

BJP president booked for hate speech

AFP, Lucknow

Police yesterday charged the president of India's ruling political party, Amit Shah, over a speech that allegedly inflamed religious tensions during the national election campaign, an officer said.

Shah, leader of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was charged for the speech he made at a rally in northern Uttar Pradesh state that was torn apart last year by deadly Muslim-Hindu riots.

Shah, a key confidante of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was credited for his role in the BJP winning a landslide victory at the elections in May over the centre-left Congress party run by the Gandhi dynasty.

Police filed the chargesheet in a local court in Muzaffarnagar, under sections of the criminal code that include making a statement that intends to cause religious outrage.

The charges also include promoting tensions between different religious groups and appealing for votes on religious grounds, police officer Singh said.

In his speech, Shah reportedly told a crowd of largely Hindu voters that it was time to seek revenge by casting their ballots at the national election. He branded the then centre-left government as one "that protects and gives compensation to those who killed Hindus".

More than 50 people were killed in the sectarian unrest in Muzaffarnagar district.



Obama 'eying Syria strikes'

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama is said to be ready to tell Americans yesterday that he is prepared to expand air strikes on the Islamic State into Syria, as he steels them for a long fight against the jihadists.

Despite devoting much of his presidency to exiting Middle Eastern entanglements and avoiding new ones, Obama is poised to move the campaign against the so-called Islamic State, which has already seen air strikes in Iraq, into a more offensive phase.

"You will hear from the President how the United States will pursue a comprehensive strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL," a senior official said on condition of anonymity.

The plan will include US military action against Islamic State forces and new support for the opposition in Syria and the new "inclusive" government in Iraq, the official said.

The New York Times reported, without giving further details, that Obama was ready to authorize air strikes against IS strongholds in Syria -- a step he has so far been unwilling to take.

Mindful of avoiding what he believes are the mistakes of the last decade, Obama will assure millions of television viewers at 9pm (0100 GMT Thursday) that he will not send conventional ground troops back to Iraq to fight a group that has beheaded two US journalists.



The speech will also lack a definitive timeline for US operations against IS, after several reports cited senior officials as saying they could outlast Obama's presidency, which ends in January 2017.

The address will come at a poignant time -- on the eve of the 13th anniversary of the September 11 attacks, when Islamic radicalism on a mass scale scorched the US homeland for the first time, and drew America into exhausting overseas wars and a still unending anti-terror campaign.

White House aides say the new strategy will be anchored on the cautious hope that Iraq's new unity government will prove more inclusive than ex-prime minister Nuri al-Maliki who was blamed for fanning the sectarianism that eased Islamic State's rise.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State John Kerry yesterday said in Baghdad that a global coalition will defeat jihadists in Iraq and Syria.

"We all know -- I think we come to this with great confidence -- that, ultimately,

our global coalition will succeed in eliminating the threat from Iraq, from the region and from the world," Kerry said.

The top US diplomat said the Iraqi army would be rebuilt as part of the long-awaited strategy against the Islamic State (IS) to be outlined by Obama in a televised address to the nation on Wednesday night.

Iraq's armed forces "will be reconstituted and trained and worked on in terms of a number of different strategies through the help not just of the United States but of other countries also," Kerry said.

His remarks came after talks with Iraq's new leaders on their role in efforts to halt IS since its fighters spearheaded a lightning offensive in June seizing much of the Sunni Arab heartland north and west of Baghdad.

Kerry's visit to Baghdad was the first stop on a regional tour to build support for the new US strategy which he has said would only work with the backing of the "broadest possible coalition of partners".

He was to fly on to Saudi Arabia for talks today with 11 regional foreign ministers on a joint campaign against IS.

Kerry met new Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi, a Shia regarded as far less divisive than his predecessor Nuri al-Maliki, who was criticised for driving many in the Sunni minority into the arms of IS.

Kerry praised the new premier's commitment to the sweeping reforms needed, and welcomed the military's readiness to reconstitute itself for the fightback.

Poroshenko pledges autonomy for east

EU delays sanctions as Russia pulls back troops; Putin says west made up crisis to revive Nato

AFP, Kiev

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko yesterday said that Russia had withdrawn the bulk of its forces from his country and he pledged greater autonomy for the separatist east in moves that could help sustain a fragile truce.

The pro-Western leader's comments were soon followed by a European Union decision to extend by another day a heated debate on unleashing new sanctions aimed at punishing Russia over what the West says is Moscow's military aggression in the ex-Soviet state.

Poroshenko said Friday's ceasefire -- the first backed by both Kiev and Moscow since the conflict erupted five months ago -- had

support its decision to deploy a new force in eastern Europe and encroach on Russia's western frontier.

"The crisis in Ukraine, which was basically provoked and created by some of our Western partners, is now being used to revive this military bloc (Nato)," Putin was quoted as saying by Russia's state-run RIA Novosti news agency.

Poroshenko -- elected in May on a promise to crush the rebellion and preserve Ukraine's unity -- also waded into explosive political territory by promising to submit a bill to parliament granting parts of the east temporary self-rule.

But he stressed this did not mean that the rebel-held territories were slipping away from Kiev's



dramatically improved security in the country's war-ravaged industrial rustbelt.

"According to the latest information I received from our intelligence headquarters, 70 percent of Russia's forces have been removed," the presidency website quoted Poroshenko as telling a cabinet meeting.

"This gives us hope that there are good prospects for the peace initiative."

Moscow denies having deployed troops or weaponry across the border, and President Vladimir Putin dismissed the Nato claims as a reckless attempt to "revive" the Cold War-era security bloc.

Putin accused the US-led military bloc of making up the charges to

control. "Ukraine will not make any concessions on issues of its territorial integrity," he said.

The Kremlin has long sought to turn Ukraine into a loose federation in which the largely Russian-speaking Donetsk and Lugansk regions establish their own trade and diplomatic relations with Moscow.

The truce was signed after five months of warfare that has killed more than 2,700 people and forced at least half a million from their homes.

Yet both sides have reported sporadic violations. Kiev said the lives of eight Ukrainian servicemen and one civilian had been lost since Friday.



Life under Islamic State

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A Yazidi girl captured by IS has revealed the extreme abuse she suffers as a sex slave at the hands of Islamic State (IS) extremists.

Only 17 years old, Mayat, (not her real name) was kidnapped by members of ISIS on 3rd August during an offensive against Sinjar. She remains with her captors.

These men allowed Mayat "to hurt us even more, they told us to describe in detail to our parents what they are doing." Her parents, refugees in Kurdistan, gave their daughter's number to a journalist from Italian paper La Repubblica.

One of around 40 women and young girls held by the extremists in an unknown city, Mayat

estimates their ages as anything from 12 to 30.

In the interview Mayat describes how the women and girls are kept in a house under armed guards.

There are, she says, three "rooms of horror" where the women are raped, often by different men and throughout the day.

GIRL TELLS STORY OF HORROR

"They treat us like slaves. We are always 'given' to different men. Some arrive straight from Syria," she says. "They threaten us and beat us if we try to resist."

Mayat says many of the women have attempted to end their lives.

Mayat's story contradicts previous claims from IS which purport to show life under the Islamic State, highlighting their care of widows and children.

Don't tear apart UK

UK PM makes 'No' vote plea in Scotland

AFP, Edinburgh

Prime Minister David Cameron yesterday urged Scots not to rip apart a "family of nations," as he joined British party leaders in trying to reverse surging support for Scottish independence.

In what Scottish National Party (SNP) First Minister Alex Salmond described as a sign of "panicking", Cameron and opposition Labour leader Ed Miliband skipped their weekly parliamentary debate in London to hit the campaign trail north of the border.

There are only eight days to go before Scotland votes on whether to end the 300-year-old union and recent polls suggest the outcome is on a knife-edge.

"I would be heartbroken if this family of nations that we've put together and that we've done such amazing things together... was torn apart," Cameron told an event in Edinburgh.

His visit came as John Major,

Britain's prime minister from 1990-97, warned that a Scottish split would leave Britain "weaker" in every international body, from the European Union to the United Nations, and would increase London's chances of leaving the EU altogether.

Barely a month ago, there seemed little likelihood of victory for the "Yes" camp, but two polls since the weekend put it either ahead or in a dead heat with the "No" camp among voters who had made up their minds.

Confusing the picture, a new poll out Wednesday gave the "No" camp a six point lead, unchanged from two months previously. The Survation/Daily Record poll put "No" on 53 percent and "Yes" on 47 percent, excluding undecideds.

Meanwhile Buckingham Palace made clear that Queen Elizabeth II would not be intervening after media reports that she was privately "horrified" by the narrowing polls prompted calls for a royal statement against independence.



Pak PM's ouster could trigger US sanction

PTI, Islamabad

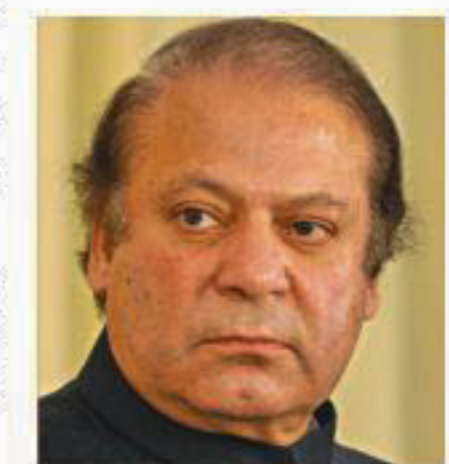
Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's ouster through illegal means could trigger another round of democracy-related US sanctions against Pakistan, according to a report.

A congressional reported titled 'Pakistan Political Unrest' warns that "any overt military ouster" of Sharif "could trigger another round of democracy-related US sanctions on foreign assistance to Pakistan", the Dawn said yesterday.

This could put "an indefinite halt to what has been one of the highest-priority American aid programmes since 9/11."

The report also warns that the ongoing political crisis could impact Pakistan's relations with India by increasing the powerful army's influence in foreign policies, the paper said.

The "Army's more openly direct control of Pakistan's foreign and security policies may, over time, shift Pakistan's approach towards Afghanistan further into a policy framework that seeks to counter Indian influence there," warns the report prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS).



Pak airstrikes kill 65 militants

Pakistan's military yesterday said it had killed 65 militants and destroyed five hide-outs in fresh air strikes as part of a major offensive against the Taliban in the north-west. Pakistan began the long-awaited push to clear insurgent bases from North Waziristan district, on the Afghan border, in June after a bloody attack on Karachi airport finally sank faltering peace talks with the rebels.

Karazi, Sushma agree to boost defence ties

PTI, Kabul

As Afghanistan prepares for a democratic transition of power, Indian external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj and Afghan President Hamid Karazi yesterday held wide-ranging talks on political and security situation in the war-torn country and agreed to intensify cooperation in areas like security and defence.

As Nato forces prepare to withdraw from the country, Afghanistan wants India to help it in meeting security challenges. Afghanistan has been pressing India for supply of military hardware and weapons system to it.

Afghanistan has been pressing India for supplying military hardware to strengthen its security set up in view of drawdown of Nato forces. Karazi has already given a "wish-list" to India.

US air strike kills 11 civilians

Meanwhile, a US air strike in eastern Afghanistan killed 11 civilians, local officials said yesterday, sparking strong condemnation from President Hamid Karazi.

Nato's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) made no immediate comment on Tuesday's air strike.

FLOODS IN INDIA, PAKISTAN



This aerial picture of Indian Kashmir's capital Srinagar was taken yesterday from a military chopper. Deadly flooding has affected more than one million people in Pakistan, officials said yesterday, as anger mounted in Indian Kashmir over the slow pace of rescue operations for hundreds of thousands left stranded. The floods and landslides from days of heavy rains have now claimed more than 450 lives in Pakistan and India.

PHOTO: AFP

Nothing left to give

Oceans, forests 'stopping absorbing CO2'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Carbon dioxide is being accumulated in the atmosphere at the fastest rate since records began, as scientists warn that the oceans and forests may have absorbed so much CO2 that their crucial function as "carbon sinks" is now severely threatened.

The jump in atmospheric CO2 is partly the result of rising carbon emissions as the world burns ever-more fossil fuels, according to the latest World Meteorological Organisation report, which finds the concentration of carbon increased by nearly three parts per million (ppm) to 396ppm last year.

But, crucially, preliminary data in the report indicates that the jump could also be attributed to "reduced CO2 uptake by the Earth's biosphere" -- the first time the effectiveness of the world's great carbon sinks has been scientifically called into question.

Scientists said they were puzzled and extremely concerned by prospect of reduced absorption of the world's oceans and plants, which they cannot explain and which threatens to accelerate the build-up of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere if the trend continues.

The plants and the oceans each typically absorb about a quarter of humanity's CO2 emissions every year, with the other half going into the atmosphere, where it can remain for hundreds of years.

The last time there was a reduction in the biosphere's ability to absorb carbon was in 1998, a year in which extensive forest fires and dry weather killed off lots of plants, dealing a blow to the world's carbon sink.

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NEWSIN brief

France, Britain get key EU jobs

AFP, Brussels

France and Britain yesterday secured top positions in incoming European Commission President Jean Claude-Juncker's new team. While France gets the most coveted job of economic affairs commissioner, eurosceptic Britain scored a coup by winning the financial services post.

Saradha scam: CBI grills Trinamool MP

IANs, Kolkata

The CBI yesterday grilled Trinamool Congress MP and owner-editor of the Bengali daily Pratidin, Srinjoy Bose, in connection with the multi-crore rupee Saradha chit fund scam. Bose was named by alleged scam mastermind and Saradha Group chairman Sudipta Sen in a letter to the CBI last year.

Japan to restart nuclear reactors

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Japan's nuclear watchdog yesterday gave the green light for two reactors to restart amid widespread anti-nuclear sentiment. The reactors were switched off after an earthquake and tsunami in March 2011 caused meltdowns at the Fukushima power plant, sparking the worst atomic disaster since Chernobyl.

Israeli army kills 1 in West Bank

AFP, Ramallah

A Palestinian was shot dead early yesterday in clashes which broke out when Israeli troops entered a West Bank refugee camp near Ramallah on an arrest mission. The death raises the total number of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank and annexed east Jerusalem to 41 since the beginning of 2014.