

At least 74 killed in Pakistan train inferno

Fire was triggered when two gas cylinders that passengers were using to cook breakfast exploded

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
RAHIM YAR KHAN

At least 74 people were killed and dozens injured after cooking gas cylinders exploded on a train packed with pilgrims in Pakistan on Thursday, some dying after leaping from carriages to escape the inferno, authorities said.

Television footage showed flames pouring out of three carriages as people could be heard crying during the incident, in a rural area of central Punjab province.

Some of the passengers had been cooking breakfast when two of their gas cylinders exploded, Ali Nawaz, a senior Pakistan Railways official, said.



Rescue effort: Workers looking for survivors on the train in Liaquatpur. *AP

Minister admits mistake
Many Pakistanis carry food on long train journeys, but gas cylinders are supposedly banned.

Railways Minister Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed said it had been "tradition" for authorities to allow people travelling to the festival to board trains carrying cooking cylinders. "I admit our mistake... this will not happen in

the future," he told journalists in televised comments from the nearby city of Multan.

"A tragedy that could have been avoided but ever since I can recall while travelling by train no baggage check or restrictions enforced," Human Rights Minister Shireen Mazari tweeted.

Dozens of people crowded along the tracks staring at the burning carriages, which had been disconnected from the rest of the train, televi-

sion images showed.

Firefighters rushed to the scene near Rahim Yar Khan district. Rescue workers and soldiers could also be seen, as bodies were carried away covered in white sheets.

"A cylinder exploded and I don't know how, fire erupted everywhere," one survivor, Muhammad Imran, told AFP from a hospital.

"I jumped out of the train to save my life. There was a whole line of people behind me, they pushed," he said.

Muhammad Nadeem Zia, a medical superintendent at the hospital in Liaquatpur, the nearest town, said some of the victims were killed by head injuries sustained as they leapt from the moving train. He said at least 44 people had been injured.

Those hurt were being rushed to hospitals in the nearby city of Bahawalpur and elsewhere in Rahim Yar Khan district. Officials said many of the bodies were charred beyond recognition.

Prime Minister Imran Khan said he was "deeply saddened" by the tragedy and had ordered an urgent inquiry. Mr. Khan said the train was the Tezgam, one of Pakistan's oldest and most popular rail services, which runs between the southern port city of Karachi to the garrison city of Rawalpindi, neighbouring Islamabad.

Religious pilgrimage

It had been diverted to facilitate the religious pilgrims travelling to Lahore.

Passengers were travelling to attend the annual Tablighi Ijtema, one of Pakistan's biggest religious gatherings, which each year sees up to 4,00,000 people descend on a tented village outside Lahore for several days to sleep, pray and eat together.

The majority of those killed were pilgrims from southern Sindh province, Mr. Nawaz said.

The Tablighi Ijtema, which begins on Thursday and concludes on Sunday, was founded by religious scholars over five decades ago and focuses exclusively on preaching Islam.

U.S. House approves rules for Trump's impeachment

The voting was the first formal test of support for the inquiry

REUTERS
WASHINGTON

A deeply divided U.S. House of Representatives took a major step in the effort to impeach President Donald Trump on Thursday when lawmakers approved rules for the next stage, including public hearings, in the Democratic-led inquiry into Mr. Trump's attempt to have Ukraine investigate a domestic political rival.

In the first formal test of support for the impeachment investigation, the Democratic-controlled House voted almost entirely along



Donald Trump

party lines - 232 to 196 - to move the probe forward in Congress.

Republicans accused Democrats of using impeachment to overturn the results

of his 2016 victory. "The Greatest Witch Hunt In American History!" Mr. Trump wrote on Twitter after the vote.

The probe focuses on a July 25 telephone call, in which Mr. Trump asked his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, to investigate Mr. Trump's Democratic political rival Joe Biden, a former U.S. Vice-President, and his son Hunter.

Republicans have largely stuck by him, blasting the effort as a partisan exercise that has given them little input.

IS names Baghdadi successor

Militant group warns U.S. it will avenge leader's death

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIRUT

The Islamic State jihadist group confirmed the death of its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in a statement on Thursday and named Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Quraishi as his replacement.

"We mourn you... commander of the faithful," said Abu Hamza al-Quraishi - presented as the jihadist group's new spokesman - in an audio statement.

Baghdadi, who led the IS since 2014 and was the world's most wanted man, was killed in a U.S. special forces raid in Syria's north-western province of Idlib on Sunday.

The group also confirmed the killing in another raid the following day of the group's previous spokesman Abu Hassan al-Muhajir.

"The Islamic State shura council convened after confirming the martyrdom of



Ground zero: Gen. Kenneth McKenzie giving detailed account of the U.S. raid that resulted in the death of IS chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. He also released videos of the operation. *AP

Sheikh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and the elders of the holy warriors agreed" on a replacement, said the seven-minute message.

Little is known about Hashimi. "We don't know much about him except that he is the leading judge of IS and he heads the Sharia (Islamic law) committee," said Hisham al-Hashemi, an Iraqi expert on IS.

In the audio message, the new IS spokesman described Donald Trump as "a crazy old man" and warned the U.S. that the group's supporters would avenge Baghdadi's death. "Do not rejoice America," he warned, "the new chosen one will make you forget the horror you have beheld... and make the achievements of the Baghdadi days taste sweet".

ELSEWHERE



'U.S. must confront China's Communist Party'

WASHINGTON
U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Wednesday stepped up attack on China's ruling Communist Party, saying Beijing was focused on international domination and it is "truly hostile" to the U.S. and our values. REUTERS

'North Korea fires short-range projectiles'

SEOUL
North Korea fired two short-range projectiles on Thursday, the South's military said, at a time when nuclear talks between Pyongyang and U.S. are at a deadlock. The weapons were launched from South Pyongan province. AFP

Amid protests, Hong Kong falls into recession

HONG KONG
Business has dried up since anti-government protests began in June in the financial centre. The government on Thursday said the economy shrank 3.2% in July-September from the previous quarter, pushing the city into a technical recession. AFP

'CIA-trained Afghan forces kill with impunity'

ISLAMABAD
CIA-backed Afghan paramilitary groups operating with impunity are summarily executing civilians during botched nighttime raids and are responsible for the disappearances of suspects, a rights group has said. AFP

Twitter bans political advertisements

Decision to 'curb misinformation' wins Democrats' praise, scorn from Trump campaign

ASSOCIATED PRESS
NEW YORK

Twitter announced an end on Wednesday to political campaign and issue ads on its service, calling it an important step in reducing the flow of election-related misinformation.

Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey said in a series of tweets that paid political messages in the targeted environment that social media enables

can be fraught.

"While internet advertising is incredibly powerful and very effective for commercial advertisers, that power brings significant risks to politics, where it can be used to influence votes to affect the lives of millions," he wrote.

Security and privacy researchers and some Democratic politicians hailed Twitter's decision as an

important way to prevent campaigns from feeding streams of misinformation to targeted voters. The move drew a sharp contrast between Twitter and its much larger rival Facebook, which has come under fire in recent months for its policy of not fact-checking political ads.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg shot back quickly, using an earnings conference

call on Wednesday afternoon to offer an impassioned defence of what he called his company's deep belief "that political speech is important."

U.S. President Donald Trump's campaign manager Brad Parscale, in a statement, called Twitter's change a "very dumb decision." "This is yet another attempt to silence conservatives," Mr. Parscale said.

Premadasa vows to complete constitutional reform

He also promises to release military-held land to civilians

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's Presidential hopeful Sajith Premadasa on Thursday promised to complete the constitutional reform process initiated by the current government, if elected to the office.

The ruling United National Party's (UNP) candidate released his election manifesto in the central city of Kandy, a fortnight ahead of Sri Lanka's presidential election.

"The Constitution reform process on the executive President acting with the concurrence of the Prime Minister, devolution and

electoral systems begun by this Parliament will be completed without delay, along with all stakeholders," his manifesto said, adding that the "new constitution" will be approved by the people through a referendum.

Addressing pending concerns of war-affected communities in the island's north and east, Mr. Premadasa promised to release the remaining military-held land belonging to civilians; to appoint task forces for development in the regions; and to release persons who had been detained for long periods without being charged. The manifesto would be

closely read by Tamils who voted against former President Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2015.

While acknowledging the initiatives of the successor government, which many argue were inadequate and slow, the Tamil constituency remains sceptical. Sri Lanka's Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the main political grouping representing Tamils of the north and east in Parliament, is yet to endorse any of the presidential candidates. Its leader R. Sampathnanth earlier said the alliance would decide after looking at the manifestos of all key candidates.

U.S. slams Russia over S-400 deals

Military Affairs envoy says Moscow is exploiting countries' security requirements

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

A month after External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said he was "reasonably convinced" that he could persuade the U.S. of India's decision to buy the S-400 Russian missile defence system, the top U.S. diplomat for Political Military Affairs, Clarke Cooper, called out Russia and China for exploiting countries' security requirements. He also made a strong pitch for the U.S. being the defence partner of choice.

Countries like Russia and China are using arms sales and security assistance to weaken the U.S.'s global influence and strengthen their own, Mr. Cooper said, at the

Meridian International Center, a Washington-based think-tank on Thursday.

"Through the targeted marketing of systems like the S-400, Russia seeks to exploit the genuine security requirements of partners to create challenges in our ability - legal and technological - to provide them with the most advanced defensive capabilities."

India had decided to buy the S-400 for \$5.2 billion in 2018 - a decision that could potentially attract U.S. sanctions under a law called Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). While the U.S. President has the authority to grant waivers under various conditions, the admi-



Clarke Cooper

nistration has repeatedly (including earlier in October in response to Mr. Jaishankar's comments) cautioned countries, including India, that it is at risk of sanctions if it goes ahead with the Russian deal.

However, Mr. Cooper said

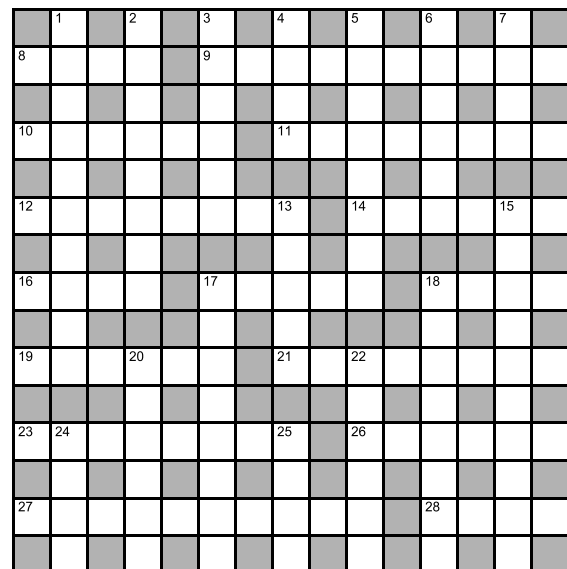
on Thursday that there was no "blanket application" of CAATSA laws.

"It can be scalable depending on what the issue is, scalable as far as application of when it's issued, timeline-wise, and to what sections would be applied where."

The U.S. has warned Turkey, a NATO ally that is buying the S-400, of CAATSA sanctions, though these have not yet been imposed. Turkey was, however, kicked out of a programme to build American F-35 jets, in July this year. Mr. Clarke clarified that CAATSA was not intended to target historical "sustained" lines countries had with Moscow but designed to "mitigate new significant acquisitions".

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12769

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



(set by Incognito)

- around beginning of tunnel after one (2,4)
- 16 Doubtful part of Cardiff yeomanry (4)
- 17 Land badly managed, in paying guest accommodation (5)
- 18 Stowe's famous uncle with some education gets a book (4)
- 19 She, after losing a bit of attraction, may still be a heavenly creature (6)
- 21 Aroused? No! (6,2)
- 23 Cut a member in front of upper gallery (8)
- 26 Pitch tent on American university grounds (6)
- 27 Place where you have to sign..... (6,4)
- 28 Throws a crustacean without hesitation after losing temper initially (4)

- 4 Weapons used to slaughter gnus? (4)
- 5 Sticking, this time, with her band, after loss of some respect (8)
- 6 Hostel leper's holding back a small piece of metal (6)
- 7 Fabulous garden found in Thaxted, England (4)
- 13 Gave out cards, after agreement, with a hint of trickery (5)
- 15 Silent elephant has body odour. Claptrap! (5,5)
- 17 Red army characters' signboards (8)
- 18 Warm clothes for rising hot air currents? (8)
- 20 Fair type of share (6)
- 22 Stone an alien and get a fire-cracker (6)
- 24 Initially Military Headquarters of War? In Madhya Pradesh? (4)
- 25 Heroic nature of electronic picture reduced (4)

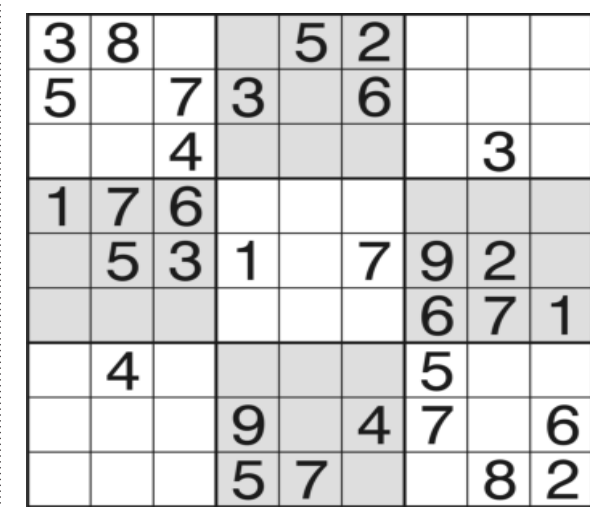
ACROSS

- 8 Repeatedly laugh and ditch (2-2)
- 9 Parliamentarians? They are often seen in Tirumala (10)
- 10 The Hulk's advertisement (6)
- 11 What witches learn at school? (8)
- 12 Not at home: taken on a social engagement. That's passé (8)
- 14 Punctually, mine explodes

DOWN

- 1 A cloth piece and a cake for an urchin (10)
- 2 Time, to save for, and when one may come across cats and dogs? (5,3)
- 3 Mountain where an artist is surrounded by his work (6)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

Solution to puzzle 12768

A	B	B	R	E	V	I	A	T	I	O	N	
D	I	T	C	H	E	R	A	D	D	O	N	
I	H	O	S	R	I	O	N					
V	O	Y	E	U	R	I	S	M	U	B	O	A
I	S	S	C	M	P	E						
N	U	C	L	E	O	L	U	S	L	I	M	P
G	A	D	E	U	R	N	H					
B	O	P	S	S	U	B	M	A	R	T	I	N
S	H	S	S	T	I	O	N					
L	I	E	G	E	H	A	R	L	I	N	E	
L	P	U	D	C	P	O						
A	D	Y	T	U	M	I	D	A	H	O	A	
I	E	A	S	R	L							
M	A	T	I	N	E	I	D	O	L	S		

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

7	1	5	9	4	8	2	3	6
6	4	2	1	7	3	8	9	5
9	3	8	2	6	5	7	1	4
8	6	9	3	1	7	5	4	2
5	7	1	4	2	6	9	8	3
4	2	3	8	5	9	6	7	1
3	5	6	7	9	4	1	2	8
1	9	4	6	8	2	3	5	7
2	8	7	5	3	1	4	6	9



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