heart of Thailand's national faith -- and law enforcement's seeming inability to confront monks accused of crimes.

PATHANKOT ATTACK Jaish handler flees to Afghanistan

PTI, Lahore

The Jaish-e-Mohammed leader who gave directions over phone to the terrorists during the attack on the Pathankot airbase has reportedly managed to flee to Afghanistan from Pakistan, an official said.

"The alleged JeM handler who communicated by telephone more than two-dozen times with the terrorists in Pathankot before they carried out the attack on the airbase on January 2 has managed to cross into Afghan border," a member of the Joint Investigation Team probing the attack told Press Trust of India today.

He said the JeM handler, who is in late 20s, was in the tribal area of Pakistan when he communicated about 18 times with the terrorists.

"The law enforcement agencies tried to trace him (in the tribal belt) but there are reports that he managed to escape to Afghanistan," he said, without disclosing the JeM leader's identity.

Interestingly, during interrogation JeM chief Masood Azhar claimed that the handler of the Pathankot operation had quit the organisation some-times ago.

"Azhar disowns the JeM handler (to prove his innocence)," another source privy to the development told PTI.

He said the investigation agencies have been under "immense pressure" from Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to thoroughly probe the matter and come up with "true facts" of the Pathankot attacks.

Although the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) of the Punjab police had registered an FIR against the alleged attackers of the Pathankot airbase and their abettors, not a single person has been charged in this regard.

Obama meets Dalai Lama behind closed doors

Talks about current situation in Tibet; China criticises US

REUTERS, Washington

US President Barack Obama met the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, at the White House on Wednesday despite a warning by China that it would damage diplomatic relations.

The meeting came at a time of heightened tensions between the United States and China over Beijing's assertive pursuit of territorial claims in East Asia.

Obama's fourth White House meeting with the Dalai Lama in the past eight years took place in the White House residence, instead of the Oval Office where the president normally meets world leaders.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said the choice of the residence emphasized the "personal nature of their meeting."

He said Obama thanked the Dalai Lama for his condolences for the victims of Sunday's mass shooting at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida.

Earnest added that Obama had in the past

spoken of his "warm personal feelings" for the Dalai Lama, appreciation of his teachings and belief "in preserving Tibet's unique religious, cultural and linguistic traditions."

At the same time, Earnest said the US position of considering Tibet part of China had not changed.

In an interview with Fox News later on Wednesday, the Dalai Lama said he and Obama talked about the current situation in Tibet.

He denied he was seeking independence and that it was in Tibet's interests to remain part of China, "provided we should have full right for preservation of our own culture, or rich Buddhist knowledge, knowledge of Buddhist philosophy, these things."

A commentary on China's official news agency, Xinhua, accused Washington of breaking its promise not to support Tibet's independence by going ahead with the meeting. It said that had "seriously jeopardized China-US relations, and deeply hurt the Chinese people's feelings."



EGYPTAIR CRASH Black box recovered from wreckage in Med

AFP, Cairo

A search team yesterday recovered the cockpit voice recorder from the EgyptAir plane that crashed into the Mediterranean last month in a major step towards establishing the cause of the tragedy.

The device was found broken into pieces but the salvage experts managed to retrieve the recorder's crucial memory unit, Egypt's civil aviation authority said.

Officials are preparing to transfer the recorder from a search vessel in the Mediterranean to Egypt for analysis, a statement said.

The cockpit voice recorder keeps track of conversations and other sounds in the pilots' cabin.

The breakthrough came hours after a deep-sea robot located pieces of the main body of the plane at the bottom of the Mediterranean.

Airbus said the flight recorders held the key to unlocking the mystery of why the plane went down with 66 people on board en route from Paris to Cairo nearly a month ago.

"The first photos of the wreckage do not allow to establish any scenario of the accident," an Airbus statement said.

"Only the black boxes could contribute to a full understanding of the chain of events which led to this tragic accident."

Investigators have said it is too soon to determine what caused flight MS804 from Paris to Cairo to crash on May 19, although a terror attack has not been ruled out.

The search vessel John Lethbridge, equipped with an underwater robot, arrived in Egypt last week to begin searching an area around 290 kilometres (180 miles) north of the Egyptian coast.

NEWSIN brief

Body of boy seized by alligator found

AFP, Orlando

A US family's desperate search for their toddler son, who was snatched by an alligator off the shore of a lake at a Disney resort, ended Wednesday when divers found the two-year-old's body in murky water. "His body was completely intact... The body has now been turned over to the Orange County medical office for an autopsy," Sheriff Jerry Demings told reporters.

Iran kills 12 Kurdish rebels near Iraq border

AFP, Tehran

Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards killed 12 Kurdish rebels near the Iraqi border in clashes in which three Guards were also killed, an Iranian news agency reported yesterday. Wednesday evening's fighting took place in Oshnavieh in the northwest, the Tasnim news agency said. "Two separate groups of rebels had slipped across the border to carry out acts of 'sabotage' and 'create insecurity among the population', it added.

US man commits suicide in Taiwan court room

AFP, Taipei

An American man fatally stabbed himself with a pair of scissors in a Taiwan courtroom yesterday during his sentencing on drug possession charges, raising questions over security failings. The man, named as 41-year-old Tyrel Martin Marhanka, is thought to have hidden the dismantled scissors inside a magazine to get past a metal detecting door, Changhua district court said.

HK bookseller: TV confession 'forced'

BBC ONLINE

One of five Hong Kong booksellers, who disappeared last year, yesterday said a confession he made for "illegal trading" was forced. Lam Wing Kee was seized in the Chinese city of Shenzhen last October. He and the four other men worked at a publishing house that sold books critical of China's leaders. Lam said a confession broadcast on Chinese television in February, featuring four of the men, had been scripted.

Croatian PM faces confidence vote

AFP, Zagreb

Croatian Prime Minister Tihomir Oreskovic faced a no confidence yesterday, with his right-wing government likely to fall -- a defeat that could lead to snap elections. If Oreskovic loses and a new government is not formed within 30 days, parliament will be dissolved and the president will call new elections. This would delay planned reforms in the European Union's newest member.



The first visitor reacts as he enters the Shanghai Disney Resort after the opening ceremony of the Shanghai Disney Resort in Shanghai, China, yesterday. Entertainment giant Disney hopes to win over communist-ruled China's growing middle class with the ultimate American cultural export.

Maldives vows to stem extremist threat

AFP, Colombo

Violent extremism poses "one of the biggest threats" to the Maldives' national security, the president of the troubled honeymoon islands said yesterday, after a wave of Maldivians joined the Islamic State group.

Presenting a new national counter-terrorism strategy in parliament, President Abdulla Yameen said the government would work to tackle "violent extremism and terrorism" and safeguard the islands' prized tourist resorts.

While the president did not specifically mention Islamic extremism, according to the government nearly 50 people have travelled to war-battered Syria from the Indian Ocean archipelago, which is Sunni Muslim by law and has a population of about 350,000.

Defence Minister Adam Shareef told reporters on Thursday that 49 Maldivians had travelled to Syria to join the Islamic State group (IS).

To date there has been no violence by jihadists in the Maldives.

However, Yameen told the People's Majlis, or parliament: "Today, one of the biggest threats to the people and the national security of the Maldives emanates from the dangers posed by violent extremism and terrorism."

The strategy focuses on drafting new national security laws, improving intelligence gathering, safeguarding tourist resorts -- a major part of the archipelago's economy -- and beefing up its international cooperation on terrorism.

Taliban use 'honey trap' boys to kill cops

AFP, Tarin Kot

The Taliban are using child sex slaves to mount crippling insider attacks on police in southern Afghanistan, exploiting the pervasive practice of "bacha bazi" -- paedophilic boy play -- to infiltrate security ranks, multiple officials and survivors of such assaults told AFP.

The ancient custom is prevalent across Afghanistan, but nowhere does it seem as entrenched as in the province of Uruzgan, where "bacha bereesh" -- or boys without beards -- widely become objects of lustful attraction for powerful police commanders.

The Taliban over nearly two years have used them to mount a wave of Trojan Horse

attacks -- at least six between January and April alone -- that have killed hundreds of policemen, according to security and judicial officials in the province.

"The Taliban are sending boys -- beautiful boys, handsome boys -- to penetrate checkpoints and kill, drug and poison policemen," said Ghulam Sakhi Rogh Lewanai, who was Uruzgan's police chief until he was removed in a security reshuffle in April amid worsening violence.

"They have figured out the biggest weakness of police forces -- bacha bazi," he told AFP.

The assaults, signifying abuse of children by both parties in the conflict, have left authorities rattled, with one senior provincial official who echoed Rogh Lewanai's view saying "it's easier tackling suicide bombers than bacha attackers".

The killings illustrate how bacha bazi is aggravating insecurity in Uruzgan, a remote province which officials warn is teetering on the brink of collapse, unravelling hard-won gains by US, Australian and Dutch troops who fought there for years.

Gun battle in Indian Kashmir kills five people

AFP, Srinagar

A soldier and four suspected rebels were killed in a gun battle in Indian-administered Kashmir yesterday, an army spokesman said.

Soldiers intercepted a group of militants trying to cross the heavily militarised de-facto border from Pakistan into India at daybreak, triggering a fierce fire fight, the spokesman, N N Joshi said.

"Four terrorists were killed in the operation and a soldier who was injured in the firefight later succumbed," Joshi told AFP.

"This was the second infiltration bid in three days." A militant and a soldier were killed on Wednesday in a gun battle in the mountainous region that lasted 24 hours.

India turns to volunteers

AFP, New Delhi

India is calling for volunteers to hold workshops for children, a minister said yesterday, as state-run schools around the country struggle with absentee teachers.

Launching the initiative, education minister Smriti Irani said people from varying professions could teach classes on creative writing, art, story telling and public speaking.

"It is the best example of participative citizenry," Irani said in New Delhi as she launched a website where volunteers can register and connect with schools in their area.

"The world over, community engagement has led to better quality education... I am hopeful by December every school in the country will be connected to this programme," she said.

Volunteers can connect to the pilot programme through an app on their smartphones.

Irani said the initiative, initially offered in 2,200 schools nationwide, was aimed at supplementing formal education.

But it comes as the government grapples with teacher shortages in schools due to extended absences or under-recruitment.

TEACHING GAPS IN SCI



Access to education has improved significantly in recent years with thousands of new government-run schools in rural and remote areas for India's tens of millions of young people.

But experts say standards of teaching in many schools is below par, leading to poor reading and writing levels among students. A survey by academics and the World Bank in 2010 found more than 20 percent of state primary school teachers were absent at any one time.

Many children in fifth year cannot read a second-year book in their own language, an annual survey by Indian education research group Pratham has consistently showed.