

International

23 killed in multiple suicide bombings in Afghanistan

Taliban militants storm army base in Farah

In the news

Pakistan acquits 12

LAHORE: A Pakistani court acquitted 12 men of child sex abuse and blackmail charges on Saturday, the latest verdict in a massive paedophilia scandal that rocked the country in August 2015. The abuse and extortion scandal, which authorities have called the largest in Pakistan's history, allegedly involved hundreds of victims in Punjab province. Two of the accused were jailed for life in April last year. Judge Chaudhry Ilyas acquitted the men of "sexual abuse of a young boy and making a video to blackmail his family," a court official told AFP. — AFP

India crash leaves 9 kids

NEW DELHI: At least nine schoolchildren were killed and 20 others injured in eastern India's Bihar state yesterday after a vehicle crashed into them outside their school in an apparent hit-and-run, police said. Officers said the driver hit the children at speed as he was driving away from another location close to the school, where his vehicle had brushed against a pedestrian. The incident took place in Muzaffarpur district, around 43 miles (70 kilometers) from the state capital Patna. "Eyewitnesses have told us that the driver didn't stop even after running over these middle-school children," Anil Kumar Singh, deputy inspector general of Bihar police told AFP. — AFP

Philippine Catholics protest

MANILA: Around a thousand Catholics in the Philippines marched in Manila yesterday to protest President Rodrigo Duterte's bloody war on drugs and his efforts to reinstate the death penalty. The protests come a day after students in the capital and provincial universities held demonstrations against Duterte, and a day before the 32nd anniversary of the "People Power" revolution that drove dictator Ferdinand Marcos into exile. — AFP

Indonesia croc attack

JAKARTA: A 66-year-old woman was mauled to death by a huge crocodile on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, police said yesterday. The Indonesian woman's family and neighbors launched a search after she failed to return home from a riverside garden near the remote village of Teluk Kuali in Jambi province earlier this week. — AFP

KABUL: At least 23 people were killed and more than a dozen wounded in multiple suicide bombings and attacks in Afghanistan yesterday, officials said, the latest in a series of assaults in the war-torn country. In the biggest attack, Taliban militants stormed an army base in the western province of Farah overnight, killing at least 18 soldiers.

"Last night a big group of militants attacked an army base in Bala Buluk district of Farah. Unfortunately, we lost 18 soldiers, two soldiers were wounded. We have sent more reinforcements to the area," defense ministry spokesman Daulat Wazir said. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. Deputy provincial governor Younus Rasooli said the authorities had sent a fact-finding delegation to Bala Buluk to investigate the assault. In another attack, a suicide bomber detonated his explosives near the diplomatic area of Kabul during the morning rush hour, killing at least three people and wounding five others, deputy interior ministry spokesman Nasrat Rahimi told AFP. "At around 8:30 am, a suicide bomber on foot, well-dressed with a necktie on, was identified at a checkpoint. He blew up his explosives, killing three and wounding five others," he said, updating an earlier toll.

A security source who requested not to be named said the explosion happened near a compound belonging to the National Directorate of Security (NDS), the Afghan intelligence agency. The NDS compound is located near the NATO

headquarters and the US embassy. "I was driving nearby when I heard a big explosion, the windows of my car were smashed. I saw several wounded people on the street near me," a witness told Tolonews TV adding that security forces had since swarmed the area, closing off the main road leading to the attack site.

In December, a suicide attacker on foot blew himself up near the same compound, killing at least six civilians. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the latest attack in Kabul, which in recent months has become one of the deadliest places in Afghanistan for civilians. Since mid-January, militants have stormed a luxury hotel, bombed a crowded street and raided a military compound in the capital, killing more than 130 people as the city remains on high alert fearing further violence.

Car bombings

In two other attacks yesterday in volatile southern Helmand province, suicide car bombs killed at least two soldiers and wounded more than a dozen others, officials said. In the first incident, militants used a Humvee to attack an army base in Nad Ali district but the vehicle was destroyed when soldiers identified it and hit it with a rocket propelled grenade, provincial spokesman Omar Zawak told AFP.

"Unfortunately, two soldiers were killed in the attack and seven wounded," he said. The Nad Ali

official, police told AFP. Besides the bloody campaign against the Rohingya in the state's north, Rakhine has been struggling with a decade-long rebellion fought by ethnic Rakhine Buddhist insurgents, though bombings in the state capital are rare. "Three bombs exploded and three other unexploded bombs were found. A police officer was injured but not seriously," a senior officer told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The blasts hit at around 4:00 am (2130 GMT Friday), the officer said. One was detonated in the compound of the state government secretary's home, while the two others exploded in front of an office in the city and on a road leading to a beach. A local official from the state government confirmed the explosions. Photos of the



KABUL: Afghan security personnel stand guard near the site of a suicide bombing at Shash Darak in Kabul yesterday. — AFP

attack was followed by a second suicide car bombing in the provincial capital Lashkar Gah that wounded seven people. The attack was against an NDS compound and near a police headquarters in the city, Helmand police spokesman Salaam Afghan told AFP. The Taliban claimed both attacks in Helmand.

Militants including the Taliban and the

Islamic State group have stepped up their attacks on beleaguered Afghan troops and police in recent months, sapping morale already hit by desertions and corruption. Afghan soldiers have taken what the UN describes as "shocking" casualties since international forces ended their combat role at the end of 2014, though troop casualty figures are no longer released. — AFP

Three bombs rock capital of Myanmar's Rakhine state

YANGON: Three bombs exploded early yesterday in the capital of Myanmar's Rakhine state, a cauldron of ethnic tensions roiled by insurgencies and a military crackdown on the Muslim Rohingya, injuring one police officer, officials said. The three blasts at separate locations around Sittwe included one at the home of a high-ranking

official, police told AFP. Besides the bloody campaign against the Rohingya in the state's north, Rakhine has been struggling with a decade-long rebellion fought by ethnic Rakhine Buddhist insurgents, though bombings in the state capital are rare.

"Some streets are being blocked by police already because of the bomb blasts," Zaw Zaw, a resident of Sittwe, told AFP by phone. In recent months, unrest in Rakhine has been concentrated in the state's northern wedge, where a sweeping military crackdown on the Rohingya Muslim community last August pushed nearly 700,000 refugees across the border to Bangladesh.

International attention has focused on that conflict, with the UN leading global condemnation of what it says amounts to a military-led ethnic cleansing campaign against the Rohingya.

Yet restive Rakhine also hosts a lesser-known insurgency waged by a Rakhine

Buddhist rebel group called the Arakan Army, which periodically clashes with Myanmar troops. Unlike the Rohingya Muslims who are denied citizenship, the Rakhine are recognized by the government as an ethnic minority but are still marginalised in a country historically dominated by the Bamar (Burmese) majority.

Tensions between the community and local authorities shot through the roof after a police crackdown on an ethnic Rakhine mob left seven dead last month.

That violence in Mrauk U township prompted the Arakan Army's political wing to warn of a "serious" retaliation for the deaths of the protesters.

Around two weeks later the town's administrator was found murdered on the side of the road. — AFP

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