

CHARGES OF HIGH TREASON

Sr aide to Suu Kyi jailed for 20 yrs

REUTERS

Win Htein, a senior aide to Myanmar's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi, was sentenced to 20 years in prison yesterday on charges of high treason, media and one of his family members said.

Win Htein, 79, is a stalwart supporter of Suu Kyi and a long time political prisoner during decades campaigning to end army rule.

He was arrested in the aftermath of a February 1 coup that has plunged Myanmar into chaos and that ended a decade of tentative democratic rule.

Win Htein's daughter, Chit Suu Win Htein, said in a message to Reuters: "So this is as we expected. It's not a surprise but it's a sad and outrageous thing to hear about the ridiculous sentencing. Perpetrators of this injustice will be held accountable for this ... Please hold on people! We will win!"

Suu Kyi, who is also on trial, is charged with a litany of offences, including breaking coronavirus protocols, illegally possessing two-way radios, accepting bribes of cash and gold, incitement to cause public alarm and violating the Official Secrets Act. In her first court testimony on Tuesday she denied a charge of incitement in connection with her party publishing a letter in February calling on international organisations not to cooperate with the ruling military junta.

Myanmar's state media has not reported developments in Suu Kyi's multiple legal cases, and one of the only sources of public information on her trial - her lawyer, Khin Maung Zaw - received a gagging order from the military authorities earlier this month.

That was after Myanmar's former president Win Myint said during his court testimony that the military had tried to force him to relinquish power hours before the coup.



Relatives hold a banner during a demonstration outside Sri Lanka's attorney general's office in Colombo yesterday, demanding action after authorities dropped charges against former navy chief Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda for the abduction and murder of 11 young men between 2008 and 2009.

PHOTO: AFP

Child among 13 killed by Yemen rebel missile

AFP, Dubai

A child was among 13 people killed when a missile fired by Yemeni rebels struck a tribal leader's home south of the strategic city of Marib, military and medical sources said yesterday.

"A Houthi ballistic missile hit the house of Sheikh Abdul Latif al-Qibli in Al-Jawba on Thursday evening during a meeting with tribal leaders fighting on the government's side," a government military official said.

"Thirteen people, including a child, were killed," he said. The death toll was confirmed by a medical source in the area.

Marib, capital of the oil-rich province of the same name, is the internationally recognised government's last bastion in northern Yemen.

The Iran-backed Huthis began a major push to seize the city in February and, after a lull, they have renewed their offensive in recent weeks.

They claimed this week to have reached the vicinity of Marib city and to have nearly surrounded it.

As well as the child, Thursday evening's missile strike also killed four tribal leaders, said the military official.

Yemen's Information Minister Moammar al-Eryani said on Twitter that at least 12 people were killed, including two sons of Qibli, whose fate was unknown.

The Houthi "militia continues to systematically and deliberately bombard villages and homes... in order to inflict max casualties among civilians" forcing hundreds of families and displaced to flee, he wrote.

The Saudi-led coalition backing Yemen's government has been conducting a fierce air campaign since October 11 to prevent the rebels from reaching Marib city.

Since then, around 2,000 Houthi fighters have been killed in Al-Jawba about 50 kilometres (30 miles) south of Marib and two other districts, according to the coalition.

Banned Islamist group on the move again in Pakistan

Thousands of TLP members continue their journey towards Islamabad; rangers draw 'red line' near Wazirabad

DAWN ONLINE

The proscribed Islamist group Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) resumed its march from Gujranwala yesterday, with thousands of activists travelling in cars, buses and on foot continuing their journey towards Islamabad.

Thousands of members of the banned group had been gathered since last Friday on a highway, with a series of demands including the release of their imprisoned leader.

Participants of the protest march spent the night near the General Bus Stand on the Grand Trunk Road and resumed their rally yesterday morning, despite Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed's Thursday night warning to the TLP to call off its march or face "consequences".

The rally, which comprises around 5,000 participants, is heading towards Wazirabad via Aziz Cross and made a stop for Friday prayers.



A senior official earlier told Dawn that the next TLP-police encounter was expected at two major security points that had been established at Chenab and Jhelum rivers, the only route for the march to reach Islamabad.

This time, he said, the Rangers would lead the command, while the Punjab Police would assist them as per the standard guidelines issued since the government deployed Rangers in the province under a notification

issued on Wednesday.

The security personnel also have armoured vehicles with them and are equipped with riot gear, according to police sources.

About 500 metres from the Chenab toll plaza, the Punjab Rangers marked a "red line", and put up a notice nearby warning the protesters not to breach the line or face consequences.

"Attention: Beyond this line, the responsibility for law and order lies with Pakistan Rangers (Punjab), who have been given the authority to open fire at the miscreants. All the people are strictly warned to return to their homes," the banner installed by the paramilitary force reads.

In Rawalpindi, the authorities have blocked the entry and exit points to the city. A heavy contingent of Frontier Constabulary, Elite Force and Rangers have been deployed at Faizabad Interchange to deal with any untoward situation.

India deploys US weapons to fortify border with China

NDTV ONLINE

India has deployed recently acquired US-made weaponry along its border with China, part of a new offensive force to bolster its capabilities as the countries remain deadlocked over territory.

The buildup in India's northeast is centered on the Tawang Plateau adjoining Bhutan and Tibet, a piece of land claimed by China but controlled by India.

It holds historical political and military significance: In 1959, the Dalai Lama fled to India across nearby mountain passes to escape a Chinese military operation. Three years later, both sides fought a war in the area.

Now US-manufactured Chinook helicopters, ultra-light towed howitzers and rifles as well as domestically made supersonic cruise missiles and a new-age surveillance system will back Indian troops in areas bordering eastern Tibet. The weapons have all been acquired in the past few years as defense ties between the US and India have strengthened due to rising concerns about Chinese assertiveness.

Indian military personnel escorted a

group of reporters through the region last week to highlight the country's new offensive capabilities. Eastern Army Commander Lieutenant General Manoj Pandey said that boots, armour, artillery and air support were being combined to make the force "agile, lean and mean so that we can employ faster."

"The Mountain Strike Corps is fully operationalized," he said. "All units including combat and combat support units are fully raised and equipped."

India has moved to bolster its defenses along the border with China after the worst fighting in decades last year led to the deaths of at least 20 Indian army personnel and four Chinese soldiers. While the two sides have engaged in talks to disengage, they have yet to agree on pulling back from a key flashpoint in another border area near Kashmir.

India's deployments show a frustration with the lack of progress on talks with China, said Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, director of the Centre for Security, Strategy and Technology at the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi.

TAWANG PLATEAU

RESTIVE MUSLIM REGION

Philippines postpones self-rule vote

AFP, Manila

The Philippine government said yesterday it will postpone elections key to ending decades of sectarian bloodshed in a troubled Muslim region, with the pandemic and a stalling peace process blamed for the delay.

The vote was a key provision in a 2014 peace agreement aimed at ending a conflict estimated to have claimed 150,000 lives and was due to take place next May in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

But former rebels from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) group appointed to lead a transitional government have said they needed more time before elections to a local legislature can go ahead and the vote will instead be held in 2025.

"President Rodrigo Roa Duterte signed... (the bill) yesterday resetting the elections in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao to 2025," his spokesman Harry Roque told reporters.

The law grants Duterte the authority to appoint members of the 80-member transition authority whose terms would end with the 2025 election, Roque said.

Former MILF rebels have warned that the failure of the peace process would likely draw disillusioned Muslim youths in the region towards the more hardline Islamists. But restrictions imposed because of the transitional government's inability to draw up an election code had left them with little choice but to delay the poll, an analyst said.



Newlyweds parade outside Anitkabir, the mausoleum of modern Turkey's founder Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, during ceremonies marking the 98th Anniversary of the Republic in Ankara yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

'Just give us our money'

Taliban push to unlock Afghan billions abroad as the drought-stricken nation faces cash crunch, mass starvation

REUTERS, Frankfurt

Afghanistan's Taliban government is pressing for the release of billions of dollars of central bank reserves as the drought-stricken nation faces a cash crunch, mass starvation and a new migration crisis.

Afghanistan parked billions of dollars in assets overseas with the US Federal Reserve and other central banks in Europe, but that money has been frozen since the Islamist Taliban ousted the Western-backed government in August.

A spokesman for the finance ministry said the government would respect human rights, including the education of women, as he sought fresh funds on top of humanitarian

aid that he said offered only "small relief".

Under Taliban rule from 1996-2001, women were largely shut out of paid employment and education and normally had to cover their faces and be accompanied by a male relative when they left home.

"The money belongs to the Afghan nation. Just give us our own money," ministry spokesman Ahmad Wali Haqmal told Reuters. "Freezing this money is unethical and is against all international laws and values."

One top central bank official called on European countries including Germany to release their share of the reserves to avoid an economic collapse that could trigger mass migration towards Europe.

"The situation is desperate and the amount of cash is dwindling," Shah Mehrabi, a board member of the Afghan Central Bank, told Reuters. "There is enough right now ... to keep Afghanistan going until the end of the year."

"Europe is going to be affected most severely, if Afghanistan does not get access to this money," said Mehrabi.

"You will have a double whammy of not being able to find bread and not being able to afford it. People will be desperate. They are going to go to Europe," he said.

The call for assistance comes as Afghanistan faces a collapse of its fragile economy.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Local Government Engineering Department. Request for Expression of Interest (EOI) for Individual GALS Expatriate Consultant (International). Includes details of the project, location, and application process.