

Bodies pulled from Myanmar plane wreck

AFP, San Hlan

Hundreds of people gathered on a beach in southern Myanmar yesterday desperately waiting for news of their loved ones as the first bodies arrived from the wreck of a military plane that crashed with more than 120 people on board.

Navy ships and air force planes have been scouring the waves since Wednesday afternoon, when the aircraft disappeared en route from the southern city of Myeik to the commercial hub of Yangon.

By mid-afternoon the commander-in-chief's office said 29 corpses -- 20 women, one man and eight children -- had been retrieved from the sea after a navy vessel discovered wreckage from the plane off the coastline near Dawei town.

Hundreds of locals, relatives and NGO workers clasp umbrellas watched as a fishing boat laden with the dead pulled up to San Hlan beach, where they were unloaded by NGO workers and uniformed soliders wearing masks and gloves.

An AFP reporter counted 29 corpses of different sizes, wrapped in black and white plastic bags, being brought onshore from the boat.

"My cousin's sister's family was in the plane crash -- her husband, her child and herself," said Kyaw Swar Myint, 44, from Dawei.

"We heard news that the helicopter was now transporting about 20 dead bodies to the beach, so we are waiting here."

A military officer said strong currents has made it hard for boats to reach the shore, so many of the bodies may have to be airlifted to land.

The Chinese-made Shaanxi Y8 plane was carrying a total of 122 people when it disappeared on Wednesday afternoon during a routine flight, according to the army chief.



Military soldiers carry dead bodies from a crashed military plane outside Launglon township, Myanmar, yesterday. A military officer said strong current has made it hard for boats to reach the shore, so many of the bodies may have to be airlifted to land.

PHOTO: REUTERS

N Korea fires cruise missiles

Launch is fourth by Pyongyang in four weeks; China media welcomes South's THAAD delay, says ties could improve

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea fired what appeared to be several land-to-ship missiles off its east coast yesterday, South Korea's military said, a day after the South postponed full deployment of a controversial US anti-missile system designed to deter a North Korean attack.

The launches, the latest in a fast-paced series of missile tests defying world pressure to rein in its weapons programme, come less than a week after the United Nations Security Council passed fresh sanctions on the reclusive state.

South Korea on Wednesday said it will hold off on installing remaining components of the US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system that has angered North Korea's main ally, China, amid early signs of easing tensions between the two countries.

The missiles were launched yesterday morning from the North Korean coastal city of Wonsan and flew about 200 km (124 miles), South Korea's Office of Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

Under third-generation leader Kim Jong Un, North Korea has been conducting missile tests at an unprecedented pace in an effort to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of hitting the mainland United States.

North Korea unveiled a number of new weapons at a mas-

sive military parade on April 15 to mark the birth anniversary of the state's founding leader and has since tested some of them.

Yesterday's launch is the fourth missile test by North Korea since South Korean President Moon Jae-in took office on May 10 pledging to engage in dialogue with Pyongyang. Moon says sanctions and pressure alone have failed to resolve the growing threat from the North's advancing nuclear and missile programme.

Two launchers of the full six-launcher THAAD battery, as well as the system's far-reaching radar that China worries could upset the regional security balance, have already been installed at a deployment site in the southeastern city of Seongju. The elements will stay in place, South Korea said.

The introduction of the THAAD system has sparked protests in South Korea and a backlash in China against South Korean business interests.

The Global Times, published by China's official People's Daily, said in an editorial that no matter the outcome of the environmental study, South Korea's announcement could reduce friction.

"Obviously, the pressure China puts on South Korea has taken effect. Seoul's will has been shaken," the paper said. "However, attitude is not everything. Without solving the problem of THAAD, the pain it has brought to bilateral relations will not disappear, and South Korea must swallow some of the bitter results."

TENSIONS IN KOREAN PENINSULA



IS militants on back foot in Marawi

Says Philippines; 100 still held hostage

REUTERS, Marawi City

The Islamist militants holed up in the southern Philippines town of Marawi have been reduced to a "small resistance" after troops crippled their logistics and some fighters have fled from the battle, military officials said yesterday.

"In a few more days it could be over," armed forces Chief of Staff General Eduardo Año told ANC television on the 17th day of a siege by hundreds of militants who have sworn allegiance to the ultra-radical Islamic State group.

The battle for Marawi City has raised concern that Islamic State, on a back foot in Syria and Iraq, is building a regional base on the Philippine island of Mindanao that could pose a threat to neighbouring Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore too.

Officials have said that, among the several hundred militants who seized the town on May 23, there were about 40 foreigners from Indonesia and Malaysia but also fighters from India, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Chechnya.

The seizure of the town suggested to many that pro-Islamic State factions wanted to establish it as a Southeast Asian "wilayat" -- or governorate -- for Islamic State.

Major General Carlito Galvez, head of military command in the region, said government troops had entered three neighbourhoods from which the militants had pulled back after two weeks of defence that relied heavily on snipers.

He said the military believed that "more or less 100" civilians were still being held hostage by the militants.

FARMERS PROTEST IN INDIA

Rahul Gandhi arrested on way to Mandsaur

TNN, Nagayaon

Amidst high drama, Congress vice president Rahul Gandhi and other senior party leaders were arrested after they were placed under preventive custody yesterday, 56 km from riot-hit Pipliamandi area of Mandsaur district, the epicentre of farmers' protest where the leaders were heading.

Gandhi, along with JDU leader Sharad Yadav and Congress leaders Digvijay Singh and Kamal Nath, were kept at Vikram Tent House, which was converted into a temporary jail, in Nagayaon.

"I squarely blame Modi and the chief minister (Shivraj Singh Chouhan for the killing of farmers)," Gandhi told reporters, before being whisked away by the police.

"Country's Prime Minister Narendra Modi can waive off Rs 1.50 lakh crore worth loans of the richest people of India, but can't pay heed to the plight of farmers. He can only give bullets to them," said Rahul.

Gandhi, who reached Udaipur on a chartered flight from New Delhi, moved

towards Nimbaheda area on road in a cavalcade, stopping at several spots to meet Congress workers.

In what seems to be a premeditated plan to dodge police and enter Madhya Pradesh at Neemuch, Gandhi jumped off his SUV and rode pillion on a motorcycle with party MLA from Rau, Jitu Ptewari, at Ranikheda Square in Nimbaheda.

After some time, he returned to Neemuch and started took a different towards Nagayaon. At the first toll point, Rahul got down from the motorcycle and walked towards the booth where over 700 policemen, including the rapid action force, had put up a blockade.

Seeing Rahul Gandhi approaching, the police advanced the blockade near a railway crossing. Gandhi and his supporters tried to evade police by running on the tracks and getting into agriculture fields, but police caught them.

Gandhi held heated discussions with the police and moved towards a cemetery, but was taken into custody.



A truck is set on fire outside a Supreme Justice Court branch office during riots at a rally against President Nicolas Maduro's government in Caracas, Venezuela, on Wednesday. A 17-year-old protester died in ferocious clashes between security forces and protesters in Caracas, taking the death toll from unrest since April to at least 66.

PHOTO: REUTERS

AI gets so-so grade in univ entrance exam

AFP, Beijing

An AI machine has taken the maths section of China's annual university entrance exam, finishing it faster than students but with a below average grade.

The artificial intelligence machine -- a tall black box containing 11 servers placed in the centre of a test room -- took two versions of the exam on Wednesday in Chengdu, Sichuan province.

The machine, called AI-MATHS, scored 105 out of 150 in 22 minutes. Students have two hours to complete the test, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

It then spent 10 minutes on another version and scored 100.

Beijing liberal art students who took the maths exam last year scored an average of 109.

India unnerved by student anger in Kashmir region

AFP, Quimoh

Another student death in clashes in Indian-administered Kashmir has heightened tensions in the disputed territory and worsened India's worries about a foe that it cannot control -- youths who do not carry guns.

The teenager was fatally shot in the chest during an exchange of fire between troops and suspected militants in Shopian, south of Srinagar, late Tuesday, sparking further violent protests.

Students have taken the lead in protests, hurling stones at soldiers tracking militants who want Kashmir to break away from India.

More than 100 young men and women have been killed over the past year in the demonstrations.

The deaths have increased anti-Indian sentiment in the part of the Muslim-majority Himalayan region it has controlled since 1947. Pakistan has the other chunk.

Analysts say there is a growing political consciousness linked to the new anger and the spread of Hindu nationalism in India after Prime Minister Narendra Modi won an election in 2014.

India is also worried about how to handle the anger. It considers the battle with armed militants to be a fair one but its leaders are unnerved about students whose only weapons are stones.

Indian army chief Gen. Bipin Rawat said he wished "instead of throwing stones at us, (they) were firing weapons".

"Then I would have been happy. Then I could do what I want," he told Press Trust of India.

Bedridden in a dimly lit room of his village home, Mohammad Younis, 18, is eager to join the protests.

Indian soldiers shot the 18-year-old in the thigh in February. He had been walking through paddy fields to attend the funeral of a rebel killed by troops.

"If I wasn't stuck in this bed I would also go out to protest," Younis told AFP at his home in Quimoh.

His father, Mohamamd Akbar, said the students were "not afraid of bullets and soldiers".

"We were timid," he added. "But this generation has to fight."

The rebel, a former student known to Younis, was killed just ten days after joining the separatists.

About 100 young Kashmiris are believed to have joined the armed militants since rebel commander Burhan Wani was killed by security forces last July.

Wani, a media savvy leader, took up the armed cause at the age of 15, galvanising Kashmiri youth by providing a new face for the militant movement.

Student unrest intensified again in April

when government forces raided a college in the southern town of Pulwama to arrest suspected protest leaders.

The army's use of a Kashmiri man as a 'human shield' tied to the front of a military jeep as it drove away from stone-throwing protesters set off even greater controversy.

Wasim Ahmed Bhat, a student, said he has been detained seven times since July and was not allowed to attend his father's funeral.

"Each time I was tortured," he said.

In nearby Shopian, students in school uniform waited outside their campus on a recent day before classes, their teacher unable to coax them inside.

The students had heard the army was approaching and within minutes were hurling stones at the vehicles as they whizzed past, horns blaring. "Go India, go back," they shouted.

"I understand their anger. Six of those

ANALYSTS SAY THERE IS A GROWING POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS LINKED TO THE NEW ANGER AND THE SPREAD OF HINDU NATIONALISM IN INDIA



killed last year were my students," said the teacher, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Kashmir police deny allegations of widespread arbitrary detentions and torture. They say there are strict orders that government forces must not enter campuses.

"We have been very lenient towards the students. In most cases we don't even register cases against them in order to save their future careers," Kashmir police chief Muneer Khan told AFP.

Speaking on condition of anonymity a top police officer conceded that during protests after Wani's death nearly 3,000 students were detained.

He said security forces were more wary of the protesters who come out in support of the militants when trapped in military cordons than the rebels themselves.

Students have always been a part of protests against Indian rule. Many helped an armed rebellion that erupted in 1989 despite tight controls on education institutions. But campus protests were rare until the college raid in April.

NEWSIN brief

Norway SC rejects Breivik appeal bid

AFP, Oslo

Norway's Supreme Court said yesterday it would not hear neo-Nazi mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik's case over his "inhumane" prison conditions, a case he said he will now take to the European Court of Human Rights. The ruling brings an end to Breivik's legal challenges in the Scandinavian country.

Darjeeling turns violent, army deployed

TNN, Kolkata

The Army was called in by the Mamata Banerjee-led West Bengal government in Darjeeling yesterday after Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) protesters set fire to government properties. The protesters also resorted to stone-pelting on the government forces.

Boko Haram kills 11 in Nigeria attacks

AFP, Maiduguri

Eleven people were killed when Boko Haram gunmen and suicide bombers launched a rare combined attack inside the strategic northeast Nigerian city of Maiduguri, police said yesterday. One civilian was killed as locals in the Jiddari Polo area of the city fled, while 10 were killed nearby in three separate suicide blasts.

Zimbabwe bus crash kills 43 people: police

AFP, Harare

A bus accident in Zimbabwe has killed 43 people after the driver lost control and rammed into a tree, police said yesterday. "The bus was travelling to Zambia when the driver lost control at a curve yesterday evening," a police spokeswoman said. The crash occurred in the Nyamakata area near the border with Zambia.