

KASHMIR SUICIDE ATTACK

Bomber was radicalised after beating by troops Say his parents

REUTERS, Srinagar

A suicide bomber who killed 44 paramilitary policemen in Indian-controlled Kashmir joined a militant group after having been beaten by troops three years ago, his parents told Reuters yesterday. Pakistan-based Islamist militant group Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) has claimed responsibility for Thursday's car bomb attack on a security convoy, the worst in decades of insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, India's only Muslim majority state. It comes months before a key Indian general election. Adil Ahmad Dar, 20, from the village of Lethipora in Indian Kashmir, rammed a car full of explosives into the convoy, escalating tension between the nuclear-armed neighbours, which both claim the rugged Himalayan region. "We are in pain in the same way the families of the soldiers are," said farmer Ghulam Hassan Dar, adding that his son had been radicalised after police stopped him and his friends on the way home from school in 2016. "They were stopped by the troops and beaten up and harassed," Dar said, adding that the students were accused of stone-pelting. "Since then, he wanted to join the militants." A video released by the militant group after the attack showed his son, dressed in military fatigues and carrying an automatic rifle, detailing his plan to carry out the bombing. His mother, Fahmeeda, corroborated her husband's account. "He was beaten by Indian troops a few years back when he was returning from school," she said. "This led to anger in him against Indian troops." Both parents said they were unaware of their son's plan to attack the convoy.



A demonstrator reacts next to burning cars during a protest in Jammu yesterday, the day after the attack on a bus killed 44 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel in south Kashmir. Inset, Indian school students in Ahmedabad pay tribute to the victims of the attack. PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

Tell us more about Khashoggi murder US lawmakers urge Trump admin

REUTERS, Washington

Republican and Democratic members of the US Senate asked the Trump administration on Thursday to tell them more about the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at a Saudi consulate last year, days after a missed deadline for a detailed report on his death prompted an angry bipartisan backlash. Ten of the 12 Republicans from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, led by Chairman Jim Risch, wrote to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo asking for more information. "The Senate Foreign Relations Committee is committed to pursuing all information available in its oversight role and, to that end, is in the process of arranging a classified briefing for the committee," Risch said in a statement. All 10 committee Democrats, led by senior member Bob Menendez, along with Appropriations Committee Vice Chairman Pat Leahy, signed their own letter demanding that Pompeo brief Congress on why President Donald Trump's administration missed last Friday's deadline to report to Congress on whether Saudi government officials and members of the royal family, including Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, were behind the death of Khashoggi, a legal US resident. Khashoggi, a Washington Post columnist and critic of the Saudi government, was killed at a Saudi consulate in Turkey in October. His death fueled simmering discontent with the Saudis among many in Washington angry over the kingdom's human rights record and heavy civilian casualties in Yemen's civil war, where a Saudi-led coalition is fighting Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

Trump declares emergency

AGENCIES

US President Trump has declared a national emergency in a bid to bypass Congress and secure funding for his border wall with Mexico, a move that Democrats vowed to challenge as unconstitutional. Trump announced the controversial move from the Rose Garden yesterday and is expected to use the powers to appropriate around \$8 billion (£6 billion) in funds from the Department of Homeland Security, the Treasury and the Department of Defence. Trump said he will sign the final papers on the national emergency when he finishes the press conference. "We will then be sued," after signing the declaration, he said. "And we will possibly get a bad ruling. And then we'll end up in the Supreme Court." Trump has long floated the idea of declaring a national emergency, which would give him extra powers to unilaterally move around funds, as a way of circumventing Congress and ensuring he could deliver his campaign promise to build a Mexico border wall. However the prospect of a lengthy battle in America's courts - a legal challenge is all but inevitable - and vocal opposition from scores of Republican senators was thought to have convinced Trump not to go down that path. Trump will take the action "to ensure we stop the

national security and humanitarian crisis at the border," White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders said shortly before the Senate passed the spending bill on Thursday. Signing the spending bill would bring an end to a rolling, two-month battle over government funding. But by declaring an emergency, Trump opens a new confrontation - and creates some of the riskiest legal peril of his term, reported Reuters. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Trump's Democratic nemesis in Congress, earlier warned that declaring such an emergency would be a "gross abuse of the power of the presidency." New York state Attorney General Letitia James said yesterday she would challenge Trump's use of his national emergency powers in order to build a wall on the southern border, reported AFP. "Declaring a national emergency without legitimate cause could create a Constitutional crisis," James said in a statement. Republican Senator John Cornyn told reporters on Capitol Hill he had concerns about an emergency declaration. He said it "would not be a practical solution, because there would be a lawsuit filed immediately and the money would be presumably balled up." Democrats in a number of states, including California and New York, look set to launch legal challenges as soon as Trump makes his announcement.

BORDER WALL FUNDING ROW

Emergency declaration would help Trump bypass Congress to redirect fund for border wall The move likely to bring swift legal and legislative challenges



300 babies die every day because of war: charity

Afghanistan, Syria are among worst conflict zones

THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION, London

Starvation, disease and a lack of aid are killing 300 babies a day in warzones around the world, with the number of children caught up in conflicts nearing a 30-year high, Save the Children said yesterday. Afghanistan, Yemen, South Sudan, Central African Republic and Syria were among the worst conflict zones for children in 2017, the charity concluded from an analysis of UN data for the five years to the end of that year. In all, more than 500,000 babies died during the period from the knock-on effects of conflict - hunger, hospital attacks and reduced aid - according to the data, which excludes those killed in attacks. "From Yemen to Syria and South Sudan, children are bearing the horror of armed conflict," said Kevin Watkins, head of Save the Children, in a statement.

Yemen's almost four-year war has killed tens of thousands of people, caused the economy to collapse and brought millions of people to the brink of famine. Children there are at risk of malnutrition, diarrhoea, cholera, and diphtheria, said Save the Children. Five million children in Africa have died over the last 20 years because armed conflict deprived them of access to basic healthcare or clean water, the Lancet medical journal said in a report last year. Save the Children said a fifth of all children worldwide - about 420 million - lived in a conflict zone in 2017, 30 million more than the year before and the highest number since 1990. It said the UN data showed the number of "grave violations" against children - from sexual violence, armed recruitment and restricting aid - rose to a record 25,000 in 2017 from 10,000 in 2010.



Maduro reveals secret meetings with US envoy

25 nations pledge \$100m in humanitarian aid

AGENCIES

A month into Venezuela's high-stakes political crisis, President Nicolas Maduro revealed in an AP interview that his government held secret talks with the Trump administration and predicted he would survive an unprecedented global campaign to force his resignation. While harshly criticising President Donald Trump's confrontational stance toward his socialist government, Maduro said Thursday that he holds out hope of meeting the US president soon to resolve a crisis triggered by America's recognition of opponent Juan Guaido as Venezuela's rightful leader. Maduro said that during two hushed meetings in New York, his foreign minister invited the Washington-based special envoy for Venezuela, Elliott Abrams, to come to visit "privately, publicly or secretly."

VENEZUELA CRISIS



"If he wants to meet, just tell me when, where and how and I'll be there," Maduro said without providing more details. He said both New York meetings lasted several hours. A senior administration official in Washington who was not authorised to speak publicly said US officials were willing to meet with "former Venezuela officials, including Maduro himself, to discuss their exit plans." Venezuela is plunging deeper into a political chaos triggered by the US demand that Maduro step down a month into a second presidential term that the US and its allies in Latin America consider illegitimate. Meanwhile, 25 countries have pledged \$100 million in aid to Venezuela, US national security advisor John Bolton said Thursday, as the crisis-hit country's Supreme Court took aim at oil executives appointed by the opposition, reported AFP.



A Palestinian reacts during clashes with Israeli troops at a protest against Jewish settlements in the village of Oref, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN brief

Trump in good health despite obesity: doctor

President Donald Trump is technically obese and has put on weight since last year, but his official doctor declared him Thursday to be in "very good health." The presidential physician, Sean Conley, said Trump, 72, passed his medical exam last week with flying colors. "It is my determination that the president remains in very good health overall," he said. Trump, who has confounded health experts with his penchant for junk food, weighs 243 pounds (110 kg), the report said.

Spanish PM calls snap elections for April 28

Spain's socialist prime minister yesterday called early elections for April 28, the third in less than four years, after his draft budget was rejected in parliament over the Catalan secession crisis. Opinion polls suggest one outcome of the snap election could be a rightwing majority in parliament, including a newly-emerged far-right party. The campaign will focus on the hot-button issue of the secession crisis in Catalonia, with the right-wing furious at Sanchez's attempts to negotiate with the region's separatist executive, accusing him of yielding to their demands to stay in power.

BITS OF HISTORY (FEBRUARY 15)

1933: Giuseppe Zangara, an Italian-born anarchist, failed to assassinate US President Franklin D Roosevelt in Miami. 1965: Canada adopted the Red Maple Leaf as its flag. 1971: Britain adopted decimal currency - 100 new pence to the pound - from pounds, shillings and 240 pence to the pound.

US-CHINA TRADE ROW

Week of talks make progress: Xi Jinping

REUTERS, Beijing

Talks between China and the United States this week made important progress, President Xi Jinping told top US trade negotiators yesterday, adding that efforts would continue in Washington next week to resolve their bruising trade war. Xi met US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin after a full week of trade negotiations at senior and deputy levels in Beijing, and called for a deal both sides could accept, state media said. US duties on \$200 billion worth of imports from China are set to rise to 25 percent from 10 percent if no deal is reached by March 1 to address US demands that China curb forced technology transfers and better enforce intellectual property rights. After the conclusion of talks, which included a banquet on Thursday, Mnuchin said on Twitter that he and Lighthizer had held "productive meetings" with Xi's top economic adviser, Vice Premier Liu He. "The consultations between the two sides' teams achieved important step-by-step progress," Xi said, according to state television. "Next week, both sides will meet again in Washington. I hope you will continue efforts to advance reaching a mutually beneficial, win-win agreement," Xi said during a meeting at Beijing's Great Hall of the People.

Iran more destabilising than N Korea: Pompeo

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo underlined the need for different foreign policy approaches to Iran and North Korea in comments published Thursday, describing Tehran as more "destabilising" than Pyongyang. "We've made very clear that these situations are very different. We take each of them where we find them," he told US television station CBS in excerpts of a transcript released by the State Department. Washington set 12 tough conditions on talks with Iran, yet President Donald Trump made almost no stipulations on meeting North Korean leader Kim Jong Un last year and the White House has had follow-up contacts with the regime. "North Korea today has weapons, nuclear weapons, capable of reaching the United States of America," Pompeo said. "This is a threat that President Trump said we needed to take on now and take on

immediately. The president's chosen to meet with Chairman Kim." Trump and Kim are due to follow their landmark first summit in Singapore last June with a meeting in Hanoi from February 27 to 28. "North Korea behaves very differently. They're not destabilising Syria. They're not conducting enormous assassination campaigns," Pompeo said. "These countries' behaviours are different, therefore, the way America is approaching resolving this." The US administration has repeatedly accused North Korea in recent years of destabilising its East Asian neighbours with its nuclear arms race and missiles pointed toward Seoul. Meanwhile, 12 North Korean officials - including Kim Jong Un's de-facto chief of staff - were en-route to Vietnam yesterday ahead of the summit between Kim and Trump, South Korea's Yonhap news agency said.



Slovenia MP resigns for stealing sandwich

AFP, Ljubljana

A Slovenian lawmaker resigned yesterday for stealing a sandwich from a supermarket because he was annoyed about being ignored by staff. Dario Krajcic, a member of parliament for the Marjan Sarec List (LMS) party - the senior partner in the ruling coalition - said he walked off without paying because three supermarket employees had "treated (him) like air" and continued chatting. "I must have stood some three minutes by the counter," he told private POP TV. Krajcic insisted that he returned shortly afterwards to pay for the sandwich. But he apologised and resigned from parliament. The centre-left LMS party of Prime Minister Marjan Sarec is the senior member of a five-party minority government, voted in last September. Public support for the premier has received a boost recently from public sector wage hikes and the dismissal of two ministers accused of abuse of power and bullying. The head of LMS' parliamentary faction, Brane Golubovic, condemned Krajcic's actions as "unacceptable" and said the MP "has to bear the responsibility, in line with LMS' high ethical standards".