

West asks UN to blacklist JeM head

REUTERS, United Nations

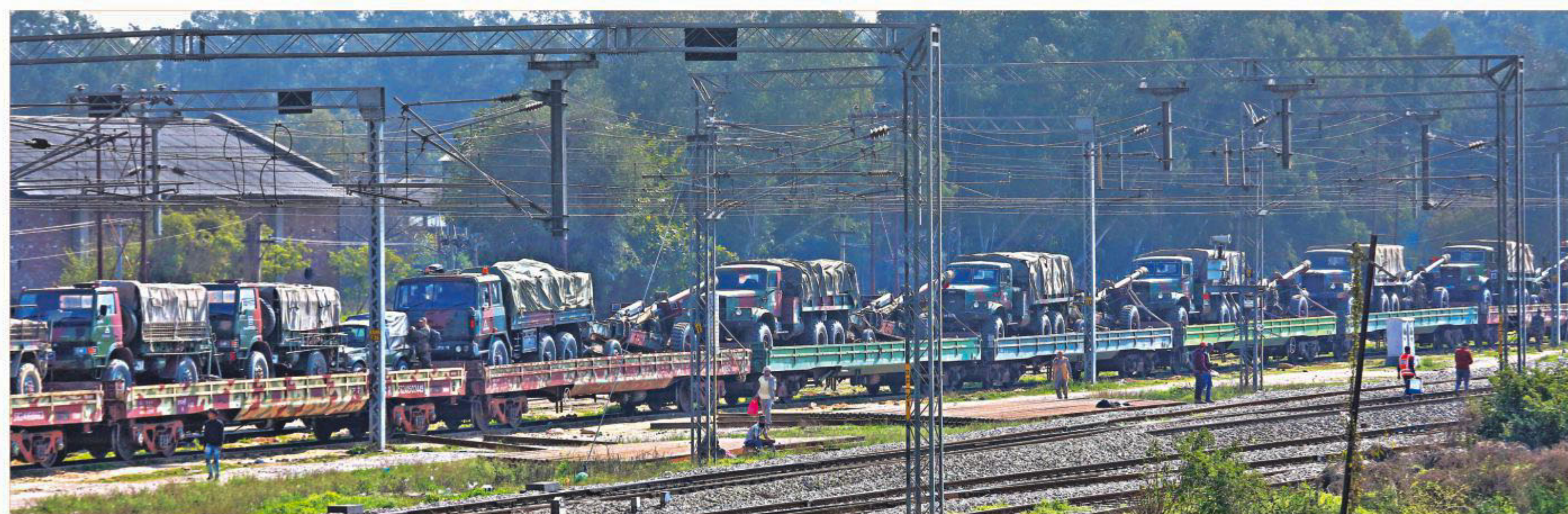
The United States, Britain and France proposed on Wednesday that the United Nations Security Council blacklist the head of Pakistan-based militant group Jaish-e-Mohammad, which said it attacked an Indian paramilitary convoy in disputed Kashmir killing forty.

However, the move is likely to be opposed by China, which previously prevented the Security Council's Islamic State and al Qaeda sanctions committee from sanctioning JeM leader Masood Azhar in 2016 and 2017.

China's UN mission did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the new proposal.

The Feb 14 attack, the most deadly in Kashmir during a 30-year-long insurgency, increased tensions between Pakistan and India with the nuclear-armed neighbors both saying they had shot down each other's fighter jets on Wednesday.

The United States, Britain and France have asked the 15-member Security Council sanctions committee to subject Azhar to an arms embargo, global travel ban and asset freeze. The



(From top, anti-clockwise) A train loaded with Indian army trucks and artillery guns is parked at a railway station on the outskirts of Jammu; children hold banners and Indian national flags after Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan said Pakistan will release an Indian Air Force pilot, in a street in Mumbai; and Pakistani civil society activists hold placards during a peace rally in Islamabad. All photos were taken yesterday.

Wreckage of Pak F-16 seen in PoK: India

NDTV ONLINE

Pakistani officers are seen looking at the remains of the Pakistani F-16 fighter jet shot down by the Indian Air Force yesterday, in an image that has been circulated on social media.

Sources in the Air Force (IAF) have confirmed that metal piece seen in the image is part of the F-16 wreckage.

Those seen in the photo are commanding officers of Pakistan's 7 Northern Light Infantry, said sources.

The plane was shot down in an aerial combat between Indian and Pakistani warplanes on Wednesday, Indian sources claimed, the first such confrontation in 48 years.

Pakistan said on Wednesday that it had shot down two Indian aircraft and taken a pilot into custody.



Indian Air Force officials show a section of an exploded AMRAAM missile, said to be fired by a Pakistan Air Force (PAF) F-16, during a joint press conference of forces in New Delhi.



India will stand like a rock

Says Modi; opposition slams BJP for 'counting seats'

AFP, New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday asked Indians to "stand as a wall" with anger boiling over Pakistan's capture of a pilot as a crisis escalates between the nuclear-armed rivals.

In his first remarks since India and Pakistan both claimed to have shot down each other's fighter planes near the disputed border of Kashmir, the prime minister urged his countrymen to unite "as the enemy seeks to destabilise India".

"In the face of their objective, every Indian should stand as a wall, as a rock," Modi said.

"The entire country is one today and standing with our soldiers."

However, Modi and his party, the BJP, were roasted by the opposition for their continued focus on the coming national elections that are due by May.

The PM had a video interaction with party workers yesterday that was billed by the BJP as the biggest ever. The opposition parties, which have postponed their election-related programmes following the escalation in hostilities with Pakistan, said the BJP was using the sacrifice of soldiers for its political interests.

The opposition pitch rose after senior BJP leader BS Yeddyurappa said India's air strike on the Jaish-e-Mohammad terror camp in Pakistan on Tuesday has created a wave in favour of PM Modi and will help the party win over 22 of Karnataka's 28 seats in coming elections.

Yeddyurappa said he was quoted out of context, but the Congress -- which had postponed its working committee meeting scheduled for today -- accused the BJP of "counting seats" when the nation is anxious to secure the release of the captured pilot.

Tension causes global travel chaos

Thousands of air travellers stranded as Pakistan closes air space

AFP, London

Thousands of air travellers worldwide were left stranded yesterday after Pakistan closed its airspace in response to escalating tensions with India.

Pakistan's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said it would keep airspace shut until 11.59pm local time (1859 GMT), disrupting major routes between Europe and South East Asia.

Thai Airways has cancelled nearly 30 flights, affecting 5,000 passengers.

"All THAI flights from Bangkok to Europe departing near midnight of 27 FEB through early 28 FEB and from Europe to Bangkok departing on 27 FEB have been cancelled due to Pakistan airspace closure," the airline wrote on its Twitter page.

The decision affected its services to London, Munich, Paris, Brussels, Milan, Vienna, Stockholm, Zurich, Copenhagen and Oslo, but the airline said at around 0530

GMT that it was resuming normal operations to Europe.

Singapore Airlines' was also forced to direct flights to Europe to re-fuel, while a flight to Frankfurt was cancelled.

Saudi Airlines also suspended all flights to Pakistan "until further notice". In Russia, two flights from Moscow to Vietnam and St. Petersburg to Thailand had to turn back to Russia while a Bangkok-bound flight had to land at Uzbekistan.

Air Canada suspended flights to Mumbai and New Delhi, while seven services from Istanbul to Pakistan were cancelled.

Thai Airways struggled to find new routes to Europe with Iran "rejecting" a request to travel over its airspace, according to a spokesperson for the carrier. But a few hours later China gave "permission to Thai Airways ... to bypass Pakistani airspace," according to Pratana Patanasiri, Thai Airways Vice President, allowing Thursday night's flights to Europe to resume.



Possible crime against humanity

Says UN report, calls for justice, identifies snipers, commanders behind killings

REUTERS, Geneva

United Nations investigators said on Thursday Israeli security forces may have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in killing 189 Palestinians and wounding more than 6,100 at weekly protests in Gaza last year.

The independent panel said it had confidential information about those it believes to be responsible for the killings, including snipers and commanders.

"The Israeli security forces killed and maimed Palestinian demonstrators who did not pose an imminent threat of death or serious injury to others when they were shot, nor were they directly participating in hostilities," it said in its report.

Report says Israel security forces should face trial
189 Palestinians killed, 6,100 wounded in 2018

ISRAELI CRACKDOWN ON GAZA PROTESTERS IN 2018



Israel rejected the report as a "theatre of the absurd".

Protests have been held at the frontier between Israel and the Gaza Strip since last year, calling for the easing of an Israeli blockade of the territory and recognition of the right of Palestinian refugees there to return to homes in Israel.

Israel has said its forces opened fire to protect the frontier from incursions and attacks by armed militants.

The latest report, covering the period from March 30-December 31 2018, to the UN Human Rights Council was based on hundreds of interviews with victims and witnesses, as well as medical records, video

and drone footage, and photographs.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet should share the findings with the International Criminal Court (ICC), it said. The Hague-based court opened a preliminary investigation into allegations of Israeli human rights abuses on Palestinian territory in 2015.

The panel, led by Argentine legal expert Santiago Canton, said individual members of the Israeli security forces killed and gravely injured civilians who were "neither directly participating in hostilities nor posing an imminent threat".

"Some of these violations may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity and must be immediately investigated by Israel," Canton said.

Thirty-five children, two journalists and three "clearly-marked" paramedics were among those killed by Israeli forces, in violation of international humanitarian law, it said.

Decision on Netanyahu indictments imminent

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's attorney general is expected to announce later yesterday a decision on whether he intends to indict Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on corruption charges, Israeli media reported.

The reports come with Netanyahu in the midst of a tough re-election campaign ahead of April 9 polls.

Under Israeli judicial procedures, Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit would announce whether he intends to indict Netanyahu pending a hearing, where the prime minister would be given an opportunity to defend himself before charges are filed.

Netanyahu denies all allegations against him.

Police have recommended Netanyahu's indictment in three different cases.

In one case, he is accused of pursuing regulatory benefits allegedly granted to telecommunications firm Bezeq in exchange for positive coverage from a related media company. Another involves Netanyahu allegedly seeking a secret deal with the publisher of Israel's top-selling newspaper Yediot Aharonot to ensure positive coverage in return for pushing forward a law that would have limited the circulation of a rival.

The third case involves suspicions the premier and his family received luxury gifts from wealthy individuals in exchange for financial or personal favours.

Social media fake news fans Indo-Pak tensions

REUTERS, Mumbai

With India and Pakistan standing on the brink of war this week, several false videos, pictures and messages circulated widely on social media, sparking anger and heightening tension in both countries.

The video of an injured pilot from a recent Indian air show and images from a 2005 earthquake have been taken out of context to attempt to mislead tens of millions on platforms like Twitter, Facebook and its messenger service, WhatsApp.

As claims and counter claims poured in from both sides, social media became a hotbed of unverified news, pictures and video clips, according to fact checkers.

Partik Sinha, co-founder of one such fact-checking website, Alt News, said it had received requests to verify news from journalists and people on social media.

"It's been crazy since Tuesday. There is so much out there that we know is fake, but we're not able to fact-check all of it," Sinha said.

A Facebook group that says it supports Amit Shah, the chief of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), posted images on Tuesday of the alleged destruction caused inside Pakistan by the Indian air strike.

Three photos posted on the group page showed debris from a destroyed building and bodies and have been shared hundreds of times. Alt News said the pictures were from a 2005 earthquake in Kashmir.

Similarly in Pakistan, a purported video of a second captured Indian pilot was being widely circulated. Fact-checking website Boom noted the clip was from an air show in the southern Indian city of Bengaluru, where two planes crashed on Feb 19.

"Everyone has a role to play in ensuring misinformation doesn't spread on the internet and we encourage people who use Twitter not to share information unless they can verify that it's true," a spokeswoman for Twitter said.

Libya rivals agree to hold polls: UN

AFP, Tripoli

The head of Libya's internationally recognised government and a military strongman who backs a rival administration in the country's east have met and agreed to hold elections, the United Nations said yesterday.

Unity government leader Fayez al-Sarraj met Khalifa Haftar on Wednesday in Abu Dhabi, where they agreed "on the need to end the transitional phase through general elections and on ways to preserve the stability of #Libya and unify its institutions," the UN's Libya mission UNSMIL tweeted.

The leaders had agreed to a Paris-brokered deal in May 2018 to hold a nationwide election by the end of the year.

'He lied' and 'no collusion'

AFP, Hanoi

US President Donald Trump sought again to discredit Michael Cohen yesterday after his former long-time lawyer's bombshell congressional testimony in which he called Trump a racist and a conman.

"He lied a lot," Trump told a press conference in Vietnam after his summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Trump insisted Cohen's testimony Wednesday had provided no evidence the Trump campaign had colluded with Russia in the 2016 US election and that this is what mattered most in the keenly awaited session before a House committee.

Cohen, who also worked as Trump's fixer, told lawmakers he had no direct knowledge of collusion but that he had suspicions.

Trump however insisted his former lawyer said no collusion had taken place.

"And I was a little impressed by that. He could have gone all-out. He went 95% instead of 100%. The fact is, there is no collusion," said Trump.

"He didn't lie about one thing. He said, no collusion with the Russian



hoax. And I said, I wonder why he didn't lie about that, too, like everything else," said Trump.

The president did not address any of Cohen's specific, damning allegations about his decade of working with Trump.

Cohen said for instance that Trump

directed him last year to lie about hush payments made to a porn actress to silence her claims of an affair with Trump.

He also said Trump knew in advance in mid-2016 that WikiLeaks would publish emails stolen from rival Hillary Clinton's campaign by the Russians.

And Cohen asserted that personal lawyers for Trump and his family reviewed and edited his written testimony to Congress in 2017 in which he lied about a Moscow real estate deal that was negotiated through the presidential election.

The president complained that the Cohen testimony took place during the summit with Kim.

"I think having a fake hearing like that and having it in the middle of this very important summit is really a terrible thing," Trump said.

Trump again insisted the probe into Russian collusion is a "hoax" and a "witch hunt."