

EU PUSHES MYANMAR FOR AID ACCESS IN NORTH

YANGON: A senior European Union official has urged Myanmar to allow full aid access to the north of Rakhine state, where thousands have fled their homes after a months-long army crackdown on Rohingya Muslims. The area along the country's northwestern border has been under lockdown since October, when the military launched a campaign to hunt down Rohingya militants who staged deadly attacks on police posts.

Some 100,000 people from the Muslim minority were displaced by the violence, most of them fleeing to Bangladesh and bringing with them harrowing stories of rape, torture and mass killings by soldiers. Myanmar has rebuffed UN claims that its secu-

city forces may have committed crimes against humanity and has refused to allow international observers into the area. De facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi this month publicly rejected a UN mission to probe the violence after meeting the EU's diplomatic chief Federica Mogherini.

European Union commissioner for aid Christos Stylianides said he pushed for unrestricted humanitarian access during a three-day visit to Myanmar, which included a tour of northern Rakhine. "A lot of problems remain in order to see what we want... about humanitarian access," he told AFP late on Sunday at the end of his trip. "I raised this issue a lot in my meetings, not only with ministers but also

with the district commissioner of Maungdaw," he added, referring to one of the locked-down areas.

The EU has pledged to give Myanmar some 800 million euros (\$875 million) of development aid between 2014-20, making it the second-largest recipient in Asia after Afghanistan.

Stylianides is the highest-profile foreign official to visit northern Rakhine since UN rights envoy Yanghee Lee and former UN chief Kofi Annan, who leads a commission tasked with healing deep divisions between Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine.

Over a million Rohingya who live in the coastal western state are treated as interlopers from neigh-

boring Bangladesh and denied citizenship, basic education and healthcare. Their movements are severely restricted. Stylianides said some foreign aid workers had been granted access to northern Rakhine, but more must be done to help 16,000 people who are still displaced before the imminent onset of the monsoon.

The commissioner also raised concerns about a push to forcibly rehouse Rohingya in state-built "model villages" in areas where troops are accused of burning hundreds of houses to the ground. "It's completely unacceptable to proceed on this project without the (voluntary) decision of the inhabitants," he said.—AFP

INDIA APPEALS TO UN COURT TO HALT EXECUTION OF 'SPY'

INDIA ACCUSES PAKISTAN OF EGREGIOUS VIOLATIONS



THE HAGUE: Dr. Deepak Mittal, joint secretary of India's Ministry of External Affairs, right, and his delegation wait for judges to enter the World Court in The Hague, Netherlands, yesterday.—AP

THE HAGUE: India yesterday appealed to the UN's top court to order Pakistan to suspend its planned execution of an Indian national convicted of spying, denouncing his court martial as "farical". In an emergency hearing called just days after India lodged its case, lawyers for New Delhi urged the International Court of Justice to halt the death sentence imposed on Kulbhushan Sudhir Jadhav saying his rights had been violated by Islamabad.

Jadhav was arrested in the restive southwestern province of Balochistan in March 2016, where a separatist insurgency has raged for years. And Pakistani officials claim he has confessed to spying for Indian intelligence services. But India has denied he was a spy, saying his confession was forced from him, and last week lodged a rare protest at the ICJ in The Hague accusing Pakistan of "egregious violations of the Vienna convention".

Pakistan was to present its arguments later yesterday in the court housed in the history-filled halls of The Peace Palace, in a case which has highlighted the uptick in tensions between the two nuclear-armed rivals. Deepak Mittal, one of the Indian legal team, insisted Jadhav was "an innocent Indian national, who, incarcerated in Pakistan for more than a year on concocted charges, (has been) deprived of his rights and protection accorded under the Vienna Convention".

Pakistan has failed to respond to all Indian demands for information about the case, snubbing requests for documents including the charge sheet, and has failed to provide Jadhav with consular access, he told the tribunal. Islamabad has also not responded to a visa application by Jadhav's parents seeking to travel to Pakistan to visit their son. Jadhav "has been denied the right to be defended by a legal counsel of his choice," Mittal said at the start of day-long hearing.

"All that we know is what we have seen in the media in Pakistan," he added. "India believes that the farical nature of the proceedings and unjust trial by a Pakistan military court... has led to a serious miscarriage of justice." India is seeking the immediate suspension of the death sentence against Jadhav who it claims was "kidnapped from Iran, where he was carrying on business after retiring from the Indian Navy," according to court documents.

Urgent situation

New Delhi ultimately wants the tribunal to order Islamabad to annul the sentence. It also wants the ICJ, set up in 1945 to rule on disputes between nations in accordance with international law, to declare that the Pakistani military court violated the Vienna Convention by imposing a death sentence on Jadhav and broke human rights laws. "The situation in which we find ourselves is grave and it is urgent," said another Indian lawyer, Harish Salve. "India has made innumerable requests since March 2016 for consular access."

Nuclear archrivals India and Pakistan routinely accuse one another of sending spies into their countries, and it is not uncommon for either nation to expel diplomats accused of espionage, particularly at times of high tension. But death sentences have rarely been issued in recent years. The case comes as relations have plummeted since a deadly attack on an Indian army base in the disputed region of Kashmir in September, which New Delhi blamed on Pakistan-based Islamist group Jaish-e-Mohammed.

Since the incident there have since been repeated outbreaks of cross-border firing, with both sides reporting deaths and injuries. Both lay claim to complete control over the Himalayan territory of Kashmir which has been divided between India and Pakistan since the end of British colonial rule in 1947. India has long insisted the issue should be resolved bilaterally, without any international involvement.—AFP



NEW DELHI: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, right, is met by officials at the start of a visit to the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing in Noida, on the outskirts of the Indian capital New Delhi.—AFP

PALESTINIAN PRESIDENT KICKS OFF INDIA VISIT WITH TECH TOUR

NEW DELHI: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas began a three-day visit to India yesterday with a tour of an IT facility that is helping Ramallah build a high-end tech hub. Abbas, who arrived late Sunday, will hold talks on the Middle East peace process, among other issues, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in coming days. But his first stop was to a technology institute outside Delhi where India is lending its IT know-how to help Palestine spur job creation in the tech sector.

India agreed in October to spend \$12 million financing a new IT hub in Ramallah in a sign of India's "strong commitment to support (the) Palestinian cause", the foreign ministry said at the time. Abbas and his delegation spent nearly two hours touring the

Centre for Development of Advanced Computing. The Palestinian leader will this evening attend a function at the India Islamic Cultural Centre in New Delhi.

Abbas will today be formally welcomed at the presidential palace before meeting Modi, Indian President Pranab Mukherjee and Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj. New Delhi is hosting Abbas ahead of Modi's visit to Israel in July—the first by an Indian prime minister. India has traditionally voiced its support for Palestinian statehood, initially shunning diplomatic relations with the Jewish state. The frost has thawed, however, with India—the world's biggest arms importer—increasingly seeking closer defense ties with Israel, a top weapons exporter.—AFP

BANGLADESH UPHOLDS LIFE SENTENCE FOR FIREBRAND ISLAMIST PREACHER

DHAKA: Bangladesh's top court yesterday upheld a life sentence for a firebrand Islamist preacher convicted of war crimes, rejecting calls for him to be hanged. The Supreme Court stood by its 2014 decision to jail Delwar Hossain Sayeedi for life over atrocities committed during Bangladesh's 1971 war of independence against Pakistan.

Sayeedi's lawyers wanted the prominent member of Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh's largest Islamist party, acquitted while government attorneys sought capital punishment for the 77-year-old cleric.

"The court rejected the review appeals by both sides," Sayeedi's lawyer Tanvir Al Amin said. Five Jamaat leaders, including mastermind Motiur Rahman Nizami, have been executed for their part in bloody crimes during the war of independence. Sayeedi was sentenced to death in 2013 by a war crimes tribunal, despite criticism by human rights groups that the proceedings failed to meet international norms. The verdict triggered some of the worst political violence in years in the Muslim-majority nation, with scores left dead as tens of

thousands of Islamists clashed with police. Support for the radical preacher-whose sermons could draw hundreds of thousands—swelled even further after rumors that his image was seen in the moon, a perceived sign of his innocence.

The Supreme Court in 2014 commuted the death sentence to life imprisonment, angering secularists who had fought for decades for top Jamaat-e-Islami members to be punished for war crimes. Sayeedi and other Islamists from the hardline group were implicated in the murder, rape and torture of Hindus and pro-independence Bangladeshis seeking a secular nation free from Pakistani rule.

The court decision in Sayeedi's case comes as Bangladesh grapples with a rise in extremism, as the moderate Islam worshipped for generations gives way to a more conservative interpretation of the scriptures. The secular government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has ordered a crackdown on homegrown extremists after a series of bloody attacks, but has more recently made concessions to Islamists to try to woo support.—AFP



LAHORE: Supporters of Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam, a Pakistani religious group, chant slogans during a demonstration to condemn the Friday's suicide bombing, in Lahore, Pakistan.—AP

PAKISTANI POLICE KILL FOUR ISLAMIST MILITANTS

MULTAN, Pakistan: Pakistani police killed four Islamic militants in a shootout in a central district yesterday, according to an official with the country's counterterrorism department. The militants were killed when the police returned fire in a raid in the Khanewal district, said Chaudhry Mohammad Saleem, the official. He said the militants were from Jamat-ul-Ahrar, a breakaway faction of the Pakistani Taliban. The faction has also expressed support for the Islamic State group but has not pledged allegiance to it.

Hand grenades, assault rifles and a cache of explosives were seized in the raid, Saleem said, adding that three other suspects managed to escape from the scene. The raid was part of an intelligence operation launched jointly by the police and military in urban areas in Pakistan, targeting militants who had fled military offensives in lawless tribal regions along the Afghan border that have long served as safe havens for local militants and foreign fighters.

Earlier in the day, a roadside bombing wounded four Pakistani paramilitary troops in

the southwestern district of Mastung, which was the site of a deadly IS attack last week. In yesterday's attack, a roadside bomb struck the troops' vehicle, police official Abdul Nabi said. Sunni extremist group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi claimed responsibility for the attack. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi claimed a similar attack on Sunday that wounded two paramilitary troops.

A suicide attack by the Islamic State group in Mastung on Friday killed 28 people. IS had said it targeted a lawmaker seen as close to the Taliban.—AP

INDIAN SEX TRAFFICKING SURVIVOR GETS COMPENSATION CASH

MUMBAI: Devi is a bubbly teenager who loves hip hop and belly dancing, and still nurtures her childhood dream to become a doctor, even after her life took a cruel turn when she was trafficked and sold for sex in Mumbai two years ago. "I want to study science after high school. I know it is difficult, but I have the will to study. I was only unsure of the money," she said by phone from a shelter where she has stayed since she was rescued.

Now the money she needs has come through. A few weeks ago, the government of the western state of Maharashtra deposited 75,000 rupees (\$1,150) into Devi's bank account, making her a rare beneficiary of a compensation scheme for victims of sexual violence that has failed to compensate many trafficking survivors. She will receive another 225,000 rupees when she turns 18 next year.

Thousands of people - largely poor, rural women and children are lured to India's towns and cities each year by traffickers who promise good jobs, but sell them into modern day slavery. Some end up as domestic workers, or forced to work in small industries such as textile workshops, farming or are pushed into brothels where they are sexually exploited.

Maharashtra is one of the top destinations for trafficked children in the country. The state government is preparing to review a financial aid scheme it established in 2013 for victims of rape and acid attacks, and for children who have been sexually assaulted. Since its launch, Maharashtra has received 7,500 requests and offered payments to nearly 4,500 girls. Some claims were rejected while others have been held

up for lack of funds, an official said. Adult trafficking victims have not been able to access compensation as perpetrators in such cases are charged under anti-trafficking laws - not rape laws, which is a requirement to get aid under the scheme. Yet trafficking victims under the age of 18 can be compensated if their cases are registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act. A district office committee decides on compensation based on the report filed by police and the victim's medical records.

Maharashtra's review of the scheme was directed by the Bombay High Court, which is hearing petitions challenging rules that exclude victims from the scheme, including one denying compensation to victims assaulted prior to the scheme's launch. "You can't have a cut-off date for this scheme. This is not how a welfare scheme works," said Wesley Menezes, a lawyer fighting for compensation for a 13-year-old rape victim who was forced to marry her attacker in 2012, a year before the scheme was launched.

Advocates for trafficking victims say the date rule has primarily impacted children. The International Justice Mission (IJM) helped in Devi's case and it took two years, reams of paperwork and follow-ups with various government departments before the financial aid came in. "This is the first time compensation has come through for a case with our follow-up. We are now encouraged and are pursuing compensation for four to five other cases of minor victims who are eligible for compensation," said Melissa Walavalkar, IJM's director of justice solutions.—Reuters

INDIAN WOMAN BATTERED TO DEATH WITH BRICKS AFTER BEING GANG-RAPED

NEW DELHI: An Indian woman was gang-raped and then brutally murdered by men who smashed her skull with bricks after she had threatened to inform authorities, police in the northern state of Haryana, said yesterday. Police have arrested two men for rape and murder in Sonapat town, and six more were being investigated after the victim's mother accused them of involvement, superintendent of police Ashwin Shenvi said.

The 23-year old woman, a laborer, was taken by the men - at least one of whom knew her - by car from near her home in Sonapat to the nearby city of Rohtak, where they raped her, Shenvi said. "When she said to them she would complain, they hammered her skull in with bricks," he said. "The way that they brutalized her is horrific."

The body was found in an open field on Thursday. The mother of the victim had previously registered a complaint against one of the accused for pressuring

her daughter into marrying him, but the disagreement was settled between the two parties, Shenvi said. Sonapat is 44 kilometers north of New Delhi. Sexual violence against women is a highly-riche issue in India, where the horrific, fatal gang-rape of a student on a bus in New Delhi in 2012 sparked nationwide protests about entrenched violence against women and the failure of authorities to protect them.

India has enacted tougher jail sentences for rapists and promised to try those accused through "fast-track" courts but rape, acid attacks and domestic violence remain common. Indian media also reported a gang-rape in the city of Gurgaon on the outskirts of Delhi over the weekend.

On average, 50 crimes against women are registered every day by police in Delhi, including at least four cases of rape, according to a senior official in the federal home ministry.—Reuters