

OPPOSITION PROTEST

Police detain dozens in Moscow

AFP, Moscow

Police said they detained 29 opposition protesters in central Moscow yesterday, a week after hundreds of others were arrested during a rally organised by leading Putin critic Alexei Navalny.

"Twenty-nine people were detained by police for breaches of public order," the city police's press service said.

An AFP journalist at the scene said he witnessed around 30 people being detained as they attempted to carry out a peaceful march.

Among them was a 16-year-old boy called Pavel Dyatlov who became a symbol of youth protest in last week's rally when he was photographed climbing up a lamppost. He was detained in that protest, too.

OVD Info, a website that monitors detentions of activists, wrote that at least 32 people had been detained including at least 4 minors.

Navalny, who is currently serving a 15-day sentence behind bars for disobeying police at last Sunday's event, has distanced himself from the latest protest.

"He knows absolutely nothing about this," his spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh wrote on Twitter.

Navalny last Sunday organised protests in cities across Russia, most of which were not authorised by municipal officials. The largest in Moscow saw about 500 people detained according to police, while OVD-Info put the total at almost 1,000.

Posts on Facebook linked the latest protest to a little-known nationalist group.

Opposition supporters had begun to walk peacefully along the city's main Tverskaya Street from a central metro station at around 1030 GMT in an event coordinated via social media.

Police in helmets and body armour swiftly moved to arrest demonstrators.

Civilians flee Raqa 'hell'

US-backed assault on IS bastion nears; jets hit rebel outpost near major border crossing with Turkey

AGENCIES

In a muddy camp in northern Syria, civilians who fled Raqa said fear of an expected US-backed assault on the Islamic State group bastion was reaching a fever pitch.

This week, hundreds of civilians escaped Raqa and headed north to the camp in Ain Issa, in territory controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces, a US-backed Arab-Kurdish alliance.

As part of their campaign to capture Raqa, the Syrian heart of the jihadists' so-called "caliphate", the SDF have been bearing down on the IS-held Tabqa Dam over the past 10 days.

Rumours that Syria's biggest dam would collapse and flood Raqa, 55 kilometres downstream, have sparked panic in the city.

"The hisbah (religious police) announced over the megaphones 'the land of Muslims will be flooded, the Tabqa dam has collapsed,'" said Mohammad Mahmoud, 38.

Mahmoud, his brother and both their families paid \$1,000 to a smuggler and fled Raqa on foot earlier this week, reported AFP.

"I was so afraid, I couldn't think straight," he said. The camp where he has found shelter is home to several thousand Syrians displaced by war, including 400 families who

arrived this week from Raqa.

Children waddled through makeshift pathways between tents emblazoned with the logo of the UN refugee agency (UNHCR), clutching sandwiches and water bottles.

Inside tents, men waited for their turn to have their IS-mandated beards shaved then examined their bare chins in a small mirror.

Mahmoud's face was weighed down by exhaustion, his clothes covered in dust.

He hovered protectively around his elderly mother who sat in a wheelchair, its wheels caked in mud after their arduous 14-hour trek out of Raqa.

JETS HIT REBEL OUTPOST

Jets believed to be Russian hit an outpost run by moderate rebel forces in northwestern Syria near a major border crossing with Turkey, killing at least one fighter and wounding several people, two rebel sources said yesterday.

They said several raids overnight hit Babeska, a village in Idlib province that has become a haven for several moderate Free Syrian Army (FSA) groups, mainly Jaish al Islam, a major insurgent group that controls the last major rebel stronghold on the doorstep of the Syrian capital, reported Reuters.

Jaish al Islam is a signatory to a fragile ceasefire brokered by Russia and Turkey at the end of last year.



WAR IN SYRIA

BREXIT TRANSITION

May tries to reassure Gibraltar in exit process

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday insisted that she would "never" allow Gibraltar to slip from British control against the wishes of Gibraltarians as the issue took centre-stage in early Brexit wranglings.

May told Chief Minister of Gibraltar Fabian Picardo that "we will never enter into arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar would pass under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes."

The European Union has said that Spain would have to agree to extend any trade deal between the bloc and Britain to also cover the 6.7-square-kilometre (2.6-square-mile) British overseas territory on the southern tip of Spain.

This means that Madrid could potentially block Gibraltar's access to any trade deal, and politicians in "the Rock" fear that Madrid will use the veto to seek sovereignty over the peninsula.

May told Picardo that she would never "enter into a process of sovereignty negotiations with which Gibraltar is not content,"

according to a readout of the phone call released by her Downing Street office.

"The UK remains steadfastly committed to our support for Gibraltar, its people and its economy," it added.

"We remain absolutely dedicated to working with Gibraltar for the best possible outcome on Brexit, and will continue to involve them fully in the process."

British foreign minister Boris Johnson earlier yesterday stressed that the territory "will not be bargained away".

"Gibraltar is not for sale. Gibraltar cannot be traded. Gibraltar will not be bargained away," Johnson wrote in the Sunday Telegraph.

Johnson wrote that the policy of the government "remains fixed and firm. The sovereignty of Gibraltar cannot be changed without the express consent of the UK and the people of Gibraltar."

"The status of Gibraltar has been unchanged since 1713. It made no difference when the UK joined the Common Market in 1973 and when Spain was not yet a member. It should make no difference today."



Rescuers seek people among the rubble left by mudslides following heavy rains in Mocoa, Putumayo department, southern Colombia on Saturday. Massive mudslides left more than 250 dead and hundreds of injured. Story on page 16.

PHOTO: AFP

MYANMAR BY-ELECTIONS

Suu Kyi's party wins nearly half of seats

REUTERS, Yangon

Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi's party won nearly half of the seats contested in by-elections yesterday, the first vote since it swept to power a year ago and an early indication of support for her administration amid increased fighting with ethnic armed groups and slower economic growth.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won nine out of 19 seats in the national and regional parliaments, according to the Union Election Commission, following a period in which she has struggled to match sky-high expectations.

In a televised address earlier this week, Suu Kyi acknowledged the public's frustration with the slow pace of reforms and development.

But she also reiterated her top priority of ending the ethnic conflicts that have kept Myanmar in a state of near-perpetual civil war.

While the outcome of the by-elections will not affect the balance of power within the parliament, where the NLD enjoys a large majority, it offers a chance to gauge the popularity of the administration in a country where nationwide public polls are not available.

Win Htein, one of the NLD's top leaders, said the party faced language barriers and problems with armed groups in the Shan state districts being contested. Fighting in some of those areas has intensified in recent months.

"We are still improving in Shan state. The local people don't understand Burmese, so we have to translate our policies into the Shan language," he said.

'Resignation syndrome'

Report says refugee children in Sweden slip into coma-like state fearing deportation

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Authorities in Sweden are attempting to solve a problem that appears unique to its child refugees - uppgivenhetssyndrom or "resignation syndrome".

The condition causes healthy youngsters to deteriorate into a comatose-like state after learning of their impending deportation.

It is believed to only exist among the refugee population in the Scandinavian country, where it has been prevalent since the early part of this century.

In 2016, 60 children were diagnosed with the syndrome, which sees patients are rendered "totally passive, immobile, lacks tonus, withdrawn, mute, unable to eat and drink, incontinent and not reacting to physical stimuli or pain," according to medical journal Acta Paediatrica.

The children are left bedridden or have to be moved in wheelchairs and feeding must be done through a tube.

Tests which gained a response from people in comas did not work on the afflicted children, but other exercises showed they suffered no brain damage.

It was described by some doctors as "willed dying" and often occurred after families were denied asylum status and thrown into uncertainty.

A similar phenomenon was observed in Nazi concentration camps, the New Yorker reported, in

prisoners who had effectively lost all hope and given up.

Doctors saw the condition as the manifestation of fear of being returned to their old countries, where they could be unsafe, and of adjusting to a new society after having become used to Sweden.



DEADLY PROTEST

President of Paraguay fires top aides

AFP, Asuncion

Paraguay's president sacked his interior minister and police chief Saturday, following a clash that led to the death of a young activist as rioters angry about electoral reform stormed Congress.

Closed circuit cameras captured the death of 25-year-old Rodrigo Quintana, leader of the opposition Liberal Party's youth branch, who was apparently shot by police early Saturday as they searched the party's offices in Asuncion for protesters.

About 30 people were injured, including three lawmakers, according to firefighters and an opposition senator. Police said 211 people were arrested, some of them minors.

Himalayan glaciers get 'living entities' status

AFP, Dehradun

An Indian court has recognised Himalayan glaciers, lakes and forests as "legal persons" in an effort to curb environmental destruction, weeks after it granted similar status to the country's two most sacred rivers.

In a decision that aims to widen environmental protections in the mountainous region, the court granted the legal standing to glaciers Gangotri and Yamunotri that feed India's venerated Ganga and Yamuna rivers, which won the status in a landmark judgement in March.

"The rights of these entities shall be equivalent to the rights of human beings and any injury or harm caused to these bodies shall be treated as injury or harm caused to human beings," the highest court in Himalayan state of Uttarakhand said

in its ruling on Friday.

It said Yamunotri glacier, which is the source for Yamuna river was shrinking at an alarming rate.

Gangotri, which feeds the river Ganga and is one of the largest glaciers in the Himalayas, is also "receding fast", the court said.

"In over 25 years, it has retreated more than 850 meters (2,800 feet)," a two-judge bench of justices Rajeev Sharma and Alok Singh said.

The court also extended the status of "living entity" to swaths of the

Himalayan environment, including waterfalls, meadows, lakes and forests.

On March 20, the same court ordered that both Ganges and Yamuna rivers should be given "living entity" status to conserve them, in a decision cautiously welcomed by activists who expressed hope that it would signify more than just a symbolic gesture.



NEWS IN brief

UK's nuclear stations, airports on terror alert

PTI, London

Britain's nuclear power stations and airports have been instructed to "remain resilient" against potential terrorist attacks, amid fears that their systems may be targeted by hackers, according to a media report. Security services have issued a series of alerts in the past 24 hours, warning that terrorists may have developed ways of bypassing safety checks, The Sunday Telegraph reported.

200 Indian police in hospital after meal

AFP, New Delhi

At least 200 Indian paramilitary police were hospitalised with suspected food poisoning after eating meals at a training camp in the southern state of Kerala, police said yesterday. Training cadets and security forces belonging to the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) complained of diarrhoea and vomiting after eating rice and fish curry for dinner on Saturday at a training camp in Ernakulam district.

Fire engulfs Dubai tower in Downtown district

AFP, Dubai

Clouds of smoke billowed over central Dubai yesterday after a fire burned for several hours in a residential tower under construction near the city's largest shopping mall. The blaze erupted around 6:30 am at the complex, which is near the Dubai Mall and a hotel ravaged by fire on New Year's Eve in 2015, authorities said.



A Black Lives Matter activist confronts a member of the NYPD during a protest against US President Donald Trump and New York Mayor Bill de Blasio in the Manhattan borough of New York, US, on Saturday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Egyptian court backs Islands sale to Saudis

AFP, Cairo

An Egyptian court yesterday issued a new ruling in support of a government accord to transfer two Red Sea islands to Saudi Arabia, a deal that has sparked protests, lawyers said.

In the latest in a series of contradictory judicial rulings on the case, the urgent matters court in Cairo followed a verdict by Egypt's highest administrative court that went against the islands' transfer.

Saudi Arabia has been a main financial backer of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi since the former army chief toppled his Islamist predecessor in 2013.

The deal to hand over the islands, signed during an April 2016 visit by Saudi King Salman during which Riyadh showered Egypt with aid, provoked accusations that Cairo had "sold" the strategic islands.

Cairo said the two islands -- Tiran and Sanafir -- were Saudi territory to start with, but had been leased to Egypt in the 1950s.

which insists along with Sisi that the islands are Saudi, and lawyers opposed to the measure.

The urgent matters court ruled "in favour of disregarding the ruling of the high administrative court," as "the judiciary doesn't have the authority to interfere with



matters of sovereignty", said Ashraf Farahat, the lawyer who filed the latest lawsuit.

Khaled Ali, a lawyer who argued in the administrative court that the islands belonged to Egypt, said yesterday's verdict aimed to give the government "judicial cover" as it pushes to hand over the territory.