

NEWS IN brief

India bans J&K terror group

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India yesterday imposed a ban on terror group Tehreek-ul-Mujahideen, which has been fighting for "liberation of Kashmir" and involved in a series of terror acts in Jammu and Kashmir state, under the stringent Unlawful Activities Act.

Woman arrested for shooting Gandhi effigy

AFP, New Delhi

A right-wing Indian woman who shot an effigy of independence hero Mahatma Gandhi with an air pistol to mark his assassination some seven decades ago has been arrested, police said yesterday. Pooja Shakun Pandey was filmed shooting the effigy at an event by a far-right Hindu group on Friday -- the 71st anniversary of Gandhi's death.

Iran tells US to get out of Syria

REUTERS, Geneva

Senior Iranian figures said yesterday that Syria was a top foreign policy priority and American troops should withdraw, as planned by US President Donald Trump. "Whether they want to or not, the Americans must leave Syria," Ali Akbar Velayati, a senior adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was reported as saying.



Indian politician Priyanka Gandhi arrives at the Directorate of Enforcement with her husband Robert Vadra, inset, as he faced questioning in a money laundering case in New Delhi yesterday. Vadra has faced accusations of financial irregularities that he denies, describing them as politically motivated. He was being questioned for alleged possession of illegal foreign assets, Indian media reported.

Stay out of politics, media

Pak top court tells army, criticises role of intelligence agencies in anti-blasphemy protests that paralysed Islamabad in 2017

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's Supreme Court yesterday rebuked the powerful military and intelligence agencies, calling for them to uphold free speech and stay out of politics in a country ruled by the generals for nearly half its existence. The unusually strong criticism was issued in a judgement released criticising the role of the intelligence agencies in anti-blasphemy protests which paralysed the capital Islamabad for several weeks in 2017.

"If any personnel of the Armed Forces indulges in any form of politicking or tries to manipulate the media he undermines the integrity and professionalism of the Armed Forces," the judgement, posted on the Supreme Court website, stated.

Pakistan's Constitution "emphatically prohibits" members of the armed forces from "engaging in any kind of political activity", it added, ordering

the government and the chiefs of the army, air force and navy to take action against anyone found violating their oaths to uphold the document.

The 2017 protests were led by a then-little known Islamist group called the Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP).

SC orders govt and chiefs of army, air force and navy to take action against anyone found violating their oaths

Intelligence agencies cannot curtail freedom of speech: top court

and were only dispersed after violent clashes led to a military-brokered deal which forced the resignation of the federal law minister.

Viral videos showing what appeared to be soldiers handing out cash to protesters helped fuel speculation the

demonstrators were backed by the military as it sought to put pressure on the then-ruling party of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

The judgement also spelled out curbs on free speech, singling out the intelligence agencies for a stern warning.

"All intelligence agencies... and the (military's media wing) must not exceed their respective mandates. They cannot curtail the freedom of speech and expression," the judgement said.

"Those who resort to such tactics under the mistaken belief that they serve some higher goal delude themselves," it continued.

Local media have complained about pressure in the run-up to a general election in July to self-censor in favour of the eventual victor, cricket-turned-prime-minister Imran Khan.

Activists and bloggers speaking out against the state and military have also complained of repression.

BITS OF HISTORY (FEBRUARY 6)

1922 : Cardinal Achille Ratti was elected Pope Pius XI. He succeeded Benedict XV.

1952 : King George VI's daughter, Elizabeth II, proclaimed Queen.

2004 : An apparent suicide bombing killed at least 40 people and injured more than 100 on an underground train during morning rush-hour in Moscow.

2016 : More than 100 people killed in Taiwan earthquake.

FLASHPOINT INDIAN TEMPLE

Board reverses opposition to entry of women

REUTERS, New Delhi

A board that oversees an ancient Hindu temple in southern India said yesterday it now favoured allowing women of menstruating age to enter the temple, reversing its previous support for a centuries-old ban.

The Sabarimala temple has been the site of tension since India's Supreme Court ruled in late September to end a ban on women and girls aged from 10-50 from entering.

The Travancore Devaswom Board, which administers the temple, had refused to abide by the court ruling and thousands of devotees have blocked attempts by women to visit the site.

The board said yesterday it would now abide by the court ruling.

"After the Supreme Court judgement, we discussed a lot. We realise that we should respect the judgement of the court," lawyer Rakesh Dwivedi told Reuters after a board hearing on the matter.

The temple in Kerala state pays homage to the celibate god Ayyappan and draws millions of worshippers each year. It is one of only a few in India which had barred entry to girls and women between the ages of 10 and 50.

After the Supreme Court ruling, Hindu groups physically blocked younger women from entering the temple, though a number managed to get in with help from police.

But on January 2, Bindu Ammini, 40, a law lecturer at Kerala's Kannur University, and Durga succeeded in entering the temple through a side entrance in the middle of the night. Some other women have claimed they have got into the temple since then.



Newly initiated 'Naga Sadhus' (Hindu holy men) perform rituals on the banks of the Ganges River during the Kumbh mela festival, in Allahabad, India yesterday. Some 55 million Hindu devotees plunged into holy waters to cleanse their sins and seek salvation over the busiest days of the world's largest religious gathering, officials said.

MYANMAR CONSTITUTION

Parliament approves panel to discuss amendment

REUTERS, Yangon

Myanmar's parliament yesterday voted to set up a committee to discuss amending the country's constitution, despite objections by military-aligned lawmakers against a move that is likely to challenge the army's power.

Aung San Suu Kyi's ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) submitted an "emergency proposal" last week aimed at amending parts of the military-drafted 2008 constitution that the party deems undemocratic.

It was the Nobel laureate's biggest challenge to the military's power in nearly three years, and sparked a protest in the legislature from green-glad army appointees, who stood in silence for several minutes to show their opposition. The move comes as both civilian and military leaders face growing international pressure over an army crackdown on Rohingya Muslims in 2017 that sent about 730,000 people fleeing to neighbouring Bangladesh. In a vote among members of both houses

of parliament, 414 out of 611 voting lawmakers were in favour of setting up the committee.

Suu Kyi's party commands a large majority in the combined Union Parliament.

"Representatives from political parties and military lawmakers will be involved proportionally," speaker T Khun Myat told the house, announcing that deputy speaker Tun Tun Hein, an NLD lawmaker, would chair the new committee.

The constitution guarantees the army a quarter of seats in parliament, as well as control of key ministries. Change to the charter needs a vote of more than 75 percent of members, giving the military an effective veto.

Debating the proposal in parliament on Tuesday, NLD lawmakers said there was public support for amending the charter and that the new committee would allow all parties to have a say.

Mps from the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) said the proposal was not in line with the section of the constitution on amendments.

ANTI-TRAFFICKING OPS

Indian cops rescue 180 Nepalis

REUTERS, Mumbai

Indian police have rescued more than 180 Nepali men and women in a major operation near the border with Myanmar after activists raised suspicions they were being trafficked into forced labour.

Police in the northeast Indian state of Manipur said they had arrested four Nepalis in the main city of Imphal and charged them with human trafficking. Other arrests had been made elsewhere, they said.

"We got specific inputs from certain NGOs (non-government organisations) who were alerted by relatives that their family members had gone without their knowledge and permission," said Manipur's director general of police L.M. Khaute.

INDIA GENERAL ELECTION

Political parties abuse WhatsApp

Says top executive of messaging app

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's political parties have been abusing Facebook Inc's popular messaging service WhatsApp ahead of the country's general election and the company has warned them not to do so, a senior executive said yesterday.

WhatsApp declined to name the parties or give the exact nature of the alleged misuse, but there is mounting concern in India that party workers could abuse the platform by using automated tools for mass messaging, or spread false news to sway voters.

The messaging app has become a key campaign tool used widely by workers of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the opposition Congress party, which accuse each other of propagating fake news while denying they do so themselves.

"We have seen a number of parties attempt to use WhatsApp in ways that it was not intended, and our firm message to them is that using it in that way will result in bans of our service," Carl Woog, head of communications for WhatsApp, told reporters.

The next general election must be held by May.

The platform's challenges in India are not unique. It was flooded with falsehoods and conspiracy theories ahead of the October election in Brazil, raising concerns that it was being used to distort the political debate.

India is WhatsApp's biggest market with more than 200 million users.

Ahead of state polls in the western state of Rajasthan in December, BJP and Congress workers showed a Reuters reporter dozens of WhatsApp groups they belonged to and used for campaigning.

Woog said they had engaged with political parties to explain the company's view that the app was not a "broadcast platform".

"We are trying to be very clear going into the election that there is abuse on WhatsApp. We are working very hard to identify it and prevent it as soon as possible," he said.

WhatsApp warns parties not to abuse service

The platform has over 200m users in India; its biggest market

AFGHANISTAN CONFLICT

US promises to halve its troops by April

Says Taliban; two Afghan journalists killed in attack

REUTERS, Moscow

A Taliban official said yesterday that the United States had promised to withdraw half of its troops from Afghanistan by the end of April during talks last month, RIA news agency reported, more than past estimates of the planned pull-out.

There was no immediate reaction from the Pentagon or the US Department of State to the comments from a member of a Taliban delegation visiting Moscow.

But they came a day after President Donald Trump told Americans his administration had accelerated talks for a political settlement in Afghanistan and would be able to reduce US troops there as negotiations advance to end America's longest war.

US and Taliban delegations met in Qatar in January and are due to meet again in February. A US official at last month's meeting said significant progress was made, though more talks were needed on US demands for a Taliban ceasefire before any withdrawal and other issues.

Meanwhile, two journalists were shot and killed when gunmen stormed their radio station in north-east Afghanistan, officials said yesterday.

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TENDER NOTICE

For Purchase of Software for Collaboration Suite

01. Sealed tenders are invited from bona-fide suppliers for supplying and implementations/customizations of the following items:

- Windows Server Standard
- Exchange Server Standard
- SharePoint Server
- SQL Server Standard
- System Centre Server Standard
- Document Archiving Solution

02. The participating company must have at least 3 (three) years proven experience in supplying software/computers in any scheduled Bank in Bangladesh/Bangladesh Bank or must have previous record of successfully supplying software/computers to BASIC Bank Limited. The participating company must submit relevant document(s) as proof of its experience as mentioned here.

03. The participating company must have successful implementation experience in SharePoint workflow customization for at least 02 (two) organizations. The participating company must submit relevant document (s) as proof of its experience as mentioned here.

04. The participating company must be a Microsoft Certified LSP/Gold partner.

05. The participating company must have at least 5 years' experience of supplying and deploying Microsoft solutions in Banks in Bangladesh.

06. The participating company shall have experience of successful deployment of Microsoft SharePoint workflow customization (Carry-out at least 5 level of workflow) in any Bank.

07. The participating company has to submit BDT 5,00,000/- (Five Lac) only with the tender through PO/DD in the name of BASIC Bank Limited, Head Office, Dhaka as earnest money. The earnest money of the successful company will be returned at the time of making the 1st payment. Earnest money will be forfeited for any of the reasons mentioned in the tender schedule.

08. The tender schedule may be obtained from ICT Division (Peoples Insurance Bhaban - 5th Floor, 36 Dilkusha C/A, Dhaka) of BASIC Bank Limited during 10:00 A.M. to 02:00 P.M. of all working days at a cost of Tk 5,000/- only in cash (non refundable). No schedule will be sold after 02:00 P.M. of February 25, 2019.

09. Sealed offers/tenders have to be dropped in the tender box kept at the ICT Division (Peoples Insurance Bhaban - 5th Floor, 36 Dilkusha C/A, Dhaka) of BASIC Bank Limited on or before February 26, 2019 by 03:00 P.M., and the tenders will be opened at 03:15 P.M. on the same day in presence of bidders, if any.

10. Other terms and conditions can be found in the tender schedule.

General Manager
 ICT Division