



Residents pick up polystyrene and other rubbish in Heng Fa Chuen in Hong Kong yesterday, a day after Typhoon Hato created a sea surge which flooded the area leaving debris across the area. The death toll from Severe Typhoon Hato rose to at least 16 after the storm left a trail of destruction across southern China, blacking out Macau's mega-casinos and battering Hong Kong's skyscrapers.

PHOTO: AFP

Pak security concerns must be respected

China tells US after Trump lambasts Islamabad

REUTERS, Beijing

The United States must value Pakistan's role in Afghanistan and respect its security concerns, China's top diplomat Yang Jiechi told US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in a phone call, according to Chinese state media.

China's Foreign Ministry defended its ally Pakistan earlier this week after President Donald Trump said the United States could no longer be silent about militants using safe havens on Pakistani soil.

On Monday, Trump committed the United States to an open-ended conflict in Afghanistan, signalling he would send more troops to America's longest war and vowing "a fight to win".

He insisted that others - the Afghan government, Pakistan, India and Nato allies - step up their own commitment to resolving the 16-year conflict, but he saved his sharpest words for Pakistan.

Yang, who outranks China's foreign minister, told Tillerson on Wednesday that China was willing to coordinate with the United States on Afghanistan and make joint efforts to realise peace and stability

there and in the region, according to a Chinese statement issued late that night.

"We must value Pakistan's important role on the Afghanistan issue, and respect Pakistan's sovereignty and reasonable security concerns," Yang told Tillerson.

Pakistan has been battling home-grown Islamists for years. It sees Afghanistan as a vital strategic interest and a bulwark against old rival, India. Islamabad denies harbouring militants, who move across the porous border with Afghanistan.

China and Pakistan consider each other "all-weather friends" and have close diplomatic, economic and security ties.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi met Pakistani Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua in Beijing on Tuesday, according to a statement yesterday. He praised Pakistan's efforts to combat extremism and to secure the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

"Given the current complicated and changing international and regional situation, the strategic significance of China-Pakistan relations is even more prominent," Wang said.



NORTH KOREA TENSION

US to install radar in Pacific's Palau

AFP, Koror

The United States has announced plans to install radar systems in Palau, a move that will increase its monitoring ability in the western Pacific region recently rocked by threats from North Korea.

In a joint statement, the US Defense Department and the Palau government said they were working to finalise the location of radar towers on the archipelago nation of 22,000 people.

"The radar systems will provide Palau enhanced maritime law enforcement capability... while also providing the US with greater air domain awareness for aviation safety and security," they said in the statement dated August 21.

While Palau is an independent nation, it has no military and the US is responsible for its defence under an agreement with Washington.

Under the deal, the US military has access to the islands, although it currently has no troops stationed there.

Palau is about 1,300 kilometres (800 miles) south-west of Guam, the US Pacific territory that Pyongyang threatened to fire missiles towards earlier this month, sparking rhetoric of "fire and fury" from President Donald Trump.

The statement said the US proposed the radar installation on July 18, before the recent crisis with North Korea erupted.

"This project is essential to the well-being of the Republic of Palau's air and maritime domains, as well as to the ability of the United States to maintain its defence of the Republic of Palau," it said.

FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM

US seeks bigger Indian role in Afghanistan

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Shortly after American President Donald Trump articulated Washington's new policy for Afghanistan and South Asia envisaging a bigger role for India in trouble-torn Afghanistan, New Delhi said it "welcomed" his "determination" to step up efforts to address issues of safe havens to terrorists and other forms of cross-border support enjoyed by them, in a clear reference to Pakistan.

Warning Pakistan against continued support to terror networks, Trump said "We can no longer be silent about Pakistan's safe havens for terrorist organisations, the Taliban, and other groups that pose a threat to the region and beyond... Pakistan has much to gain from partnering with our effort in Afghanistan. It has much to lose by continuing to harbour terrorists."

Hours after Trump's speech, India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a statement on Tuesday night that "we welcome President Trump's determination to enhance efforts to overcome the challenges facing Afghanistan and confronting issues of safe havens and other forms of cross-border support enjoyed by terrorists. India shares these concerns and objectives".

What has buoyed India most by Trump's speech is his unambiguous invitation—although in a typical transactional diplomatic style—is the invitation to New Delhi for playing a bigger role in economic reconstruction and development assistance to Afghanistan.

"We appreciate India's important contributions to stability in Afghanistan, but India makes billions of dollars in trade with the United States, and we want them to help us more with Afghanistan, especially in the area of economic assistance and development," said the US President.

India has a 24 billion dollar trade balance in its favour in bilateral trade with the US.

Displaying its soft power in sharp contrast to the US' hard military strength through deployment of troops and armaments in Afghanistan, India has so far provided three billion dollars to the war-torn country making it the fifth largest aid-giver to Kabul.

India has trained in its defence and police establishments 4,000 Afghan security officers, supplied attack helicopters to Afghanistan, constructed the Afghan parliament, a huge dam, a power plant and a strategic highway connecting with Iran. And all this has been done by India facing serious threats from the Taliban and other terrorists to its men and assets in Afghanistan.

The recasting of the US policy on South Asia following Trump's lengthy discussion with his armed forces and strategists has clearly elevated India to play a more important role in partnership with America in stabilizing Afghanistan economically.

What remains to be seen is how much further India will go in helping Afghanistan to step up its soft power diplomacy on dis-

play for the last decade and half.

What is often not adequately appreciated is that the small development projects Indian government has undertaken in Afghanistan is based on needs of Afghan people. "They may not be big-ticket projects but related directly to the day-to-day life of Afghan people," said an Indian official.

Analysts and officials here read Trump's remarks about Pakistan as the strongest message by an American President to Pakistan's duplicity on terrorism but say all would depend on how the details of his policy play out.

While that geography cannot be changed, it remains to be seen what the Trump administration to implement its tough stance towards Pakistan because Trump has not disclosed how he gets to get Pakistan to change its ways.

What has encouraged Indian officials very much is Trump's remark that "For its part, Pakistan often gives safe haven to agents of chaos, violence, and terror... Pakistan has

NEWS ANALYSIS

India has trained in its defence and police establishments 4,000 Afghan security officers, supplied attack helicopters to Afghanistan, constructed the Afghan parliament. And all this has been done by India facing serious threats from the Taliban and other terrorists to its men and assets in Afghanistan.



also sheltered the same organisations that try every single day to kill our people.

"We have been paying Pakistan billions and billions of dollars, at the same time they are housing the very terrorists that we are fighting. But that will have to change, and that will change immediately. No partnership can survive a country's harboring of militants and terrorists who target US service members and officials. It is time for Pakistan to demonstrate its commitment to civilisation, order, and to peace," Trump said.

This, Indian officials compared with Barack Obama's statement eight years ago when he had said that "we will strengthen Pakistan's capacity to target those groups that threaten our countries and have made it clear that we cannot tolerate a safe haven for terrorists whose location is known and whose intentions are clear. America is also providing substantial resources to support Pakistan's democracy and development."

NEWS IN brief

Trump to meet Najib Razak on Sept 12

REUTERS, Washington

President Donald Trump has invited Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, who is dogged by a corruption scandal being investigated in the United States, to the White House on Sept 12, officials from both countries confirmed yesterday.

Russian ambassador to Sudan found dead

AFP, Khartoum

Russia's ambassador to Sudan, veteran diplomat Mirgayas Shirinsky, was found dead in the swimming pool at his Khartoum home on Wednesday, Sudanese and Russian officials said. "The envoy was found in his residence with evidence of an acute heart attack," a Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman said.

20 Iraqi sailors found dead after ship sinks

AFP, Basra

The bodies of 20 Iraqi sailors have been recovered after their ship sank following a collision off the country's southern coast, the transport ministry said yesterday. The Al-Misbar sank in Iraqi waters on Saturday following the collision with a foreign-flagged vessel.

Eight missing after landslide in Swiss Alps

AFP, Geneva

Eight hikers are missing after a massive landslide swept away an entire mountain side in the Swiss Alps, ripping apart buildings and forcing the evacuation of a village, police said yesterday. The landslide sent dirt flooding down the Piz Cengalo mountain.

SOUTH ASIA FLOODING

Death toll tops 1,000

AFP, New Delhi

The death toll from floods sweeping South Asia has climbed above 1,000, officials said yesterday, as rescue teams try to reach millions stranded by the region's worst monsoon disaster in recent years.

Thousands of soldiers and emergency personnel have been deployed across India, Bangladesh and Nepal, where authorities say a total of 1,013 bodies have been recovered since August 10 when intense rainfall started falling.

All three countries suffer frequent flooding during the monsoon rains, but the Red Cross has termed the latest disaster the worst in decades in some parts of South Asia.

It says entire communities have been cut off and many are short of food and clean water.

"It has been a difficult year," said Anil Shekhawat, spokesman for India's national disaster response force.

"In the last few months there have been floods in western, eastern and northern parts of the country," Shekhawat told AFP.

Twenty-six bodies were found Wednesday in Bihar, a hard-hit state in India's east, taking the death toll there to 367, said Anirudh Kumar, a top state disaster management official.

"We still have nearly 11 million people affected in 19 districts of the state," he told AFP, adding nearly 450,000 flood evacuees had taken shelter in government refuges.

In neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, floods have swamped nearly half the vast state of 220 million, India's most populous.



Palestinian schoolchildren attend a lesson inside a tent after Israeli troops confiscated caravans used as school classrooms, due to the lack of an Israeli-issued construction permit, in the West Bank village of Jubbet Al Dhib, near Bethlehem yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Cambodia accuses US of political interference

REUTERS, Phnom Penh

Cambodia yesterday hit back at US criticism over its decision to expel a US-funded pro-democracy group, accusing Washington of political interference and describing American democracy as "bloody and brutal".

Prime Minister Hun Sen, the strongman who has ruled Cambodia for more than three decades, has taken a strident anti-American line in the increasingly tense run up to a 2018 election.

The US State Department criticised Cambodia's decision to expel the National Democratic Institute (NDI) on Wednesday and a statement from the US embassy in Phnom Penh questioned whether Cambodia was a democracy.

In an open letter yesterday, the Cambodian government asked whether the United States was "coming to Cambodia to help or hinder the Khmer people" and blamed it for contributing to the rise of the genocidal Khmer Rouge in the 1970s.

"Cambodians are well aware of what a democratic process means. You do not need to tell us what

it is," the letter said, describing US-style democracy as "bloody and brutal".

"We wish to send a clear message again to the US Embassy that we defend our national sovereignty," it added.

Tensions have risen anew in Cambodia, with rights groups and the United Nations expressing alarm and the opposition accusing Hun Sen of persecution ahead of next year's election.

After the government's order to expel the NDI and a threat to shut a newspaper founded by an American journalist if it didn't pay back taxes immediately, the US State Department voiced concern at the government "curtailing freedom of the press and civil society's ability to operate".

Government supporters have threatened to protest at the US Embassy in Phnom Penh, the pro-government "Fresh News" web site reported yesterday.

"The protests are likely to be in large scale against the US Embassy in Phnom Penh like in the 1960s because of the American interference in Cambodia's sovereignty," it said, citing an anonymous government source.

REPORTED ROAD PROJECT ON BORDER

China slams Indian move

AFP, Beijing

China slammed India yesterday over a report that it plans to build a road in territory disputed between the two countries, after weeks of tension elsewhere along the border.

India's newly approved road project will run through the disputed Ladakh region close to Pangong Lake, the country's Hindustan Times reported Tuesday.

A separate Chinese attempt to build a road in the Doklam area -- which is disputed between China and Bhutan -- has prompted a standoff between hundreds of Indian and Chinese soldiers which has lasted for more than two months.

"The Indian side is closely following China's road building recently, but the Indian's actions themselves have proven that the Indian side says one thing and does another," Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told a regular briefing.

She said the reported decision to build a road in Ladakh is "in complete contradiction to its deeds in terms of the border issues".

"The current road construction in that area by the Indian side is not conducive to peace and stability in that area."

A video surfaced last week of a brawl between Chinese and Indian soldiers near the Ladakh area, which is over 4,000 metres above sea level on the Tibetan plateau and is a popular tourist attraction.

China and India have a number of border disputes and went to war in 1962 over the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.

No Durga idol immersion on Muharram

Says Mamata Banerjee to avoid clashes

NDTV ONLINE

In a more charged re-run of last year, the immersion of Goddess Durga idols and Muharram - the Muslim day of mourning - are set for a head-on collision.

On Wednesday, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee addressed a large meeting of Durga Puja organisers, leaders of the Muslim community and other religions. She told them that Durga idol immersions, set for September 30 after the four-day Puja festival ends, would be allowed only till 6:00 pm on that day and would resume on October 2, after Muharram.

This, because processions or tazias to mark Muharram on October 1 would begin the previous evening, said



the Chief Minister.

"Some people will try to create trouble on Hindu-Muslim grounds. Every religion is ours. But if there is a problem while a procession is passing a puja pandal, we will all be affected," Banerjee said, urging against politics.

The announcement immediately triggered virulent reaction on social media and accusations of minority appeasement against Banerjee.

Last year, when there was a similar overlap, the BJP went to the Calcutta High Court, which said the time limits set by the state government for Durga idol immersion on account of Moharram were "arbitrary" and a "clear endeavour" by the state to "appease the minority section of the public".