



People hold a giant banner reading "Self-determination is not a crime" during a protest against the trial of former Catalan separatist leaders in Barcelona yesterday. Twelve Catalan separatist politicians and activists face years behind bars if they are convicted of rebellion or other charges for pushing an independence referendum in October 2017, in defiance of a court ban, and a brief declaration of independence. PHOTO: AFP

## Heroes born out of blaze

FROM PAGE 16

There were four attendants in the ICU. Time was running out and something had to be done fast.

Noor immediately called Dr ABM Muksudul Alam, principal of the college and head of the anaesthesia department, who rushed to the scene.

They then scoped out the way to evacuate the patients. By then, the air outside the ICU unit was thick with smoke, further complicating any rescue effort.

The ventilators' batteries continued to flicker. So far, two batteries had reached their last legs, while five others could continue for a bit longer.

More phone calls were made as the urgency of the situation became more pronounced.

Finally, when help was still not arriving, around 20 minutes later, a decision was taken. They would break into the store room nearby and take whatever they could salvage.

In a stroke of luck, one of the many minor miracles that would take place that day, they found five cylinders of oxygen, ambu bags and other necessary things.

By this time, a ward boy and a few students of the college had also gathered at the unit. The rescue mission was about to begin.

Connecting the patients to ambu bags, which was feverishly being pumped by attendants or students, each patient, along with their bed strapped to different machines, was taken towards the exit.

The task required prodigious strength and conviction. Rasel, a ward boy, was given credit by Noor for pulling it off. Noor also mentioned two nurses -- Daisy and Nupur -- were said to have offered tremendous support. Soon, the patients were carried out one by one.

Elsewhere, students, honorary doctors and interns were helping people exit the children and gynae wards. Legends were born during this phase. Doctors and patients later spoke of doctors who helped, as if they were folk heroes of fables of the past.

There were tales of those who stayed back, despite being so close to the fire, out of sheer conviction and dedication to their role as saviors of life.

But it wasn't just the doctors. General people, police and fire officials, and students of the nearby Sher-e-Bangla Agriculture University all came together to help.

But as the patients, their relatives

and all hospital staffers, began to be evacuated, another problem arose: there was only one entry and exit point to the hospital. How could a stampede be avoided?

### IT'S A MIRACLE

KM Mamun Morshed, assistant director of the hospital, still cannot explain how the evacuation went about so smoothly.

"This structure was designed to be a 350-bed one. Now it is 850-bed. There is only one entry point as the structure was not developed according to the increase in beds.

"There is also no space left to do. So evacuating around 3,000-3,500 had to be evacuated using one exit, without any casualty, is a big deal," he said.

He credited a fire drill which had taken place around five to six months ago for their preparation. "At the time of the drill, we had laughed at why we were doing this," he said.

But now he understood. He was still in awe of the discipline with which the evacuation was conducted.

"The risks were tremendous. There was an oxygen plant right next to where the fire was. Although the ICU was safe, if too much heat reached the oxygen plant, there would be an explosion," he recalled, his voice still a little shaky at the thought of a possible disaster of epic proportions.

Again, he reiterated that he could not explain how everything had been done so smoothly. "God had directly helped us."

He praised all those involved for ensuring no casualties. He also reserved special praise for the Dhaka Mahanagar Ambulance Shomobai MalikSamity.

"We had two ambulances initially but afterwards few more reached the spot."

The situation changed when the ambulance association was called using the 999 emergency hotline.

Once the incident was verified, 80-90 private ambulances were dispatched to the area. Within an hour, 120 more had arrived.

The ambulances provided the service free of cost. During a meeting with the inspector general of police last year, ambulance owners were told that they would have to provide ambulances during national emergencies. And so they delivered.

President of the association Alamgir Hossain said, "Around 8:30pm, the fire came under control but we worked till midnight carrying patients.

Dr Uttam Kumar Barua, the director

of the hospital, said the ambulances shuttled 800 times in total. This was made more exceptional because the fire had broken out during rush hour on a Thursday, one of the busiest times in the city.

But the efforts of the volunteers and officials made everything possible.

### FIGHTING THE FLAMES

Mohammad Shohag Mia, a student of the medical college, used a hand mike, to ensure the discipline of the ambulances.

When asked how he got there, he said, "Right after the incident, there was a Facebook page for all doctors and medical students where the matter was posted.

"We then sent out a message that there would be deluge of patients going to certain hospitals so that they should be prepared.

The many volunteers did not only help with the evacuation process but much more.

The first call to the fire service had reached the Mohammadpur unit. Two units from there made their way to the hospital but found no source of water.

Finally, a water source was found. It was at a pond at a nearby university.

By then, two more units from Kallyanpur had joined the fight. Students rushed to lug the pipes towards the hospital so the blaze could be put out.

Meanwhile, fire fighters were busy making an important decision.

Anwar Hossain, deputy assistant director, Fire Service and Civil Defence, said, "We first had to decide whether to fight the fire or evacuate the people.

Fighting the fire, however, would mean the spread of smoke. So we decided to evacuate first.

He then spoke of the role of the patients, attendants and students in the evacuation process.

Afterwards, the fight against the flame began.

Anwar mentioned again about the fire drill. "That is when we decided the primary shelter point during a fire would be the field in front of the hospital. Knowing that we could proceed," he said.

Eighteen units worked together to control the blaze which was finally put out two and a half hours later.

It was finally done. The patients were evacuated. The blaze was put out.

Heroes were born in the smoke and fire of February 14. A rare precedent was set by doctors, nurses, hospital staffers, fire-fighters and volunteers.

Kashmiris.

Sanjeev Verma, the divisional commissioner of Jammu, said that the curfew will remain until further orders to maintain law and order. An army column staged a flag march.

In New Delhi, leaders of political parties met and said they stood behind the government in its resolve to tackle terrorism.

The all-party meeting put up a strong and united front against Pakistan-sponsored terrorism and adopted a unanimous resolution expressing the resolve to fight the menace.

The attack comes at a difficult time for Pakistan, as it struggles to attract foreign investment and avert a payments crisis, with foreign currency reserves swiftly diminishing.

On Friday, it summoned India's deputy envoy in Islamabad to reject the accusations against the country.

## 8-year-old

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[K]knowing the incident, her family members took her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital in a critical condition, the OC said, quoting the girl's family members.

Contacted, Farhana Hossain Shimu, an assistant director of Bangladesh Betar, said Razzak was an irregular Dotara player with the state-run radio channel. She was not aware of the rape incident, she added.

A complaint was filed with the police station right after the incident came to notice.

The girl's father demanded capital punishment for the accused.

"I want the rapist to be hanged so that no other beast dares to commit such crime again," he said.

## 2 'Neo JMB'

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interrogation, Al Amin, who was form Sylhet, told police that he used different Facebook IDs, under the names like Tonmoy Bakshi and Noyon Chatterjee, to spread "provocative writings and similar items" on social media, law enforcers claimed.

He admitted that he joined militancy in 2015 after being influenced by one Saif alias Babul and later got acquainted with other militant suspects, including Osama alias Taskin, Abdus Salam, Faizullah and Milad, police claimed.

Police officials said militants use different encrypted apps to communicate and share organisational directives. Milad who hailed from Habiganj district, had good connection with Al Amin, police said.

Several books and three mobile phone handsets were recovered from their possession, the law enforcers claimed.

A case was filed with Jatrabari Police Station under the anti-terrorism act.

## PM leaves

FROM PAGE 16

National Exhibition Center (ADNEC) today.

The PM is likely to meet Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and hold bilateral talks with Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Prime Minister of the UAE. She will have meetings with other leaders.

Hasina will have an audience with Sheikhha Fatima bint Mubarak Al Ketbi, Wife of Late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the Founder and the Inaugural President of the UAE and Ruler of Abu Dhabi at Al Bahar Palace.

The PM will join a community event at St Regis Abu Dhabi Hotel where she will stay during the visit.

She will return home in the morning on February 20.

## Sarah Sanders questioned by special counsel: CNN

AFP, Washington

Special Counsel Robert Mueller's office has interviewed White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders as part of the investigation into possible connections between President Donald Trump's team and Russia, CNN reported Friday.

"The president urged me, like he has everyone in the administration, to fully cooperate with the special counsel. I was happy to voluntarily sit down with them," Sanders told the cable news outlet.

# N Koreans pay tribute to Kim's father

AFP, Pyongyang

The Day of the Shining Star dawned bitterly cold in Pyongyang. But thousands of North Koreans lined up in temperatures of minus 8 degrees Celsius on Saturday to pay their respects to late leader Kim Jong Il on his birthday.

Kim, the son of the isolated North's founder Kim Il Sung and the father and predecessor of current leader Kim Jong Un, was born on February 16.

According to Pyongyang's orthodoxy, he came into the world in 1942, in a snow-covered hut at a secret camp on the slopes of Mount Paektu, the spiritual birthplace of the Korean people, where his father was fighting occupying Japanese forces.

Outside historians point instead to official Soviet records, which say he was born a year earlier in a Siberian village where Kim Il Sung was in exile.

Either way, it is a key anniversary in a nuclear-armed nation whose people are taught from birth to revere the "Paektu lineage", as the Kim family which has ruled it for three generations is known.

Referred to as the Day of the Shining Star, the occasion is celebrated with flower shows, mass dances in the capital and elsewhere, and laudatory tributes in state media, all reinforcing the underlying narrative.

Driver Kim Chol Jun, 42, took his two boys to Mansu Hill, where giant statues of the two older Kims look out over the capital, to pay his respects to them and the current leader.

"No sons and daughters feel tired when they visit their parents," he told AFP. "The great leaders are regarded as our own parents, so I visit here to bow before our parents with my sons."

Ordinary North Koreans consistently express unequivocal support for the leadership and its policies when speaking to foreign media.

Snow dusted the two monumental panels -- one to the fight against Japanese occupiers, the other to the building of socialism -- that flank the

statues, their faces bathed in the light of the rising sun as small children swept the steps clean.

In pride of place before the bronze effigies stood a large floral tribute emblazoned with the name of Kim Jong Un, who is due to hold his second summit with US President Donald Trump at the end of the month.

Pyongyang is under multiple international sanctions over its pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, which Washington is pressing it to give up. North Korea has rejected demands for what it calls its "unilateral" disarmament.

At the statues, groups ranging from couples and families to hundreds-strong detachments of workers or soldiers assembled turn by turn in front of the images.

After placing individual blooms or flower baskets before the figures, they lined up as an announcer intoned: "Let us pay tribute", and bowed deeply, the military personnel saluting.

Kim Jong Il died in 2011 and his remains are preserved in a palatial mausoleum on the outskirts of Pyongyang, but officially he remains Eternal General Secretary of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea.

Retired actress Ri Cho Ok, 77, instantly became emotional when asked about the late leader, her voice trembling as she described how much she missed him and how standing before the statues brought the incumbent to mind.

Kim Jong Il was a film director himself and renowned cinephile, to the extent he had a top South Korean director and actress kidnapped so they could develop the North's cinema industry. Pyongyang says their eight-year stay was voluntary.

"The great general taught me step-by-step as I was becoming an actress," Ri said, "and gave me many orders and medals."

But, she added, "it was like I received all the honours in the world when I met him".

## 'YELLOW VEST' PROTESTS

# French city to mark three months

AFP, Paris

Demonstrators are to hit French city streets again Saturday, marking three months of "yellow vest" protests as a poll now suggests that most of the country wants them to stop.

The number of those attending the weekly rallies has dropped since 287,000 turned out on November 17, the first Saturday of protest.

And for the first time, a poll found Wednesday that more than half those questioned felt it was time to end the protests.

On February 9, the 13th weekend of anti-government actions, 51,000 people took to the streets according to police, though protest organisers put the figure at 118,000.

Violence has marred nearly every large-scale rally.

In Paris, where 4,000 gathered last week, clashes broke out outside the National Assembly building where one demonstrator lost a hand, reportedly as he tried to bat away a stun grenade.

Masked activists tried to break down barriers protecting the parliament but were repelled by police firing tear gas and grenades.

As the march continued, vandals burned rubbish bins and cars and smashed bus shelters, cash machines and shop windows along the route.

One of the torched vehicles belonged to Sentinelle, an anti-terrorism unit. Interior Minister Christophe Castaner expressed his "indignation and disgust" in a tweet.

Some 550 shops have been damaged by protesters in the capital since mid-November.

Thousands of protesters also turned out in the southern cities of Marseille, Montpellier, Bordeaux and Toulouse -- strongholds of the movement -- as well as several cities in the north and west of France.

The "yellow vest" movement started as a protest against rising fuel taxes, but it has become one of opposition to President Emmanuel Macron's policies.

Speaking at a meeting with local mayors on Thursday, Macron said it was time for a "return to reason", adding that authorities would act with "greater firmness" against violent demonstrators.

The interior ministry said 1,796 people have been sentenced for rioting or other acts of violence over the past three months, while 1,422 more are awaiting trial.

Ex-boxer Christophe Dettinger who became a hero to some protesters after beating up police officers during a demonstration in January was convicted Wednesday and given a one-year prison term.

An Elabe opinion poll published Wednesday said 56 percent of French

people now wanted the protests to stop -- 11 points higher than a month ago.

And while 58 percent of people still backed or had sympathy for the protesters, that was five points lower than two weeks ago and nine points below the level in early January.

Two out of three people thought the recurring Saturday rallies were no longer in keeping with what "yellow vests" originally stood for.

Macron has pledged 10 billion euros (\$11.2 billion) in response to anger over the high cost of living, including tax cuts for some pensioners and measures to boost low wages.

He has also spearheaded a "grand national debate" by way of the internet and town hall meetings to gather opinions on how the country could be reformed.

It was not known how many people might turn out for protests over the weekend as social media messaging has alternatively called for blocking the Arc de Triomphe monument in Paris Saturday, or marching down the Champs-Elysees avenue on Sunday.

Others suggested "yellow vests" should return to their original tactics of massing at roundabouts nationwide and blocking traffic.

## Tunisian workers kidnapped in Libya

AFP, Tunis

Militiamen have kidnapped a group of Tunisian workers near the Libyan capital Tripoli, demanding Tunis release a comrade, the foreign ministry and a rights activist said.

"The foreign ministry is following the case of the Tunisian citizens... kidnapped by armed Libyan elements near Zawiya", the ministry said on its Facebook page late Friday.

Rights activist Mustapha Abdelkebir said the armed group behind Thursday's kidnappings was demanding the release of one of its members held in Tunisia.

The kidnap victims were workers at Zawiya oil refinery, Tunisian media said. A diplomatic source told AFP that 14 workers had been taken hostage.

"The minister has spoken to his Libyan counterpart to insist on the protection of the detainees, accelerate their release and ensure that they return safe and sound", the ministry said in a statement.

Tunisia reopened a consulate in Libya in 2018, after shutting it three years earlier due to the kidnapping of 10 Tunisian diplomats.

## US backs India's

FROM PAGE 16

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has faced calls for retribution from Indians on social media as well hard-line groups demonstrating in the streets, said on Saturday he had given a free hand to the military to respond to acts of violence.

"The country understands the anger simmering within the soldiers," he said at a political rally in western Maharashtra state.

Modi's Hindu nationalist ruling group faces a tough general election in April-May.

India and Pakistan have twice gone to war over Kashmir since their independence from Britain in 1947. In 2001, an attack on its parliament building prompted New Delhi to mobilise the military along the border with Pakistan in a standoff that lasted a year.

On Friday, India withdrew trade

privileges to Pakistan in what it said was the first step to isolate Pakistan for not acting against Islamist militants operating from its soil.

As the bodies of the policemen who died in the car bomb reached their homes in small towns across India, crowds waving the Indian flag gathered in the streets to honour them and demand revenge.

Others held flowers as they walked behind the coffins in the towns of Jabalpur, Varanasi and Moga, television showed.

Tens of thousands of troops, paramilitary police and state police are deployed across scenic Kashmir to quell the nearly 30-year revolt there, India's only Muslim-majority region.

In Jammu, the winter capital of Jammu and Kashmir, authorities imposed a curfew for a second day after mobs attacked vehicles and pelted stones at the homes of