

NEWS IN brief

Turkey orders detention of 73 air force pilots
 AFP, Ankara

Turkish authorities ordered the detention of 73 air force pilots as part of the probe into the group blamed for July's failed coup, state media reported yesterday. At least 45 had already been detained after police operations began yesterday across the country including the central Konya province and the capital Ankara, the official Anadolu news agency said.

Politics should never override policy: Modi
 PTI, New Delhi

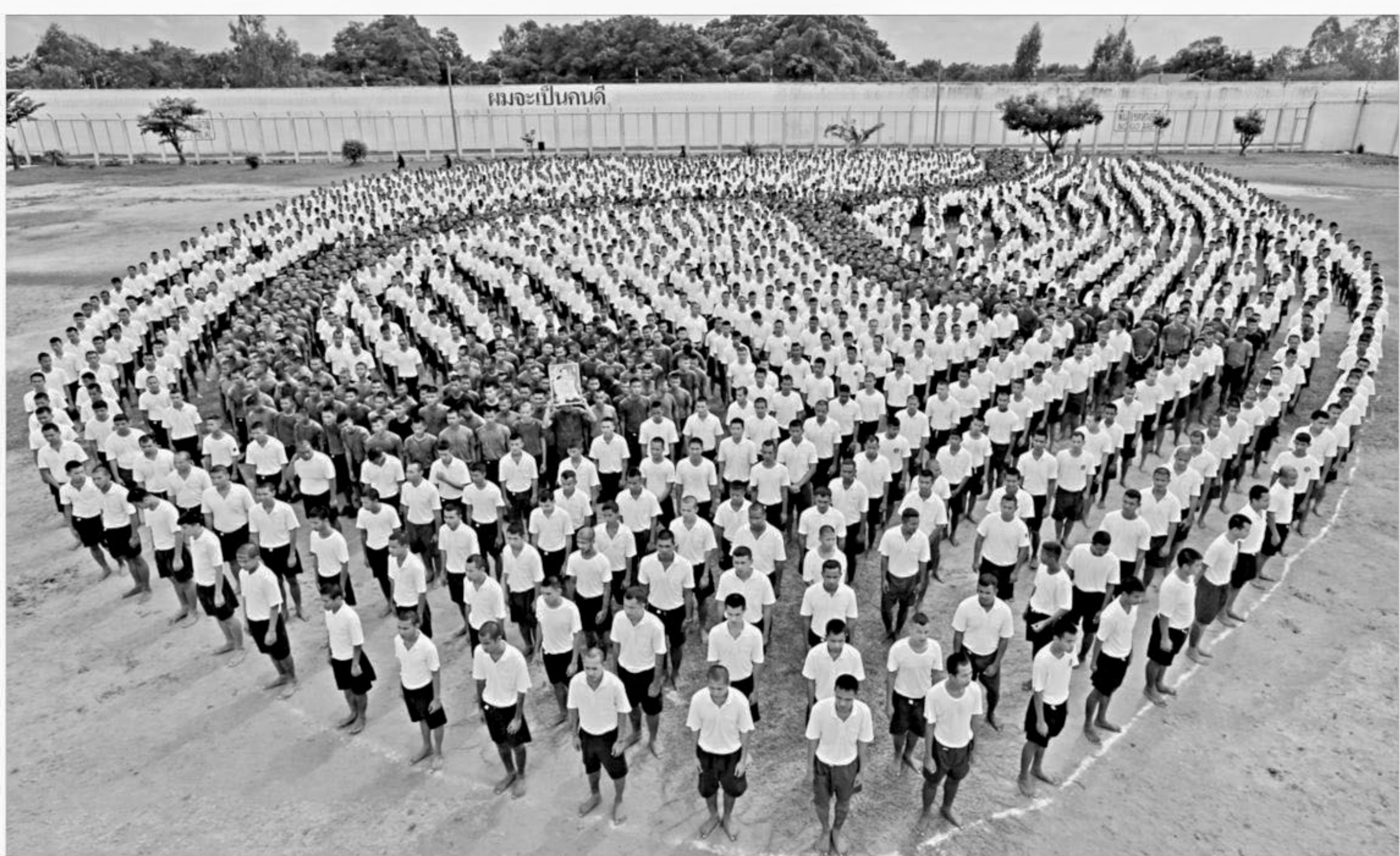
"Politics should never override policy." This was the message of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to IAS officers as a young batch met him here yesterday. "The Prime Minister urged the officers to inculcate team spirit, and work towards breaking silos, in whatever capacity they serve," a PMO statement said.

Sri Lanka to sell white elephants to cut debt
 AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka said yesterday that it would reduce its foreign debt by \$1 billion by selling off former strongman president Mahinda Rajapakse's vanity projects. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe told parliament he wanted to privatise a port and an airport in Rajapakse's home constituency which have become huge white elephants.

Allies agree to step up pressure on N Korea
 REUTERS, Tokyo

Japan, US and South Korea yesterday agreed to work together to put more pressure on North Korea to get it to abandon its nuclear and missile programmes, Japanese Minister Shinsuke Sugiyama said. Tension on Korean peninsula has been high this year, beginning with North Korea's fourth nuclear test in January.



Male inmates form the Thai symbol for the number nine, in honour of late Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej, also known as King Rama IX, at the Central Correctional Institution for Young Offenders in Pathum Thani province, on the outskirts of Bangkok, Thailand yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Xi anointed 'core' leader, on par with Mao, Deng

REUTERS, Beijing

China's Communist Party gave President Xi Jinping the title of "core" leader yesterday, putting him on par with past strongmen like Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, but it signalled his power would not be absolute.

A lengthy communique released by the party following a four-day, closed-door meeting of senior officials in Beijing stressed maintaining the importance of collective leadership. The collective leadership system "must always be followed and should not be violated by any organisation or individual under any circumstance or for any reason", it said.

But all party members should "closely unite around the Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core", said the document, released through state media.

The "core" leader title marks a significant strengthening of Xi's position ahead of a key party congress next year, at which a new Standing Committee, the pinnacle of power in China, will be constituted.

Since assuming office almost four years ago, Xi has rapidly consolidated power, including heading a group leading economic reform and appointing himself commander-in-chief of the military, though as head of the Central Military Commission he already controls the armed forces.

While head of the party, the military and the state, Xi had not previously been given the title "core".

Deng coined the phrase "core" leader. He said Mao, himself and Jiang Zemin were core leaders, meaning they had almost absolute authority and should not be questioned.

The once-every-five-years congress will be held in the second half of 2017 and Xi will be looking to stack the Standing Committee with as many of his own people as possible.

Zhang Lifan, a Beijing-based political commentator, said now that Xi was the "core", things should go more smoothly for him at next year's congress. But he will have more on the line, given his increased responsibility to answer economic and social problems facing the leadership. "If the economy continues to go downhill and the rifts in society become more serious, the responsibility of the core is greater," Zhang said. "Your relative power and authority are greater, everyone is deferring to you. But they will be watching to see if your leadership is good or bad."



TENSIONS IN KASHMIR Infiltration bid foiled by Indian army

TNN, Srinagar

One soldier was martyred and another injured yesterday as Indian army foiled an infiltration bid by terrorists from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in the Tangdhar sector along Line of Control in Kashmir.

"An infiltration bid was foiled in Tangdhar as troops intercepted a group of terrorists attempting to infiltrate," an Army official said. He said in the ensuing gunfight, one soldier was killed while another was injured.

"The injured soldier has been evacuated," he said. The official said the operation was in progress and further details were awaited.

Meanwhile, a Pakistani Ranger was killed and another injured in retaliatory firing by Indian troops after heavy overnight shelling by Pakistani forces in RS Pura and Arnia sectors along international border (IB), the BSF said yesterday.

"At 12:30 and 1315 hours today, BSF troops in Arnia and RS Pura sectors killed one Pak Ranger and seriously injured another in the retaliatory fire," a senior BSF officer said.

Pak bans protests in Islamabad

PM sets stage for confrontation with opposition leader Imran Khan

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan yesterday banned all public gatherings in Islamabad for two months, setting the stage for confrontation ahead of a major protest aimed at paralysing the capital and unseating Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

The premier is under growing pressure from opposition parties over his children's offshore bank accounts that were revealed in the Panama Papers leak.

Former cricketer turned opposition leader Imran Khan, who is due to lead the protest on November 2, has demanded Sharif stand down over the revelations.

"This will be a decisive and historic gathering, people will come together with resolve to hold the prime minister accountable," Khan told reporters.

However, there will be a heavy police presence in Islamabad to deter protesters with confrontation now appearing inevitable.

Khan led a previous mass protest in the summer of 2014 that lasted four months, allying himself to populist cleric Tahir-ul-Qadri to back a sit-in in front of parliament calling for the government to resign over election rigging allegations.

A notification banned gatherings for two months because protests were "likely to threaten public peace and tranquility, cause public annoyance or injury, endanger human life and safety".

The planned protest comes at a sensitive time for Sharif, with Pakistan's Supreme Court due to start hearing a case into the Panama Papers revelations about Sharif's family involvement on November 1. Sharif government's relationship with the all-powerful army is also at a low ebb following the publication of an embarrassing report this month that said civilian officials had clashed with the military over its alleged covert support for proxy fighters.



TENSIONS BETWEEN INDIA, PAKISTAN

Diplomats expelled in tit-for-tat move

AFP, New Delhi

New Delhi yesterday announced it was expelling a Pakistani visa official for suspected spying, with Islamabad responding by saying it would send back an Indian diplomat in an apparent tit-for-tat move.

The expulsions come as tensions between the nuclear-armed neighbours are running high over their disputed territory of Kashmir.

New Delhi police said the Pakistani official had been recruiting Indian nationals for two and a half years to spy for Pakistan's powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in return for cash.

The official, named as Mehmood Akhtar, was detained on Wednesday with documents in his possession on Indian troop deployment along the border, Indian police told a press conference in Delhi. Akhtar was later released.

India's foreign secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar summoned Pakistan's high commissioner to inform him of the decision to expel the official within 48 hours.

Pakistan's foreign secretary then summoned the Indian High Commissioner yesterday night to say Islamabad would also be sending back a diplomat over alleged improper activities.

It named the official as Surjeet Singh and added he and his family would also be required to leave within two days.

Tensions between India and Pakistan have soared since a raid last month on an Indian army base near the de-facto border dividing Kashmir killed 19 soldiers, the worst such attack in more than a decade.

Pak to execute mentally ill murder convict

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani authorities issued a death warrant for a mentally ill condemned prisoner on Wednesday after the country's Supreme Court ruled that his schizophrenia is "not a permanent mental disorder".

Lawyers and rights groups say convicted murderer Imdad Ali, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia while in prison in 2012, cannot be executed as he cannot understand his crime and punishment.

Ali's death warrant was issued by a criminal court on the request of the provincial Punjab government, said a statement by the Justice Project Pakistan (JPP), which is providing Ali with counsel.

It follows a ruling last week by Pakistan's top court that said schizophrenia was a "recoverable disease" that could be treated by drugs, and not a mental disorder.

He will now be executed on November 2 in a prison in the city of Vehari, the JPP said. Ali, aged 50, was sentenced to death for the murder of a religious cleric in 2002.

He had been sentenced to hang last month, but received a last minute stay of execution by the Supreme Court, before that expired last week. Rights groups have slammed the ruling.



Opposition supporters take part in a rally against Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro's government in Caracas, Venezuela, on Wednesday. Opposition leaders called a 12-hour general strike today and vowed to use their legislative majority to issue a declaration holding the elected socialist accountable for his handling of a severe economic crisis. PHOTO: REUTERS

Two top Qaeda leaders killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Two top al-Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan were killed in a US drone attack, the nation's spy agency confirmed yesterday, in a major blow to the group as it seeks to re-establish safe havens in the country.

Washington said the strikes on Sunday targeted Farouq al-Qahtani, al-Qaeda's emir for northeastern Afghanistan, and his deputy Bilal al-Utubi, calling it the most significant attack against the group in several years.

Multiple Hellfire missiles "levelled" two different compounds in Kunar where the men were believed to be hiding, US officials said Wednesday, without confirming if the strikes were successful.

Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security offered confirmation of their death yesterday, adding that a third senior member of the group had also been killed.

"The attack was carried out in coordination with NDS," the spy agency said in a statement, without naming the third leader.

to the militant group's presence in Afghanistan.

"Eliminating these core leaders of Al-Qaeda will disrupt efforts to plot against the United States and our allies, reduce the threat to our Afghan partners, and assist their efforts to deny al-Qaeda safe haven in Afghanistan," Cook said.

Another US official said the attack represented the "most significant strike" against the al-Qaeda leadership in Afghanistan in years.

The Pentagon had been actively hunting for Qahtani for four years. He had longstanding ties with Osama Bin Laden before his death in the 2011 US raid on his Pakistan compound.

Qahtani has operated in Afghanistan since at least 2009 and led an al-Qaeda battalion since at least mid-2010, officials said.

"He was charged with the requirement to establish AQ safe-havens throughout Kunar and Nuristan provinces."

Duterte again vents anger at US

REUTERS, Yokohama

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said yesterday his country could join naval exercises with Japan, but repeated there would be no more war games with long-time ally the United States and again gave vent to his anger against Washington.

Duterte also said he had explained to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in talks on Wednesday just why he resented the United States, reiterating that Washington treated the Philippines like "dogs on a leash" and lectured about human rights in connection with his domestic campaign against drugs.

The Philippine leader's visit to Japan coincides with jitters about his foreign policy after weeks of verbal attacks on the US, including threats to end military agreements.

US DRONE STRIKES

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Ref: DACGO/Recruitment/2016/335 Date: 27 October 2016

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Manager Employment
 Human Resources Department
 Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd.
 Head Office, Balaka
 Kurmitola, Dhaka-1229
 Email: mgrmp@dbiman.com
 Tel: 8901600 Extn: 2154, 2157

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