

ASSAM RIOTS

Four more killed in new violence

THE HINDU ONLINE

Four more persons fell victim to the fresh wave of violence in lower Assam districts, triggering protest by locals who blocked National Highway 31 at Beltoli on the Kokrajhar-Dhubri border yesterday.

With four more people being killed, the death toll in the ethnic violence in Assam has climbed to 73.

To protest the killing of the three persons who allegedly belong to the minority community, a group of 500 people blocked National Highway 31 at Beltoli.

Indefinite curfew has been reimposed in Kokrajhar district while round-the-clock curfew continues in neighbouring Chirang district where one more body was found early Tuesday morning.

Iran pledges support to ally Syria

Assad vows to crush rebellion as forces encircle rebels in Aleppo; death toll mounts

AGENCIES

Syria's President Bashar al-Assad yesterday won a pledge of support from regional ally Iran as his forces tried to choke off rebels in the northern city of Aleppo.

"Iran will never allow the resistance axis -- of which Syria is an essential pillar -- to break," said Jalili, a top aide to Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"What is happening in Syria is not an internal issue but a conflict between the axis of resistance on the one hand, and the regional and global enemies of this axis on the other," he added.

The statement came a day after Syrian Prime Minister Riad Hijab defected to the opposition.

Iran has accused Turkey and Gulf countries of arming the opposition in Syria, in collusion with the United States and Israel, to overthrow the regime of Tehran's key ally, Assad.

Arriving in Damascus, Jalili said only a "Syrian solution" would end the crisis.

In the same meeting, Assad said he was determined to crush the 17-month rebellion against his regime and cleanse the country of "terrorists," according to state news agency SANA.

"The Syrian people and their government are determined to purge the country of terrorists and to fight terrorism without respite," Assad told Jalili.

Assad said his country "is able to defeat foreign plans targeting the resistance axis and Syria's role in it."

Correspondents say "axis of resistance" refers to Iran, Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas in Gaza.

In Aleppo, rebels trying to fight off an army offensive said they were running low on ammunition as Assad's forces tried to encircle their stronghold in the southern approaches to the country's biggest city.

Assad has reinforced his troops in preparation for an assault to recapture rebel-held districts of Aleppo after repelling fighters from most of Damascus.



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, right, meets with Saeed Jalili, a top aide to Iran's supreme leader Khamenei in Damascus yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

"The Syrian army is trying to encircle us from two sides of Salaheddine," said Sheikh Tawfiq, one of the rebel commanders, referring to the southwestern Aleppo neighbourhood which has seen heavy fighting over the last week.

Mortar fire and tank shells exploded across the district early

yesterday, forcing rebel fighters to take cover in crumbling buildings and rubble-strewn alleyways.

Tanks have entered parts of Salaheddine and army snipers, using the cover of heavy bombardment, deployed on rooftops, hindering rebel movements.

As Assad's forces battle to

retake Aleppo, fighting has continued across the country. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the violence, said more than 270 people - including 62 soldiers - were killed in Syria on Monday, one of the highest death tolls in the uprising.

64 of those killed on Monday died in the city of Aleppo and its surrounding province, it added.

On Monday, Prime Minister Hijab denounced Assad's "terrorist regime" after fleeing the country.

The defection of Hijab was a further sign of the isolation of Assad's government around an inner core of powerful members of his minority Alawite sect.

A spokesman for US President Barack Obama hailed Hijab's defection as a sign that the 40-year rule of Assad's family was "crumbling from within" and said he should step down.

Western leaders' repeated predictions of Assad's imminent collapse have so far proven pre- mature, however

Suu Kyi to lead parliamentary committee

AP, Yangon

Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been named chairman of a new parliamentary committee that is to monitor and help implement the rule of law under the country's new government.

Her appointment to head the "Rule of Law and Tranquility Committee" was announced yesterday.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureate and former political prisoner was elected to parliament in April.

The committee consists of 15 lawmakers including at least five from Kachin and Rakhine states and other ethnic areas that have been gripped by conflict.

Suu Kyi's party platform included three main objectives: to seek an end to ethnic conflicts, to try to achieve peace and rule of law and to amend the country's constitution.

GURDWARA SHOOTING US launches probe; killer identified

AFP, Oak Creek

Police on Monday probed the white power ties of the former US soldier who gunned down six people at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin.

Wade Michael Page, 40, burst into the temple with a 9mm handgun and several magazines of ammunition -- all of which had been purchased legally -- and opened fire on worshippers attending a Sunday service, authorities said.

Special Agent Teresa Carlson, head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Milwaukee office, said the suspect -- killed at the scene during a shootout with police -- is now the subject of a "domestic terrorism" investigation.

"We are looking at ties to white supremacist groups," she told reporters, noting that the FBI did not have an active file on Page before the incident.

"No law enforcement agency had any reason to believe he was plotting anything," she said.

But the Southern Poverty Law Center, a civil rights group, branded Page a "frustrated neo-Nazi who had been the leader of a racist white-power band," and the SITE Intelligence Group said he was an active skinhead.

Page was a member of the Hammerskins Nation, a group that describes itself on its website as a "leaderless group of men and women who have adopted the White Power Skinhead Lifestyle," SITE said in a report.

"He was identified as a mentor for aspiring skinheads," SITE said, noting that Page "engaged in extensive online activity" and maintained user accounts on "some of the most prominent white supremacist forums."



A Sikh boy, 4, holds a candle in honor of six people killed in an attack the day before on a Wisconsin Sikh temple on Monday in Brookfield, Wisconsin, USA.

PHOTO: AFP

Shocked Obama calls for 'soul searching'

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama said "soul searching" was needed on how to reduce violence in America after the killings, and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said he was "deeply shocked and saddened."

Obama ordered flags at government buildings to fly at half-staff until sunset Friday over the Sikh killings.

"I think all of us recognise that these kinds of terrible, tragic events are happening with too much regularity for us not to do some soul-searching and to examine additional ways that we can reduce violence," Obama told reporters at the White House.

"I think it will be very important for us to reaffirm once again that, in this country, regardless of what we look like, where we come from, who we worship, we are all one people, and we look after one another and we respect one another," he said.

The Indian-American community held a candlelight vigil late Monday to honor the

dead, at a temple not far from the scene of Sunday's carnage

The dead were identified as Paramjit Kaur, a 41-year-old woman, Sita Singh, 41, Ranjit Singh, 49, Satwant Singh Kaleka, 65, Prakash Singh, 39 and Suveg Singh, 84, all men. Singh is a common surname in the Sikh community.

The Indian embassy in Washington said it had been told that four of the six were Indian nationals but did not respond to a request for more details.

The Washington-based Sikh Coalition said there had been "thousands" of incidents of hate crimes, discrimination and profiling against Sikhs since the September 11 attacks of 2001, attributing blame to anti-Muslim sentiment.

Religious tradition demands that Sikh Indians wear turbans to cover their uncut hair and sport long beards, which often leads them to be mistaken for Muslims in the United States.

ATTACKS ON MUSLIMS Saudi accuses Burma of 'ethnic cleansing'

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia accused authorities in Buddhist-majority Myanmar on Monday of "ethnic cleansing" against the Muslim Rohingya minority in the west of the country, state media reported on Tuesday.

The Saudi cabinet said it "condemns the ethnic cleansing campaign and brutal attacks against Myanmar's Muslim Rohingya citizens, as well as violation of human rights by forcing them to leave their homeland," in a statement carried by the official SPA news agency.

The cabinet, chaired by King Abdullah, urged the "international community to take up its responsibilities by providing needed protection and quality of life to Muslims in Myanmar and preventing further loss of life."

Fighting in western Rakhine state between Buddhist Rakhine and Muslim Rohingya has killed 80 people since June, with three killed on Sunday, a government official in Yangon said.

The violence initially broke out following the rape and murder of a Rakhine woman and the subsequent lynching of 10 Muslims by a crowd of angry Buddhists.

New York-based Human Rights Watch has accused Myanmar forces of opening fire on Rohingya, as well as committing rape and standing by as rival mobs attacked each other.

Myanmar's government considers the estimated 800,000 Rohingya in the country to be foreigners, while many citizens see them as illegal immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh and view them with hostility.

Egypt vows to avenge Sinai attack

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's army vowed Monday to "avenge" the killing of 16 troops by gunmen near the Israeli border and President Mohamed Morsi won US backing as he ordered his security forces to take full control of the Sinai.

"We swear in the name of God to avenge them," the Egyptian army said. "Anyone liaising with these groups that have attacked our troops in the Sinai in recent months will pay dearly, be it inside Egypt or abroad."

In Sunday's attack, 35 gunmen in Bedouin clothing opened fire on the troops before crossing into the Jewish state in an armoured vehicle, Egyptian officials said.

Israel yesterday returned to Egypt the bodies of gunmen involved in the attack and Egypt held State funeral for the dead.

CONTEMPT LAW Pak govt takes on supreme court

PTI, Islamabad

The Pakistan government has decided to file petitions in the supreme court seeking a review of the annulment of a new law aimed at preventing the premier's disqualification and another order on reopening graft cases against President Asif Ali Zardari.

Presidential spokesman Farhatullah Babar confirmed that the government will file a petition seeking a review of SC's order that struck down the Contempt of Court Act of 2012.

"We will file a review petition in the court against this decision," he said. A decision to file the petition was made after law minister Farooq H Naek and the president discussed options available to the government at a meeting held on Friday, he said.

Babar said the government will also challenge the apex court's order of July 12 that asked PM Raja Pervez Ashraf to approach Swiss authorities to revive graft cases against Zardari. The two petitions will be filed "as soon as possible", he said.



Raja Pervez



Residents carry their belongings as they wade through flood waters after a river overflowed following torrential rain in Manila yesterday. Half of Manila was under water, officials said, as heavy rains paralysed the city in its worst floods since a typhoon killed more than 400 people three years ago. At least 16 people were killed in the floods so far.

PHOTO: AFP

Violence kills 21 in Afghanistan

AFP, Washington

A Nato soldier killed in Afghanistan yesterday by men in Afghan army uniforms was an American, a US defense official said, after Nato officials in Kabul announced an allied casualty.

The official said the latest victim in what has become a series of so-called "green-on-blue" attacks was a US Army soldier.

Two suspected shooters wearing Afghan National Army uniforms were in custody, and an investigation was underway to determine whether they were Taliban infiltrators, the official said.

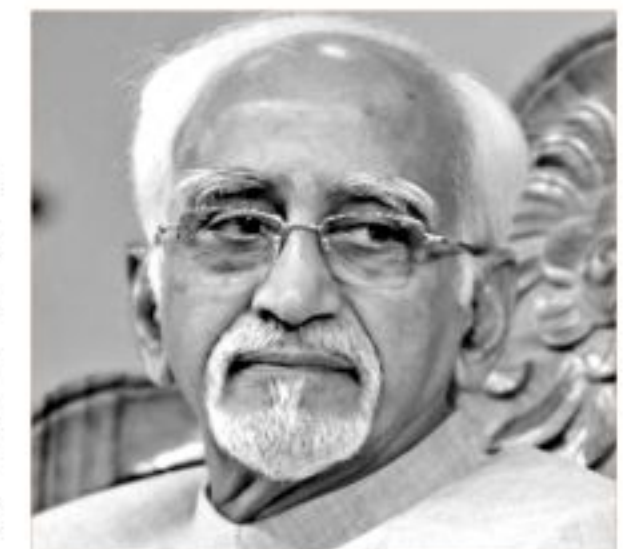
Since the start of the year, 28 members of the Nato-led force in Afghanistan, including 14 Americans, have been killed in "friendly fire" incidents involving Afghan troops, the official said.

Some of the attacks are claimed by the Taliban, who say they have infiltrated Afghan army ranks, but many are attributed to cultural differences and antagonism between the allied forces.

The attack came on the same day that nine civilians were killed in a roadside bomb explosion on the outskirts of Kabul and a suicide truck bomb attack was launched against a Nato base south of the capital.

Ansari re-elected Indian VP

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi



Hamid Ansari

India's ruling UPA candidate Hamid Ansari was elected as India's vice president for an unprecedented second successive term as he defeated BJP nominee Jaswant Singh by an emphatic margin in the elections held yesterday.

Ansari, 75, polled votes of 490 members of both Houses of Indian Parliament while Jaswant secured 238 votes. Eight votes were declared invalid.

Members of Parliament comprise the electoral college for Vice Presidential poll. There are a total 790 members of both Houses of Parliament -- Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

The victory of Ansari was predictable given that he went to the poll with the backing of all UPA coalition constituent parties as also parties supporting the alliance from outside like Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party and CPI (M).

Earlier, brisk polling was witnessed with 600 electors casting their votes by 1:00pm after the polling began at 10:00am.

His opposition, Jaswant Singh, 74, a former Minister of External Affairs and Finance, had the support of NDA and AIADMK.

NEWS IN brief

Italy PM wins confidence vote

REUTERS, Rome

Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti won a confidence vote yesterday on a bill to cut spending by an extra 4.5 billion euros (3.57 billion pounds) this year in order to rein in the deficit and delay a planned increase in sales tax.

Italy's Chamber of Deputies voted 403 to 86 to back Monti and pave the way for a final vote to convert the bill into law in the afternoon. A confidence vote was called to limit debate and accelerate the passage before the summer recess.

The expenditure reductions are in addition to the 10.5 billion in savings envisioned in Monti's austerity package, which was passed in December.

Tibetan self-immolates in China

AFP, Beijing

A 26-year-old woman immolated herself yesterday in a Tibetan-populated region of northwest China after chanting slogans calling for the return of the Dalai Lama, the Free Tibet campaign group said.

Dolkar Kyi made her desperate gesture at Tso monastery in Kanliho prefecture (Gannan in Chinese), a region of Gansu province which in 2008 saw a lot of protests against Beijing's rule, said the London-based group.

Afghan defence minister quits

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan's outgoing defence minister Abdul Rahim Wardak abruptly resigned yesterday after parliament demanded his ouster but President Hamid Karzai kept him on in an acting capacity.

"In accordance with the decision of parliament as the highest legislative body, and with permission of the presidency, I declare my position as defence minister finished," Wardak told a news conference.

Karzai on Sunday accepted a decision by parliament to dismiss Wardak and Interior Minister Bismillah Mohammadi.

US mosque destroyed in attack

AFP, Washington

A mosque burned to the ground in the midwestern United States on Monday, in what worshippers suspect was a hate attack, less than a day after a deadly shooting at a Sikh temple.

Firefighters and police were called to the Islamic Center in Joplin, Missouri at 3:40 am (0840 GMT) -- about an hour before local Muslims were about to pray during Ramadan -- according to the FBI.

No one was hurt in the incident, according to a statement by the office that referred to the mosque as an "Islamic Church."