

China accuses India of betrayal on border

NDTV ONLINE

China yesterday said that its border with India in Sikkim is well-demarcated and the Indian Army's action there over the last month is a "betrayal" of the position taken by successive Indian governments.

"Former Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru endorsed the 1890 Sino-British Treaty on Sikkim in a letter to the then Chinese counterpart Zhou Enlai in 1959. Successive Indian governments have also endorsed this," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said at a media briefing.

He said India needs to observe the Treaty and pull back troops immediately from Doklam.

Indian troops crossed the de facto border of Line of Actual Control a month ago to stop the construction of a new road that China is building on the Himalayan border on Friday, saying it raises "serious security" concerns.

The new hotspot has emerged in a remote scrap of territory where the frontiers of China, India and Bhutan meet.

Beijing made a formal protest last week, accusing Indian border guards of crossing from the north eastern state of Sikkim into its Tibetan territory to stop the road building.

But India said on Friday that China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops entered the area to "unilaterally" construct the road. "India is deeply concerned at the recent Chinese actions and has conveyed to the Chinese government that such construction would represent a significant change of status quo with serious security implications for India," said a statement from the Foreign Ministry.

"India cherishes peace and tranquility in the India-China border areas. It has not come easily," it said, urging Beijing to resolve the skirmish through dialogue.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Rescuers transfer residents with a boat at a flooded area in Guilin, Guangxi province, China, yesterday. Rainstorms have triggered floods across central and southern China, forcing hundreds of thousands of people from their homes and leaving more than two dozen dead or missing.



Family feud is baseless

Says Singapore PM in parliament

AFP, Singapore

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday strongly rejected as "baseless" claims from his siblings of abuse of power and nepotism as he faced parliament over a political drama that has shocked tightly-controlled Singapore.

The leader was seeking to draw a line under an escalating feud about his late father Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's founding leader, which has captivated the wealthy city-state where speaking so openly against the first family is rare and critics have in the past been taken to court.

The dispute burst into the open last month when the premier's brother and sister launched attacks on social media -- which quickly went viral -- accusing him of exploiting their father's legacy for his own political agenda and seeking to groom his son as a future leader.

They have also raised questions about his wife, who is chief executive of state investment fund Temasek Holdings.

The elder Lee, who led Singapore for three decades and died in March 2015, is widely revered for having transformed the former British colony into one of the world's wealthiest societies but faced criticism from rights groups for muzzling the press and jailing political opponents.

In a closely watched speech to parliament, Lee, 65, said the allegations levelled at him by his brother and sister were "entirely baseless".

BESIEGED PHILIPPINE CITY

Militants cling on to 1,500 buildings

AFP, Marawi

Islamist gunmen led by one of the world's most wanted terrorists still hold about 1,500 buildings in a southern Philippine city after weeks of ferocious fighting that has left hundreds dead, officials said yesterday.

The Philippine military has struggled to expel scores of gunmen who rampaged across Marawi city on May 23 flying the black flag of the Islamic State group, despite day and night artillery and air strikes that have reduced swathes of the downtown area to rubble.

President Rodrigo Duterte last month vowed to "crush" the militants, but several deadlines have already been missed to end a conflict that has left scores dead and forced some 400,000 people from their homes.

The gunmen are led by Isnilon Hapilon, one of the world's most wanted men, who is believed to be still alive and holed up in a mosque, Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana told a news conference in Manila.

In the most detailed assessment yet, he conceded there was no saying when soldiers would be able to retake all 1,500 houses and buildings still held or booby-trapped by the militants.

"Since it is urban fighting a lot of our troops there are not prepared. One can say they are learning as they fight in this built-up area," he said, adding that soldiers are battling street-to-street retaking up to a hundred buildings a day.

The military in Marawi suggested a slower rate, with soldiers recapturing 40 buildings on Saturday and 57 on Sunday.

IS steps up suicide attacks

AFP, Mosul

Iraqi forces are facing increasingly difficult fighting and a rising number of suicide bombings in the final stages of the battle for Mosul, senior commanders said yesterday.

Following recent suicide bombings by two girls, security forces in the Old City were seen ordering civilians to remove some of their clothing before approaching to guard against the threat.

More than eight months since the start of the operation to retake Mosul from the Islamic State group, the jihadists have gone from fully controlling the city to holding a limited area on its western side, but resistance is still tough.

"The fighting is becoming harder every day because of the nature of the Old City," Staff Lieutenant General Abdulghani al-Assadi, a commander in the elite Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS), said of the area of narrow streets and closely spaced buildings where the end of the battle for Mosul is unfolding.

Iraqi forces have been closing in on the Old City in west Mosul for months, but the terrain combined with a large civilian population has made for an extremely difficult fight.

The same conditions that aid

jihadist defences also serve to shield Iraqi forces from snipers, Assadi said, and "our losses are not to the level that would prevent us from advancing."

Staff Lieutenant General Sami al-Aridhi, another top CTS commander, said that IS has increased the number of suicide attacks it is carrying out.

"The enemy has been using suicide bombers, especially women, for the past three days in some of the neigh-

MOSUL BATTLE

200 jihadists holding limited area of the city

Suicide bomber kills 14 in Iraq refugee camp

bourhoods. Before that, they were using snipers and bombs more," Aridhi said.

"There are still at least 200 fighters from the (IS) organisation" in Mosul, most of them foreigners, he said.

"The battle will end in five days to a week," Aridhi said.

A suicide bomber attacked a camp for displaced people west of Baghdad on Sunday, killing 14 people and wounding

13, a police major and a doctor said.

CTS forces in the Old City ordered fleeing civilians to remove some articles of clothing before approaching yesterday in an effort to detect suicide bombers.

Men were told to remove their shirts, while women had to take off veils covering their faces and hair, and flowing abaya robes.

The measure followed two recent suicide bombings -- one by a 14-year-old girl and another by a 12-year-old that killed three members of CTS, soldiers said.

Civilians fleeing the fighting are receiving treatment at a makeshift clinic in Mosul.

"People come from the Old City of Mosul, where fierce fighting is taking place. They're running away from (IS), running away from death, hunger and fear," said Nazar Salih, a doctor at the clinic.

Shahed Omar, a 20-year-old who fled the Old City, pointed to two children at the clinic.

"This one's father was killed, and that girl there, her father was killed as well," Omar said.

Security forces have made significant progress since launching a renewed assault on the Old City on June 18.

Macron plans to slash French MPs by a third

AFP, Paris

President Emmanuel Macron yesterday promised a "profound transformation" of French politics, proposing to slash by a third the number of MPs, and telling lawmakers he would call a referendum if they do not agree.

In his first address to members of the National Assembly and Senate since his election in May, Macron delivered a US-style state of the nation speech in the Versailles palace, the former seat of French kings, saying the country must change.

"Until now, we were too often on the wrong track," said the 39-year-old leader, who won office on a promise of political renewal.

"We preferred procedures to results, rules to initiative, a society where you live off inherited wealth, to a just society."

He confirmed a plan to implement reform of France's jaded political



system, changes first raised during campaigning.

That would include shrinking the number of lawmakers in both houses of parliament -- 577 in the lower house National Assembly and 348 in the Senate -- by a third, saying it would have "positive effects on the general quality of parliamentary work".

Macron also pledged to introduce a degree of proportional representation into France's winner-takes-all electoral system.

The centrist president said as far-right National Front, would ensure "all tendencies are fairly represented", he said.

The centrist president said he hoped lawmakers would adopt the changes within a year but reserved the right to organise a referendum "if necessary".



A group of Myanmar migrant workers cross the border between Thailand and Myanmar by boat near the Thai port city of Ranong, yesterday. Tens of thousands of migrant workers have fled from Thailand in fear after new labour regulations adopted by the military government.

MALDIVES POLITICAL CRISIS

Opposition in fresh bid to take House

AFP, Colombo

Maldives opposition parties yesterday launched a new bid to seize control of parliament through a third attempt to impeach the speaker.

An opposition coalition said it had submitted a no-confidence motion with the support of 45 MPs -- enough to force a vote in the 85-member majlis, or parliament.

The main opposition Maldivian Democratic party (MDP) said the coalition now has a majority in the chamber.

"Forty five signatures means we, the opposition coalition, now command parliament majority," MDP legislator Eva Abdulla said.

A previous attempt to impeach Speaker Abdulla Masheeh in April failed when the number of signatures required for a no-trust motion against the speaker was raised to 50 percent of the house, up from one third.

The first attempt to impeach Masheeh in March ended in chaos when President Abdulla Yameen ordered troops to eject some lawmakers from parliament. That prompted the United States to urge the Maldives to restore faith in democracy.

The opposition coalition, led by exiled former Maldives president Mohamed Nasheed, is trying to undermine Yameen before elections next year.

NEWS IN brief

Germany bus accident leaves 18 dead

AFP, Munich

Eighteen people were killed yesterday in one of the deadliest road accidents in recent German history when a tour bus carrying pensioners smashed into a trailer truck and burst into flames. Emergency workers retrieved 11 bodies and a search for the remains of seven other victims was underway.

8 injured in shooting near French mosque

AFP, Marseille

Eight people including a girl were lightly wounded late Sunday in a shooting in front of a mosque in the southeast French city of Avignon, the prosecutor's office said, ruling out terrorism. At least two men got out of a car around 10:30 pm near the mosque and opened fire.

Saudi king cancels visit to G20 summit

AFP, Berlin

King Salman of Saudi Arabia has cancelled attendance at this week's G20 summit in Hamburg, the German government said yesterday, as Riyadh is engaged in a diplomatic standoff with Qatar. The 81-year-old monarch will send Finance Minister Mohammed al-Jadaan in his place.

Two rebels killed in Kashmir fire fight

AFP, Srinagar

Two suspected rebels were killed and a civilian was critically wounded in a shootout with government forces in Indian Kashmir yesterday, police said, as tensions in the disputed territory ran high. A police officer was also critically wounded in a separate incident in the region.

Volunteers in India plant 66m trees in 12 hours

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Volunteers in India planted more than 66 million trees in just 12 hours in a record-breaking environmental drive.

About 1.5 million people were involved in the huge plantation campaign, in which saplings were placed along the Narmada river in the central state of Madhya Pradesh throughout Sunday.

India committed under the Paris agreement to increasing its forests by 95 million hectares before 2030 to combat climate change.

Last year volunteers in Uttar Pradesh state set a world record by planting more than 50 million trees in one day.

Observers from Guinness World Records also monitored Sunday's plantation and are expected to confirm in the coming weeks that the effort set a new high.

The campaign was organised by the

RECORD-BREAKING DRIVE



He said volunteers including children and the elderly had planted 66.3 million saplings between 7am and 7pm, adding in a tweet: "By planting trees we are not only serving Madhya Pradesh but the world at large."

India is the world's third largest generator of carbon emissions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi last month reaffirmed his country's commitment to the Paris climate accord. "The protection of the environment and the mother planet is an article of faith," he said at a joint press conference with French President Emmanuel Macron.

World hunger on the rise again: UN

REUTERS, Rome

The number of hungry people in the world is rising again after years of decline, as millions suffer from the combined effects of conflict and climate change, the head of the UN food agency said yesterday.

"Preliminary data available for this year indicates that the number of undernourished people in the world has (started to) rise again," said Jose Graziano da Silva, director-general of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

He didn't provide an exact figure, saying final data would be available in September. "Unfortunately this is not good news," Graziano da Silva added, speaking at the FAO's biennial conference in Rome.

US pullout gives 'global push' to climate deal

AFP, Lisbon

The US decision to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement has given a "global push" to the deal, as other signatories have strongly re-committed to the landmark accord, UN chief Antonio Guterres said yesterday.

President Donald Trump, whose country is the world's second biggest producer of greenhouse gases after China, drew widespread criticism when he announced on June 1 that he would quit the 2015 pact.

"Since the decision by the US government to abandon the Paris accords, we have been witnessing a global push and a reaffirmation by all the other governments of their commitment" on climate change, Guterres told a conference in Lisbon.

"It's obvious for the European Union, China and India," he added.

Guterres recalled that he had recently met the leaders of China and India, describing them as countries which were "crucial" for the success of the Paris accords.



"Their commitment is clear," he said.

"In the United States, this push is generating at the level of cities, in some states and in the business world a very strong commitment towards the green economy," the UN chief said.

Former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg, who has become a UN special envoy for cities and climate, "is convinced that the United States will be able to reach the targets it set itself under the Paris accord," said Guterres.

The Paris agreement, struck in the French capital in December 2015, aims to keep the increase in average world temperatures "well below" two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels.

Guterres also told the conference a "clear understanding" has been reached at talks between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders and their backers on what is needed to reach a comprehensive agreement to reunite the island.