



DIVIDED INDIA | (Left) People in support of India's new citizenship law stage a demonstration in solidarity with the new legislation at the Town Hall in Bangalore, yesterday. (Right) Female protesters take part in a demonstration against the law in Chennai.

PHOTO: AFP

Didi, are you spreading rumours?

Modi, Mamata trade barbs as PM reminds rebel CMs of their constitutional obligation

NDTV ONLINE

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday took on the chief ministers who have refused to implement the contentious citizenship law, reminding them of their constitutional obligation.

To Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who has been most vocal about her intention, he had a mocking advice: "Ask your Advocate General if you can do this". So far, several state CMs, including Kerala's Pinarayi Vijayan and Punjab's Amarinder Singh have refused to allow the citizenship law.

"Some are stating that they won't implement the Citizenship Amendment Act. You are the chief minister. You have taken oath on the constitution. You are under the national flag -- and then give such statements? At least talk to those who know law, if not openly, then behind closed doors," the Modi said in a no-holds-barred attack on his detractors.

Accusing the Banerjee of reversing her stand to protect her job, he said it was she who once complained about the illegal migration of Bangladeshi nationals and "threw clip at the Speaker". Banerjee has said a video clip of the matter, tweeted last week by state Governor

Jagdeep Dhankar, was a fake.

She has also been spearheading the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Registry of Citizens and dared PM Modi and Union Minister Amit Shah to take an opinion poll on the subject. "Just because you are majority, you can't do just about anything," she said at a rally last week.

ROW OVER CITIZENSHIP ACT IN INDIA



Modi also ridiculed her over her comment on a UN referendum. Banerjee, who had asked the BJP to get a referendum on the citizenship law if it "dared", later clarified that she had meant an opinion poll.

"Mamata Didi, what has happened to you? Why have you changed? Why are you spreading

rumours?" PM Modi said.

"Powers come and go. Why are you scared? Trust people of Bengal. Why are they your enemies now?" he added, mocking the CM again over her party's performance in the Lok Sabha elections -- shabby in comparison to the BJP's remarkable gains. The party, which won just two seats of the state's 42 seats in 2014, won 18 this time -- feeding its hopes for unseating the Trinamool Congress in the next assembly elections.

Within hours, Mamata Banerjee hit back on Twitter. "Whatever I said is there in public forum, whatever you said is there for people to judge. With #PM contradicting #HomeMinister publicly on Nationwide NRC, who is dividing fundamental idea of India? People will definitely decide who is right & who is wrong #IRejectCAA #IRejectNRC," her post read.

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act makes religion the test of citizenship in India for the first time. The government says it will help minorities from three Muslim-dominated countries to get citizenship if they fled to India because of religious persecution.

Critics say it is designed to discriminate against Muslims and violates the secular principles of the constitution.

'It's so unfair'

Trump slams House's impeachment delay

REUTERS, West Palm Beach, Florida

President Donald Trump on Saturday criticised House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi for holding off on sending the articles of impeachment against him to the Senate.

"It's so unfair," Trump said, days after he was impeached by the House, during a speech to conservative student group Turning Point USA, saying that Pelosi adopted the strategy because she has "no case."

"They are violating the Constitution," Trump said, calling Pelosi "crazy Nancy."

The Democratic-controlled House voted on Dec 18 to impeach Trump, setting the stage for a trial in the Senate. Trump is very unlikely to be convicted and removed from office by the upper chamber of Congress because it is controlled by his Republican Party. A two-thirds majority vote in the Senate is needed for a conviction on impeachment charges.

Republicans and Democrats are at loggerheads over how the trial will play out. Pelosi and other Democrats want to call top Trump aides as witnesses and are seeking assurances that the trial will be held on terms they consider fair.

Pelosi has not yet sent the impeachment package to the Senate in a bid to increase pressure on Republicans there. Pelosi has also not yet announced the managers, or prosecutors, who will present evidence in the trial.

AFGHAN POLLS

Ghani on track for 2nd term

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani appeared to have secured a second term yesterday, narrowly scoring an outright win in preliminary polling results, but his main rival immediately vowed to challenge the tally.

After months of political limbo and bitter allegations of fraud and corruption in the September 28 poll, Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission (IEC) said Ghani had won 50.64 percent of the vote.

If it holds, the result is enough for Ghani to avoid a run-off. He easily beat his top challenger, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, who scored 39.52 percent.

Candidates now have a few days to file any complaints before final results are announced, probably within weeks.

As soon as results were



announced, Abdullah's office said in a statement he would contest them.

"We would like to make it clear once again to our people, supporters, election commission and our international allies that our team will not accept the result of this fraudulent vote unless our legitimate demands are addressed," the statement read.

Abdullah lost to Ghani in 2014 in a divisive election that saw the US intervene to broker an awkward power-sharing deal between the two rivals.

Ghani's office did not immediately comment.

US ambassador to Afghanistan John Bass said it was vital the full electoral process plays out.



Cuba gets first prime minister in over 40 years

Cuba's first prime minister in more than four decades -- long-serving tourism minister Manuel Marrero -- took office Saturday as the country resurrected a post last held by Fidel Castro. The appointment of Marrero, 56, as head of government is part of a process of decentralization and generational change from the revolutionary old guard that is aimed at extending and protecting Communist Party rule. Immediately after his presentation, Marrero received a handshake from former president Raul Castro, the leader of the Communist Party. Marrero has been serving as tourism minister from 2004. The position of prime minister was last held by Fidel Castro in 1976. But the post was abolished when Castro transitioned to the presidency, taking over from Osvaldo Dorticos after the country's constitution was restructured.

Thousands protest in Iraq as deadline for PM looms

Thousands took to the streets in Iraq's capital and across the south yesterday to protest against Iran's kingmaking influence as the latest deadline for choosing a new prime minister loomed. Anti-government rallies have rocked Baghdad and the Shia-majority south since October 1, with demonstrators calling for a complete overhaul of a regime they deem corrupt, inefficient and overly beholden to Tehran. Yesterday marked the latest deadline -- already pushed back twice by President Barham Saleh -- for parliament to choose a new premier to replace Adel Abdel Mahdi, who tendered his administration's resignation last month. Officials say Iran wants to install Qusay al-Suhail, who served as higher education minister in the government of Adel Mahdi. The protesters categorically reject Suhail's candidacy.

25,000 fled Syria's Idlib for Turkey over two days

At least 25,000 civilians have fled Syria's northwestern region of Idlib and headed towards Turkey over the past two days, Turkish state media said yesterday, as Syrian and Russian forces intensified their bombardment of the region. Turkey currently hosts some 3.7 million Syrian refugees, the largest refugee population in the world, and fears another wave from the Idlib region, where up to 3 million Syrians live in the last significant insurgent-held swathe of territory. Ankara has repeatedly asked its allies to support it in hosting refugees. Hundreds of people have been killed this year in attacks on residential areas of Idlib, according to UN agencies. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has vowed to recapture Idlib, pushing more people towards Turkey.

SOURCE: AFP

'There's not much left'

Improved condition in Australia allows firefighters to access badly burnt towns; PM defends climate policies amid raging bushfires

REUTERS, Sydney

Firefighters battling wildfires in Australia made the most of cooler weather yesterday to access badly burnt towns and contain blazes before the expected return of hotter conditions at the end of the week.

The reprieve came as Prime Minister Scott Morrison defended both his government's climate change policies and his decision to go on holiday to Hawaii last week.

The leader of New South Wales (NSW), Gladys Berejiklian, said "catastrophic" fire conditions on Saturday in parts of the prime minister's home state had destroyed communities.

"We've got the devastating news there's not much left in the town of Balmoral," Berejiklian told journalists.

Balmoral is about 120 kilometres south west of Sydney. No fatalities were reported.

Morrison visited the Rural Fire Service (RFS) headquarters in Sydney after returning on Saturday night from Hawaii.

Morrison addressed his conservative Liberal-National coalition's climate policies yesterday, which his government has been forced to defend following the severity of this year's bushfires.

Morrison said there was no argument



that there is a link between climate change and weather events around the world but said it was not credible to make a direct connection to any single fire event and climate change.

Nearly 100 fires were still burning across NSW late yesterday afternoon, though none were rated as emergencies.

Conditions are expected to remain favourable over coming days allowing firefighters to work to contain fires.

But authorities stated that large fires would continue to burn across NSW without significant rainfall, which is not forecast for four to six weeks.

Australia has been fighting wildfires for months as hot, dry conditions brought about an early start to the fire season, with blazes destroying more than 800 homes and close to 3 million acres (1.2 million hectares) of bushland. At least 10 people were killed.

YEAR-END DEADLINE FOR US TO CHANGE POLICY

Kim holds top-level military meeting

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un held a meeting of top military officials to discuss boosting the country's military capability, state news agency reported yesterday amid heightened concern the North may be about to return to confrontation with Washington.

Kim presided over an enlarged meeting of the ruling Workers' Party's Central Military Commission, KCNA news agency said, to discuss steps "to bolster up the overall armed forces of the country ... militarily and politically."

"Also discussed were important issues for decisive improvement of the overall national defence and core matters for the sustained and accelerated development of military capability for self-defence,"

KCNA said.

It did not give details on when the meeting was held nor what was decided.

The commission is North Korea's top military decision-making body. Kim rules the country as its supreme military commander and is the chairman of the commission.

North Korea has set a year-end deadline for the United States to change what it says is a policy of hostility amid a stalemate in efforts to make progress on their pledge to end the North's nuclear programme and establish lasting peace.

North Korea has repeatedly called for the United States to drop its "hostile policy" and warned about its "Christmas gift" as the end-year deadline it set for Washington to change its position looms.



FROM CASHIER TO WORLD'S YOUNGEST PM

When leaders from the European Council gathered for a group photo in Brussels last week, it was hard to miss the class newbie. Standing front and center among the neat rows of middle-aged men was Finland's new prime minister -- 34-year-old Sanna Marin. The young woman had a huge smile on her face. And why not, given her trailblazing new status as the world's youngest sitting prime minister.

The former transport minister shot to worldwide fame earlier this month after the leader of her Social Democratic Party stepped down -- and Marin stepped up, becoming the country's youngest serving prime minister.

She now heads Finland's governing coalition of five parties -- all of which have female leaders, and almost all under the age of 35. It's a remarkable line-up, given the country's leaders have traditionally been older men.

Marin's youth and gender "make her stand out from her predecessors, that for the most part have been males in their 50s," said Timo Miettinen, researcher at Helsinki University's Department of Political and Economic Studies.

Finland was the first country in the world to elect women to parliament, a little over a century ago. In that time, there have been just two female prime ministers before Marin, each serving for no longer than a year.

Initially, many Finns were too embroiled in internal political strife (the previous prime minister resigned after nationwide industrial strikes) to make much of a fuss about Marin's record-setting age. But when the international press started weighing in, they took notice, said Miettinen.

"People have been saying it's the best thing to happen to the international reputation of Finland," he said.

"There is a sense of pride -- at least among her supporters and people who support her coalition parties."

Marin and her fellow coalition leaders don't look like your average senior politicians. The new prime minister is a big Rage Against the



Machine fan, and a photo of Marin and her all-female line-up was proudly shared on Instagram by the band's guitarist, Tom Morello. Marin's modest background doesn't read like your average world leader's either.

Her parents divorced when she was a small child "because of my father's alcohol problem," Marin wrote in a 2016 blog. She grew up in a "rainbow family," her mother in a same-sex relationship, in the Pirkkala region, north of Helsinki. They lived in a rented apartment and despite not having much money, Marin wrote that they had an "abundance" of love.

At 15, Marin's first summer job was at a bakery, and at high school she distributed magazines to earn extra cash.

After graduating, she worked as a cashier -- a role Estonia's interior minister this week mocked, calling her a "sales girl" and questioning her ability to run the country. Estonia apologized to Finland for the comments.

Her politics sit to the left of her party -- supporting increasing refugee intakes and raising taxes to support the welfare state. With her humble background and humanitarian policies, some commentators have cast Marin as the antidote to other strongman world leaders. Many draw comparisons with New Zealand's progressive Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who took office at the age of 37.

SOURCE: CNN

Riot police break up HK rally for Uighurs

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong riot police yesterday broke up a solidarity rally for China's Uighurs -- with one officer drawing a pistol -- as the city's pro-democracy movement likened their plight to that of the oppressed Muslim minority.

The initially peaceful rally descended into chaos when a small group of protesters removed a Chinese flag from a nearby government building and tried to burn it, an AFP reporter on the scene said.

Organisers stopped the flag being burned but riot police then swooped in with pepper spray, sparking anger from the crowd who threw water bottles.

One officer drew his side-arm and pointed it at the crowd but did not fire. Multiple protesters were seen being detained.

The rally in support of Uighurs is likely to anger Beijing. China has faced international condemnation for rounding up an estimated one million Uighurs and other mostly Muslim ethnic minorities in internment camps in the northwestern region of Xinjiang.

The emergence of a huge surveillance and prison system that now blankets much of Xinjiang has been watched closely in Hong Kong which has been convulsed by six months of huge and sometimes violent protests against Beijing's rule.

Pro-Uighur chants and flags have become commonplace in Hong Kong's marches but yesterday's rally was to be specifically dedicated to Uighurs.