

Report: India throttling J&K media

AFP, New Delhi

India's government is muzzling Kashmir's media as part of the lockdown it imposed on the disputed region a month ago, according to a new report by two rights networks.

The study comes after Delhi revoked Kashmir's special autonomy on August 5 and sent in tens of thousands of extra troops to reinforce the half a million already there.

Published earlier this week, the study said reporters were being subjected to surveillance, informal investigations and harassment for publishing reports considered adverse to the government or security forces.

Titled "News Behind The Barbed Wire", its findings reveal "a grim and despairing picture of the media in Kashmir, fighting for survival against the most incredible of odds."

It also highlighted that recent editorials in major Kashmir papers covered only harmless topics, such as on the benefits of Vitamin A and "Should you consume caffeine during summer?"

"This is intrinsically undemocratic and harmful, as it privileges the voices of authority and weakens those who speak truth to power," the report said of the situation faced by the media in Kashmir.

Published by the Network of Women in Media, India and the Free Speech Collective, the report was prepared by two journalists who spent five days in Indian Kashmir and spoke to more than 70 journalists, local administration officials and citizens.

The Indian government insists the situation is calm and normal and that the curbs are being eased gradually.

Since August 5, at least 500 protests and incidents of stone throwing have occurred and some 4,000 people have been detained, according to multiple sources. Five civilians have also died, the army said this week, blaming the deaths on stone-pelters and militants.



This aerial photo taken on Thursday shows the extent of destruction by Hurricane Dorian in Abaco Island and Marsh Harbour, Bahamas. PHOTO: AFP

Pak can't remain oblivious

PM steps up rhetoric over Kashmir; frustration mounts in J&K as calls not going through after land phones restored

AGENCIES

Pakistan will make the fullest possible response to India's actions in disputed Kashmir and the global community would be responsible for any "catastrophic" aftermath, Imran Khan, the prime minister of the Muslim-majority nation, said yesterday.

The rhetoric on the annual Defence Day remembrance of Pakistan's fighters in a 1965 war with India underscores rising tension between the nuclear-armed foes after New Delhi last month revoked the autonomy of its part of disputed Kashmir.

"I have informed the world that Pakistan does not want war, but at the same time, Pakistan cannot remain oblivious to the challenges posed to its security and integrity," Khan said in a statement on the website of state-run Radio Pakistan.

"We are prepared to give the enemy the fullest possible response. Failing, the world community will be responsible for the catastrophic aftermath," he added.

This week Khan had said war between the South Asian neighbours was a risk, but Pakistan would not act first, reported Reuters. Pakistan will never abandon Kashmir, army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa told a defence function in the city of Rawalpindi.



India flooded the Kashmir valley with troops and restricted movements as Prime Minister Narendra Modi withdrew special rights for Kashmir on August 5.

Meanwhile, the government in Kashmir said landline telephone service had been restored a month into a near-total communications blackout and security lockdown was imposed.

On Thursday, people lined up at offices or homes that have landline telephones to try to contact family and friends after the long wait, but many were unable to get through after repeated attempts.

"Our landlines have been restored but we are still unable to talk to people. It is frustrating. I have been trying to call people since morning, but I am not getting through," said Syed Musahid in Srinagar.

Many Kashmiris living outside the region also said they were having trouble getting in touch with their families inside occupied Kashmir, reported AP.

"I kept trying a hundred times to reach my family in Kashmir, and only then did my call go through," said Bint-e-Ali, a Kashmiri in Bengaluru.

She said she still hasn't been able to talk to her ailing grandmother in Srinagar.

DEVASTATION FROM HURRICANE DORIAN

Bahamas fears 'staggering' toll

N Carolina braces for impact

AFP, Charleston/Marsh Harbour

The final death toll from Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas could be "staggering," a government minister has said as the storm lashed North Carolina in the US Friday with torrential rain and fierce wind.

Bahamian Prime Minister Hubert Minnis told CNN Thursday that at least 30 people were killed in the storm, which caused what he called "generational devastation."

An AFP team in the town of Marsh Harbour on Great Abaco on Thursday saw scenes of catastrophic damage with homes reduced to matchsticks, overturned cars, fields of jumbled debris, widespread flooding and beached boats.

Dorian was a Category 5 hurricane -- the highest on the five-level wind scale -- when it slammed into the northern Bahamas on Sunday, leaving a trail of immense destruction.

Thousands have been left homeless, while the United Nations said 70,000 were in immediate need of aid.

The Miami-based National Hurricane Center (NHC) on Friday downgraded Dorian to a Category 1 storm as it whipped the Outer Banks -- finger-like barrier islands off the coast of North Carolina. It warned of life-threatening storm surges and dangerous winds, and said some areas have been hit with flash flooding.

It warned that although weakening, Dorian was still packing winds of 9150 kilometers per hour, with some areas of the Carolina coast forecast to get between six and 12 inches of rain.

Hong Kong erupts again

Cops fire rubber bullets, tear gas as protesters say withdrawal of extradition bill 'too little, too late'

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Hong Kong police fired rubber bullets, tear gas and pepper spray on Friday to clear protesters outside a subway station on the densely populated Kowloon peninsula, the latest clash in 14 weeks of sometimes violent anti-government demonstrations.

Hundreds of protesters, many of them masked and dressed in black, took cover behind umbrellas and barricades made from street fencing. Some had broken through a metal grill to enter the station where they pulled down signs and daubed graffiti on the walls.

"We're angry at the police and angry at the government," said Justin, 23, dressed in black and wearing a hoodie. "Police was very brutal with us at this station. We cannot let them get away with it."

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam announced measures this week to try to restore order in the Chinese-ruled city, including the formal withdrawal of a bill that triggered the demonstrations. The law would have allowed extraditions to



mainland China, despite the city having an independent judiciary dating back to British colonial rule.

But the demonstrations, which began in June, had long since morphed into a broader calls for more democracy and many protesters have pledged to fight on, calling Lam's concessions too little, too late.

Apart from pulling the bill, she announced three other measures to help ease the crisis, including a dialogue with the people.

Meanwhile, visiting German Chancellor Angela Merkel raised the issue of Hong Kong with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in Beijing, saying a peaceful solution was needed.

"I stressed that the rights and freedoms for (Hong Kong) citizens have to be granted," Merkel said.

Hong Kong returned to China in 1997 under the "one country, two systems" formula which guarantees freedoms not enjoyed on the mainland. Many Hong Kong residents fear Beijing is eroding that autonomy.

North Korea pursues nuclear programme: UN

North Korea is pressing ahead with its nuclear weapons programme while evading sanctions, a United Nations report said, following a series of recent test-launches that have been downplayed by US President Donald Trump. The reclusive regime has declared a moratorium on nuclear blasts and long-range missile launches, and last year said its Punggye-ri atomic bomb test site would be dismantled as it was no longer needed. But the report by a panel of experts, published Thursday, said that despite these moves, Pyongyang's development of nuclear warheads had not stopped. The UN panel said Pyongyang had breached an annual cap of 500,000 barrels of refined petroleum through "unabated" ship-to-ship transfers in the first four months of this year.

US states announce antitrust probe of Facebook

A coalition of US state officials yesterday announced that they had launched an antitrust investigation of Facebook to determine if the social media giant "has stifled competition and put users at risk." New York state Attorney General Letitia James released a statement announcing the action on behalf of seven other states and the District of Columbia. The move marks the first official US antitrust action against one of the so-called Big Tech companies -- although a landmark case had targeted Microsoft back in the 1990s. Joining the action were attorneys general of Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, according to James.

French first lady is 'truly ugly,' says Brazil minister



A Brazilian government minister yesterday said French first lady Brigitte Macron was "truly ugly," only days after the country's president appeared to endorse an attack on her appearance. Brazil's economy minister Paulo Guedes said he agreed with President Jair Bolsonaro's comments about Macron's looks. "The president said it's true," he said to applause during an economic forum. "The woman is truly ugly." Bolsonaro garnered criticism last week when he appeared to agree with a Facebook post that implied French President Emmanuel Macron's wife was not as attractive as his own wife, Michele Bolsonaro. He wrote "Do not humiliate the guy, ha ha" on a post that read "Now you understand why Macron is persecuting Bolsonaro" next to pictures of the two first ladies. The French president called Bolsonaro's behavior "extraordinarily rude" and the Brazilian president later deleted his comment.

Taliban launch assault on Afghan provincial capital

AFP, Herat

The Taliban yesterday launched an offensive against a key city in western Afghanistan, officials said, the latest in a surge of attacks as the US pushes for a deal that would allow it to begin withdrawing troops.

The fighting started early in the morning when insurgents briefly seized an Afghan army recruitment centre in Farah city, the capital of Farah province.

Afghan forces, with US support, were able to push the fighters back a few hours later, Farah police spokesman Mohibullah Mohib said.

"Helicopters with the cooperation of (US) troops have launched air strikes and bombarded the Taliban positions in Farah city," he told AFP.

"The Taliban have been pushed back from the city but fighting is ongoing on the outskirts."

He said 10 Taliban fighters had been killed, along with one paramilitary Afghan police officer.



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (L) is shown around by farmer Peter Watson (R) at Darnford Farm in Banchory near Aberdeen in Scotland, yesterday. Boris Johnson was in Scotland yesterday in campaign mode despite failing to call an early election after MPs this week thwarted his hardline Brexit strategy. PHOTO: AFP

MUGABE: FROM LIBERATOR TO OPPRESSOR

It is difficult to resolve the contradictions in the career of independent Zimbabwe's first leader, Robert Mugabe, who has died aged 95.

A man of action, socialist, pragmatist, and freedom fighter, he came to the forefront of the liberation struggle through being in touch with the people and the frontline guerrillas, but also through being able to outwit and outflank his rivals.

When he swept to power amidst a wave of euphoria in the 1980 elections, it should have been the start of a new era. Besides the goodwill of the liberated people of Zimbabwe, Mugabe had inherited one of the most stable and successful economies in Africa.

In a better world he could have been Zimbabwe's Nelson Mandela. He had intelligence and a shrewd political instinct.

But Mugabe, never a democrat, stayed too long in power, lost the common touch and failed to respond to the profound political changes brought about in southern Africa by the end of the Cold War and the transition to black majority rule in South Africa.

By the end of his career, Mugabe was isolated from Zimbabweans and from fellow African heads of state. His government was reviled for its corruption, incompetence, economic mismanagement and political repression.

Zimbabwe itself was teetering on the verge of economic collapse and civil conflict. He will not be missed.

Born on Feb 21, 1924, on a Roman Catholic mission near Harare, Mugabe was educated by Jesuit priests and worked as a primary school teacher before going to South Africa's University of Fort Hare, then a breeding ground for African nationalism. He got in touch with Marxism there and met many influential leaders of

African liberation movements. Returning to then-Rhodesia in 1960, he entered politics but was jailed for a decade four years later for opposing white rule. When his infant son died of malaria in Ghana in 1966, Mugabe was denied parole to attend the funeral, a decision by the government of white-minority leader Ian Smith that historians say played a part in explaining Mugabe's subsequent bitterness.

After his release, he rose to the top of the powerful Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army, known as the "thinking man's guerrilla" on account of his seven degrees, three of them earned behind bars.

Mugabe played a pivotal role in Zimbabwe's liberation and led the major faction of the war against white rule.

After the war ended in 1980, Mugabe was elected the nation's first black prime minister.

Initially, Mugabe offered forgiveness and reconciliation to old foreign and domestic adversaries, including Smith, who remained on his farm and continued to receive a government pension.

In his early years, he presided over a booming economy, spending money on roads and dams and expanding schooling

for black Zimbabweans as part of a wholesale dismantling of the racial discrimination of colonial days.

But it was not long before Mugabe began to suppress challengers. His history as a ruler is full of oppression, shrewd and brutal political moves and even genocide. As his rule extended, with the scale of oppression, Zimbabwe suffered dearly. Inflation reached sky high, oppression made people, who regarded him once as the liberator, despise his rule, foreign sanctions crippled economy which only worsened the situation. Nearly four decades later, many at home and abroad denounced him as a power-obsessed autocrat willing to unleash death squads, rig elections and trash the economy in the relentless pursuit of control.

Mugabe was ultimately ousted by his own armed forces in November 2017. Celebrations erupted spontaneously throughout the country.

If a lesson can be drawn from the life of Mugabe, it is that Africa needs more democracy.

It is not only bad for the governed when their popular heroes stay in power too long, it is also bad for the heroes themselves. They end up losing their dignity and their reputation.

Had he, like Mandela, engineered his own retirement and a smooth transition of power after, say, 10 years in office, he would not only have done Zimbabweans a favour, he would have done himself a favour.

And he would now be remembered for his achievements as the leader of the struggle for black majority rule, rather than for the many spectacular failures of his last years in office.

SOURCE: INDEPENDENT, REUTERS



Mugabe played a pivotal role in Zimbabwe's liberation and led the major faction of the war against white rule.

After the war ended in 1980, Mugabe was elected the nation's first black prime minister.

Initially, Mugabe offered forgiveness and reconciliation to old foreign and domestic adversaries, including Smith, who remained on his farm and continued to receive a government pension.

In his early years, he presided over a booming economy, spending money on roads and dams and expanding schooling

SOURCE: AFP