

BRIEFS

Taliban attack Afghan city of Kunduz

KUNDUZ, Afghanistan — Taliban insurgents launched an assault on Kunduz yesterday, triggering intense fighting and forcing residents to hide in their homes, one year after the militants briefly took control of the strategic Afghan city.

Government helicopters were targeting gunmen from the air in a bid to repel the attack, a day before President Ashraf Ghani is due to meet world powers at a major donors conference in Brussels.

"People of Kunduz are panicked and trying to flee but they are caught in the middle of fighting," Ghulam Rabbani Rabbani, Kunduz provincial council member, said.

Indonesian jailed over failed terror plots

JAKARTA — An Indonesian militant was jailed for six years yesterday over a series of failed plots hatched under the guidance of an Indonesian jihadist fighting with the Islamic State group in Syria.

Arif Hidayatullah plotted to assassinate Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, an ethnic Chinese Christian, and bomb a Jewish community centre and a mosque used by members of the Muslim Shia minority, a court heard.

The 31-year-old, who was detained last December on the outskirts of Jakarta, did not carry out any of his plans because he was not confident his homemade bombs were ready.

The Jakarta court heard he concocted the plots under the wing of Bahrun Naim, a leading Indonesian militant fighting with IS, who has been linked to several botched assaults in his homeland, from a plot to fire a rocket at Singapore to a suicide attack on a police station.

Japan probes dozens of hospital deaths

TOKYO — Japanese police are probing the deaths of 46 patients on the same floor of a hospital where a pair of elderly men were fatally poisoned, reports said yesterday.

An autopsy on the two men who died at the hospital in Yokohama determined they were caused by a chemical found in disinfectant, public broadcaster NHK and other media reported earlier.

Police reportedly suspect the chemical was injected into intravenous drips that were administered to the two 88-year-old victims, Sozo Nishikawa and Nobuo Yamaki. The men both died last month.

But the probe has grown with authorities looking at how almost four dozen others died at the hospital since early July, although some were already seriously ill.

Hospital staff reportedly found puncture marks in 10 intravenous bags stored near the nursing station on the same floor.

Big crop of Singapore babies in 2015

SINGAPORE — According to population figures, there were 33,725 citizen births in 2015, a number that eclipsed the 33,238 births in 2012, a year of the Dragon in the Chinese zodiac calendar, which some Chinese consider to be the most auspicious.

The supposedly mild sheep has pummeled the most powerful beast in the Chinese zodiac calendar.

A mix of factors — the SG50 feel-good factor, more parental perks, and demographics — resulted in a bumper crop of Singaporean babies in 2015, the Year of the Sheep.

There were 33,725 citizen births, the highest number in the last 13 years, according to population figures released last week.

This is the first time in about two decades that the number of dragon babies has been overshadowed by those born in other years, based on available population statistics.

Bangladesh foreign murder trial date set

DHAKA — A hearing on the murder of a Japanese man in Bangladesh a year ago will take place on Friday, a court in the northern Rangpur District announced yesterday.

Kunio Hoshi, 66, was shot by unidentified attackers on a motorcycle in Katchu Alutari village in Rangpur on October 3 last year.

The agricultural worker was reportedly shot in the chest, head and leg, and died on the way to hospital.

Rangpur Police said on Sunday that they are looking for two murder suspects after laying charges against eight militants from the banned Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen group.

Officers said five of those charged have already been arrested, while another was killed in an encounter with police in Dhaka and the remaining two are on the run.

Hoshi had arrived in Bangladesh in May, 2015, and had rented a plot of land from a local resident with the aim of growing grass to be used as animal fodder.

Following his death, he was buried in Rangpur 10 days later, in keeping with a request from the Japanese Embassy in Dhaka. — Agencies

India ratifies Paris climate pact

World's third biggest carbon emitter officially approves deal

NEW DELHI — India, the world's third biggest carbon emitter, ratified the Paris agreement on climate change on Sunday on the birthday of the country's famously ascetic independence leader Mahatma Gandhi.

India, with a population of 1.3 billion people, is the latest big polluter to formally sign onto the historic accord which now takes a major step towards becoming reality.

Environment minister Anil Madhav Dave said "India deposited its Instrument of Ratification of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change" at the United Nations in New York.

"Great push to global actions to address climate change," he added on *Twitter*.

The accord, sealed last December in Paris, needs ratification from 55 countries that account for at least 55 percent

of the planet's greenhouse gas emissions responsible for climate change.

With India's move, a total of 62 countries accounting for almost 52 per cent of emissions have now ratified the agreement to commit to take action to stem the planet's rising temperatures.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced last month that October 2, a national holiday, had been chosen as the ratification date because freedom fighter Gandhi had lived his life with a low-carbon footprint.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon and others have voiced confidence the accord will come into force by the end of the year, after a string of nations joined up, including the US and China, the two largest emitters.

"India's leadership builds on the continued strong po-

litical momentum from Paris for urgent global action on climate change," Ban said in a statement.

"Action on climate change is crucial for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and creating a more prosperous, equitable and livable future for all people."

US President Barack Obama also commended India's move, writing on *Twitter* that "Gandhi believed in a world worthy of our children. In joining the Paris Agreement, @narendramodi & the Indian people carry on that legacy."

France also welcomed India's ratification of the agreement.

French Environment Minister Segolene Royal said it would "allow the accord to come into effect in record time".

And the Elysee Palace

"hailed" Delhi's move.

"This decision, following that of the European environment ministers, brings us close to the Paris accord coming into effect by the end of the year."

EU environment ministers agreed last week to fast-track the ratification.

The accord requires all countries to devise plans to achieve the goal of keeping the rise of temperatures within two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

Environmentalists welcomed Sunday's move, but urged India to work to phase out heavily-polluting coal, which it relies on heavily for electricity.

"India is one the very few large economies that has not made any promises of phasing out of coal," said Joydeep Gupta, director of "the third pole" website which focuses on environmental issues. — AFP

UN releases human settlement draft

FUKUOKA, Japan — A draft outcome document was introduced and discussed during a press conference organised by UN-Habitat — a United Nations human settlement programme — in Fukuoka, Japan last week.

The document, which is expected to be adopted in the upcoming UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development — Habitat III — in Quito, Ecuador during 17-20 October, aims to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, assess up-to-date accomplishments, address poverty and identify new and emerging urban challenges.

It outlines some 169 targets and 17 goals, designed to be the successor of UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Key sustainable development goals include plans to ensure access for all to adequate and affordable housing, to improve transport systems, enhance human settlement planning, expand public space across human settlements and make them more resilient in the face of natural disasters. Cities and human settlements are encouraged to adopt and implement policies and plan to improve resource efficiency, and adapt to and mitigate adverse effects of global climate change.

The document stresses the importance of local governmental and social bodies, especially in the area of poverty reduction, fighting inequality, improving water sources and sanitation as well as promote responsible con-



Journalists during a panel discussion at the press conference. — Photo courtesy of organiser

sumption and production.

The UN programme also encourages cities to build and develop their own goals as well as emphasise synergies across different sectors.

At the conference, journalists from eight Asian countries presented and discussed numerous urbanisation issues in their respective cities and countries. Key issues consisted of overpopulation, infrastructure inefficiency, degradation of living environments in developing countries such as Mongolia, India and Vietnam and the aging population in more developed countries such as Japan and Korea.

H-III, along with its predecessors H-I and H-II, will contribute towards the UN's New Urban Agenda that view cities as a force of global development and find answers to the challenge of how to man-

age the urbanisation process to improve citizens' lives.

The United Nations General Assembly convened the Habitat I Conference in Vancouver, Canada, in 1976, as governments began to recognise the need for sustainable human settlements and the consequences of rapid urbanisation, especially in the developing world.

The Vancouver commitments were reconfirmed 20 years later in 1996, at the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul, Turkey. World leaders adopted the Habitat Agenda as a global plan of action for adequate shelter for all, with the notion of sustainable human settlements driving development in an urbanising world.

During the last four decades, the world has witnessed the greatest and fastest migration of people into cities and

towns in human history. From just 0.9 billion people living in cities across the world in 1900 (20 per cent of the global population at the time) by 2000 the number of city-dwellers had risen to 3.5 billion (50 per cent). By 2050, an estimated 7 billion people, or 70 per cent of the world's population, will reside in cities.

Habitat III is one of the first United Nations global summits after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. It offers a unique opportunity to discuss the important challenge of how cities, towns, and villages are planned and managed, in order to fulfill their role as drivers of sustainable development, and hence shape the implementation of new global development goals. — VNS