

Philippines

15 IS supporters killed

Leader of Abu Sayyaf 'might die' after strike

MANILA, Jan 29, (Agencies): Philippine soldiers killed 15 militants and seriously wounded their leader, believed to be the Islamic State's representative in the country, following air and artillery strikes in a southern province, a senior military official said on Sunday.

Isnilon Hapilon, also known as Abu Abdullah and a leader of the Philippine militant group Abu Sayyaf, might die as he needed immediate medical treatment, military chief General Eduardo Ano told reporters, citing intelligence and communications intercepts.

"He needs blood transfusion. Without proper medical treatment, he may die," Ano said.

Philippine forces on Thursday dropped bombs and fired shells at rebel positions in the mountains of Lanao del Sur in a bid to flush out Hapilon. The province is a stronghold of the Maute rebel group, which has also pledged allegiance to Islamic State.

Hapilon is on the Federal Bureau of Investigation's most wanted list for his role in the kidnapping of 17 Filipinos and three Americans in 2001 and carries a bounty of \$5 million.

One of those killed is an Indonesian but Ano said they were still "digging and doing more investigation" about the foreigner's background. Hapilon was with two other foreigners whose nationality was uncertain, he said.

President Rodrigo Duterte appealed on Friday to the country's Muslim separatist groups to deny sanctuary to militants with links to Islamic State, warning a war would ensue that would put civilians in danger.

Expand

A day before he made the appeal, the defence minister said foreign intelligence reports showed Hapilon was getting instructions from Islamic State to expand in the Philippines, in the strongest sign yet of links to the Middle Eastern militants.

Duterte has said he could no longer contain the extremist "contamination" and urged two Muslim separatist rebel groups — the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Moro National Liberation Front — to rebuff Islamic State's advances.

Ano said a firefight could be expected between soldiers and Hapilon's group following the strikes.

Meanwhile, a suspected Indonesian militant was killed and one of Southeast Asia's top terror suspects was seriously wounded as the Philippines launched airstrikes using South Korean-made fighter jets for the first time in combat, the military chief said Sunday.

Military Chief of Staff Gen. Eduardo Ano said the body of the suspected Indonesian militant, known by his nom de guerre Mohisen, was recovered by troops along with three dead Filipino followers of militant leader Isnilon Hapilon, who was seriously wounded in the hilly outskirts of Butig town in Lanao del Sur province.

Four FA50s have been delivered and the rest of 12 jets are to be delivered by July, air force officials said. President **Rodrigo Duterte** has criticized the FA50s as being inadequate for counterinsurgency and good only as fly-by aircraft for ceremonies.

Hapilon, who has reportedly been designated to lead an Islamic State group branch in Southeast Asia, was being moved around by his men in a makeshift stretcher but could not escape from Lanao, about 830 kms (520 miles) south of Manila, because artillery-backed troops have blocked possible exit points, Ano said.

Survive

"We're making it very difficult for them to move around and survive," Ano told The Associated Press by telephone.

The military will ask Indonesian authorities for help in confirming the identity and background of Mohisen, who was not among the foreigners previously monitored as having joined Filipino militant groups in the south.

Hapilon, who is on the US Department of Justice list of most-wanted terrorists worldwide with a reward of up to \$5 million for his capture, moved to Butig from his stronghold on southern Basilan island a month ago with about 30 fighters to look for a base, Ano said.

IS group commanders apparently wanted Hapilon to set up a base in Lanao, a vast region that offers more security than his mountain base on Basilan island, so foreign militants can have a springboard to expand their influence, he said.

The ongoing offensive "is significant because it will derail their plan to expand the IS presence to mainland Mindanao," said Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, referring to the southern Philippine region, the scene of decadeslong uprisings by minority Muslims.

Duterte has repeatedly warned the emergence of Islamic State-influenced militant groups is fast looming as a major national security threat. While pursuing peace talks with two large Muslim rebel groups in the predominantly Roman Catholic nation, he has ordered the military to destroy smaller but brutal extremist groups like the Abu Sayyaf, which is dreaded for cross-border kidnappings, beatings and bombings.

Duterte has asked the two Muslim rebel groups in talks with the government not to help extremists under attack by troops, warning that may bring them in a new conflict with Manila.

The elusive Hapilon, an Arabic-speaking Islamic preacher known for his expertise on commando assaults, pledged allegiance to the IS group in 2014.

He then organized an alliance called Dawlatul Islam Wilayatul Mashriq, which is now believed to include at least 10 small militant groups including some Abu Sayyaf factions and the Maute armed group, which he was meeting in Lanao when the military launched the airstrikes using the FA50s and OV-10 bomber planes.

The Maute and the Ansar Al Khilafah Philippines, another group under Hapilon's nascent alliance, have been linked to a Sept 2 bombing of a night market that killed 15 people and wounded 69 others in southern Davao city, the president's hometown, and a failed bombing at Manila's popular Rizal Park and a promenade near the US Embassy last year.



Duterte



In this Jan 28, 2017 photo, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (center), speaks to the media after having a telephone conversation with US President Donald Trump at the prime minister's official residence in Tokyo. Trump has invited Abe to a meeting in Washington on Feb 10. White House spokes-

man Sean Spicer says on Twitter that Trump extended the invitation during a telephone conversation with Abe on Saturday. The White House says in a statement that Trump affirmed the 'ironclad US commitment' to Japan's security. (AP)

Migration

'Trump curbs may hamper anti-terror fight'

Indonesia regrets US vetting plans

Refuge of choice

Rich? Scared about the Trumppocalypse? Try NZ

JAKARTA, Jan 29, (Agencies): Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said on Sunday the Muslim-majority nation deeply regrets President Donald Trump's plans for "extreme vetting" of people from some Muslim countries entering the United States under new immigration orders.

In a far-reaching order that caused chaos and confusion after it was signed late on Friday, Trump put a four-month hold on allowing refugees into the United States and temporarily barred travellers from Syria and six other Muslim-majority countries.

Indonesia, which has the world's largest Muslim population, is not among the seven nations whose citizens face restrictions. However, when asked about Trump's plans for "extreme vetting", Marsudi said in social media message sent to Reuters: "We have deep regrets about the policy."

Indonesia has close relations with the United States and many of its citizens think highly of former US President Barack Obama, who spent part of his childhood in Jakarta.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo said after Trump's inauguration he was optimistic that relations between the countries would strengthen, to the benefit of both.

Foreign Minister Marsudi said Indonesians seeking visas to go the United States had not faced any problems so far. She said there were "hundreds of thousands" of Indonesians in the United States.

Trump's crackdown on Muslim immigration will damage the global fight against terrorism, Indonesia — the world's most populous Muslim-majority country — said Sunday.

The foreign ministry said it "deeply regrets" Trump's order to suspend refugee arrivals and impose tough new controls on travellers from seven Muslim coun-

tries.

Also:

SYDNEY: US President Donald Trump has confirmed that his administration will honour a refugee resettlement deal with Australia, a source close to the Australian government said on Sunday.

Trump spoke by telephone with

Just last week it emerged that tech titan Peter Thiel, one of Trump's strongest supporters, quietly obtained New Zealand citizenship in 2011 and owns several properties in the South Pacific nation.

The New Yorker magazine this month reported it had become the refuge of choice for ultra-rich Americans looking for a bolthole if Trump's presidency goes disastrously wrong.

Peter Campbell of high-end construction firm Triple Star Management said wealthy Americans wanted help pads in their luxury escapes, but not necessarily underground shelters.

"It's not like you need to build a bunker under your front lawn, because you're several thousand miles away from the White House," he told the magazine.

Apocalyptic anxieties will have been heightened Thursday after the symbolic "Doomsday Clock" was moved 30 seconds closer to midnight on the strength of Trump's comments about nuclear weapons and climate change.

The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists set it at two-and-a-half minutes to midnight, the closest it has been since the height of the Cold War in 1953.

Australian Prime Minister **Malcolm Turnbull** earlier on Sunday, officials in both countries said, one of a number of conversations the new US president held with world leaders, including Russian President **Vladimir Putin**, German Chancellor **Angela Merkel** and Japanese Prime Minister **Shinzo Abe**.



US President Donald Trump speaks on the phone with Prime Minister of Australia Malcolm Turnbull in the Oval Office of the White House on Jan 28, in Washington. Behind Trump is a portrait of president Andrew Jackson. (AP)



Hen



Suu Kyi

Asia

'Avoid looking identical': Chinese cities must avoid looking identical in their urban development and focus on each city's unique historical value, the government said in a policy document released late on Wednesday, in Beijing.

Rapid development over the last four decades of breakneck economic growth has seen many old buildings demolished and cookie-cutter skyscrapers and other edifices put up in their place.

While some places like Shanghai and Tianjin have done a relatively good job at protecting their cultural heritage, such as the colonial-era architecture of these two cities, others have lost swathes of historic buildings.

The new policy to better protect traditional Chinese culture, released by the central government, states cities have to set more store on their "historic and cultural value".

"Refine and carefully choose prominent examples of special cultural characteristics and symbols, put this into urbanisation and city planning, rationally use public spaces for sculptures, squares and parks," it said.

"Avoid a thousand pieces of the same tune, a thousand cities with the same face." In many parts of China the destruction of old buildings pre-dates the country's economic reforms of the late 1970s and can be dated back to the early days of Communist rule ushered in by the 1949 revolution. (RTRS)

HK returns seized vehicles: Nine Singapore armoured troop carriers impounded by Hong Kong while in transit from military exercises in Taiwan are on their way back home, the city-state's defence minister said Friday.

The release of the Terrex vehicles closes the curtain on a diplomatic row that also involved China, which has sovereignty over Hong Kong and considers Taiwan a renegade island awaiting reunification.

"Terrexes left Hong Kong port this morning at 0415hrs. Next stop, home," Defence Minister **Ng Eng Hen** said in a Facebook post.

Ng had said on Wednesday that the journey would take a week.

Hong Kong customs authorities had impounded the vehicles in November when they were being shipped home following exercises in Taiwan, where land-starved Singapore has for decades trained its troops.

Following the seizure, China lodged a diplomatic protest to Singapore over its military cooperation with Taiwan.

Ties between China and Singapore were already strained over the city-state's perceived support for Southeast Asian na-

tions disputing Beijing's extensive territorial claims in the South China Sea. (AFP)

Ruling party lawyer killed: A legal adviser for Myanmar's ruling National League for Democracy was shot dead outside the country's busiest airport on Sunday after returning from a government-led trip to Indonesia.

An unidentified lone gunman killed the veteran lawyer, Ko Ni, and injured two oth-

ers in front of the main terminal of Yangon International Airport at 5:00 pm, according to San Naing, Ko Ni's assistant.

"They shot my boss. He is dead. I am beside his body and there's blood on the floor," San Naing told Reuters by phone.

Images posted on social media appeared to show a pool of blood around the slain lawyer's head.

Police have detained a suspect, but the motive was unknown so far. Ko Ni was a prominent member of Myanmar's Muslim

minority.

The shooting comes amid heightened communal tensions in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, where leader **Aung San Suu Kyi** is under pressure over a security operation in an area of the country's northwest that is populated mostly by Muslims.

A police official in the capital, Naypyidaw, told Reuters a Myanmar citizen from the central Myanmar city of Mandalay had been arrested.

The official, who declined to be named as he was not authorised to speak to media, did not provide additional details about the suspect. (RTRS)

25 missing found alive: Twenty-five Chinese have been found alive after their tourist boat sank off eastern Malaysia but six people remain missing, a minister said on Sunday.

The figures were given by Shahidan Kassim, minister in the Prime Minister's Department, after the catamaran sank on Saturday off Malaysia's Sabah state on Borneo island.

Five Chinese and one crew member are still unaccounted for, Shahidan told a press conference in Sabah.

The boat had left Saturday morning from the state capital Kota Kinabalu en route for Pulau Mengalum, an island known for its pristine beaches and dive sites.

The boat owner reported it missing on Saturday evening.

The skipper and one of the two crew members were found alive earlier Sunday off a nearby island. (AFP)



Actors perform classical Chinese opera at Chinatown to celebrate the Lunar New Year in Yokohama, a suburb of Tokyo on Jan 29. (AFP)