

ATTACK ON WOMEN India arrests four over New Year assaults

REUTERS, New Delhi

Police yesterday arrested four men in India's technology hub of Bengaluru over a video recording of a New Year attack on a woman that has sparked a national public debate about women's safety. News of the video came after a Reuters witness and media said several women revellers were groped and assaulted by a mob in the southern city in a separate incident on New Year's Eve.

Police made the arrests after examining a closed-circuit video clip of the attack by two men as the woman walked down a secluded lane in a residential area late on Dec. 31. The four men arrested were "directly related to the case", including the two who perpetrated the attack, a senior city police official said.

"There is clear evidence in the case," added the official, who declined to be named as he was not authorised to speak to the media.

The police official did not elaborate on why the other two men were arrested. All face charges of sexual harassment and assault.

The video sparked outrage because it showed a man dismounting from a scooter to grab the woman and drag her towards the vehicle, despite her struggles. The other man on the scooter briefly joined the scuffle as bystanders watched.

But she was thrown to the ground before the men rode off.

Bengaluru, in India's southern state of Karnataka, is home to many well-educated professionals, and had widely been viewed as safer for women than New Delhi, which is often labelled the country's rape capital, for the many sex crimes reported there.



A Pakistani policeman takes a selfie with Indian fishermen at the railway station in Karachi yesterday, after their release from prison. Pakistan freed 219 Indian fishermen who had strayed into its waters, an official said, calling it a "goodwill gesture" ten days after a similar number were also released.

PHOTO: AFP

INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS Agni-V test injects tension into Asia

CNN ONLINE

It's a frightening prospect, India and China going to war. The countries are home to 2.5 billion people, a long and sometimes disputed border -- which they've fought wars over -- and each have nuclear weapons.

And India announced last month it successfully tested the Agni-V intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), which could theoretically deliver a nuke to Beijing.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted the accomplishment "makes every Indian proud."

But some in China see the test as a provocation. And provocations can make the region less stable, which can lead to hostilities, says Victor Gao, the director of the China National Association of International Studies.

Hua Chunying, a spokeswoman for China's Foreign Ministry, responded to a question about the missile launch by noting UN Security Council regulations regarding nuclear capable ballistic missiles and stressing that the two countries "are not rivals for competition but partners for cooperation."

PRECISELY AMBIGUOUS
India and China both maintain what's called a "no first use" policy as part of their nuclear doctrine.

The policy means exactly what it sounds like -- in the event of a war, the country won't use nuclear weapons unless they're attacked by an enemy using nuclear weapons.

But India's hawkish defense minister, Manohar Parrikar, publicly mused in November whether India should be bound by the "no first use" policy.

"If a written down policy exists, or you take a stand on a



Head of pro-IS group killed in Philippines

AFP, Manila

Philippine security forces yesterday killed the leader of a Muslim militant group that has carried out deadly attacks on civilians to win support from Islamic State fighters in Iraq and Syria, authorities said.

Mohammad Jaafar Maguid, founder and leader of Ansarul Khilafa Philippines, was tracked down and shot at a beach resort on the southern island of Mindanao shortly after midnight, while three "cohorts" were arrested, a police report said.

Ansarul Khilafa is one of several violent Islamic militant groups on Mindanao, homeland of a large Filipino Muslim minority where a decades-old separatist rebellion has claimed more than 120,000 lives.

"He's wanted for bombing incidents. They use improvised explosive devices, killing people at town festivals," Chief Superintendent Cedric Train, the regional police chief, told AFP.

"They fly the ISIS flag in their camps. They want to be recognised by the ISIS," Train added, referring to the Islamic State group by one of its acronyms.

The military killed eight Ansarul Khilafa members in a clash in November 2015 at Maguid's Mindanao hometown of Palimbang, 1,000 kilometres (600 miles) south of Manila.

Interior Secretary Ismael Sueno warned of potential violent repercussions from the death of Maguid, more widely known by his nickname of Commander Tokboy.

"They might retaliate so we have to double our preparations," Sueno said, citing large Catholic religious festivals in the Philippines this month.



Poll survey gives BJP clear majority in UP

TNN, New Delhi

On a day when Election Commission announced the poll schedule for five states, an India Today opinion poll projected clear majority for BJP in Uttar Pradesh.

Conducted from October and December last year in the politically crucial state, the survey shows Prime Minister Narendra Modi's demonetisation move as having a positive impact on BJP's vote-share.

Demonetisation was announced on November 8, halfway through the survey period. The survey shows the BJP's vote share increasing from 31% in October (before note ban) to 33% in December. In terms of seats, it projects 206-216 seats for the saffron party in the 403-member UP assembly. In the 2012 assembly election, BJP commanded a 15% vote share and won 47 seats.

The ruling Samajwadi Party is likely to emerge as the second largest party with a vote share of 26%, according to the survey which puts its seat tally at 92-97. Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party is neck-and-neck with

SP in terms of vote share, and is projected to win 79-85 seats. This shows that despite repeated reminders of Mayawati asking Muslim voters to shun SP, it has had little impact as the community remains loyal to the SP even as party remains a divided house.

Congress continues to struggle in the state as party is projected to win barely 5-9 seats with only 6% vote share in the state. The other parties in the state -- Rashtriya Lok Dal, Apna Dal, the Left and others - might win 7-11 seats.

The February-March election will test the popularity of Modi's decision to ban Rs 500 and Rs 1000 notes in India's most populous state. However, chief minister Akhilesh Yadav emerges as a clear choice for the next chief minister with 33% of those surveyed wanting him to return to power.

Among choice of CMs among the BJP faces, Rajnath Singh is the most preferred with 20% in his favour. However, Gorakhpur MP, Yogi Adityanath has been second preference with 18% preferring him as chief minister candidate.

INDIAN STATE ELECTIONS

China justifies its stand on JeM chief

THE HINDU ONLINE

China yesterday dismissed as "untrue" allegations of double standards by India by blocking its bid to list JeM leader Masood Azhar as global terrorist by the UN, claiming that it had adopted a "just, objective and professional" attitude in deciding the matter.

"With regard to the listing matter of the security council 1267 committee the so called double standards adopted by China on this relevant issue is not true. We take action based on solid evidence that is the standard upheld by us," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told media briefing here.

Responding to remarks made by Minister of State for External Affairs M J Akbar on Azhar's issue during the press conference in New Delhi yesterday Geng said, "We have taken a responsible and constructive part in relevant discussion in a professional and objective way".

"Relevant members differed on this issue. The purpose of China to put forward technical hold on that issue is to create enough time for the committee and relevant parties to consult with each other on the relevant issue," he said.

Akbar on Wednesday had said, "We really do expect China to hear the voice of the world, not just voice of India on terrorism."

Referring to Pakistan's support to terror, India also hoped that as a "responsible and a mature" nation, China will understand the "double standards" and "simply self-defeating and suicidal" approach of Islamabad to terrorism.

China was the only country among the 15-member 1267 counter terrorism committee of the UN Security Council which has objected to India's application to list Azhar who is accused of master

SOUTH KOREA SCANDAL TRIALS BEGIN Choi, Park cases in court

AFP, Seoul

The impeachment trial of South Korea's President Park Geun-Hye got under way yesterday, with her lawyers arguing there is no evidence to back the corruption allegations that threaten to force her from office.

Parliament voted to impeach Park last month over an influence-peddling scandal that has brought hundreds of thousands of protesters onto the streets every week demanding her removal.

Park is accused of colluding with a longtime friend, Choi Soon-Il, to strong-arm donations worth tens of millions of dollars from top firms which were then funnelled to dubious foundations.

The president is also accused of using her influence to ensure the merger of two Samsung units in 2015 to help facilitate a father-to-son power succession of Samsung's founding family, allegedly in return for bribes given to Choi.

The National Assembly, which must have its vote upheld by the Constitutional Court, accused Park of a "serious breach of the constitution" during the first full hearing in the impeachment case.

"The court is requested to fire the president so that impaired constitutional order can be restored," said Kwon Seong-Dong, a lawmaker representing the parliament.

"The president has betrayed the trust and mandate from the people", he added.

The Constitutional Court's initial hearing on Tuesday was curtailed after Park failed to attend. It decided to proceed yesterday regardless of whether she was present.

Park's lawyers said there was no proof the president had issued any directive, oral or written, to tell her aides to ensure the National Pension Fund -- the largest shareholder of one of the two Samsung units -- voted for the merger.

They urged the court to overturn the



Local residents waded through a flooded street in Jal Besar, Malaysia's northeastern town of Tumpat, yesterday. Floods continued to inundate two northeast Malaysian states, as thousands of people remained in relief centres while others expressed fears of looting and sought aid.

PHOTO: AFP

Queen Elizabeth II 'nearly shot' by palace guard

IANS, London

Queen Elizabeth II was once nearly shot by a former guardsman when she went for a late night walk in the palace grounds, reported a newspaper here.

An unnamed soldier revealed how he nearly pulled the trigger when he spotted



an unknown figure in the dark at Buckingham Palace at 3:00am on an unspecified day several years ago, said a report in the Times daily on Wednesday.

The daily's diary column reported: Thinking that he had come across an intruder, he shouted: "Who's that?"

"To his surprise it was the Queen," according to the account. "Bloody hell, Your Majesty, I nearly shot you", he said. Realising his remarks were inappropriate, the guard expected to be rebuked.

The Queen, who apparently likes to go for a stroll when she cannot sleep, was said to have replied: "That's quite all right. Next time I'll ring through beforehand so you don't have to shoot me."

Buckingham Palace declined to comment.

The Queen performed her first royal engagement on Wednesday since falling ill with the heavy cold that forced her to miss church services over the festive season.

The Queen presented a trusted member of staff with an honour as she continues to recuperate at Sandringham.

The monarch invested Ray Wheaton, the Queen's Page of the Chambers, with the insignia of a Lieutenant of the Royal Victorian Order, according to the court

MILITARY COOPERATION WITH AUSTRALIA Indonesia backs down in row

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia appeared to back down yesterday from a decision to suspend all military cooperation with Australia in a row over teaching materials, with a senior minister saying only language training had been put on hold.

The Indonesian military said Wednesday that military cooperation with Canberra, including joint exercises and exchange programmes, had been put on ice last month after teaching materials deemed offensive to Jakarta were found at an Australian army base.

The row erupted after a visiting Indonesian officer raised concerns about the materials at a language training facility in Perth.

Indonesia's military chief General Gatot Nurmantyo told reporters it involved "unethical stuff" which "discredits Indonesia and its military, even the nation's ideology".

He said it concerned East Timor -- which seceded from Indonesia after a bloody occupation -- the Papuan region's independence movement and the nation's founding philosophy "Pancasila", all deeply sensitive topics for the Indonesian military.

But following the military's announcement, leaders of

both Australia and Indonesia publicly insisted ties were strong before Indonesian Security Minister Wiranto announced yesterday he was giving a "clarification" after receiving information from Nurmantyo.

The military "has temporarily suspended cooperation in language training," said the minister in a statement, adding it was due to "a small incident that has offended our dignity as a nation".



But he said Indonesia was not "completely stopping all cooperation", contradicting the earlier military statement. Indonesian and Australian forces cooperate on a range of issues from border protection to counter-terrorism.

"The suspension is temporary and will be resumed after Australia clearly takes measures to resolve the matter," he added.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation also broadcast footage yesterday of Nurmantyo giving a lecture in November, voicing fears Canberra was trying to recruit soldiers sent to Australia for training.

"Every time there is a training programme -- like recently -- the best five or 10 students would be sent to Australia. That happened before I was chief so I let that happen," he said in translated remarks, according to the broadcaster.