

In boost to Taliban ties, India joins in with victory day celebrations

2 Officials Attend Event At Embassy

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New Delhi: In another expression of solidarity with Afghanistan, India participated in the fifth anniversary of the Taliban Victory Day that marks the return of Taliban to Kabul in August 2021, following the return of US-led forces.

MEA joint secretary Anand Prakash — who handles the Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran (PAI) division of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) — represented India at the event held at the Afghan embassy. Prakash was accompanied by director (PAI) Sneha Dubey.

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gagement with the Taliban and as it looks to further ramp up its development presence there, a high-level visit to Kabul from India a little further down the line is also not ruled out. Standing next to the flag of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Taliban's name for the country, charge d'affaires Mufti Noor Ahmad Noor addressed a select gathering of diplomats, including ambassadors from neighbouring countries like Iran and Uzbekistan, and other dignitaries.

Noor said in his remarks that stronger political trust,

economic partnership, and continued engagement between Afghanistan and India will not only benefit both countries, but will also make an important contribution to regional stability, connectivity, and shared prosperity.

The top Taliban diplomat here thanked MEA and minister S Jaishankar for their help in protecting and respecting the international rights of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. "We also appreciate their emphasis at international forums on the need to ensure Afghanistan's legitimate international rights. We hope that greater attention and practical efforts will be made in this regard," he said.

Chinese and Russian diplomats attended the reception.

India's position on recognition of the regime in Kabul remains in consonance with that of the international community but govt allowed Taliban diplomats to take control of

the embassy last year, while upgrading its own mission in Kabul. In the absence of official recognition, the main embassy flagpole still flies the flag of the previous Islamic Republic of Afghanistan but the Taliban are allowed to hold events in the embassy, like the news conference by foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi last year, under their own flag.

Highlighting high-level visits from Afghanistan to India in the past, Noor said that in recent years relations between the two have witnessed progress, guided by "mutual respect, political engagement, and shared interests". According to him, Afghanistan's geography should not be a field for negative competition, but a bridge for cooperation and shared prosperity. "...Afghanistan has continued efforts to expand regional economic and transit cooperation, facilitate trade, and strengthen relations..." he added.

Trump orders Pentagon to scale back joint drills with South Korea

WASHINGTON, Aug 17 (AP)

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump on Sunday ordered Pentagon to scale back planned joint military exercises with South Korea after he said it declined to help denuclearise Iran, adding that the joint wargames may be perceived as "hostile" by "unthreatening and respectful" North Korea.

Trump said in a social media post that he had recently asked South Korea's president to join the US in its efforts to denuclearise Iran, "and they said, No thanks!"

The US president further said the exercises, slated to begin this week, are not only costly but "send a signal that is totally inappropriate and hostile" to North Korea, which he said "has been unthreatening and respectful" during his time in White House.

"Therefore, and based on the fact that it is too late to cancel, I have instructed Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth, to substantially reduce the Joint Military Exercises!" Trump wrote.

The move is the latest example of the president appearing to side against an ally in favour of a leader that previous administrations have cast as an adversary.

Trump and others in his administration have also railed against NATO allies over perceived lack of support for his war against Iran, even as they seek to confront an increasingly aggressive Russia in the Baltic region.

The planned 11-day exercises involving 18,000 South Korean soldiers were designed to beef up readiness against North Korean threats.

Agreement reached with Oman on map of new route in Hormuz Strait: Iran

TEHRAN, Aug 17 (IANS)

IRANIAN Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said on Monday that Iran and Oman have agreed on the map of the new route for maritime traffic in the Strait of Hormuz.

He made the remarks at a weekly press conference in Tehran while elaborating on the latest progress of negotiations between Iran and Oman on the designation of a safe route for passage through the strait.

Baghaei said the two countries are supposed to finalise the agreement in the form of a package comprising the map and a joint statement, Xinhua News Agency reported. He attributed the protraction of process to the issue's complexity, "the number of the players" seeking to influence the process, and "attempts by certain malicious parties."

Baghaei said Tehran and Muscat are continuing the talks with seriousness, and exchanging their views on the joint state-

We'll bomb the sh** out of them: Trump warns Oman over Hormuz deal with Iran

WASHINGTON DC, Aug 17 (ANI)

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump on Monday warned Oman against getting involved in a deal with Iran over control of the Strait of Hormuz, saying the United States would "bomb the s*** out of them" if Muscat interferes with Washington's position on the strategic waterway.

During a phone call with Fox News correspondent Trey Yingst, Trump discussed the situation with Iran as the 60-day memorandum of understanding, signed in June, in order to open negotiations to end the war in West Asia, expires.

Trump told Fox News that "Iran should raise the white flag of surrender" in that context

while adding that he has "no time schedule".

"I'm not in a hurry," the US President said.

Asked about parallel talks between Iran and Oman over control of the Strait of Hormuz, Trump said, "If Oman gets in the way, we'll bomb the sh** out of them."

The US President further indicated that the US naval blockade was continuing to put new economic pressure on the Iranian regime despite counterstatements made publicly by Tehran.

He said the Iranians were "good poker players" but were "dying" and added that the US midterm elections, scheduled to take place in November, had nothing to do with his thinking.

ment's text, adding that both sides want to develop a mechanism capable of safeguarding their interests, addressing their concerns and taking into account considerations regarding international shipping.

Commenting on the Iran-US memorandum of understanding signed on June 18, Baghaei said that under the deal, the two countries were scheduled to hold negotiations on Tehran's nuclear issue and the removal of sanctions within a 60-day period, which ends on Monday; however, the negotiations never started, which he blamed on the US "flagrant and extensive violations" of the deal.

A senior Iranian diplomat said on Saturday that the Strait of Hormuz will be closed and opened only under Iran's command. Kazem Gharibabadi, Iranian deputy Foreign Minister's remarks came in response to a claim by US President Trump, who said that he would soon declare the strait a US territory.

Army contingent departs for Thailand **MAITREE-XV** joint military exercise

■ Delhi Bureau & Agencies
NEW DELHI, Aug 17

AN INDIAN Army contingent left for Thailand on Monday, where it will participate in 15th edition of India-Thailand Joint Military Exercise MAITREE-XV, slated to be held from August 18 to 31 at Vibhavadi Rangsit Camp in Surat Thani. The bilateral military exercise is aimed at strengthening defence cooperation between India and Thailand and enhancing the ability of the two armies to conduct joint operations in challenging environments.

The Indian Army and Royal Thai Army contingents participating in the exercise will comprise 85 personnel each. The Indian contingent will be repre-



Indian Army contingent, primarily troops from 9 Gorkha Rifles, stands in formation in front of a transport aircraft with the Exercise MAITREE-XV banner before departing for Thailand to participate in the 15th edition of the India-Thailand Joint Military Exercise at Vibhavadi Rangsit Camp, Surat Thani, in New Delhi. (ANI)

sented primarily by troops from the 9 Gorkha Rifles, while the Royal Thai Army contingent will comprise personnel from the 3rd Battalion, 25th Infantry Brigade, 5th Division.

The exercise will focus on company-level joint training for operations in jungle and semi-urban terrain. The training is designed to enhance the combined capabilities of the two forces in conducting joint counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist operations in jungle and semi-urban environments under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

The exercise will include a range of training activities, including field exercises, combat discussions, lectures and demonstrations.

Moroccan security forces arrest 300 migrants trying to reach Spain's Ceuta

CASABLANCA, Aug 17 (AP)

HUNDREDS of migrants trying to reach the Spanish exclave of Ceuta by land and sea were arrested by Moroccan security forces, Moroccan state television reported, as authorities tightened security along the border following calls for a new mass crossing.

Moroccan state broadcaster said 294 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa were arrested Saturday while attempting to enter Ceuta. Authorities also arrested 61 Moroccans accused of facilitating the migration attempts.

The attempted crossings followed a surge in social media



posts calling on migrants to make their way to Ceuta, a Spanish city on Morocco's northern coast. In response, Moroccan and Spanish authorities beefed up security and limited movement toward the area.

The latest attempt comes two weeks after tens of thousands of would-be migrants, driven by poverty and misinformation, rushed toward Ceuta in one of the deadliest migration crises in the region.

MoD inks pact with General Atomics to lease 2 MQ-9B Sea Guardian unmanned aircrafts

NEW DELHI, Aug 17 (PTI)

THE Defence Ministry announced inking an agreement with American defence major General Atomics Aeronautical Systems to lease two MQ-9B Sea Guardian high-altitude long-endurance unmanned aircraft for the Indian Navy at a cost of Rs 1,943 crore.

The Navy already operates two Sea Guardian drones, which were leased a few years ago.

The Ministry said it signed a contract with the General Atomics Aeronautical Systems for the remotely-piloted aircraft for a period of 30 months.



“The contract is valued at approximately Rs 1,943 crore. It was signed in the presence of additional secretary and director general (acquisition), Department of Defence,” it said.

The MQ-9B Sea Guardian remotely-piloted aircraft are

equipped with advanced systems, state-of-the-art sensors and sophisticated payloads.

They will significantly enhance the Indian Navy’s Maritime Domain Awareness capabilities, the Defence Ministry said in a statement.

Indian Army chief General Seth conferred rank of Honorary General of Nepal Army

■ By Shirish B Pradhan

KATHMANDU, Aug 17 (PTI)

INDIAN Army chief General Dhiraj Seth was conferred the rank of Honorary General of Nepal Army by President Ramchandra Paudel during an investiture ceremony at Sheetal Niwas here on Monday.

General Seth arrived in Nepal on Sunday on a four-day official visit at the invitation of his Nepalese Army counterpart General Ashok Raj Sigdel.

Nepal Vice President Ram Sahaya Prasad Yadav, Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal, India's Ambassador to Nepal Naveen Srivastava and high officials of Nepal Army and the Nepal Government were present during the ceremony, according to a press release by the Secretariat of President Paudel.

The conferral of the honorary rank continues a long tradition that started in 1950, under which
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Nepal President Ramchandra Paudel shakes hands with Indian Army chief General Dhiraj Seth during an investiture ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan, in Kathmandu, on Monday. (PTI)