

International

India disappointed as China blocks bid to ban JeM chief

Indian groups urge boycott of Chinese goods

NEW DELHI: India said yesterday it was “disappointed” by China again delaying a bid to blacklist the leader of a Pakistan-based militant group that claimed a massive suicide bombing in Kashmir last month. The blast on February 14 killed 40 Indian troops and triggered tit-for-tat air strikes and an aerial dogfight in the most serious bust-up in years between New Delhi and Islamabad.

Although the suicide bomber was native to the part of Kashmir that Indian controls, the attack was claimed by Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), one of several militant groups based in Pakistan. China on Wednesday put on hold a request by Britain, France and the United States to add the leader of JeM, Masood Azhar, on a UN sanctions blacklist which would subject him to a global travel ban, an assets freeze and an arms embargo.

China—an all-weather ally of Pakistan which has blocked three similar moves—said it needed more time to examine the sanctions request targeting Azhar, and asked for a technical hold which could last up to nine months. In a statement, the Indian foreign ministry said it “was disappointed by the outcome”, adding it would continue to pursue all avenues to make sure “terrorist leaders who are involved in heinous

attacks on our citizens are brought to justice”.

China has blocked three previous attempts at the committee on sanctions against Al-Qaeda and IS-linked groups to blacklist the JeM leader. The group itself was added to the UN terror list in 2001. China’s decision was the top news across Indian media yesterday, with the Indian Express headlining its report: “Jaish chief gets Great Wall of China”. India’s main opposition leader Rahul Gandhi used the opportunity to mock Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is seeking re-election in a national ballot starting next month.

“Weak Modi is scared of Xi. Not a word comes out of his mouth when China acts against India,” Gandhi tweeted, referring to Chinese President Xi Jinping. Regional rivals China and India have longstanding territorial disputes but Modi and Xi have tried to patch up ties, banking on their personal chemistry to smoothen differences. China’s move on Azhar also triggered a storm of anti-Chinese sentiment on Twitter with #BoycottChinaProduct attracting hundreds of

tweets. China is India’s biggest trading partner, but the trade imbalance is skewed heavily in favor of Beijing.

Boycott of Chinese goods

Meanwhile, an influential Hindu nationalist group and an Indian traders body called yesterday for a boycott of Chinese goods, to slap Beijing for blocking a move to put a Pakistani militant leader on a UN terrorist list following a suicide attack last month. Regarded by Pakistan as its most reliable friend, China has repeatedly thwarted efforts to implement UN sanctions against Masood Azhar, the founder of Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), the group that claimed responsibility

for the attack that killed 40 paramilitary police in Indian-controlled Kashmir.

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), which represents 70 million traders, said it would burn Chinese goods on March 19 to “teach a lesson” to China. “The time has come when China should suffer due to its proximity

with Pakistan,” CAIT said in a statement. “The CAIT has launched a national campaign to boycott Chinese goods among the trading community of the country, calling the traders not to sell or buy Chinese goods.”

The United States, Britain and France asked the Security Council’s Islamic State and Al-Qaeda sanctions committee to subject the Jaish leader to an arms embargo, travel ban and asset freeze. But China placed a “technical hold” on the proposal, saying it needed more time to consider, using the same stalling tactic it has used in the past. Mounting impatience with Beijing’s stance was evident on social media yesterday as #BoycottChineseProducts was the second-highest trending hashtag on Twitter in India.

Similar campaigns in the past have proved ineffectual. China is India’s second biggest trading partner. Chinese products – from mobile phones made by companies such as Xiaomi Inc to toys – are ubiquitous in India and trade between the countries grew to nearly \$90 billion in the year ending March 2018. The leader of the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, the economic wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a Hindu nationalist group with close ties to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), also called for a boycott of Chinese goods.—Agencies



UK, France, US want JeM leader, on a UN blacklist

Indonesia uncovers huge explosives stash after suicide blast

SIBOLGA: Indonesian police said yesterday they had uncovered a huge stash of explosives linked to a terror suspect whose wife blew up herself and a child following a dramatic standoff at their home. The discovery of some 300 kilograms of assembled explosives and bomb-making materials raised fears that a major attack was being planned, a month before national elections and less than a year after Indonesia was rocked by a wave of deadly suicide bombings. The suicide blast early Wednesday morning came after police had arrested the husband, Abu Hamzah, who was identified as a member of Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD).

The Islamic State-linked jihadist network has been blamed for attacks last May in Indonesia’s second-biggest city, Surabaya, the deadliest in years to rock the world’s biggest Muslim majority nation. Officers surrounded the arrested militant’s home in Sibolga on Sumatra island when the confrontation began. During a nearly 12-hour standoff, the wife lobbed an explosive device at security personnel, wounding a police officer, authorities said.

They later found parts of a woman’s corpse and that of at least one child. Police initially said they thought two of the couple’s children might have been killed. “We’re still trying to formally identify his wife because the body isn’t one piece,” said national police spokesman Dedi Prasetyo. Police said they uncovered a large cache of bombs and explosive materials in the couple’s home and another in the same city. “A total of 300 kilograms of bombs and bomb-making materials were discovered,” Prasetyo said. Yesterday, police destroyed materials in a controlled explosion in a field.

University of Indonesia terrorism expert Stanislaus Riyanta said the large stash hinted that a serious attack was being planned. “This



NORTH SUMATRA: Indonesian police blow up explosives recovered from a suspect in police custody identified as a member of Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), an Islamic State-linked jihadist network. — AFP

is frightening,” he said. “The impact of bombs depends on the materials used. But this amount – 300 kilograms—if used all at one time, could certainly be very destructive and deadly, especially in a densely populated area.” The arrest of Hamzah, who police said was a skilled bomb maker, comes days after authorities arrested two other terror suspects in other parts of the country. Police said all three were connected. Last year, two families carried out attacks at churches in Surabaya, killing a dozen people and children of the attackers, including two young girls. Yesterday, a Jakarta court sentenced several militants linked to the Surabaya bombings with prison sentences ranging from about three to 10 years. Since the 2002 Bali bombings, which killed over 200 people including scores of tourists, Indonesia has seen a string of deadly attacks that have tested its long-held reputation for religious tolerance.— AFP

Afghan airstrikes kill 31 militants

GHAZNI: Thirty-one militants, many of them believed to have been Al-Qaeda fighters, have been killed in airstrikes in south-eastern Afghanistan, officials said yesterday. The strikes were carried out in Ghazni province late Wednesday, where the defense ministry said they targeted a “base” belonging to the militants.

“Qari Aref, one of the facilitators (for Al-Qaeda) was transferring these 31 terrorists, including nine suicide bombers, in several cars when targeted by airstrikes and eliminated,” the ministry said. It described the fighters as all belonging to the Middle Eastern jihadist group, although a spokesman for the Ghazni governor said fighters from the Taliban-affiliated Haqqani network were also present. The defense ministry did not specify who carried out the airstrikes. Only Afghan and US forces in Afghanistan conduct airstrikes.

The Ghazni governor’s spokesman, Mohammed Aref Noori, said the strikes had been carried out by US forces, but there was no immediate confirmation of his claim. Al-Qaeda is still believed to be active in parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan, where some of its surviving leadership such as Ayman al-Zawahiri are thought to be hiding. While still regarded as a threat by Afghan and US officials, the group has not been able to conduct major attacks in Afghanistan or repeat the spectacular success of the September 11, 2001 attacks by hijacked airliners on New York and Washington.— AFP