

DIVIDED KOREANS PAY RESPECT TO ANCESTORS

IMJINGAK: On the frozen banks of the Imjin river, South Koreans divided from their families decades ago by war gathered yesterday to pay respects to their ancestors. Mostly elderly men—according to tradition, Korean ceremonies for the lunar new year must be carried out by the eldest son—they lined up before an altar piled with offerings of rice cakes, fruit and fish. Shoeless despite the bitter cold, they each placed a flower on the stone, poured an offering of soju-rice wine and burned incense before prostrating themselves twice, forehead to the floor, and bowing deeply.

Some walked away in tears. Others held ceremonies of their own to pray for their relatives near the fence at Imjingak, just south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) that has marked the border since the 1950-53 Korean War ended with an armistice rather than a peace treaty. Among them was Seo Jin-Sun, 87, whose father—a policeman during Japan's colonial rule over Korea—was executed along with his son by Communist forces during the war. She travelled southwards in 1951 only to discover that her husband—who had fled earlier—was married to another woman.

Park Ju-Seong, her son from her second marriage, said the family came "to pay respects to my mother's deceased relatives as Imjingak is the closest place to the North that we can get to". Every time they visit, he added, "my mother yearns all the more to return home and see her relatives there".

Millions of family members were separated by the conflict, and most have since died without ever seeing or hearing from their relatives on the other side in the absence of civilian cross-border post and telephone communications.

A series of carefully managed reunions were held in past years, but with relatively few participants, and the last of them was in October 2015. Relations between the two sides have since worsened as the North stepped up the nuclear and missile programs that have seen it subjected to heightened United Nations sanctions. Kim Young-Ki, 80, came to Imjingak, 53 kilometers from Seoul, to pay respects to his grandfather, who is buried in his home town of Kaesong, just north of the border.

Kim fled the city, along with his six siblings, parents and grandmother when South Korean and UN troops retreated in the face of a Chinese offensive in 1951. "Whenever national holidays come around, I am haunted by the memory of my old home," he said. "I myself shut and locked the gate door," he said. "If I were put in Kaesong I would be able to find it quite easily. All the roads and back alleys are so vivid in my memory." A few meters away from the site of yesterday's ceremony, the rusting hulk of a steam engine stood where it came under attack in 1950. Pock-marked with the holes of 1,020 bullets, a panel describes it as "a symbol of the tragic history of the division into North and South Korea". — AFP



PAJU: North Korean refugees and their family members place flowers to respect their ancestors in North Korea as they celebrate the Lunar New Year at the Imjingak Pavilion, near the demilitarized zone of Panmunjom, in Paju, South Korea yesterday. — AP



MANILA: Activists hold a protest in front of Camp Crame, the headquarters of the Philippine National Police (PNP) condemning the government's War on Drugs. — AFP

FEARS, DEATHS AS PHILIPPINE ROGUE POLICE ON RAMPAGE

SOUTH KOREAN BUSINESSMAN STRANGLED TO DEATH

MANILA: Philippine police allegedly abducting, framing, extorting and murdering people have raised fears of rogue cops going on the rampage under the cover of President Rodrigo Duterte's deadly drug war, critics and some of his supporters say. Revelations last week — a South Korean businessman was strangled to death inside the national police headquarters after being kidnapped by anti-drugs officers looking to extort money from his wife have led to multiple other scandals being uncovered. They have fuelled concerns that the police force, already widely perceived as one of the nation's most corrupt institutions, cannot be trusted to prosecute Duterte's drug war.

"It is hard for the all out war on illegal drugs to succeed because we have a problem with members of the police force taking advantage," Senator Panfilo Lacson, an ex-national police chief and member of Duterte's ruling coalition, said this week. "They know the president is mad at drugs, very passionate and ordinary policemen are carried away hearing him say he has signed their pardon and they will believe that."

Duterte has repeatedly promised to shield police from prosecution if they are charged with killing drug suspects as part of the crackdown, known locally as Tokhang.

Police have reported killing more than 2,500 people they have accused of being drug suspects, while nearly 4,000 others have died in unexplained circumstances. Often bodies are left on streets with signs branding them drug addicts or traffickers. The crackdown is fulfilling a campaign pledge that underpinned Duterte's election win last year—that he would eradicate drugs in society by killing tens of thousands of people. As president he has expanded on that vow, saying he would be "happy to slaughter" three million drug addicts to save the Philippines from becoming a narco state. His campaign has proved popular for many Filipinos hoping to see a quick solution to the intractable problem of crime.

'Camp Crime'

But an admission by the national police chief last week that a South Korean businessman was

murdered by members of his Anti-Illegal Drugs Group confirmed critics' fears about rogue officers taking advantage of the drug war. The businessman, Jee Ick-joo, was abducted from his home in October last year then brought to the national police headquarters where he was strangled to death in a car close to the police chief's residence, according to an official investigation. His wife paid the kidnapers a ransom of five million pesos (\$100,000), only becoming aware this month that he had been murdered on the day of his abduction.

The killing in the police headquarters, officially named Camp Crame, has led critics to dub it "Camp Crime". Soon after the case was made public, authorities revealed that other policemen robbed and extorted money from three South Korean golfers in December last year. Jee's killing prompted a Senate inquiry on Thursday where lawmakers spoke of at least 12 similar cases.

Senator Lacson aired CCTV footage at the inquiry of what he said were policemen beating up people in an office in October last year and pointing guns at them before planting bags of crystal methamphetamine in their drawers. Lacson said the operation was a fake drug raid to extort money from the business, which netted the police the equivalent of \$180,000. Metro Manila police chief Oscar Albayalde said on Friday at least eight policemen suspected to be in the video were relieved of their duties pending a probe. Three more policemen in Manila charged with robbery and extortion were this week merely ordered to be transferred to a new region instead of suspended or sacked.

Presidential backing

Even before the recent revelations, one high-profile case was the killing of a town mayor inside his own jail cell. The National Bureau of Investigation found that police shot dead mayor Rolando Espinosa after Duterte named him as being involved in the illegal drug trade. However Duterte said he would not allow the accused police to go to prison. "Because I am the president and the police are under me, I will believe them," he said in December. The police leadership has insisted rogue officers have been around long before the drug war began, and that there are only a few of them. But critics think otherwise. "Tokhang for ransom is the direct result of an anti-drug campaign that has shunned human rights and the rule of law and encouraged extrajudicial killings," Senator Risa Hontiveros said on Friday. "It opened a Pandora's box of pure evil!" — AFP

WHAT'S IN TRUMP'S ORDER HALTING REFUGEE PROGRAM

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said on Friday his administration wants more rigorous screening of refugees and visitors from certain countries to prevent terrorist attacks. Here is what Trump's order on "extreme vetting" — denounced by civil rights groups as discriminatory — includes.

Suspension of visas

The order bars the entry of foreign nationals from certain countries for 90 days. While no countries are specifically named in the order, it refers to a statute that would apply to seven Muslim-majority nations: Syria, Iran, Sudan, Libya, Somalia, Yemen and Iraq. There is an exception for certain types of visas, including for diplomats and the United Nations. The temporary halt is aimed at giving the Department of Homeland Security, the State Department and the Director of National Intelligence time to determine what information is needed from each country to ensure that visas are not issued to individuals posing a national security threat.

Changes to screening

The order calls for a review to create a single process for screening people entering the country, which could include holding more in-person interviews, searches of an expanded database of identity documents or longer application forms. Under the current system, some visa applications require interviews but others do not. The government already has extensive databases but some believe they need to be expanded. The order suspends the Visa Interview Waiver Program, which allows consular officers to exempt some applicants from face-to-face interviews if they are seeking to renew their temporary visas within a year of expiration. Immigration attorneys say the changes will make even routine applications much more complicated and time consuming and could mean that more people will need assistance to get through the visa process. In an attempt to ensure wait times for interviews

are "not unduly affected," the order calls for the hiring of more consular fellows to work in US embassies abroad.

Restricting refugees

The order calls for the temporary halt of all refugee admissions for four months so the government can study the process and determine if additional checks are necessary, although there will be case-by-case exceptions. The order also implemented a blanket ban of all Syrian refugees until "sufficient changes" have been made to the refugee program, without giving more details. After the suspension is lifted, the government will give priority to applicants that are suffering religious-based persecution, but only if they are minorities in their country. Trump said in a television interview that the move would protect Christians. It could also protect ethnic minorities like the Yazidis in the Middle East. This could potentially open the door to legal challenges claiming religious discrimination, some legal experts say. Once refugee admissions resume, fewer will be allowed. The 2017 cap was set at 50,000 people, compared to 85,000 designated by President Barack Obama for 2016. In a nod to certain states and cities that have objected to refugee resettlement, the order also seeks to give state and local jurisdictions a role in deciding whether or not to allow people to live there.

Biometric tracking system

The system is aimed at tracking foreign visitors' arrival and departure using information like finger prints. Former President Barack Obama's administration had aimed to start implementing biometric exit checks at the country's largest airports by 2018. Some experts have said that for the system to work properly, it would need to cover all land, air, and sea ports of entry, which is a major undertaking. According to a 2014 report from the Bipartisan Policy Center the system would be expensive to implement and would "offer mixed value for enforcement objectives." — Reuters

NORTH KOREA APPEARS TO HAVE RESTARTED PLUTONIUM REACTOR

WASHINGTON: New commercial satellite imagery indicates North Korea has resumed operation of a reactor at its main nuclear site used to produce plutonium for its nuclear weapons program, a US think tank said on Friday. Washington's 38 North North Korea monitoring project said previous analysis from Jan 18 showed signs that North Korea was preparing to restart the reactor at Yongbyon, having unloaded spent fuel rods for reprocessing to produce additional plutonium for its nuclear weapons stockpile.

"Imagery from January 22 shows a water plume (most probably warm) originating from the cooling water outlet of the reactor, an indication that the reactor is very likely operating," it said in a report. It said it was impossible to estimate at what power level the reactor was running, "although it may be considerable." A 38 North Korea report last week said operations at the reactor had been suspended since late 2015.

North Korea has maintained its nuclear and missile programs in violation of repeated rounds of international sanctions. News of the

apparent reactor restart comes at a time of rising concern about North Korea's weapons programs, which could present the new administration of US President Donald Trump with its first major crisis. A report by leading US-based nuclear expert Siegfried Hecker published by 38 North last September estimated North Korea had stockpiles of 32 to 54 kg (70 to 119 pounds) of plutonium, enough for 6 to 8 bombs, and had the capacity to produce 6 kg, or approximately one bomb's worth, per year.

North Korea also produces highly enriched uranium for atomic bombs and would have sufficient fissile material for approximately 20 bombs by the end of last year, and the capacity to produce seven more a year, that report said. In a New Year speech, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said his country was close to test launching an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) and state media has said a launch could come at any time. Trump's defense secretary plans to visit Japan and South Korea next week and shared concerns about North Korea are expected to top his agenda. — Reuters



KASHMIR: The site of a snow avalanche is pictured in Gurez sector, some 130 kms north of Srinagar. Rescuers retrieved the bodies on January 27, 2017, of another four Indian soldiers buried beneath tons of snow in Kashmir, taking the death toll from a series of avalanches to 20. — AFP

HEAVY SNOW TRAPS FIVE INDIAN SOLDIERS ALONG THE FRONTIER

SRINAGAR: Five Indian soldiers on patrol were trapped under snow after a snowy track caved yesterday along the highly militarized Line of Control that divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan. A rescue operation was started immediately despite hostile weather, Indian army spokesman Col Rajesh Kalia said. The soldiers were on a routine patrol when the cave-in occurred in the Machil sector of the Himalayan region under India's control.

Authorities in Indian-controlled Kashmir have issued avalanche warnings for many parts of the region, especially along the de facto frontier. Two avalanches on Wednesday buried a military post and swept away a patrol in

Gurez, burying 21 soldiers, seven of whom were rescued. The bodies of the 14 others were recovered in two days.

Also earlier Wednesday, four members of a family and an Indian army officer were killed in other avalanches. The heavy snowfall has cut off roads and disrupted power and communications in Kashmir, and hundreds of residents have been evacuated from high-risk areas. Avalanches and landslides are common in Kashmir and have caused some of the heaviest tolls for the Indian and Pakistani armies camped near the Line of Control area. In 2012, a massive avalanche in the Pakistan-controlled part killed 140 people, including 129 Pakistani soldiers. — AP