

## International

# Pakistan's Khan decries 'arrogant' India for cancelling rare meeting

## India accuses Pakistan's PM of harboring an 'evil agenda'

ISLAMABAD: India's decision to cancel rare talks with Islamabad was disappointing and "arrogant", Imran Khan said yesterday, one day after New Delhi accused Pakistan's prime minister of harboring an "evil agenda". India pulled the plug on a meeting between its foreign minister and her Pakistani counterpart set for next week on the sidelines of a major UN conference, just one day after saying it would go ahead.

The foreign ministry in New Delhi blamed the about-face on recent actions that had revealed Pakistan's "evil agenda" and the "true face" of Khan, who hit back on Twitter yesterday. "Disappointed at the arrogant & negative response by India to my call for resumption of the peace dialogue," he wrote. "However, all my life I have come across small men occupying big offices who do not have the vision to see the larger picture." New Delhi said it cancelled the talks after the "latest brutal killings of our security personnel by Pakistan-based entities" and the recent release of a series of Pakistani postage stamps "glorifying a terrorist and terrorism".

India did not specify which killings it was referring to in its statement, but earlier this week, an Indian

border guard in the disputed territory of Kashmir was killed and his body mutilated. Three policemen were then found dead on Friday after being abducted in Indian-administered Kashmir. Pakistan also recently issued postage stamps of Burhan Wani, a charismatic Kashmiri militant commander killed by Indian troops in July 2016, whose death sparked a wave of violent protests in the territory. India has long accused

### Indian border guard killed, his body mutilated

Pakistan of arming rebel groups in Kashmir, a Himalayan territory divided between the two countries but claimed in full by both.

In a statement from its foreign office, Pakistan said Friday it had "nothing to do with" the deaths, accusing India of spreading "motivated and malicious propaganda". The meeting in New York between Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj and Pakistan's Shah Mehmood Qureshi on the sidelines of the annual UN General Assembly debate was only confirmed on Thursday. It came after Khan wrote to his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi calling for a resumption of talks between the nuclear-armed foes. High-level talks between India and Pakistan are rare. Indian media described the meeting would have been the first in nearly three years.—AFP



SRINAGAR: In this file photo, Indian Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) troopers parade in Srinagar. Suspected rebels abducted and killed three policemen in Indian-administered Kashmir on September 21 as tension in the disputed region mounted ahead of civic polls.—AFP

## US president holds on to 'diplomatic success' in N Korea

WASHINGTON: More than a year after President Donald Trump threatened Pyongyang with "fire and fury like the world has never seen," the US leader now boasts of his relationship with North Korean strongman Kim Jong Un. "He's calm. I'm calm," Trump said this week. The US leader has claimed a diplomatic win, citing the "tremendous progress" and "great responses" from Pyongyang since he met Kim at a summit in Singapore in June.

The historic meeting resulted in a lofty joint statement, though momentum appeared to have stalled in recent weeks, with the two sides unable to agree on how Kim would get rid of his nuclear weapons. But on Friday, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said he hoped for a second summit between Trump and Kim "before too long" to press ahead with efforts to denuclearize North Korea.

"I hope the two leaders get together again to continue to make progress on this incredibly important issue for the entire world," Pompeo said. The development came after Kim this week welcomed South Korean President Moon Jae-in to Pyongyang. The North Korean leader agreed to close a missile testing site, giving new momentum to nuclear negotiations with the US, and said the North could dismantle its best-known nuclear facility at Yongbyon-provided the US takes "corresponding measures."

Experts praised the positive developments, but cautioned much remains to be done, noting the steps Kim has so far taken do not ensure North Korea will get rid of its nuclear weapons. "Trump still thinks the first (summit) was a major success," Jon Wolfsthal, director of the Nuclear Crisis Group, told AFP. "He needs a foreign policy success soon to reverse his domestic decline," the former Obama administration official added.

### Denuclearization first

Pompeo has said Washington is ready to "immediately" begin negotiating with Pyongyang, and has invited his North Korean counterpart to meet on the sidelines of next week's United Nations General Assembly in New York. But the top US diplomat has quietly ignored North Korea's demand for counter-measures, such as sanctions relief, as the US has long insisted on denuclearization before it rewards Pyongyang. "Nothing can happen in the absence of denuclearization," State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said. "Denuclearization has to come first," she added. "In order to get to the denuclearization of North Korea, sanctions must be enforced. We cannot let our foot off the gas."

While Washington isn't budging on sanctions, Trump has indicated he is ready to independently offer other concessions, a move Kim may be counting on. "After a nice letter from (Kim), the president says he's willing to have a summit-though none of the problems have been fixed," Bruce Klingner, who formerly worked for the CIA and now specializes in Korean and Japanese affairs for the Heritage Foundation think tank said. "Pyongyang is trying to decouple Trump from the rest of the administration. They see him as more likely to offer concessions, as he did in Singapore, without demanding things in return-and Kim is right to think so."

The US could try to use North Korea's eagerness to meet with Trump as some sort of leverage to get concrete steps ahead of the meeting," Klingner added. Still, many experts view the prospect of new talks positively. While the announcements made by the North this week are limited, "it is the first time where we have seen this initiative where North Koreans are willing to talk to South Koreans about denuclearization," said Joseph Yun, who was the US special representative for North Korea until days before Trump accepted the Singapore summit invitation.—AFP

## China opens embassy in Dominican Republic

SANTO DOMINGO: China's most senior envoy inaugurated a new embassy in the Dominican Republic on Friday after the Caribbean country cut ties with Taiwan in a move that prompted US concern over the Asian island's dwindling number of allies. Self-ruled Taiwan, which China claims as its own, now has formal relations with only 17 countries, almost all of them small and less developed nations in Central America and the Pacific, including Belize and Nauru.

"We have witnessed a historic breakthrough," capping 20 years of growing engagement, Chinese State Councilor Wang Yi, the government's top diplomat, said in a speech televised by Chinese state media. Along with the Dominican Republic's decision in May, Panama and El Salvador have also switched recognition to Beijing in the past two years.

## Pope to honor Baltic martyrs amid abuse crisis

VILNIUS: Pope Francis kicks off a Baltic tour in Catholic Lithuania yesterday where he will honor victims of the region's Nazi and Soviet occupations as the Church reels from fresh clerical abuse scandals. The four-day trip to the northeastern edge of the European Union and NATO alliance brings him geographically close to Russia, where Vatican diplomats have been trying for years to arrange a papal visit. The pontiff will also visit mainly Protestant Latvia on Monday and secular Estonia on Tuesday as all three Baltic states mark 100 years of independence this year. But the celebrations risk being overshadowed by a fresh wave of devastating claims of sexual abuse by clergy across the globe.

### Allegations of abuse

Scandals in Australia, Europe, and North and South America have involved widespread claims of abuse - and cover-ups - by clergymen and lay members with one archbishop describing it as the church's "own 9/11". Pope Francis has called for a meeting of the heads of Catholic bishops' conferences at the Vatican next February to discuss the issue of the "protection of minors". However, the pontiff has kept a stony silence regarding claims he had ignored allega-

## Unexploded mortar shell kill eight kids

MAZAR-I-SHARIF: Eight children, including four siblings, were killed in Afghanistan when a mortar shell they were playing with exploded, relatives said yesterday, adding to the ever-growing civilian toll in the 17-year war. Another six children were wounded in the blast on Friday, including

The United States recalled its top diplomats in those countries and warned that China was offering economic incentives in a bid for domination. Tensions between the United States and countries in the region have flared over US President Donald Trump's hard line policies against immigration. US Ambassador Robin Bernstein said on Thursday, in her first public appearance back in the Dominican Republic, that she had been asked about China's role in the region while in Washington, and that she hoped countries were considering their "long-term goals".

In a statement on Thursday, the US embassy in El Salvador lamented that countries in the region were deepening ties to "unfamiliar partners" and engaging in transactions that "lack transparency". Taiwan says China offered the Dominican Republic a \$3.1 billion package of investments and loans to get them to sever ties, though China said there were no economic pre-conditions. Wang said the Dominican Republic is China's biggest trade partner in the Caribbean, setting the foundation for diplomatic ties. "The Chinese developing economy and expanding market have brought real benefits to the Dominican Republic," he said.

Wang, in a swipe at US criticism, said

tions of abuse that were reported to him. U2 frontman Bono said he could see the pain on Francis's face after a Wednesday meeting when he told the pope that "it looks to some people that the abusers are being more protected than the victims". Church authorities in Germany are expected to officially publish a study detailing decades of child sex abuse by priests as Francis winds down his trip on Tuesday. According to the study, 1,670 clergymen in Germany committed some form of sexual attack against 3,677 minors between 1946 and 2014, Spiegel Online reported earlier this month quoting leaked data.

### 'Sacrifices, freedom'

Francis will meet President Dalia Grybauskaitė in Vilnius before addressing youth and visiting a revered icon. His trip will follow in the footsteps of late Polish-born pontiff Saint John Paul II, who travelled to all three Baltic states in 1993, just two years after they broke free from the crumbling Soviet Union. The trio have since firmly anchored their sovereignty in alliances with the West by joining both NATO and the EU in 2004. While that led to solid economic growth, it also brought social inequality that triggered mass emigration to western Europe - a troubling trend for states with populations ranging from 1.3 to 2.9 million. The last century of Baltic state history was marked by the Nazi invasion - which wiped out almost all of the region's Jews - and then decades of Soviet occupation during the Cold War.

Behind the Iron Curtain, the Catholic Church played a key role in the non-vio-



SANTO DOMINGO: Minister of Foreign Affairs and State Counselor of the People's Republic of China, Wang Yi (right) and the Dominican Republic Foreign Minister Miguel Vargas Maldonado, shake hands during the inauguration ceremony of the Chinese Embassy in Santo Domingo.—AFP

lence that as a sovereign country, the Dominican Republic had the absolute right to decide its own foreign policy and that no other nation had the right to interfere. "The Dominican Republic establishing diplomatic relations with China does not target any third party,

and will not harm the traditional influence and legitimate rights of other countries in the region," he added. Wang will also visit Guyana and Suriname before speaking at the UN General Assembly in New York.—Reuters



VILNIUS: Pope Francis, in his papamobile, greets the crowd as he arrives for a meeting with youth near the Vilnius Cathedral Square yesterday in Lithuania.—AFP

lence anti-Soviet resistance, especially in Lithuania, the only Catholic-majority country of the three. "The Church was a fortress for all dissidents, not only Catholics. It strongly resisted Sovietisation and defended the rights of believers," historian Terese Birute Burauskaitė said. As a result, it was persecuted with both priests and bishops killed by the authorities. Vilnius estimates that more than 50,000 Lithuanians died in camps, prisons, and during deportations between 1944 and 1953. Another 20,000 partisans and supporters were killed in anti-Soviet guerilla warfare.

"I will honor all those whose past sac-

rifices have made freedom possible in the present," the pontiff said in a Thursday video message addressed to the people of the Baltic states. Francis will visit a museum in the former KGB building in Vilnius where regime opponents were tortured and killed. He will also honor Holocaust victims at the ghetto memorial in Vilnius, known as the "Jerusalem of the North" for its vibrant Jewish community prior to WWII. Around 200,000 Lithuanian Jews died at the hands of the Nazis and local collaborators under the 1941-44 German occupation. Today there are only around 3,000 Jews left in the country of 2.9 million people.—AFP

a security checkpoint, Faryab police spokesman Abdul Karim Yoresh said. "On Friday afternoon the children were passing the area when the mine hit them," Yoresh said.

Children are often killed or maimed by explosive devices left over from decades of conflict, carelessly discarded or deliberately planted. Civilians, including children, have borne the brunt of the conflict which began with the US-led invasion in 2001 that toppled the Taliban regime. UN figures show 3,179 children were killed or wounded in 2017, accounting for almost one-third of the total civilian casualties for the year. Improvised explosive devices, such as remotely detonated or pressure-plate bombs, killed or wounded 545 of them. Unexploded ordnance claimed the lives of 142 children and wounded 376 in the same period.—AFP

two who had lost limbs and were in a critical condition in a hospital in the northwestern province of Faryab. All the children were aged between five and 12. "They found an unexploded mortar shell and brought it near our house," Shukurullah, an uncle of four of the children killed said. "They didn't know what it was and were trying to open it when it suddenly exploded."

Mohammad Alam, who was a cousin of four of the children, said he heard a "big explosion". "I rushed to the site and saw the kids covered in blood," Alam told AFP from the hospital. "They had found an unexploded shell and were playing with it when it went off." Officials were quick to blame the explosion on the Taliban, which last week captured Koh-e-Sayad village where the children lived. The militants had planted a mine near