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Pak SC rejects appeal of convict for raping and killing six-year-old girl

ISLAMABAD, JUNE 12 /--/ Pakistan Supreme Court today rejected an appeal of a convict for raping and killing a six-year-old girl and upheld his death sentence in a crime that drew nationwide condemnation and led to widespread protests across the country, according to a media report. A three-judge bench at the Lahore registry, comprising Justices Asif Saeed Khosa, Manzoor Ahmed Malik and Mansoor Ali Shah, rejected convict Imran Ali's appeal, upholding the death penalty handed to him by an anti-terrorism court (ATC), Dawn News reported. The ATC gave him four counts of the death penalty, one life term, a 7-year jail term and Rs 41 lakh in fines. The four death penalties were for kidnapping, raping and murdering the six-year-old girl, and for committing an act of terrorism. Ali faces further charges in the cases of at least seven other children he attacked five of whom were murdered in a spate of assaults that had stoked fears a serial child killer was on the loose, the report said.

He had appealed to the Lahore High Court against the sentence but his appeal was dismissed. The six-year-old girl went missing on January 4 and was found dead in a trash heap in Kasur on January 9. Her rape and murder had sparked outrage and protests across the country. The heinous nature of the crime had seen immediate riots break out in Kasur in which two people were killed while the incident became a rallying cry for an end to violence against children. (PTI)

China firmly backs Pak's sovereignty, core interests: Xi tells Hussain

BEIJING, JUNE 12 /--/ President Xi Jinping has assured his Pakistani counterpart Mamnoon Hussain of China's firm backing in Islamabad's efforts to safeguard its sovereignty, territorial integrity and core interests. In his meeting with Hussain on June 9 on the sidelines of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Qingdao, Xi said China attaches high importance to its relationship with Pakistan, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told media here today. Xi told Hussain that China would like to maintain high-level and strategic exchanges, expand friendly communications in all areas and enhance energy and transportation cooperation under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Geng said answering a question about the meeting.

The two sides will also agreed to enhance counter-terrorism cooperation, he said. "Xi stressed that China will firmly support Pakistan's efforts in safeguarding its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity," he said. China will support Pakistan's choice of development path and issues concerning Pakistan's core interests, Xi told Hussain and hoped Pakistan will do the same in backing China's core interests. Hussain said that China is a reliable friend and partner for Pakistan. Pakistan-China relation are unshakable. Pakistan is committed to the One China Policy and support China's core interests," he said. Pakistan stands ready to enhance overall cooperation with China, look forward to CPEC and stay in close coordination on major international issues, Hussain told Xi.

Pakistan also supports China in playing a big role in international affairs since it is of great importance to global stability and security, Hussain told Xi, Geng said. The SCO summit concluded at Qingdao yesterday.

Children work at the San Pya seafood wholesale market early in the morning in Yangon, Myanmar—REUTERS

After Trump-Kim meet, China makes case for relaxing sanctions on N Korea

BEIJING, JUNE 12 /--/ As US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un held their historic summit in Singapore today, a wary China made out a case for lifting of UN sanctions against Pyongyang and highlighted its central role in working out a new peace mechanism for the Korean Peninsula. Trump and Kim today held a comprehensive and in-depth dialogue in Singapore on the issues related to the establishment of new relations between the two countries and the building of a lasting and robust peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. The North Korean leader agreed to work toward "complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula" in return for security guarantees from the US as Trump wrapped up his historic summit which he described as "honest, direct and productive."

"We believe that this is the only correct direction for resolving the peninsula issue. That is to say, it should be solved through dialogue, through peaceful means," Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said soon after Trump and Kim began their meeting. He said "to solve this problem, of course, we need to achieve denuclearisation and complete denuclearisation", Trump's main demand that North Korea should dismantle its nuclear weapons programme. "At the same time, we must also establish a peninsula peace mechanism and resolve the reasonable security concerns of North Korea," Wang said. Highlighting the central role for China, which is a close ally of North Korea, the Chinese Foreign Minister said, "I don't think anyone would doubt the unique and important role China has played in this process, and it will continue to play. China had provided its aircraft to Kim to travel to Singapore. There is also speculation that the North Korean leader would visit Beijing on his way back from Singapore or will soon apprise Chinese President Xi Jinping about his talks with Trump.

Kim has already visited China twice to meet Xi, ahead of his meeting with Trump, to ally apprehensions of striking a deal with Washington on the back of Beijing. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang denied Trump's allegation that Beijing, in the last few months, has relaxed implementation of sanctions in the last few months, saying the UN Security Council resolutions on imposing sanctions on North Korea also provides for relaxing or suspending them, if situation improves. In his post-summit press conference, Trump alleged that China was relaxing sanctions at its North Korean border as the situation improved. The US President also said that sanctions will remain in place until Pyangyong halts and dismantles its nuclear programme. "China has been following UNSC sanctions comprehensively and strictly observing obligations. There is no question about that," Geng said, refuting allegations of relaxing sanctions.

"About the lifting of the sanction, UNSC resolutions have relevant stipulations. It is said that in accordance with the compliance of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (the official name of North Korea DPRK) and development of the situation the UNSC will consider relief or lift the sanctions on DPRK. "Sanctions are not endless. We believe the UNSC should support the current diplomatic efforts and contribute to the settlement of the Korean Peninsula issue," Geng said. He also emphasised China's central role on the Korean Peninsula issue in establishing any future peace mechanism, saying that Beijing is a signatory to Korean Armistice Agreement of 1953 which ended the Korean war. "Regarding the peace mechanism, I want to say China is an important party to the Korean Peninsula affairs and also signatory to the Armistice treaty. (PTI)

Nepal delegation in China to seal transit, transport deal

KATHMANDU, JUNE 12 /--/ A Nepali delegation is in China to seal a deal for linking more border points of the land-locked country with highways in Tibet, ahead of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's visit to the country next week. The team comprising officials of Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport will hold talks with the Chinese side to link more border points with Tibetan highways so that people living in northern parts of Nepal have better access to supplies, the Kathmandu Post reported. Nepal currently uses three border points Kerung, Kimathanka and Tatopani linked with Tibetan highways, for transportation of goods from China. The Tatopani border point has remained closed since the 2015 earthquake. The Nepali side is proposing opening of at least nine more trading points bordering Tibet. Nepal and China agreed in 2015 to open seven new trading points between Nepal and Tibet, the daily said.

12 dead, 31 wounded in Kabul attack

KABUL, JUNE 12 /--/ A suicide attacker blew himself up today as government workers queued for an early bus home during the holy month of Ramadan, killing at least 13 people and wounding 31, officials and hospital staff said. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the latest attack in the Afghan capital, a day before the government's separate ceasefire with the Taliban is due to start. The blast happened at the main gate of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, police and health ministry spokesmen told AFP. Employees were gathered at the entrance of the compound waiting for a bus to take them home when the bomber blew himself up in the crowd, said rural ministry spokesman Faridoon Azhand, who was inside the building at the time. "I was in my office when I heard a big blast," another employee told AFP. "Most of my colleagues were leaving for the day to go home. I am worried about my colleagues. We are told to stay inside for now." Police spokesman Hashmat Stanikzai confirmed the attacker had targeted the employees as they waited for the bus at around 1:00 pm (local time).

They were leaving early due to the holy month of Ramadan, when most Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. The attack, which IS claimed via their Amaq propaganda agency, killed 13 people and wounded 31, Azhand told AFP. A doctor at a hospital treating many of the victims confirmed the death toll. Police and health officials said earlier that 12 people were killed and 31 wounded. The attack was just one of several around Afghanistan Monday. Militants raided a government building in the eastern city of Jalalabad in Nangarhar province, prompting terrified employees to jump out of the windows, officials said. A suicide bomber blew himself up at the entrance to the education department, triggering a fierce battle between gunmen and Afghan security forces, Nangarhar provincial governor spokesman Attaullah Khogyani told AFP. At least 10 people were wounded, city health department director Najibullah Kamawal told AFP. In another incident an explosion inside a house in Kabul killed one person and wounded three others, Stanikzai said. The three wounded were detained after police found explosives, including suicide vests, in the building which they suspect was being used by militants planning attacks in the city. Taliban and IS militants have stepped up their attacks on Kabul in particular in recent years, making it the deadliest place in the country for civilians.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on Thursday announced police and troops would halt hostilities with the Taliban for a week -- though he warned that operations against other groups, including IS, would continue. The ceasefire would last from the "27th of Ramadan until the fifth day of Eid-al-Fitr", he said, indicating it could run from June 12-19. The Taliban said Saturday their fighters would stop attacking Afghan security forces but only for the first three days of Eid, the holiday capping Ramadan. They said they would continue attacking US-led NATO troops. It is the first time the militants have agreed to suspend fighting since the 2001 US invasion, and the move was largely welcomed by war-weary Afghans. Both sides have vowed to retaliate if attacked during the ceasefire.

If it holds, analysts had expressed cautious optimism that the agreements could help build trust between the government and the Taliban and lay the groundwork for peace talks. But with myriad armed groups in Afghanistan, there are still fears that IS could continue to carry out attacks -- or even be helped by the Haqqani Network, a brutal arm of the Taliban that is suspected of partnering with IS on attacks in Kabul in the past. The latest violence comes as dozens of protesters march hundreds of kilometres towards Kabul to demand an end to the nearly 17-year conflict.

Sharif accuses Pak SC chief justice of oppression, injustice

ISLAMABAD, JUNE 12 /--/ **Pakistan's ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif today accused the country chief justice of rushing through the hearings in the three corruption cases filed against him, terming it an "extremely unfortunate" example of "oppression and injustice". The Supreme Court had disqualified Sharif, 68, last year, forcing the three-time prime minister to resign. Sharif has dismissed as politically motivated the corruption charges linked to the Panama Papers case. Sharif claimed that his fundamental rights were being violated as no lawyer would take up a case where he is not even allowed time to prepare and is asked to appear even on the weekends. Sharif was referring to his lawyer Khawaja Harris who failed to represent him today, arguing that he can neither work under pressure nor on the weekends as demanded by the Accountability Court. "Does the chief justice (Mian Saqib Nisar) not know that justice rushed is justice crushed?" Sharif, 68, was quoted as saying by the Dawn newspaper.**

Sirisena inducts 7 ministers, including a Tamil from Jaffna

COLOMBO, JUNE 12 /--/ Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena today inducted seven new ministers in his government, including a Tamil who is the only elected representative of the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party from Jaffna, the capital of Northern district. Two state ministers and five deputy ministers were sworn-in by Sirisena at a function at the Presidential Secretariat, amid an internal bickering within the unity government. Angajan Ramanathan, of the Sirisena-led Sri Lanka Freedom Party from Jaffna, was appointed as a deputy minister. The main Tamil party, Tamil National Alliance, had last week objected to Ramanathan being appointed as the deputy Speaker of Parliament.

Five out of the seven ministers appointed today are from Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe-led United National Party (UNP). Sirisena and Wickremesinghe are involved in a political tug of war since mid February when the President asked the Prime Minister to step down. The expansion is being seen as a reward to the UNP back benchers, who stood by Wickremesinghe when no trust motion against the premier was brought by the united Opposition in Parliament in early April. With today's swearing-in, the number of state ministers and the number of deputy ministers has increased to 22 each. (PTI)

14 killed as landslides sweep away Rohingya shelters in B'desh

DHAKA, JUNE 12 /--/ At least 14 people were killed and several others went missing today as torrential rains triggered landslides near camps housing over one million Rohingya refugees in southeast Bangladesh. The landslides triggered by heavy rains washed away several homes and shelters in the districts of Cox's Bazar and Rangamati - both bordering Myanmar from where some 700,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled into the country due to a military crackdown. Heavy rains have caused severe structural damage to camps. So far, more than 9,000 have been affected and the number is expected to rise as the monsoon rains, which lashed the camps for the last two days, continue. At least twelve people were killed in landslides in different areas of the hilly district of Rangamati while two people were killed in Cox's Bazar. Rangamati Civil Surgeon Shahid Talukder said the victims could not be identified yet and rescue and relief teams were struggling to reach people due to difficult terrain. Most of the victims were buried under mud when surrounding hills gave way after a deluge.

Officials said that the death toll could increase in Rangamati district, which has been cut off from the rest of the country due to debris on the roads caused by landslides. A senior official in Bangladesh's refugee relief and repatriation commission, said that around 1,500 shacks have been damaged or destroyed since the weekend due to the rain. More than 30,000 camp residents are still living in areas considered to be at high risk of deadly flooding and landslide. On this day a year ago, landslides struck the Rangamati district killing more than 100 people. The Rohingyas are a Muslim minority community in Myanmar, where most citizens are Buddhist. The majority of those in Bangladesh began arriving in the wake of violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state which began last August. (PTI)

Prominent secular writer, publisher shot dead in B'desh

DHAKA, JUNE 12 /--/ A prominent Bangladeshi writer and publisher was dragged out of a shop and shot dead by unidentified attackers in central Bangladesh, ending a lull in the killings of secular bloggers and activists in the Muslim-majority country. Shahzahan Bachchu, 60, an outspoken proponent of secular principles and owner of a publishing house 'Bishaka Prokashoni' that specialised in publishing poetry, was gunned down in his ancestral village Kakaldi in Munshiganj district last evening by five assailants. Bachchu had gone to meet friends at a pharmacy shop near his home before iftar, when the five attackers on two motorcycles came into the area. They blasted a crude bomb outside the pharmacy, creating panic, the Dhaka Tribune reported. They then dragged Shahzahan out of the shop and shot him, a senior superintendent of police was quoted as saying by the daily.

Although no group has claimed responsibility, police officials from the counter-terrorism department are investigating the murder as a possible targeted attack by Islamist extremists. Bachchu had previously received threats from extremist groups due to his outspoken support for secularism Bachchu was a former district general secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh and was known as a free-thinking writer,. His publishing house Bishaka is based in Dhaka's Banglabazar area. Deaths of secular writers, bloggers, online activists and a publisher in attacks by suspected Islamist militants shook Bangladesh for months after the murder of atheist writer and blogger Avijit Roy in Dhaka on February 26, 2015. Avijit's publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan was also hacked to death on October 31 the same year. Militant groups claimed responsibility for most of these attacks and the law enforcers arrested many radical Islamists in connection with the attacks. (PTI)

18th century Chinese moon flask sells for 4.1m euros

MONTBAZON (FRANCE), JUNE 11 /--/ A rare porcelain moon flask that belonged to the 18th century Chinese Emperor Qianlong has been sold for 4.1 million euros (USD 4.8 million) after a bidding war at an auction in France. The blue, white and celadon flask -- more than 200-years-old -- was bought by a French woman who outbid 17 Chinese buyers during a sale that lasted about ten-minutes, according to auctioneers who described the buy as "historic and legendary". The final sale including fees totalled more than 5 million euros -- ten times the auction's opening price of 500,000 euros. Emperor Qianlong, one of the longest serving Chinese emperors who ruled for much of the 18th Century, was an avid art collector. The round-shaped moon flask has eight Buddhist symbols in stylised lotus petals and bears the seal of the emperor. It was discovered by chance in April in a French castle during a valuation of antiques and its original owners remain anonymous. The buyer, who bid over the phone during the auction at Artigny chateau in Montbazon, central France, s expected to keep the flask at her apartment in Paris but it could potentially be loaned to a museum in future, the auctioneer said. According to the auctioneer Philippe Rouillac, the flask was probably brought back from China by a French navy officer. Far East art specialist Alice Jossaume said the flask is one of two flasks from Emperor Qianlong that exist. The other flask was sold for 1.8 million euros at Sotheby's in Hong Kong in 2016. (AFP)