

NEWSIN
brief

10 dead in massacre
in eastern DR Congo

AFP, Beni

Ten people were killed overnight Sunday in eastern DR Congo, where massacres of civilians by a rebel group have sparked protests against UN peacekeepers, local officials said. Ten civilians were killed in the village of Kamango, a day after 22 were murdered in Ntombi, Donat Kibuana, administrator for the territory of Beni, told AFP yesterday. "The 22 who were killed in Ntombi had not even been buried when other civilians were killed, in Kamango," he said. "Ten bodies have been brought to the morgue so far."

Talks with Saudi break
'stalemate': Qatar FM

AFP, Doha

Qatar's foreign minister has voiced optimism over ending a bitter rift with Riyadh, saying early talks broke a "stalemate" but stressed Doha's unwillingness to downgrade ties with Turkey as a pre-condition. Saudi Arabia along with its allies the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt cut all diplomatic and transport ties with Qatar in June 2017. The four nations accused Doha of backing radical Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood, and seeking closer ties with Saudi arch rival Tehran -- allegations Qatar vehemently denies.

Cars torched near US
embassy in Athens

AFP, Athens

Seven cars were burned near the US embassy in Athens yesterday, state agency ANA said. Nobody was hurt. The pre-dawn arson attack is consistent with prior far-left acts. Police found an empty plastic bottle on the scene, a few blocks behind the embassy, ANA said. Greek far-left and anarchist groups often carry out arson attacks against foreign embassies and business targets in the country.



(Clockwise from left) Students and activists shout slogans and hold placards during a protest against the Indian government's Citizenship Amendment ACT (CAA) at the University Campus of Mumbai yesterday. Supporters of All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) hold placards during a protest against CAA and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Siliguri. Members of Student Federation of India (SFI) display placards during the protest against CAA in Chennai yesterday.



PHOTO:
AFP

'Dismiss my government'

Mamata dares Centre over citizenship law during mega protest rally in Kolkata, says no one will be ousted from the state

NDTV ONLINE

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee led a massive protest march against the citizenship law in the heart of Kolkata yesterday and dared the centre to dismiss her government, declaring that the law could be enforced in her state "only over her dead body".

Hundreds of her party leaders and supporters walked with her carrying posters and flags against the controversial law in the first of several protests over the next three days.

"As long as I am alive, I will never implement the citizenship law or NRC in the state. You can very well dismiss my government or put me behind bars but I will never implement this black law. We will continue to protest democratically till this law is scrapped. If they want to implement it in Bengal they will have to do it over my dead body," Mamata Banerjee said.

"They thought Mamata is alone. But now so many are with us. If your cause is right, people will come. Remember ekla chalo re," said the chief minister, 64, on a stage put up

near Jorasanko, home to Rabindranath Tagore's ancestral home in Kolkata.

This was not a fight based on religion, she said, but a fight for what is right.

Mamata's march from a statue of BR Ambedkar on Red Road to Jorasanko was dubbed unconstitutional by Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar, whose ties with the Chief Minister over the past few months have been tense and acrimonious.

"I am extremely anguished that CM (chief minister) and Ministers are to spearhead rally against CAA, the law of the land. This is unconstitutional. I call upon CM to desist from this unconstitutional and inflammatory act at this juncture and devote to

retrieve the grim situation," the Governor tweeted.

Mamata plans similar marches till tomorrow to underline her fierce opposition to the citizenship law, which, she says, she will not be allowed in Bengal.

Launching the protest, the Chief Minister administered a pledge to participants, calling for peace and harmony of all religions and emphasising that nobody would have to leave Bengal.

Mamata administers a pledge to participants, calling for peace and harmony of all religions

West Bengal Governor dubs Mamata's march unconstitutional



Let's get this done

US special envoy for N Korea urges Pyongyang to return offers of talks, warns against provocation

REUTERS, Seoul

US special envoy for North Korea, Stephen Biegun, yesterday urged Pyongyang to return offers of talks, dismissing leader Kim Jong Un's year-end deadline while highlighting Washington's willingness to discuss "all issues of interest".

Tension has been rising in recent weeks as Pyongyang has conducted a series of weapons tests and waged a war of words with US President Donald Trump, stoking fears the two countries could return to a collision course they had been on before launching diplomacy last year.

Biegun arrived in Seoul on Sunday amid speculation he might try to salvage negotiations by reaching out to North Korea, which has vowed to take an unspecified "new path" if Washington fails to soften its stance before the end of the year.

"The United States does not have a deadline. We have a goal," Biegun told a joint news conference with his South Korean counterpart Lee Do-hoon.

"Let me speak directly to our counterparts in North Korea. It is time for us to do our jobs. Let's get this done. We are here, and you know how to reach us," Biegun said.

Kim and Trump met three times since last year to negotiate an end to North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes but there has been scant progress. Working-level talks led by Biegun in October in Stockholm fell apart.

On Sunday, state media said North Korea had successfully conducted another test at a satellite launch site aimed at "restraining and overpowering the U.S. nuclear threat," a second such test in a week.

Seoul officials are concerned the flare-up may signal a repeat of earlier cycles of detente ending in escalations.

Biegun, who also met South Korean President Moon Jae-in yesterday, expressed regret over statements from North Korean officials in recent weeks, describing them as "so hostile and negative and so unnecessary".



Rescuers search for survivors of a collapsed building after an earthquake struck Padada town, Davao del Sur province in the southern island of Mindanao, Philippines yesterday. The 6.8-magnitude earthquake killed at least three people and wounded dozens more.

PHOTO: AFP

Lanka arrests Swiss embassy staffer over kidnap claim

A Sri Lankan working at the Swiss embassy in Colombo, who sparked a diplomatic spat after claiming she was kidnapped and forced to divulge sensitive information, was arrested yesterday for allegedly making a false accusation. The Swiss embassy said the woman was abducted and sexually assaulted by unidentified attackers on November 25, a day after a Sri Lankan police inspector investigating cases involving the family of the president and prime minister sought asylum in Switzerland. She was arrested after Attorney-General Dappula de Livera advised the police's Criminal Investigations Department to name her as a suspect, his coordinating officer Nishara Jayaratne said.

Sydney bushfire haze a 'public health emergency'

Australia's biggest city is facing a "public health emergency" over the bushfire smoke that has choked Sydney for weeks, leading doctors warned yesterday after hospitals reported a dramatic spike in casualty department visits. Hundreds of climate change-fuelled bushfires have been raging across Australia for months, with a "mega-blaze" burning north of Sydney destroying several homes overnight and fires near Perth threatening towns. More than 20 medical groups including the Royal Australasian College of Physicians -- which represents 25,000 doctors and trainees -- released a joint statement yesterday calling on Australia's government to address the toxic air pollution.

Brazil's Bolsonaro dismisses COP25 'game'



Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, a climate change skeptic, on Sunday dismissed as a "commercial game" the result of the COP25 climate talks in Madrid. He particularly singled out rich European nations as the players. Brazil was meant to host this year's global climate meeting but withdrew its offer more than a year ago, citing financial restrictions shortly after Bolsonaro's election. "I don't know why people don't understand that it's just a commercial game," Bolsonaro told reporters outside his official residence. Blaming wealthy countries, he said, "I'd like to know: has there been a resolution for Europe to be reforested, or are they just going to keep bothering Brazil?"

SOURCE: AFP

RUSSIAN MEDDLING

UK PM clears report for publication

AFP, London

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has cleared for publication a parliamentary report into alleged Russia interference in British politics, his spokesman said yesterday, but no date has been set for its release.

The Conservative leader "is content publication would not prejudice the functions of those bodies that safeguard our national security", the spokesman told reporters.

The 50-page report into Russian activity in the UK, including possible meddling in the 2016 Brexit vote, was written by parliament's intelligence and security committee earlier this year.

But the committee was disbanded before last week's general election and the report cannot be published until a new one is formed -- which could take weeks because new members need to be approved by parliamentary vote.

The committee launched its Russia investigation in November 2017 and its final report was signed off by Britain's intelligence agencies earlier this year, according to former chairman Dominic Grieve.

The committee had written in its annual report that the inquiry was a response to concerns about Russia interference in the 2016 US presidential election and the impact of Russian-sponsored disinformation. It also referenced the 2018 poisoning of former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in the English town of Salisbury.

Poorest countries facing both obesity, malnutrition

AFP, Paris

Low and middle-income countries risk seeing their development progress slashed by the double-edged sword of obesity and undernutrition, both caused by a lack of access to affordable healthy food, a report in The Lancet warned yesterday.

This "double burden of malnutrition", or DBM, affects more than a third of some 130 countries classed as low-and middle-income, the report in the medical journal said.

More alarming, it is increasingly seen in the same household -- most commonly an overweight mother and a child stunted by undernutrition living under the same roof.

Both forms of malnutrition are linked to health problems and premature death, weighing heavily on a country's health system and labour productivity.

The report, compiled in collaboration

with the World Health Organization, said being overweight can no longer be considered a rich country problem, nor undernourishment a preserve of the poor.

"While more than 149 million children have stunted growth, childhood overweight and obesity are increasing almost everywhere, and suboptimal diets are responsible for one in five (22 percent) adult deaths globally," it said.

"The economic, social, and environmental costs of inaction will hinder the growth and development of individuals and societies for decades to come," it warned.

Nowhere has the prevalence of DBM grown more than in the poorest countries, the report found.

It pointed to the rise in cheap, satisfying foods high in salt, sugar and fat, combined with a "major reduction" in physical activity at work, at home and in transportation.

LANCET REPORT



Work on Ram temple within 4 months: BJP

PTI, Patna

BJP president Amit Shah yesterday said a sky-touching Ram temple would come up in Ayodhya within four months which Indians from all over the world have been demanding for 100 years.

Making a blistering attack on Congress, Shah asked its leader Kapil Sibal why he sought to drag the Ram Janmabhoomi case in the Supreme Court.

The BJP president was addressing an election rally in Pakur in favour of the party candidate. His another poll meeting is lined up at Kamli Baghicha maidan, Poraiahat in the neighbouring Godda district.

Not long ago, the Supreme Court gave its ruling on Ayodhya, there was a demand of Indians from all over the world for 100 years that a grand Ram temple should be built at Ram Janmabhoomi, he said.

"I want to tell you that the Supreme Court verdict has come, a grand Ram temple touching the sky is going to be built in Ayodhya within 4 months," Shah said.