

Kashmir observes self-imposed strike

Shopkeepers refuse to open despite India easing some curbs; Amnesty urges Delhi to remove restrictions

A month after India withdrew contested Kashmir's autonomy, locked it down with thousands of additional troops and made mass arrests, residents are resisting attempts by authorities to show some signs of normalcy returning in the Muslim-majority valley. Prime Minister Narendra Modi revoked special rights for Jammu and Kashmir state on August 5, striking down long-standing constitutional provisions for the Himalayan region, which is also claimed by neighbouring Pakistan. To dampen the possibility of widespread protests, India flooded Kashmir - already one of the world's most militarised zones - with troops, imposed severe restrictions on movements, and cut all telephone, mobile phone and internet connections. Thousands of people were arrested. New Delhi has since eased some of the curbs although no prominent detainees have been freed and mobile and internet connections remain suspended.

SELF-IMPOSED STRIKE

In previous phases of protests in Kashmir, separatist groups would issue official calls for shutdowns and protests. This time, however, separatist leaders - who either want independence for Kashmir, or support joining Pakistan - have been detained alongside mainstream politicians, including three former chief ministers and hundreds of other civil society leaders. In posters across Srinagar, which began appearing in late August, shopkeepers have been asked to only open late in the evenings and early in the mornings to enable residents to buy essentials. In the commercial areas of downtown Srinagar, the majority of shops remain shuttered. Rohit Kansal, the official spokesman of the Jammu and Kashmir state government, blamed "anti-national" forces for preventing shops from opening.



SCHOOLS, GOVT SHUTDOWN

Attendance in major government offices in Srinagar is about 50% and those in smaller, subordinate offices in the city is substantially lower, a state government official said, declining to be named as he was not authorised to speak to the media. At an office of the state housing and urban development department in western Srinagar, only 30 out of about 300 staff were in attendance on most days, another official said. Government workers employed to tend Srinagar's famous Dal Lake have not turned up for work in several weeks, officials said, and the water's surface has become clogged with weeds. Many schools are empty.

RESTRICTIONS REMAIN

The shutdown and restrictions are having an impact across all areas of society. Yesterday, rights group Amnesty International launched a campaign urging New Delhi to lift the communications blockade. "It has grossly impacted the daily lives of Kashmiri people, their emotional and mental well-being, medical care, as well as their access to basic necessities and emergency services. It is tearing families apart," said Aakar Patel, head of Amnesty International India. With tourists avoiding the region, hotel owners say occupancy rates are close to zero. Srinagar's historic Jamia Masjid mosque has been closed for a month. Kashmir's postal service is heavily disrupted, and online retailers, including Amazon, say their operations in Jammu and Kashmir remain suspended. Pharmacists say there are shortages of some drugs because of logistical problems, particularly thyroid, diabetes, anti-depressant and cancer drugs. SOURCE: REUTERS



People fly the flags of the UAE and south Yemen (C) as Yemenis from the country's south gather ahead of a demonstration in support of the UAE called for by the Southern Transitional Council (STC) which seeks independence for south Yemen, at al-Maala square in the centre of the second city of Aden yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

China backs extradition bill withdrawal: HK leader

Urges protesters to end their demonstrations

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said yesterday that China "understands, respects and supports" her government's move to formally withdraw an extradition bill, part of measures she hoped would help the city "move forward" from months of unrest.

In a press conference, Lam was repeatedly questioned on why it took her so long to withdraw the bill that would have allowed extraditions to mainland China despite increasingly violent protests, but she skirted the questions.

"It is not exactly correct to describe this as a change of mind," she said.

She added that full withdrawal of the bill was a decision made by her government with Beijing's backing.

"Throughout the whole process, the Central People's Government took the position that they understood why we have to do it. They respect my view, and they support me all the way," said Lam, dressed in a cream suit and looking less

tense than a televised appearance the day before.

She withdrew the bill, which has plunged the Chinese territory into its worst political crisis in decades, on Wednesday. Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index surged more than 4% to a one-month high ahead of the announcement.

Lam also announced other measures including opening a platform for dialogue with society to try to address other deep-rooted economic, social and political problems.

"We must find ways to address the discontent in society and look for solutions," she said.

The withdrawal of the bill was one of the pro-democracy protesters' five demands, although many demonstrators and lawmakers said the move was too little, too late.

Demonstrators were still calling for all demands to be met, with many placing emphasis on the independent inquiry. Lam said yesterday that the independent police complaints council was credible enough to address the probe.



Cut int'l aid staff

N Korea tells UN as its programs fail to bring results due to 'politicization'

REUTERS, United Nations

North Korea has told the United Nations to cut the number of international staff it deploys in the country because the world body's programs have failed "due to the politicization of UN assistance by hostile forces," according to a letter seen by Reuters on Wednesday.

The United Nations estimates 10.3 million people - almost half the country's population - are in need and some 41 percent of North Koreans are undernourished, while Pyongyang said in February it was facing a food shortfall this year and had to halve rations, blaming drought, floods and sanctions.

"UN supported programs failed to bring the results as desired due to the politicization of UN assistance by hostile forces," Kim Chang Min, secretary general for North Korea's National Coordinating Committee for the United Nations, wrote to the top UN official posted in the country.

In the August 21 letter, Kim said the number of international staff should be cut by the end of the year.

North Korea wants the number of international staff with the UN Development Programme to be cut to one or two from six, the World Health Organization to four from six and the UN Children's Fund (Unicef) to cut its 13 staff by one or two.

Kim said the number of international staff with the World Food Programme should be reduced "according to the amount of food aid to be provided" once the agency and North Korean agree how to implement a plan for 2019 to 2021.

Pak moves over 2,000 troops close to LoC

Indian army watching closely: sources

ANI, New Delhi

Amid tensions over the Kashmir issue, Pakistan has moved almost a brigade-size force in the Bagh and Kotli sector close to the Line of Control (LoC) in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

The troops who have been moved are from a peace location and for now have been stationed around 30 kilometres from the Line of Control, Indian Army sources said here.

"At present, they have not been deployed in offensive posturing. However, the Indian Army is closely watching their movements," the sources informed.

The sources further said that the movement of the Pakistan Army troops has come at a time when it has already activated its terrorist infrastructure and the terrorist organisations Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) have started recruiting locals and Afghans in a big way.

It added that the troops moved by the Pakistan Army are close to a brigade-size and

their numbers would be more than 2000.

The Pakistan Army has moved troops closer to the LoC at a time when Islamabad has been trying to fuel terrorism in the Valley.

It has also been attempting to draw international attention and intervention by terming the prevailing situation between the two countries as very tense.

Since the abrogation of Article 370 which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan deployed more than 100 SSG commandos along the LoC to push terrorists and incite violence in the state.

In the retaliatory fire, more than 10 SSG commandos have been killed by the Indian security forces. Pakistan has also deployed its Special Forces along the Sir Creek area opposite Gujarat.

Sources said that Pakistani agencies are also in the process of recruiting Afghan terrorists to carry out action against Indian security forces. Afghans are being recruited probably to replace the Kashmiri terrorists as local commanders.

China hacked iPhones to target Uyghurs

Say US researchers

CNN ONLINE

Hackers associated with the Chinese government compromised websites frequented by ethnic minority Uyghurs earlier this year, programming them to install monitoring implants to spy on the phones of users that visited them, according to researchers.

Some of the sites had the capability to infect both Android phones and iPhones, a source familiar with multiple companies' research on the sites, some of which is not public, confirmed to CNN. It wasn't clear, however, that the sites were capable of hacking both types of phones at the same time.

The findings highlight just how powerful cyberespionage campaigns can be when governments with sufficient resources decide to spy on particular groups by compromising entire categories of websites and indiscriminately hacking the mobile users who access them.

The broad approach of the attacks could easily be repurposed for other groups, like Hong Kong protesters, said Adam Segal, the director of the Digital and Cyberspace Policy program at the Council on Foreign Relations.

"These are all outwardly facing websites, so you would expect that the capacity would be able to do the same to Taiwanese parties or Hong Kong student websites, or any other websites," Segal told CNN.

China has been resoundingly condemned by the international community recently for its treatment of Uyghurs, including putting them under intense, multifaceted surveillance.



Ahmedabad Fire and Emergency services personnel rescue a woman after a residential building collapsed in Ahmedabad yesterday. Two women died after the two-storey building collapsed in the afternoon. BJP's Amraiwadi councillor Baldev Desai said the structure was 100 years old.

PHOTO: AFP

KIDNAPPING RUMOURS

Man killed in mob lynching in India

AFP, New Delhi

Indian police said yesterday that five people had been arrested for lynching a man after accusing him of kidnapping children, the latest in a renewed string of attacks fuelled by malicious rumour-mongering.

Some 150 people have been attacked recently across the country based on false kidnapping reports, some of them shared on WhatsApp, leaving authorities in a fix.

Since August 1, at least nine people have died and 135 others injured in mob attacks, according to figures collated by local media.

Police said in the latest incident a mob set upon the 45-year-old man in eastern Jharkhand state late Tuesday, thrashing him with sticks and shoes.

"The rumour was going around in the village about child lifters roaming in the area. We have arrested five persons in the case," senior local police officer Prabhat Kumar told AFP by telephone.

The attack came on the heels of six persons being thrashed in the same state on Monday.

A pregnant deaf and mute woman was also attacked in New Delhi in late August, with the mob wrongly believing she was involved in kidnapping.

Brazil's Bolsonaro accuses UN rights chief of meddling

Praises Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet

AFP, Brasilia

Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro taunted UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet Wednesday over her father's death under 1970s Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, sparking a new international row after she raised concerns over a spike in killings by police.

Fresh from a spat with French President Emmanuel Macron over his management of wildfires raging in the Amazon, Bolsonaro took aim at Bachelet for allegedly meddling in Brazil's internal affairs by "attacking our courageous civil police and military."

The leftist former Chile president was "following Macron's line," Bolsonaro tweeted, later taunting Bachelet by praising the Pinochet regime, under which both she and her father were tortured.

Bachelet had told a news conference in Geneva that her office was concerned by a hike in killings by police officers and by broader human rights restrictions in Brazil.

She said that in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo alone, "1,291 individuals were killed by the police. It might be police action, but what I want to highlight is there is an increase from 12 to 17 percent compared to the same period last year."

"In recent months, we have seen also a shrinking of civic and democratic space, highlighted by documented attacks against human rights defenders, restrictions on the work of civil society and attacks on educational institutions," Bachelet said.

Bolsonaro's harshest words for Bachelet came later, in comments to reporters outside his Brasilia residence.

Bachelet "is saying that Brazil is losing democratic space, but forgets that her country would be a new Cuba if it wasn't for those who had the courage to curb the left, including her father -- a communist brigadier general -- in 1973."



MEETING WITH MAHATHIR

Modi discusses Zakir Naik's extradition

THE HINDU ONLINE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday sought the extradition of controversial Indian televangelist Zakir Naik, who is wanted in India for fuelling terrorism, when he met Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on the sidelines of the fifth meeting of the Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) held here in the Russian Far East region.

"Prime Minister Modi raised the issue of Zakir Naik's extradition. Both the parties have decided that our officials will stay in contact regarding the matter and it is an important issue for us," Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale said on PM Modi's meeting with Mahathir.

Naik, a 53-year-old radical Islamic preacher, reportedly left India in 2016 and subsequently moved to Malaysia, a Muslim-majority nation, where he was granted permanent residency.

He has been banned from any public activities in the multi-ethnic country after his remarks against Malaysian Hindus and Chinese on August 8.

Modi also discussed with Mahathir the "reorganisation" and the developments related to Jammu and Kashmir. They growing threat of terrorism also figured in their talks.

"PM Mahathir acknowledged that terrorism was a global problem and Malaysia is against any form terrorism," he added.

NEWSIN brief

China built bridge in Arunachal: BJP MP

INDIAN EXPRESS ONLINE

A BJP MP from Arunachal Pradesh on Wednesday said that Chinese soldiers had built a wooden bridge nearly 75 km inside the Indian territory, a claim the Army denied, with Army spokesperson Colonel Aman Anand emphasising that "there has been no such incursion" in the border state. Tapir Gao, the state BJP president, claimed the bridge was built on a stream approximately 25 km from Chaglagam, the administrative circle in Anjaw district, from where the McMahon Line, India's legal border with China, is about 100 km.

Four dead in Mumbai monsoon deluge

AFP, Mumbai

A six-year-old boy was among four people killed after severe flooding hit India's financial hub Mumbai, resulting in dozens of cancelled or delayed flights, officials said yesterday. Mumbai -- home to 20 million people -- has been hit by torrential downpours over the past two months amid the annual monsoon deluge. Non-stop rain over several hours on Wednesday paralysed traffic, halted trains and delayed airport operations at the western city. Residents spoke of being trapped in traffic for several hours amid chaotic scenes.

1 dead, 30 hurt in Tokyo train, truck collision

AFP, Yokohama

An express train travelling at around 120 kilometres per hour smashed into a truck at a crossing south of Tokyo yesterday, sparking a blaze and killing the truck's driver with around 30 others injured. The crash derailed the train's front carriage and pinned the truck to a wall, as it burst into flames, spewing black smoke into the air and its cargo of citrus fruit onto the tracks. The local police confirmed it was the truck driver who was killed.