



'Lord Ram is Nepali not Indian'

NDTV ONLINE

Ayodhya, the ancient city believed by millions of Hindus to be the birthplace of Lord Ram, is actually a small village near Kathmandu, Nepal Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli said Monday.

Speaking at a cultural programme at his residence, Oli then accused India of cultural oppression and encroachment, and said Nepal's contribution to science had been undervalued.

"We still believe we gave Sita to Prince Ram but we gave the prince too, from Ayodhya, not India. Ayodhya is a village a little west (of) Birgunj (a district in Nepal that is around 135 km from capital Kathmandu)," he said.

According to news agency ANI, which quoted Nepalese media sources, Oli also said: "Real Ayodhya lies in Nepal, not in India. Lord Ram is Nepali not Indian".

Ayodhya is a town in Uttar Pradesh, around 135 km from state capital Lucknow.

The Nepal PM's remarks come amid a row between the two countries over overlapping territorial claims. Last month the Nepal parliament voted, unanimously, to pass a constitutional amendment to update the country's map including the disputed lands irking New Delhi.

US rejects China's 'maritime empire'

Pompeo declares Beijing's claims in South China Sea 'unlawful'

REUTERS, Washington /Beijing

The United States has rejected China's claims to offshore resources in most of the South China Sea, drawing criticism from China which said the US position raised tension in the region, highlighting an increasingly testy relationship.

China has offered no coherent legal basis for its ambitions in the South China Sea and for years has been using intimidation against other Southeast Asian coastal states, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement on Monday.

"We are making clear: Beijing's claims to offshore resources across most of the South China Sea are completely unlawful, as is its campaign of bullying to control them," said Pompeo, a prominent China hawk within the Trump administration.

The United States has long opposed China's expansive territorial claims on the South China Sea, sending warships regularly through the strategic waterway to demonstrate freedom of navigation there. Monday's comments reflect a harsher tone.

"The world will not allow Beijing to treat the South China Sea as its maritime empire," Pompeo said.



The US statement supports a ruling four years ago under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) that invalidated most of China's claims for maritime rights in the South China Sea.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian condemned the US rejection of China's claim.

"It intentionally stirs up controversy over maritime sovereignty claims, destroys regional peace and stability and is an irresponsible act," he said at a regular briefing.

"The US has repeatedly sent large fleets of sophisticated military planes and ships to the South China Sea ... The US is the troublemaker and destroyer of regional peace and stability."

China claims 90% of the potentially energy-rich South China Sea, but Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also lay claim to parts of it.

About \$3 trillion worth of trade passes through the waterway each year. China has built bases atop atolls in the region but says its intentions are peaceful.

Analysts said it would be important to see if other countries adopted the US stance and what, if anything, Washington might do to reinforce its position and prevent Beijing from creating "facts on the water" to buttress its claims.

The relationship between the United States and China has grown increasingly tense recently over various issues including China's handling of the novel coronavirus and its tightened grip on Hong Kong.

China routinely outlines the scope of its claims in the South China Sea with reference to a so-called nine-dash line on its maps that encompasses about nine-tenths of the 3.5-million-square-kilometer waters.



French elite acrobatic flying team "Patrouille de France" (PAF) performs a flying display of the French national flag over the Louvre pyramid designed by Chinese architect Ioh Ming Pei, during annual Bastille Day military ceremony on the Place de la Concorde in Paris, yesterday. France yesterday held a reduced version of its traditional Bastille Day parade this year due to safety measures over the COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) pandemic.

PHOTO: AFP

Canada PM apologizes for 'mistake' amid charity uproar

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized on Monday for taking part in a Cabinet decision to use a charity he and his family have worked with to administer a \$900 million (\$663.4 million) student grant program. Trudeau, 48, is facing a third investigation for conflict of interest in a little over three years after his government tapped WE Charity Canada on June 25 to manage the program. The charity backed out about a week after the contract was announced. WE Charity disclosed last week that from 2016-2020 it paid honoraria to Trudeau's mother, Margaret, amounting to C\$250,000 for speaking at some 28 events, while his brother, Alexandre, received about C\$32,000. Trudeau and his wife, Sophie Gregoire Trudeau, have regularly participated in WE Charity events.

Hagia Sophia's 'Christian icons aren't obstacles to prayers'

Turkey's Hagia Sophia could open to visitors outside prayer times and its Christian icons will remain, religious officials said yesterday, after a court ruling paved the way for it to become a mosque. The sixth-century Istanbul landmark's museum status -- in place since 1934 -- was revoked on Friday and control was handed to the religious authority, Diyanet. Hagia Sophia spent almost 1,000 years as a cathedral before being converted into a mosque in 1453 and later a museum. Diyanet said in a statement on Tuesday that Christian icons in Hagia Sophia were "not an obstacle to the validity of the prayers". "The icons should be curtained and shaded through appropriate means during prayer times," it said.

Weinstein accusers call \$18.9m NY settlement a 'cruel hoax'

Six women who claim they were sexually abused by Harvey Weinstein urged a US judge on Monday to reject an \$18.9 million settlement with the disgraced movie producer, the board of his former studio and other accusers. The settlement announced on June 30 would end litigation by New York Attorney General Letitia James and separate class-action litigation, and permit accusers to claim \$7,500 to \$750,000 each. But in a Manhattan federal court filing, the six women said accusers would receive just \$11.2 million after deducting legal fees and costs, with typical awards of just \$10,000 to \$20,000, while shielding the defendants' insurers from big payouts. Weinstein, 68, is serving a 23-year prison term following his Feb 24 conviction for sexually assaulting a former production assistant and raping a onetime aspiring actress. He is appealing, and still faces rape and sexual assault charges in Los Angeles.

SOURCE: AFP

'There is a Trump effect'

UN expert accuses White House of mounting 'onslaught' against global press freedom

REUTERS, Geneva

The UN special rapporteur on freedom of expression on Monday accused the White House of mounting an "onslaught" against the media and referred to a negative "Trump effect" on global press freedom.

In his last official press briefing before his six-year tenure ends later this month, David Kaye said in a series of forthright comments that he hoped "attacks" on US journalists would end when President Donald Trump leaves office.

"Clearly the signature issue over the past four years now has been the way in which this particular president addresses the media: The way he denigrates the media, denigrates freedom of expression," he told journalists in Geneva. Kaye specified that the so-called onslaught consisted



of criticism of reporters and spreading "disinformation," as well as partnerships with conservative media organisations.

When Kaye was asked about the impact of that on press freedom around the world, the special rapporteur said: "There clearly is a Trump effect, a very negative one," adding that the Trump administration has created a global culture of permissiveness.

Kaye also raised broad concerns about government crackdowns that has worsened with the COVID-19 pandemic in a trend he described as "very disturbing" and contributing to the spread of the disease.

"Unfortunately often under the guise of trying to restrict disinformation, governments have resorted to old tools of clamping down on the free flow of information," he said, without naming specific countries.

DGHS didn't bother to check

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Almost a similar thing happened to Regent Hospital, which allegedly issued several thousand fake Covid-19 test reports. The DGHS had reached a deal with Regent for Covid-19 treatment though its licence expired in 2014 and was never renewed.

TEST REPORT SCAM One month after the coronavirus hit the country in March, JKG got the approval from DGHS on April 6 and started collecting samples for free through their 44 kiosks installed in Dhaka, Narayanganj and other places.

However, the scam surfaced on June 24 after Tejgaon police arrested five employees of Oval Group, including CEO Ariful, over their alleged involvement in issuing fake Covid-19 test reports.

Police said although JKG Health Care had no permission to collect Covid-19 test samples from people's homes, they would do so through their two platforms -- Booking BD and Health Care.

For such home service, they used to charge Tk 5,000 for locals and USD 100 for foreigners.

After investigation, police found all the test results for samples collected from homes were fake.

DGHS EXPLANATION The DGHS, in an explanation letter on July 11, said it gave permission to JKG Health Care to set up booths and collect Covid-19 test samples as its coordinator Ariful Chaudhury came to DGHS saying that his organisation can do it -- like in South Korea -- to help the government deal with the Covid-19 crisis.

The DGHS letter clarified that it gave permission to JKG Health Care based on previous event management experience of the Oval Group, including a health ministry event.

It mentioned that Ariful Chaudhury is the CEO of Oval Group, an event management company which had organised a health ministry event -- Health Services Week -- in 2018 as well as managed several events of the Bangladesh Medical Association.

It also referred to the fact that the government would not have to give any money for this collection arrangement.

"As it was needed to increase collection of Covid-19 sample and also there were previous experiences with Oval Group, so the health ministry or DGHS thought it right to give the permission," the letter stated, adding that the DGHS had no idea that JKG could cheat.

STATUS OF INVESTIGATION Investigators said lobbying government high-ups, Ariful's wife Dr Sabrina Arif Chaudhury managed to get JKG the job of collecting Covid-19 test samples after showing it to be a non-profit organisation.

Her influence also brought the firm several government contracts, including those of the health ministry, after she was married to Ariful in 2015, they said.

Sabrina, a suspended registrar (cardiac surgery) at the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD), was detained on Sunday. Meanwhile, the investigation charge

of the case over the scam has been handed over to the Detective Branch on Monday night. The Tejgaon division of the branch is now probing it.

The DB has sought seven-day remand for Oval Group CEO Ariful, and JKG chief coordinator Sayed Chowdhury, who is the husband of JKG's owner Jebunnessa Reema, again to cross-check Sabrina's claim and interrogate them further about the fake test report scam, DB and court sources said.

The remand hearing will be held today.

Police said they found messages from Sabrina's mobile phone where she referred to herself as the chairman of JKG.

Besides, some documents, the website of an event management firm connected to JKG, and Sabrina's LinkedIn profile, mention her as the chairman of Oval Group, which was established in 2008.

But on Monday, the first day of her remand, she was still denying that she held any post at JKG.

Man who read independence

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caliphs" -- Shajahan Siraj, ASM Abdur Rob, Abdul Kuddus Makhon and Nur-e-Alam Siddique -- of Liberation War. He was also the commander of Bangladesh Liberation Force.

In independent Bangladesh, Siraj played the role of minister for environment and forest between 2001 and 2006. He was also a former vice president of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

He left behind his wife Rabeya Siraj, daughter barrister Sarwat Siraj, son Rajiv Siraj and a number of relatives, followers and well-wishers to mourn his death.

Born in Tangail on March 1, 1943, Siraj entered into the political arena through the movement against Hamidur Rahman Education Commission in 1962. He was a student of Sadat College of Karatia in Tangail at that time.

He was elected as the VP of the college twice in 1964-65 and 1966-67. He participated in the 1969 mass upsurge movement and became the general secretary of undivided Chhatra League in 1970-1972.

Siraj was one of the key figures of Swadhin Bangla Biplabi Parishad, a secret organisation that was formed by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1962 with an aim to liberate the country from Pakistan.

The then Pakistan government on March 2 placed curfew in Dhaka but students of Chhatra Sangram Patishad, led by vice president ASM Abdur Rob and general secretary Shahjahan Siraj, held a massive rally. They then hoisted a flag of Bangladesh.

Saluting the flag, they all expressed their solidarity with the liberation movement.

After the country got independence, he played a role to form Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and was the acting general secretary and then president.

Siraj was elected lawmaker from Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal thrice from Tangail-4. He joined the BNP in 1995 and got elected from the same constituency that year.

When he was environment minister, some good initiatives were taken including banning of polythene and withdrawal of two-stroke scooters from Dhaka.

During the army backed caretaker government in 2007, Siraj was arrested for corruption charges and he was convicted. The BNP expresses deep condolences saying the nation has lost a great leader.

His body will be taken to his constituency of Tangail Kalihati. The first Namaj-e-Janaza will be held at Kalihati college ground. His another Janaja will be held at Gulshan Society mosque. He will be buried at Banani graveyard after Isha prayer.

Meanwhile, President M Abdul Hamid yesterday expressed profound shock and sorrow at the death of the veteran freedom fighter and former minister.

In a condolence message, the President recalled with due respect his outstanding contribution to Bangladesh's politics and the country's Liberation War in 1971.

The head of the state prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed profound sympathy to the bereaved family, reported BSS.

Gonoforum President Dr Kamal Hossain and General Secretary Reza Kibria expresses deep condolence and said Siraj had a significant role after Liberation War.

Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Janata League President Bangabir Kader Siddiqui expresses his deep condolence too.

Advertisement for Bangladesh Bank (বাংলাদেশ ব্যাংক) regarding a tender for a building project. It includes details about the project location, dates, and contact information.

Advertisement for Taka South City Corporation (ঢাকা দক্ষিণ সিটি কর্পোরেশন) regarding a parking project. It includes details about the project location, dates, and contact information.