

Polish student told to leave India over CAA

NDTV ONLINE

A Polish student of Jadavpur University has been told by the Foreigner Regional Registration Office (FRRO) to leave India after he participated in an anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act or CAA rally in Kolkata, university sources said yesterday.

The incident comes close on the heels of a Bangladeshi student of Visva Bharati University being issued a similar directive by the FRRO after she posted photographs of an anti-CAA demonstration, held on the campus, on social media.

Kamil Siedcynski, a Polish student of Comparative Literature, was asked by the FRRO to visit its Kolkata office, which he did on February 24, news agency Press Trust of India reported quoting an unnamed source. Siedcynski was served a notice by the FRRO asking him to leave the country within 15 days, the source said, PTI reported.

The JU source said several teachers and Left-leaning students of the varsity were of the view that Siedcynski was paying the price for attending an anti-CAA rally at Moulali in Kolkata in December last year where he was interviewed by a Bengali daily and a brief report on him was published the next day.

"Some people probably forwarded a copy of the report to the FRRO. Siedcynski has no political leanings but his enthusiasm to attend the protest rally and click photographs landed him in trouble," the source said.

Siedcynski, who is supposed to write his MA examinations this year, could not be contacted. JU authorities also did not take calls.

The Polish student had earlier studied Bengali and Sanskrit at the Visva Bharati University.



Migrants from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestinian territories arrive on a dinghy near the city of Mytilene, after crossing part of the Aegean Sea from Turkey to the island of Lesbos, Greece, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

Afghan deal hits a snag over prisoners' release

Ghani says his govt hasn't committed to release 5,000 Taliban

REUTERS, Kabul

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani yesterday rejected a Taliban demand for the release of 5,000 prisoners as a condition for talks with the Afghan government and civilians, included in a deal between the United States and the Islamist militants.

"The government of Afghanistan has made no commitment to free 5,000 Taliban prisoners," Ghani told reporters in Kabul, a day after the deal was signed in Qatar to start a political settlement aimed at ending the United States' longest war.

The accord said the United States and the Taliban were committed to work expeditiously to release combat and political prisoners as a confidence-building measure, with the coordination and approval of all relevant sides.

It said that up to 5,000 jailed Taliban would be released in exchange for up to 1,000 Afghan government captives by March 10.

However, on the issue of the prisoner swap, Ghani said, "It is not in the authority of United

States to decide, they are only a facilitator."

Saturday's accord was signed by US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban political chief Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, witnessed by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

After the ceremony, Baradar met foreign ministers from Norway, Turkey and Uzbekistan in Doha along with diplomats from Russia, Indonesia and neighbouring nations, the Taliban said, a move that signalled the group's determination to secure international legitimacy.

US President Donald Trump said he would meet Taliban leaders in the near future.

Under the agreement, Washington is committed to reducing the number of its troops in Afghanistan to 8,600 from 13,000 within 135 days of signing. It will also work with allies to proportionally reduce the number of coalition forces in Afghanistan over that period, if the Taliban adhere to their security guarantees and ceasefire. A full withdrawal of all US and coalition forces would occur within 14 months.

Trump says will soon meet with Taliban leaders

Taliban start diplomatic outreach



Mamata 'triggered riots' on CAA Says Amit Shah in Kolkata rally

THE STATESMAN/ANN

Indian Home Minister Amit Shah yesterday targeted West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee in Kolkata at a rally to launch BJP's Aar Noi Annay' (no more atrocity) campaign said that 'sonar Bangla' (golden Bengal) is not possible as long as Mamata's government remains in power.

He accused Banerjee of "triggering riots" and "burning trains" to oppose Citizenship Act. The protests by the Bengal CM, who opposed it staunchly will be of no avail, Shah said as "Mamata didi by doing all this could you stop us?"

Amit Shah said the Narendra Modi government would not stop until and unless all refugees in the country are granted citizenship under



the amended citizenship law (CAA).

In a virtual kick-start to the BJP's campaign for upcoming civic bodies poll in West Bengal, he accused opposition parties of misguiding the refugees and minorities and said not a single person will lose citizenship as a result of the CAA which was at the centre of riots in parts of north east Delhi last week that left 43 people dead and over 250 injured.

The CAA offers citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis, Jains and Buddhists who took shelter in India till 2014 after fleeing "atrocities" in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

Sri Lanka heads for snap polls

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's new president is set to dissolve parliament shortly and call snap a legislative election six months ahead of schedule, a state-run newspaper said yesterday.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa is expected to exercise his constitutional power to sack the assembly when it completes four-and-a-half out of its five-year term on Sunday night, the Sunday Observer said.

Rajapaksa, 70, won a landslide at November presidential polls and appointed his older brother and former president Mahinda as prime minister in a move that saw the family consolidate their hold on power.

Official sources told AFP that a general election was most likely in the final week of April if the 225-member national assembly is dissolved by Monday as widely expected.

Mahinda, who had been president twice and prime minister thrice, is expected to lead the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP, or People's Front) party to a comfortable victory. Political commentators have said it would be a formidable challenge for the opposition to prevent Rajapaksa securing a two-thirds majority which will allow him sweeping powers to govern the nation.

The Rajapaksa are adored by the Sinhala-Buddhist majority -- but loathed among minority Tamils -- for spearheading the defeat of separatist militants in 2009 to end the island's 37-year ethnic war.



Health officials, wearing face masks amid fears over the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus, check the body temperature of policewomen before an anti-government rally in Bangkok, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Want peace, but not at our cost

Women in Afghanistan fear Taliban's return

AFP, Kabul

As US troops prepare to leave Afghanistan, opening the door for a potential Taliban comeback, women across the war-torn country are nervous about losing their hard-won freedoms in the pursuit of peace.

The militants were in power for around five years until the US invasion of 2001. They ruled Afghanistan with an iron fist that turned women into virtual prisoners under a strict interpretation of sharia law.

The Taliban's fall transformed women's lives, much more so in urban areas like Kabul than in conservative rural Afghanistan.

But across the country, women remain wary of the insurgents, desperate to see an end to the violence, but fearful of paying a heavy price.

Under the Taliban, women were barred from seeking education or work -- rights that Afghan female professionals are fiercely protective of today.

In the western city of Herat, saleswoman Setara Akrimi, 32, told AFP: "I will be very happy if peace comes and the Taliban stop killing our people."

"But if the Taliban come back to power... with their old mentality, it is a matter of concern for me," the divorced mother of three added.



"If they tell me to sit at home, I will not be able to support my family," she said.

"There are thousands of women like me in Afghanistan, we are all worried."

Akrimi's anxieties are echoed by Kabul-based veterinarian Tahera Rezaei, who believes "the arrival of the Taliban will affect women's right to work, freedom and independence". "There has been no change in their mentality," the 30-year-old told AFP.

Passionate about her career, Rezaei said she was pessimistic about her prospects if the insurgents return to government, even in a truncated capacity.

"Looking at their history, I feel less hopeful... I believe the situation will get harder for working women like me," she said.

In the run-up to the US deal, the militants made a vague commitment while they now allow girls to attend primary school in some areas, occasional reports of floggings and even the public stoning of women persist, fuelling fears they will turn back the clock if they return to power.

The Taliban control large swathes of Afghanistan and to respect women's rights in line with "Islamic values", prompting warnings from activists that the pledge was mere lip service and open to broad interpretation.

AFTERMATH OF DEADLY ATTACK ON TURKEY TROOPS IN SYRIA

Migrants head to Greece after floodgates opened

Turkey says it has destroyed scores of Syrian army targets

REUTERS, Kastanies/Lesbos

Greece placed its borders on maximum security footing yesterday after hundreds of migrants used porous crossing points to enter the country from Turkey, with thousands behind them seeking entry after Ankara relaxed curbs on their movement.

At least 500 people had arrived by sea on three Greek islands close to the Turkish coast within a few hours yesterday morning, police said.

On the mainland further north, migrants waded across a river to the Greek side at Kastanies.

A Greek government source put the number of people gathered on the border yesterday at 3,000, while the International Organization for Migration estimated the number at 13,000.

Turkey said on Thursday it would no longer restrain hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers in its territory from reaching Europe despite a deal to do so reached with the EU in 2016.

Turkey's turnabout came after an

air strike killed 33 Turkish soldiers in neighbouring northwest Syria where Ankara has deployed forces to help secure its border against a new influx of refugees from the Syrian civil war.

Meanwhile, Turkey yesterday said it had destroyed air defence systems, more than 100 tanks and downed two planes belonging to the Syrian army as part of an operation it launched after the attack on its soldiers.

Tensions in northwest Syria have escalated sharply as fighting between Turkey-backed rebels and Russian-backed Syrian government forces risks bringing the two regional powers into direct confrontation.

Diplomatic efforts by Ankara and Moscow to defuse tensions have so far fallen short of achieving a ceasefire in the Idlib region of northwest Syria, the country's last major rebel stronghold after nine years of civil war.

The Syrian Observatory, a Britain-based war monitor, said 74 Syrian government troops and pro-Damascus fighters had been killed since Feb. 27.

Hundreds rally in US cities against Delhi violence

Hundreds of Indian Americans of different faiths rallied outside Indian consulates in major American cities on Friday evening to protest against the recent violence in Delhi that has killed at least 42 people, and injured hundreds. Violence erupted in the Indian capital last week with Hindu mobs attacking Muslim homes, shops. The attacks were carried out on protesters, who have been rallying against a new citizenship law, after the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Kapil Mishra threatened peaceful sit-ins would be removed from the streets. India's Hindu nationalist government says the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is meant to help persecuted minorities from neighbouring countries, but critics say the law, which makes faith a basis for granting citizenship, is against the country's secular ethos. More than 30 people have been killed in a harsh police crackdown on nationwide peaceful sit-ins against the "anti-Muslim" law.

India crowd wows Modi

US President Donald Trump on Saturday praised Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, calling him a "great guy" who is loved by his countrymen. Terming his recent visit to India "worthwhile", President Trump, while addressing a rally in South Carolina also quipped that he would never be excited again about crowds after having addressed over 1 lakh spectators in Ahmedabad's Motera Stadium earlier this week. "I may never be excited again about a crowd after going to India. Think of this, they have 1.5 billion people. We have 350, so we're doing pretty well, I'll tell you what, but I love this crowd, and I love that crowd too. Tell you they have a great love for ... They have a great love. They have a great leader, and they have a great love for the people of this country. That was really a worthwhile trip," he added. President Trump, accompanied by wife Melania and a high-level delegation, visited India last week.



UK PM Johnson announces engagement with partner

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his partner, Carrie Symonds, have announced they are expecting a baby and are engaged to be married. Downing Street confirmed on Saturday. No further information is being provided by the Prime Minister's office at this stage. The last time a child was born to a sitting prime minister was in 2010, when David Cameron and his wife, Samantha Cameron, welcomed their daughter Florence. Johnson, 55, has four children from his second marriage. Symonds, 31, has enjoyed a successful political career, working as part of the campaign team that helped to get Johnson re-elected as mayor of London in 2012. Symonds went on to become the youngest-ever director of communications at the party, at 29, and analysts say she was crucial in tidying up Johnson's famously disheveled persona during the leadership campaign.

SOURCE: AFP, NDTV, AL JAZEERA

NEWSIN brief

Steyer quits race

AFP, Columbia

Billionaire activist Tom Steyer dropped out of the race for the Democratic presidential nomination on Saturday after a disappointing finish in the South Carolina primary. Steyer spent more than \$20 million on advertising in South Carolina but was heading to a third-place finish behind former vice president Joe Biden and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders.

Israel votes

AFP, Tel Aviv

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and rival Benny Gantz wrapped up another bitter election campaign, before voters cast their ballots for the third time in 12 months today. After inconclusive elections in April and September, latest opinion polls put the two opponents neck and neck in a gruelling political triathlon. According to the projections, Netanyahu's right-wing Likud and Gantz's centrist Blue and White alliance would each win 33 seats in the 120-member Knesset.

Asia Bibi offered asylum in France

REUTERS, Paris

Asia Bibi, a Christian woman acquitted of blasphemy in Pakistan, has said she had been invited to live in France, after a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron. Bibi had been sentenced to death before her acquittal by the Supreme Court last year in a case that has become emblematic of fair trial concerns in such cases. She left Pakistan for Canada in May 2019 and has been living there with her family ever since.