



NARATHIWAT: Muslim devotees offer special Taraweeh prayer in a mosque during the holy month of Ramadan in Narathiwat. — AFP

Pope denounces 'hardships and trials' facing Catholics in China

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis paid tribute yesterday to Chinese Catholics for holding on to their faith despite "hardships and trials", an apparent reference to Beijing's restrictions on religion. His comments to tens of thousands of people gathered in St Peter's Square for his weekly general audience came as the Vatican and China are still in the implementation phase of a landmark deal, signed last September, on the appointment of bishops.

The deal has split Catholics in China and around the world, with some critics of the pope saying he has caved in to the Communist government. The deal's most outspoken critic has been Cardinal Joseph Zen, the former archbishop of Hong Kong. Francis noted that this Friday would mark a feast day particularly celebrated by Catholics at the shrine of Our Lady of Sheshan, near Shanghai.

"This happy occasion allows me to express

special closeness and affection to all the Catholics in China, who, among daily hardships and trials, continue to believe, to hope and to love," he said. Francis also urged Catholics in China to "always remain united in communion with the universal Church".

China's constitution guarantees religious freedom, but since President Xi Jinping took office six years ago, the government has tightened restrictions on religions seen as a challenge to the authority of the ruling Communist Party. The government has cracked down on underground churches, both Protestant and Catholic, even as it seeks to improve relations with the Vatican. China has been following a policy it calls the "Sinicisation" of religion, trying to root out foreign influences and enforce obedience to the Communist Party.

Restrictions on religion in China have attracted particular concern in the United

States. In March, during a visit to Hong Kong, the US ambassador for religious freedom called on Beijing to end religious persecution. Also in March, a senior Chinese official accused Western forces of trying to use Christianity to influence China's society and even "subvert" the government, warning that Chinese Christians need to follow a Chinese model of the religion.

The pope has defended the Vatican deal with China on the appointment of bishops, saying he, and not the Beijing government, will have the final say on who is named. China's approximately 12 million Catholics have been split between an underground church swearing loyalty to the Vatican and the state-supervised Catholic Patriotic Association. The Vatican has said the absence of a deal could have led to a schism between Chinese Catholics that would have been difficult to heal. — Reuters



VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis delivers his message to pilgrims gathered in St Peter's square during his weekly general audience at the Vatican yesterday. — AFP

Maid's body flown to the Philippines...

Continued from Page 1

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is in charge, so once the report by forensic experts (comprising of MoI and MoH experts) is issued, it will be channeled to MFA, and MFA will hand it over to the embassy. As we speak, we haven't got the complete report yet," he explained.

Dayag's next of kin want her remains to be sent back to Manila so they can file for a second autopsy in Philippines. "What I heard is that the next of kin want a second autopsy to be conducted by our National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) in Manila. There is nothing wrong with that. Probably the family of Dayag wants to make sure there is no foul play in the death of their loved one. So that is the right thing to do, which the embassy also supports," he added.

India launches world's fastest...

Continued from Page 1

BrahMos could start being introduced to the air force from 2020. BrahMos is a joint venture between India

and Russia and officials from the enterprise have said at recent international air shows that discussions on sales are being held with a number of countries. Media reports have said Southeast Asian countries have expressed particular interest, which could worry China. India and Russia are reported to be preparing plans for a longer range version of the missile which could fly at up to Mach 5, or 6,125 kilometers (3,800 miles) per hour. BrahMos is named for the Brahmaputra and Moskva rivers of India and Russia respectively. — AFP

Lomondot said they were informed by authorities in Kuwait that they invited and questioned the employer of Dayag, and the employer informed them that he was surprised by the death of his domestic helper inside her room. "The male employer was summoned and questioned about the death of her housemaid. He is an elderly and sickly man in a wheelchair, so how could a sexual assault be present in this case - we don't know.

The authorities have not slapped any charges against the employer. What is clear is that Dayag was found dead inside her room with blood oozing from her nose," he said. Sources said investigations by detectives showed the relationship between the maid and her sponsor and his sons was good and there were no problems between them.

Last year, Kuwait and the Philippines signed a memorandum of agreement to provide greater protection for Filipino domestic workers in Kuwait. Manila set the agreement with Kuwait as a condition to end its deployment ban, a move triggered by a string of deaths of Philippine migrant workers in the state, including Joanna Demafelis, whose body was found in a freezer.

and Russia and officials from the enterprise have said at recent international air shows that discussions on sales are being held with a number of countries. Media reports have said Southeast Asian countries have expressed particular interest, which could worry China. India and Russia are reported to be preparing plans for a longer range version of the missile which could fly at up to Mach 5, or 6,125 kilometers (3,800 miles) per hour. BrahMos is named for the Brahmaputra and Moskva rivers of India and Russia respectively. — AFP

something sinful or to sever ties of kinship, God grants it to him in one of three ways: either He will hasten to answer his supplication, or He will grant him the like of it of good, or He will turn away from him the like of it of evil." Someone said, "O Messenger of Allah, and if we increase (our supplication)?" He replied, "(With) Allah is more." (Al-Abani rated it as Saheeh in Sharh At-Tahawiya # 462)

(C) Overindulgence: We are also encouraged to maintain and develop a devout frame of mind in that we don't over-indulge in something that is permissible to the extent that we ignore acts of worship. Umar bin Al-Khattab (RA) said, "With devotion that prevents one from what Allah prohibited, Allah (SWT) will accept one's supplication and glorification." (See Ja'miul-UloomWal-Hikam 1/258)

(D) Supplicating to Allah (SWT) only when in adversity: An Arab poet said: "We invoke our Lord whenever suffering from calamities, but forget Him when relieved." Allah (SWT) tells us what can be translated as: "And hasten to 'attain' forgiveness from your Lord - and a Garden 'in Paradise,' whose breadth is 'as' the heavens and the earth, prepared 'only' for the God-fearing. The ones who spend 'in charity', in 'times' of prosperity and adversity 'alike.'" (Al-Imraan 3: 133 - 134)

US says robust military action...

Continued from Page 1

United Arab Emirates as well as drone strikes on a crude pipeline in Saudi Arabia, although he stopped short of giving a definitive conclusion. Yemen's Houthis rebels, who are allied with Iran and are being hit hard by US-backed Saudi air strikes, claimed responsibility last week for a drone strike on a major east-west pipeline in the kingdom, which was forced to shut down temporarily.

Representative Michael McCaul, the top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the administration made a convincing case that Iran and its proxies were behind numerous attacks - including a rocket that landed Sunday near the US embassy in Baghdad, which has been evacuated. But McCaul also cast the US response as deterrence, telling reporters: "It was made very clear... there is no intention to go to war."

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif warned that the United States was "playing a very, very dangerous game" with military deployments, saying that some actors were "interested in accidents" - a likely allusion to its regional rivals such as Saudi Arabia. "There will be painful consequences for everybody (if) there is an escalation against Iran, that's for sure," he said, Zarif told CNN.

Trump last year pulled out of a multinational agreement negotiated under his predecessor Barack Obama under which Tehran drastically scaled back its nuclear work in return for promises of sanctions relief. The administration, which is closely allied with Riyadh, instead vowed "maximum pressure" to weaken Iran's regional influence, including by trying to stop all oil sales by Tehran.

Democrats, while criticizing Iran, said its actions were

Advisor defends expats against...

Continued from Page 1

"Expatriates are human beings who came to Kuwait to work for salaries after obtaining official work permits" Saleh said.

A number of MPs, led by MP Hashem, writers and social media activists have recently increased their criticism of expatriates, using racist remarks in some cases, and blaming them for almost all the problems in the country. Some MPs have demanded a gradual deportation of expatriates, who number some 3.3 million, to bring their numbers down to be equal with Kuwaitis who make just 1.4 million.

Meanwhile, a number of lawmakers have submitted a

predicted responses to Trump's actions and vowed to hold the White House to account after the debacle over the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Senator Bernie Sanders, an independent leftist who is seeking the Democratic presidential nomination, said that both the Iraq and Vietnam wars were based on lies. "I worry very much that, intentionally or unintentionally, we can create a situation in which a war will take place," Sanders told reporters.

"I believe that a war with Iran would be an absolute disaster, far worse than the war with Iraq," Sanders said. Representative Adam Smith, a Democrat who leads the House Armed Services Committee, said that Pompeo in the briefing gave "a very lengthy political argument" explaining "all the terrible things Iran has done" until the Democratic lawmaker said he cut him off and asked to hear about US policy. "I think there's a risk of miscalculation on both sides. And that remains my biggest concern," Smith said.

Numerous Republicans have been clamoring for a tough stance on Iran that includes military options. Senator Lindsey Graham, a longtime hawk who is close to Trump, called the classified briefing a "game-changer." "The appeasement strategy against Iran is over," he declared after the briefing. But Trump has sent mixed signals, on Sunday warning by tweet that the United States could obliterate Iran while also calling for talks. He similarly threatened North Korea before his historic meetings with its leader Kim Jong Un, although few expect Iran's leadership - for whom anti-Americanism is a cardinal tenet of the 1979 Islamic revolution - to meet Trump.

But Zarif has proposed a swap of prisoners, a step some observers say could offer a path to resume at least low-level dialogue to ease tensions. Pompeo, in a radio interview with conservative host Hugh Hewitt, said without further explanation that there had been "just a hint" that Iran was moving to release imprisoned US citizens. "Even a small confidence-building measure is a good thing, so it's absolutely the case that were they to release these Americans who are wrongfully held, it would be a good thing," Pompeo said. — AFP

motion calling to allocate two hours in the next session to study the government's security and defense preparations in the wake of rising tensions in the region. MP Safa Al-Hashem said through the two-hour debate, MPs want to assess the readiness of the government agencies, especially the security agencies, in case of any escalation in the region in light of the US-Iran tension.

She said that lawmakers want to know specifically the readiness of the police force, the army and the national guard in securing the country and vital installations in case a regional war breaks out. The National Assembly held a special debate last Thursday during which MPs heard presentations by senior government ministers on the regional developments.

After the session, Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said that based on the briefings by the ministers, the chances of a regional war breaking out were very high. MP Mohammad Al-Dallal said that during that session, MPs were not briefed on the readiness of the security and defense agencies.