

NEWS IN brief

China detains activists in year-end crackdown

AFP, Beijing

Over a dozen Chinese lawyers and activists were detained or went missing in the final days of 2019 in a crackdown on participants of a private democracy gathering, rights groups said yesterday. The Chinese government has severely reduced the space for civil liberties since President Xi Jinping took power in 2012, rounding up rights lawyers, labour activists and even Marxists students in various sweeps. The crackdown showed how the authorities have "zero tolerance of even just private discussion on issues like democracy and human rights," Amnesty International said.

French citizen dead in US custody

AFP, Houston

A French citizen and native of Angola has died in the custody of US immigration agents, they said on Wednesday, the latest in a number of deaths during a US crackdown on illegal immigrants. A statement from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) identified the person only as "a 40-year-old native of Angola and citizen of France." They said the person died on Sunday at a hospital in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Quake causes limited damage in Iran

REUTERS, Dubai

An earthquake of magnitude 5.8 shook northeastern Iran yesterday, but there was little damage and no casualties, state television reported. The quake was centred on an area near Sangan at a shallow depth of 8 km (5 miles). "Our near-final report is that about 14 villages have had very limited damage," Morteza Salimi, head of rescue at Iran's Red Crescent, told the television.



Anti-government protesters take part at a lunchtime protest outside HSBC headquarters in Hong Kong, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Protest against Pakistan's atrocities on minorities

Indian PM tells anti-CAA protesters

PTI, Tumakuru

Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday slammed the Congress and its allies opposing the Citizenship Amendment Act, saying they are against giving relief to those who have been brutalised and victimised in Pakistan.

"Pakistan was founded on religious grounds due to which atrocities on minorities such as Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Christians have increased. But Congress and its allies don't speak against Pakistan," he said at a function here.

He also said the Congress and its allies take out rallies and stage demonstrations against the efforts to prevent atrocities on religious lines and save women from sexual assaults.

Modi wondered why those opposed to the CAA were not speaking out against Pakistan's atrocities and asked what stopped them from doing so.

Strongly defending the CAA, he said it was adopted by Parliament in a historic move, but that the Congress and its allies and the ecosystem created by his party's rival were now against the very institution.

He said India cannot leave the Hindus, Christians and Sikhs apparently fleeing Pakistan to "their fate" and added it was the country's responsibility to protect them.

Modi pointed out that the efforts are specially to protect the Dalits and tribals in Pakistan.

The Prime Minister also pointed out that the abrogation of Article 370 was a step towards ending terrorism and uncertainty in Jammu and Kashmir.

Modi on December 22 categorically rejected accusations that his government's new citizenship law was anti-Muslim.

The total number of people killed has reached at least 23 since violence broke out over the Citizenship Amendment Act that was passed in parliament last week, and it shows no sign of abating.

The law makes it easier for religious minorities from Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan to get citizenship in India, but it excludes Muslim immigrants.

Protesters reacted angrily, concerned that it threatens India's secular constitution and Indian-Muslim citizenship.

30 dead, several missing

Thousands fled to temporary shelters in Jakarta

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia's disaster agency yesterday warned of more deaths after torrential rains pounded the Jakarta region, triggering floods and landslides that killed at least 30 and left vast swaths of the megalopolis underwater.

Tens of thousands fled to temporary shelters across the capital region -- home to some 30 million -- with scores of houses damaged in the deadliest flooding in years, after torrential rains on New Year's Eve.

Images showed waterlogged homes and cars covered in muddy floodwaters, while some people took to paddling in small rubber lifeboats or tyre inner-tubes to get around.

In Bekasi, on the outskirts of the city, receding waters revealed swampy streets littered with debris and crushed cars lying on top of each other -- with waterline marks reaching as high as buildings' second floors.

"I saw the water coming and it just kept getting higher and higher," said Deddy Supriadi, after a local river overflowed on the first day of 2020.

"It swept away 40 or 50 cars that were parked right here," he told AFP.

Rescuers used inflatable boats to evacuate residents trapped in their homes, including children and seniors.

INDONESIA FLOODS

