

## CHINA JAILS PROVINCIAL BOSS OVER \$36 MILLION IN BRIBES

**BEIJING:** A Chinese court yesterday handed a former top provincial official a suspended death sentence for bribery, it said, the latest senior politician to be jailed in a high-profile, anti-corruption campaign. Bai Enpei, the former top Communist Party official in the southwestern province of Yunnan was handed the sentence-usually commuted to life in prison-for accepting bribes worth more than 240 million yuan (\$36 million) a court in Anyang city said on an official microblog.

Graft has become endemic in China and President Xi Jinping launched a much-publicized drive against corruption after he came to power in 2012, vowing to target both high-level "tigers" and low-ranking "flies". But analysts say China has failed to implement institutional safeguards, such as an independent judiciary and free media, leaving anti-graft campaigns subject to the influence of politics. China's ruling Communist Party promoted Bai to the top-ranking post in Yunnan from 2001 to 2011,

before putting him under investigation in 2014. The court said he had accepted bribes in exchange for giving out rights to real estate and mining projects, and political promotions.

The sentence came as two other formerly high-ranking officials were charged with corruption, the official Xinhua news agency said yesterday.

Former boss of Hebei province in the north Zhou Benshun was charged with bribery, as was Yang Dongliang, China's top work safety official until he

was sacked last year. The Communist Party put Yang under internal investigation shortly after a massive explosion at a chemical storage warehouse in the northern port city of Tianjin killed 173 people in one of China's worst workplace accidents in decades.

Zhou Benshun, removed from his Hebei post last year, was a former aide to China's ex-security czar Zhou Yongkang, the highest ranking official to have been jailed in the corruption crackdown since Xi took office. — AFP



**BELGRADE, SERBIA:** Migrants queue for food at a park where hundreds of migrants are temporarily residing on Thursday, October 6, 2016. —AP

## AFGHAN MIGRANTS STUCK IN BALKANS RESIST GOING HOME

### NO TURNING BACK

**BELGRADE:** They have come a long way, spent most of their money on smugglers and camped out in the open for weeks. For Afghan migrants stranded in the Balkans there is no turning back, even as the most likely prospect many of them face in the European Union could be deportation back to their country.

Thousands of young Afghan men in Serbia and elsewhere in the region are determined to reach wealthy EU nations, despite closed borders and an agreement between their government and the EU that will more easily send home Afghan citizens who have been rejected for asylum.

Aid groups have sharply criticized "The Joint Way Forward" declaration, which was agreed upon only days ahead of an international donors' conference Wednesday for Afghanistan that pledged \$15.2 billion for the beleaguered country. Imogen Sudbery, head of the Brussels office of the International Rescue Committee, says the plan "is worrying on several levels."

"Deals made behind closed doors, thrashed out with no civil society engagement and without apparent consideration for people's safety, nor the realities on the ground, set an alarming precedent for the EU," Sudbery said. "The notion that vulnerable women and children can be sent back to a place of war is preposterous."

#### Measures to return

The document outlines measures to return Afghan citizens, including charter flights, the issuing of travel documents and the possible construction of a separate terminal at Kabul Airport. The EU declaration said the plan aims "to establish a rapid, effective and manageable process for a smooth, dignified and orderly return of Afghan nationals" who don't receive asylum in the 28-nation bloc.

Afghanistan has been mired in conflict for

decades. Clashes have revived recently between government forces and the Taliban around the northern city of Kunduz with civilians increasingly fleeing. Sudbery said 11,000 civilians were killed in Afghanistan last year and 1.2 million people remain internally displaced.

"Afghanistan cannot be considered a 'safe country,'" Sudbery insisted. Serbia is not part of the EU, making the situation for Afghans stuck here even more complicated. It has asked to be included in the EU-Afghanistan return arrangements.

Some migrants in Belgrade, the Serbian capital, said they are not safe in Afghanistan and have no way to finish schools, find jobs or earn money. The young men - who stand little chance of being granted asylum in EU countries - pleaded with EU nations to let them in so they can have a hope of a better future. "Life in Afghanistan is too hard for us, we can't live there," said 15-year-old Sulaiman Zazai. "That is why we go to live in Germany, for a good life, for our future."

#### The struggle is real

Saifullah Zamiri, 18, added that "we struggle a lot in these bad conditions and with closed borders." "We can't go back," Zamiri insisted. "Our government can't control a bad situation, so why do you want us to go back to our country?"

Germany and other EU nations have sought to limit the influx of refugees and migrants after taking in more than one million people last year. The German government says the joint declaration with Afghanistan will provide a "clear and reliable basis" for both voluntary returns and deportations.

IRC's Sudbery blasted as "most damning" the clause that envisages that unaccompanied minors could be returned if "adequate reception and care-taking arrangements" are put in

place in Afghanistan. "It is unclear how the EU will measure or verify this," she said. Rados Djurovic, from Serbia's Asylum Protection Center, said asylum-seekers from Afghanistan must not be automatically rejected but reviewed individually, considering that parts of the country are still dangerous. "Each application should be taken most seriously," he said.

Afghans account for about one half of more than 6,000 migrants who have piled up in Serbia after EU neighbor Hungary introduced strict limits on asylum-seekers and reinforced the border with a razor-wire fence and heavy patrols. On Tuesday, several hundred men set off on a protest march toward Hungary, demanding that authorities there open the border. Tired and cold, the marchers gave up the next morning after walking 40 kilometers (24 miles) and spending the night out in the open.

On Friday, Serbian authorities discovered two Afghan boys, aged 12 and 16, hiding in a truck heading toward EU member Croatia. In Belgrade, a park close to the railway and bus stations where migrants from Afghanistan spend their days and nights is now dubbed "Afghan park."

On a sunny day last week, some migrants were sleeping on the benches wrapped in blankets at the park. A man was helping his friend shave without a mirror on the park's water pipes. A woman was washing clothes and hanging them on a rope spread between two poles.

At lunch time, hundreds lined up for a warm meal of beans and beets distributed by a Belgrade aid group. Hunched over, the migrants ate their food on the ground or on the limited benches. Aid coordinator Gordan Paunovic says his Info Park center now delivers more than 2,000 meals a day in what he described as a "dramatic" increase in recent months. — AP

## NINE MYANMAR POLICE KILLED IN ATTACK ON BANGLADESH BORDER

**YANGON:** Nine Myanmar police officers were killed in coordinated attacks by insurgents on posts along the border with Bangladesh early yesterday, an official and police said. No-one has claimed responsibility but a senior local Myanmar official pointed the finger at a militant group from the Muslim Rohingya minority that has been dormant for years.

The assaults hit three border posts around 1:30 am near Maungdaw in the impoverished western state of Rakhine, simmering with tensions between Buddhists and Muslim Rohingyas, who are forced to live in dire conditions. "Altogether nine police were killed, four others were injured and one is still missing," Tin Maung Swe, a senior official within Rakhine's state government, told AFP.

He added that eight insurgents were also killed in the attacks. Police in the capital Naypyidaw confirmed the attack and said multiple weapons were seized by the assailants. Tin Maung Swe said the attackers were "RSO insurgents", a reference to a group known as the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation.

He did not elaborate on how he knew this. The RSO was a small Rohingya militant group active in the 1980s and 1990s but has not been heard from in nearly two decades. Rakhine has been effectively split on religious grounds since bouts of communal violence tore through the state in 2012, killing scores and forcing tens of thousands to flee.

The Muslim Rohingyas are largely confined to camps and face restrictions which rights groups have likened to apartheid. Several complex ethnic conflicts are rumbling across Myanmar's bor-

derlands, hampering efforts to build the economy after the end of junta rule.

But compared to the country's civil war-ravaged eastern and northern border states, Rakhine has not boasted a significant rebel military presence. In the last few years the Arakan Army, a small Buddhist militia which wants an independent homeland in the state, has fought sporadic battles with the military.

Despite their plight the Rohingyas do not have a known militant faction fighting for them. In May attackers stormed a security post at a camp for Rohingya refugees in southern Bangladesh, just across the border from Maungdaw.

A Bangladeshi camp commander was shot dead and the attackers made off with weapons. Police at the time said the Rohingyas themselves could be suspects. In recent years Bangladeshi police have also alleged that Rohingya refugees are involved in criminal activities including human trafficking. Any rise in violence in Rakhine will be a major concern for the new civilian-led government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

She has asked former UN chief Kofi Annan to head a commission tasked with trying to heal sectarian divisions in the state. The move was largely welcomed by Rohingya community leaders but angered Buddhist nationalists.

Anti-Muslim sentiment still runs high in the region, fanned by hard line Buddhist nationalists who revile the Rohingyas and are viscerally opposed to any move to grant them citizenship. They insist the roughly one-million strong group are intruders from Bangladesh, even though many can trace their ancestry in Myanmar back generations. — AFP

## AUSTRALIAN, BRITON ARRESTED IN BALI FOR POSSESSION OF DRUGS

**JAKARTA:** An Australian and a Briton residing on the resort island of Bali have been arrested on suspicion of possessing hashish, an offence that can incur jail sentences of up to 20 years, Indonesian police said in a statement yesterday.

Police found 7.32 grams of suspected hashish at the residence of the 48-year-old Australian in Sanur. He led them to a 55-year-old Briton, who was found in possession of at least 10.09 grams of hashish, as well as a bong.

Both suspects have lived in Bali for five years according to the police. Drug trafficking in Indonesia carried a maximum

death penalty, and the country has faced widespread international criticism for executions of drug traffickers, including those of a group including two Australians in 2015 which went ahead despite repeated pleas for mercy from governments and international activists.

"For sure, we are building this case further to find the big dealer behind the origin of this (drugs)," said Gede Ganefo, head of narcotics units of Denpasar police.

The two suspects has violated a narcotic law which carries a maximum 20 year of prison, Ganefo said — Reuters



**NEW DELHI:** An ambulance, present as a precautionary measure, leaves a cargo area near the international terminal at New Delhi's international airport yesterday. — AFP

## SUSPECTED RADIOACTIVE LEAK AT DELHI AIRPORT

**NEW DELHI:** Emergency workers sealed off a portion of New Delhi's international airport yesterday after officials suspected a consignment containing radioactive material had leaked, a police officer said.

Fifteen cartons containing nuclear medicine material were isolated to investigate the suspected leak after the shipment arrived at the cargo area in an Air France plane, Sanjay Bhatia, the police chief of Delhi airport security, told AFP.

"The consignment had come from Paris. Our staff reported a leak in the shipment and we alerted the authorities," said Bhatia. "The situation is under control. We have cleared the cargo area and experts from India's Atomic Energy Regulatory Board are examining the material."

The shipment was meant for biomedical companies in New Delhi and a few other Indian cities, he said. Last year a similar suspicion caused a scare at the busy airport after cargo staff found a shipment with nuclear medicine damaged on Turkish Airlines.

Investigators from India's nuclear watchdog later found an organic liquid from another consignment had spilled over the nuclear medicine cartons. In 2010, a scrapyard worker in Delhi died from radiation poisoning and seven others were injured, raising concerns over the handling of radioactive material in India. Environmental group Toxic Links estimates that India produces five million tons of hazardous industrial waste every year. — AFP

## SCORES FLEE PITCHED BATTLES IN NORTHERN AFGHAN CITY

**KABUL:** The number of war-displaced civilians in Kunduz has more than doubled to 24,000, the UN said yesterday, as street battles persisted a week after the Taliban stormed into the northern Afghan city.

Terrified residents facing a growing humanitarian crisis have been fleeing explosions and

gunfights to neighbouring provinces of Balkh, Takhar, Baghlan and the capital Kabul. "Initial reports indicate that around 24,000 internally displaced persons" have fled Kunduz, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said in a statement. "As assessments are ongoing and families are still

on the move, this figure will almost certainly change." The UN had earlier said up to 10,000 people had fled the city, which briefly fell last year to the Taliban in a similar assault. Kunduz residents have faced crippling shortages of food and medicine after the Taliban launched an all-out assault last Monday, capturing parts of the city.

Afghan forces have struggled to flush them out of residential neighborhoods, with the government saying the clearance operation was being carefully conducted to prevent civilian casualties. At least three civilians have been killed and more than 290 wounded, according to the Kunduz general hospital, but local residents say the actual toll is much higher. "Key parts of the city have been cleared, with 52 insurgents killed in the last 24 hours," the interior ministry said on Sunday.

The Taliban attack on Afghanistan's fifth largest city a year after it was overrun by insurgents has raised serious concerns about the capacity of NATO-trained government forces to protect large urban centres. "Kunduz is a tragedy caused by the government's failure to stop the Taliban from entering the city," Kunduz MP Fatima Aziz told local TOLO TV. "If the senior officials of Kunduz had been held accountable last time we wouldn't be facing this renewed crisis." — AFP



**KUNDUZ, AFGHANISTAN:** Residents leaving the city on October 5, 2016 amid ongoing fighting between Taliban militants and Afghan security forces. —AFP