

#MeToo: India forms powerful panel

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

In the backdrop of snowballing #MeToo movement, the Indian government yesterday constituted a Group of Ministers (GoM) to examine the existing legal and institutional frameworks for dealing with matters of sexual harassment of women at the workplace. The GoM, to be headed by Home Minister Rajnath Singh, will recommend within three months actions required for effective implementation of the existing provisions as well as for strengthening the existing legal and institutional frameworks for addressing issues related to sexual harassment at workplace.

Hurricane Willa slams into Mexico, weakens

AFP, Escuintapa

Hurricane Willa crashed ashore in western Mexico Tuesday, lashing the Pacific coast with powerful winds and heavy rain before weakening to a tropical storm as it moved inland. The powerful storm had weakened considerably when it made landfall. No casualties were reported.



Modi conferred with Seoul Peace Prize

PTI, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been conferred with the Seoul Peace Prize for 2018 for his contribution to international cooperation and fostering global economic growth. Modi is the 14th recipient of the award and the past laureates included former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and renowned international relief organizations like Doctors Without Borders and Oxfam.

MISSILE DEFENCE SYSTEMS

India signs \$777m deal with Israel

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) said yesterday it had won a \$777 million (680 million euro) order from India to buy defence systems for its navy. The deal with India's state-owned Bharat Electronics Limited to supply the marine version of the Barak 8 air and missile defence system for seven more warships follows a \$630 million (551 million euro) order placed last year. State-owned IAI, Israel's largest defence firm, said worldwide sales of the Barak 8 system now totalled more than \$6 billion.

The LRSAM, part of the Barak 8 family, is an air missile defence system used by Israel's navy as well as India's navy, air and land forces. Israel is among the world's top arms dealers, with nearly 60 percent of its defence exports going to the Asia-Pacific region, according to Israeli defence ministry figures.

Russia is still by far India's largest arms supplier. During a visit last week, President Vladimir Putin won an order for the S-400 surface-to-air missile defence system, worth \$5.2 billion according to an Indian source.

But as the United States has imposed sanctions on countries buying Russian military hardware, India has sought to diversify its suppliers.

Washington and New Delhi announced plans last month for joint military exercises in 2019 and the United States is now India's second-biggest supplier. In April last year, Israel won 1.6 billion euros of orders from India, which it hailed as its largest ever arms export deal. "It constitutes further proof that security is an investment not an expense," Israeli Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman said of yesterday's deal.

"Israel Aerospace Industries is a pillar of the nation that we must conserve and strengthen," he added, recalling his opposition to proposals for partial privatisation of the firm.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a "groundbreaking" first ever visit by an Indian premier to Israel in July last year to cement growing defence ties.



Honduran migrants taking part in a caravan heading to the US, rest at a makeshift camp during a stop in Huixtla, Chiapas state, Mexico, on Tuesday. Thousands of mainly Honduran migrants heading to the US -- a caravan President Donald Trump has called an "assault on our country" -- stopped to rest Tuesday after walking for two days into Mexican territory.

PHOTO: AFP

Yemen at risk of 'big famine': UN

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

The United Nations humanitarian chief warns that Yemen is on the verge of widespread famine, with about half of the population completely relying on humanitarian aid for survival.

Addressing the Security Council on Tuesday, UN Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock said, "there is a clear and present danger of an imminent and great big famine engulfing Yemen."

Lowcock told the UN's most powerful body that this famine would be "much bigger than anything any professional in this field has seen during their working lives".

He said that "the situation is now much graver" than when the world governing body last warned of a risk of famine at the beginning of 2017 and again last November because "of the sheer number of people at risk".

According to Lowcock, last month's estimate that 11 million people could soon face "pre-famine conditions" actually stood closer to 14 million - about half of Yemen's population.

Lowcock said the United Nations currently coordinates the delivery of aid to some eight million people in Yemen and that the humanitarian crisis has been deepened by an economic crisis and continued fighting around the country's key Hodeidah port. Yemen traditionally imports 90 percent of its food.

Lowcock said three conditions are required for famine to be declared: At least one in five households faces an extreme lack of food, more than 30 percent of children under the age of five are suffering from acute malnutrition, and at least two out of every 10,000 people are dying every day.

An assessment is now under way across Yemen to measure the risk of famine and initial results are expected in mid-November, he said.

'We don't want new cold war'

Trump adviser tells Putin despite vowing to quit key nuke treaty

AGENCIES

Washington will press ahead with a plan to quit a landmark nuclear arms control pact despite objections from Russia and some European countries, senior US official John Bolton said on Tuesday, after meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Bolton had a 90-minute meeting in the Kremlin with Putin which resulted in an agreement for the Russian leader to hold talks with US President Donald Trump in Paris next month, their first meeting since a July summit in Helsinki.

But the Moscow talks appeared to yield no breakthrough over Trump's stated desire for Washington to leave the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF), a step Moscow has decried as dangerous and many European countries have warned could reignite a Cold War-style arms race, reported Reuters.

"There's a new strategic reality out there," Bolton, who is National Security Advisor to Trump, told a news conference, adding that the Cold War-era treaty did not address new missile threats from countries such as China,

Iran and North Korea, and was therefore redundant.

"In terms of filing the formal notice of withdrawal, that has not been filed but it will be filed in due course," he said, suggesting it was a process that could take several months.

Moscow has warned Washington it will be forced to respond in kind to

Moscow denies.

"The threat is not America's INF withdrawal from the treaty. The threat is Russian missiles already deployed."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said yesterday Russia and the United States have discussed the possibility of President Vladimir Putin visiting Washington next year. No specific plans had yet been arranged, Peskov told reporters on a conference call.

Meanwhile, NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said yesterday he did not see the alliance's member states deploying more nuclear weapons in Europe in response to a new Russian missile programme, reported AFP.

"We don't want a new Cold War," the alliance's secretary general told reporters. "We don't want a new arms race."

"And I don't foresee that (Nato) allies will deploy more nuclear weapons in Europe as a response to the new Russian missile," he added.

Stoltenberg was speaking after Trump said he was ready to build up the US nuclear arsenal in response to Russia's SSC-8 missile programme.

Russia, US discussed possible Putin visit to Washington  
Nato does not want new nuclear arms race: alliance chief

restore the military balance if Trump carries through with his threat to quit the INF treaty, a 1987 agreement that eliminated all short- and intermediate-range land-based nuclear and conventional missiles held by both countries in Europe.

"The problem is there are Russian INF violations in Europe now," Bolton told reporters, repeating an allegation

Potential explosives sent to Clintons, Obamas

AGENCIES

Federal authorities are investigating suspicious packages sent to former US President Barack Obama and former Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, the US Secret Service and a person familiar with the matter said yesterday.

The suspicious packages sent to the two top Democrats as well as a bomb sent to one of their major donors came roughly two weeks ahead of the high-stakes Nov 6 election that will determine whether Republicans maintain control of Congress in a nation that has become deeply polarized.

The package to Clinton was found late Tuesday while the one addressed to Obama was found early yesterday, both during routine mail screenings, the Secret Service said. Both Obama and Clinton were not at risk, they added.

The White House, in a statement, condemned the attempted attacks on Obama and Clinton.

"These terrorizing acts are despicable,

and anyone responsible will be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law," White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said.

Moments later US news network CNN said it had evacuated its New York bureau over another suspicious package.

The FBI said it was investigating the packages.

The incidents come just days after an explosive device found in the mailbox at the New York home of US billionaire and liberal donor George Soros, a target of right-wing groups.

The Secret Service, which provides protection to current and former US presidents and their families -- Clinton is the wife of former president Bill Clinton -- said it had initiated a "full scope criminal investigation."

An employee of the residence in Bedford, an ultra-wealthy enclave just a 20-minute drive from Westchester, found the package in the mailbox on Monday. It was later defused by bomb squad technicians.



Kashmiri protesters clash with Indian security forces in the Nowgam area on the outskirts of Srinagar, yesterday, following a gun battle between suspected militants and Indian forces. Two suspected militants were killed in the early morning gunfight while six security personnel were injured.

PHOTO: AFP

US calls on Pak to cut off extremist ties

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Tuesday renewed calls on Pakistan to curb extremists fighting in Afghanistan, saying Washington was holding its uneasy war partner accountable.

Pompeo made the comment as he welcomed long-delayed legislative elections in Afghanistan.

"Our expectation is that Pakistan will not provide safe harbor to terrorists on their western border," Pompeo told reporters when asked about Islamabad's role. "We couldn't have made that message any more clear," he said, adding: "Pakistan will be held to account if they don't achieve that, if they're not sincere in that effort."

Autonomy of CBI being compromised

Says ex-chief of India's top probe body, moves SC on his forced leave

NDTV ONLINE

Alok Verma, the CBI chief who has been exiled into leave, has told the Indian Supreme Court that the autonomy of the country's premier investigating agency is being compromised. He also accused that "certain investigations into high functionaries do not take the direction that may be desirable to the government".

Verma was replaced as the top boss of the CBI in a 1:00am coup that saw the CBI headquarters in the capital being cordoned off by the police before the man chosen as the new CBI head, M Nageswar Rao, drove in and took charge.

Like Verma, the CBI's No 2 officer, Rakesh Asthana, has also been sent on leave; this was necessitated to "maintain the CBI's integrity", claimed Indian finance minister yesterday.

Arun Jaitley cited the public feud between Asthana and Verma - both men have accused each other of accepting bribes worth crores by men being investigated by the CBI. Earlier this week, the CBI named Asthana as an accused in an FIR.

Verma has challenged his removal in the Supreme Court which will hear his case tomorrow. His petition says that Asthana "concocted evidence" against him to accuse him of corruption and that he was inevitably at odds with the



Alok Verma



Rakesh Asthana

opinion of majority officers in sensitive cases.

"Not all influence that is exerted by the political government would be found explicitly or in writing. More often than not it is tacit and requires considerable courage to withstand," says the petition. Verma also promises to give details of "many cases that have led to the present circumstances".

The opposition has alleged that Verma has been sent on leave effectively sacked - because he was weighing an inquiry into India's purchase in 2015 of 36 Rafale fighter jets from France.

Earlier this month, Verma personally met with Arun Shourie, Prashant Bhushan and Yashwant Sinha, all critics of the Modi government, when they filed a complaint about corruption in the Rafale deal angering the government, NDTV had reported.

Asthana is known for his proximity to BJP chief Amit Shah and Verma's removal yesterday is seen as a major victory for him.

Asthana was made No. 2 in the CBI though he was tainted by allegations of accepting favours and bribes and was named in six cases being investigated by the CBI. While a senior police officer in Gujarat, he handled the case involving the Godhra train burning, which led to three-day communal violence across Gujarat in 2002, and the Sohrabuddin Sheikh fake encounter case, in which Amit Shah was discharged.

1 winning ticket in \$1.6b US jackpot

AFP, Washington

A single winning ticket has been identified in the record-setting \$1.6 billion Mega Millions lottery jackpot, organizers said yesterday.

A single ticket holder in South Carolina will claim that bounty, Mega Millions said on its website. The winner has not been identified.

Mega Millions said the jackpot is not only a US record but a worldwide lottery record.

The six winning numbers drawn on Tuesday night were 5, 28, 62, 65, 70 and 5 again as the special Mega Ball.

The record jackpot had set off a lottery frenzy across America, with people lining up at convenience stores, supermarkets and liquor stores to buy a \$2 ticket that gave them a roughly one in 300 million chance of winning.

The winner can take \$913 million in a lump sum cash payment or the whole pile in annuities over 29 years.

The jackpot got so big because no one had won since July, when a group of office workers in California shared \$543 million.

Until now the US record jackpot was \$1.586 billion for a different lottery, called Powerball, in 2016.

KHASHOGGI KILLING

Such murder unthinkable 'without US backing': Iran

REUTERS, Geneva

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday that Saudi Arabia would not have murdered prominent journalist Jamal Khashoggi without American protection, according to the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA).

US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday Saudi authorities staged the "worst cover-up ever" in the killing of Khashoggi in Turkey this month, as Washington vowed to revoke the visas of some of those believed to be responsible.

"No one would imagine that in today's world and a new century that we would witness such an organised murder and a system would plan out such a heinous murder," Rouhani said, according to IRNA.

"I don't think that a country would dare commit such a crime without US backing."

Khashoggi's death in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2 has triggered global outrage.

Saudi Arabia initially denied knowledge of Khashoggi's fate before saying on Saturday he was killed in a fight in the consulate, an account met with skepticism from several Western governments.

Iran and Saudi Arabia are regional rivals and have supported opposing sides in the conflicts in Syria and Yemen and different political factions in Iraq and Lebanon.

US protection has allowed Saudi Arabia to carry out bombings against civilians in Yemen's war, Rouhani said, according to IRNA.

"If there was no American protection, would the people of Yemen still have faced the same brutal bombing?" Rouhani said.

Rouhani also called on Turkey's government to conduct an impartial investigation into Khashoggi's "unprecedented" murder.

Separately, Rouhani said that Iran would "defeat" new American sanctions targeting its oil sector, according to the IRIB news agency.