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Philippines' Duterte calls Kuwait work ban 'permanent'

MANILA, APRIL 29 /-/- Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte today said the temporary ban on Filipinos going to work in Kuwait is now permanent, intensifying a diplomatic standoff over the treatment of migrant workers in the Gulf nation. Duterte in February imposed a prohibition on workers heading to Kuwait following the murder of a Filipino maid whose body was found stuffed in a freezer in the Gulf state. The crisis deepened after Kuwaiti authorities last week ordered Manila's envoy to take the country over videos of Philippine embassy staff helping workers in Kuwait flee allegedly abusive employers. The two nations had been negotiating a labour deal that Philippine officials said could result in the lifting of the ban but the recent escalation in tensions put an agreement in doubt.

"The ban stays permanently. There will be no more recruitment for especially domestic helpers. No more Duterte told reporters in his hometown in the southern city of Davao. Around 262,000 Filipinos work in Kuwait, nearly 60 percent of them domestic workers, according to the Philippines' foreign department. Last week the Philippines apologised over the rescue videos but Kuwait officials announced they were expelling Manila's ambassador and recalling their own envoy from the Southeast Asian nation. Duterte today described the situation in Kuwait as a "calamity". He said he would bring home Filipino maids who suffered abuse as he appealed to workers who wanted to stay in the oil-rich state. "I would like to address to their patriotism: come home. No matter how poor we are, we will survive. The economy is doing good and we are short of our workers," he said.

About 10 million Filipinos work abroad to seek high-paying jobs they were unable to find at home, and their remittances are a major pillar of the Philippine economy. Duterte said workers returning from Kuwait could find employment as English teachers in China, citing improved ties with Beijing. Describing China as a "true friend", he said he would use Chinese aid to fund the workers' repatriation. Duterte added that he was not after "vengeance" against Kuwait and did not "nurture hate". "But if my people are considered a burden to some of them, to some government mandated to protect them and uphold their rights, then we will do our part," he said. (AFP)

Two Hazara community members killed in attack

KARACHI, APRIL 29 /-/- Two members of the minority Shia Hazara community were killed by motorcycle-borne gunmen in Quetta, the provincial capital. Two masked men, one said, the fourth attack on the community in a month. The two Hazara men were killed at their electronics shop, the police said. The killing of Jaffer Ali and Muhammad Ali led to widespread protests by the members of the community in Quetta, the provincial capital. Two masked men on the motorcycle came to the electronics shop and opened fire on them killing them on the spot after which they fled away, police officer Abdullah Afridi said.

"They had bullet wounds in their head," he added. Members of the minority Shia Hazara community which reside in large numbers in Quetta have frequently been the victims of sectarian attacks in recent times. This is the fourth attack in a month on the members of the Hazara community in Quetta. Last week, two members of the minority community were killed in a similar attack in Quetta. Earlier this month, an auto parts dealer was also gunned down in his shop by men on a motorcycle and in a separate incident, a man was killed and another injured in a targeted attack in Quetta. Following the attack, the Hazaras staged a protest to denounce the government's failure to provide security to Balochistan's marginalised community. The community has asked the government to prove its seriousness in the security matters pertaining to the ethnic group. (PTI)

Pak navy says rescued Indian fishermen

KARACHI, APRIL 29 /-/- The Pakistan Navy today said it had delivered "medical and humanitarian assistance" to 12 Indian fishermen on a boat which was lost at sea after developing engine trouble. The Pakistan Navy in a press release claimed that about eight days back its ship PNS Alamgir delivered assistance to the Indian fishermen travelling on the ST Mars' boat.

The fishermen were close to running out of food and water after their boat developed engine problems eight days back. Despite repeated appeals, no Indian boat had come to their rescue, the release said. It said there were 12 Indian fishermen on the ST Mars and medical and other assistance was provided to them on humanitarian grounds. The Pakistan Navy said it also delivered food and medical supplies and helped the fishermen repair the boat. (PTI)

Suspected jihadists kill 40 civilians in northeast Mali

BAMAKO (MALI), APRIL 29 /-/- A governor in Mali says suspected jihadists have killed at least 40 civilians in two attacks near the country's border with Niger. The attacks have increased in the past year. Menaka Gov. Daouda Maiga said Saturday that gunmen on motorbikes staged the assaults Thursday and Friday. He said Fulani members of Islamist State Greater Sahara likely attacked in retaliation for military actions supported by Tuaregs in the region. In recent months Tuareg civilian defense groups, supported by French soldiers, have fought against jihadists in northeastern Mali. The jihadist attacks may also be an attempt to further exploit tensions between Tuaregs and Fulani herdsmen over land. In early April the head of the U.N. mission in Mali's human rights division, Guillaume Ngefa, said Tuaregs killed 95 Fulani civilians in the region. (Agencies)

Pak death row terrorists acquitted in school attack case

KARACHI, APRIL 29 /-/- Two terrorists who had been sentenced to death in a terror attack case were today acquitted by a Pakistani anti-terrorism court in another attack on a private school in 2013 in Karachi.

The judge acquitted Saad Aziz alias Tin Tin and Tahir Hussain Minhas alias Saen in a case in which they were accused of throwing hand grenades at a school in North Nazimabad here in March, 2013. Saad and Tahir who were students at a prestigious university here have already been sentenced to death in the Safoora case when they were found guilty of being part of an eight-member gang which stormed a passenger bus in Safoora Goth on May 13, 2015, and gunned down 46 members of the minority Shia Ismaili community including women.

The two death row convicts and three other members of their group have appealed against their death sentences in the Supreme Court. The judge said the prosecution had failed to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the two were also involved in the school bombing. Saad, Tahir and three of their group members were found to be involved with the Islamic State terror group. (PTI)



Lanka's new Cabinet to be sworn in on May 1: Prez Sirisena

COLOMBO, APRIL 29 /-/- The new Cabinet of Sri Lanka's unity government will be sworn in on Tuesday, President Maithripala Sirisena announced today, weeks after he had suspended Parliament in the backdrop of the ongoing political turmoil in the country. The unity government of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the United National Party (UNP) was thrown into a crisis after former president Mahinda Rajapaksa's new party pulled off a stunning victory in February's local elections seen as a referendum on the ruling alliance. Early this month, Sirisena was forced to face a vote of no confidence in Parliament moved by the Joint Opposition which has the backing of Rajapaksa. Wickremesinghe won the vote convincingly even after some of the unity government's Sirisena loyalists voted for his ouster among them were six ministers of the Cabinet.

Wickremesinghe's party urged that those who voted against him need sacking from the government. Acting ministers were appointed to cover for six of them when they resigned. Sirisena, on April 12, made the decision to prorogue Parliament by virtue of the powers vested in him by Article 70 of the Constitution. A group of 16 Sirisena loyalists is to sit in Parliament as a separate opposition group. Buoyed by the positive outcome of the local polls, the Rajapaksa camp now pushes for a snap parliamentary election ahead of the scheduled August 2020. However the next election due is the presidential election which must be called by November 2019. The country had plunged into a political crisis after the unity government's parties lost the local council elections to Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka People's Front. Sirisena immediately urged the resignation of Wickremesinghe but he resisted. Sirisena in a bid to quit the then Rajapaksa government took his hands with Wickremesinghe, the then main opposition leader, to defeat Rajapaksa in the presidential election ending his nearly 10-year rule. (PTI)

Aamir to be appointed as brand ambassador to promote India-China trade ties

WUHAN, APRIL 26 /-/- Ahead of tomorrow's informal summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping, China today hailed reports that India plans to appoint Bollywood star Aamir Khan as brand ambassador to boost trade between the two countries. "I saw relevant reports. We all know that Aamir Khan is a famous Indian actor. Many Chinese people, including myself, have watched his starring movie 'Wrestling'." Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying told a media briefing in Beijing today. Some reports said that the Commerce Ministry is planning to appoint the Bollywood star as brand ambassador to promote trade ties between the two countries. Khan has become famous with his 'Dangal' movie in China which was watched by President Xi. His other movie 'Secret Super Star' has also become very famous in China raking up record box office earnings. "The story of the father's struggle to make his daughters top wrestlers is very inspiring," Hua said.

On tomorrow's Modi-Xi informal summit being held here, she said the two leaders will have in-depth exchange of views on the overall, long-term, and strategic issues of the future development of China-India relations. "We are willing to work together with India to take this important meeting as an opportunity to push for faster and better development," she said. She said at present, China-India relations have maintained sound momentum of development under the guidance of the leaders of China and India, and in particular, people-to-people and cultural exchanges are in the ascendant. (PTI)

Knife attacker kills nine children in China

BEIJING, APRIL 29 /-/- The death toll has risen to nine in a stabbing attack outside a middle school in northwestern China. The Mizhi county government in Shaanxi province reported that another 10 people have been hospitalized with injuries resulting from the Friday evening rampage outside the No. 3 Middle School. Police have arrested a suspect in his 20s identified by the surname Zhao who had been a student at the school and was apparently seeking revenge for having been bullied, according to the Mizhi government's official microblog. China's tight security restricts private gun ownership, making knives and homemade explosives most common weapons in violent crimes.

Many schools have beefed up security at access points following violence against students and family members. In 2010, nearly 20 children were killed in knife attacks outside school gates. (Agencies)



Rohingya refugees line the streets as United Nations Security Council convoy passes by, outside Kutupalong Refugee Camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh —REUTERS

Pak, Indian DGMOs discuss LoC firing



ISLAMABAD, APRIL 29 /-/- Pakistan's director general of military operations has discussed with his Indian counterpart the issue of cross-border firing along the Line of Control and international border. Radio Pakistan reported that hotline contact was established between the Pakistani and Indian DGMOs. "The Pakistani DGMO also highlighted deliberate targeting of innocent civilians residing along LoC and Working Boundary by Indian forces on false pretext of reaction against alleged cross border infiltration, according to the report. The DGMO said "such unprofessional and unethical acts are provocative, detrimental to peace, vitiate the situation along LoC and also contribute towards further escalation". He said durable peace along the LoC and the international border is contingent upon practical manifestation of existing understandings by Indian troops on the ground. He claimed that so far this year there have been 219 civilian casualties due to Indian ceasefire violations. In a strong message, the Indian Army yesterday told the Pakistan military to stop supporting terror groups in Jammu and Kashmir, asserting that it will continue to take all "retaliatory measures" to foil Pakistan's designs. (PTI)

One cannot be strong without a sound and strong heart: Prez Xi

WUHAN, APRIL 29 /-/- Chinese President Xi Jinping has likened a microchip to the human heart, saying "no matter how big a person is, he or she can never be strong without a sound and strong heart". Urging Chinese businesses to make major breakthroughs in chip technology, Xi, who hosted Prime Minister Narendra Modi here in the central Chinese city for an unprecedented two-day informal summit, said they should achieve new heights in global semiconductor industry.

On Thursday, ahead of his one-on-one meetings with Modi, Xi, also the general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, inspected two leading chipmakers in a high-tech development zone in Wuhan, capital of Hubei Province. The area, dubbed "China's Optics Valley," is the world's largest R&D and manufacturing base for optical communication equipment. Xi first visited FiberHome Technologies Group, which leads the world in R&D and production of optical communication equipment of "ultra-large capacity ultra-long haul and ultra-high rate," with technology that can enable 6.75 billion telephone calls at the same time using a single optical fiber, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Referring to chips as like the human heart, Xi said, "No matter how big a person is, he or she can never be strong without a sound and strong heart," he said. Xi said that innovation is the priority in China's new development concept.

Having become the world's second largest economy, China must rely on innovation to spur economic growth as the old resources-dependent way is no longer effective, he said. Independent core technology determines the survival of businesses, he said. "Businesses must increasingly make breakthroughs in core technology, mastering more key

technologies with self-owned intellectual property rights and building up the ability to dominate industrial development. The country needs you to pick up this pace," Xi said. The Chinese president then visited Wuhan Xinxin Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation to inspect a national memory production base and assembly lines of integrated circuits. He listened to reports about smart manufacturing of chips and accelerating chip localisation progress. China's integrated circuit (IC) industry production volume stood at 156.5 billion yuan (about USD 24.9 billion) in 2017, while the market value of the industry has reached 541.1 billion yuan, according to official figures. Xi said the opportunities and challenges in front of China are unprecedented. He called on every Chinese to make a bigger contribution to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Xi also visited Qingshui, a modern community developed from a



former shanty town. He said that redevelopment of former shanty areas is about allowing people to live and work in contentment, adding that there are still some daunting tasks. "We will strive to take actions as long as they are good for the people, and will make every endeavour to get things straight," said Xi. While visiting a community center, Xi urged more efforts to reform and innovate the governance at the community level to offer more targeted and detailed services to the public. Pushing high quality development is the fundamental requirement for good economic work, Xi said. Supply-side structural reform should be pushed forward, with efforts to be made both on upgrading the traditional industries and developing emerging sectors, he said. The overall quality of the supply system should be improved so that the system will be more adaptive to demand, Xi said. "Chinese quality should be just as world-renowned as Chinese speed," he said. Technological innovation should be deeply integrated with economic and social development, Xi said. Environmental protection should also be enhanced, and actions should be based on the understanding that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets," Xi said. A holistic approach should be used to conserve the mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, and grasslands, while controlling the pollution of the air, water, and soil should be strengthened, Xi said.

Chinese-made chips for mobile devices account for more than one-fifth of the global market share.

The country's high-end design capacity is also improving. Domestic design industry market scale rose from 104.7 billion yuan in 2014 to 198 billion yuan in 2017, the second largest value in the world. China was picking up speed in building advanced IC production lines, which has led to growth in supporting industries, including equipment and materials. Xinhua news agency said in a separate report. (PTI)