

Military

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interfering in what the foreign ministry insisted was "entirely the internal affair of India".

"Seeking to interfere in that jurisdiction by invoking an alarmist vision of the region will never succeed," the ministry said in a statement.

"The government of India regrets the steps announced by Pakistan... and would urge that country to review them so that normal channels for diplomatic communications are preserved," the statement added.

Meanwhile, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his first comments on the issue, yesterday said that Kashmir region was stripped of its autonomy to free it from "terrorism and separatism" which was encouraged by Pakistan.

"Friends, I have full belief that we will be able to free Jammu and Kashmir from terrorism and separatism under this system," Modi said.

"I have full faith that the people of Jammu and Kashmir, after defeating separatism, will move forward with new hopes and aspirations."

The Indian leader said nuclear rival Pakistan used the special status "as a weapon against the country to inflame the passions of some people" against the Indian state.

The diplomatic clash came as a petition was filed with the Supreme Court by an activist challenging the curfew in Kashmir, which was imposed to suppress any unrest in response to the loss of autonomy.

Activist Tahseen Poonawala and lawyer M.L. Sharma asked the Supreme Court to lift the lockdown and release people who have been detained as part of the crackdown.

Pakistani Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai, who was shot in the head by the Taliban in 2012, on Thursday tweeted that she was "worried about the safety of the Kashmiri children and women, the most vulnerable to violence and the most likely to suffer losses in conflict".

"I believe we all can live in peace," she added, in comments that were supported and criticised by Twitter users from India and Pakistan.

University professors, business leaders and activists are among the 560 people rounded up by authorities and taken to makeshift detention centres -- some during midnight raids -- in the cities of Srinagar, Baramulla and Gurez, the Press Trust of India and the Indian Express reported.

ANI news agency also reported that the leader of the opposition in the upper house, Ghulam Nabi Azad from the Congress party, was stopped at Srinagar airport when he flew to the city and sent back.

Tens of thousands of Indian troops are enforcing the lockdown which includes no internet or phone services, and are allowing only limited movement on streets usually bustling with tourists flocking to the picturesque valley.

Experts warn that the valley is likely to erupt in anger at the government's shock unilateral move once the restrictions are lifted, which could come on the Muslim festival of Eid on Monday.

Late Wednesday India's aviation security agency advised airports across the country to step up security as "civil security has emerged as a soft target for terrorist attacks" on the back of the Kashmir move.

'Drug peddler'

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elite force challenged a group of drug peddlers around 4:00am in Jagua-Choupashar Pole area of the city.

At one point, the criminals opened fire, forcing the law enforcers to retaliate, he added.

Fakir sustained bullet injuries during the "gunfight". Later, Rab members rushed him to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead, the Rab official claimed.

The body was then sent to the medical college morgue for autopsy. Rab also claimed to have recovered a foreign pistol, two one-shooter guns, nine bullets, 725 yaba pills and Tk 2120 in cash from the spot.

The Daily Star, however, could not independently verify the law enforcers' claims.

Meanwhile in Teknaf upazila of Cox's Bazar, police recovered two bullet-hit bodies.

The dead are Kabir Ahmed, 40, and Rubi Akter, 25, hailing from the upazila's Pallanpara, were sibling and spouse of notorious Rohingya robber Abdul Hakim, said police.

Prodip Kumar Das, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station, said the duo might have been killed in a "gunfight" between Hakim Bahini and their opponents.

Police recovered the bodies around 10:00am receiving information from the locals, he added.

The bodies were sent to Cox's Bazar General Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Our Barishal and Cox's Bazar correspondents contributed to this report



Long queues of vehicles near Shimulia Ghat in Munshiganj. Vehicles continued to face delay at the ghat where ferry operations resumed yesterday after remaining suspended for nearly 17 hours due to strong currents of the Padma.

PHOTO: STAR

Heavy rains to cause flash floods again

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will contribute to rise water level in different rivers," said Arifuzzaman Bhuyan, executive engineer of Bangladesh Water Development Board and duty officer of FFWC.

It likely rains heavily in the country's northeastern region and its adjacent Meghalaya and Tripura regions of India. It may contribute to increase water level in northern rivers. As a result, a short-term flood may occur in some northeastern districts, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Besides, water level of the Brahmaputra and the Jamuna rivers may cross danger level by the end of this month. Following this, a short-term flood may happen in some northern districts and northeastern district Jamalpur by the end of this month, said the FFWC forecast report.

Furthermore, water of the Teesta river may rise rapidly in the middle of this month due to heavy rainfall in the country's northern region and its adjacent northern region of West Bengal in India.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) yesterday advised the maritime ports of Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Mongla and Payra to hoist danger signal No 3 until further notice due to rough weather caused by the depression in the Northwest Bay.

Besides, all the fishing boats and trawlers over the North Bay have been asked to stay close to the coast, according to the BMD's forecast.

In its daily weather forecast, the BMD said light to moderate rain or

thunder showers accompanied by temporary gusty and squally wind is likely to occur at many places in Khulna, Barishal, Chattogram and Dhaka divisions and at a few places in Rajshahi, Rangpur, Mymensingh and Sylhet divisions with moderately heavy to heavy falls at places over the country today.

Yesterday's maximum rainfall in Dhaka was recorded 102mm, which was heavy to very heavy rainfall, according to weather experts.

Losing links to the roots

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speaking Telegu, Jangli (a form of Bangla), Sadri and Oriya, were brought from the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Orissa, respectively.

The cultural affairs ministry on March 23 published what it called a list of Bangladesh's small tribal communities.

The Tantis were not recognised as a community on that list.

The United Nations, estimating that an indigenous language disappears every 2 weeks, has dedicated this year's International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples on August 9 to indigenous peoples' languages and marked 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages.

Yet, the seniors of the tea worker

communities of Sylhet are struggling to keep their native language and tradition alive.

Septuagenarian Veronika Kerketa, a retired tea worker of Bormachhara tea garden in Srimangal upazila of Moulvibazar, still remembers her mother tongue, Kharia.

"A couple of us spoke this language, but many had died. Only two or three people now interact in Kharia," she said, claiming Sadri was the most prevalent tongue in the tea gardens.

Pius Nanuar, 35, of the Kharia community in the area, said, he does not speak or understand Kharia.

"The government published books in Sadri language for pre-primary level. It is not my mother language, but it is easy to read and used widely

in our area," he said.

Sheer poverty also discourages the present generation of tea workers from learning their native languages.

"The British are gone, but our plight has not changed much. With an income of Tk 102 a day, we are on the verge of losing our language and cultural identity," said Gita Rani Kanu, president of Bangladesh Tea Workers Women Forum. She belongs to the Kanu community, which speaks Deshwali.

"The government recognised 50 communities without mentioning us. Even some indigenous leaders do not acknowledge us," she said.

AFM Zakaria, acting head of anthropology at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, expressed

Experts fear conflicts in the region

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BBC has reported that Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has vowed to fight India's decision to revoke Indian-administered Kashmir's autonomy, including at the UN Security Council.

"I am afraid that [India] will now carry out ethnic cleansing in Kashmir," Khan told Pakistan parliament on Tuesday, adding that the removal of the special status would allow India to change the demographic make-up of the Muslim-majority state.

China termed India's decision as unacceptable. Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said India continued to hurt Chinese sovereignty by unilaterally changing domestic law, and that India's claim over Ladakh, as part of Kashmir, involved Chinese land.

Experts say India has so far failed to win over the Kashmiris and address their concerns. Now, revoking the state's autonomy without any consultation with Kashmiri lawmakers, arrest of its leaders and a new clampdown by suspending

telephone and internet services have aggravated the situation.

"The question at this stage is whether the latest measure by India will help establish peace and stability in Kashmir. I don't think so," said Prof Imtiaz Ahmed of international relations at Dhaka University.

The way of revoking autonomy of Jammu and Kashmir was undemocratic as the lawmakers of the state were not consulted and there was no referendum, he said.

"Things might have been different if there was a referendum" Imtiaz Ahmed told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

Many Indians, including politicians, are also opposing the Indian decision on Kashmir considering that the Indian culture of unity in diversity is no more there, he said.

Munshi Faiz Ahmad, chairman of Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, said the distance between Delhi and Kashmiris that has been there for long is now further widening -- something that may create

instability within India as well as in the Indian sub-continent anew.

"Thousands more troops have been deployed. If repression against the Kashmiris goes on, it might flare up new conflicts," Faiz Ahmad told The Daily Star.

The conflict, if escalated, may spread beyond India. The Muslim sympathisers in the sub-continent may resort to violence, he added.

Former ambassador Munshi Faiz said it was important to observe how the BJP government, which has large support of the Hindus, handles the situation prevailing in Kashmir now.

Security analyst Brig Gen (ret'd) Shakhawat Hossain said though India claims Kashmir to be an internal issue, it actually is not. Pakistan fought three wars against India over Kashmir. China too fought a war in 1962 against India over border conflict in the Himalayan region.

He termed dangerous the Indian Union Home Minister Amit Shah's comment on Tuesday in the Lok Sabha that Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and

Aksai Chin were part of the state and were integral part of India.

He also said the government leaders were ready to sacrifice their lives for the state.

"There is no other region in the world where three neighbours have nuclear power. If the conflict escalates, none in the region would be spared," he warned.

With the BJP in power for two consecutive terms, there is a trend of rise in Hindu nationalism in India -- a situation that may encourage militant elements among the Muslims, Shakhawat Hossain said.

It's no wonder if the militants having international links become active on Kashmir issue, he added.

"BJP government must keep the aspects in mind," the security expert said.

All the three experts opined that Kashmir issue will not have any impact on the diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and India.

Pentagon chief makes rare visit to Mongolia

AFP, Ulaanbaatar

US Defense Secretary Mark Esper made a rare visit to Mongolia yesterday -- the latest leg of an Asian tour aimed at shoring up partnerships to counter China's growing influence in the region.

Esper has visited several regional US allies including Japan and Australia in his maiden tour abroad following his confirmation as Pentagon chief last month.

His diplomatic offensive comes as Washington seeks to reassure its traditional friends of its support in the face of China's more assertive foreign policy and military posture.

Including Mongolia in his trip is partly a reflection of the landlocked country's geo-strategic importance -- sandwiched between China and Russia.

"It is my deep privilege to be here, to be with you and to have the opportunity to look at different ways we can further strengthen the ties between our two countries," he said.

Esper was invited to name a horse in a traditional gesture of respect for visiting state guests.

He chose the name Marshall, after the general and diplomat who drafted the US-funded plan for the reconstruction of Europe after World War II.

Scientists

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of an EU-funded project, by scientists at the Free University of Brussels and University of Cambridge.

Prof Bram Vanderborgh, from the Free University of Brussels (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), who is leading the project, told The Guardian: "Over the past few years, we have already taken the first steps in creating self-healing materials for robots.

"With this research we want to continue and, above all, ensure that robots that are used in our working environment are safer, but also more sustainable.

"Due to the self-repair mechanism of this new kind of robots, complex, costly repairs may be a thing of the past."

The scientific advance would be welcome in the agriculture industry that currently utilises grabbers for fruit.

This shift is part of a wider future trend in which lower skilled jobs in the future are likely to be replaced by robots.

A recent employment outlook from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a coalition consisting of 36 countries across the world, said that within the next two decades half of all jobs will be substantially transformed by technology.

In some cases, that will mean workers losing their jobs outright -- the OECD estimates 14 percent of jobs will be completely automated in the next two decades -- while others, 32 percent of jobs, will be vastly different from what they look like now.

Pranab

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Two others received the award posthumously -- iconic singer Bhupen Hazarika and Nanaji Deshmukh, one of the founding members of Bharatiya Jan Sangh, which later evolved into the BJP.

Mukerjee's term as president of India, a post enabled by the Congress, ended in 2017.

But the leader -- who dubbed himself Citizen Mukherjee after stepping down -- had made headlines, most notably last year with his controversial decision to attend an event of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the ideological mentor of the BJP.

The 83-year-old had served as senior ministers in the Congress governments headed by Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh.

His proximity to the Gandhis and his ability to get opposition parties to the negotiating table during tricky impasses, made him one of the most respected political leaders across party lines.

Many considered him the sharpest mind in Manmohan Singh's cabinet, with a deep understanding of Indian politics, economic policies and strategic issues.

As a president, he had been a model of constitutional propriety, but still managed to speak his mind on contentious and even divisive issues.

After coming to office, Narendra Modi had more than once acknowledged him as a mentor. The two had shared a cordial relation -- one that was reflected in their warm praise of each other when Mukherjee stepped down from the nation's highest office.

In his tweet congratulating Mukherjee after the Bharat Ratna awardee -- recommended by his government -- was announced, PM Modi posted: "Pranab Da is an outstanding statesman of our times. He has served the nation selflessly and tirelessly for decades, leaving a strong imprint on the nation's growth trajectory. His wisdom and intellect have few parallels. Delighted that he has been conferred the Bharat Ratna".