

NEWSIN
brief

Albania earthquake
death toll hits 40

AFP, Durrës

The death toll from the most powerful earthquake to strike Albania in decades rose to 40 yesterday after more bodies were pulled from the wreckage overnight in a tragedy that has wiped out whole families. The 6.4 magnitude earthquake rocked the Balkan state while people were sleeping just before 4:00 am on Tuesday, razing buildings and trapping victims beneath the debris in towns near the Adriatic coast.

Indian govt extends
ban on ULFA for 5 yrs

PTI, New Delhi

The Centre has extended the ban on the Assam-based insurgent outfit ULFA for five years for continuing subversive activities, including killings, kidnapping and extortions. In a notification, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) yesterday said the ULFA has been indulging in various illegal and violent activities intended to disrupt the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India in furtherance of its objective of liberating Assam.

Two Turkish soldiers
killed on Syria border

AFP, Istanbul

Two Turkish soldiers died when a mortar hit their post on the Syrian border, the defence ministry said yesterday. "Two of our fellow comrades were martyred by a mortar attack" in Akcakale town, Sanliurfa province, on Wednesday, the ministry said in a statement. It did not specify if the attack came from Syrian territory, but said Turkish forces responded with intense artillery fire. Akcakale lies adjacent to areas that were targeted in Turkey's offensive against Kurdish militants.



Palestinians check the house of a man who reportedly carried out an attack against Israelis in August, after it was demolished by Israeli authorities yesterday, in the village of Beit Kahel near the West Bank town of Hebron.

PHOTO: AFP

BJP's arrogance rejected

Says Mamata after her party's by-polls victory

NDTV ONLINE

Trinamool Congress won all the three seats in the by-elections to three assembly seats in West Bengal yesterday. Trinamool supremo and Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee described it as a victory of the people and added that it was also a victory for development.

"The BJP's arrogance has cost them," she said.

The Chief Minister, who has been fighting to retain her grip on Bengal with an aggressive BJP chipping away at her strongholds, said the BJP's constant talk of the NRC or National Register for Citizens to weed out illegal migrants had cost it.

"So much arrogance and pride is not good. The BJP is too arrogant and proud. Sometimes they are saying NRC, sometimes they are saying they will evict people and then give citizenship rights," Mamata Banerjee said to a TV channel.

"This result's message is clear, people are saying goodbye to BJP. BJP should go back," she said.

The by-polls were held on Monday in Kharagpur Sadar, Karimpur and Kaliaganj assembly constituencies. In all three, the Trinamool and the BJP were locked in a tough fight.

The Karimpur seat was vacated by Mahua Moitra when

she contested and won the parliamentary election in May.

There was a huge outcry when the BJP's Karimpur candidate, Jay Prakash Majumdar, was heckled, assaulted and kicked into bushes by the side of the road by Trinamool supporters during polling. Trinamool's Bimalendu Sinha Roy humbled his nearest rival Majumdar by 23,650 votes.

But more significant is the Trinamool's victory in Kaliaganj and Kharagpur Sadar, where the party has never won before.

"Today's spectacular victory in the Assembly bypolls proves that the people of Bengal are with us... For the first time in 22 years, since the formation of Trinamool Congress, we have won the Kaliaganj and Kharagpur Assembly seats," Banerjee wrote on Twitter. Kaliaganj had always been a Congress domain. The seat fell vacant after MLA Pramatha Nath Ray died earlier this year.

In early leads, the BJP's Kamal Chandra Sarkar was ahead. But the Trinamool candidate, Tapan Deb Singha, overtook him and won by a narrow margin of over 2,000 votes.

The Kharagpur Sadar victory is also sweet for the Trinamool as BJP's Bengal chief Dilip Ghosh was an MLA from the seat and he had swept the Kharagpur parliamentary seat. This was a Congress stronghold before the BJP's rise.

BJP's talk of NRC to weed out
illegal migrants had
cost it: Mamata

Trinamool and BJP were
locked in a tough fight in
all three seats



Envoy's 'GOOD LUCK' to
Myanmar was a mistake

Says Israel on Rohingya genocide case

REUTERS, Jerusalem

The Israeli ambassador was mistaken to have sent a "GOOD LUCK" message to Myanmar ahead of World Court hearings on accusations the state committed genocide against Rohingya Muslims, Israel's foreign ministry said yesterday.

Israel's Haaretz newspaper reported that the ambassador to Myanmar wished authorities good luck in tweets that have since been deleted ahead of the hearings next month at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague.

"The ambassador's tweet was a mistake and was immediately amended," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

"Israel forthrightly condemns the atrocities perpetrated against the Rohingya in the Rakhine region. Israel voted, a week ago, in favour of a U.N. resolution condemning the atrocities."

More than 730,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled to neighbouring Bangladesh since a 2017 crackdown by Myanmar's military,

which U.N. investigators say was carried out with "genocidal intent". Buddhist majority Myanmar denies accusations of genocide.

Myanmar's de facto leader, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, will lead a delegation to defend against accusations brought at the ICJ by Gambia, which has the backing of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

Ronen Gilor, Israel's ambassador to Myanmar, had tweeted "Encouragement for a good verdict and good luck!" in one post, Haaretz reported with a screengrab of the since deleted tweet.

Another tweet said: "State Counsellor going to respond for Myanmar in the ICJ! GOOD LUCK!"

Western countries have widely condemned Myanmar's actions in Rakhine state while China has offered support for what it terms Myanmar's efforts to preserve domestic stability.

Myanmar is facing a wave of international pressure from courts across the world, and other cases involve individual criminal responsibility.



Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa (C) arrives at the Indra Gandhi International airport in New Delhi yesterday. Gotabaya will hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi to deepen strategic bilateral ties.

PHOTO: AFP

Foreigners' Tribunals creating
'havoc' in Assam: Amnesty

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Amnesty has accused Indian authorities and courts of lack of oversight on the functioning of Foreigners Tribunals' courts that have been accused of creating "havoc" in the northeastern state of Assam, where nearly two million people were excluded from a citizenship list in August.

"For the last 15 years, Foreigners' Tribunals have wreaked havoc in Assam by arbitrarily denying people their citizenship. They have not been held accountable by the courts, the Government of India and the Government of Assam," Amnesty International India said on Wednesday in a report titled Designed to Exclude.

The report alleges that the Foreigners' Tribunals, quasi-judicial courts that decide the citizenship of people, are "riddled with bias" and work in "arbitrary ways".

"Holding governments accountable for the human rights abuses they commit has always been difficult. However, in this case, it is the judiciary that has aided

the government institutions and Foreigners' Tribunals in committing abuses with impunity," said Aakar Patel, Head of Amnesty International India, in a statement.

On August 31, the National Register of Citizens (NRC) - a Supreme Court-monitored bureaucratic citizenship exercise - excluded 1.9 million people from its final citizenship list in Assam.

Activists have criticised the NRC for anomalies and procedural flaws, with many cases where genuine Indian citizens, including former government officials, were excluded.

Those excluded from the NRC list have been given 120 days to appeal in the Foreigners' Tribunals. They can file cases in the High Court and the Supreme Court for redress.

An analysis of the affidavit filed by the Government of Assam in the Gauhati High Court, according to Amnesty International India, shows that on an average, a Foreigners' Tribunals member who declared people were foreigners in fewer than 10 percent of their disposed cases, stood the risk of being axed.



Anger over India's envoy
calling for 'Israel model'

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

A senior Indian diplomat has triggered a controversy by calling for the adoption of an "Israeli model" in Indian-administered Kashmir, which is reeling under a crippling military lockdown and internet blackout for nearly four months now.

An hour-long video featuring Sandeep Chakravorty, India's consul general in New York, has gone viral on social media, in which he is addressing a group of Kashmiri Hindus - known as Pandits - at a private event in the US city last week.

"I believe the security situation will improve, it will allow the refugees to go back, and in your lifetime, you will be able to go back ... and you will be able to find security, because we already have a model in the world," said Chakravorty, referring to the exodus of tens of thousands of Kashmiri Hindus in 1989 after an armed rebellion against the Indian rule started in

the Himalayan region.

"I don't know why we don't follow it. It has happened in the Middle East. If the Israeli people can do it, we can also do it," he said, adding that the current Indian leadership is "determined" to do so.

"The video was chilling," Mona Bhan, associate professor of anthropology at Syracuse University in the United States, told Al Jazeera.

"It tries to recreate an idyllic home for Kashmiri Pandits based on ugly and violent exclusions."

Bhan, herself a Kashmiri Pandit, said the narratives about her community's suffering have been "instrumentalised as a justification" for the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A.

"It will, unfortunately, mean that if Pandits do return at all, they will return as settlers. There can be no justification for an ethical return that does not affirm and acknowledge Kashmir's plural cultures and histories," she said.

THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY IN US

N Korea fires two
projectiles: Seoul

AFP, Seoul

North Korea fired two "unidentified projectiles" yesterday -- the Thanksgiving holiday in the US -- Seoul said, as nuclear talks between Pyongyang and Washington remain deadlocked.

The projectiles were fired eastwards from South Hamgyong province and came down in the Sea of Japan, also known as the East Sea, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said.

They added that the launch, the latest in a series by Pyongyang, was carried out at 16:59 pm local time (0859 GMT) -- or the early hours on the east coast of the United States, during one of the country's biggest annual holidays.

It was also one day short of the two-year anniversary of the North's first test of its Hwasong-15 intercontinental ballistic missile, which analysts say is capable of reaching the entire US mainland.

Pyongyang is banned from firing ballistic missiles under UN Security Council resolutions, and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said that yesterday's launch was the latest in a series of violations.

"North Korea's repeated launches of ballistic missiles are a serious defiance to not only our country but also the international community," he told reporters in Tokyo.

Yesterday's launch came after Pyongyang fired what it called a "super-large multiple rocket launcher" system last month, and the JCS said the latest devices were presumed to be of a similar type.

They flew 380 kilometres and reached a maximum altitude of 97 kilometres, the JCS added.

Pak SC grants army chief
six more months in power

Imran Khan welcomes court's decision

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's Supreme Court gave the country's army chief a reprieve yesterday, allowing him to hold on to power for at least six more months after a days-long legal battle posed unprecedented questions about the nuclear-armed nation's most powerful institution.

General Qamar Javed Bajwa has served three years in his role, arguably the highest authority in the country, and in August Prime Minister Imran Khan asked him to extend his tenure and serve another three.

The request is not unusual. The Pakistani military has long played an outsized role in national life, ruling the country for roughly half its 72-year history, while many army chiefs have gone well beyond their mandated term.

This time, however, the Supreme Court has raised questions about the legality of the decision, in an unexpected move that has shocked the South Asian nation long accustomed to seeing the military get its way.

Yesterday, hours ahead of the midnight deadline for Bajwa's term to expire, the court said it was granting him a conditional extension of six months, giving parliament time to clarify the constitutional guidelines under which an army chief's tenure could be prolonged.

"Considering that the (army chief) is responsible for the command, discipline, training, administration, organisation and preparedness for war of the army ... we, while exercising restraint, find it appropriate to leave the matter to the parliament," Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khosa told the court. Khan celebrated the



court's decision.

"Today must be a great disappointment to those who expected the country to be destabilised by a clash of institutions," the prime minister tweeted moments after the ruling.

But the episode has damaged Khan's administration, which is seen as close to Bajwa.

GANDHI KILLER REMARK

BJP MP sacked
from defence
panel

PTI, New Delhi

Cracking the whip on MP Pragya Thakur over her remarks on Nathuram Godse in Lok Sabha, the BJP yesterday barred her from attending its parliamentary party meeting in the ongoing Parliament session and removed her from the consultative committee on defence.

BJP working president J P Nadda announced the disciplinary action against her and condemned the controversial Hindutva leader's remarks in a bid to defuse the political crisis triggered by her remarks in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

Nadda also said that Thakur will be removed from the consultative committee on defence, to which she was recently appointed.

"The statement given by MP Pragya Thakur is condemnable. BJP never supports such statement and we do not support this ideology. We have decided that Thakur will not attend meetings of BJP parliamentary party during the session," he told reporters.

Thakur created a controversy on Wednesday with her remark in the Lower House during DMK member A Raja's narration of a statement by Nathuram Godse before a court on why he killed Mahatma Gandhi.

However, after opposition members protested against Thakur's remarks, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said only the DMK leader's speech during the discussion on the Special Protection Group (Amendment) Bill will go on record.

Opposition parties attacked the government, particularly Prime Minister Narendra Modi, alleging that the PM's "inaction" against her proves his latent support to "Godse's sinister thought".