

Three-fold rise in attacks on children

Says UN report on war zones

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Children continue to pay a deadly price as they succumb to a nearly three-fold rise in attacks over the last 10 years in conflict-ridden areas, the United Nations has said.

Violations against minors in wars include killing, maiming, sexual violence, abductions, denial of humanitarian access, child recruitment and attacks on schools and hospitals.

The UN has verified more than 170,000 grave violations against children since 2010 - the equivalent of more than 45 violations each day for the last 10 years.

"Conflicts around the world are lasting longer, causing more bloodshed and claiming more young lives," Unicef executive director Henrietta Fore said.

"Attacks on children continue unabated as warring parties flout one of the most basic rules of war: the protection of children," she said, adding that many more acts of violence against children go unreported.

In 2018, the UN recorded more than 24,000 abuses, nearly three times as many as in 2010.

In approximately half of those cases, children were killed or maimed by air attacks and explosive weapons such as landmines and mortars.

Unicef also noted that the number of countries blighted by war is the highest it has been in 30 years.

Children in Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan were at particular risk in 2019, according to Unicef. In Afghanistan, children live in fear of explosives, gun violence and the sound of attack helicopters on their way to and at school, and also when they go to the market, or simply while playing outside with friends.

The UN agency called on the warring parties around the world to end violations against children and the singling out of civilian infrastructure.



Demonstrators display a make-shift detention camp during a protest against a new citizenship law, in Kolkata, India yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS



CITIZENSHIP LAW

Modi launches social media campaign

Toi, New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday said that the newly introduced Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is meant to give refuge to the persecuted refugees and launched a social media campaign in support of the new legislation.

Earlier, BJP had also launched a social media campaign to "bust myths" surrounding the new law.

The Prime Minister, in a tweet, asserted that the CAA does not take away anyone's citizenship.

"#IndiaSupportsCAA because CAA is about giving citizenship to persecuted refugees & not about taking anyone's citizenship away. Check out this hashtag in Your Voice section of Volunteer module on NaMo App for content, graphics, videos & more. Share & show your support for CAA," he tweeted.

It also asked people to share content, graphics and videos from the prime minister's NaMo app to show their support for the law, which has triggered protests in different parts of the country.

The Prime Minister also tweeted a video of the Sadhguru saying "do hear this lucid explanation of aspects relating to CAA."

"Do hear this lucid explanation of aspects relating to CAA and more by @SadhguruJV. He provides historical context, brilliantly highlights our culture of brotherhood. He also calls out the misinformation by vested interest groups. #IndiaSupportsCAA," the PM tweeted from his official handle.

Earlier yesterday, the BJP also launched a social media campaign, "Spread Facts Not Myth", in support of the Citizenship Act and in a series of tweets, the party has addressed various issues related to the new legislation.

'It is too late to leave'

Residents in parts of Australia's Victoria state are given a stark warning as wildfires rage

CNN ONLINE

Residents of several towns in the picturesque southeastern Australian state of Victoria are being warned to "take shelter indoors immediately," as devastating wildfires continue to rage across the region.

Tens of thousands of residents and people on vacation were urged to evacuate yesterday, as authorities had forecast that several factors could make it an incredibly dangerous day in terms of fire risk.

"The extreme fire dangers, the strong winds that were forecast, and the very hot temperatures have all come as we thought," Andrew Tupper of the Victoria Bureau of Meteorology said at a news conference yesterday.

Several emergency warnings have been put in place throughout Victoria, meaning people in those areas are in "imminent danger," according to Victoria Emergency. Victoria Emergency have issued several warnings on Twitter telling people in a handful of villages in remote parts of the state "it is too late to leave" and advising them to stay inside.

The Australia Bureau of Meteorology said that fires in the region "exhibited very dangerous behaviour overnight"

that are "likely to worsen today."

East Gippsland is expected to be one of the areas most affected. Victoria Emergency Management Commissioner Andrew Crisp said a number of new fires broke out there yesterday, and conditions aren't expected to improve until midnight local time.

"We have been telling people for more than 24 hours East Gippsland is at significant risk," Crisp said at a briefing yesterday. "You should not be on the roads."

Located in the far eastern corner of Victoria, East Gippsland is home to about 80,000 people, who are scattered across remote villages and towns. The region is popular with tourists, who go to see wildlife and hike in the

national parks.

A fire in nearby Mallacoota also has authorities worried. Crisp said the blaze began Sunday afternoon, and as winds changed direction it quickly shifted directions and traveled some 24 kilometers (15 miles) in about four hours, he said. The smoke columns from the fire rose some 14 kilometers (9 miles) high, and have begun generating their own weather systems.



Helicopter dumps water on bushfire in Melbourne. PHOTO: CNN

STALLED NUKE TALKS WITH US

N Korea urges offensive policy ahead of deadline

W House warns Pyongyang over 'Christmas gift' threat

AGENCIES

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called at a ruling party meeting for "positive and offensive measures" to ensure security ahead of a year-end deadline he has set for denuclearisation talks with the United States, state media KCNA said yesterday.

Kim convened a weekend meeting of top Workers' Party officials to discuss policy matters amid rising tension over his deadline for Washington to soften its stance in stalled negotiations aimed at dismantling Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programmes.

At a Sunday session, Kim suggested action in the areas of foreign affairs, the munitions industry and armed forces, stressing the need to take "positive and offensive measures for fully ensuring the sovereignty and security of the country," KCNA said, without elaborating.

The meeting was the largest plenary session of the party's 7th Central Committee

since its first gathering in 2013 under Kim, according to Seoul's Unification Ministry handling inter-Korean affairs.

The key policy-making organ drew several hundred attendees, state television showed yesterday. The committee also met in 2018 and in April but on a much smaller scale, reports Reuters. KCNA said the meeting was still under way. It was the first time the gathering has lasted more than one day since Kim took power in late 2011, ministry spokesman Lee Sang-min told a regular briefing.

"By 'positive and offensive measures,' they might mean highly provocative action against the United States and also South Korea," said Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean studies in Seoul.

The White House said Sunday it would consider "other tools" beyond personal diplomacy if North Korea went ahead with a threatened "Christmas gift" that could reignite global tensions over its nuclear program, reports AFP.



China jails scientist who gene-edited babies

A Chinese court yesterday sentenced the scientist who claimed to be behind the world's first gene-edited babies to three years in prison for illegal medical practice, state media reported. He Jiankui, who shocked the scientific community last year by announcing the birth of twin girls whose genes had allegedly been altered to confer immunity to HIV, was also fined three million yuan (\$430,000), Xinhua news agency said. He, who was educated at Stanford University, was sentenced by a court in Shenzhen for "illegally carrying out the human embryo gene-editing intended for reproduction," Xinhua said.

Israel deducts Palestinian money over prisoner pay

Israel said Sunday it would withhold millions more dollars worth of tax money it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, saying the amount equals payment made to families of Palestinian attackers. Palestinian official media denounced the move as a "new theft," but the Israeli defence ministry called it a "freeze." The security cabinet voted in favour of Defence Minister Naftali Bennett's request to freeze 150 million shekels in taxes paid to the Palestinian Authority (PA) (around \$43 million), the defence ministry said in a statement. Israel collects around \$190 million a month in customs duties levied on goods destined for Palestinian markets that transit through Israeli ports, and then it transfers the money to the PA.

Greta's father sceptical about her activism



Svante Thunberg, father of eco-warrior Greta Thunberg, thinks his daughter is happier being an activist but admitted in an interview he had reservations about her taking up the struggle. Speaking to the BBC, the 50-year-old actor-turned-producer said he and Greta's mother - opera singer Malena Ernman - originally objected to their daughter's decision to become a climate activist. "Obviously we thought it was a bad idea, putting herself out there with all the hate on social media," he said. Greta's family realised just how much the existential threat of climate change weighed on her when she became depressed at age 11. Despite his initial apprehension Svante Thunberg also said he thought it was clear his daughter was much happier since taking up activism.

SOURCE: AFP



Khusi, a white tigress, looks at a heater kept by the zoo authority to warm her up outside her enclosure on a cold day at Assam State zoo in Guwahati, India yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

KILLING OF PROTESTER

Sudan sentences 27 intel agents to death

AFP, Omdurman

A Sudanese court yesterday sentenced 27 intelligence agents to death for torturing and killing a protester early this year, an AFP correspondent said.

It is the first time members of the security forces have been condemned to death in relation to the killing of protesters whose movement toppled veteran autocrat Omar al-Bashir.

The defendants were found guilty of torturing to death Ahmed al-Kheir Awadh at an intelligence services facility and sentenced to be hanged, judge Sadok Albdelrahman said.

The teacher was beaten and tortured to death after he was arrested in late January by intelligence operatives in Kassala state in eastern Sudan, the judge said.

Dozens of protesters from the capital's teachers' association gathered in front of the court in Khartoum's twin city of Omdurman, carrying pictures of Awadh.

Defence lawyers have two weeks to lodge an appeal against the death sentences.

Sudanese first took to the streets just over a year ago, to protest against high bread prices, but the demonstrations soon turned into demands for Bashir to step down.

The president was deposed in April by the military, but huge protests continued, culminating in a compromise that saw a joint military-civilian transitional council formed in August.

THE FORT WORTH CHURCH ATTACK

Shooter among 2 killed in Texas

REUTERS, Texas

A gunman who opened fire in a Texas church, killing one person and leaving another in critical condition, died after parishioners at the Sunday morning service shot him in response, authorities said.

The Fort Worth Fire Department said three people, including the person who they believed to be the shooter, were transported from the scene in critical condition. The scene was secure, they added.

Two of the people, including the shooter, died while en route to the hospital, and the third person was successfully resuscitated by paramedics, according to Macara Trusty, a spokeswoman for local emergency services MedStar. Two more people sustained minor injuries as they ducked for cover inside the church, she said.

The incident took place in White Settlement, a suburb northwest of Fort Worth, at the West Freeway Church of Christ.

White Settlement police chief J.P. Bevering said that the gunman was shot by two worshippers who were armed and returned fire. "The threat is stopped based on the heroic actions of the two parishioners in the church," Bevering said.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott said in a statement: "Places of worship are meant to be sacred, and I am grateful for the church members who acted quickly to take down the shooter and help prevent further loss of life."

Putin thanks Trump

Suspect planning attack pledged to IS: FSB

AGENCIES

Russia said on Sunday it had thwarted terrorism attacks reportedly planned in St. Petersburg thanks to a tip from Washington, bringing personal thanks again from President Vladimir Putin to his US counterpart Donald Trump.

Russian news agencies cited the Federal Security Service (FSB) as saying that thanks to the information, two Russians were detained on December 27 on suspicion of plotting attacks during New Year festivities in St Petersburg.

The Kremlin said Putin passed on his gratitude to Trump during a phone call on Sunday for the tip from US special services. It gave no more details.

Diplomatic ties between Washington and Moscow are fraught over disagreements from Ukraine to Syria and allegations of Russian

meddling in the US presidential election, but Trump and Putin have managed to keep personal lines open, reports Reuters.

Two years ago, the Russian leader also phoned Trump to thank him for a tip that Russia said helped prevent a bomb attack on a cathedral in St Petersburg. Russia has

repeatedly been the target of attacks by militant groups including Islamic State.

Sunday's Kremlin statement said Putin and Trump agreed to continue bilateral cooperation to tackle terrorism.

Meanwhile, a suspect detained during New Year's festivities had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group, Russia's FSB security service said yesterday.

Two men, both Russian citizens, were arrested on Friday suspected of planning the attack, reports AFP.

TIP FOR FOILING NY ATTACKS



NEWS IN brief

Taliban say they have 'no ceasefire plans'

AFP, Kabul

The Taliban yesterday denied agreeing to any ceasefire in Afghanistan after rumours swirled of a potential deal that would see a reduction in fighting after more than 18 years of war. The statement from the insurgents comes as local and international forces brace for another bloody winter amid renewed US-Taliban talks, after President Donald Trump called off the negotiations earlier this year over insurgent attacks.

Five J&K political leaders released

PTI, SHINAGAR

The Jammu and Kashmir administration yesterday released five political leaders who have been under detention since August 5, the day when the Centre announced abrogation of Article 370 provisions and bifurcation of the state. The five leaders released belonged to the National Conference, the PDP and the Congress, who were kept under preventive detention, officials said.

Turkey arrests 100 IS suspects

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey has arrested 100 suspected members of the Islamic State group (IS) in raids across the country, state news agency Anadolu reported yesterday. More than 40 Iraqis, around 20 Syrians and a Moroccan were among those detained across six provinces in recent days, including Ankara, Bursa and Batman, Anadolu said. Turkey has stepped up raids on IS militants in recent months and pushed to repatriate them to their countries of origin.