

'It was a non-event'

Pro-Trump protests quiet amid massive police presence across US; FBI screens troops ahead of Biden inauguration

AGENCIES

Law enforcement officers far outnumbered protesters at state capitol grounds on Sunday, as few Trump supporters who believe the president's false claim that he won the 2020 election turned out for what authorities feared could be violent demonstrations.

More than a dozen states activated National Guard troops to help secure their capitol buildings following an FBI warning of armed demonstrations, with right-wing extremists emboldened by the deadly attack on the US Capitol in Washington on January 6.

Security officials had eyed Sunday as the first major flashpoint, as the anti-government "boogaloo" movement made plans weeks ago to hold rallies in all 50 states.

But by Sunday evening, only small gatherings of demonstrators had taken to the streets alongside much larger crowds of law-enforcement officers and media personnel.

"It was a non-event today and we are glad it was," said Troy Thompson, spokesman for the Department of General Services, the agency that protects the Pennsylvania Capitol in Harrisburg.

Tens of thousands of security personnel from the National Guard and law-



enforcement agencies descended in recent days upon Washington, DC, to bolster security ahead of Wednesday's ceremony, when Joe Biden will receive departing Republican President Donald Trump.

General Daniel Hokanson, who heads the National Guard Bureau, was asked by CBS News on Sunday if troops were being checked as they arrived in Washington.

"In coordination with the Secret Service and the FBI, they're screening all the personnel that are coming in," Hokanson said. The image of Washington as a fortress has unsettled US pride over the traditionally peaceful transfer of power.

It was unclear how much the FBI warning and robust security presence around the country on Sunday led protesters to cancel plans, reports AFP.



An anti-Trump protester pulls a cardboard cutout depicting US President Donald Trump as his supporters are expected to protest against the election of President-elect Joe Biden, outside the Pennsylvania State Capitol in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, US on Sunday. PHOTO: REUTERS

India exposed on Balakot strike

Pak PM says leaked chat shows BJP conducted 2019 air raid to win polls

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Pakistan said a 2019 air raid by India was a "false flag" operation conducted by India's governing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for electoral gains and urged the world community to stop its long-time rival's "reckless, militarist agenda". In a series of tweets yesterday, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan said India's "fascist" government led by his counterpart Narendra Modi "used the Balakot crisis for domestic electoral gains", referring to the Indian raid on the northwestern Pakistani town on February 26, 2019.

Khan's tweets followed the publication of hundreds of pages of the transcript of WhatsApp chats between prominent right-wing Indian TV anchor Arnab Goswami and Partho Dasgupta, the incarcerated head of the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) ratings company.

The chats, published as evidence submitted by the police in Mumbai city as part of an ongoing investigation into manipulation of television ratings, suggest that Goswami, Republic TV's co-owner and host, knew in



advance of New Delhi's plan to attack Balakot in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

India's "surgical strike", which it claimed was targeting a training camp for Kashmiri rebels in Balakot, was conducted to avenge the killings of 40 Indian soldiers in Indian-administered Kashmir's Pulwama area earlier that month.

India had blamed Pakistan-backed Kashmiri rebels for the February 14 attack on its military convoy, an allegation Islamabad denied.

On the day following the Balakot attack, the Pakistani Air Force shot down an Indian Air

Force aircraft and captured a pilot, who was later released by Islamabad as a "goodwill gesture".

Since their independence from British rule in 1947, India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir – a Himalayan region split between them but claimed by both the nuclear powers in its entirety.

According to the WhatsApp chat transcript, published in a report on the Scroll.in news website, Goswami texted Dasgupta on February 23, 2019, three days before the Balakot attack, saying "something big will happen".

Pakistan's Khan yesterday said the chats "reveal the dirty nexus" between the Indian government and its media "that is pushing our nuclearised region to the brink of a conflict it cannot afford".

"Latest revelations from communication of an Indian journalist, known for his warmongering, reveal the unholy nexus between the Modi gov't & Indian media that led to a dangerous military adventurism to win an election in utter disregard for the consequences of destabilising the entire region," Khan tweeted.

Kremlin foe Navalny held in pre-trial detention

Moscow tells West to butt out

REUTERS, Moscow

A Russian judge yesterday remanded Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny in pre-trial detention for 30 days for violating the terms of a suspended jail sentence, ignoring calls from Western countries to free the opposition politician immediately.

The ruling, a day after police detained him at the airport as he returned home for the first time since being poisoned by a military-grade nerve agent, may be the prelude to him being jailed for years.

Moscow's prison service has applied to convert a suspended 3.5 year embezzlement sentence in the same case, which he says was trumped up, into real jail time later this month.

He faces three other separate criminal cases too.

The United Nations and Western countries told Moscow before the ruling to let Navalny go and some countries have called for new

sanctions after earlier penalties from the EU in response to his poisoning, Moscow told them to mind their own business.

Navalny, in a video released on Twitter after the ruling, urged Russians to take to the streets in protest.

"Don't be afraid, take to the streets. Don't go out for me, go out for yourself and your future," Navalny said.

He called his treatment illegal under Russian law and lashed out at President Vladimir Putin, accusing him of throwing the criminal code out of the window in fear.

The Kremlin did not immediately respond, but has previously said that the 44-year-old politician must face justice like any other citizen if he has done anything wrong.

Around 200 hundred Navalny supporters had gathered outside the police station in temperatures of minus 18 degrees Celsius and demanded he be set free, a Reuters witness said.



Activists of various organisations take part in a demonstration held in support of farmers who are continuing their protest against the central government's recent agricultural reforms in Amritsar, India yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

TRAPPED CHINESE GOLD MINERS

Handwritten note seeds hope for 12 injured

AFP, Beijing

At least 12 gold miners trapped hundreds of metres underground in China for more than a week have sent up a note warning that they are injured, surrounded by water and urgently need medicine. Twenty-two workers were trapped more than 600 metres from the mine's entrance after a blast eight days ago near Qixia city in eastern Shandong province.

After days without any signs of life, rescuers heard knocking sounds on Sunday afternoon as they drilled through the mine's shaft.

A note was sent up on a line from the depths below saying that at least a dozen of the miners are still alive, but that they urgently needed help as their health deteriorates.

"We are in urgent need of medicine, painkillers, medical tape, external anti-inflammatory drugs, and three people have high blood pressure," the note read.

The condition of the other ten workers is unknown.

Four people were injured, according to the note, which was crumpled, water-stained and scrawled in pencil on pages ripped out of a notebook.

"We wish the rescuers won't stop so that we can still have hope. Thank you," the note read.

The writer of the note asked rescuers to send down some medication from his car, and warned that there was a large amount of underground water where the miners are trapped.

Rescuers were later able to speak with some of the trapped workers after lowering a phone line into the mine, local officials said at a press conference yesterday, without giving details of what was said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Thousands skip India's vaccine drive launch

India yesterday stepped up efforts to bolster trust in coronavirus vaccines after it was revealed that nearly a third of those invited to get jobs at the launch of a nationwide drive failed to turn up. The government has launched one of the world's most ambitious vaccine programmes, aiming to inoculate 300 million of the 1.3 billion population by July. In the first two days of the drive, which started Saturday, the government said 224,000 of 300,000 planned vaccinations were carried out. In the capital New Delhi, only 53 percent of people came forward for jobs, according to a health official.

Mein Kampf published in Poland

An academic edition of Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf" is being published in Poland this week for the first time, with its editor responding to critics by calling it "a homage to the victims". Hitler's inflammatory tract has rarely been published even after rights to the book, which first came out in 1925, entered the public



domain in 2016. "According to the critics, the publication of this book is an offence to the victims of Nazism. In my view, it is the opposite," said Eugeniusz Krol, a historian who has been preparing the Polish-language edition for the past three years. Pirate copies or abridged versions of Hitler's blueprint for the rise of Nazism and the Holocaust have circulated in Poland for years.

Saudi reports sharp drop in executions in 2020

Saudi Arabia yesterday reported a sharp drop in executions in 2020, as the kingdom seeks to blunt international criticism of its human rights record. The Gulf state, an absolute monarchy, has long faced criticism for one of the world's highest rates of executions and what human rights campaigners call an opaque judicial system. The Saudi government's Human Rights Commission (HRC) said it documented 27 executions in 2020, a decrease of 85 percent over the previous year due in part to a moratorium on the death penalty for drug-related offences.

"The Commission welcomes this news as a sign that the kingdom and its justice system are focusing more on rehabilitation and prevention than solely on punishment," HRC president Awwad Alawwad said in a statement.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

47 killed in Sudan S Darfur fighting

AFP, Khartoum

Clashes between rival ethnic groups in Sudan's South Darfur have left 47 dead, a local leader said yesterday, a day after over 80 people were killed in separate clashes elsewhere in the restive region.

The violence in the two states is some of the most significant fighting reported since the signing of a peace agreement in October, which observers hoped would end years of war.

While former rebel forces have committed to lay down their weapons, decades of conflict have left the vast western region awash with weapons and divided by bitter rivalries.

Key issues include land ownership and access to water.

It also comes just over two weeks since the hybrid United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) ended operations in their long-running peacekeeping mission.

"The clashes between the Rizeigat tribe and the Fallata tribe have stopped, and we have now counted 47 deaths," local leader Mohamed Saleh told AFP.

Saleh, from the ethnically non-Arab Fallata people, added that several houses were burned in the attack.

The violence -- which erupted early yesterday -- came after the killing of at least 83 people in clashes between rival ethnic groups on Saturday and Sunday in Sudan's West Darfur state.

Medics overwhelmed by casualties

AFP, Mamuju

Medics battled exhaustion and the risk of Covid-19 as they raced yesterday to treat scores of people injured by a devastating earthquake on Indonesia's Sulawesi island. At least 84 were killed and thousands left homeless by the 6.2-magnitude quake that struck early Friday, reducing buildings to a tangled mass of twisted metal and chunks of concrete in the seaside city of Mamuju.

Doctors in hazard suits treated patients with broken limbs and other injuries at a makeshift medical centre set up outside the only one of the city's hospitals that survived relatively intact -- one was flattened by the violent tremor.

A handful of doctors and nurses worked "non-stop" in the first couple of days after the quake until reinforcements arrived, but it was still barely enough amid shortages of medicine and other supplies.

"We were completely overwhelmed at one point," said Indahwati Nursyamsi, director of West Sulawesi General Hospital. "My nurses were also quake victims and had to help their families."

Medics scrambled to quarantine Covid-19 positive patients in a bid to

INDONESIA EARTHQUAKE



prevent an outbreak at the crowded open-air triage centre.

Some with coronavirus have been put in a prayer room -- common in the Muslim majority nation -- at the back of the hospital.

The hospital was trying to open up more rooms for surgery and erect additional tents outside to treat the injured.

But fears that another quake could bring down the building added to the challenges as patients, and some staff, refused to stay inside.

"There are patients who were scared and

pleaded to be taken out of the building," Nursyamsi said.

Nurse Agriani, 29, who came from a nearby district to help, said she had been working day and night.

"It's tiring... but it's part of my job as a nurse," said the woman, who like many Indonesians goes by one name.

It was unclear how many people -- dead or alive -- could be buried under mountains of debris, as rescuers rushed to find survivors more than three days after the disaster.

Most of the 84 dead were found in Mamuju, but some bodies were also recovered south of the city of 110,000 people in West Sulawesi province.

At least 18 people had been pulled out of the rubble alive, including a pair of young sisters, according to official data.

Police began using sniffer dogs to help in the search at a badly damaged hospital, as body bags were filled with recovered corpses.

"There are probably some people still trapped under the rubble," search and rescue agency spokesman Yusuf Latif said earlier yesterday.