

NEWSIN
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 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 shock 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

NEW YEAR’S DAY PROTESTS

About 400 people
arrested in HK

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Hong Kong police arrested about 400 people in New Year’s Day protests after what started as a peaceful pro-democracy march of tens of thousands spiralled into chaotic scenes with police firing tear gas to disperse the crowds.

The arrests take the total to about 7,000 since protests in the city escalated in June over a now-withdrawn bill that would have allowed extradition to mainland China, and will highlight the apparent absence of any progress towards ending the unrest.

The tension on Wednesday rose after some arrests were made in the Wan Chai bar district near a branch of global banking group HSBC, which has been the target of protester anger in recent weeks.

When scuffles broke out, large numbers of black-clad protesters rushed to the scene while other protesters formed human chains to pass them various supplies including bricks, forcing police to bring in their own reinforcements.

Police then asked organisers to call off the march early and crowds eventually dispersed as a water cannon truck and scores of police in riot gear patrolled the streets late into the evening.

Jimmy Sham, one of the leaders of the Civil Human Rights Front that organised the march, criticised the police decision to get the crowd to disperse at such short notice and said they had arrested protesters indiscriminately.

Police told media yesterday they had arrested 420 people over the New Year holiday, most on New Year’s Day, with 287 of them in one sweep for illegal assembly, including a 12-year old.

Protest against Pakistan’s
atrocities on minorities

Indian PM tells anti-CAA protesters

Pri, 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.



TV images showed the dramatic rescue of a baby saved by disaster personnel who waded through chin-deep water to the family’s home and carried the infant away to safety in a small plastic tub.

“We’ve been rescuing newborns, mothers who just gave birth and babies trapped in houses without food,” said Yusuf Latif, spokesman for the National Search and Rescue agency.

“In some places, the rescue operation was quite challenging and difficult. The water was deep with a strong current. Some alleyways were so narrow that it was hard for our inflatable boats to pass through,” he added.

Across the city, kids took the opportunity to swim in the floodwaters while some people grabbed fishing rods.

“I saw people were fishing here so I followed them,” said 28-year-old Agung Rosiadi.

“There were lots of fish before and difficult. The water was deep with a strong current. Some alleyways were so narrow that it was hard for our inflatable boats to pass through,” he added.

Police in Lebak said Thursday they were searching for as many as eight people who could still be missing. “We hope the toll won’t keep going up,” Social Affairs Minister Juliani Peter Batubara told reporters earlier yesterday.

UP govt sets deadline for
response to seizure notices

TNN, Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh government has set a 7-day deadline for response to property attachment notices slapped on those accused of damaging public property during citizenship protests.

More than 150 notices have been issued by the Lucknow administration since chief minister Yogi Adityanath declared those who indulged in violence will have to compensate for damages.

Reviewing security arrangements in the aftermath of massive protests across the state during anti-CAA protests, the chief minister had directed police and administration to expedite identification of ‘rioters’ through photographs and video footage and swiftly issue notices.

“In Lucknow, around 150 notices were issued. The accused will be given a week to present their side, but if the committee is not satisfied, proceedings will begin to extract compensation. If they are not in a position to pay, their properties will be attached and auctioned,” said a senior official in the government.

Under fire from National Human Rights Commission for alleged police excesses during the protests, the CM also directed the administration to forward video clips of protestors to NHRC to bolster the government’s position.

The government has taken recourse to a 2010 Allahabad high court order which allows the government to claim damages for public property destroyed during protests or riots from those convicted for violence.

Even though the CM has drawn flak from Opposition parties, Kamataka chief minister BS Yeddiurappa declared he too would take similar action against protesters. Yogi’s model is also being followed by the Railways.

Meanwhile, the chief minister has said since protests were triggered by rumours and misinformation, police should reach out to the people, especially among the minority community, and tell them CAA will not take away citizenship. For this, help should be taken from the intellectual class, media professionals, professors, doctors and religious leaders.

ANTI-CAA PROTESTS



Supporters of India’s main opposition Congress party shout slogans during a protest against price hike in cooking gas and milk in Chandigarh, India yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS



REPUBLIC DAY PARADE

Centre rejects
West Bengal’s
tableau
proposal

NDTV ONLINE

In what could spark fresh tensions between West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and the BJP-led centre, the Union Ministry of Defence on Wednesday rejected her state’s tableau proposal for the Republic Day parade on January 26.

“The tableau proposal of West Bengal government was examined by the expert committee in two rounds of meetings. The tableau proposal of the West Bengal government was not taken forward for further consideration by the committee after deliberations in the second meeting,” the ministry said in its statement.

Twenty-two proposals comprising 16 states and union territories and six ministries and departments have been shortlisted for the parade. The shortlist was compiled from as many as 56 tableau proposals - 32 from states and union territories and 24 from various ministries and departments - received by the central government.

“The expert committee examines the proposals on the basis of theme, concept, design and visual impact before making its recommendations. Due to time constraints arising out of the overall duration of the parade, only a limited number of tableaux can be shortlisted for participation in the parade,” the statement read, adding that West Bengal was shortlisted for the 2019 Republic Day parade through a similar process.

‘Deeply concerned’

Says UN secretary-general after N Korea said it
could resume nuclear and missile tests

REUTERS, United Nations

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is “deeply concerned” that North Korea has indicated it could resume nuclear and missile tests, a UN spokesman said on Wednesday.

“The Secretary-General very much hopes that the tests will not resume, in line with relevant Security Council resolutions.

Non-proliferation remains a fundamental pillar of global nuclear security and must be preserved,” spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in a statement.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said this week that there were no longer grounds for Pyongyang to be bound by a self-declared moratorium on intercontinental ballistic missile and nuclear bomb testing and that a “new strategic weapon” would be introduced in the near future.

“Diplomatic engagement is the only pathway to sustainable peace,” Dujarric also said.

US President Donald Trump - who in 2018 became the first American leader to meet with a North Korean leader - said after Kim’s remarks that the leader had signed a

denuclearization contract and Trump thought Kim was a “man of his word.”

Trump has repeatedly pointed to the moratorium, in place since 2017, as a sign that his policy of engagement with North Korea was working.

Kim has complained the United States had continued joint military drills with South Korea, adopted cutting-edge weapons and imposed sanctions while making “gangster-like demands.”

Last month, Pyongyang warned Washington of a possible “Christmas gift” after Kim gave the United States until the end of the year to propose new concessions in talks over his country’s nuclear arsenal.

North Korea experts said that Kim’s remarks - made during an hours-long plenum speech - were likely directed at his party, military, and government officials in North Korea, preparing the country for another period of economic hardship as it prepares for a long stalemate with the United States.

