



TUNIS: Seifeddine Jameli "one of the most dangerous terrorist leaders" who was killed yesterday during a security operation.—AFP

TUNISIA SAYS ONE OF ITS 'MOST DANGEROUS' JIHADISTS KILLED

TUNIS: Tunisia's military has killed a jihadist described as "one of the most dangerous terrorist leaders" in the country during a security operation, the defense ministry said yesterday.

Seifeddine Jameli, as known as Abou al-Qaaqaa, belonged to the Tunisian branch of the Islamic State (IS) group, Jund al-Khilafa (the soldiers of the caliphate), the ministry said in a statement. He was killed overnight by special forces in the central region of Mount Mghilla, it said, adding that weapons were seized during the operation.

Since its 2011 revolution, Tunisia has been hit by an upsurge in jihadist violence in which dozens of police, soldiers and civilians have been killed. Two attacks last year claimed by IS on the National Bardo Museum in Tunis and on a hotel near the Mediterranean resort of Sousse killed a total of 60 people, all but one of them foreign tourists.

The beheading of a teenage shepherd by jihadists as his sheep grazed on Mount Mghilla last November also horrified the country.—AFP

US MILITARY BASE WORKER ON OKINAWA ARRESTED IN MURDER CASE

TOKYO: Japanese police have arrested an American working on a US military base in Okinawa on suspicion of abandoning the body of a woman who had been missing since last month.

The arrest yesterday sparked outrage on Okinawa, where anti-US military sentiment is already high because of the heavy American troop presence. The relocation of a US air station on the southern Japanese island was recently stalled because of large protests. Police said Kenneth Shinzato, 32, was arrested after he was questioned and investigators found the body at a location he provided.

Investigators determined that the body, found in a forest in central Okinawa, is that of a 20-year-old woman missing since April 28, when she messaged her boyfriend that she was going for a walk. Police said they suspect Shinzato was also responsible for the death of the woman. He has not been formally charged.

They said the suspect works at Kadena Air Base and is believed to be former US serviceman. Kyodo News service said Shinzato used to be a Marine. Okinawa Gov. Takeshi Onaga said he was "outraged" and that the death of the woman broke his heart. "As I look back at all the developments to date, I'm simply speechless," he said.—AP

PAKISTAN TO ISSUE BIOMETRIC PASSPORTS TO CURB HUMAN TRAFFICKING

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan plans to issue biometric passports from next year to halt the thousands of people who are being trafficked overseas, largely to European and Gulf nations, officials said.

Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan approved the move last week after a meeting with officials from the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) on tackling human trafficking and migrant smuggling in the South Asian nation. "We will start issuing biometric passports from 2017," Sarfraz Hussain, the Interior Ministry spokesman, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation late on Wednesday.

Pakistan in 2004 adopted computerized passports that can be read by scanning machines, he said, but the passports do not contain a microchip, which contains the holder's biodata. This is useful as it will help authorities detect forged travel documents used by traffickers who lure poor people from rural areas with the promise of a good job overseas, Hussain added.

A combination of poverty, natural

disasters and insecurity caused by a long-running Islamist insurgency has forced thousands of Pakistanis to flee in search of a better life in Europe and the Middle East. There are no accurate figures on how many people are being trafficked or smuggled outside the country, but the United Nations says government data on deportations of Pakistanis due to illegal migration have risen in recent years.

There were 66,427 Pakistanis deported from countries such as Spain, Greece, Turkey, Oman and Iran in 2013, up from 46,032 in 2010, according to a 2014 report by the UN Office for Drugs and Crime. Many trafficking victims are detected at border posts in Iran and Turkey as they attempt to travel on to Europe, where they often have to risk their lives on board dangerously inadequate vessels run by people smugglers, said the report. Others are deported from Oman - often en route to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where they take up low-skilled employment as

maids, construction workers or drivers, and are often subjected to labor abuses.

A FIA official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media, said more than 1,000 trafficking networks were operating across the country, the majority in the central Punjab province.

These organized criminal gangs primarily use Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan province, which shares a border with Iran, as a trafficking route to Europe and the Middle East. From Iran, the trafficking victims are either taken to Turkey where they continue on to Europe, or sent to Oman and then on to the UAE, he added.

More than a million migrants and refugees crossed into Europe in 2015, sparking a crisis as nations struggled to cope with the influx, and created division in the EU over how to resettle people. According to the UN Refugee Agency, about 3 percent of these migrants and refugees were Pakistani nationals.—Reuters

PAKISTAN CLAIMS KILLING OF EIGHT AL-QAEDA MILITANTS

LAHORE: Pakistani officials yesterday said they had killed eight Al-Qaeda militants during a raid in the central city of Multan after learning of their plans to attack a local university.

The operation, which officials said was carried out on Wednesday night after an intelligence tip-off, occurred on the city's outskirts, a spokesman for the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of Punjab, told AFP on the condition of anonymity. "On the basis of the information, a joint team of ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) and CTD Multan carried out a raid at the meeting point, near the village of Nawabpur on the bank of the river Chenab in Multan, resulting in intense fire from the militants," he said.

The CTD official said the militants fired rockets and hand grenades during the encounter, and several were able to escape. Two of the men who were killed were said to have murdered a senior military officer while another, "Hafiz Abdul Mateen" was accused of masterminding a 2009 attack on a mosque in Rawalpindi that killed around 40 people.

No security officials were said to have been killed or injured in the raids, and authorities are routinely accused by rights groups of staging such encounters to carry out extra-judicial killings of people who are already in custody.

Muhammad Amir Rana, a senior security analyst, said none of the names disclosed by authorities were familiar, raising further questions. "It's true that Al-Qaeda exists in this region and an operation is also underway in Punjab against all kind of militants, but the names disclosed after this recent raid are not familiar," he said.

In 2015, Pakistan stepped up a multi-pronged offensive against Islamist and other militants through military operations, raids, as well as a crackdown on

some hard line seminaries and money laundering as part of its "National Action Plan". It came in the wake of a Taliban

massacre at a Peshawar army school in December 2014 in which 134 children were killed.—FP

BANGLADESH TEACHERS PROTEST PENANCE FOR 'ISLAM INSULT'

DHAKA: Thousand of teachers took to the streets across Bangladesh yesterday to protest against a lawmaker's punishment of a headmaster falsely accused of insulting Islam, after the incident went viral on social media.

Teachers from universities, schools and seminaries held rallies in support of the headmaster after opposition MP Salim Osman ordered him to squat while holding his ears—a demeaning punishment in the Muslim-majority country.

Shyamol Kanti Bhakta was punished last week in Bandar town, outside Dhaka, in front of hundreds of people after he was falsely accused of making derogatory remarks against Islam. Criticism of Islam is often incendiary in Bangladesh, which is reeling from a wave of recent killings of secular and liberal activists and religious minorities.

The videoed incident was uploaded onto social media, sparking an outcry and demands for justice for the headmaster. The tag #SorrySir was trending on Twitter and many posted photos of themselves squatting in a show of support. "The MP has insulted the entire nation by humiliating its builder—the teacher," said Shahab

Enam Khan, a professor at Jahangirnagar University, during a rally in Dhaka. "It seems as if the MP has forgotten the difference between a lawmaker and a law enforcer," Khan told AFP.

Dhaka University pro-vice chancellor Nasreen Ahmed said thousands of teachers were taking part in the protests held in cities and towns "to demand justice for the deplorable incident". Bangladesh education minister Nurul Islam Nahid on Thursday reinstated the headmaster and sacked the school's governing board, which had suspended him over the incident.

"Injustice has been done to the teacher," the minister said, describing the incident as "shameful". However, the lawmaker, from the small opposition Jatiya Party, refused to apologise, saying many had supported his actions. "Why shall I apologise? Five thousand men gathered and chanted slogans against him (Bhakta). I actually helped him to escape the angry public," Osman told reporters.

Last month, two Hindu school teachers were jailed for allegedly making "abusive" remarks against Islam in the southwestern town of Chitalmari.—AFP