

US, Australia, Japan vow to work together against China

AFP, Honolulu

The defense ministers of the United States, Australia and Japan agreed Saturday to boost military cooperation in the face of China's growing ambitions "to shape the world around it".

Washington is pressing a diplomatic offensive to counter Chinese influence across the Asia-Pacific.

"We are deeply concerned by China's increasingly aggressive and bullying behavior in the Taiwan Strait, and elsewhere in the region," US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said as he welcomed his counterparts from Australia and Japan to the US military headquarters for the Pacific region in Hawaii.

"Our interest lies in the upholding of the global rules-based order. But we see that order under pressure in the Indo-Pacific as well, as China is seeking to shape the world around it in a way that we've not seen before," said Richard Marles, the Australian defense minister.

On Thursday, Washington announced an \$810 million aid package for Pacific Island nations where the US plans to intensify its diplomatic presence.

Vice President Kamala Harris traveled last week to Japan and South Korea and said the US would act without fear or hesitation throughout Asia.

Austin also held a bilateral meeting with his Australian counterpart, focusing on a 2021 agreement between the United States, Australia and Britain that would provide nuclear-powered submarines to Canberra.



People pray during a vigil outside the Kanjuruhan stadium after a riot and stampede following a soccer match killed at least 125 people, in Malang, East Java province, Indonesia, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
Lula leads as Brazil votes

REUTERS, Brasilia

Brazilians cast their votes yesterday in the first round of their country's most polarized election in decades, with leftist Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva expected to beat right-wing incumbent Jair Bolsonaro.

Most polls have shown Lula with a solid lead for months, but Bolsonaro has signaled he may refuse to accept defeat, stoking fears of institutional crisis or post-election violence.

Most opinion surveys favor Lula, who was president from 2003 to 2010, by 10-15 percentage points. If he wins more than 50% of valid votes, which several pollsters show

within reach, that would clinch an outright victory, foregoing a second round vote.

Lula was jailed during the last election, serving a conviction for graft that was later overturned by the Supreme Court.

Bolsonaro voted in Rio, and said he expected to win the election in first round, despite his poor showing in polls.

A winner could be announced within hours after polling stations close at 5:00 pm Brasilia time (2000 GMT). If no candidate wins more than half of the votes, excluding blank and spoiled ballots, the top two finishers go to an Oct. 30 run-off, prolonging the tense campaign season.



Bolsonaro has threatened to contest the result of the vote, after making baseless allegations of fraud, accusing electoral authorities of plotting against him and suggesting the military should conduct a parallel tally, which they declined to do.

Brazilians were also voting yesterday for all 513 members of the lower chamber of Congress, a third of the 81 members of the Senate and state governors and legislatures.

Though Lula leads the presidential race, the conservative coalition backing Bolsonaro is expected to hold a majority in both chambers of Congress. That could present challenges for the leftist to govern a country with rising hunger, high unemployment and an uneven recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Taliban foil women's protest

AFP, Herat

Authorities dispersed a women's rally in Afghanistan's western city of Herat yesterday, with protesters claiming they were beaten by Taliban forces who fired shots in the air.

Scores of students turned out in protest at a Friday suicide bombing on a Kabul classroom that killed dozens of pupils.

AFP said the rally of more than 100 women in Herat were dispersed after gunshots fired by Taliban forces.

King Charles won't attend COP27 on PM Truss's advice

REUTERS, London

Britain's King Charles will not attend a world leaders' climate change summit in Egypt next month, a royal source said yesterday, as the new monarch steps back from his previous high-profile campaigning roles. Buckingham Palace sought government advice about the United Nations COP27 summit and it was unanimously agreed that it would not be right for Charles to visit in person for what would be his first overseas trip as sovereign, the source said. Charles spoke at the opening ceremony of the COP26 summit in Glasgow in 2021, which he described as a "last chance saloon" to save the world from climate change, after the queen pulled out on doctors' advice. The Sunday Times newspaper reported that Charles had been told not to go to Egypt by new Prime Minister Liz Truss, dashing his plans to deliver a speech at the conference. The newspaper quoted a Downing Street source as saying a recent meeting between Charles and Truss had been cordial and there had not been a row.

Pope begs Putin to end Ukraine war

REUTERS, Vatican City

Pope Francis for the first time directly begged Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday to stop the "spiral of violence and death" in Ukraine, saying that the crisis was risking a nuclear escalation with uncontrollable global consequences. Francis also condemned Putin's latest annexation of parts of Ukraine as being against international law. He was making an urgent appeal "in the name of God" for an end to the conflict and said it was "absurd" that the world was risking a nuclear conflict. "My appeal goes above all to the president of the Russian Federation, begging him to stop this spiral of violence and death, even out of love for his own people," Francis said. "On the other side, pained by the enormous suffering of the Ukrainian population following the aggression it suffered, I address an equally hopeful appeal to the president of Ukraine (Volodymyr Zelensky) to be open to a serious peace proposal," he said. Francis later tweeted both the appeals to the two leaders in Russian and Ukrainian. His speech comes two days after Putin proclaimed the annexation of nearly a fifth of Ukraine.



Still haunted by last year's horrors

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supplied idols to the mandap this year as well.

Shanchay Pal, one of the artisans said, "We had crafted the idols last year. When I heard that they were attacked, it broke my heart." In addition to being a labour of love and devotion, it was a task that took months, but was destroyed in mere moments.

Mithun Modok, who was the main complainant in the police case filed over the attack, said, "The administration asked us to decorate with more lights, have a bigger festival, but we decided to celebrate with no excess."

The Hindus of Karimpur village in Ramnathpur union of Rangpur's Pirganj upazila, who came under arson attack over a Facebook comment on the day following Durga Puja last year, are celebrating this year at a makeshift mandap as the dismantled and burnt mandap has been left without repair.

Arjun Kumar Sarkar, president of the Durga Puja Udjapan Committee of Karimpur, said around 66 Hindu families came under arson attack on October 16, a day after Bijoya Dashami. The panic and trauma of that day persists among locals.

Talking with The Daily Star over phone on Sunday, Arjun said there are around 200 Hindu families at Karimpur and surrounding villages. "Most were against hosting a puja this year, because of the attack last year. Later, they agreed to celebrate it for the sake of tradition," said Arjun.

But the burnt ruins of their temple still stand today - and the makeshift mandap was set up right beside it. Four ansar men guard the mandap at all times, even during night.

"Local administration promised to renovate the temple, but they have not," he said.

Purnima Rani Sarkar, a local, said crowds were thin this year because of fears of a repeat of last year's violence.

In Kamalganj upazila of Moulvibazar, 14 temples were attacked and vandalised from October 13 last year. A total of six complaints were made to Kamalganj Police Station but only two have been registered as cases.

This impunity hangs heavy on this year's celebration.

Malay Malakar, secretary of Vasudebpur Puja Udjapan Parishad, said their temple was attacked and vandalised on October 13.

"The next day, I filed a complaint with the police station. But the case has not been registered till now," he

said. On the other hand, Amal Shabdkar, president of the Moydail Puja Udjapan Parishad, said, "Police arrested two people and we are in fear of reprisals since then. We are being threatened in various ways. There is fear of another attack. So, we have to stay awake at night."

A president of another puja udjapan parishad whose temple was vandalised last year, told this correspondent on condition of anonymity that they are not filing a case out of fear. "We will not be able to stay at home if we pursue legal action."

Ferdous Hasan, officer-in-charge of Kamalganj Police Station, told this newspaper that of the two cases filed, one is with the Police Bureau of Investigation, and that around five or six people have been arrested so far.

In Kurigram, there is tight security in the five temples that came under attack last year at Gunaigach and Thetrai unions of Ulipur upazila. Ulipur Upazila Puja Udjapan Parishad President Soumendra Kumar Pandey Gaba said security has been beefed up at temples attacked last year. "We are keeping strong watch on all the Durga Puja temples."

The temples that were attacked last year have been renovated with government funds. Apart from this, government funds have been given to the families affected by the attack," he said. But the wounds are still fresh.

The mandap at the historical JM Sen Hall of Chattogram was attacked and vandalised by a group of criminals from a procession brought out from Andarkillah Shahi Jame Mosque on October 16 last year.

The lights have gone up this year with that bitter memory fresh in locals' minds.

Security has been beefed up in the city and upazilas to thwart any untoward situation centring the puja. Chattogram Metropolitan Police (CMP) has taken four-tier security measures in the city for the occasion.

Along with policemen in uniform and plain clothes, members of a strike force, SWAT and the bomb disposal unit are on duty, said Krishna Pada Roy, commissioner of CMP.

"Apart from the mobile team and members of Detective Branch of police, a team of police and Ansar men is on duty at every puja mandap," he said.

Security has been provided everywhere from the place of making

the idol to the puja mandap and finally to the Bisarjan (immersion), said the CMP commissioner. A disciplinary committee has been formed around each mandap regardless of caste and religion, he said.

Ashish Kumar Bhattacharia, president of Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad's Chattogram city unit, said, "We don't think there is any threat this year but a quarter is always trying to destroy our communal harmony. This year we've arranged puja with a new vibe, but the devotees are carrying the pain of the previous year."

(Our correspondents in Moulvibazar, Lalmonirhat, Dinajpur, Cumilla and Chattogram contributed to this report)

More than 40 bodies found in Libya mass grave

AFP, Tripoli

Forty-two bodies have been found in a mass grave in the Libyan city of Sirte, an ex-stronghold of the Islamic State group, the country's missing persons authority said yesterday.

Exhumation teams unearthed "42 unidentified bodies" after following up reports of a "mass grave" at the site of a former school in Sirte, the authority said. "DNA samples have been taken for analysis in coordination with the office of forensic medicine," it added, without elaborating further.

Sirte, a central coastal city, was held by IS between 2015 and 2016, as it exploited the chaos engulfing much of Libya in the wake of the 2011 overthrow and killing of dictator Moamer Gaddafi in a Nato-backed uprising.

The jihadist group was dislodged by forces loyal to the then Government of National Accord in December 2016 after months of intense house-to-house fighting.

In October 2017, a grave containing the bodies of 21 Coptic Christians, executed by the jihadists two years earlier, was uncovered near the Mediterranean city.

Another mass grave with the remains of 34 Ethiopian Christians was discovered near Sirte in December 2018, more than three years after IS published a video showing its personnel executing at least 28 men described as Ethiopian Christians.

AUDIO LEAKS
Pak Cabinet okays legal action against Imran, aides

DAWN ONLINE

Pakistan's Cabinet has formally given the go-ahead to hold an inquiry into the audio leaks purportedly featuring PTI Chairman Imran Khan and his party leaders, it emerged yesterday.

On Friday, the Cabinet suggested that legal action could be taken after a steady stream of audio recordings surfaced, most recently of informal conversations allegedly between Imran and his aides - Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Asad Umar and his former principal secretary Azam Khan - purportedly discussing the cypher that the PTI chief has for long presented as evidence of a "foreign conspiracy" to oust him from office.

Dawn also reported that the Cypher had gone "missing" from the Prime Minister House records.

The Cabinet was told that the audios exposed "the criminal conspiracy of the former government", while the cypher was given "fictitious meanings for political mileage and subsequently it was stolen after fraud, forgery, fabrication."

In the first audio clip leaked on September 28, Imran can be heard telling Azam to "play up" the cypher and turn it into a foreign plot to oust his government.

To this end, Azam is heard suggesting to Imran to call a "meeting of then-foreign minister Qureshi and foreign secretary wherein we will ask Qureshi to read out the letter. So whatever he will tell us, I will type it down and convert it into [meeting] minutes" so that it becomes part of the office record.

Advertisement for Bangladesh Bank (বাংলাদেশ ব্যাংক) regarding the 2022 tender process for the supply of stationery. It includes details about the tender process, contact information, and a table with specifications for various items like stationery, printing, and security services.