

News from Neighbour State

India, Myanmar sign defence agreement

Courtesy/Northeast now
New Delhi July 30,

India and Myanmar have signed a defence co-operation agreement. The agreement was signed on Monday after extensive talks covering a wide range of issues. Both sides conducted reviews of joint military exercises and training provided to Myanmar defence services in India. Strengthening of maritime security through joint surveillance and development of new infrastructure were also discussed. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, commander-in-chief of the Burmese Army 'Tatmadaw'

is currently on an official visit to India from July 25 to August 2.

On Monday, he held talks with minister of state for defence Shripad Naik, following which the agreement was signed. India and Myanmar armies have in recent past co-operated closely in tackling trans-border ethnic insurgencies plaguing the long border region of both countries. The Tatmadaw attacked and demolished several bases of the NSCN-IM and other northeastern rebel groups in the Sagaing region of Myanmar's Sagar region earlier this year. This has led to a spurt of surrenders especially from the

ranks of the ULFA. The Indian Army conducted 'Operation Sunrise' to deny the rebel Arakan Army any base in Mizoram and blocked its escape routes in coordinated operation with the Tatmadaw. Analysts say this agreement may not only pave the way for round-the-year coordinated border patrolling but intelligence-driven joint counter-insurgency operations between the Indian and Burmese armies. Myanmar does not have such agreement with any neighbour, so this is a landmark in military relations between the two countries.

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How the police in Manipur are adapting to the evolving challenges posed by trafficking - CRY

The problem of rampant trafficking in strife-torn Manipur cannot be seen as one in isolation. Most of the population is here below the poverty line; there is lack of infrastructure for education, economic equality and basic facilities of sustenance. Incidence of HIV-AIDS is very high and contraband smuggling, over the years, has affected the psycho-social well-being of the youth in a big way. The prolonged armed conflict in the state has left the population in a vulnerable condition.

This vulnerability of the populace – families, adolescents, victims of domestic violence, single-parent families et al – has left them as sitting ducks for traffickers to lure them to "greener" pastures, with consent, force, threat or otherwise. This is a phenomenon so stark and apparent that it resonates itself in the findings of the survey. Asked what is trafficking, 42 per cent of the police have said that rampant trafficking is often a result of abuse of power in situations of extreme vulnerability. Around 38 per cent see the use of threat or coercion on socially and economically vulnerable communities, as the most important factor that sustains trafficking as a viable "trade".

While poor socio-economic condition and protracted political armed conflicts have played a significant role in spurring trafficking in Manipur, the pattern has changed to a certain extent. As per government and media reports, the traditional "destinations" of trafficking have changed.

In the incidence of child trafficking in the state, from 2008 to 2016, children have been trafficked in the name of free education, free accommodation and job placement, mostly to other states in the country. Now, as details emerge about the recent anti-trafficking rescue operation in Moreh and Imphal in February, the state has been turned into a safe conduit for trafficking across the Myanmar border.

With a subtle shift in

"destinations", the profile of the trafficked victims, however, remains the same. Around 62 per cent of the police, by virtue of their experiences on the ground and knowledge of the socio-economic scenario, have said that adolescent girls, in the age-bracket of 14-17 years, remain the desired prey of traffickers, who send them to other states, and indeed, South East Asian countries, to work in spa centres and massage parlours and even as domestic helps. Majority of these girls end up in brothels and red-light areas.

"By virtue of its location on the border with Myanmar, Manipur has become an easy corridor to reach countries in South East Asia and Middle East countries, mostly for sexual exploitation," says Dr. S. Ibomcha Singh, MPS Superintendent of police, Thoubal. Dr Singh played an active role in the recent drive to rescue the Nepalese victims at Moreh town. At the time, he was the SP of Tengenoupal district.

According to the police, as reflected in their responses, lucrative job offers remain the top pretext for traffickers. A staggering 82 per cent of the police feel that recruiters still pick up their targets by offering them "lucrative jobs" in faraway lands, often in south-east Asia. Unemployment and bleak earning prospects at home makes it easy bait for unsuspecting victims.

Mr Yumnam Kheda Singh, a retired SI, who was in the charge of the anti-Human Trafficking Police Unit, Imphal West, mentions poverty as one of the root causes of trafficking. "Poverty is a crucial factor. The helpless parents are easily lured by the trafficking agents with the promise of free education, lucrative jobs and placement for their children and young people".

Across the table
One factor that perhaps explains the heightened awareness among the police about trafficking is the sensitization and training workshops conducted by CRY, its alliance and partners with the police. Around 24

such sessions have been held over the past three years for around 1280 police personnel, educating them about the nuances of trafficking and also other child rights issues. Discussions focused POCOS and the Juvenile Justice Act have not only broadened their understanding of the subjects, but also prompted them to master their knowledge of relevant acts in the Indian Penal Code, that can come handy in nabbing and prosecuting traffickers – a finding that has come to the fore in the responses of the police personnel we spoke to.

Awards for police officers on such a prestigious platform have also helped motivate the rank and force to step up their fight against trafficking. Mr N. Ingocha Singh, inspector, has played a major role in many rescue operations in Imphal city and Imphal airport. "The border state needs

relevant regulations specifically to combat human trafficking. Multi-ethnic population along the border areas and lack of well-equipped check posts along the highways and international border have made it easy for traffickers to continue their operations and slip out of the radar," he says.

Summing it up
Trina Chakrabarti, Regional Director, CRY, feels trafficking needs to be viewed from a composite lens in order to be able to curb it and nip it in the bud. "Trafficking as a phenomenon cannot be viewed in isolation. There are different aspects to it and the police need to be aware of them thoroughly. Our awareness workshops with the police have been aimed at boosting this understanding," she says.

The police brass in Manipur is aware of the task that lies ahead. Going ahead, an anti-trafficking unit in place in each and every district is definitely a good start. Inspector Singh mentioned that the police are trying hard to ensure that FIRs are filed immediately in suspected trafficking cases. It is also necessary to coordinate with other departments and establish a good rapport with the general public to ensure a complete crackdown on traffickers.

News from South East Asia

Outrage mounts in India over rape case teen's suspicious car crash

Agency
New Delhi (AFP) July 30,

Fresh protests erupted in India Tuesday (July 30) amid growing public fury over a car crash that critically injured a teenager who accused a lawmaker from the ruling party of rape and harassment.

Two of the 19-year-old's aunts were killed and her lawyer was badly injured when a truck collided with their car in northern Uttar Pradesh state Sunday, raising suspicions of foul play.

The incident will be probed by federal investigators amid speculation that local police could favour her alleged rapist, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) legislator Kuldeep Singh

Sengar. Sengar, a four-term lawmaker, has been in jail since last year but reports say he still enjoys considerable clout.

The young woman and the lawyer were battling for their lives in hospital in the state capital Lucknow Tuesday. The teenager had accused Sengar of raping her at his home in Unnao district in 2017 but police in the notoriously lawless state initially refused to take action.

Her father was detained by police and severely beaten in custody - allegedly by Sengar's brother - and later died from his injuries.

The woman also tried to set herself on fire outside the home of state Chief Minister Yogi

Adityanath, a hardline BJP stalwart.

On Tuesday, members of opposition parties chanted slogans as they protested outside the national parliament. "The BJP government should answer how a lawmaker who is in jail is able to plan a murderous attack like this?" said Mahua Moitra, a member of the opposition Trinamool Congress.

The teen's family members also staged a protest outside the Lucknow hospital, accusing Sengar of ordering the highway crash.

The demonstrations followed a rally late Monday, with supporters holding up banners with the words "you are not alone" in Hindi. More

protests were planned in New Delhi and Lucknow later Tuesday.

"We demand justice for the survivor and her family which has been put through unspeakable horrors," activist Shehla Rashid said on Twitter. The protests were reminiscent of those that followed the fatal gang rape of a Delhi student on a bus in 2012 that made headlines around the world.

That case unleashed public anger over rampant sexual violence against women in India, and the introduction of tough new laws to punish rapists.

But high numbers of assaults persist, with 40,000 rape cases reported every year.

Muslims rejoin Sri Lanka Cabinet after Easter bombings

Agency
Colombo (AFP) July 30,

Sri Lanka's Muslim ministers who resigned en masse in the wake of the deadly Easter Sunday bombings have rejoined the government, officials said Tuesday (July 30), after police cleared them of any involvement with Islamists.

Nearly 100 people linked to a local militant group were arrested after the April 21 attacks on three churches

and three luxury hotels that killed 258 people.

Nine government legislators, several of them Cabinet ministers, resigned in early June after a Buddhist lawmaker demanded their sacking and accused them of terror links.

"The ministers, state ministers and deputy ministers who resigned recently were sworn in before the president last night," a statement from the president's office said.

A spokesman for the lawmakers said they decided to accept their old portfolios after police cleared them of any links with Islamists involved with the bombings. Muslim leaders had said their community - which makes up 10 per cent of Sri Lanka's 21 million population - were victims of violence, hate speech and harassment after the attacks. Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader Rauff Hakeem said his community had cooperated

with security forces but faced collective victimisation.

In the wake of the bombings, anti-Muslim riots spread in towns north of the capital, killing one Muslim man and leaving hundreds of homes, shops and mosques vandalised.

Sri Lanka is under a state of emergency since the Easter attacks. Police and troops have been empowered to arrest and detain suspects for long periods.

Malaysia installs new king six months after surprise abdication

Agency
Kuala Lumpur July 30,

Pahang's Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin, was installed as Malaysia's 16th Malaysian King on Tuesday (July 30) in a ceremony steeped in royal customs and tradition.

The installation came six months after the surprise abdication of his predecessor, Sultan Muhammad V of Kelantan.

The 60-year-old ruler of the state of Pahang was crowned as king for the next five years in a ceremony at the Istana Negara, the national palace in Kuala Lumpur.

Malaysia's kings are elected by the rulers of the country's nine states, who take turns in serving five-year terms.

The king wore a black baju Melayu - a traditional Malay outfit - intricately woven with gold thread, along with a tengkolok, the traditional headgear worn by Malay males, reported DPA.

His outfit was accessorised with a keris, a Malay dagger. The ceremony, held in the palace's throne room, was attended by members of Malaysia's nine royal houses dressed in their full regalia, and local political leaders including Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad.

Foreign royals, including the Sultan of Brunei, Sultan Hassanah Bolkiah and his consort Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Hajah Saleha, as well as the Crown Prince of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, were also present. The ceremony began in the



morning with a royal salute involving members of the Malaysian Armed Forces at the main square of Istana Negara.

National news agency Bernama said the royal salute symbolises "the pledge of loyalty of the national defence forces" to the King, also known as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong or Supreme Ruler, as the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.

The ceremony began with the arrival of Sultan Abdullah and his Queen, Tunku Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah Sultan Iskandar. The royal couple were welcomed by Tun Dr Mahathir, Deputy Prime Minister Wan Azizah Wan Ismail and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Mujahid Yusof Rawa.

Sultan Abdullah also inspected the guard of honour comprising four officers and 103 members of various ranks. Upon completion of the inspection, Sultan Abdullah

was accorded a second royal salute.

In his maiden speech as King, Sultan Abdullah urged Malaysians to refrain from raising matters that can undermine and destroy the country's harmony, stressing that unity and harmony are pillars of strength of the nation. "Playing with fire will burn not only oneself but also the whole village," Bernama quoted Sultan Abdullah as saying. "It is the basis of unity, of bringing the people together and of sparking the spirit of patriotism. It is a spirit that, if inherited and cherished by every single citizen, can bring forth a sense of love and loyalty to the country."

Sultan Abdullah will reign as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong for five years.

His predecessor, Sultan Muhammad V of Kelantan, stepped aside in January following just two years on the throne after he went on medical leave. Reports then surfaced he had married a former Miss

Moscow.

No official reason was given for his abdication, but it was the first time a king had stepped aside before the end of his term in the Muslim-majority country. Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy with a unique arrangement where the national throne changes hands every five years between royal rulers of the country's nine states. Pahang was next in line for the throne after Muhammad V stepped down, and Sultan Abdullah was formally chosen as the country's 16th king by Malaysia's royal families.

Despite the merely ceremonial role, Malaysia's Islamic royalty command great respect, especially from Muslim Malays, the country's majority group, and criticising them is strictly forbidden.

Portraits of the king and queen adorn government buildings throughout the country. The king is also the symbolic head of Islam in the nation, as well as the nominal chief of the military.