

# Protesters caused 'insult' to India

Modi breaks silence after deadly farmer riot in New Delhi

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yesterday protesters that stormed New Delhi's Red Fort had caused "insult" to the country, his first public comments on a months-long farmers' agitation that turned violent last week.

Tens of thousands of farmers have camped on the outskirts of the capital for more than two months, protesting new agricultural laws they say benefit private buyers at the expense of growers.

A tractor parade on Tuesday's Republic Day turned violent when some protesters deviated from pre-agreed routes, clashing with police and breaking into the historic Red Fort complex in the capital. One died and hundreds were injured.

"The country was saddened by the insult to the Tricolor (Indian flag) on the 26th of January in Delhi," Modi said in a radio address yesterday. "The government is committed to modernizing agriculture and is also taking many steps in that direction."

Farm leaders say they were not responsible for violence, that was caused by a minority of those on the parade, and the government has left open the possibility talks between the two sides will resume. Modi told opposition party leaders on Saturday an offer to freeze the laws for 18 months still stands, according to a government summary of the meeting.

Agriculture employs about half of India's labour force, and unrest among an estimated 150 million landowning farmers is one of the biggest challenges to Modi's rule.



People arrive for Covid-19 vaccination at a drive through setup at Coors Field baseball stadium on Saturday, in Denver, Colorado, US. UHealth, the organizer and Colorado's largest healthcare provider, has set the goal of vaccinating 10,000 people over the weekend.

PHOTO: AFP

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Pearl's family to challenge Pak murder acquittals

The family of American journalist Daniel Pearl will challenge an order by Pakistan's top court to release a British-born militant acquitted of masterminding his kidnapping and brutal murder in 2002. The Supreme Court on Thursday upheld the acquittal of Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and three other men last year, triggering outrage from the United States. Pearl was the South Asia bureau chief for The Wall Street Journal when he was abducted and beheaded by jihadists in Karachi in January 2002 while researching a story about Islamist militants. "The Pearl family intends to file a review petition against the illegal and unjust majority decision," parents Ruth and Judea Pearl said in a statement that was tweeted by the murdered journalist's friend and former Wall Street Journal colleague Asra Nomani.

### Pope dedicates world day to 'forgotten' grandparents

Pope Francis yesterday announced a Catholic Church-wide celebration of grandparents and the elderly, to be marked each year in July. "Grandparents are often forgotten," the 84-year-old said as he led the weekly Angelus prayer from the Apostolic Palace, adding that "old age is a gift." "Grandparents are the link between generations, to pass on to the young the experience of life and faith."



The Argentine pontiff said the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly would be held on the fourth Sunday of July each year. Francis will preside over the evening mass on July 25 at St Peter's on the first World Day, subject to coronavirus restrictions, the Vatican said.

### Amit Shah slams Mamata ahead of West Bengal polls

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee "will be left all alone" to face the Assembly election - due in a few weeks - Home Minister Amit Shah said yesterday afternoon as he addressed - via video-conferencing - a rally in Howrah district. Shah's swipe comes a day after he personally welcomed five former members of the Trinamool into the BJP, to continue a flood of defections from the ruling party that began with ex-Nandigram MLA and cabinet minister Suwendu Adhikari. "Mamata Banerjee should reflect on why so many Trinamool Congress leaders are joining the BJP. It is because she has failed the people of the state. By the time elections arrive, she will be left all alone," the Home Minister was quoted by news agency PTI.

SOURCE: AFP, NDTV

## NUCLEAR DEAL WITH WORLD POWERS

# Iran rejects new talks or parties

REUTERS, Dubai

Iran's foreign ministry rejected any new negotiations or changes to the participants in Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers, after French President Emmanuel Macron said any new talks should include Saudi Arabia.

"The nuclear accord is a multilateral international agreement ratified by UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which is non-negotiable and parties to it are clear and unchangeable," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh was quoted by state media as saying on Saturday.

Iran began breaching the deal's limits on uranium enrichment activity after Washington withdrew from the pact in 2018 under then-President Donald Trump and reimposed economic sanctions on Tehran.



President Joe Biden's new administration has said it will rejoin the deal but only after Tehran resumes full compliance with its terms.

Saudi Arabia and its ally the United Arab Emirates have said that Gulf Arab states should be involved this time in any talks, which they say should also address Iran's ballistic missile programme and its support for proxies around the Middle East.

In his comments on Friday, cited by Al Arabiya television, Macron

stressed the need to avoid what he called the mistake of excluding other countries in the region when the 2015 deal was negotiated.

Saudi Arabia, which is locked in several proxy wars in the region with Tehran including in Yemen, supported Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran.

Macron said any new talks on the nuclear deal with Iran would be very "strict" and that a very short time remained to prevent Tehran from having a nuclear weapon.

Khatibzadeh said Macron should "show self-restraint".

"If French officials are worried about their huge arms sales to Persian Gulf Arab states, they better reconsider their policies," Khatibzadeh said. "French arms, along with other Western weapons, not only cause the massacre of thousands of Yemenis, but are also the main cause of regional instability."

# Trump impeachment lawyers leave team

AFP, Washington

Several of former US president Donald Trump's impeachment lawyers have left his team a little over a week before his trial, US media reported Saturday.

CNN cited unnamed sources as saying that five lawyers -- including two who were thought to be leading the team -- had parted ways with the Republican billionaire after disagreeing over his legal strategy.

Trump had wanted the lawyers to continue his baseless claims of mass election fraud rather than focus on the legality of convicting a president after he has left office, CNN said, adding that he was "not receptive" to discussion.

The lawyers included Butch Bowers and Deborah Barbier, expected to lead Trump's defense, CNN and other outlets reported, saying it had been a "mutual decision."

"We have done much work, but have not made a final decision on our legal team, which will be made shortly," tweeted Trump advisor Jason Miller in response to the reports.

The development leaves Trump, who has reportedly been struggling to form a defense ahead of his historic second impeachment trial over the ransacking of the US Capitol this month, facing new hurdles with just days to go.

However, even with his legal team in chaos he looks increasingly likely to dodge conviction.



The body of a Palestinian man shot by Israeli security after reportedly attempting a knife attack, lies on the side of the road, near Gosh Etzion, north of Hebron city in the occupied West Bank yesterday. Gosh Etzion is a bloc of two dozen Israeli settlements and outposts near Bethlehem.

PHOTO: AFP

# UK opens visa route for HK residents

AFP, Hong Kong

A new visa scheme offering millions of Hong Kongers a pathway to British citizenship went live yesterday as the city's former colonial master opens its doors to those wanting to escape China's crackdown on dissent.

Anyone with a British National (Overseas) passport and their dependants can now apply online for a visa allowing them to live and work in the United Kingdom. After five years, they can apply for citizenship.

The immigration scheme is a response to Beijing's decision last year to impose a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong to snuff out the huge and often violent democracy protests.

Britain has accused China of tearing up its promise ahead of Hong Kong's 1997 handover that the financial hub would maintain key liberties and autonomy for 50 years, and has argued it has a moral duty to protect its former subjects.

"We have honoured our profound ties of history and friendship with the people of Hong Kong, and we have stood up for freedom and autonomy," Prime Minister Boris Johnson said of the scheme this week.

The website for visa applications went online at 5pm in Hong Kong (0900 GMT).

China has reacted with fury to the visa offer, announcing that it would no longer recognise the passports as a legitimate travel or ID document.

## ROW OVER NEW MEDIA RULES IN AUSTRALIA

# Facebook CEO fails to persuade lawmakers to change policy

REUTERS, Sydney

Facebook Inc CEO Mark Zuckerberg called Australian lawmakers last week to discuss rules that would make internet giants pay news outlets for content but failed to persuade them to change policy, the country's Treasurer said yesterday.

Zuckerberg "reached out to talk about the code and the impact on Facebook" and a constructive discussion followed last week between the social media billionaire, Australian Treasurer Josh Frydenberg and communications minister Paul Fletcher.

"No, Mark Zuckerberg didn't convince me to back down if that's what you're asking," Frydenberg told the Australian Broadcasting Corp, without giving further details of the meeting.

A Facebook spokeswoman in Australia

said the company's executives regularly meet with government stakeholders on a range of topics.

"We're actively engaging with the Australian government with the goal of landing on a workable framework to support Australia's news ecosystem," she said.

Australia intends to introduce a law that would force Facebook, the world's largest social media platform, and internet search giant Google Inc to negotiate payments to media companies whose content drives traffic to their websites. If the

parties cannot agree on payments, a government-appointed arbitrator will set the fees for them.

Facebook and Google oppose the "News Media Bargaining Code" and have mounted public campaigns against it.



## AFGHANISTAN CONFLICT

# Int'l troops plan to stay beyond deadline: Nato

REUTERS, Islamabad

International troops plan to stay in Afghanistan beyond the May deadline envisaged by the insurgent Taliban's deal with the United States, four senior Nato officials said, a move that could escalate tensions with the Taliban demanding full withdrawal.

"There will be no full withdrawal by allies by April-end," one of the officials told Reuters.

"Conditions have not been met," he said on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter. "And with the new U.S. administration, there will be tweaks in the policy, the sense of hasty withdrawal which was prevalent will be addressed and we could see a much more calculated exit strategy."

The administration of then-President Donald Trump signed an agreement with the Taliban early last year calling for the withdrawal of all foreign troops by May in return for the insurgents fulfilling certain security guarantees.

Trump hailed the accord - which did not include the Afghan government - as the end of two decades of war. He reduced U.S. troops to 2,500 by this month, the fewest since 2001.

Plans on what will happen after April are now being considered and likely to be a top issue at a key Nato meeting in February, the Nato sources said.

The positions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization are becoming increasingly important after the alliance was sidelined by Trump, diplomats and experts say.



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