

NEWSIN
brief

Japan executes first
foreigner in years

REUTERS, Tokyo

Japan yesterday executed a 40-year-old Chinese man convicted of murdering a family of four, in the country's first execution of a foreigner since the disclosure of details on sentences carried out began in 2007, the justice ministry said. The man, Wei Wei, had committed the murders in mid-2003 with two accomplices who were also Chinese nationals, media reported. The other two fled to China and were arrested there. One was executed in China in 2005 and the other received a life sentence, media said.

China sails aircraft
carrier in Taiwan Strait

REUTERS, Taipei

China has sailed its new aircraft carrier into the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan's defence ministry said yesterday, weeks ahead of presidential election on the island. Democratic Taiwan is claimed by China as a wayward province and is the Communist Party's most sensitive and important territorial issue. China has threatened to attack if Taiwan moves toward formal independence. The Chinese carrier group sailed north through the Strait, the defence ministry said in a short statement.

Syria strike kills 5
pro-Iran fighters

AFP, Beirut

Five pro-Iranian fighters were killed by unidentified missiles on Wednesday evening in Syria's eastern province of Deir Ezzor, a war monitor said. "Missiles of unidentified origin targeted the headquarters of the 47th Brigade of pro-Iranian militias in the town of Albu Kamal, in the east of Deir Ezzor province, killing five fighters," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Observatory chief Rami Abdul Rahman said drones may have been responsible for the strikes, which caused "loud blasts".



Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, and her party supporters attend a protest march against a new citizenship law, in Kolkata, India yesterday.

Inset, A protester shouts slogans after being detained outside the Uttar Pradesh Bhawan during a demonstration against the crackdown on protesters over the citizenship law.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS



Leading crowds to arson,
violence not leadership

Says Indian army chief on anti-CAA protests

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

In his first public remarks on the violent anti-Citizenship Amendment Act, the Indian Army Chief Gen Bipin Rawat yesterday said it is not leadership if leaders guide masses, comprising university and college students, to carry out arson and violence in cities.

"Leaders emerge from crowds but are not those who lead people in inappropriate directions" he told a function here adding "leaders are those who lead people in the right direction."

The army chief's remarks were seen as his comments on the recent widespread violence seen during the pan-India protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act and proposed NRC. More than 20 protestors have died in these protests, especially in Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Karnataka.

"What is so complex about leadership if it is all about leading? Because when you move forward, everybody follows. It is not that simple. It appears simple, but it is a complex phenomenon," Rawat said in his speech.

"Even amongst the crowd, you find that

the leaders emerge. But leaders are those who lead people in the right direction. Leaders are not those who lead people in inappropriate directions," he added.

Giving the example of ongoing protests by a large number of university and college students, the Army Chief said the way masses of crowds were being led to carry out arson and violence in cities and towns is not leadership.

Meanwhile, the Uttar Pradesh Shia Central Waqf Board yesterday favoured implementation of NRC.

"Hindustani Muslims do not have any threat from NRC. It should be implemented in the country. The real matter is of identification of intruders who are real threat to the country," Board Chairman Waseem Rizvi told reporters in Lucknow.

"The intruders are vote bank for the Trinamool Congress and the Samajwadi Party. The Congress is making voter identity cards of intruders from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. If NRC is implemented, their real face will come to the fore," he said.



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UP demands damages

Threatens to confiscate property over protests

REUTERS, Lucknow

India's northern Uttar Pradesh state is demanding millions of rupees from over 200 people and threatening to confiscate their property as a penalty for damage done to public property during protests against the country's new citizenship law.

Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, has suffered some of the most violent protests against India's Citizenship Amendment Act, which gives minorities who have migrated from three neighbouring countries a path to citizenship but doesn't make the same concessions for Muslims.

At least 15 of the 21 people killed in the protests have been in Uttar Pradesh, a state that has been a tinder box for tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities.

At least 230 such notices have been issued, and most of the people they had been issued to were Muslims, state government officials said on Thursday. The claims are likely to run into tens of millions of rupees, they said.

It was unclear how many of them have been charged with rioting or

other crimes, and none have been convicted. State officials have blamed much of the violence on Muslim mobs protesting against the law.

In the town of Rampur, the family of Mohammad Faheem, whose brother-in-law Mohammad Mehmood is in police custody, has received one such notice.

ANTI-CAA PROTESTS

At least 230 notices have been issued demanding millions of rupees

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"Mehmood did not participate in a protest and was at home that day but police still arrested him," Faheem told Reuters.

Mehmood, sells spices on a cart and cannot even afford a lawyer to get bail, Faheem said.

"How will we pay the fine?" he asked.

Authorities have followed the legal procedure in assessing damage to public property as well as in issuing the notices, said Mrityunjay Kumar, a spokesman for the Uttar Pradesh government.

Critics, however, said such notices are premature.

"You cannot be the complainant and the judge yourself," Vikram Singh, a former head of police in Uttar Pradesh, told Reuters.

"Sending notices to 100, pursuing 50 and succeeding in two will do more harm than good."

Hundreds of thousands of people across India, including university students, have joined protests against the law, posing the biggest challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi since he took office in 2014.

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party controls the state government in Uttar Pradesh, and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, a Hindu priest, is one of the leading lights in the Hindu nationalist party.

Students in several Indian cities have led the protests, making use of social media to wage a parallel battle online and teach people how to organise demonstrations.

'I'm still scared'

Communities across Asia remembers tsunami that killed 230,000

REUTERS, Phang Nga

Communities across Asia commemorated the more than 230,000 victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami on Thursday, the 15th anniversary of one of the world's most deadly disasters.

On the morning after Christmas Day in 2004, a 9.1 magnitude quake off northern Sumatra island triggered a tsunami with waves as high as 17.4 meters (57 feet) that swept over vulnerable coastal areas of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand and nine other countries.

"It still haunts me ... I can remember it all the time," said Suwannee Maliwan, 28, who lost both parents and five other relatives when the tsunami hit the Thai province of Phang Nga.

"Sometimes I dream that a wave is coming. I'm still scared," she said. "Sometimes I want to move somewhere else, but it's not possible because I was born here, my mom and dad passed away here."

Memorials were scheduled in the Indonesian province of Aceh, where

entire villages were flattened and more than 125,000 people perished in the giant waves. Since then, the area has been largely rebuilt, with some 25,600 residential, commercial, government and school buildings constructed inside a high-risk zone, that had suffered virtually total devastation in 2004.

In Thailand, where more than 5,300 people were killed, including tourists visiting resort islands in the Andaman Sea, officials held a memorial ceremony and called for more awareness and preparedness for disasters.

"The government wants to lift safety standards... and build awareness across all sectors in preparing and protecting people against disasters," Deputy Interior Minister, Nipon Bunyamanee, said at an opening ceremony. He said Dec. 26 had been designated national accident prevention day.

Officials later laid wreaths at a memorial center in Phang Nga province to pay tribute to King Maha Vajiralongkorn's nephew, Bhumii Jensen, who was last seen jet-skiing off the coast when the tsunami hit.



Riot police question a man (R) in the Tai Po district in Hong Kong yesterday. Hong Kong endured a third straight day of political unrest over the Christmas period on December 26 as police and pro-democracy protesters clashed inside shopping malls.

PHOTO: AFP



BJP hits back at
Rahul on 'liar
PM' comment

ANI, New Delhi

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) hit back at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi over his "Prime Minister of RSS lies to mother India" comment, calling him the "chieftain of liars" and accused the Congress of spreading misinformation on the construction of detention centres.

Earlier yesterday, Gandhi tweeted a video which shows a road in Assam's Matia leading to a purported detention centre, and a part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech wherein he said that rumours of detention centres raised by Congress and urban Naxals were a "lie".

"The Prime Minister of RSS lies to Bharat Mata," he captioned the post with the hashtag lies, lies, lies.

Speaking at a press conference here, BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra said that Gandhi was wrong in calling the Prime Minister a 'liar'.

Seeking to clarify Modi's comments, Patra said: "He said that no detention centre has been made to detain any Indian Muslims under NRC under the BJP government rule. What is the lie in it?"

"Rahul Gandhi is spreading lies regarding detention centres. He and his Congress party have been spreading rumours that Muslims will be detained and deported. This is a pure lie," he said. Calling Gandhi, the BJP leader said that three detention centres were constructed in Assam on directions of previous UPA government.

Blindspot to backlash

India's Modi, BJP did not anticipate protests against citizenship law

REUTERS, Mumbai

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government did not anticipate the protests against a new citizenship law that have raged across the country and is now scrambling to control the damage, members of his ruling party said.

In Modi's biggest challenge since taking office in 2014, hundreds of thousands have protested against the law offering citizenship to immigrants from non-Muslim minorities who have fled Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

At least 21 people have died in clashes with police. Ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders were taken aback by the backlash, some party members told Reuters. They said they had been prepared for some anger from Muslims, but not the widespread protests that have convulsed most major cities for two weeks.

Now the party and the government are reaching out for help in defusing the crisis to allies and opponents sidelined when the bill passed earlier this month, the sources said.

"I really did not see the protests coming ... not just me, other BJP lawmakers were also unable

to predict this kind of anger," Sanjeev Balyan, a ruling party legislator and junior federal minister, told Reuters.

While there is no threat to his big parliamentary majority, the 69-year-old Modi's reputation as a master strategist with his finger



on the pulse of the people has taken a hit.

Publicly, his government has prioritised development, seeking to make India a \$5 trillion economy by 2025.

But Modi's muscular pro-Hindu platform has also gone down well in a nation that is over 80% Hindu: he won back-to-back national elections

with thumping majorities.

Outrage at the citizenship law has been fanned by resentment against the government for following a majoritarian agenda instead of addressing an economic slowdown and loss of jobs.

In a nation with a history pocked with sectarian bloodshed, many Muslims fear the new law - and a planned national citizenship register - could make the minority second-class citizens.

Students, politicians and rights activists, both Hindus and Muslims, have also taken to the streets, saying Modi is jeopardising India's secular constitution.

The government denies the citizenship register is imminent and says none of the changes will affect existing citizens.

Three other BJP lawmakers and two federal ministers, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said they were mobilizing party supporters from all walks of life to start community dialogues and dispel discontent over the law and the register.

"I believe that the political math behind the clearance of this law was not taken into account," said one of the federal ministers, an apparent reference to lack of consultation with allies and opposition parties.

17 killed in attack on
Yemen market: UN

AFP, Sanaa

Seventeen civilians were killed in an attack in a market in Yemen's northern Saada governorate, the United Nations said, the third deadly assault on the same location in just over a month.

The attacks come despite relative calm in Yemen, where large-scale combat between government troops -- backed by a Saudi-led coalition military coalition -- and the Iran-aligned Huthi rebels has largely subsided.

The UN said 12 Ethiopian migrants were among the 17 civilians killed in the incident on Tuesday at the Al-Raqw market in Saada governorate, a Huthi rebel stronghold.

At least 12 people were wounded, it said, without saying who was responsible or what weaponry was used.

The Saudi-led coalition yesterday acknowledged it had carried out an operation in Monabbih, a Saada district where the market is located.

The Joint Incident Assessment Team (JIAT) -- which the coalition established but says operates independently -- will investigate "the possibility of collateral damage", coalition spokesman Turki al-Maliki said in a statement.

The coalition did not provide further details.

An attack on Al-Raqw market on November 22 killed 10 civilians, again including Ethiopian nationals, and just days later, at least another 10 civilians were killed and 22 wounded in a second such incident.