

NEWS IN
briefGunmen kill 4 Iraqi
soldiers at checkpoint

REUTERS, Falluja

Unidentified gunmen shot dead four Iraqi soldiers and wounded seven more at a military checkpoint in Anbar province yesterday, two security sources said. The attack occurred near Garma, a town 50 km (30 miles) northwest of Baghdad, in the early hours of yesterday morning. In a separate incident early in the day, three policemen were shot and wounded by unnamed gunmen at a security checkpoint in Jalawla, Diyala province, northeast of the capital. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for either attack.

US military aircraft
flies over Taiwan Strait

AFP, Taipei

A US military plane flew over the Taiwan Strait yesterday, the island's government said, just days after one of its navy ships sailed through the waters and the latest arms sale between Washington and Taipei. Taiwan's defence ministry said in a statement that the transport aircraft flew south along the "median line" of the narrow strait, a traditionally respected maritime line dividing self-ruled Taiwan and mainland China, in a move likely to provoke Beijing. "Nothing unusual" occurred, the statement added.

Malaysia seeks origin
of tons of plastic waste

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia wants to return almost 200 shipping containers believed to contain plastic waste, officials said yesterday, but first they need to work out where they came from. Southeast Asia has been flooded with waste plastic from more developed nations such as the US, Australia and Britain since last year when China -- which boasted a massive recycling industry -- ordered a halt to imports.



Troops are seen by a row of over a dozen army jeeps at the Shek Kong military base of People's Liberation Army (PLA) in New Territories, Hong Kong, China yesterday. China sends fresh troops to Hong Kong as part of a "routine" garrison rotation, as the financial hub braced for a new round of violent protests after police refused permission for a mass rally at the weekend.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Pak army controls
policies under PM

Says US Congressional report

PTI, Washington

During Imran Khan's tenure as prime minister, the Pakistani military has retained the dominant influence over foreign and security policies of the country, according to a US Congressional report.

The report prepared for US lawmakers by the bipartisan Congressional Research Service (CRS) said Khan had no governance experience prior to winning his current office and analysts contend that Pakistan's security services manipulated domestic politics during elections with a motive of removing Nawaz Sharif.

Khan's "Naya Pakistan" vision -- which appeared to animate many younger, urban, middle-class voters -- emphasizes anti-corruption and creation of a "welfare state" that provides better education and health care, but his effort has foundered due to the country's acute financial crisis, and a need for new foreign borrowing and government austerity, the report said.

"Most analysts see Pakistan's military establishment continuing to retain dominant influence over foreign and security policies," it said.

The CRS is an independent research wing of the US Congress, which prepares periodic reports on issues of interest for lawmakers. Its report is meant for US lawmakers to make informed decision and not considered as an official report of the US Congress.

Partake in Kashmir Hour

Pak PM calls for nationwide demonstrations today to protest Delhi's actions; India reacts with anger

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan yesterday called on the country to join mass demonstrations to protest Delhi's actions in Indian-administered-Kashmir as tensions between the nuclear-armed rivals continued to boil.

"I want all Pakistanis to come out tomorrow 12 noon-12.30 pm to show solidarity with the Kashmiri people," Khan wrote on Twitter, adding: "We must send a strong message to Kashmiris that our nation stands resolutely behind them."

The call to join protests today repeated earlier demands from Khan for Pakistanis to begin holding weekly nationwide rallies until the prime minister departs for the United Nations General Assembly next month, where he vowed to act as an ambassador for all Kashmiris.

Tensions have been soaring between Islamabad and Delhi for weeks in the wake of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's move to strip India's portion of Kashmir of its autonomy and bring it under direct

rule.

Kashmir has been divided between the two countries since independence, and has been the spark for two major wars and countless clashes between the arch-rivals.

In February, the neighbouring countries again came close to all-out conflict, after a militant attack in Indian-held Kashmir was claimed by a group based in Pakistan, igniting tit-for-tat air strikes.

Khan's renewed calls for protests came as the Pakistani military announced earlier yesterday the testing of a surface-to-surface ballistic missile, with the army's spokesman saying the weapon was "capable of delivering multiple types of warheads".

India reacted angrily to Khan's call for nationwide action.

"This is intended to project an alarmist situation which is far from ground realities," foreign ministry spokesman Raveesh Kumar told a regular press briefing.

In recent weeks, both countries have repeatedly accused each other of violating ceasefires and seeking to provoke conflict in what is one of the world's most dangerous nuclear flashpoints.



No elevator to success

Says Modi while launching 'Fit India Movement'

NDTV ONLINE

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, launching the "Fit India Movement" yesterday, encouraged the nation to make fitness a part of the daily routine, saying: "There is no elevator to success, you have to take the stairs."

And to take the stairs, you have to be fit, PM Modi said, addressing a large gathering of ministers, schoolchildren, celebrities and others in Delhi's Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium.

"Whether it is the boardroom or Bollywood, whoever is fit, the sky is the limit. If the body is fit, the mind is a hit," he said.

Seen to be a huge fitness enthusiast, PM Modi urged people to take the pledge for a fitter India and embrace the Fit India Movement like the "Swachh Bharat" campaign.

"We should make fitness our mantra for life," he said, commenting that while many spoke about dieting and fitness, they did not adhere to what they preached at the dinner table. He also felt that technology had contributed to a sedentary lifestyle.

"A few decades back, a normal person would walk 8-10 km in a day, do cycling or run. But with technology, physical activity has reduced. We walk less now and the same technology tells us that we are not walking enough," he said, drawing chuckles from the audience.

The Prime Minister, who is known to maintain a Yoga routine, urged people to make lifestyle changes.

"Earlier we heard of people getting heart attacks in the 60s but now you hear men in their 30s and 40s suffering heart attacks. Lifestyle diseases and disorders are on the rise. Small changes in our lifestyle can make all the difference."

The 'Fit India Movement' marks the 'National Sports Day' and aims at encouraging people to inculcate physical activity and sports in their everyday lives.

A committee comprising government officials, members of Indian Olympic Association (IOA), national sports federations, private bodies and fitness promoters has been formed to advise the government on the campaign.



A flood-affected resident receives help following heavy rains in Omachi, Saga prefecture yesterday. Two people were confirmed dead as heavy rains pounded southwest Japan, prompting flood and landslide warnings and orders for 870,000 people to seek safety.

PHOTO: AFP

GRAFT SCANDAL

S Korea's SC
orders review
of Park's case

AFP, Seoul

South Korea's top court yesterday ordered new trials for former president Park Geun-hye and Samsung heir Lee Jae-yong over the corruption scandal that brought her down, in a blow to the world's biggest smartphone and memory chip maker.

Park is serving a 25-year jail term after being convicted last year on bribery and abuse of power charges.

But Lee, whose sprawling conglomerate is vital to the health of the world's 11th-largest economy, had many of his convictions quashed on appeal in February 2018 and was released after being given a suspended sentence.

Their trials highlighted shady links between big business and politics in South Korea, with Park and



her close friend Choi Soon-sil accused of taking bribes from corporate bigwigs in exchange for preferential treatment.

South Korea's Supreme Court yesterday sent all three of their cases back for new proceedings, saying that errors had been made in the judgements.

After a 10-month trial -- in which she boycotted most of the proceedings in protest at being held in custody -- Park was convicted in April last year of receiving or demanding more than \$20 million from conglomerates, sharing secret state documents, "blacklisting" artists critical of her policies, and firing officials who resisted her abuses of power.

CRITICISM OF MILITARY

Myanmar filmmaker
jailed for one year

AFP, Yangon

A Myanmar filmmaker was sentenced to a year in prison yesterday for criticising the military, as free expression advocates warned of "grave threats" to those who challenge the powerful armed forces.

Min Htin Ko Ko Gyi, an activist and founder of human rights film festivals, was detained in April following a Facebook post in which he slammed the 2008 military-drafted constitution.

The charter is deeply unpopular in Myanmar as it gifts the armed services three-quarters of parliamentary seats and control of three ministries despite an ostensible transition to civilian rule.

He was sentenced under a law that criminalises incitement by publishing statements causing "fear or alarm" to the public.

"I wasn't surprised because I expected what was coming," Min Htin Ko Ko Gyi told reporters as he was led from the Insein courthouse in Yangon.

The ruling will take into account time served since his arrest.

The free expression group Article 19 said the case was further evidence of the "grave threats" faced by those who criticise the Myanmar military.

US-Taliban deal 'close'

Claim insurgents; Trump says US to keep 8,600 troops in Afghanistan after deal

AFP, Kabul

The US and the Taliban are "close" to a deal that would see the Pentagon slash troop numbers in Afghanistan, the insurgents said Wednesday, although the US military insisted that the country must not become a sanctuary for extremists.

The foes have been meeting in Doha to put the final touches on a historic deal that would see the Taliban make various security guarantees in return for a sharp reduction in the 13,000 or so US troops based in Afghanistan.

"We are close to an agreement. We hope to bring good news for our Muslim and freedom seeking nation soon," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid tweeted.

In Washington, General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and America's most senior uniformed officer, sounded a note of caution, telling reporters he was not yet using the word "withdrawal" to describe the deal.

"I'm using 'we're going to make sure that Afghanistan is not a sanctuary, and we're going to try to have an effort to bring peace

and stability to Afghanistan," he said.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper, standing next to Dunford, also said a deal with the Taliban must guarantee that Afghanistan "is no longer a safe haven for terrorists to attack the United States."

US troops were first sent to Afghanistan after the September 11, 2001 terror attacks on US soil carried out by Al-Qaeda, which was sheltered by the former Taliban regime. Washington now wants to end its military involvement and has been talking to the Taliban since at least 2018.

The agreement will centre on the US withdrawing troops in exchange for a Taliban guarantee that Afghanistan will not be used as a jihadist safe haven, talks with the Afghan government, and an eventual ceasefire.

Any agreement is going to be "conditions-based," Dunford said, adding that it was premature to talk about how a US counter-terrorism force in Afghanistan might look.

President Donald Trump yesterday said that US troop levels in Afghanistan will drop to 8,600 if a peace deal is reached with the Taliban and that a permanent presence will remain.

Japan dishonest
over wartime past

Says S Korean president

AP, Seoul

South Korean President Moon Jae-in yesterday berated Japan for carrying out its plan to downgrade South Korea's trade status and reiterated that Tokyo was weaponizing trade to retaliate over political rows stemming from the countries' wartime history.

Moon said in a Cabinet meeting that Japan is being dishonest by insisting that its trade curbs weren't retaliation over historical issues, including South Korean court rulings that called for Japanese companies to offer reparations to aging South Korean plaintiffs for forced labor during World War II.

He said Japan should look "squarely at the past" and that its current actions were aggravating the pain and anger of South Koreans who suffered under Japan's brutal colonial rule of Korea from 1910 to 1945.

"Japan has yet to even state an honest reason for its economic retaliation... No matter what excuse it provides as justification, it is clear that the Japanese government has linked historical issues to economic matters," Moon said.

Later yesterday, the countries' diplomats are expected to hold working-level meetings in Seoul to discuss the trade row and security issues related to North Korea.