

## International

# Muslim rebels hand over their guns in Philippines peace deal

## 'The war is over... I have no firearms left'

**SULTAN KUDARAT:** Muslim rebels in the mainly Catholic Philippines began handing over their guns to independent foreign monitors yesterday, as part of a treaty aimed at ending a decades-long separatist insurgency that has left about 150,000 people dead. Just over a thousand guerrillas in the country's restive south were turning in 940 weapons in a single day, the start of a graduated decommissioning process that aims to turn the country's largest rebel force into a regular political party.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) fighters who were demobilized on Saturday represent a symbolic first step towards retiring what MILF says is a force of 40,000 in the coming years. "The war is over... I have no firearms left," Paisal Abdullah Bagundang, 56, a self-described veteran of more than 100 firefights with government security forces since the 1970s, told AFP. But the disarmament will take time to make an impact in a place where violence is an almost-daily threat. A bomb hidden in a parked motorcycle exploded near a market in Isulan town early on Saturday, just hours before President Rodrigo Duterte was to witness the decommissioning ceremony some 40 kilometers away in Sultan Kudarat.

Police said eight people were injured in the attack that was later claimed by the Islamic State group, according to SITE Intelligence, which monitors jihadist activities worldwide. The decommissioning process "should not lead to expectations that it is going to result in a major deceleration in attacks", said Francisco Lara, senior conflict adviser for Asia at watchdog International Alert, noting that the general public in the region are also armed.

Acquiring a gun is "like buying fish in the market" in the southwestern provinces where most of the Philippines' Muslim minority live, MILF commander

Murad Ebrahim told reporters. But "if people no longer feel they need firearms to survive then they will easily give them up", added Ebrahim, who is also chief minister of the area that has its own regional parliament, but no separate police force or military.

### 'We are civilians now'

About a third of MILF combatants and their weapons are to be initially retired over the coming eight months. Each retired fighter will receive a million pesos' (\$19,000) worth of cash, scholarships, health insurance, and training to become productive civilians. Rebels facing criminal cases related to the insurgency will be granted amnesty, while those qualified can train to join the security forces, Duterte's peace adviser Carlito Galvez told reporters.

"Let me assure our MILF combatants that the government will assist you as you re-integrate into society and enjoy fruitful and productive civilian lives," Duterte told the ex-rebels in a speech yesterday. Suharto Abdullah, 36, told AFP he had joined the MILF when he was 10 years old, but now plans to sell rice. "We are civilians now and won't be carrying guns any more," he said. Saida Lingas, a 66-year-old former fighter, warned she and others would take up arms again if poverty continues to hound their communities.

"The war will resume if the government reneges on what it promised us," added Lingas, who said she dropped out of a Catholic-run high school and became a rebel courier and cook in 1969 after soldiers killed several of her cousins. The second phase of decommissioning involving the main bulk of MILF fighters kicks in next year, with the rest to undergo the process before 2022.

With the MILF pact, jihadists now pose the biggest



**SULTAN KUDARAT:** Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rebels wait for transportation to a weapons decommissioning ceremony at Camp Darapanan, Sultan Kudarat town on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. —AFP

threat to security in the southern Philippines. In a January attack claimed by IS, an Indonesian couple carried out suicide bombings at a Catholic cathedral on the Muslim-majority island of Jolo, killing 21 peo-

ple. In 2017, local and foreign militants flying the IS flag seized the city of Marawi, sparking a five-month battle that flattened the city centre and left more than 1,000 people dead. —AFP

## India says lifting of Kashmir restrictions 'depends on Pakistan'

**NEW DELHI:** The lifting of New Delhi's communications restrictions in Indian Kashmir depends on Pakistan stopping deploying "terrorists" and fomenting unrest there, India's national security advisor said yesterday. More than a month after India stripped the restive region of its autonomy and severely restricted movement, mobile phone networks and the internet remain cut off in all but a few pockets. National Security Advisor Ajit Doval said that "100 percent" of landlines now worked but that a further easing depends on Pakistan, which he said has sent 230 militants into the region.

"Lifting the communications depends on how Pakistan behaves," Doval told reporters. "We are determined to protect the lives of Kashmiris from Pakistani terrorists even if we have to impose restrictions." Doval also said that India had intercepted messages sent by Pakistani "communication towers" over the effective border to operatives inside Indian-administered Kashmir. He added that he believes a "majority" of Kashmiris backed India's step on August 5 to scrap Kashmir's special status since they felt it would bring economic and other benefits.

### Thousands detained

Kashmir, split between India and Pakistan since 1947, has been the spark for two major wars and countless clashes between the two nuclear-armed arch-rivals. Indian-administered Kashmir has seen a decades-old armed rebellion — backed by Pakistan, New Delhi says — against Indian rule with tens of thousands, mostly civilians, killed.

## Flies overwhelm Pakistan's Karachi in monsoon 'hell'

**KARACHI:** Swarms of flies are descending on Pakistan's commercial capital in what residents say are record numbers this rainy season, adding to the misery of Karachi's monsoon "hell". Heavy rains have inundated the sprawling port city of nearly 20 million people for weeks, overwhelming shoddy drainage systems clogged with mountains of uncollected garbage and flooding neighborhoods with raw sewage.

"I have never seen such a fierce presence of flies in my life," Karachi resident Abdul Aziz, 45 said. "Clouds of flies keep covering the food at the market. It's repulsive — they cover the fruit so much that you can't see beneath them." At a market in Surjani town, meat trader Zahid Ali looked on as flies engulfed the area. "If the customers

come, they impulsively leave after seeing the swarms of flies," said Ali, adding that an increasing number of people working in the market had fallen ill.

Shershah Syed, a health rights activist and prominent surgeon in Karachi, said many illnesses were on the rise because of flies and mosquitoes. "This time (the flies are) the worst ever as rain water is unable to drain and the garbage heaps are not dealt with," Syed said. "The number of children entering hospitals for diarrhea or dysentery has jumped several fold this year. The number of children — who are the most vulnerable to the fly-borne diseases — has increased by about 10 times."

While Karachi is responsible for 60 percent of Pakistan's economic output, the city has long endured creaky infrastructure, illegal construction and failing municipal services. This week, the Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Karachi as one of the least liveable cities in the world along with the likes of war-torn Libya's Tripoli and the crisis-hit Venezuelan capital Caracas.



**SRINAGAR:** Indian paramilitary troopers stand guard. —AFP

Multiple sources have told AFP that several thousand people have been detained since August 5, including local politicians. A senior government source told AFP last week that at least 500 protests and incidents of stone throwing have occurred, leaving nearly 100 civilians and 400 members of the Indian security forces injured. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, who has compared the Indian government to the Nazis, has been on a diplomatic offensive against New Delhi's move in Muslim-majority Kashmir, saying it is bent on "ethnic cleansing".

Indian media yesterday quoted US State Department spokesperson Morgan Ortugas as saying Washington

remained "very concerned by widespread detentions, including of local political and business leaders, and the restrictions on the residents of the region." "We are also concerned about reports that Internet and mobile phone access continues to be blocked in certain regions," Ortugas said.

India has repeatedly insisted that Kashmir is purely an internal matter and has bristled at outside comment or suggestions of mediation. Yesterday Pakistan said that it denied Indian President Ram Nath Kovind permission to fly through its airspace in view of New Delhi's "behavior". —AFP



**KARACHI:** Young boys wade and play among floodwaters during heavy monsoon rains. —AFP

"People in Karachi are numb to the idea of living with medical waste, overflowing gutters, broken down roads, and a complete lack of any kind

of respectable public transport system," wrote Saadat Ali Zia on Twitter. "We live in hell," tweeted Farooq Afridi. —AFP

Lieutenant General Tukur Buratai, a military officer and a vigilante said. "The convoy came under fire from the terrorists near Kamuya at around 11:30 am (1030 GMT), killing one soldier and injuring three others," said the military officer who spoke on condition of anonymity. A military pickup truck was "burnt in the attack", said vigilante Mustapha Karimbe who confirmed the casualties. Kamuya, the home village of Buratai's mother, has been repeatedly hit by jihadists since 2015 when Buratai was appointed army chief.

In January this year, six soldiers were killed and 14 injured when ISWAP sacked a base in Kamuya, stealing weapons and burning military vehicles. The IS-backed faction has repeatedly targeted military installations and troops since mid-2018. Late on Thursday the convoy of

Borno state governor was attacked by jihadists from rival Boko Haram faction near Kawuya village, south east of the state capital Maiduguri, but no one was hurt.

Governor Babagana Umara Zulum was returning from a tour of some districts around 2000 GMT when the militants opened fire on his motorcade, two civilian militias who spoke anonymously said. "Police escorts in the convoy returned fire and thwarted the ambush, forcing the insurgents to retreat," one of the militias said. In February Boko Haram fighters killed dozens of civilians when they opened fire on the convoy of Zulum's predecessor near Dikwa, 80 kilometers east of Maiduguri. Boko Haram's decade-long conflict has killed more than 35,000 people and displaced around two million in northeast Nigeria. —AFP

## N Korean leader berates officials over typhoon prep

**SEOUL:** North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has berated officials for their "easygoing" attitude to the approach of Typhoon Lingling, state media reported. The powerful storm is expected to make landfall in the North yesterday afternoon after passing off the coast of South Korea, according to Seoul's Korea Meteorological Administration.

Kim convened an emergency meeting on Friday and said "dangerous circumstances" caused by the typhoon were "imminent", but that many in positions of authority were ill prepared, the North's KCNA news service said later that day. Officials in North Korea "remain unchanged in their attitude and helpless against the typhoon, unaware of its seriousness and seized with easygoing sentiment", Kim said during the meeting, according to the KCNA report. The impoverished and isolated North is vulnerable to natural disasters, especially floods, due in part to deforestation and poor infrastructure. In South Korea, at least one death was reported after the country was hit by the storm, which yesterday had wind speeds of up to 125 kilometers per hour. A woman in her 70s was killed after being blown over by strong winds in Boryeong, a city 140 kilometers southwest of Seoul, authorities said.

More than 230 flights were cancelled and power outages were reported in more than 30,000 South Korean homes, while public parks and zoos were closed for the weekend due to heavy rain and strong winds. Seoul's weather authorities also warned of landslides and flooding, advising the public to stay indoors. Kim said efforts to minimize damage from the typhoon in North Korea would be an "enormous struggle", adding that its army should "remain loyal to its sacred duty" of ensuring citizens' safety. At least 138 North Koreans were known to have died after torrential rain triggered major floods in 2016, the United Nations said at the time. More than 160 people were killed by a massive rainstorm in the summer of 2012.

### New commander

In other news, Pyongyang has named an army general with expertise in artillery as its new military commander, North Korean state media reported, in a move that an analyst said could signal plans for the development of new weapons. Pak Jong Chon was appointed the "chief of the General Staff of the Korean People's Army," KCNA said late Friday, adding that the decision was announced during a meeting attended by leader Kim Jong Un. Pak succeeds Ri Yong Gil, an expert on military operations who has served in the position on two separate occasions since 2013. His promotion from head of the Korean People's Army's Artillery Command may suggest a new military focus on weapons development, said Ahn Chan-il, a North Korean defector and researcher in Seoul.

The North was particularly threatened by the South's acquisition of cutting-edge American F-35 stealth fighter jets — known for their ability to evade radar detection — earlier this year, Ahn said. "It is also notable that Pak accompanied Kim during the North's test-firing of its new weapons," he added. "With him as the North's top military officer, it's more likely that Pyongyang will prioritize artillery along with its new weapons system."

Pak accompanied Kim when he supervised the test-firing of what North Korea said were "new-type tactical guided missiles" in August. Pak was also present when Kim oversaw the test of a "newly developed large-caliber multiple launch guided rocket system" in July, KCNA reported at the time. South Korea has described the two launches as "short-range ballistic missiles," which the North is barred from testing under UN resolutions. Pyongyang had said the two launches — along with five other tests in July and August — were a warning to Washington and Seoul over their August joint military drills, which it has long considered rehearsals for invasion. —AFP

## Jihadists kill Nigerian soldier in ambush

**KANO:** At least one soldier was killed and three others injured when suspected IS-affiliated jihadists ambushed a military convoy in northeast Nigeria's Borno state, according to security sources. Militants believed to be from the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) on Friday opened fire on the convoy in Kamuya village, close to the family home of Nigeria's army chief,