

Al-Qaeda terrorist nabbed in Delhi

Rohingya link emerges: police

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The Delhi police have arrested 27-year-old Shami-Ur-Rehman, a British national and a key Al-Qaeda's operative in India, who was planning to recruit youth for carrying out operations against the Myanmar army.

A police official said yesterday that Rehman was arrested from Vikas Marg in east Delhi; and 2000 dollars, a pistol and magazines were recovered from him. He has been taken on remand for interrogation.

He said Rehman was fighting for al Nusra front in Syria when he was sent to Bangladesh in 2014. He was arrested there on charges of terror financing and recruitment and remained in jail till April 2017.

On his release, he was sent to India to recruit Rohingyas. He had been given a voter card as a proof of identity in the name of Shumon Haq, a resident of Kishanganj in eastern Indian state of Bihar, the official said.

Rehman was trying to set up a base in Delhi and in two north-eastern states and prepare the recruits to carry out strikes and fight against Myanmar army. He had come to Delhi to meet his contacts and obtain a list of vulnerable Rohingya refugees who could be brainwashed, said the official, adding he was in touch with 12 possible recruits who are being tracked.

After his arrest, Rehman was produced before Additional Sessions Judge Sidharth Sharma who handed over his custody to the special cell of Delhi police after the probe agency said he was required for custodial interrogation to unearth the larger conspiracy. Haq will remain in police custody till September 30.



Army soldiers from the 602nd Area Support Medical Company gather on a beach as they await transport on a Navy landing craft while evacuating in advance of Hurricane Maria, in Charlotte Amalie, St Thomas, US Virgin Islands on Sunday. Hurricane Maria blasted towards the storm-battered eastern Caribbean and was expected to strengthen yesterday as it churned along a path similar to that of megastorm Irma earlier in the month.

Libya, Italy net 5,000 migrants in a week

Libya's coastguard has rescued over 3,000 migrants aiming to cross the Mediterranean to Europe in the past week, while Italy picked up another 2,000 in recent days, official and reports said Sunday.

Though the numbers attempting the dangerous journey have dropped off significantly in recent months, these new rescues indicate the route is still very much open.

The tally was the highest reported out of Libya for a one-week period since mid-July saw a dramatic fall in the number of migrants trying to reach Europe.

Six years since a revolution and Nato intervention that toppled dictator Moamer Gaddafi, violence-ravaged Libya has become a key gateway for clandestine migration to Europe with nearest European country Italy bearing the brunt of the fallout.

Most of the latest rescue operations in Libyan waters were staged off the cities of Zawiya and Sabratha, Libyan navy spokesman General Ayoub Kacem said in a statement.

He added the Libyan coast guard rescued 2,082 migrants in nine operations from Monday-Friday -- adding one woman had died -- while Saturday saw a further 1,047 people picked up.

Italy, the closest and main destination, has recorded 6,500 arrivals since mid-July, barely 15 percent of the figure for the same period in the past three years.

Even so, the past week alone has seen around 2,000 rescues according to NGOs and media reports.

Italian daily La Stampa on Sunday reported the arrival in Sicily of 589 migrants on a boat chartered by British charity Save the Children, which could not be immediately reached for comment.

A further 200 people were picked up off the Italian island of Lampedusa and the Sicilian coast.

Trump, Xi discuss N Korea

White House says two leaders commit to maximize pressure on Pyongyang during a phone call

AFP, United Nations

US President Donald Trump and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping committed to "maximizing pressure on North Korea", the White House said yesterday, amid an escalating crisis over Pyongyang's ballistic and nuclear weapons programs.

In a phone call the two men discussed "North Korea's continued defiance of the international community and its efforts to destabilize Northeast Asia," the White House said. "The two leaders committed to maximizing pressure on North Korea through vigorous enforcement of United Nations Security Council resolutions."

Trump is currently in New York for the United Nations General Assembly but Xi -- who has a major Communist Party congress that will cement his leadership for the next five years -- is not attending the event.

Trump is expected to make his first presidential visit to China in early November.

September has seen a significant

ratcheting up of already sky-high tensions with Pyongyang.

Already North Korea has conducted its sixth and most powerful nuclear test and staged an intermediate-range missile test over Japan.

The UN Security Council last week imposed a fresh set of sanctions, though Washington toned down its



original proposals to secure support from China and Russia.

The US president has not ruled out a military option, which could leave millions of people in the South Korean capital -- and 28,500 US soldiers stationed in the South -- vulnerable to potential retaliatory attack.

The US flew four F-35B stealth

fighter jets and two B-1B bombers over the Korean peninsula yesterday in a blunt show of force.

China's official news agency, Xinhua, said that during the phone conversation "Xi also expressed sympathy and solicitude to Trump and the American people for the hurricane attacks on the United States over the past few days."

"The two leaders also exchanged views on the current situation on the Korean Peninsula."

In Beijing, the official Xinhua news agency said China and Russia began naval drills off the Russian far eastern port of Vladivostok, not far from the Russia-North Korea border, reported Reuters.

Those drills were being conducted between Peter the Great Bay, near Vladivostok, and the southern part of the Sea of Okhotsk, to the north of Japan, it said.

Meanwhile, North Korea yesterday warned that more sanctions and pressure will only make it accelerate its nuclear programme.

China opens highway to Nepal border via Tibet

PTI, Beijing

China has opened a strategic highway in Tibet to the Nepal border which could be used for civilian and defence purposes, a move that Chinese experts say will enable Beijing to make forays into South Asia, according to a media report yesterday.

The 40.4-kilometre highway in Tibet between Xigaze airport and Xigaze city centre officially opened to the public on Friday with a short section linking the national highway to the Nepal border.

The highway will shorten the journey from an hour to 30 minutes between the dual-use civil and military airport and Tibet's second-largest city.

State-run 'Global Times' quoted experts as saying that the highway "will enable China to forge a route into South Asia in both economic and defence terms" and being a forerunner to a railway line connecting Nepal.

Geographically, any extension of the road and railway connectivity to South Asia

is through India, Bhutan and to Bangladesh.

Chinese officials have said in the past that the projects are feasible and could become a trade corridor for India and China if New Delhi comes on board.

The new road runs parallel with the Xigaze-Lhasa railway and links the city's ring roads with the 5,476-kilometre G318 highway from Shanghai to Zhangmu on the Nepal border, the report said.

As part of G318, the highway connects the border town of Zhangmu with Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. It can link with the future cross-border China-Nepal railway, said Zhao Gancheng, director of the

Centre for Asia-Pacific Studies at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies. The G318 with Xigaze in the middle connects to Nepal on one end and other end links to Nyingchi, the Tibetan town close to Arunachal Pradesh border.

China has been stepping efforts to improve road connectivity between Tibet and Nepal while speeding up plans to build a railway line connecting to Nepal's border.

The 40.4-km highway will enable Beijing to make forays into S Asia: report

Wife of ousted PM Sharif wins Pakistan by-election

REUTERS, Lahore

The wife of ousted Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Sunday captured his parliamentary seat with a reduced majority in a by-election seen as a test of support for the Sharif dynasty ahead of the 2018 general election.

Sharif's daughter Maryam said her mother Kulsoom won despite Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party workers being threatened and kidnapped. Although she did not name anyone, PML-N sources said she was referring to alleged intimidation by parts of Pakistan's powerful military.

The military could not be reached for comment.

"This is not an ordinary victory," Maryam said in a speech to jubilant PML-N supporters. "You have defeated not only people who were in the field but also those who are invisible."

The main opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party made gains but alleged voter irregularities in the eastern city of Lahore, the electoral heartlands of the Sharif

family since 1980s.

Official results are yet to be announced but party officials who also tallied the numbers say Kulsoom, who did not campaign as she is receiving treatment for cancer in London, scooped about 53.5 percent of the vote, with the party's majority reduced from about 61 percent in the 2013 general election.

The PML-N wanted to demonstrate that support for the Sharif family was undiminished despite the Supreme Court's removal of Nawaz, who has kept control of the party and installed long-term ally Shahid Khaqan Abbasi as prime minister.

Maryam said dozens of PML-N activists were blindfolded and picked up from their homes at night, while others received threatening phone calls from unknown numbers during the campaign.

"This victory is a message to the forces hatching conspiracies against Nawaz Sharif that there would be only rules of people and democracy," added Maryam.



A man is transferred to an ambulance after being sprayed with a chemical agent by police, after the not guilty verdict in the murder trial of Jason Stockley, a former St Louis police officer charged with the 2011 shooting of a black man, in St Louis, Missouri, US, on Sunday night.

KURD INDEPENDENCE VOTE

Iraq SC steps in to block referendum

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's Supreme Court yesterday ordered the suspension of a September 25 referendum on the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan, as legal and political pressure mounted on the Kurds to call off the vote.

"The supreme court has issued the order to suspend organising the referendum set for September 25... until it examines the complaints it has received over this plebiscite being unconstitutional," it said.

Court spokesman Ayas al-Samouk told AFP it had "received several complaints", as a parliamentary source said at least eight lawmakers had called on the court to intervene on constitutional ground.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's office said it had also filed a complaint against the referendum in the oil-rich autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq on constitutional grounds.

There was no immediate reaction from Iraqi Kurdish leader Massud Barzani, who called the referendum and has so far resisted pressure from Baghdad, Iraq's neighbours Turkey and Iran, as well as from the United States and its Western allies, all opposed to the poll.

Philippine troops retake IS-stronghold in Marawi

Priest abducted by gunmen wins freedom

REUTERS, Manila

Philippine troops rescued a catholic priest held hostage for almost four months by Islamic State-linked rebels after an offensive that captured a stronghold of the militants in southern Marawi City, defence officials said yesterday.

Marawi's vicar-general Father Teresito "Chito" Soganub was kidnapped along with other Christians as militants rampaged through the city on May 23, burning churches and schools, releasing prisoners and seizing arms in a well-planned assault.

Soganub, flanked by Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and military chief General Eduardo Ano, appeared to be in good health and high spirits when he was presented to the media in Manila. He expressed his thanks but gave no statement.

"Our troops gained the upper hand, the terrorists were forced to withdraw to nearby

structures on the periphery of the mosque," Lorenzana told a media briefing in Manila, referring to the Bato mosque held by the rebels for 117 days.

"Troops had opportunity to snatch Father Chito..."

The appearance of Soganub is some rare good news for a military that has suffered a string of setbacks in Marawi, from deadly accidents during a controversial campaign of air strikes to repeatedly missing deadlines on when the battle would be won.

The siege of the city by an alliance of rebels from the island of Mindanao, and numerous foreign fighters, has been the biggest internal security crisis in years for the Philippines.

Soganub made an appearance under duress in a militant propaganda video about a week after his capture, urging the government to stop the military operation.



Nepal holds final phase of local polls

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal yesterday completed its first local elections for nearly two decades, a key step in the country's protracted post-war transition to a federal democracy.

Most of the country has already voted, but the local polls had been repeatedly delayed in a southern province bordering India which was the scene of deadly ethnic turmoil two years ago.

The government deployed troops and sealed the border before the ballot, fearing violence in the third phase of voting which covered around 2.6 million people.

The election commission put turnout at over 70 percent as booths closed. There were a few arrests for voter fraud but no reports of unrest, it said.

The province around the cities of Birgunj and Janakpur was hardest hit by deadly monsoon flooding last month that killed over 150 in Nepal and more than 1,200 across South Asia.

Some aid agencies, including the UN's World Food Programme, suspended aid distribution before the polls.

NEWSIN brief

Top official leaves Brexit ministry

AFP, London

The top official at Britain's Brexit ministry quit yesterday to start working directly for Prime Minister Theresa May, in what opposition parties branded as "chaos" at a sensitive time in the negotiations. Oliver Robbins, the permanent secretary at the Department for Exiting the European Union, will now be May's EU adviser.

US may close Cuba embassy: Tillerson

AFP, New York

The United States may again close its embassy in Cuba, which reopened two years ago after a half-century stand-off, following a series of mystery "health attacks" on its diplomats, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said Sunday.

UN gives top prize to Chibok girls negotiator

AFP, Abuja

A Nigerian lawyer who helped secure the release of more than 100 schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram was yesterday awarded one of the United Nations' top prizes. The UNHCR said Zannah Mustapha was given the annual Nansen award for his "crucial mediating" role.

Snapchat blocks Al-Jazeera in Saudi Arabia

AFP, Dubai

Global image messaging service Snapchat has scrubbed Qatari broadcaster Al Jazeera from its app in Saudi Arabia at the request of Saudi authorities, the company said yesterday. "We make an effort to comply with local laws in the countries where we operate," a spokesman for Snap Inc said.