

## International

# China-India brutal high altitude, low-tech battle

## Fists, stones and clubs

**NEW DELHI:** India and China's militaries have some of the world's most sophisticated modern weaponry, but their deadliest scrap in over 50 years was fought using fists, rocks wrapped in barbed wire and clubs studded with nails. There is an understanding between the nuclear-armed neighbors that despite their decades-old failure to demarcate their huge border, their troops in the disputed and inhospitable region will not use firearms. The several hours of scuffles on Monday, reportedly involving hundreds of soldiers around 4,500 meters (15,000 feet) up in the Himalayas, left at least 20 Indians dead, according to the Indian army.

Indian media claim that 43 Chinese were also killed or seriously hurt - Beijing is yet to give casualty numbers - making it the deadliest encounter since 1967 and the first deaths in fighting since 1975. But unlike then, this time no shot was fired, with the victims bludgeoned with crude hand-made weapons, hit by stones or punched and shoved off a ridge onto rocks and an icy river below, reports and sources indicate. Post-mortems so far showed that the "primary reason for death is drowning and it looks like they fell from a height into the water because of head injuries," one Indian official told AFP. The NDTV and Network 18 television channels reported that 16 of the Indian soldiers were killed with blunt objects and four fell into the river.

### 'Rocks in barbed wire'

According to broadcaster India Today, last week Chinese forces returned and camped in an area that they had previously withdrawn from. Indian troops "dismantled" the camp and a scuffle left several soldiers injured. The Chinese returned in larger numbers over the weekend and on Sunday stones were thrown. The next evening, on a high ridge with a big drop towards the fast-flowing Galwan river, clashes erupted. Matters escalated rapidly and several Indian soldiers tumbled into the icy water, while an unarmed Indian patrol team led by Colonel Santosh Babu set out to parley with the Chinese.

But the Chinese refused to budge and attacked the Indians with boulders, rocks wrapped with barbed wire and clubs studded with nails, Indian reports said. Colonel Babu was seriously injured. He would later die. Forty minutes later, the same unit led by a major returned and further fighting broke out, this time reportedly involving hundreds of soldiers and the Chinese outnumbering the Indians, raging until after midnight. "When they (the Indian soldiers) were encountered by the Chinese soldiers they were overwhelmed and many were pushed down a harsh rocky slope," one security source said. "They came hurtling down like free falling objects."



**SILIGURI:** Police personnel catch activists of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as they shout slogans during an anti-China protest in Siliguri. — AFP

### 'A cold desert'

Colonel S Dinny, who until 2017 commanded an Indian battalion in the region, said that the terrain is "extremely treacherous", with troops having to climb as high as 5,200 meters. "It's a cold desert," he told AFP. "It takes a toll on the body and mind. The oxygen level is only 60 percent of what is available in cities like Delhi, Mumbai." And it's also confusing. The area "is not demar-

cated on the map, there is no boundary. The maps have not even been exchanged so that the other person knows what someone is claiming. There are no boundary markers," Dinny said. But retired lieutenant general DS Hooda, who headed the army's Northern Command, said that there are detailed protocols that have ensured misunderstandings usually do not escalate - starting with the no-guns policy. — AFP

## India, Mexico, Norway, Ireland elected to UN Security Council

**UNITED NATIONS:** The UN General Assembly elected on Wednesday four new members of the Security Council for 2021 and 2022, with Canada losing out again and the battle for the African seat going to a second round. India, Mexico, Norway and Ireland were chosen as non-permanent members, while Djibouti and Kenya - both of which failed to receive the two-thirds vote majority required to win - will go to a second round of voting. Canada was beaten once again for one of the Western seats, by Ireland and Norway, despite a long and star-studded campaign, a result likely to be a blow to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. In the Asia-Pacific region, India - which has been trying unsuccessfully to win a permanent seat in an expanded Security Council - ran unopposed to win 184 votes out of the 192 countries that participated in the election.

The result means that India will now have a seat at the same table as China, just days after the two nations disputed their Himalayan border, trading blame for a brawl that left at least 20 Indian soldiers dead. Mexico, which also ran unopposed, earned 187 votes. African nations have in the past picked their own candidate but were unable to put forward a single country this time. Kenya received 113 votes against Djibouti, which got 78. Kenya boasts of enjoying the support of the African Union, but Djibouti says it should have the seat due to Nairobi's past participation on the Security Council and the principle of rotation.

French-speaking Djibouti and English-speaking Kenya are both highlighting their roles in seeking peace on the Horn of Africa, as well as their contributions to UN peacekeeping options. Kenya has pointed to its welcome to refugees from Somalia and South Sudan, as well as to its support to the two countries' fragile governments. Djibouti, in turn, notes its strategic location and unusual role as a defense base for diverse countries - France, the United States, China and Japan - as well as its contributions in Somalia.

For Europe and the Western seats, the competition was more customary. Canada - already stung by a defeat in 2010 during its last bid for the Security Council, when the General Assembly chose Portugal instead - was dominated by Norway, with 130 votes, and Ireland, which had 128, the minimum number required to win. Trudeau had invested heavily in the latest Security Council effort, with the defeat potentially causing him political embarrassment at home. "As we move forward, we remain committed to the goals and principles that we laid out during this campaign," Trudeau said in a statement, adding that Canada would "continue to play a vital role in advancing global cooperation and building a more peaceful, inclusive and sustainable world."

### Celine Dion vs Bono

Hoping to woo delegates, both Canada and Ireland had wielded star power: Celine Dion sang in New York City to promote Canada at the UN, while U2 performed a concert in the Big Apple for Ireland. "Campaigning for a UNSC seat involves endless lobbying, entertaining and worrying that the ambassador who just promised you a vote is a liar," tweeted Richard Gowan, an expert on the world body at the International Crisis Group. Fearing fraud or manipulation, the General Assembly did not vote electronically, even though the United Nations is mostly operating virtually until the end of July due to the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

## Egypt repatriates laborers abused in Libya

**CAIRO:** Egypt repatriated 23 laborers yesterday from western Libya after allegations that forces allied to the UN-recognized government had detained and abused them, private television channel CBC Extra and a security source said. The 23 workers arrived at Marsa Matrouh, a Mediterranean resort town in northwest Egypt, the security source told AFP.

Prominent TV host Ahmed Moussa broadcast pictures of the men on their arrival draped in Egyptians flags and donning protective masks. Earlier in the week, a video widely circulated on social media allegedly showing the laborers forced to stand on one leg with their bare feet on sand as they raised their hands. The detained men in the footage, filmed in daylight, appeared to be repeating at the command of an unidentified man expletives against Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and Libya's self-styled leader Khalifa Haftar.

The video immediately drew swift condemnation from senior Egyptian officials. It "will not pass lightly and the Egyptian state does not allow assault on its citizens abroad," immigration minister Nabila Makram was quoted as saying in local media. Libya's UN-recognized Government of National Accord announced Wednesday the arrest of suspects in the alleged abuse after the outcry. Police had "apprehended the people involved" and were preparing to present them to the prosecutor, the GNA's interior ministry said in a statement. — AFP