

GANG-RAPE AND KILLING OF DALIT WOMAN

Cops arrest Gandhi scions as protests flare in India

REUTERS, Lucknow/Delhi

Indian police arrested several opposition leaders, including Congress leaders Priyanka and Rahul Gandhi, yesterday heading for the site where a low-caste woman died after being gang-raped in the latest high-profile assault to whip up nationwide anger and protests.

The 19-year-old victim from the Dalit community, which often faces violence and discrimination, died from injuries on Tuesday after the Sept. 14 attack in a field near her home in Hathras district, authorities said.

Police have arrested four men for rape. India is one of the world's most dangerous places for women, with a rape occurring every 15 minutes, according to federal data - figures that rights groups say vastly underestimate the scale of the problem.

Priyanka and Rahul Gandhi, siblings and leaders of the main opposition Congress Party, were blocked and arrested by police as they tried to drive then walk to see the woman's family in Hathras about 100 km (62 miles) from Delhi, the party said.

Video footage from ANI news agency

showed Rahul - the descendant of three former prime ministers - jostling with police before falling to the ground. Congress said other senior party members were also detained, without giving more details.



Rahul and Priyanka were later released. Protesters and security forces had clashed in the district of northern Uttar Pradesh state on Wednesday after police cremated the woman's body.

The victim's brother told Reuters the cremation was against the wishes of her family, who had wanted to perform funeral rites. Local officials deny this.

Twenty-five people were arrested over the unrest, according to a police information report. A witness told Reuters police had wielded batons.

Authorities yesterday said they were barring gatherings of five or more people and would block politicians from the area.

The victim and her brother are not being identified due to laws against naming victims of sexual violence. The four men arrested were all from a higher caste, her brother told Reuters.



Riot police officers detain people during a protest urging the release of twelve Hong Kong activists detained on the Chinese mainland, who were arrested at sea after attempting to flee to Taiwan, on Chinese National Day in Hong Kong yesterday. Dozens of democracy supporters were arrested in Hong Kong yesterday for defying a protest ban as the city marked China's National Day and its leader hailed Beijing's new security law for restoring stability to the restive finance hub.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Google to invest \$1b with news partners

AFP, Paris

Google plans to invest \$1 billion on partnerships with news publishers worldwide to develop a "Showcase" app to highlight their reporting packages, CEO Sundar Pichai said in a statement yesterday.

"This financial commitment -- our biggest to date -- will pay publishers to create and curate high-quality content for a different kind of online news experience," Pichai said.

Google has locked horns with publishers repeatedly in recent years over its reluctance to pay for displaying articles, videos and other content in its search results, which has become a vital path for reaching viewers as print subscriptions fade. It is currently in a standoff with several European media groups, including Agence France-Presse, over its refusal to comply with a new EU law governing digital copyrights.

Pichai said Google had already signed up almost 200 publications in several countries, including Der Spiegel in Germany and Brazil's Folha de S. Paulo, but the list lacked any from the United States or France.

Google News Showcase, he said, will highlight "the editorial curation of award-winning newsrooms to give readers more insight on the stories that matter, and in the process, helps publishers develop deeper relationships with their audiences."

"It will start rolling out today to readers in Brazil and Germany, and will expand to other countries in the coming months where local frameworks support these partnerships," Pichai said.

Stop 'waging war on nature'

Says UN chief, warns imbalance in nature causes pandemics like Covid-19

AGENCIES

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has warned humanity must stop "waging war on nature" at the United Nations' first ever summit on the biodiversity crisis.

He said one consequence of the imbalance with nature - caused by deforestation, climate change and food production - was the emergence of deadly diseases such as HIV-AIDS, Ebola and COVID-19.

"Humanity is waging war on nature. And we need to rebuild our relationship with it," said Guterres.

"Wildlife populations are plummeting because of overconsumption, population growth, and intensive agriculture. And the rate of species extinction is accelerating with some one million species currently threatened or endangered."

Earlier this month, the UN published a major assessment that found none of the 20 global biodiversity targets agreed 10 years ago with a 2020 deadline were fully met.

Guterres said governments must include nature-based solutions in coronavirus recovery plans, investing in forests,



wetlands and oceans.

"Ten years ago, we secured commitments that should have protected our planet. We have largely failed. But where effort has been made, the benefits to our economies, human and planetary health are irrefutable. Nature is resilient and it can recover if we ease our relentless assault," the UN chief said.

Wednesday's online event gave more than 100 heads of state and government the opportunity to raise ambitions for the development of the 10-year-strategy.

Addressing the summit in a video message, Chinese President Xi Jinping urged global cooperation on the environment,

saying countries were "passengers in the same boat".

French President Emmanuel Macron said "2021 must be the year of action," while European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen reaffirmed her commitment to the new global biodiversity framework.

The United States did not participate in the UN summit.

The world spends an estimated \$80-\$90bn on conservation each year, but studies show hundreds of billions of dollars may be needed to save ecosystems from collapse.

Ahead of the UN summit, leaders from more than 70 countries and the European Union signed a pledge to reverse losses to natural habitats by 2030.

But leaders of some of the world's worst polluters - Brazil, China, India and the US - did not sign the pledge.

Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg noted "it's so easy to pledge".

"Everyone wants to save nature and save the climate. When it comes to real action, however, they fail every single time," she tweeted.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Navalny blames Putin

Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny accused President Vladimir Putin of being behind his poisoning with nerve agent Novichok, as he vowed to return to Russia to press on with his opposition campaign. Navalny was evacuated to Berlin for treatment after he collapsed in August following a campaign trip to support opposition candidates in local elections. The Kremlin has firmly denied allegations of involvement and accused Western leaders of launching a disinformation campaign over the opposition leader's illness. Yesterday, Moscow accused Navalny of working with Western security services.

Turkey begins life under strict social media rules

Turkey yesterday entered a new era of tight social media restrictions which threaten to erase the local presence of Facebook and Twitter should they fail to take down contentious posts. The legislation was rammed through parliament by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling AKP party and follows the government's crackdown on opposition newspapers and television channels. Under the new rules, platforms with more than one million daily users must open offices in Turkey that can deal with local court decisions to remove offending content within a day. If not, they face advertising bans, multi-million-dollar fines and -- crucially -- bandwidth reductions of up to 90 percent, making the platforms effectively unusable. They also require social media companies to "take necessary measures" to store user data locally.

Trump slashes US refugee admissions to record low

President Donald Trump's administration said late Wednesday the United States will admit a record low of no more than 15,000 refugees over the coming year despite surging global displacement, stepping up its hard line one month before elections. The 15,000 figure -- the maximum who can be admitted over the next 12 months barring a change in administration -- is a further cut from 18,000 last year and down dramatically from more than 100,000 under previous president Barack Obama. Trump, who has campaigned on fierce denunciations of immigration, already suspended refugee admissions entirely for several months this year citing the Covid-19 pandemic. Nearly 80 million people around the world are displaced, double the number a decade ago, according to the UN refugee agency.

SOURCE: REUTERS



Jockeys compete in Chonburi's 149th annual buffalo race festival in Chonburi, Thailand yesterday. Thailand's annual water buffalo racing festival ploughed ahead yesterday despite coronavirus travel restrictions leaving the event with a fraction of its usual tourist crowds.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Covid vaccine won't be ready by US polls

Says Moderna; Spain locks down Madrid

AGENCIES

US biotech firm Moderna won't seek an emergency use authorization for its coronavirus vaccine before November 25, its CEO told the Financial Times on Wednesday.

The news deals a blow to President Donald Trump's hopes of having an injection ready before the election to give his campaign a much-needed boost. Stephane Bancel told the newspaper: "November 25 is the time we will have enough safety data to be able to put into an EUA file that we would send to the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) -- assuming that the safety data is good, i.e. a vaccine is deemed to be safe."

Moderna's vaccine is one of 11 experimental vaccines in final stage trials. The coronavirus pandemic has killed at least 1,018,634 people around the world since emerging in China in late 2019, according to an AFP tally based on official sources. More than 34 million cases globally have been officially diagnosed.

Spain's government published a decree extending drastic restrictions across the capital yesterday, with partial lockdown measures to come into play within 48 hours, despite fierce opposition from Madrid's regional authorities.

Meanwhile, the UN's International Labour Organization said Wednesday that at least 34 million jobs have been lost in Latin America due to the pandemic.

The ILO urged countries in the region to adopt "immediate strategies" to deal with the problem. The organisation's Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, Vinicius Pinheiro, called it "an unprecedented challenge."

Wave your hand to pay!

AFP, Washington

Amazon has unveiled a new biometric payment system using palm recognition, to be made available to rival retailers and also promoted as a replacement for badge entry at stadiums or workplaces.

The system called Amazon One was touted as "a fast, convenient, contactless way for people to use their palm to make everyday activities like paying at a store, presenting a loyalty card, entering a location like a stadium, or badging into work more effortless."

The US technology giant said it would be installing the system at its Amazon Go retail locations, starting with two stores in its hometown of Seattle, Washington.

Amazon vice president Dilip Kumar said the system was developed as "a quick, reliable, and secure way for people to identify themselves or authorize a transaction while moving seamlessly through their day."

Amazon One uses each individual's "unique palm signature," an alternative

to other biometric identifiers such as fingerprint, iris or facial recognition.

"No two palms are alike, so we analyze all these aspects with our vision technology and select the most distinct identifiers on your palm to create your palm signature," Kumar said in a blog post.

In Amazon Go stores, the palm-waving system will be added to the store's entry gate as an option for shoppers.

The company said it was "in active discussions with several potential customers," which could include other retailers, but offered no details.

The announcement comes amid rapid growth in the use of biometric payments ranging from fingerprint verification on smartphones to more sophisticated systems using facial recognition.

China's Alipay -- the financial arm of e-commerce giant Alibaba -- has been using a "Smile-to-Pay" system, with a machine roughly the size of an iPad, for retailers.

PAK SHELLING ALONG LOC IN J&K

Three Indian soldiers killed, five injured

AGENCIES

Three soldiers of the Indian army were killed and five injured in separate incidents during heavy shelling by Pakistan along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir. The troops responded strongly to the enemy fire, said the army, alleging that Pakistan used mortars to target Indian positions.

"A befitting response is being given," the army said. The ceasefire violation started on Wednesday night as Pakistan launched unprovoked firing in the Mankote and Krishna Ghati sectors, a defense spokesperson said yesterday.

Two soldiers were killed in firing by Pakistan in the Nowgam sector of Kupwara district in North Kashmir early yesterday morning. A third soldier was killed in overnight firing in Poonch. The injured soldiers were evacuated, the spokesman said.

India is separately locked in a serious military face-off with China along the border in Ladakh that those two countries dispute.

India's defence ministry yesterday said the government is set to upgrade its communication network for the army along the border with China as also with Pakistan at an estimated cost of Rs 7796.39 crore, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

'Swearing and laughing' parrots removed from UK safari park

AGENCIES

A group of African gray parrots who were quarantined together at a wildlife park in Lincolnshire, England, taught each other how to swear, Lincolnshire Live reported on Monday.

The five birds arrived at Lincolnshire Wildlife Park in August and shared a room, the park's chief executive, Steve Nichols, told reporters.

The foul language made staff members laugh, which encouraged the birds to keep going with their naughty words, Nichols told Lincolnshire Live. The parrots started to equate swear words with laughter and would start laughing at their own obscenities.

It's not uncommon for parrots to learn swear words and be encouraged to continue when they see people enjoy their vulgar comedy.

"But when you get four or five together that have learnt the swearing and naturally learnt the laughing so



when one swears, one laughs and before you know it just got to be like an old working men's club scenario where they are all just swearing and laughing," Nichols told Lincolnshire Live.

By the time the park reopened to the public, the birds had gotten in the habit of calling visitors names. Nichols said the park decided to move to improve their vocabulary. "We put them in an off-shore enclosure with the intention that hopefully they will start learning the other parrot's noise that are around," Nichols told Lincolnshire Live.