

EVICION DRIVE 24 people dead as Indian police clash with sect AFP, NEW DELHI

Clashes between Indian police and followers of a revolutionary sect have left at least 24 people dead after an operation to evict thousands of people from parkland erupted into violence, officials said yesterday.

Two police officers were among those killed in the overnight clashes during a move to expel around 3,000 sect followers who had illegally occupied public land in the state of Uttar Pradesh for the last two years.

Police and other officials said they came under fire from members of the sect who were armed with automatic weapons and also hurled crude explosive devices during the violence in the northern city of Mathura.

"They were firing at us from tree-tops. Others were hurling stones or assaulting us with sticks and other weapons. Two of our men were wounded and they died in hospital," said Uttar Pradesh police chief Javed Ahmad.

"Soon after the attack, we got reinforcements and launched a counter-attack on the camp and successfully cleared the area."

Speaking to reporters in Mathura, Ahmad said some of the Swadhin Bharat Vidhik Satyagrah sect's followers had set fire to huts which were storing gas cylinders and explosives during the clearance operation.

"Twenty-two of their people have died, out of which 11 have died due to burn injuries. One of the dead is a woman," he added.

Police have also recovered several dozen pistols and rifles along with live ammunition rounds.

The operation was launched after authorities won a court order to remove hundreds of tents and makeshift wooden structures from a 270-acre (109-hectare) patch of land the sect had been occupying since late 2014.

Boat with 700 capsizes in Med

Says IOM; Greece rescues over 340, recovers four bodies; more than 100 bodies wash up on Libyan beach in another boat disaster

AFP, Athens

At least four people have died and a desperate effort was underway yesterday to find hundreds more believed missing after a migrant boat capsized off the Greek island of Crete, the coastguard said.

Coastguard spokesman Nikos Lagadianos said at least 340 people had been rescued, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said the vessel "is believed to have left Africa with at least 700 migrants on board".

It was the second migrant vessel found in that area of the southern Aegean Sea since last week, indicating that people smugglers may be forging a new route to avoid Nato ships.

A coastguard spokeswoman told AFP a major rescue operation was underway, including four ships that were passing through the area, in clear but windy conditions about 75 nautical miles south of Crete.

"The number of people in distress could be counted in the hundreds," she said. It was not immediately clear where exactly the boat had left from or where it was headed, or the nationalities of those on board.

The coastguard spokeswoman said a passing

ship spotted the sinking vessel off Crete. The coastguard rushed two patrol boats, a plane and a helicopter to the scene.

About half of the 25-metre-long boat was completely underwater, the spokeswoman said.

Meanwhile, the bodies of at least 104 migrants



have washed up on a beach in the western Libyan town of Zwara, the navy said yesterday, warning however that the toll could rise.

"The number of bodies retrieved Thursday evening was 104 but the toll is expected to rise since an average boat carries 115-125 passen-

gers," Libyan navy spokesman Colonel Ayoub Qassem said.

People smugglers have exploited the chaos gripping Libya since the 2011 uprising that overthrew dictator Moamer Gaddafi to traffic migrants across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe.

It is a lucrative business for the smugglers who cram migrants into boats that are small and unsafe for the perilous journey to Italy just 300 kilometres from Libya's shores.

Thousands of migrants try each year to make the crossing, but many drown when their boats founder.

Qassem said that migrant boats leaving from western Libya usually set off from the port cities of Sabratha and Zwara, with passengers who are mostly African or Arabs from Morocco.

The identities of the bodies found on Thursday were not yet known.

Some 204,000 migrants and refugees have crossed the Mediterranean to Europe since January, the United Nations refugee agency said on Tuesday.

More than 2,500 people have died trying to make the crossing this year -- the vast majority of them between Libya and Italy -- as Europe battles its worst migration crisis since World War II.

Iran is top state sponsor of terror

Says US report on worldwide terrorism

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Iran is the main state sponsor of terrorism, according to the US State Department's annual survey of worldwide terrorism.

The Islamic republic "remained the foremost state sponsor of terrorism in 2015, providing a range of support, including financial, training, and equipment, to groups around the world," the report said.

It went on to highlight the group's support for Lebanon's Hezbollah, Palestinian groups such as Hamas and the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Despite reaching an agreement on its nuclear programme and the partial end of sanctions in 2015, the report says Iran has continued to use the Quds Force of its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to implement its foreign policy goals.

Speaking after the report's release, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Tehran had no intention of cooperating on regional issues with its main enemies - The United States and "evil" Britain.

In a speech broadcast live on state TV, Ayatollah Khamenei accused Washington of not being committed to the nuclear deal reached between Iran and six major powers.

The terror report also included Syria and Sudan as state sponsors of terrorism. Cuba was removed from the list last year in an effort to restore diplomatic ties between the two countries.

'Trump unfit for office'

Clinton tore into her likely election rival as never before

AFP, San Diego

US presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton tore into her likely election rival Donald Trump as never before Thursday, saying his foreign policy is dangerously incoherent and labeling him unfit for office.

"He is temperamentally unfit to hold an office that requires knowledge, stability and immense responsibility," Clinton said, cranking up the rhetoric in what is already a deeply acrimonious election season.

"This is not someone who should ever have the nuclear codes." Americans will go to the polls on November 8 to elect a new president, replacing Barack Obama who steps down after eight years in office.

Clinton and Trump are all but assured to be the Democratic and Republican party nominees.

Clinton, who formerly served as secretary of state, first lady and US senator, is vying to become the first female president in America's 239-year history.

Trump, speaking at a rally in San Jose,

California on Thursday night, ridiculed the Democrat's speech.

"It was pathetic. It was so sad to watch. She was up there, supposed to be a foreign policy speech, it was a political speech, had nothing to do with foreign policy."

Earlier, the businessman took to his favorite social media platform Twitter as Clinton was speaking: "Bad performance by Crooked Hillary Clinton! Reading poorly from the teleprompter! She doesn't even look presidential!"

The 69-year-old celebrity real estate mogul burst onto the political scene last year, leveraging his fame to garner media coverage and dispatching much more experienced Republican rivals.

But in the process Trump has rejected many of the central tenets of foreign policy endorsed by both major parties.

Clinton ridiculed her foe -- painting him as a thin-skinned neophyte -- and voiced incredulity at his views.

"I will leave it to the psychiatrists to explain his affection for tyrants," she said, while trying to showcase her own grasp of world affairs.



38 dead in regime strikes

UN to meet on aid drops; US drops weapons to rebels battling IS

AGENCIES

Regime air strikes killed dozens of civilians in the Syrian city of Aleppo and nearby areas yesterday as the UN Security Council prepared to discuss emergency aid drops to besieged areas.

The raids were the most intense in more than a week, with dozens of barrel bombs -- crude, unguided explosive devices -- dropped on several rebel-held eastern districts of the city, an AFP correspondent said.

Ten people were killed when a bus they were travelling in was hit on the Castello road, a key rebel supply route out of Aleppo, the civil defence said.

Twenty-eight other civilians were killed in regime strikes on several neighbourhoods in the rebel-held east of the city, said the civil defence, known as the White Helmets.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the Castello road was now "effectively cut".

"All movement is targeted, be that buses or bystanders," its head Rami Abdel Rahman said. Nearly 600,000 people are estimated to live under siege in Syria, most of them encircled by forces of President Bashar al-Assad's regime, whose approval the United Nations says is needed to deliver aid by air.

Last month the UN said that if it did not see an improve-

ment on aid access to besieged areas by June 1, it would task its food agency to carry out drops.

The US has reportedly dropped weapons to rebel fighters in Syria as the UN Security Council considers dropping food and medicine by air to civilians.

Witnesses say the US delivered the weapons to armed units battling the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant group in Syria.

The developments come as a former Russian diplomat tells Al Jazeera that his country is seriously considering putting boots on the ground in Syria.

The weapons supplies were airdropped to rebels in Marea, a town in the northern province of Aleppo, yesterday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said.

"Coalition airplanes dropped ... ammunition, light weapons and anti-tank weapons to rebels in Marea," Rami Abdel Rahman, the SOHR head, said.

He said it was the first time the coalition had made such a drop to rebel fighters other than the Kurds.

A US defence official confirmed to the AFP news agency that the airdrop took place but denied that they included light weapons or anti-tank weapons.



Floods batter Paris region

Louvre museums shut as swollen Seine nears peak

AFP, Paris

Paris' world-famous Louvre and Musee d'Orsay museums were shut yesterday to salvage valuable artworks from their basements, as the rain-swollen River Seine neared its highest level in three decades.

At least 14 people have been killed in floods that have wrought havoc in Europe after days of torrential rain, trapping people in their homes and forcing rescuers to row lifeboats down streets turned into rivers.

Parisians were urged to stay away from the Seine, which has spilled its banks in places and rose more than six metres above its normal level yesterday. Authorities said the river could swell to "perhaps 6.50 metres in a worst-case scenario", comfortably beating the level reached during floods in 1982.

The record remains the 8.68 metres reached during devastating floods in 1910. A small number of basement flats in the capital began to flood yesterday and the environment ministry also warned it was possible some residents in areas near the Seine in western Paris could be evacuated if necessary.

Persistently heavy rainfall across western and central Europe has swollen rivers and claimed victims from at least four countries.

Ten people have been killed in Germany and two in Romania, while a beekeeper died in Belgium while trying to protect his hives from the floods.

In France, a man on horseback drowned on Thursday after being swept away by a swollen river in Evry-Gregy-sur-Yerre, southeast of Paris.

However, French Environment Minister Segolene Royal said she feared more bodies would be found as waters recede in villages in central France.



Residents who refused to be evacuated sit on makeshift boats during evacuation operations of the Villeneuve-Trillage flooded suburb in Villeneuve Saint-Georges, outside Paris, France, yesterday after days of almost non-stop rain caused flooding in the country. PHOTO: REUTERS

ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

'Two-state solution in serious danger'

AFP, Paris

French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault yesterday warned that hopes of a two-state solution in the Israel-Palestinian conflict were in "serious danger" without a peace process on the table.

Ayrault, who hosted an international meeting in Paris in a bid to revive the moribund peace process, said that a solution which would see Israelis and Palestinians living side by side was "getting further away each day."

"We must act, urgently, to preserve the two-state solution, revive it before it is too late," Ayrault said after the meeting.

Neither Israeli nor Palestinian representatives attended the meeting -- as direct talks between the two sides are currently considered impossible -- and the French initiative has received a lukewarm response from Washington.

Representatives from 28 countries, the Arab League, European Union and United Nations discussed ways in which the international community could "help advance the prospects for peace, including by providing meaningful incentives to the parties to make peace," according to a joint statement.

The meeting aims to lay the ground for a fully-fledged peace conference to be held by the end of the year, but few believe that genuine progress will be made.

Despite a sense of scepticism that the French peace initiative will succeed where so many others have failed, Ayrault said the world could not "fold its arms and do nothing."

NEWS IN brief

Falluja is a tough nut to crack: Iraqi minister

REUTERS, Baghdad

Islamic State is putting up a tough fight in Falluja and its recapture by the Iraqi army could take time, said Iraqi Finance Minister Hoshiyar Zebari. "Falluja is a tough nut to crack," he told Reuters in an interview on Thursday evening. "Daesh are holding the population as hostages, not allowing them to escape, and they are putting up a tough fight there," he added.

Germany probes 180 terror suspects

AFP, Berlin

German prosecutors have launched legal proceedings against 180 suspects linked to jihadist groups in Syria, the justice ministry said yesterday. "The chief prosecutor is currently carrying out 120 proceedings targeting 180 suspects in connection with the civil war in Syria, for their membership in, or backing of, a terrorist organisation," said justice ministry spokesman Philip Scholz.

'Black women most educated group in US'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Black women are now the most educated group in US, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Between 2009 and 2010, black women earned 68 per cent of associate's degrees, 66 percent of bachelor's degrees, 71 percent of master's degrees and 65 percent of all doctorate degrees.

The percentage of black students attending college has increased from 10 percent to 15 percent from 1976 to 2012, while the percentage of white students fell from 84 to 60 percent.

By both race and gender, a higher percentage of black women (9.7 percent) is enrolled in college than any other group, including Asian women (8.7 percent), white women (7.1 percent) and white men (6.1 percent).

However, a recent study found black women make up just 8 percent of private sector jobs and 1.5 percent of leadership roles. When it comes to the public sector, a quarter of state legislators are women, but less than a quarter of those are women of colour.

Catalyst found in 2014 that Asian, black, and Hispanic women make up 17 per cent of workers in S&P 500 companies, but fewer than four per cent of executive officials and managers.

The same groups also make up fewer than three percent of Fortune 500 company board directors.

Sweden is now world's goodest country: study

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Sweden has topped a poll as the best or "goodest" country when it comes to serving the interests of its people while avoiding damaging impacts to other nations and the environment.

The country has outranked 162 others to take pole position in the Good Country Index, a league table based on 35 separate indicators from sources including the United Nations and the World Bank.

Sweden scores highest for positive lifestyle contributions including prosperity, equality, health and wellbeing.

Iceland tops the list for its overall contribution to the planet and climate protection, including low CO2 emissions and minimal production of hazardous material.

Extraordinary survival of the boy left in a Japanese forest

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A seven-year-old Japanese boy has been found alive in bear-infested woods, six days after being left there by his parents as punishment for bad behaviour.

Yamato Tanooka was made to get out the car driven by his parents in woods on the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido on May 28. However, on returning to the spot a few minutes later, his parents found that he was no longer there.

The young boy was eventually found early yesterday by a soldier inside a building at a military base near the town of Shikabe, 2.5 miles from where he was left. Yamato told the soldier who discovered him that he had spent several days at the army base after wandering alone in the forest.

Other than suffering from dehydration for which he was put on an intravenous drip, doctors found the seven-year-old had only a few minor scratches to his arms and feet.

Yamato's parents had initially said the boy had got lost before eventually admitting briefly abandoning him for being naughty. More than 180 people were involved in the search for the young boy, including troops. The remote area where he was abandoned is home to brown bears.

His father, Takayuki Tanooka, told reporters: "We have raised him with love all along. I really didn't think it would come to that, we went too far. I thought we were doing it for my son's own good. I told him I was so sorry for causing him such pain."

Tanooka also apologised to those involved in the search attempts: "I deeply apologise to people at his school, people in the rescue operation, and everybody for causing them trouble."

The parents reportedly told police they had punished the boy for throwing rocks at people and cars while playing at a river earlier in the day.



Nepal drains glacial lake near Everest

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepali soldiers have kicked off efforts to partially drain a giant glacial lake near Mount Everest, fearing possible flooding that could threaten the lives of thousands, an army official said yesterday. Scientists say climate change is causing Himalayan glaciers to melt at an alarming rate, creating huge glacial lakes which could burst their banks and devastate mountain communities. Imja Tsho, located at an altitude of 5,010 metres, just 10 kilometres (6.2 miles) south of the world's highest peak, is the fastest-growing glacial lake in Nepal.