

## THAIS NEEDS 'MORE TIME' TO FEND OFF EU FISHING BAN

**BANGKOK:** Thailand's fisheries director said yesterday his department needs more time to clean up the kingdom's scandal-mired seafood sector and avoid a looming European threat to ban its fish products.

The kingdom is the world's third largest seafood exporter, a status that rights groups say is achieved through illegal overfishing and a reliance on low-paid trafficked workers from neighboring countries.

But the sector has fallen under intense pressure to overhaul the lucrative and largely unregulated industry. Last year the European Union threatened to ban all Thai seafood products unless the military government tackled rampant illegal fishing among its fleets.

EU officials affirmed last week that the boycott is still on the table and called on Thailand to present "robust measures" of improvement in Bangkok talks next month. But the director of the kingdom's fishing department, Adisorn Promthep, told AFP Thursday more time is needed to restructure a sector that has long operated as a free-for-all.

"Right now what I need is more time," he said, stressing that key legislation has been passed but efficient law enforcement remains a challenge. "Not everything is functioning at 100 percent yet," he said. A ban on seafood exports could cost Thailand up to \$1 billion a year at a time when the current junta is struggling to revive the economy. Thanks to a new vessel monitoring system, fisheries staff are now able to track the movements of some 7,000 vessels from their Bangkok control room equipped with wall-to-wall screens. "When they cross into neighboring countries' (territory) we get an alert," said Pholphisin Suvanachai, the director of the department's technology centre.

His staff then notify any stray ships-around three or four per day-by phone or text message. But more stringent regulations that would set quotas for the catch of specific species remain a long way off, said Adisorn.

"We need more scientific data. We don't know what we're going to do next," he told AFP. He said previous efforts to address the industry's ills were stymied by frequent changes in Thailand's government, which led to a backlog in the bills put before successive parliaments.

The politically tumultuous country has seen democratically elected governments toppled by two military coups in the past 10 years, a period analysts refer to as the "lost decade". But the threat of a costly EU ban has spurred the military government into action, with the ruling junta desperate to avoid any further hits to the kingdom's slumping economy. "The yellow card was like an alarm bell ringing," said Adisorn. The kingdom's fishing industry has also been battered in recent years by allegations of fleets staffed by trafficked slave and child labor from neighboring countries. — AFP



**LAHORE, PAKISTAN:** People protest on Wednesday against Afghanistan carrying placards paying tribute to a Pakistani soldier who was killed during a recent clash with Afghan forces. — AP

## PAKISTAN, AFGHAN OFFICIAL IN TALKS TO EASE BORDER TENSIONS FOLLOWING THIS WEEK'S DEADLY CLASHES

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan's foreign ministry says Islamabad and Kabul are engaged in talks to deescalate tensions at a main border crossing between the two neighboring countries following this week's deadly clashes.

Outbreaks of shooting at the Torkham crossing have killed two

Afghan and one Pakistani border guard and wounded at least 20 on both sides. Spokesman Nafees Zakaria with Pakistan's foreign ministry told reporters in Islamabad on Thursday that he hopes the matter will be resolved soon.

He says the shooting first erupted after Pakistan started building a gate

on its side of the Torkham border to curb illegal cross-border movement. He says Pakistan plans to build seven more such gates along the porous 2,200 kilometer (1,375 mile)-long border. Torkham, a usually busy crossing, has remained closed because of continuing tensions. — AP

## INDIA TURNS TO VOLUNTEERS AS SCHOOLS SUFFER TEACHING GAPS

**NEW DELHI:** India is calling for volunteers to hold workshops for children, a minister said yesterday, as state-run schools around the country struggle with absentee teachers. Launching the initiative, education minister Smriti Irani said people from varying professions could teach classes on creative writing, art, storytelling and public speaking. "It is the best example of participative citizenry," Irani said in New Delhi as she launched a website where volunteers can register and connect with schools in their area. "The world over, community engagement has led to better quality education...I am hopeful by December every school in the country will be connected to this program," she said.

Volunteers can connect to the pilot program through an app on their smart phones. Irani said the initiative, initially offered in 2,200 schools nationwide, was aimed at supplementing formal education. But it comes as the government grapples with teacher shortages in schools due to extended absences or under-recruitment.

Access to education has improved significantly in recent years with thousands of new government-run schools in rural and remote areas for India's tens of millions of young people. But experts say standards of teaching in many schools is below par,

leading to poor reading and writing levels among students.

A survey by academics and the World Bank in 2010 found more than 20 percent of state primary school teachers were

absent at any one time. Many children in fifth year cannot read a second-year book in their own language, an annual survey by Indian education research group Pratham has consistently showed. — AFP

## GUN BATTLE IN INDIAN KASHMIR KILLS FIVE

**SRINAGAR, INDIA:** A soldier and four suspected rebels were killed in a gun battle in Indian-administered Kashmir yesterday, an army spokesman said.

Soldiers intercepted a group of militants trying to cross the heavily militarised de-facto border from Pakistan into India at daybreak, triggering a fierce fire fight, the spokesman, N. N. Joshi said.

"Four terrorists were killed in the operation and a soldier who was injured in the firefight later succumbed," Joshi told AFP. "This was the second infiltration bid in three days." A militant and a soldier were killed on Wednesday in a gun battle in the mountainous region that lasted 24 hours. Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since 1947 but both countries claim the Muslim-majority territory in its entirety.

Rebel groups have for decades been fighting Indian troops deployed in the region, seeking independence or a merger with Pakistan. The fighting has killed tens of thousands of people, most of them civilians. India regularly accuses Pakistan of arming rebels to launch attacks in Indian-administered Kashmir.

Islamabad refutes the allegation, saying it only provides diplomatic support. Overall violence levels have fallen since the 1990s when militancy was at its peak, but there have been a number of attacks on government forces in recent weeks. — AFP

## PAKISTANI WOMAN 'THROWS ACID ON BOYFRIEND FOR REFUSING MARRIAGE'

**MULTAN, PAKISTAN:** A Pakistani woman who allegedly threw acid on her boyfriend causing life-threatening injuries after he refused to marry her, officials said yesterday, and was arrested in a rare case of a woman attacking a man. Momil Mai, a married mother-of-four, had been in a relationship with 25-year-old Saddaqt Ali, who was also married, for several years, police near Multan city in Punjab province told AFP.

Mai was demanding Ali make her his second wife, officials said. Polygamy is legal though rare for men in conservative Muslim Pakistan, however a woman would have to divorce before being allowed to marry again. "On Wednesday night, Ali went to see Mai as usual and she threw acid on his body after he once again refused to

marry her," Bashir Ahmed, a local police official, told AFP.

Ali had time to turn, he said, with the acid burning his back but not his face. Ashiq Malik, medical superintendent at the government hospital in Multan where Ali is being treated, said that the victim received burns to around 60 percent of his body.

Doctors are fighting to save Ali's life, he said. A criminal case was registered against Mai, whose current husband is a laborer, after a complaint by Ali's family. Acid attacks, which disfigure and often blind their overwhelmingly female victims, have long been used to settle personal or family scores in Pakistan, with hundreds of cases reported each year. It is rare for a woman to attack a man. — AFP