

## TERROR LINK AS PAKISTANI KILLED IN HORRIFIC AUSTRALIA ATTACK

**SYDNEY:** A Pakistani petrol station attendant was stabbed to death during an "absolutely horrific" crime spree in Australia, authorities said, fearing yesterday that the attack was terror-linked. The 29-year-old man was found with multiple stab wounds late Thursday after allegedly being attacked by two teenage boys. Police believe the pair, aged 15 and 16, went on a rampage, allegedly stabbing another man in the stomach, hitting a third with a tire iron and a fourth with a beer bottle.

Sydney's Daily Telegraph reported that "IS" appeared to be scrawled in blood on a window at the petrol station, referring to the Islamic State group. Authorities did not confirm the gruesome details but Deputy Commissioner Catherine Burn said "there was physical evidence at the scene which does go to our view that this might be an act of terrorism". "We don't know the motivation. We don't know what might have led to this. All we know again is that there are very, very serious crimes," she told reporters at a press conference in Sydney.

The boys were arrested early yesterday after being chased by New South Wales state police into the Australian Capital Territory. The Sydney Morning Herald said one of the teenager's mothers thought her son had been radicalized in recent weeks. Burn added that both were known to police for other offences, but not terrorism. The 16-year-old was being investigated for terror links, she said. Local police commander Superintendent Rod Smith described the incident as "absolutely horrific" and said "it doesn't get more serious than this".

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull called it "shocking" and reiterated concerns about the radicalization of youths. Counter-terrorism police have made a series of arrests since late 2014 across Australia and say they have prevented 11 terror attacks on home soil in the past two years. But several attacks have taken place, including the murder of a Sydney police employee in 2015 by a 15-year-old boy, who was then killed in an exchange of gunfire with officers.

The young age and radicalization of many of those detained has been a growing concern for authorities. Last year parliament passed new legislation to lower from 16 to 14 the age at which individuals can be subject to a control order, which aims to prevent a terror attack by limiting a person's movements, communication and activity.—AFP



**SYDNEY:** New South Wales Police Deputy Commissioner, Catherine Burn speaks about a Pakistani petrol station attendant who was stabbed to death during a crime spree in Australia at a media conference in Sydney yesterday.—AFP



**THAILAND:** Thai Navy rangers survey the scene where a high voltage tower was blown up on a rural road in Bachoc district in Thailand's restive southern province of Narathiwat yesterday.—AFP

# WAVE OF VIOLENCE ROCKS THAI SOUTH

BOMBS, ARSON ATTACKS CAUSE WIDESPREAD BLACKOUTS

**BANGKOK:** Nearly two dozen bomb and arson attacks erupted across Thailand's insurgency-torn south shortly after midnight, the army said yesterday, causing widespread blackouts but no casualties in the Muslim-majority region. The violence, which saw more than 50 electricity poles toppled by explosives and tires set alight, struck only hours after Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn signed a new military-backed charter into law.

"There are 23 simultaneous incidents in three southern provinces and four districts of Songkhla," said Colonel Pramote Prom-in, an army spokesman for the south. The border provinces have sizzled with violence for over a decade as ethnic Malay rebels battle Thai troops for more autonomy from the Buddhist-majority state. The fighting has claimed

more than 6,800 lives—mostly civilians—since 2004. The region was one of few areas to reject the ruling junta's constitution in a referendum that saw the document approved last year.

The new charter curbs the power of elected lawmakers and will bolster the army's role in government even after the junta steps down following elections expected in late 2018. However Don Pathan, a Thai analyst based in the far south, said yesterday's wave of attacks did not appear to be linked to the charter's signing. The violence was most likely revenge for the killing of two suspected rebels by security forces last month, he told AFP.

"There has been a small spike of violence since then. My gut feeling is that last night was a retaliation for that alleged extrajudicial killing," said

Pathan. The southern region has been hit with a string of suspected rebel assaults since that fatal shooting on March 29, including one that saw around 30 militants open fire on a police checkpoint in Yala province, injuring 12 officers. The junta, which seized power in 2014, has held several rounds of negotiations with a group that claims to represent the insurgents.

But the talks have failed to make headway and many doubt the rebel negotiators have clout over fighters on the ground. Speaking to reporters yesterday, defense minister Prawit Wongsuwan blamed the previous night's unrest on a "new generation" of fighters, without elaborating. The shadowy insurgent movement rarely claims attacks and is believed to have several factions.—AFP

## PHILIPPINE MILITARY TO UPGRADE ISLAND FACILITIES, NOT LAUNCH LAND GRAB

**MANILA:** The Philippines' military said yesterday that it plans to upgrade and improve facilities on islands it already occupies in the disputed South China Sea, not embark on a new land grab. Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said Thursday that he had ordered the armed forces to "occupy all" remote reefs claimed by Manila. Rival claimant Beijing responded yesterday with a pledge to "firmly safeguard its territorial sovereignty, its maritime rights and interests" in the South China Sea, which is rich in resources and hosts vital shipping lanes.

The firebrand Filipino leader said he want-

ed "nine or 10" islands occupied and fortified, but did not make clear whether he was referring to the nine islands already held by the army, or to some of the 40-odd other Spratly features also claimed by Manila. Duterte's announcement had appeared to be a sharp departure from his previously cordial overtures to Beijing and non-confrontational approach. But military officials yesterday said they did not think order required the army to occupy new outcrops.

"The context with which we take the order is to improve on our already occupied islands, islets and features," military

spokesman Colonel Edgard Arevalo said. The defense department said the plan was to add military barracks, water desalination systems, power generators, light houses, and shelters for fishermen to the features that the Philippines currently occupy. "The president recently announced plans to improve, and implement the Pag-asa development plan which includes nine areas," Duterte spokesman Ernesto Abella said, referring Pag-asa municipality, the Philippines' political subdivision for the Spratly islands that it claims.

"This is part of his mandate to serve the

best interests of the nation," he added. All other major outcrops inside the section of the Spratlys claimed by Manila are already occupied by troops from other claimant countries, Filipino maritime law expert Jay Batongbacal said yesterday. Only a few "reefs and shoals" do not currently have soldiers on them, he said, adding that the Philippine government would likely back away from Duterte's explosive original proposal.

China claims most of the sea and in recent years has been building up disputed reefs into artificial islands that can house military facilities, further raising tensions.—AFP