

Subcontinent

Statue wreckers arrested

India-Pak fighting in Kashmir kills 3

SRINAGAR, India, July 20, (AP): Firing between Indian and Pakistani soldiers along the highly militarized frontier in the disputed region of Kashmir has left three members of an Indian family dead and two Pakistani civilians wounded, officials from both sides said Saturday.

A 50-year-old Indian woman, her husband and their teenage son were hit by a shell in their home as the family was cooking late Friday night in southern Poonch district in India-administered Kashmir, said Rahul Yadav, an Indian administrator. He said the three died on the spot.

Indian army spokesman Lt Col Devender Anand said Pakistani troops attacked Indian positions along the Line of Control dividing Kashmir between the two countries late Friday.

Anand called it an "unprovoked violation" of a 2003 cease-fire accord between the archrivals and said Indian troops "retaliated befittingly," giving a usual description almost after every such fighting along the volatile de facto border.

Pakistan's foreign ministry said in a statement that two Pakistani women were wounded in firing in Pakistani-administered Kashmir on Friday.

Like in the past, both summoned other's senior diplomats in their capitals to register their anger and protest. Pakistan summoned an Indian diplomat to "lodge strong protest" over the cease-fire violations "by the Indian occupation forces along the Line of Control," the statement said.

It said Indian forces "have been continuously targeting civilian populated areas with artillery fire, heavy-caliber mortars and automatic weapons."

India's foreign ministry in a statement condemned "in the strongest terms, the deliberate targeting of innocent civilians by Pakistan forces" and summoned a senior Pakistani diplomat to register New Delhi's protest.

India and Pakistan have a long history of bitter relations over Kashmir, which both claim in its entirety. They have fought two of their three wars since 1947 over their competing claims to the region.

In the past, each side has accused the other of starting border skirmishes in Kashmir, which is divided between the two countries but claimed by both in its entirety.

There has been almost daily fighting between Indian and Pakistani soldiers over the last several months along the rugged and mountainous frontier, leaving dozens of civilians and soldiers dead on both sides.

India says Pakistan so far this year has committed more than 2,700 cease-fire violations. Pakistan says India has violated the cease-fire about 1,700 times this year.

Meanwhile, police arrested four men Saturday for allegedly destroying an ancient statue of Buddha they found while doing construction work near an historic Buddhist site in northwest Pakistan, officials said.

The arrests in the district of Mardan were made hours after a video went viral on social media showing a man breaking the statue with a hammer when it was still partially embedded in the ground.

Local archaeologists later determined the Buddha statue was of historic value.

The men, charged under the country's antiquities laws, face up to five years in jail if convicted. The laws prohibit the destruction of damage to any antiquities, police said.

"We have taken the pieces of the destroyed Buddha into our custody to assess its archaeological value but apparently it was an ancient one. We lost it unfortunately," said Abdul Samad Khan, who heads the province's archaeology department.

Police said they are questioning the men, who are local residents, to determine exactly why they destroyed the Buddha, instead of alerting authorities.

The incident took place not far from Takhat Bhai, a mountainous area that was once part of Gandhara, an important Buddhist kingdom that stretched across modern-day Pakistan and Afghanistan more than 1,000 years ago.

Pakistan possesses a rich cultural heritage but doesn't have the resources to adequately protect it.

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DHAKA: Security officials in Bangladesh have arrested the owner of two hospitals that issued thousands of fake coronavirus test reports as he attempted to flee the country to India, officials said Thursday.

Mohammed Shahed, a member of the governing party who regularly appeared on TV talk shows, was arrested Wednesday by the Rapid Action Battalion near the Indian border after a nine-day manhunt.

Shahed is chairman of the Regent Group and owner of two Regent hospitals in the capital, Dhaka.

Abdul Baten, a commissioner of the Detective Branch in Dhaka, said Shahed admitted after his arrest that his hospitals did not have proper equipment to conduct coronavirus tests.

A court in Dhaka on Thursday allowed investigators to keep Shahed in custody for 10 days for questioning.

Officials said the hospitals had issued more than 10,000 coronavirus test results and about 60% were fake even though patients were charged for them. The hospitals allegedly arranged for the remaining tests to be conducted by another hospital.

The two hospitals had not renewed their medical licenses for years, but the Ministry of Health nevertheless signed a deal with Shahed to dedicate the hospitals to coronavirus testing and treatment as the number of cases rose in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh on Thursday was nearing 200,000 confirmed coronavirus cases, including 2,496 deaths. Public health experts say the actual number is much higher because only about 70 testing facilities are available in the country of 160 million people.

Shahed belongs to the governing Awami League party headed by Prime Minister **Sheikh Hasina** and is a member of its foreign affairs subcommittee. He has more than 50 illegal cases pending against him across the country on various charges including forgery and cheating.

Another doctor and her husband were also arrested recently on similar charges of falsifying test results.

Local media reports say the scams could hurt Bangladesh's earnings from overseas workers. Last week, Italy suspended all flights from Bangladesh to Rome after some Bangladeshis reportedly presented fake negative test reports for the coronavirus.

Bangladesh earns about \$19 billion a year from about 10 million overseas workers. Authorities said about 15,000 Bangladeshi workers with jobs in Italy remain stranded in Bangladesh and it is unclear whether they will be able to travel to the European country.

Bangladesh has reopened businesses including its main export-earning garment sector after a monthslong closure.



European Council President Charles Michel, (left), poses for photographers with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, (third right), French President Emmanuel Macron, (second right) and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, (right), prior to a meeting on the sidelines of an EU summit at the European Council building in Brussels, July 19. Leaders from 27 European Union nations meet face-to-face for a third day of an EU summit to assess an overall budget and recovery package spread over seven years estimated at some 1.75 trillion to 1.85 trillion euros. (AP)

European Council President Charles Michel, (left), poses for photographers with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, (third right), French President Emmanuel Macron, (second right) and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, (right), prior to a meeting on the sidelines of an EU summit at the European Council building in Brussels, July 19. Leaders from 27 European Union nations meet face-to-face for a third day of an EU summit to assess an overall budget and recovery package spread over seven years estimated at some 1.75 trillion to 1.85 trillion euros. (AP)

Coronavirus

Glimmer of hope

EU summit goes into 4th day

BRUSSELS, July 20, (AP): Weary and bleary, European Union leaders were gearing up Monday for a fourth day of fighting over an unprecedented 1.85 trillion-euro (\$2.1 trillion) EU budget and coronavirus recovery fund, barely recovered from a weekend of walkouts, fists slamming into tables and insults.

With a brilliant sun warming the negotiating sundeck at the Europa summit center early Monday, there finally was a glimmer of hope that the talks to help the continent emerge from the pandemic through an unprecedented economic aid package are not doomed after all.

"It looks more hopeful than when I thought during the night: 'It's over,'" said Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, the target of much of the criticism. The meeting broke up temporarily and is due to resume on Monday afternoon.

"All want a solution instead of shelving the problem," German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said. Alluding to the infighting, he added, "It also shows: massive efforts are needed to make Europe strong again together. The corona pandemic shocked all of us."

It took a heart-tugging dinner speech by EU Council President Charles Michel about leaders not failing their union, French President Emmanuel Macron slamming his fist in anger into the table, and a new set of budgetary numbers to send this epic summit onward.

It was planned as a two-day summit scheduled to have ended Saturday, but there are deep ideological differences between the 27 leaders forced the talks into two extra days.

Rutte, defending the cause of a group of five wealthy northern nations - the Netherlands, Austria, Finland, Sweden and Denmark - sought to limit costs and impose strict reform guarantees. He came under criticism from Macron, Italy and Hungary, whose Prime Minister

Viktor Orban asked why the Dutchman had such "hate" toward him.

Rutte took it in stride. "We are not here because we are going to be visitors at each other's birthday party later. We are here because we do business for our own country. We are all pros," he said.

On Sunday night, after three days of fruitless talks and with hope dimming, Michel implored leaders to overcome their fundamental divisions and agree on the budget and recovery fund.

"Are the 27 EU leaders capable of building European unity and trust or, because of a deep rift, will we present ourselves as a weak Europe, undermined by distrust," he asked the leaders. The text of the behind-closed-doors speech was obtained by The Associated Press.

Succeed

"I wish that we succeed in getting a deal and that the European media can headline tomorrow that the EU succeeded in a Mission Impossible," Michel said.

The pandemic has sent the EU into a tailspin, killing around 135,000 of its citizens and plunging its economy into an estimated contraction of 8.3% this year.

The bloc's executive has proposed a 750 billion-euro coronavirus fund, partly based on common borrowing, to be sent as loans and grants to the countries hit hardest by the pandemic. That comes on top of the seven-year 1 trillion-euro EU budget that leaders had been haggling over for months even before the pandemic hit.

Even with Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel negotiating as the closest of partners, the traditionally powerful Franco-German alliance could not get the quarreling nations in line.

At their dinner table Sunday night, the leaders mulled a proposal from the

five wealthy northern nations that suggested a coronavirus recovery fund with 350 billion euros of grants and the same amount again in loans. The five EU nations - nicknamed "the frugals" - had long opposed any grants at all, while the EU executive had proposed 500 billion euros.

"We are ready to take the leap from loans to subsidies," Rutte said.

All nations agree they need to band together but the five richer countries in the north, led by the Netherlands, want strict controls on spending, while struggling southern nations like Spain and Italy say those conditions should be kept to a minimum.

Rutte has long been known as a European bridge builder, but this weekend his tough negotiating stance was being blamed for holding up a deal. He and his allies have been pushing for labor market and pension reforms to be linked to EU handouts and a "brake" enabling EU nations to monitor and, if necessary, halt projects that are being paid for by the recovery fund.

"He can't ask us to do specific reforms," Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said, complaining Rutte may look like a hero in his home nation, but nowhere else.

Rutte also wants a link to be made between the handout of EU funds and the rule of law - a connection aimed at Poland and Hungary, countries with right-wing populist governments that many in the EU think are sliding away from democratic rule.

That drew Orban's anger. "I don't know what is the personal reason for the Dutch prime minister to hate me or Hungary, but he's attacking so harshly and making very clear that because Hungary, in his opinion, does not respect the rule of law, (it) must be punished financially," Orban said.



Pope Francis speaks during the Angelus prayer from his studio window overlooking St Peter's Square at the Vatican, Sunday, July 5. Pope Francis is assuring his closeness to all those grappling with COVID-19 and its 'economic and social consequences.' Speaking on Sunday from his studio window overlooking St Peter's Square, Francis remarked that, currently, 'the pandemic is showing no sign of stopping.' (AP)



Macron

Kelin

Europe

Envoy rejects hacking:

Russia's ambassador to Britain has rejected allegations that his country's intelligence services sought to steal information about coronavirus vaccine.

Andrei Kelin said in a BBC interview broadcast Sunday that there was "no sense" in the allegations made last week by the United States, Britain and Canada.

"I don't believe in this story at all, there is no sense in it," he said when asked about the allegations. "I learned about their (the hackers) existence from British media. In this world, to attribute any kind of computer hackers to any country, it is impossible."

Intelligence agencies in the US, Britain and Canada on Thursday accused the hacking group APT29 - also known as Cozy Bear and believed to be part of Russian intelligence - of using malicious software to attack academic and pharmaceutical research institutions involved in COVID-19 vaccine development. It was unclear whether any useful information was stolen.

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab also said that "Russian actors" had tried to interfere in last year's general election by "amplifying" stolen government papers online.

Kelin said in the interview that his country had no interest in interfering in British domestic politics.

"I do not see any point in using this subject as a matter of interference," he said. "We do not interfere at all. We do not see any point in interference because for us, whether it will be (the Conservative Party or Labour's party at the head of this country, we will try to settle relations and to establish better relations than now." (AP)

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Fire breaks out at Cathedral:

French emergency services on Saturday announced that a huge fire broke out at the landmark Nantes Cathedral, and firefighters managed to bring it under control.

In a press statement, the director of the fire department General Laurent Verlai said that the damage caused to the cathedral is not comparable to that of the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris a year ago.

Meanwhile, Nantes' public

prosecutor Pierre Sen said that the fire broke out in three places, which indicates that the incident could be deliberate.

For his part, French President **Emmanuel Macron** tweeted his support for the firefighters who were "taking all the risks to save the Gothic jewel". (KUNA)

Six traffickers arrested: Greek police have arrested six people who were trafficking migrants from Greece to Italy using sailboats and were searching for five more suspects, police said Saturday.

One suspect was arrested Friday offshore from the island of Corfu, the Greek island closest to the Italian mainland, on a sailboat that carried 23 migrants and was headed to Italy. The others were arrested in the Greek capital of Athens.

Police say members of the trafficking ring had bought at least four sailboats, 10 to 15 meters (32 to 49 feet) in length, each capable of carrying a minimum of 15 migrants.

The boats were registered in the names of Bulgarian citizens who were not the actual owners.

The ring, active at least since June 2019, moved the sailboats around in Greek marinas to avoid detection, police said. At least three trips to Italy, including Friday's, have been established but there may have been more, police say.

The trafficking ring members transported the migrants to Corfu in groups of three or four by car or bus to avoid raising suspicions and paid for their lodging at local hotels. Each migrant had to pay 5,500 euros (\$6,280) for the trip, police said. (AP)

Police close down beach: Police in Barcelona closed down access to a large area of the city's beaches on Saturday after too many sunbathers ignored authorities' request to stay at home amid a new wave of surging coronavirus

infections.

Police blocked more people from entering the beach and used loudspeakers to recommend that the crowds already on the sand disperse because they were too closely packed and could increase the contagion risk.

Barcelona and other areas of Spain's northeastern Catalonia region have experienced the largest outbreaks in the country since the European country ended a strict three-month nationwide lockdown that succeeded in reining in a savage outbreak that has claimed over 28,400 lives.

Catalan health authorities on Saturday reported over 1,200 new daily cases.

The new outbreaks have forced regional officials to prohibit gatherings of over 10 people in the city, an edict that took effect Saturday. They also strongly recommended that residents of Barcelona and neighboring municipalities only leave home for work or necessary errands.

Spanish Health Minister Salvador Illa urged Barcelona residents to follow the guidelines issued by the regional Catalan authorities.

The mandatory use of face masks is rapidly spreading across Spain as officials grapple with more than 180 active outbreaks, most of them in Catalonia and the neighboring Aragon region.

Overall, Europe has seen over 199,000 virus deaths, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. Experts say the true toll is the pandemic is even higher than that, due to limited testing and other reasons. (AP)

Military helicopter crashes: A Dutch military helicopter has crashed into the Caribbean Sea near the island of Aruba, killing two of the crew, the Defense Ministry said in a statement early Monday.

The NH90 helicopter was nearing the end of a coast guard patrol when it crashed Sunday afternoon near the island. The cause of the crash is under investigation, the ministry said.

A 34-year-old pilot, Lt at Sea Christine Martens, and 33-year-old tactical coordinator, Lt at Sea Erwin Warnies, were killed. The two other crew escaped without serious injury, Defense Chief Lt Adm Rob Bauer said.

The helicopter was based on a navy patrol ship, the Groningen. The ship was working to secure the wreckage and the helicopter's black box, Bauer said.

Defense Minister Ank Bijleveld expressed condolences to the families of the victims in a tweet.

Virus-infected migrants: Asylum-seekers infected with coronavirus could be seeping through the porous cease-fire line in the ethnically divided Mediterranean island of Cyprus, the country's health minister warned Sunday.

Minister Constantinos Ioannou pointed to "a problem" after a number of migrants who recently crossed from the breakaway north to seek asylum in the internationally recognized south have tested positive for COVID-19.

Ioannou said the government had ordered two months ago that all migrants undergo testing for COVID-19 before they enter reception centers. At least eight Syrian migrants who crossed southward in the last week have reportedly tested positive.

Ioannou said coronavirus checks are being conducted at several crossing points that dot the 180-kilometer (120-mile), UN-controlled buffer zone. But migrants seek other, more remote routes to cross into the south, which is part of the European Union. (AP)



Vans of the Italian Penitentiary Police enter the court in Rome where the trial of two American tourists accused of killing Carabinieri police officer Mario Cerciello Rega is being held, July 20. The two tourists from California are accused of murdering the officer during a summer vacation in Italy in July 2019. (AP)