

SEDITION CHARGE FOR BACKING FARMERS' PROTESTS

Students in Delhi protest against activist's arrest

REUTERS, New Delhi

Students chanted slogans outside the Delhi police headquarters yesterday demanding the release of a 22-year-old environmentalist accused of sedition for an online document in support of farmers' protests.

Police say Disha Ravi, a leader of the local arm of climate change campaigner Greta Thunberg's advocacy group, created and shared a "toolkit" or an action plan that was used to foment violence in Delhi last month during the protests.

Her supporters have denied she did anything illegal and said the toolkit was an information pack about the protests, which erupted late last year to demand a rollback of three new agricultural laws, and was not designed to incite violence.

"The way the police took her away is illegal," said Prasenajit Kumar, a leader of the student group which tried to march to the front gates of the police headquarters.

Her arrest in her hometown of Bengaluru on Sunday has stoked outrage and comes at a time when Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government faces allegations it is suppressing dissent.

Police said her detention was part of the investigation into the violence that took place on Jan. 26 when thousands of farmers tore down barricades and reached the historic Red Fort and raised a religious flag there.

Police also have arrest warrants for two of Ravi's two associates, Nikita Jacob and Shantanu Muluk.

Jacob, a Mumbai-based lawyer, has petitioned a court, seeking to block her arrest. The court was due to hear her petition later yesterday. She said in her petition that she was trying to raise awareness about the plight of farmers protesting against deregulation of the produce market. There was no question of inciting violence, she said.

Thousands of farmers remain camped on the outskirts of New Delhi. The government says the new laws open up opportunities to farmers by allowing them to directly sell produce to private buyers such as large retailers.



Demonstrators shout slogans during a protest against the arrest of climate change activist Disha Ravi by Delhi police for allegedly helping to create a guide for anti-government farmers protests shared by environmentalist Greta Thunberg, outside the Delhi Police headquarters, in New Delhi, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

Barge accident on Congo river kills 60

At least 60 people died when a passenger barge carrying more than 700 people became shipwrecked on the Congo river at night, Democratic Republic of Congo's humanitarian affairs minister said on Monday. Some 300 survivors had been found near the scene of the accident in Mai-Ndombe province in the west of the country, but another 240 remained unaccounted for, Steve Mbikayi wrote on Twitter. "We sympathize with the families of the victims and we demand sanctions against all those responsible for the transport sector," Mbikayi said, without elaborating. No further details were immediately available.

Belarus mounts raids on journo, activists

Police in Belarus yesterday raided the homes and offices of more than 20 journalists, rights defenders and trade union members, investigators and activists said, as part of a probe into mass protests. Belarus was gripped by months of demonstrations against the rule of strongman President Alexander Lukashenko after he claimed an overwhelming victory in an August election the opposition said was rigged. The authorities snuffed out the protest movement in the ex-Soviet country by detaining thousands of people in a crackdown that left at least four demonstrators dead and several independent journalists facing years behind bars.

Wilders tweet irks Turkey

Turkish prosecutors yesterday launched an investigation into Dutch far-right leader Geert Wilders over a tweet in which he wrote "terrorist" accompanying an image of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Wilders tweeted an image on Monday of Erdogan, with the right side of his face depicted against a Turkish flag, and the left side - bearded and darker-skinned - against the black-and-white flag of the Islamic State extremist group. He wrote the word "terrorist" over the image, which was shared and liked thousands of times. The Ankara chief public prosecutor's office said it was opening a probe into the "photograph and written insult about" Erdogan.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

ACCIDENT IN INDIA

39 killed as bus plunges into canal

AFP, New Delhi

At least 39 passengers were killed when a bus plunged into a canal in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh yesterday, police told AFP as recovery efforts continued.

The accident happened when the bus, which was carrying more than 50 passengers, veered off the road and into the water near the village of Satna early morning.

According to media reports, seven people, including the driver, managed to swim to safety.

The state government has ordered an inquiry into the accident. An initial investigation suggested the driver lost control of the bus, reports said.

Iran renews pledge against nukes after controversy

AFP, Tehran

Iran has reiterated that its opposition to nuclear weapons was official policy as laid down by its supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in the wake of controversial remarks by a minister.

"Iran's position remains unchanged. Iran's nuclear activities have always been peaceful and will remain peaceful," foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told a news conference.

"The supreme leader's fatwa banning weapons of mass destruction and nuclear weapons is still valid," he added, referring to Khamenei's religious edict.

The renewed pledge came a week after Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi said it would not be Tehran's fault if the country was ever "pushed" towards developing a nuclear bomb.

He stressed that "under normal circumstances, Iran has no such intention or plan".

Iranian intelligence ministers can only be appointed or dismissed with the approval of the supreme leader.

Iran had claimed the existence of the fatwa for years before making the text public for the first time in 2010, at a time of crisis over Iran's nuclear programme.

Tehran was at the time accused by the international community, especially the West and Israel, of seeking to secretly acquire the atomic bomb.

The fatwa declares the use of the atomic bomb and other weapons of mass destruction to be "haram", or forbidden by Islam, and it is regularly cited by Iranian authorities as a guarantee of Tehran's good intentions.

Tasnim news agency, considered close to Iran's ultraconservatives, has blasted Alavi over his "astonishing remarks" that could have "very serious consequences".

It said in an editorial that the leader's fatwa was not designed just to "appease" the West but showed that an atomic bomb would go against "the nature of the Islamic republic".

"These remarks are completely against national interests as they can strengthen the West's leverage in negotiations and more importantly, give credence to the America's unjust stance against Iran," Tasnim said.

UN condemns deadly Iraq rocket attack

AFP, Arbil

The United Nations yesterday warned that Iraq could spin out of control after a rocket attack on the Kurdish regional capital Arbil killed a foreign contractor for the US military and wounded several other people.

The attack late Monday was the first time in nearly two months that Western military or diplomatic installations have been targeted in Iraq after a series of similar incidents last year that were blamed on pro-Iranian Shia factions.

Besides the foreign civilian contractor, who is not an American national, another nine people were wounded, including eight civilian contractors and one US soldier.

EBOLA OUTBREAKS IN GUINEA, CONGO

WHO alerts six African countries

REUTERS, Conakry

The World Health Organization has asked six African countries to be alert for possible Ebola infections, as Guinea yesterday reported new cases and Democratic Republic of Congo said its new infections were a resurgence of a previous outbreak.

Guinea declared an outbreak of the virus on Sunday in the first return of the disease there since the 2013-2016 outbreak, while Congo has confirmed four new cases this month. Guinea has so far recorded up to 10 suspected cases of Ebola and five deaths.

Health authorities have rushed to respond to the cases in Guinea, anxious to prevent a repeat of the last outbreak in West Africa, which killed more than 11,300 people.

Guinea's neighbours include Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Further spread of the disease could cripple the regions' under-funded health systems which are also battling the coronavirus pandemic.

Since the devastating epidemic in West Africa, the development of vaccines and treatments has greatly improved survival rates and containment efforts.

The Ebola virus can cause severe bleeding and organ failure and is spread through contact with body fluids. It has a much higher death rate than COVID-19, but unlike the coronavirus it is not transmitted by asymptomatic carriers.

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টেস্ট মি রোগ প্রতিরোধে সাহায্য করে
আর তাইতো মন বলে...

"ওয়ে হেলদি এ" ওয়ে মজাবে

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