

Imran held in small, dirty prison cell

Says lawyer, prepares to appeal against his graft conviction

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan is being held in a small, dirty prison cell, one of his lawyer's said yesterday after being given access to the former cricket star in jail as he prepares to appeal against his graft conviction.

Khan, 70, has been at the heart of political turmoil since he was ousted as prime minister in a vote of no confidence last year, raising concern about stability in the nuclear-armed country as it grapples with an economic crisis.

Police took Khan from his home in the city of Lahore on Saturday and transferred him to a jail in Attock district, near the capital Islamabad, where a court convicted him of graft charges arising from the unlawful sale of state gifts and sentenced him to three years in prison.

"I met Imran Khan who told me that 'they've put me in a C-class'," Naem Panjutha, the lawyer, referring to conditions in the jail where he said he spent just under two hours with Khan preparing paperwork for filing his appeal.



"It is a small room which has got an open washroom where he said there were flies in the daytime and insects in the night."

Khan's legal team was also appealing to authorities to secure him better conditions in

jail, Panjutha told reporters in Islamabad earlier. Political prisoners are entitled to better "B class" facilities, including access to television, newspapers and books.

A government spokesperson and the prison authorities did not respond to repeated requests for comment on the conditions in which Khan is being held.

The graft conviction, which Khan rejects as politically motivated, likely means he will be disqualified from running in a general election due by November.

Khan's arrest was the latest in a series of blows that have weakened his political standing after he fell out with the powerful military and his party splintered.

Ever since his ouster, Khan has been campaigning for a snap election and organising protests, which led to significant violence on May 9.



Indian paramilitary troopers carry out a precautionary search operation at a park in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir yesterday, ahead of the country's 77th Independence Day.

PHOTO: AFP

INDIA'S MANIPUR

SC to monitor probes into violence cases

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court said yesterday it will monitor all cases of violence against women committed during three months of sectarian clashes in the northeastern state of Manipur since May.

A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud said it will appoint a retired senior police official to oversee all complaints of sexual violence to be probed by the federal Central Bureau of Investigations.

The retired police official will report back to the Supreme Court, Chandrachud said.

Last month videos of two tribal Kuki women being paraded naked by a mob of allegedly majority Meitei men had surfaced attracting international condemnation.

The women had said in their police complaints that they were later gang-raped.

Since then several other cases of women being deliberately targeted in violence that has resulted in more than 180 deaths and rendered tens of thousands homeless.

The court has also created a committee of three retired female judges from different high courts to look into the humanitarian issues emerging from the violence.

One of the smallest states in India, Manipur has a population of around 3.2 million. Meiteis, who are 53 percent of the population reside in the more prosperous valley, while the Kukis with a 16 percent population share live largely in the surrounding hills.

TANKER SEIZURES BY IRAN

Thousands of US sailors, Marines reach Red Sea

Tehran accuses Washington of inflaming regional instability

AFP, Dubai

More than 3,000 United States military personnel have arrived in the Red Sea aboard two warships, part of a beelined response from Washington after tanker seizures by Iran, the US Navy said yesterday.

The deployment adds to a growing US military buildup in tense Gulf waterways vital to the global oil trade and led Tehran yesterday to accuse the US of inflaming regional instability.

The US military says Iran has either seized or attempted to take control of nearly 20 internationally flagged ships in the region over the past two years.

The US sailors and Marines entered the Red Sea on Sunday after transiting through the Suez Canal in a pre-announced deployment, the US Navy's Fifth Fleet said in a statement.

They arrived on board the USS Bataan and USS Carter Hall warships, providing "greater flexibility and maritime capability" to the Fifth Fleet, the statement from the Bahrain-based command added.

The deployment adds to efforts "to deter destabilising activity and de-escalate regional tensions caused by Iran's harassment and seizures of merchant vessels," Fifth Fleet spokesman Commander Tim Hawkins told AFP.

USS Bataan is an amphibious assault ship which can carry fixed-wing and

rotary aircraft as well as landing craft.

The USS Carter Hall, a dock landing ship, transports Marines, their gear, and lands them ashore.

In press conference yesterday, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said US deployments are only serving Washington's interests.

"The US government's military presence in the region has never created security. Their interests in this region have always compelled them to fuel instability and insecurity," he told reporters.

"We are deeply convinced that the countries of the Persian Gulf are capable of ensuring their own security."

The latest deployment comes after Washington said its forces blocked two attempts by Iran to seize commercial tankers in international waters off Oman on July 5.

The maritime services in Iran said one of the two tankers, the Bahamian-flagged Richmond Voyager, had collided with an Iranian vessel, seriously injuring five crew members, according to state news agency IRNA.

In April and early May, Iran seized two oil tankers within a week in regional waters.

Those incidents came after Israel and the United States blamed Iran in November for what they said was a drone strike against a tanker operated by an

Israeli-owned firm carrying gas oil off the coast of Oman.

The US announced last month that it would deploy a destroyer, F-35 and F-16 warplanes, along with the Amphibious Readiness Group/Marine Expeditionary Unit, to the Middle East to deter Iran from seizing ships in the Gulf.

Last week, a US official told AFP that Washington is also preparing to put Marines and Navy personnel aboard commercial tankers transiting the Gulf as an added layer of defence.

Washington's stepped-up military response comes at a time of deepening engagement between the region and China, which brokered a shock detente between Gulf rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran in March.

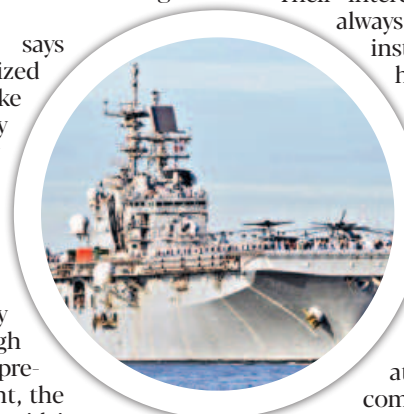
Tehran's relations with other Arab Gulf states are also growing.

The president of the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait's foreign minister were both offered invitations to visit the Islamic Republic last week.

"Security will remain a friction point in US-Gulf relations even if the threat posed by Iranian attacks against shipping eases in the short term," said Torbjorn Soltevd of the risk intelligence firm Verisk Maplecroft.

"The perception that the US isn't doing enough to deter Iranian attacks against international shipping will persist," he told AFP.

"The need for a new approach is evident". Iran on Sunday appointed Mohammed Jafar Montazeri, who is under US and British sanctions, to head the Islamic republic's top court.



Residents carry belongings after heavy rains caused flooding and landslides in Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province, Vietnam yesterday. Flash floods and landslides have killed at least eight people across northern Vietnam, disaster officials said.

THAI ELECTION

Pheu Thai party finds new partners to try to form govt

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thailand's populist Pheu Thai party yesterday announced that it was forming an alliance with the Bhumjaithai party and was open to other parties joining in to form a government nearly 3 months after polls.

Pheu Thai, led by Shinawatra family, won the second-largest share of votes in the May election and last week stepped up to try and form a government after winner Move Forward's attempts were blocked twice in parliament.

"Pheu Thai and Bhumjaithai party will form the government with the support of other parties," said Pheu Thai leader Cholan Srikaew, adding that Srettha Thavisin remained the party's candidate for prime minister.

Southeast Asia's second-largest economy has been beset by political uncertainty since opposition parties rode a wave of anti-establishment support to crush incumbent military-backed rulers at the polls in May.

RE-ELECTION BID

Maldives leader faces seven rivals

AFP, Male

Seven lower-profile candidates registered yesterday to challenge Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih at next month's elections. The independent Elections Commission said a total of eight candidates, including 61-year-old Solih, have filed nominations for the September 9 poll. The Indian Ocean nation embraced multi-party democracy in 2008 after having a one-party since ending its status as a British protectorate in 1965. The jailed main opposition leader Abdulla Yameen was disqualified from election because of his criminal conviction for corruption while president between 2013 and 2018.

SHIPWRECK OFF TUNISIA

16 migrants dead, 44 missing

REUTERS, Tunis

Seven more bodies believed to be of migrants who drowned in a shipwreck off Tunisia have washed ashore, local authorities said yesterday, bringing the confirmed death toll to 16, with 44 still missing and only two rescued. A judicial official said the migrants aboard the boat, which sank off Tunisia's Kerkennah island, were from sub-Saharan African countries. From January 1 to July 20 this year, Tunisian coast guard recovered 901 bodies of drowned migrants. The country is facing a record wave of migration this year and catastrophes involving boats heading to the Italian coast.

THREAT OF INTERVENTION

Niger junta shuts airspace

REUTERS, Niamey

Niger's junta braced for a response from the West African regional bloc yesterday after ignoring its deadline to reinstate the ousted president or face the threat of military intervention. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which has sent military forces into troubled member states in the past, said it would issue a statement on its next steps, responding to the junta's refusal to stand down by Sunday. The bloc has taken a harder stance on the July 26 power grab, the region's seventh coup in three years, than it did on previous ones. On Sunday, as the ECOWAS deadline expired, the junta closed its airspace until further notice.

UNAUTHORISED MIGRANTS

UK hikes fines for employers

AFP, London

The UK government on Sunday announced increased fines for employers and landlords who allow migrants without papers to work for them or rent their properties, as part of measures to deter migrant arrivals. The Conservative government, languishing in the polls ahead of a general election due next year, wants to stop illegal crossings of the English Channel in small boats. The interior ministry said "illegal working and renting are significant pull factors" for migrants making the dangerous journey. Civil penalties for employers will triple to up to £45,000 per worker.