

NEWS IN brief

Rocket attacks kill US contractor in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

New rocket attacks in Iraq have killed a US civilian contractor, raising fears that violence could escalate in the protest-hit country already engulfed in its worst political crisis in decades. In the latest attack, 30 rockets were fired at the K1 Iraqi military base in Kirkuk, an oil-rich region north of Baghdad, at 22:20 GMT Friday, a US official told AFP in Washington. Alongside the contractor, several US service members and Iraqi personnel were wounded. No one claimed responsibility, but Washington blames pro-Iran factions for such attacks.

Chile protests turn violent again

AFP, Santiago

Thousands of protesters clashed with police Friday in Santiago in a fresh round of anti-government demonstrations that erupted more than two months ago in Chile. Authorities have been trying to restore calm in downtown Santiago, which has been roiled by a crisis that initially erupted over metro fare hikes but quickly escalated into the most severe outbreak of social unrest since the end of the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet nearly 30 years ago.

2,000 evacuated as cyclone hits Fiji

AFP, Wellington

Nearly 2,000 people took refuge in emergency shelters and one man was missing after being swept away in floodwaters as Tropical Cyclone Sarai pounded Fiji yesterday causing widespread damage. With wind gusts strengthening to 150 kilometres per hour during the day, Sarai destroyed houses and crops, brought down trees, cut power and caused considerable flooding in low-lying areas.



A Somali woman walks past a wreckage at the scene of a car bomb explosion at a checkpoint in Mogadishu, yesterday. Inset, A woman is being assisted at the Medina hospital following the explosion. At least 90 people were killed and dozens were wounded in the bombing targeting a checkpoint in the Somali capital. No group claimed responsibility.

PHOTO: REUTERS



BJP doesn't listen to voice of people

Says Rahul in Assam
NDTV ONLINE

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi yesterday accused the BJP of not listening to the "voice of the people" as protests against the new citizenship law continued across the country.

The protests against the new law have entered its third week, with protesters demanding a repeal of the law. But the government has indicated that the law stands.

While the police have used force to counter the protesters in most states, Assam is one that witnessed massive violence.

"Wherever the BJP goes, it spreads hate. In Assam, the youth is protesting, in other states protests happening as well. Why do you have to shoot and kill them? BJP doesn't want to listen to voice of people," said Gandhi, who was in Assam to lead the party's "Save Constitution-Save India" protest march.

"They think they can suppress the culture and history of the northeast, they did not understand your pulse," he said. "We



will not allow the BJP and RSS to attack the history, culture and tradition of Assam. Assam cannot be ruled from Nagpur. Assam will only be run by its people," he added.

On Thursday, the 49-year-old leader had hit out at Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his claim that there are no detention centres in India and the suggestion that a nationwide rollout of National Register of Citizens is not happening.

"The Prime Minister of the RSS lies to Mother India," Rahul Gandhi tweeted in Hindi, along with an edited clip of PM Modi's speech at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan on Sunday and a media report on a purported detention centre in Assam.

'Now we have woken up'

Despite early signs, Indian protesters explain why they have hit the street now

AFP, New Delhi

Mumbai-based copywriter Sarah Syed says she was long alarmed by the Hindu nationalist direction of India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi but felt powerless to stop it -- until now. Like many others taking part in the current wave of protests, the final straw was Modi's new citizenship law and then the images of students being tear-gassed when they demonstrated against it.

"It's not as if one didn't know that things were not right. But for many of us, politics was just too depressing to think about," said Syed, a Muslim married to a Catholic.

"Now though it feels criminal to sit out the protests and say nothing," the 27-year-old told AFP.

The law, which offers fast-track citizenship to non-Muslim nationals from three neighbouring countries, is the latest policy instituted by Modi's government that critics accuse of marginalising Muslims in the Hindu-majority nation.

During his nearly six years in power, Modi's party has renamed places with Islamic-origin names, rewritten history textbooks to diminish or discredit the role of Muslim leaders, and stripped the Muslim-dominated region of Kashmir of its special autonomy.

Modi has insisted the legislation will have no impact on Indian Muslims, however his party's 2019 election pledge to conduct a nationwide survey to identify illegal immigrants has raised fears among Muslims of becoming stateless, with no fast-track naturalisation

option available to them.

Mumbai-based lawyer Momin Musaddique, who has been providing free legal advice to people worried about the implications of the law, said years of pent-up anxiety among Muslims have finally found an outlet in the protests rippling across the country.

"People have been afraid for so long of this government's Hindu nationalist agenda that they now feel like they have



nothing left to fear," he told AFP.

"Now that their very survival in India is under threat, they have no option but to protest," he added.

In addition to Muslims, the demonstrations have galvanised large sections of Indian society, from secular Hindus and members of other minorities to intellectuals and opposition politicians.

Historian Zoya Hasan of Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University told AFP the protests represented "the biggest challenge to the Modi government in the last six years".

Several local governments in opposition-ruled states such as Kerala and West Bengal have said they will not conduct surveys for the national citizens' register, responding to the public mood and undermining the prime minister's authority.

Although the protests began as a fight against the citizenship law, many of the demonstrators are now seeking a rollback of the government's push to remake officially secular India as a Hindu nation, said Hasan.

Nevertheless, she added that the unrest was unlikely to derail Modi's Hindu nationalist campaign and risk alienating his base which propelled him to a landslide re-election victory in May.

"The government may take a step back as a result of the protests but they are not going to move away from their core agenda," Hasan said.

For first-time protester Syed, participating in the demonstrations left her with "goosebumps" as she described her elation at seeing people from different communities come together.

"I used to feel so helpless before, like there was nothing I could do to change the way things were in this country," she said.

"The government's strategy has been all smoke and mirrors", she said.

"Now we have woken up."

WAR CRIMES IN SYRIA, MYANMAR

UN allocates funds for investigation

AFP, United Nations

The United Nations General Assembly on Friday adopted a \$3.07 billion operating budget which for the first time includes funding for the investigation of war crimes in Syria and Myanmar.

UN will have additional missions including the observer mission in Yemen, a political mission established in Haiti, the investigation of crimes committed in Syria since the outbreak of civil war in 2011, and in Myanmar after the 2017 crackdown on the Rohingya Muslim minority.

For the first time, the budgets for the Syria and Myanmar investigations -- which were previously financed by voluntary contributions -- will in 2020 be transferred to the UN secretariat's budget and will receive compulsory contributions from the 193 member states.

Russia proposed multiple amendments during negotiations in the Committee on Budgetary Questions meeting and in the General Assembly plenary session.

At each vote, Russia, Syria, Myanmar and their supporters, including North Korea, Iran, Nicaragua and Venezuela, were outvoted.

Russia said it would examine its future obligatory payments in light of the vote outcome and predicted an increase in the arrears that currently plague the UN's treasury due to countries not paying enough.



Plainclothes police officers detain a pro-democracy protester during a rally inside a shopping mall in Sheung Shui in Hong Kong, yesterday. Police arrested at least 15 people in clashes yesterday with dozens of pro-democracy protesters who targeted a mall near the border with China to demonstrate against mainland tourists and shoppers.

PHOTO: AFP

'Toxic' and 'freaking evil'

A Navy SEAL platoon leader controversially pardoned of war crimes by US President Donald Trump was described as "toxic" and "freaking evil" by veterans who served with him in Iraq. The New York Times reported Friday. Video testimony provided to war crimes investigators and published by the newspaper showed former members of Eddie Gallagher's elite commando unit accusing him of shooting at a 12-year-old and discussing the accusations that Gallagher targeted civilians. "The guy is freaking evil," special operator first class Craig Miller, one of the most experienced members of Alpha Platoon's SEAL Team 7, told the Naval Criminal Investigative Service. "The guy was toxic," special operator first class Joshua Vriens added. Gallagher denies the allegations.

Ukraine rivals to swap prisoners today

Ukrainian authorities and pro-Russian separatists in the east of the country have agreed to swap dozens of prisoners yesterday, the self-declared rebel republic of Donetsk said. Both sides had said earlier this month they would carry out a prisoner exchange by the end of the year, following high-profile peace talks in Paris aimed at de-escalating Europe's only active war. Sources said two separatist territories Donetsk and Lugansk will get 87 prisoners, while 55 others will be handed over to Kiev, without giving details on the identity of those involved. The swap would come three months after Ukraine carried out a long-awaited exchange with Russia of 35 prisoners each.

UN extends probe of leader's mysterious 1961 death



The United Nations General Assembly on Friday approved a resolution extending the investigation into the mysterious 1961 death of secretary-general Dag Hammarskjöld. The Swedish diplomat had been traveling in southern Africa for a mission when his plane crashed. The text, initiated by Sweden and co-sponsored by more than 100 countries, was adopted by consensus without a vote. Sweden recommended the reappointment of Tanzanian lawyer Mohamed Chande Othman, who has led the investigation for several years. In his last report, published in early October, Othman accused the United States and Britain of withholding information regarding Hammarskjöld's death.

SOURCE: AFP

'Go to Pakistan'

Says police officer as UP chief minister praises crackdown

AGENCIES

Officials in India's Uttar Pradesh state, including its hardline chief minister, have made controversial remarks while rejecting accusations that police are using "deadly force" against mostly Muslim protesters.

The state, India's most populous with nearly 20 percent of them Muslims, saw 19 of the 27 deaths so far in nationwide protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which critics see as anti-Muslim.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who belongs to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), rebuffed accusations from Muslims and rights groups of police abuses, crediting his tough stance with restoring calm to the streets.

"Every rioter is shocked. Every troublemaker is astonished. Looking at the strictness of the Yogi government, everyone is silent," one of Adityanath's verified official accounts on Twitter said late on Friday.

"Do whatever you want to, but the damages will be paid by those who cause damages," it added, repeating the warning

his government had made earlier in the week.

"#TheGreat_CMYogi," read the hashtag with the tweet, which came hours before a video appeared in which a senior Uttar Pradesh police officer is seen telling a group of Muslims: "Go to Pakistan."

PROTESTS AGAINST CITIZENSHIP LAW



The video circulating on social media is likely to compound the concerns of those worried about the plight of Muslims, who accuse the police of killing peaceful demonstrators, raiding and ransacking homes, and beating hundreds of people, even children, since protests against the

CAA began earlier this month.

"You eat here but sing praises of another place... This lane is now familiar to me. And once I remember, I can even reach your grandmother," Akhilesh Narayan Singh, a police officer in Meerut district, is seen saying in the video. "Every man from every house will be arrested."

Singh told Reuters News Agency that some protesters were shouting pro-Pakistan slogans. "It is in this situation I told them to go to Pakistan," he said yesterday.

Uttar Pradesh has seen the most violent turmoil over Modi's citizenship law, which activists say is discriminatory towards Muslims, who make up some 14 percent of India's 1.3 billion population.

The clashes in the state appear to have eased over the past week, however, although small-scale demonstrations are still taking place.

Earlier this week, Adityanath's government said it was demanding millions of rupees from more than 200 people, threatening to confiscate their property to pay for damage caused during the protests.

NEW CONVENTION ON CYBERCRIME

UN backs Russia-led, China-backed bid

AFP, United Nations

The United Nations on Friday approved a Russian-led bid that aims to create a new convention on cybercrime, alarming rights groups and Western powers that fear a bid to restrict online freedom.

The General Assembly approved the resolution sponsored by Russia and backed by China, which would set up a committee of international experts in 2020.

The panel will work to set up "a comprehensive international convention on countering the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes," the resolution said.

The United States, European powers and rights groups fear that the language is code for legitimizing crackdowns on expression, with numerous countries defining criticism of the government as "criminal."

China heavily restricts internet searches to avoid topics sensitive to its communist leadership, as well as news sites with critical coverage.

A number of countries have increasingly tried to turn off the internet, with India cutting off access in Kashmir in August after it stripped autonomy to the Muslim-majority region and Iran taking much of the country offline as it cracked down on protests in November.