

Narendra Modi's trip to Ladakh comes after a deadly clash with Chinese soldiers that saw 20 Indian troops killed last month



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (C) walks with military commanders as he arrives in Leh, the joint capital of the union territory of Ladakh

India's Modi makes surprise China border visit after clash

Reuters | New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi flew yesterday into the northern border region where Indian and Chinese troops are locked in a stand-off, and said the military stood ready to defend his country.

His comments prompted Beijing to call for restraint at the tense border area in the northern Himalayan region of Ladakh.

Modi, making his first trip to the Ladakh region since the Indian army lost 20 soldiers in a clash with Chinese soldiers last month, said his country's commitment to peace should not be seen as a sign of weakness.

"Today India is becoming stronger, be it in naval might,

air power, space power and the strength of our army. Modernization of weapons and upgradation of infrastructure has enhanced our defence capabilities manifold," he said in a speech to soldiers near Leh, the regional capital.

India says Chinese troops have intruded across the Line of Actual Control, or the ceasefire line separating the two armies in the high altitude Ladakh region, and the clash on June 15 occurred because Chinese troops sought to erect defences on India's side of the de facto border.

China says the whole of the Galwan valley where the clash occurred is its territory and that it was frontline Indian troops that had breached the border, which is not demarcated.

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NARENDRA MODI

China's foreign ministry said yesterday the two countries were holding talks to reduce

tensions.

Spokesman Zhao Lijian, responding to a question about Modi's visit to the border region, said both sides were in communications through diplomatic and military channels to ease the situation.

"In these circumstances, neither side should take actions that might complicate the border situation," he said at a daily news briefing in Beijing.

Modi referred to expansionism in his speech to soldiers, saying it caused problems.

"(The) Prime Minister said that the time for expansionism is over. This is the era of development," the Indian government quoted Modi as saying, in a press release. "He recalled that it is this mindset of expansionism that did great harm."

News in brief

Pakistani foreign minister tests positive for COVID-19

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said he had tested positive for COVID-19, days after holding high profile meetings including one with US special representative on Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad in Islamabad. In the last few days, Qureshi has had contact with Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan in parliament and in a cabinet meeting on Wednesday.



Kim Jong Un says North Korea prevented coronavirus from making inroads

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un told a meeting of the politburo of the ruling Workers Party the North had stopped the novel coronavirus from making inroads in the country. He warned against self-complacency or relaxation in the anti-epidemic effort and urged North Koreans to maintain "maximum alert".



France gets new PM as Macron charts 'new course'

French President Emmanuel Macron named a senior bureaucrat to replace Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, whose government resigned after a poor local election showing for the ruling party. The new premier, Jean Castex, officially a member of the right-wing opposition but in charge of overseeing the country's progressive emergence from coronavirus lockdown, is taking over as Philippe leaves the post after three years, the Elysee Palace announced.



A powerful Afghan warlord accused of kidnapping and raping a political opponent and of committing rights abuses for decades has been given the country's highest military rank, a top official said. Abdul Rashid Dostum, 66, was awarded the rank of marshal in a decree issued by President Ashraf Ghani, making him the only third such recipient in Afghan armed forces.

Afghan warlord accused of rights abuse awarded highest military rank

The search for 14 people missing after their fishing boat and a cargo ship collided off the Philippines has turned into a retrieval operation with little hope of finding them alive, the coast guard said. The vessels crashed last Saturday night in waters southwest of Manila, capsizing the Philippine fishing boat Liberty 5 off the coast of Occidental Mindoro province. The crew of the Hong Kong-registered cargo ship MV Vienna Wood has been detained as investigators prepare to lay criminal charges over the incident.



22 pilgrims killed as train rams van in Pakistan

AFP | Karachi

At least 22 Sikh pilgrims -- 19 from the same family -- were killed yesterday when a train smashed into a van in the east of Pakistan, authorities said.

The vehicle's driver was crossing an unmanned level crossing when it was hit by an oncoming train near the small city of Farooqabad.

"The crossing was unmanned and the driver of the van took a hasty decision by driving onto the tracks," Pakistan Railways spokeswoman Quratul Ain said, adding that the passengers were all Sikh pilgrims.

"Around 20 people lost their lives in [the] tragic collision. Two injured succumbed to injuries later, raising the death toll to 22", Pakistan's ministry of interior said in a statement.



Residents gather around the wreckage of the van following the accident

Earlier a local police spokesman Wajid Abbas confirmed at least 19 dead were from the same family. In total there were 30 pilgrims in the van. No train passengers were injured. The pilgrims from the north of the country were returning from a visit to Nankana Sahib, the birth-

place of Sikhism founder Guru Nanak, near the megacity of Lahore.

Prime Minister Imran Khan tweeted that he was "deeply saddened" by the deaths.

Images broadcast on local television showed the mangled van on the train tracks.

India approves human trials for second vaccine candidate

Reuters | Bengaluru

Zydus has received approval from Indian regulators to begin human studies for its COVID-19 vaccine contender, the drugmaker said yesterday, as the novel coronavirus infections continue to surge in the world's fourth worst-hit nation.

The potential vaccine showed a "strong immune response" in animal studies, and the antibodies produced were able to completely neutralize the wild type virus, Zy-



A small bottle labeled with a 'Vaccine' sticker is held near a medical syringe in front of displayed 'Coronavirus COVID-19' words in this illustration

du, part of Cadila Healthcare Ltd, said in a statement to Indian stock exchanges. India's approval for Zydus comes days after privately held Bharat Biotech got a similar green light for human studies for its vaccine candidate.

Zydus will begin human trials this month in over 1,000 subjects in multiple sites in India, it said. The company also plans to ramp up its production capacity for the vaccine contender to serve Indian and global demand, it added.

