

Pakistan using 'proxy war' to stay relevant

Says Modi

REUTERS, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yesterday that Pakistan is trying to stay relevant through "terrorism" and "proxy war" but its "unholy plans" will never succeed.

The nuclear-armed neighbours share an uneasy relationship and India has, for decades, accused Pakistan of backing Islamist militants fighting its rule in Kashmir, the Himalayan region both claim in full but rule only in part.

Pakistan denies the accusations, saying it only provides diplomatic and moral support to Kashmiris seeking self-determination in the Muslim-majority region. Modi's comments came at an event to mark the 25th anniversary of India's short military conflict with Pakistan in Kargil.

IRAQ, SYRIA

Rockets launched at bases hosting US troops

AFP, Baghdad

Several rockets were launched Thursday and yesterday against bases hosting troops from the US-led anti-jihadist coalition in Iraq and Syria, security officials and a war monitor said.

Such attacks were frequent early in the war between Israel and Hamas Palestinian militants in Gaza but since then have largely halted.

"Four rockets fell in the vicinity" of Ain al-Assad base in Anbar province, an Iraqi security source said.

Another security official said an attack occurred with "a drone and three rockets" that fell close to the base perimeter.

A United States official said initial reports indicated that projectiles landed outside the base without causing injuries or damage to the base.

All sources spoke on condition of anonymity because they are not authorised to speak to the media.

At least one rocket also fell near a base of the coalition in the Conoco gas field in Deir Ezzor province of eastern Syria, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor.



Displaced Palestinians from the eastern part of Khan Yunis prepare to cook at a temporary camp set up on the grounds of a cemetery in the western part of the city, in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

WEEKS OF ISRAELI BOMBARDMENT Gaza civilians shelter in former prison

REUTERS, Gaza

After weeks of Israeli bombardment left them with nowhere else to go, hundreds of Palestinians have ended up in a former Gaza prison built to hold murderers and thieves.

Yasmeen al-Dardasi said she and her family passed wounded people they were unable to help as they evacuated from a district in the southern city of Khan Younis towards its Central Correction and Rehabilitation Facility.

They spent a day under a tree before moving on to the former prison, where they now live in a prayer room. It offers protection



Palestinians, many of whom have been displaced several times, say nowhere is free of Israeli bombardment.

from the blistering sun, but not much else.

Dardasi's husband has a damaged kidney and just one lung, but no mattress or blanket.

"We are not settled here either," said Dardasi, who like many Palestinians fears she will be uprooted once again.

Palestinians, many of whom have been displaced several times, say nowhere is free of Israeli bombardment, which has reduced much of Gaza to rubble.

An Israeli air strike killed at least 90 Palestinians in a designated humanitarian zone in the Al-Mawasi area on July 13, the territory's health ministry said, in an attack that Israel said targeted Hamas' elusive military chief Mohammed Deif.

On Thursday, Gaza's health ministry said Israeli military strikes on areas in eastern Khan Younis had killed 14 people.

Entire neighbourhoods have been flattened in one of the most densely populated places in the world, where poverty and unemployment have long been widespread.

According to the United Nations, nine in ten people across Gaza are now internally displaced.

Israeli soldiers told Saria Abu Mustafa and her family that they should flee for safety as tanks were on their way, she said. The family

had no time to change so they left in their prayer clothes.

After sleeping outside on sandy ground, they too found refuge in the prison, among piles of rubble and gaping holes in buildings from the battles which were fought there. Inmates had been released long before Israel attacked.

"We didn't take anything with us. We came here on foot, with children walking with us," she said, adding that many of the women had five or six children with them and that water was hard to find.

She held her niece, who was born during the conflict, which has killed her father and brothers.

More than 39,000 Palestinians have been killed in the air and ground offensive, Palestinian health officials said.

Hana Al-Sayed Abu Mustafa arrived at the prison after being displaced six times.

OIL SPILL FROM TANKER

Philippines races to avoid 'catastrophe'

AFP, Limay

The Philippine Coast Guard yesterday raced to offload 1.4 million litres of industrial fuel oil from a sunken tanker and prevent an "environmental catastrophe" in Manila Bay.

One crew member died when the MT Terra Nova sank in rough seas nearly seven kilometres (4.3 miles) off Limay municipality early Thursday after setting out for the central city of Iloilo.

An oil slick stretching several kilometres was detected in the waterway, which thousands of fishermen and tourism operators rely on for their livelihoods.

Coast guard spokesman Rear Admiral Armando Balilo said yesterday the spill was "minimal" and that it appeared to be diesel fuel used to power the tanker and not the industrial fuel oil cargo. "No oil has been leaking from the tank itself, so we're racing against time to siphon the oil so we can avoid the environmental catastrophe," Balilo said.

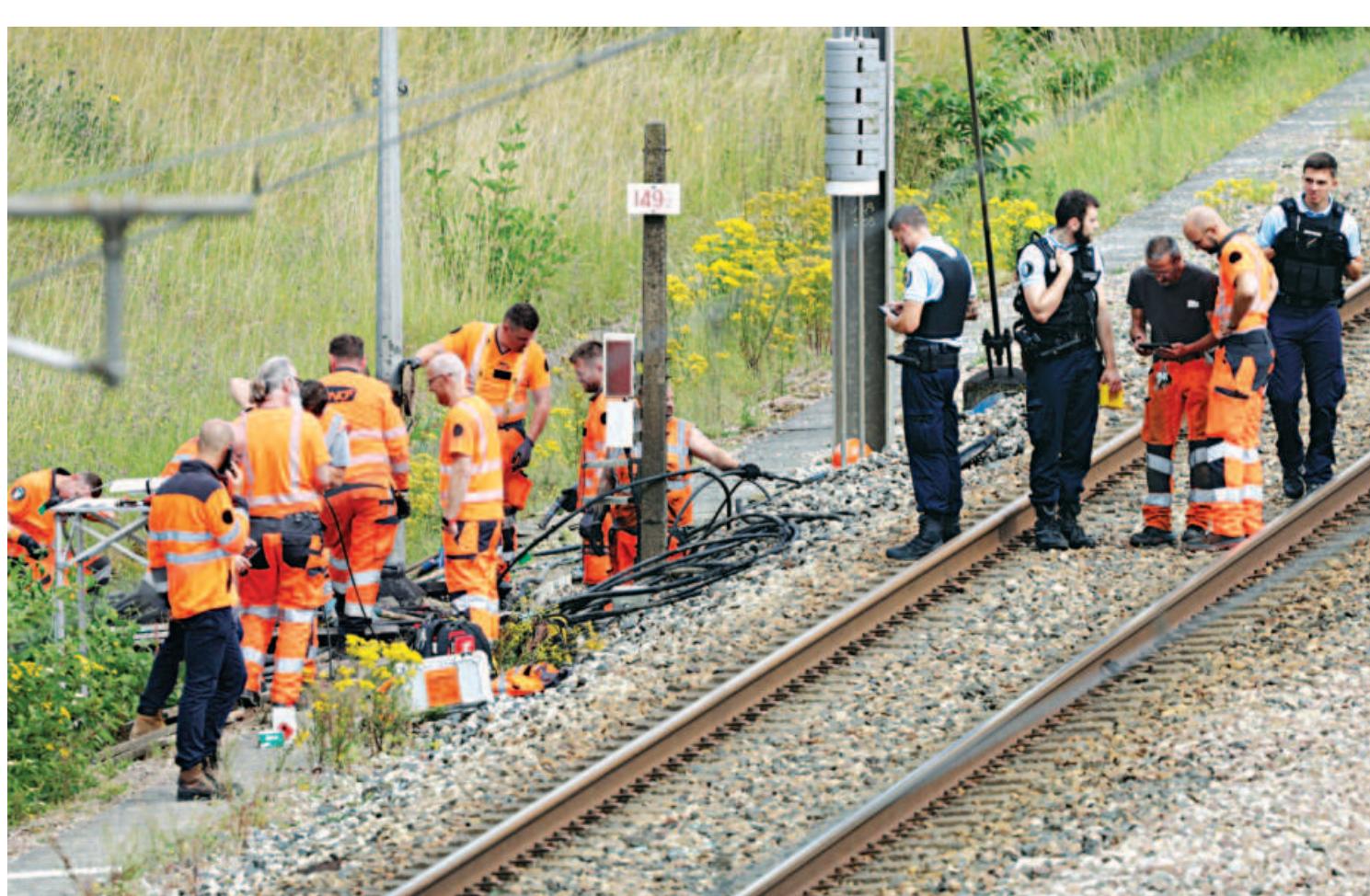
The coast guard has set a target of seven days to offload the cargo and prevent what Balilo warned would be the worst oil spill in Philippine history if it were to leak.

AFP journalists at the Port of Limay in Bataan province watched coast guard personnel load oil dispersant and a suction skimmer onto a boat to be used against the slick.

Balilo said oil spill containment booms had also been deployed in preparation "for the worst case scenario" of the industrial fuel oil leaking before it could be offloaded.

Once the weather improved, coast guard divers would inspect the position of the tanker so the "siphoning operation" could get under way, he said.

The coast guard met with representatives of the MT Terra Nova's owner and a contracted salvage company yesterday to discuss the timeline.



SNCF employees and French gendarmes inspect the scene of a suspected attack on the high speed railway network at Croiselles, northern France yesterday. French security forces are hunting people behind arson attacks that hobbled the country's high-speed rail network hours before the Olympic Games opening ceremony.

Regional security chiefs arrive in Myanmar for talks

AFP, Bangkok

National security chiefs from six South and Southeast Asian countries have arrived in Myanmar for regional talks, state media reported yesterday, in a rare visit for the isolated and embattled junta.

National security chiefs from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Thailand and Sri Lanka arrived on Thursday, the Global New Light of Myanmar reported.

The six countries, plus Myanmar, make up the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) group, loosely focused on trade.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing met BIMSTEC officials ahead of the talks which began yesterday.

They discussed "peace and stability... cooperation among member states in drug eradication, combatting terrorism, anti-human trafficking," the newspaper said.

AFP has contacted the embassies of the six countries for comment.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military seized power in 2021 and launched a sweeping crackdown on dissent.

It is now battling established ethnic minority armed groups and newer "People's Defence Forces" that are fighting its rule, and together have seized swathes of territory.

Rights groups accuse the military of massive human rights abuses as it struggles to crush its opponents.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

China, Russia vow to counter 'extra-regional forces'

AFP, Vientiane

China and Russia's foreign ministers met their Southeast Asian counterparts yesterday after vowing to counter "extra-regional forces", a day before Washington's top diplomat was due to arrive.

Wang Yi and Sergei Lavrov were attending a three-day meeting of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) bloc in the Laos capital Vientiane.

Both held talks with counterparts from the bloc, while Wang also met with new British Foreign Secretary David Lammy.

On Thursday Wang and Lavrov agreed to work together in "countering any attempts by extra-regional forces to interfere in Southeast Asian affairs," according to Moscow's foreign ministry.

They also discussed implementing "a new security architecture" in Eurasia, Lavrov said in a statement, without elaborating.

According to a readout from Chinese state news agency Xinhua, Wang said Beijing was "ready to work with Russia to... firmly support each other, safeguard each other's core interests".

China is a close political and economic ally of Russia, and Nato members have branded Beijing a "decisive enabler" of Moscow's war in Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is expected to arrive in Vientiane this morning for talks with Asean foreign ministers.

Blinken has made Washington's alliances in Asia a top foreign policy priority, with the aim of "advancing a free and open" Indo-Pacific -- a veiled way of criticizing China and its ambitions.

Plan to tax super-rich divides at G20 meet in Rio

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Brazil's vision for a global deal to tax the ultra-rich sparked divisions Thursday at a meeting of G20 finance ministers in Rio de Janeiro, where the US dismissed the need for an international accord on the matter.

The initiative, discussed at an afternoon meeting, is a key priority for Brazil's leftist president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who this year heads the G20 grouping of the world's major economies, the European Union and the African Union.

Even before talks began, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen dampened the mood by saying there was no need for a global agreement on taxing billionaires.

"Tax policy is very difficult to coordinate globally," she told journalists. "We think that all countries should make sure that their taxation systems are fair and progressive."