

TOP OF THE WORLD



Kim Jong Un

NORTH KOREA 'US could pay dearly for rights criticism'

Seoul: North Korea on Saturday warned the US would only aggravate tensions and "pay dearly" for criticising Pyongyang over human rights, with nuclear negotiations between the two deadlocked. The international community has condemned North Korea for political repression, and for decades of prioritising its military and its nuclear weapons programme over providing for its people. Criticising Pyongyang's human rights record would only aggravate the "already tense situation... like pouring oil over burning fire", a North Korean foreign ministry spokesperson said.

MALI Over 30 jihadists neutralised, says Macron

Abidjan: President Emmanuel Macron said French forces had "neutralised" several dozen jihadists in Mali on Saturday, as he visited West Africa with a pledge to give new force to the battle against Islamist militants in the region. The operation in the flashpoint city of Mopti in central Mali came just weeks after 13 French soldiers were killed in a helicopter crash as they were hunting down jihadists in the troubled country. Macron said in a speech to the French community in Ivory Coast that 33 "terrorists" had been "neutralised".

AFGHANISTAN Official: Dozens of IS members detained

Kabul: The Afghan government said Saturday it has arrested or surrounded up to 700 IS group fighters and family members over the past six months. The Afghan intelligence service, the National Deteriorate for Security, said at least 75 women and 159 children, most of them from foreign countries, are in custody. There was no way to independently confirm that the prisoners the government presented to reporters are affiliated with the Islamic State group. As many as 277 foreigners are among the arrested militants, he said.

SEVENTH MONTH OF DEMONSTRATIONS

Riot police arrest protesters after clashes in Hong Kong

ALUN JOHN & DONNY KWOK HONG KONG, DECEMBER 21

HONG KONG riot police swept into several shopping malls on Saturday, chasing off and arresting some anti-government Hong Kong demonstrators who had gathered to press their demands in the peak shopping weekend before Christmas.

In a mall in Yuen Long, close to the China border, hundreds of black-clad protesters marked the five-month anniversary of an attack in a train station by an armed mob wearing white T-shirts which beat up bystanders and protesters with pipes and poles.

Police have been criticised for not responding quickly enough to calls for help, and for not arresting any alleged culprits at the scene. They later made several arrests and said the assailants had links to organised criminal gangs, or triads. The protesters demanded justice for the attack, shouting "Fight for Freedom" and "Stand With Hong Kong".

"The government didn't do anything so far after 5 months... I deserve an answer, an explanation," said a 30-year-old clerk



SUPPORT FROM TAIWAN: Protesters hold signs and flags in support of Hong Kong's pro-democracy protests, during a rally in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, on Saturday. Reuters

sumamed Law.

"Yuen Long is no longer a safe place... and we all live in white terror when we worry if we will be beaten up when dressed in black."

As dozens of riot police stormed into the mall to chase protesters off, a sushi restaurant had its window smashed and shops were forced to close.

On Friday night, police arrested a man who fired a single

shot with a pistol at plain clothes officers in the northern Tai Po district. No one was injured.

In Tsim Sha Tsui on Saturday, groups of protesters also converged on a mall popular with mainland Chinese luxury shoppers. "We can't celebrate Christmas when our city is taken over by the police. When you see the police outside the mall, do you feel like shopping for presents?" said Bob, 17, a protester. REUTERS

EXPLAINED E. Anger over 'brutality'

OUTRAGE OVER police brutality — and a perceived failure by the administration to hold them accountable — continues to be a sore spot for protesters despite relative calm in recent weeks. Since the protests began, the police have faced allegations ranging from excess force to sexual violence. Despite condemnation by citizens, medical workers and international organisations, calls for an independent probe into these accusations have not been answered. The call for action has continued to be a major demand in protests such as Saturday's.

11,000 GARFIELD COMIC STRIPS TO FACE AUCTION

Cartoonist Jim Davis is offering up more than 11,000 'Garfield' comic strips hand-drawn on paper in an auction that will stretch into years, with at least a couple of strips available weekly. "There are just so many, and it was such a daunting task to figure what to do with them so that they could be out there where people enjoy them too," said Davis, creator of the comic strip

Trump signs \$1.4 trillion in spending, averts shutdown

Administration threatened to veto financial package if Ukraine aid directive was not removed from legislation

AGENCIES DECEMBER 21

PRESIDENT DONALD Trump signed off Friday on nearly \$1.4 trillion in spending that will keep the government funded through Sept. 30, dodging the possibility of a shutdown ahead of what's expected to be a contentious election season.

White House deputy press secretary Judd Deere said Trump signed the legislation aboard Air Force One as he traveled to his Mar-a-Lago resort, where he will be celebrating Christmas and New Year's. The spending measures, which will add roughly \$400 billion to the deficit over 10 years, include money for the president's US-Mexico border fence, pay raises for military and civilian federal workers, and federal funding for election security grants.

The massive spending measures were made public earlier this week and headed off a repeat of last year's end-of-the-year impasse that led to a 35-day partial government shutdown. That showdown stemmed from Trump's demand that Congress sign off on nearly \$6 billion in funding for the border wall. President Trump's advisers



Donald Trump

rejected a bid to force his administration to quickly release military assistance for Ukraine early next year, threatening in recent weeks that he would veto the spending legislation.

Three officials familiar with the discussions said Democrats ultimately agreed to drop the language, which would have forced the administration to release \$250 million in defense aid to Ukraine within 45 days of enactment of the spending package, in order to avoid a government shutdown.

Two administration officials said that the veto threat was not a direct issue regarding Ukraine, but part of a broader effort to defend the president's authority to spend money at any time and in any manner that he determines appropriate.

TWITTER, FB BLOCK STATE-LINKED ACCOUNTS, SOME FAVOURING TRUMP

FACEBOOK, TWITTER said they had blocked multiple state-backed manipulation efforts, several of which favoured Donald Trump

88,000 ACCOUNTS linked to Saudi state-backed "information operations" were among those blocked, Twitter said on Friday

FACEBOOK SAID on Friday it had blocked a network in Vietnam and the US which posted pro-Trump messages aimed at US citizens

A RECENT report by the Oxford Internet Institute found such efforts have doubled over the past two years and are being used in 56 countries

Syrian oil refinery hit by rockets in 'major terror attack'

REUTERS & AP BEIRUT, DECEMBER 21

ROCKETS WERE fired overnight at Syria's main Homs refinery and two gas units causing minor damage and disrupting production, oil officials said on Saturday, calling it a "terrorist attack".

Fires were extinguished after several hours and maintenance engineers had begun repair work, the refinery head, Haitham Musawkar, was quoted as saying on state media.

The refinery, located west of Homs, is one of two main refineries covering most domestic demand for diesel, heating fuel, gasoline and other products, industry experts say.

No one claimed responsibility for the attacks so far.

Syria has suffered fuel shortages since earlier this year amid Western sanctions blocking imports, and because most of the country's oil fields are controlled by Kurdish-led fighters in the country's east.

State TV said it believes the attacks were carried out by drones and happened at the

AID VETOED

Russia and China used their vetoes Friday to block a UN Security Council resolution that would have extended for a year cross-border humanitarian aid to four million Syrians.

Russia is a close ally and major supporter of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and has used its veto 14 times on Syrian issues since the start of the civil war there in 2011.

The resolution failed just as tens of thousands of civilians flee the northwestern Idlib region due to heavy bombardments

same time. It said a fire at the Homs oil refinery was soon put under control. The report said the Rayan gas facility and a third installation, also in Homs province, were hit.



A fire at the Homs oil refinery on Saturday. AP



AUSTRALIA FIRES AT 'CATASTROPHIC' LEVEL

Catastrophic conditions fuelled massive bushfires across Australia's New South Wales state on Saturday, with two blazes around Sydney burning at emergency level, while in South Australia one person was found dead in a fire zone.. Reuters

Pakistan court sentences Muslim professor to death for 'blasphemy'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ISLAMABAD, DECEMBER 21

A MUSLIM professor was sentenced to death on Saturday by a Pakistani court for a blasphemous Facebook post, according to a media report.

Junaid Hafeez, who was a visiting lecturer at the Department of English Literature of the Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU) in Multan city of Punjab Province, was booked on blasphemy charges and was arrested by police on March 13, 2013.

The trial of the case started in 2014 and Hafeez has been



Pakistani police stand guard outside Multan jail after the court's decision. AP

lodged in a high-security ward of New Central Jail in Multan.

Additional Sessions Judge Kashif Qayyum sentenced

Hafeez to death and imposed a fine of Rs 0.5 million under Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), the Dawn News reported.

Hafeez's lawyer, Rashid Rehman, was shot dead in May 2014 in his office.

His parents had earlier this year appealed to former chief justice Asif Saeed Khosa to look into their son's case. They sought justice for their son, fearing for his mental and physical health, the daily said.

They had said their son had been languishing in solitary confinement in a cell of the Central Jail, Multan, for the last six years on the false charge of

blasphemy. "Due to transfer of many judges, delaying tactics of prosecution witnesses, and difficulties finding adequate legal counsel for the defence because of the sensitive nature of the case, our son continues to await justice in a fabricated case," Junaid's parents had said in a written appeal to the chief justice.

Blasphemy is a hugely sensitive issue in Pakistan, with even unproven allegations often prompting mob violence. Anyone convicted, or even just accused, of insulting Islam, risks a violent and bloody death at the hands of vigilantes.

China says US defence act blatantly interfered in its affairs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA BEIJING, DECEMBER 21

Beijing Saturday slammed a new US defence act, which includes measures to strengthen Washington's ties with Taiwan and support for Hong Kong's pro-democracy protesters, saying it "blatantly interfered" in China's internal affairs.

Beijing and Washington have agreed to a temporary truce in their bruising trade war, with a phase-one deal that has rolled back tariffs on billions of dollars worth of goods. But China has come under strong criticism in Congress, including from Trump's Republican party, over its attempt to clamp down on pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong.

There is also growing concern in Washington, among both Democrats and Republicans, over the mass repression of ethnic Uighurs, a mostly Muslim minority in northwest China's Xinjiang region.

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) calls for a report on the treatment of minorities in Xinjiang and to improve military ties with Taiwan, which Beijing regards as a renegade province awaiting reunification, by force if necessary.

You Wenzhe, a spokesman for the Foreign Affairs Committee of China's National People's Congress (NPC), told state-run Xinhua news agency, that the bill "blatantly interfered" in China's internal affairs. The parts relating to Taiwan undermined peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, he said.

INDIAN, CHINESE NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS CONNECTED IN CONTEXT OF TRANSNATIONAL CIRCULATION OF IDEAS: STUDY

'Russian bomb-making tech linked India, China revolutionaries in early 1900s'

SOWMIYA ASHOK BEIJING, DECEMBER 21

ON FEBRUARY 24, 1910, tipped off by residents who were spooked by suspicious materials under a bridge near Shichahai in central Beijing, police constables came to investigate an iron box with several rolls of wires. The discovery, so close to Qing Dynasty regent Prince Chun's residence, prompted constables to report the matter to their officers, who in turn alerted the Ministry of Civil Affairs. A technician later uncovered the box to reveal a bomb made of dynamite, picric acid,

detonators and wires. The bomb was big enough to destroy structures in a one sq km radius, Tsinghua University Department of History Associate Professor Cao Yin wrote in a paper.

Over two years later, on December 23, 1912, the British marked the formal completion of shifting India's capital from Calcutta to Delhi, with a huge procession. In attendance that day was Lord Hardinge, the viceroy of British India, who rode an elephant towards the Red Fort with his wife for the formal handover. A bomb was suddenly flung from the Viceroy's left side, hitting the back of a Jamadar who was hold-

ing an umbrella over him. The Jamadar was killed instantly and Lord Hardinge suffered nonfatal wounds on his back and neck.

Cao Yin, the author of 'Bombs in Beijing and Delhi: The Global Spread of Bomb-Making Technology and the Revolutionary Terrorism in Modern China and India', said he was surprised to see that Indian and Chinese revolutionaries appeared to have knowledge of producing similar bombs.

Cao's paper, published in the December 2019 issue of the Journal of World History, argues that the "two seemingly separated political developments in China and India were closely re-



Biographies of Chinese revolutionaries. Cao Yin

lated through a series of events in Russia, India, China, France, and Japan." He examines the spread of bomb-making technology from Russia to India and China in the first decade of the 20th century to argue that "Indian and Chinese nationalist movements were implicitly connected in the context of transnational circulation of ideas, personnel, and technologies".

Cao tells the story in three strands: following the course of Indian and Chinese revolutionaries and the diaspora of the Russian anarchists and their bomb-making expertise. "...bombs had rarely been used

by assassins until the late 19th century," Cao writes. "Studying this bomb-making technology made me focus on the Russians, who were the first to use dynamites as a weapon for assassinations... they had the most sophisticated knowledge of building portable dynamite," Cao told The Sunday Express.

Cao traces the journey of Hemchandra Das, the "forefather of the bomb-making enterprise" in the Bengali nationalist struggle, "who learned the knowledge of designing, manufacturing and assembling small explosive from Russian revolutionaries in Paris in 1907". With

the British having restricted circulation of arms in India after the 1857 sepoy mutiny, many secret societies of the late 19th and early 20th century instructed their members in different martial arts forms. "Hemchandra Das believed that the Indian revolution would be much accelerated if the technology of bombmaking could be imported from Europe to India," writes Cao.

In China, he writes, a young man, Huang Fusheng, arrived in Japan in the autumn of 1904 with thousands of other Chinese students to learn modern knowledge, and joined an anti-Qing revolutionary group soon after.

"Chinese revolutionaries were impressed by the political assassinations conducted by their Russian counterparts and by the explosives the Russians used in their assassination attempts in particular," the paper states.

Cao says such accounts show their activities were connected through Russians and through their French and Japanese experiences. "If we are going to discuss India and China in the modern times, maybe we can only find limited sources between the two, but if you have a global view, they are parallels and are closely related to each other," he said.