

KABUL ATTACK

IS claims responsibility

REUTERS, Riyadh/Kabul

Islamic State yesterday claimed responsibility for an attack on Taliban forces in Kabul.

The militant group said on Telegram that the attack on Sunday had killed 20 people and wounded 30.

A spokesman for Afghanistan's Taliban-run interior ministry said an explosion outside the military airport in the capital Kabul had caused multiple casualties.

The interior ministry denied the casualty figures claimed by Islamic State and said it would release the official death toll.

Islamic State has claimed several high-profile attacks in Kabul, including the storming of a hotel that caters to Chinese businessmen and a shooting at Pakistan's embassy that Islamabad called an assassination attempt against its ambassador, who escaped unharmed.



People inspect the rubble of a house that was demolished by Israeli soldiers, in the village of Kafr Dan in Jenin, in the occupied West Bank, yesterday. The Israeli army killed two Palestinians in a West Bank raid yesterday as it demolished the homes of two Palestinians accused of killing an Israeli soldier, Palestinian officials said.

PHOTO: AFP

FRESH AUSTERITY DRIVE

Lanka freezes recruitment

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka began a fresh austerity drive yesterday, freezing government recruitment as new taxes and higher electricity prices kicked in with authorities trying to secure an IMF bailout.

The Indian Ocean island nation needs to achieve debt sustainability as a precondition to a \$2.9 billion bailout from the Washington-based lender after it defaulted in April as its economy went into crisis. The IMF has also asked Colombo to trim its 1.5 million strong public service, sharply raise taxes and sell off loss-making state enterprises.

A record 20,000 civil servants retired at the end of December — eight times as many as usual according to the public administration ministry — after President Ranil Wickremesinghe reduced their retirement age from 65 to 60.

They will not be replaced, the ministry said.

Doubled personal income and corporate taxes kicked in on New Year's Day to shore up state revenue, while electricity prices went up 65 percent after a 75 percent tariff increase in August.

Wickremesinghe, who came to power after Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled the country and resigned in July following months of protests, said the crisis was not yet over despite the restoration of fuel, food and fertiliser supplies.

"Our problems have not been resolved yet," he told his staff on the first working day of the year.

"We need to reduce our debt burden if we are to move forward."

Key creditors such as China and India are yet to announce agreement to a "haircut" on their loans to the South Asian nation.

As part of the new measures, the finance ministry has also banned non-essential capital expenditure.

Any officials who authorised investments over 500 million rupees (\$1.38 million) without clearing them with the treasury first will be held personally accountable, a ministry official said.

2016 DEMONETISATION

India's SC upholds legality of move

Says govt followed due process



REUTERS, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court yesterday upheld the legality of the government decision in 2016 to demonetise 86 percent of the country's cash in circulation, saying the decision was taken in consultation with the central bank and followed due process.

A five-judge bench of the country's top court passed the verdict by a majority on a batch of petitions questioning the move. One out of the five judges wrote a dissenting opinion.

"The...notification dated 8th November 2016 does not suffer from any flaws in the decision-making process," Justice B R Gai, one of the four judges who agreed on the decision, said in a written opinion.

The petitioners included lawyers, a political party, co-operative banks and individuals.

India's former finance minister, P Chidambaram was among the lawyers who argued against the note ban measure.

In November, 2016, Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally led the shock move to outlaw 86 percent of the cash in

circulation to target undeclared "black money" and fight corruption.

But the move, widely known as demonetisation, badly hurt India's cash-dependent economy. Hundreds of thousands of people lined up outside banks for days to exchange their cash savings for legal tender.

Despite the chaos caused, many people supported demonetisation after Modi framed the decision as a fight for the poor against the corrupt rich.

Some of the petitioners had argued that the recommendation to ban or declare any series of banknotes invalid should have come from the Reserve Bank of India and not from the government.

India's main opposition Congress party said yesterday's decision by the top court said nothing about the impact of demonetisation, which the party called "a singularly disastrous move."

"The majority Supreme Court verdict deals with the limited issue of the process of decision-making, not with its outcomes," Jairam Ramesh, the party's spokesperson said in a statement.

Sudden spike in violence in Kashmir

10 killed in 6 days

AFP, Srinagar

Ten people have been killed within six days in a sudden uptick in violence in the usually more peaceful Hindu south of disputed Indian-administered Kashmir, officials said yesterday.

Rebel groups in the Muslim-majority Himalayan region have for decades fought for its independence or merger with Pakistan, which controls a smaller portion of the divided territory.

About half a million Indian soldiers are deployed in Kashmir, and its southern portion, Jammu, is mostly Hindu and comparatively peaceful.

But two gunmen suspected to be anti-India rebels opened fire on houses in the remote village of Dangri on Sunday, leaving four residents dead and five injured, police officer Mukesh Singh told reporters. Police and security forces launched a manhunt in the area close to the Line of Control that divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan.

Yesterday, a seven-year-old child and another person were killed in an explosion near one of the houses, another police officer told AFP. An unexploded device was also found nearby and neutralised by a specialist squad, officers said.

The deaths followed a firefight between government forces and suspected rebels at a checkpoint in Jammu city on Wednesday.

Police said four suspected rebels were killed while the driver of their truck escaped and was on the run.

Officials said at least 172 suspected rebels and 26 armed forces personnel were killed in fighting last year.

Indian Kashmir has been without an elected government for over five years and has been directly controlled by New Delhi since 2019.

India regularly blames Pakistan for supporting the rebels, an allegation denied by Islamabad, which says it only provides diplomatic support to Kashmir's struggle for the right to self-determination.

WEST BANK RAID

Israel kills two Palestinians

AFP, Kafr Dan

The Israeli army killed two Palestinians in a West Bank raid yesterday as it demolished the homes of two Palestinians accused of killing an Israeli soldier, Palestinian officials said.

The Palestinian health ministry announced the deaths of "Mohammad Samer Hoshieh, 22, after being shot in the chest, and Fuad Mohammad Abed, 25, after being shot in the abdomen and thigh" during a raid by the Israeli army near Jenin.

Israeli soldiers had entered the village of Kafr Dan "in order to demolish the residences of the assailants who were involved in the shooting adjacent to the Gilboa (Jalame) Crossing, in which Major Bar Falah was killed," Israel's military said.

Clouds of smoke engulfed the small village as two houses were levelled with explosives shortly after sunrise yesterday.

The army later said "a violent riot was instigated" when troops entered the village, resulting in the deaths.

Palestinian news agency Wafa reported that 18 others were arrested by the Israeli army in overnight raids across the West Bank.

Falah, the Israeli major, was killed in September 2022 during clashes with Palestinian gunmen at the Gilboa checkpoint between Israel and the occupied West Bank.

Ahmed Abed, 23, and Abdul Rahman Subhi Abed, 22, whose family homes were demolished yesterday, were also killed in the September clashes in which Falah died.

Blinken new China FM hold talks

REUTERS, Washington

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he spoke on Sunday with incoming Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang, appointed last week to the post following his role as ambassador to the United States. On Twitter, Blinken said he discussed the US-China relationship and efforts to maintain open lines of communication in a telephone call with Qin. On Friday China appointed Qin, its ambassador to the United States and a trusted aide of President Xi Jinping, to be its new foreign minister, as Beijing and Washington seek to stabilise rocky relations. China's foreign ministry acknowledged that the two spoke by phone. Qin, 56, replaces Wang Yi, who had been foreign minister for the past decade. Wang, 69, was promoted to the politburo of the Chinese Communist Party in October and is expected to play a bigger role in foreign policy.

Iran issues warning on mandatory headscarf in cars

AFP, Tehran



Iranian police have resumed warnings that women must wear mandatory headscarves even in cars, media reported yesterday, as unrest continues following the death of Mahsa Amini.

Protests have gripped Iran since the September 16 death of Iranian-Kurdish Amini, 22, after her arrest in Tehran for an alleged breach of the Islamic republic's strict dress code for women. Fars news agency quoted a senior police officer who said the "new stage" of the Nazer-1 programme — "surveillance" in Persian — was being rolled out "across the country by the police".

The Nazer programme, launched in 2020, concerns the "removal of hijab in cars", Fars added. When it was launched in 2020, car owners would be sent an SMS text message alerting them of a dress code violation in their vehicle and warning of "legal" action if repeated.



Family members mourn next to the bodies of residents who were killed after two gunmen suspected to be anti-India rebels opened fire on houses in the remote village of Dangri in the Rajouri district in Indian-administered Kashmir, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Armed attack on Mexican prison kills 14

AFP, Ciudad Juárez

Gunmen attacked a prison in the northern Mexican city of Ciudad Juárez on Sunday, leaving 14 people dead and allowing 24 inmates to escape, the Chihuahua state prosecutors' office said.

An unknown number of gunmen aboard armored vehicles took part in the attack, and the dead included 10 prison guards and security agents, the office said in a statement.

About five hours after the dawn incursion began, security forces managed to control the situation, which had also erupted into fighting between inmates within the sprawling state prison, near Mexico's border with the US. Inside, some rioting inmates set fire to various objects and clashed with prison guards, local media reported.

গোবাল ইন্স্যুরেন্স লিমিটেড-এর সন্মানিত পরিচালক ও প্রথম চেয়ারম্যান, বীর মুক্তিযোদ্ধা স্থপতি মোবাস্শের হোসেন গত ২ জানুয়ারী, ২০২৩ রোজ সোমবার রাত ১:৩০ ঘটিকায় বাংলাদেশ স্পেশালইজড হাসপাতালে চিকিৎসাধীন অবস্থায় ইন্তেকাল করেন (ইল্লা-লিল্লাহি ওয়া ইল্লা ইলাইহি রাহিউন)।

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