

Monk's death sparks protest in China

AFP, Beijing

Chinese authorities have suppressed protests over the jailhouse death of a revered Tibetan monk, and briefly detained two of his sisters for not signing his health record, rights groups said Thursday.

Police held the sisters of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche for "around 10 hours" on Wednesday, the US-based International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) cited local sources as saying.

Delek, 65, was 13 years into a life sentence for terrorism and separatism, imposed following a trial observers said was deeply flawed, when authorities announced news of his death at the weekend.

Delek was convicted of separatism and being involved in a bombing in a public square, but his supporters insisted he was innocent.

Authorities have so far refused to release Delek's body to his family or others in the Tibetan community, according to ICT, which said the circumstances of his death remained unclear.

Several protests in his hometown and in the southwestern city of Chengdu, where he was jailed, have taken place since his death was announced, according to ICT and other Tibetan rights groups.

Police opened fire when around 1,000 people gathered near government offices in Nyagchuka county this week to protest the death, injuring about 20 people, the British-based Free Tibet group said.

The US-funded Radio Free Asia also reported that police fired on the protesters, who were angry at a government decision to cremate his remains, rather than give him a traditional Tibetan burial.

ICT said his two sisters were detained after they "refused to sign a document that was described to them as being the health record of their brother".

"The sisters were apparently told that they would not be able to keep a copy, and the information on the document was not clear," it added.

One of the women apparently fainted in prison before the two were allowed to leave, it added.

AFP was unable to independently verify the reports of the protests, or contact authorities in charge of Delek's case.

Access to Tibetan regions is tightly controlled by the Chinese government and local media is barred from reporting issues the government deems sensitive.

China, which has ruled Tibet since 1951, has been accused of trying to wipe out its Buddhist-based culture through political and religious repression and large-scale immigration by Han Chinese, the country's ethnic majority.

China says Tibetans enjoy extensive freedoms and that it has brought economic growth to the region.

Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama fled Tibet after an abortive uprising in 1959 and established his government-in-exile in Dharamsala, India.

Delek became one of China's highest profile Tibetan prisoners when he was sentenced, which the United States and the European Union at the time condemned. Washington said it was "saddened" by his death.

Hollywood star and Tibetan rights activist Richard Gere expressed outrage over Delek's death on Tuesday.

Pluto has huge

FROM PAGE 20
The young mountains might suggest that Pluto's surface is still active, and changing, now.

The New Horizons' Geology, Geophysics and Imaging Team, led by Jeff Moore, have made the prediction of the age based on the lack of impact craters on the dwarf planet.

Pluto must have been hit by huge amounts of space debris – but the marks of those impacts could well have been removed by the recent geological activity.

"This is one of the youngest surfaces we've ever seen in the solar system," Jeff Moore said in a statement.

Scientists still aren't sure how those characteristics might have been formed.

"This may cause us to rethink what powers geological activity on many other icy worlds," GGI deputy team leader John Spencer of the Southwest Research Institute in Boulder, Colo., said in a statement.

The new image was taken about an hour and a half before New Horizons made its closest approach to Pluto, from about 480,000 miles away.

More pictures are expected to be released in coming weeks – building up a "mosaic" of the surface of the planet.

Dismantle Cuba embargo

Castro calls on Obama

AFP, Havana

Cuban President Raul Castro asked his US counterpart Barack Obama Wednesday to use his executive powers to "dismantle" the economic embargo placed on his island nation.

Castro called the embargo, in place since 1962, the main stumbling block towards "normalization" between the two nations.

However, only Congress has the authority to lift the measure and its Republican majority has declined Obama's calls to repeal it.

Castro's comments came ahead of the formal reestablishment of diplomatic relations and the opening of embassies between the two countries on Monday.

The move will allow for a higher level of dialogue, but is just the first step in a complex process, with one of the biggest hurdles ahead involving ending the US trade and financial embargo.

"We hope (Obama) will continue to use his executive powers to dismantle aspects of this policy, which is

causing damage and hardships for our people," Castro said at the close of the first of the island nation's twice-yearly meetings of its one-party National Assembly.

His comments were reported by Cuban state news portal Cubadebate as media was not given access to the event.

The reopening of embassies will culminate the historic decision by Obama and Castro on December 17 to begin normalizing relations between.

Monday "will begin a new stage, long and complex, on the way to the normalization of relations, which will require finding solutions to problems that have accumulated over more than five decades and affect the ties between our countries and people."

Castro reiterated, however, that in order to "normalize relations" the blockade would have to be removed.

US conservatives and members of its Cuban exile community have called on Obama to halt the rapprochement with Cuba until Havana carries out political and human rights reforms.

Major greenhouse gases hit record highs in 2014

AFP, Miami

All the major greenhouse gases that fuel global warming hit record highs last year, while the planet's surface temperature reached its hottest point in 135 years, international researchers said yesterday.

The findings of the 2014 State of the Climate report -- a peer-reviewed study that examines temperature, precipitation and weather events experienced around the world -- were released by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

A total of 413 scientists from 58 countries around the world contributed to the report, which is based on data collected by environmental monitoring stations and instruments on land, water, ice and in space.

"Carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide -- the major greenhouse gases released into Earth's atmosphere -- once again all reached record high average atmospheric concentrations for the year," said the study.

Amid worldwide heat records, eastern North America was the only major region of the world to experience below-average annual temperatures.

"Europe observed its warmest year on record by a large margin, with close to two dozen countries breaking their previous national temperature records," said the study.

"Many countries in Asia had annual temperatures among their 10 warmest on record; Africa reported above-average temperatures across most of the continent throughout 2014; Australia saw its third warmest year on record, following record heat there in 2013."

In Latin America, Mexico had its warmest year on record, while Argentina and Uruguay each had their second warmest year on record.

The world's oceans experienced record warmth last year, and sea level was at its highest in modern times, too.

"Owing to both ocean warming and land ice melt contributions, global mean sea level in 2014 was also record high and 67 millimeters (2.6 inches) greater than the 1993 annual mean," when satellite measurements of ocean levels began, said the study.

The full report is published in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society.

Forkan gets death

FROM PAGE 20
But as her father resisted them, Forkan shot him dead.

They took the woman to a Pakistani army camp where the army men raped her for hours. Forkan and his associates also raped her before returning her two days later.

This woman was one of the victims and eyewitnesses who testified before a special court narrating the brutality Forkan committed 44 years ago.

The International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday sentenced Forkan to death for the crimes.

"Untold beastly acts of the group of attackers, which was in fact a locally formed criminal enterprise in which the accused Forkan Mallik was an active associate, were the gravest violation of humanitarian law," said the tribunal.

The three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Shahinur Islam found Forkan guilty in three out of five charges framed against him.

Of the three charges, he was handed down death penalty for two charges and sentence of imprisonment until death for another charge. He, however, was acquitted from two other charges.

Forkan was given death sentence for the brutal rape and killing of the teenage Hindu girl, and the rape of the Muslim girl and killing of her father and two other civilians.

He was given "sentences of imprisonment for life till death" for raping two Hindu women and forcing them to leave the country.

"Mass rape is graver than murder. What was the goal of committing such mass rape especially on defenceless Hindu women? Its goal was not to ravish the extreme wealth of a woman and to kill her. The goal was to cripple the socio-political order and cultural integrity," said Justice Hassan when he read out the summary of the 99-page judgment.

"The nation today pays humble reverence to those women who laid highest sacrifice for the cause of our independence," the judgment read.

More pictures are expected to be released in coming weeks – building up a "mosaic" of the surface of the planet.

adding that the rape victims shall always remain alive in the nation's history as "bravest women".

Forkan was acquitted from the charge of killing four people, including two local Awami League leaders in Mirzaganj, and forceful religious conversion of three Hindu brothers in Subidkhali Bazar and their deportation.

The prosecution also failed to prove that Forkan was a Razakar. He was "a notorious associate of the local Razakars", the court observed.

Citing the arguments of Prosecutor Tureen Afroz that Forkan can well be prosecuted as an individual if it was not proved as a Razakar, the court said: "It is now settled that the gravity of the crimes committed by the convicted person stems from the degree of his participation in the crimes, irrespective of his position and status."

The convict was taken to the courtroom around 10:30am yesterday.

Forkan, who wore a golden coloured panjabi and check lungi, remained motionless, as he could not understand the verdict pronounced in English. Later he learned of the verdict from his lawyer and family members.

The prosecution and victims' family members expressed their satisfaction over the verdict.

"We are happy. Especially I am very happy because he [Forkan] was sentenced to death for raping women," said Prosecutor Sabina Yesmin Khan Munni.

Forkan's lawyer Abdus Salam Khan said they were dissatisfied with the verdict. "The case was filed over family enmity in the first place. I will advise my client to lodge an appeal."

Zahir Mallik, son of the convict, claimed that his father is innocent and said they would move an appeal. The convict will get 30 days' time to file an appeal with the Appellate division of the Supreme Court.

Son of Sader Mallik and Sonavan Bibi of Sailabunia village under Mirzaganj, Forkan was an active supporter of the Muslim League, an anti-liberation party in 1971. Later he was affiliated with the BNP, prosecution said.

"The nation today pays humble reverence to those women who laid highest sacrifice for the cause of our independence," the judgment read.

More pictures are expected to be released in coming weeks – building up a "mosaic" of the surface of the planet.

More pictures are expected to be released in coming weeks – building up a "mosaic" of the surface of the planet.

Thwarted Indian couple in Taj Mahal 'suicide pact'

AFP, Agra

An Indian couple forbidden to marry because of their different backgrounds are in hospital after slitting their own throats in an apparent suicide pact at India's famed monument to love, the Taj Mahal.

Police said the pair -- named in the Times of India as Rajveer Singh and Shabnam Ali -- were stable after they were discovered in a pool of blood in the grounds of the Taj Mahal on Wednesday afternoon.

"This couple, one of whom is a Hindu and the other a Muslim, tried to commit suicide at the Taj," said police deputy superintendent Aseem Chaudhary.

"The girl cut her throat first followed by the boy."

Marriage outside caste or religion still attracts strong censure in parts of India and can even lead to so-called honour killings, carried out to protect what is seen as family pride.

"Both Shabnam and I tried hard to convince our parents that they should allow us to get married, but the boundaries of religion remained the biggest hurdle," the Times of India quoted Singh as saying.

"We did this after failing at all possible ways to be together."

The Taj -- India's top tourist attraction -- was built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan as a tomb for his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal, who died giving birth in 1631.

It has drawn a string of world leaders and royalty including former US president Bill Clinton, while Diana, the late British princess, was famously photographed alone on a marble seat there in 1992.

"Many countries in Asia had annual temperatures among their 10 warmest on record; Africa reported above-average temperatures across most of the continent throughout 2014; Australia saw its third warmest year on record, following record heat there in 2013."

In Latin America, Mexico had its warmest year on record, while Argentina and Uruguay each had their second warmest year on record.

The world's oceans experienced record warmth last year, and sea level was at its highest in modern times, too.

"Owing to both ocean warming and land ice melt contributions, global mean sea level in 2014 was also record high and 67 millimeters (2.6 inches) greater than the 1993 annual mean," when satellite measurements of ocean levels began.

The full report is published in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society.

The military said it suffered no casualties.

An AFP photographer and a witness in the Palestinian Gaza Strip, just across the border, said the boat was struck at least three kilometres (two miles) from shore.

"We were sitting on the beach and suddenly there was an explosion," said Ahmed Nofal.

Other navy boats came to rescue the crew as their vessel spewed a plume of smoke.

Jihadists loyal to the Islamic State (IS) group have killed scores of soldiers and policemen in the peninsula since the army's overthrow of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in 2013.

It was not immediately clear how the boat was hit Thursday, but militants have started to deploy wire-guided missiles against tanks and armoured vehicles.

The military said it suffered no casualties.

Two foreign revolvers, three bullets and two knives were found at the "gunfight" spot.

Police said the bodies were sent to the hospital morgue for autopsy.

"GUNFIGHT" IN DHAKA

Although Rab did not confirm the identity of the man killed in the capital, one Anisur Rahman claimed the "gunfight" victim was his brother Yasir Sarkar.

Yasir, 32, was a contractor at Agargaon, he said.

Lt Col SM Masud Rana, commanding officer of Rab-2, said a patrol team found four to five men moving suspiciously in Taltola area around 2:30am.

Cleaners have already visited all the flats there.

"We, 585 hijras, live in Bashundhara Residential Area. You spend a lot of money during Eid. You can give us some," reads a slip that the hijra community sent to all the buildings in the area.

Tuhin, who lives in a tiny flat in the capital's Paribagh area, received a note from his caretaker, asking for Tk 600. "I will ensure you don't need to pay the other guards separately."

With days left before Eid, politicians, businessmen and contractors are avoiding the secretariat, the administrative hub of the government, as they don't want to encounter the lift operators, office assistants and security guards.

Engineers and contractors regularly visit our ministry but most of them are not coming these days," said an official of the roads and bridges ministry.

Talking to this newspaper, a lawmaker at the secretariat said he now

Limon losing hope

FROM PAGE 20

shot in the left leg by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel in April 2011. Later, the leg had to be amputated and was replaced with a prosthetic leg.

"It hurts when I cannot join others in new attire in the field during the Eid prayer as I cannot bend my leg and sit on the ground. Rather, I have to sit on a chair at a distance and watch them pray," he said, tears welling up in his eyes.