

## SECURITY COOPERATION FUND

## US pledges \$300m for Southeast Asia

REUTERS, Singapore

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo yesterday pledged to provide nearly \$300 million in new security funding for Southeast Asia, as China forges ahead with plans to bolster its engagement in the region.

Pompeo unveiled the figure to reporters on the sidelines of a meeting of foreign ministers from the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and other officials from around the world in Singapore.

"As part of our commitment to advancing regional security in the Indo-Pacific, the United States is excited to announce nearly \$300 million in new funding to reinforce security cooperation throughout the entire region," he said.

The new security assistance will strengthen maritime security, develop humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping capabilities and counter "transnational threats", he added.

The United States said earlier this week it would invest \$113 million in technology, energy and infrastructure initiatives in emerging Asia which he called "a downpayment on a new era of US economic commitment to the region".

The United States' developing vision for a "free and open Indo-Pacific" comes at the same time as China ramps up its influence as part of its Belt and Road plan to bolster trade ties with nations in Southeast Asia and beyond.

Analysts have said that a spiralling trade dispute between Beijing and Washington could also ratchet up tensions over other regional hotspots, such as the South China Sea, claimed in whole by China and in part by some Southeast Asian nations.



PHOTO: AFP

Female protesters shout slogans during a rally against 'spy-cam porn' in central Seoul, yesterday. Tens of thousands of women staged a mass rally in Seoul to protest against spycam porn, which largely involve men secretly filming women in schools, offices, trains, toilets and changing rooms, urging tougher punishments for the peeping Toms.

## Erdogan blinks in US row

Slaps sanctions on US officials in tit-for-tat move, says he doesn't want escalation of crisis over jailed pastor

AFP, Ankara

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday said Turkey would impose sanctions on two US officials in retaliation for a similar move by Washington in a row over the detention of an American pastor.

Turkey's holding of pastor Andrew Brunson on terror-related charges for almost two years has sparked one of the most intense crises between the Nato allies in years.

But in his first comments on the dispute since Washington imposed the sanctions on Wednesday, Erdogan also appeared keen to ward off any further escalation by saying that neither side had an interest in a "lose-lose" scenario.

"Today I will give our friends instructions to freeze the assets in Turkey of the American justice and interior ministers, if they have any (such assets)," Erdogan said in a televised speech.

He did not specify to which members of the US administration he was referring.

The US attorney general is Jeff

Sessions and while the United States does not have an interior ministry similar to Turkey, the Secretary of the Interior is Ryan Zinke and Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security is Kirstjen Nielsen.

Erdogan's announcement was a tit-

business with them.

Both Turkish ministers have denied having any assets in the US and it is highly unlikely the American officials would have assets in Turkey, making the sanctions largely symbolic.

But analysts say the row could be hugely damaging for Turkey's fragile economy and tougher measures could be imposed if Brunson is not freed.

"There is a risk of more sanctions to come... which could hit more directly at the heart of Turkish government interests and which have the potential to cause a run on the lira," Anthony Skinner, director of Middle East and North Africa at risk management consultants Verisk Maplecroft, told AFP.

And Erdogan appeared to indicate that he did not want the crisis to escalate further to full-scale economic sanctions.

"We don't want to be a party to lose-lose games. Moving political and judicial disputes into an economic dimension will be harmful for both sides," Erdogan said.



for-tat response to Washington's decision to impose sanctions on Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu and Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul.

The sanctions freeze any property or assets on US soil held by the two ministers, and bar US citizens from doing

## 'Immediately' release Reuters reporters

Pompeo tells Myanmar to free journos held for reporting on Rohingya massacre

AFP, Singapore

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo yesterday called on his Myanmar counterpart to release two Reuters journalists accused of breaking a draconian secrecy law during their reporting of a Rohingya massacre.

Myanmar nationals Wa Lone, 32, and Kyaw Soe Oo, 28, have been detained since December and face up to 14 years in prison for possessing classified documents linked to security operations in crisis-hit Rakhine state.

Pompeo said in a tweet that he had raised the issue with the Southeast Asian country's foreign minister at a regional security meeting in Singapore.

"I spoke with #Burma's Minister Kyaw Tin and raised US concerns about 2 @Reuters reporters detained in Burma for doing their job. They should be released immediately," he said, using the former name for Myanmar.

The journalists were arrested while reporting on a military crackdown against Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine which the United Nations and Washington have described as ethnic cleansing.

They had been investigating the extrajudicial killing of 10 Rohingya men in the village of Inn Din -- a massacre in which the military eventually admitted involvement.

During the pair's ongoing trial, Kyaw Soe Oo said last week he had been entrapped by police while reporting on the massacre with his colleague and had been abused in custody.

## NEWS IN brief

### Chopper crash kills 18 in Siberia

AFP, Moscow

Moscow yesterday said 18 people were killed when a helicopter crashed on its way to an oil station in northern Siberia in the early hours of the morning. The Russian Transport Ministry said the Mi-8 helicopter carrying three crew members and 15 passengers crashed when it collided with machinery carried by another helicopter soon after take-off. It added that the second helicopter landed safely and that the accident took place in "normal" weather conditions.

### 11 workers killed in India quarry blast

AFP, New Delhi

At least 11 workers were killed and four others injured after a stock of dynamite caught fire and exploded at a granite quarry in southern India, officials said yesterday. Around 16 people were inside the quarry when the blast occurred late Friday in Andhra Pradesh. The massive explosion caused cracks in nearby residential buildings. Police said they have launched an inquiry into the incident.

### Yemen rebels willing to attend UN talks

AFP, Sanaa

A member of the political wing of Yemen's Houthi rebels yesterday said the insurgents were willing to attend UN-brokered talks, although they had low expectations of a positive outcome. The UN envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, on Thursday told the Security Council that the United Nations will invite Yemen's warring sides for talks in Geneva on September 6 to discuss a framework for peace negotiations.

## Protests as troops kill 5 militants in Kashmir

REUTERS, Srinagar

Indian security forces yesterday killed five militants in the disputed region of Kashmir, the biggest single-day casualty since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government took direct control of the state, leading to protests.

Modi's Hindu nationalist party pulled out of a coalition government in the state of Jammu and Kashmir in June, citing a deterioration in security, leading to president's rule or direct control by the federal government.

Dozens of protesters were injured, two of them critically with gunshot wounds, as a large number of youths gathered in Kilora village in South Kashmir's Shopian district and pelted Indian troops with stones.

Witnesses said troops fired tear gas, pellets and bullets to quell the protests. A doctor at the local hospital said they had received at least two dozen injured people.

Srinagar-based Indian Defence Ministry spokesman, Colonel Rajesh Kalia, told Reuters the militants were killed yesterday.

The Indian army along with the police on Friday launched an operation against the militants, who, they said, were hiding in Kilora village. The officer said they recovered automatic assault rifles.

Officials say 227 people, including 130 militants and 52 Indian security force personnel, have been killed this year in the Kashmir conflict.



Islamic State fighters who surrendered to Afghan forces during a ceremony in Sheberghan, capital of Jawzjan province, Afghanistan. Around 150 militants, including two senior commanders, gave themselves up after being driven from their strongholds in Jawzjan by the Taliban after weeks of fighting. Picture was taken on Friday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

### ATTACK ON SHIA MOSQUE

## Afghans bury victims as death toll rises to 35

AFP, Khost

Hundreds of mourners yesterday buried the victims of a twin suicide attack on a Shia mosque in eastern Afghanistan, as the death toll rose to 35, officials said.

Two suicide bombers dressed as women struck a Shia mosque in Gardez, capital of Paktia province, Friday as it was crowded with worshippers for weekly prayers.

The burqa-clad attackers shot at the mosque's security guards before opening fire on worshippers then detonating their explosives.

The death toll from Friday's mosque attack in Gardez has jumped to 35 with 94 wounded, "Paktia governor Shamin Khan Katawazi told AFP.



Provincial police chief Raz Mohammad Mandozai confirmed the toll. Officials had earlier said 29 people were killed and more than 80 wounded.

"Today, we held funeral ceremony and buried all the martyred of Friday's attack," a weeping Sayed Moharram, who lost his 16-year-old son, told AFP from a graveyard on the outskirts of Gardez where hundreds of people attended the ceremony.

Haji Sultan, 70, who also attended, accused the government of "negligence" in providing security for the Shiite minority.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack.

The Taliban denied involvement but in recent years the Islamic State group has carried out attacks on Shiites in Afghanistan.

However, if the NA session was called on Aug 12, the election of the PM would be held on Aug 15.

The PTI emerged as the single largest party in the National Assembly with 115 general seats while with the addition of the general and reserved seats of its allies the party claimed to have secured at least 172 seats.

## N Korea FM to visit Iran on Tuesday

AFP, Tehran

North Korea's foreign minister Ri Yong Ho is due to visit Iran on Tuesday, Iranian media reported yesterday.

North Korea's top diplomat will meet Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, according to the conservative-aligned Fars news agency.

The report did not give any details of what will be discussed.

Ri is thought to have met with a high-level Iranian delegation at a meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in Baku, Azerbaijan in April, according to the Korean Central News Agency.

A United Nations Panel of Experts has expressed concern over collaboration between the two countries in the past,

the reimposition of crippling sanctions on Aug 7.

In May, the United States pulled out of a

2015 deal between world powers and

Tehran under which international sanctions

on Iran were lifted in return for curbs on its

nuclear programme.

Washington decided to reimpose sanctions on Iran upon its withdrawal, accusing

it of posing a security threat, and has told

countries they must halt all imports of

Iranian oil from Nov 4 or face US financial

## Scattered protests in Iran as US sanctions loom

REUTERS, Dubai

Sporadic protests were taking place in cities in Iran for a fourth day, with demonstrators attacking a Shia seminary west of Tehran, according to Iranian news agencies and social media yesterday, as Iranians brace for a return of US sanctions.

Hundreds have rallied in cities across the country, including Tehran, Isfahan and Karaj, according to videos posted on social media, to protest against high inflation caused in part by a plunging rial over fears of the reimposition of crippling sanctions on Aug 7.

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measures.

The protests have often begun with slogans against the high cost of living and alleged financial corruption but quickly turned into anti-government rallies.

In the town of Eshtehard, 100 km (63 miles) west of Tehran, riot police intervened late on Friday to disperse about 500 people who chanted slogans against the government, with some throwing rocks and bricks at a Shia Muslim seminary, the semi-official news agency Fars said yesterday.

In Tehran, street demonstrators chanted "Death to the dictator," according to a social media video, which could not be independently verified.

In Washington, the US State Department said on its Persian-language Twitter account: "While it is ultimately up to the #people\_of\_Iran to determine their country's path, #America supports the voice of the Iranian people, which has been ignored for a long time."