Maldives breached

N Korean sanctions

Maldives on Wednesday denied a Japanese foreign ministry

Claims Japan; Male denies role

REUTERS, Colombo

NEWSIN brief

No pay rise for S'pore's million-dollar ministers

AFP, Singapore

Singapore government ministers were told yesterday their salaries will stay frozen despite a recommendation for a hike. Ministerial salaries in the financial hub are the highest on Earth, with an entrylevel minister paid Sg\$1.1 million (\$830,000) and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong earning an eyewatering Sg\$2.2 million.

Sri Lanka begins probe into disappearances

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka has appointed commissioners to a special panel tasked with investigating war-era disappearances, three years after President Maithripala Sirisena was elected promising justice for victims of the island's bloody ethnic conflict. The government appointed seven commissioners to the panel, which will be headed by senior lawyer Saliya Peiris.

Death toll rises to 31 in PNG quake

REUTERS, Sydney

The death toll from the strongest earthquake to strike Papua New Guinea's rugged interior in almost a century has climbed to 31 and would probably rise further, officials said yesterday, as damage to roads, runways and phone lines slowed relief efforts. Most of the other confirmed fatalities were in or around the provincial capital of Mendi and the town of Tari 40 km from the epicentre.

Suicide, gun attacks kill six in SW Pakistan

AFP, Quetta

A suicide bomber killed four soldiers in the southwestern Pakistani city of Quetta and a gunman shot dead two policemen in a separate attack in the restive province on Wednesday, officials said. Quetta is the capital of Balochistan, a province bordering Iran and Afghanistan where police and troops have been battling Islamist militants for more than a decade.



Jordan's King Abdullah (C) holds hands with India's President Ramnath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi (R) during his ceremonial reception in New Delhi, India yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

statement that said a Maldives-flagged vessel was used to illegally transfer goods from a North Korean-flagged tanker in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions. The Japanese statement said the "Chon Ma San", designated by the United States as a sanctions target, was spot-

ted by a surveillance plane with the Maldivian-flagged tanker "Xin Yuan 18" some 250 km east of Shanghai on Saturday.

It said "Japan strongly suspects that the vessels conducted ship-to-ship transfers" banned by UN Security Council resolutions.

Maldives government denied that Xin Yuan 18 is of Maldivian origin and said "no such vessel is registered in the country."

"We condemn ... the use of our national flag in a manner so as to tarnish the good standing and reputation of our nation,"

the Maldives government said in a statement. It said Maldives has prioritized the implementation of all UN

Security Council resolutions including those on North Korea. Authorities do not allow flags of convenience to foreign owned vessels to operate outside Maldivian waters, it said,

adding that the government was investigating. "The Maldives will pursue aggressive action against any such acts which affects the national identity in such a detrimental manner," it said.

The Maldives is facing a political crisis that has hurt tourism, its main revenue source and any international action could hurt its economy further, analysts say.

Fight against terrorism isn't war on any religion

India, Jordan sign MoU

on defence cooperation,

11 other agreements in

a range of areas

Says Jordan King at a conference in New Delhi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The visiting King of Jordan Abdullah II yesterday said the global battle against terror was not a fight among different religions but a fight against extremism, hate and violence.

"Today's global war against terror is not a fight between different religions or people. It is (a fight) between all faiths and communities against extremism, hate and violence," King Abdullah II,

who is on a three-day visit to India, said in a lecture on "Islamic Heritage: Promoting Understanding and Moderation" here.

Sharing the dais with the King, Indian Prime Minister

Narendra Modi said the fight against terrorism and radicalization was not against any religion but "against a mindset that misguides the young."

"Every religion promotes human values. India has been a cradle of all major religions in the world. Indian democracy is a celebration of age old pluralism," Modi said.

He said all faiths promote human values. "... therefore, our youth should associate themselves with the humanitarian aspects of Islam and should also able to use modern technology."

The Indian PM also said "every religion found life in India and it grew here. Every Indian is proud of this virtue, no matter what language he speaks, no matter what religion he practices."

"Be it Buddha or Mahatma Gandhi, the fragrance of peace and love has spread across the world from India. India has given

the idea of 'Vasudev Kutumbakam' - which means that the whole world is our family. India found its identity in considering the people of this world as their family."

Later, India and Jordan signed a Memorandum of Understanding for defence cooperation and inked 11 other agreements in a range of areas.

The purpose of the over-arching MoU on defence is to promote cooperation between India and Jordan in some of the recognised areas like training, defence industry, counter-terrorism, military studies, cyber security, military medical services and peacekeeping.

India approves first anti-human trafficking bill

AFP, New Delhi

India's cabinet on Wednesday approved the country's first anti-human trafficking bill, increasing penalties for perpetrators and focusing on helping them recover from their ordeal, in a bid to battle the growing scourge.

Traffickers abduct or lure women and children, mostly from remote villages, with false promises of jobs before selling them off to brothels, factories or gangs which force them into begging.

Women and Child Development Minister Maneka Gandhi said the new bill made a clear distinction between the trafficker and the trafficked, unlike in earlier cases, when victims were themselves at risk of being thrown in jail, as for example after police

raids on brothels. Nobel laureate and child rights activist Kailash Satyarthi hailed the bill as a "historic achievement".

Taliban pour cold water on Afghan invitation

Pakistan ready for

one-on-one talks

with Taliban: FM

German man from

Frankfurt arrested

with Afghan Taliban

MOVE TO RECOGNISE INSURGENTS AS PARTY

AGENCIES

The Taliban yesterday issued a cool response to proposals that they should begin peace talks with the Afghan government, a day after President Ashraf Ghani offered a pact to recognise the insurgents as a legitimate party in negotiations.

The movement has not yet given any formal answer to Ghani's invitation, made

at a conference of officials from countries in the so-called Kabul Process aimed at creating a platform for talks to end more than 16 years of war. But its chief spokesman did

reply to an "Open Letter" published this week in the New Yorker magazine by Barnett Rubin, a respected commentator on Afghan politics, who urged the Taliban to accept talks with the Kabul government,

reported Reuters. "Our country has been occupied, which has led to an American-style supposed

Afghan government being imposed upon us," the Taliban response said.

accept their legitimacy is the same formula

"And your view that we talk to them and

adopted by America to win the war," it said, adding that the Kabul Process was simply aimed at seeking the "surrender" of the Taliban.

The comments come a month after the Taliban claimed responsibility for an attack in which an ambulance packed with explosives blew up in Kabul, killing around 100 people, in the worst attack seen in months.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif yesterday extended support to Kabul's proposed political process seeking to recognise the Taliban as a legitimate political group, and said Pakistan is ready for one-on-one talks with the Afghan Taliban, reported Dawn Online.

Afghan officials said yesterday a German national has been arrested with the Taliban in Afghanistan's insurgency-racked Helmand province, reported

The man, who calls himself Abdul Wadood and was pictured wearing a black

Duterte says no

Philippine President

Rodrigo Duterte said yester-

day he would not cooperate

with UN investigators look-

ing into extrajudicial kill-

ings under his rule, telling

police and soldiers not to

came after his government said

it was willing to accept a visit

from a UN Special Rapporteur

to look into the rash of killings

under Duterte's deadly anti-

or whoever is that rapporteur

arrives, my order to you is, do

not answer... Who are they

and who are you to interfere

in the way I would run my

country?" he told a gathering

"If they ask you about

of police and military.

"When the human rights

Duterte's angry reaction

cooperate with any probe.

help for UN

rights probe

turban with a long, reddish beard, identified himself as a German resident of Frankfurt and spoke German, provincial

AFP, Manila

drug war.

Trudeau red-faced again

Canada opposition to move motion for India's unity and condemn Khalistani separatists

AP, Toronto

The controversy created by an invitation to former convicted Khalistani terrorist Jaspal Atwal for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's dinner in Delhi last week has created a storm in Canadian politics, with the opposition moving a motion to support

India's unity and condemn Khalistani separatists.

The issue snowballed into a major issue in Canadian parliament on Tuesday after Trudeau's national security advisor alleged that the invitation to Atwal was arranged by some elements in the Indian government to sabotage Trudeau's India visit.

With India rejecting the allegations as "baseless and unacceptable", the opposition Conservative Party on Wednesday asked

Trudeau to respond to India's rebuttal. Trudeau defended the allegations against India by his national security advisor, and said:

"When one of our top diplomats and security officials says something to Canadians, it is because they know it to be true."

Calling the allegations against India "bizarre", opposition Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer asked Trudeau: "Will the Prime Minister produce some kind of proof for his conspiracy theory?"

> The Opposition party was moving a motion in parliament yesterday to condemn Khalistani separatists and pledge support to India's unity.

The motion says: "That the House: (a) values the contributions of Canadian Sikhs and Canadians of Indian origin in our

national life; (b)Condemn in the strongest terms all forms of terrorism, including Khalistani extremism and the glorification of any individuals who have committed acts of violence to advance the cause of an independent Khalistani state in India; and (c) Stand with a united India."



An Afghan refugee family wave from a truck before their departure to return to their home country at the repatriation centre of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the outskirts of Peshawar in Pakistan yesterday. Pakistan hosts roughly 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees, the UN says. PHOTO: AFP

NZ spy papers reveal 1981 bid to kill Queen

A mentally disturbed teenager tried to assassinate Queen Elizabeth II during a 1981 visit to New Zealand and police covered up the botched attempt, according to official docu-

ments released yesterday. Christopher Lewis fired a single shot towards the Queen's car as she toured the South Island city of Dunedin, the documents from New Zealand's Security Intelligence Service (SIS) spy agency revealed.

No one was hurt and police reportedly assured members of the Royal party who asked about a gunshot that they had simply heard a firework exploding.

Lewis, 17 at the time, was picked up soon after on an

unrelated armed robbery charge and made a rambling

confession about his attempt on the monarch's life. While police said he was delusional and "lives in a dream world" they found a .22 rifle and spent cartridge in

the building where he said the attempt took place. He claimed to be a member of a right-wing organisation called the National Imperial Guerilla Army, which police

concluded had only three members. Officers at the time decided against charging him with

treason over the assassination attempt but pursued firearms and robbery charges.

Japan cannot declare wartime crimes over

Says S Korea's Moon; calls for Tokyo to apologise

AFP, Seoul

South Korean President Moon Jae-in yesterday said Japan cannot declare the issue of its former wartime sex slaves "over", repeating calls for Tokyo to apologise over the issue and confront wrongdoings.

The controversy of the so-called comfort women -- those forced into sexual slavery for Japanese troops during World War II -- has marred relations between the neighbours for decades.

Park Geun-Hye, Moon's ousted predecessor, struck a deal in 2015 with Tokyo under which Seoul promised not to raise the issue

again and Japan paid 1 billion yen (\$8.9 million) to a foundation dedicated to supporting the victims.

office Moon condemned the deal as a "wrongful" solution and urged Japan to make a "heartfelt apology". "The issue of the comfort women cannot be declared 'over' by the Japanese government," Moon said in a speech marking the anniversary of the

angered some victims and after taking

country's 1919 uprising against Japanese colonial rule. "Wartime crimes against humanity cannot be covered up

with a declaration that it is over. "The true way of resolving a tragic history is to remember that history and to learn from it," Moon

said, expressing hopes for strong future relations "with the closest neighbour on the backdrop of a sincere apology".

Moon's remarks drew a swift response The agreement, in which Tokyo fell from Japan, which termed them "extremely short of taking legal responsibility, regrettable".

Australia amnesty yields 57,000 guns

AFP, Sydney

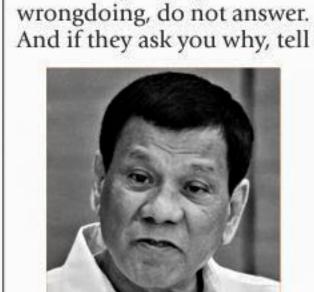
More than 57,000 illegal firearms, many of them automatic or semi-automatic weapons, have been handed in under an Australian amnesty that authorities yesterday said had made the country safer.

A final count from the three-month campaign to remove weapons from the streets came with debate over gun reform rampant in the United States after a mass school shooting in Florida.

Australia's strict gun laws, enacted after a 1996 mass shooting that killed 35 people, are often held up by safety activists as a model for the US to follow. The country has had no mass shootings since.

The first national amnesty since Martin Bryant went on the rampage armed with semi-automatic weapons at the historic Tasmanian colonial convict site of Port Arthur 22 years ago netted 57,324 firearms. Running from July 1 to September 30 last year, almost

automatic. Law Enforcement Minister Angus Taylor said it was a great example of what could be achieved "when governments and the Australian public work together to make our communities safer".



them: we have a commander in chief," who they should speak to, he said.

"You're investigating us, fact finding? Well sorry, do not fuck with me," he said, referring to the rapporteur. The Philippines' human

rights record was raised at a UN Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva late February with Iceland Foreign Minister Gudlaugur Thor Thordarson urging Manila on Monday to accept a visit from the UN Special Rapporteur.

2,500 of them were fully-automatic and semi-Foreign Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano later told the council that Manila was ready to cooperate, but also said the investigators should be fair and not "weaponise" human rights.