

Myanmar grieves for slain young anti-coup protester

AFP, Naypyidaw

A sombre Buddhist funeral song rung out in Myanmar's capital as the body of a young woman, struck down during a rally against this month's military coup, was carried to a ceremony marking the end of her short life.

Thousands lined the route of the procession to pay tribute to Mya Thwate Thwate Khaing, who was shot in the head two days before her 20th birthday at a protest demanding the release of ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The grocery store worker was kept on life support for 10 days but succumbed to her wounds on Friday, making her the first protester killed for participating in the massive civil disobedience campaign sweeping the country.

An honour guard linked hands and formed a circle around her coffin as her family members and other mourners drew near to pay their respects.

"Please don't go," one older relative whispered, grief-stricken, as she gazed down at the open casket.

A large motorbike procession rode in convoy with the ornate black and gold hearse that transported Mya Thwate Thwate Khaing to the funeral hall, alongside other vehicles decorated with floral wreaths and photographs of the deceased.

Mourners gathered outside the funeral hall held up the three-finger salute that has been adopted as a gesture of resistance to

military rule.

The crowd departed as her coffin was set ablaze for her cremation, a thin plume of smoke rising from the funeral hall's chimney.

One young woman walked back to the road while holding aloft a vinyl banner with an image depicting the moment Mya Thwate Thwate Khaing was shot, as others held her in a vain effort to render first aid.

In the days since she was shot, Mya Thwate Thwate Khaing has become a potent national symbol of resistance to military rule.

Vigils in her honour have been held elsewhere in the country. Demonstrators have in recent days hoisted photos of Mya Thwate Thwate Khaing in street marches, and news of her death on Friday sent a flash of anger through the country.

Some in the protest movement have described her as a "martyr", and rights groups have demanded an independent investigation into her death.

State media yesterday claimed that an autopsy of Mya Thwate Thwate Khaing's body showed the bullet was not fired by police officers.

It also claimed she was "throwing stones" at security forces at the protest.

But Amnesty International said footage of the incident showed that "police recklessly targeted protesters, with no respect for their lives or safety".



People line the street throw flowers on the road as the car carrying the body of protester Mya Thwate Thwate Khaing passes during her funeral service, after she died following being shot during a rally against the military coup, in Naypyidaw. Myanmar, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

'Nothing has changed'

Iran FM says Trump nuke policy remains under Biden admin, reiterates demand for lifting of sanctions for any future talks

AFP, Tehran

Tehran yesterday retreated its stance that the United States must first lift sanctions on Iran if it wants to talk about salvaging the 2015 nuclear deal with Foreign Minister Mohammad Javaf Zarif saying "nothing has changed" since President Joe Biden took power from his predecessor Donald Trump.

Biden's administration said last week it was ready to talk to Iran about both nations returning to the accord, but ruled out lifting of sanctions before talks, which aimed to prevent Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Iran also said it had held "fruitful discussions" with UN nuclear watchdog chief Rafael Grossi in Tehran, ahead of a deadline when it is set to restrict the agency's inspections unless the United States lifts painful sanctions.

Grossi's visit comes amid stepped-up efforts between US President Joe Biden's



administration, European powers and Iran to salvage the 2015 nuclear deal that has been on the brink of collapse since Trump withdrew from it.

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javaf Zarif, who was to later meet Grossi, signalled that the Islamic republic wants to avoid an "impasse" but also warned that it could step further away from its commitments if Washington does not lift the sanctions.

Grossi was due to hold a press conference when he returns to Vienna in the evening.

Iran's conservative-dominated parliament months ago demanded that, if the US does

not lift sanctions by Feb 23, Iran suspend some IAEA inspections.

Tehran has repeatedly said it is ready to return to its nuclear commitments, on the condition that Washington makes the first move by lifting the sanctions that have heaped economic pain on Iran.

Zarif said that, from Iran's point of view, "nothing has changed" as the Biden administration had so far followed the same Iran policy as his predecessor' 'maximum pressure' campaign.

If sanctions were not lifted, the stockpile of "enriched uranium will increase," he said, stressing that Tehran has the right within the deal to stop observing commitments "totally or partially" if the other parties fail to honour theirs.

"We are still in the partial phase," Zarif said. "We can be total."

Zarif also stressed that "there won't be any negotiations, period. Not before or after" the US returns to the deal.

INDIA-CHINA BORDER STANDOFF

Rivals complete troops pullback from key lake

AFP, New Delhi

India yesterday said that its troops, along with their Chinese counterparts, had completed a pullback from a disputed part of their 3,500-kilometre-long Himalayan border after months of heightened tensions.

The latest flare-up turned deadly in mid-June last year when 20 Indian soldiers were killed in a border battle in the strategically important Galwan river valley in Ladakh. Beijing said four of its soldiers had died in the clash.

After nine rounds of high-level military talks which have been held since the June clash, India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said last week that both sides agreed to disengage from the Pangong Lake area.

India's defence ministry said in a joint statement with Beijing that during the 10th round of talks on Saturday, "the two sides positively appraised the smooth completion of disengagement of frontline troops in the Pangong Lake area."

The statement said it was a "significant step forward" that provided a good starting point for the resolution of other disputes in the western sector of the contested border.

"The two sides agreed to... continue their communication and dialogue, stabilise and control the situation on the ground (and) push for a mutually acceptable resolution of the remaining issues," the statement added.

NEWS IN BRIEF

India-Maldives sign \$50 million defence deal

India and the Maldives yesterday signed a \$50 million defence Line of Credit (LoC) agreement to boost maritime capabilities of the strategically-located Indian Ocean island nation. The signing of the agreement took place after Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held talks with several Maldivian ministers including its Defence Minister Mariya Didi. "A \$50 million-dollar credit line agreement between the government of Maldives and EXIM Bank India was signed for defence projects," said a joint statement as visiting Indian external affairs minister ended his two-day visit to the Maldives.

Ebola death toll hits 4 in DRC

Four people have died from the hemorrhagic Ebola virus during a new outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo, officials said yesterday, warning that people are resisting measures to contain the highly contagious disease. The country has registered 6 Ebola cases. The virus has also resurfaced in Guinea, where it has already killed five people. A vaccination drive was launched last Monday, but as with past outbreaks, people in the region doubt the existence of Ebola and reject measures aimed at checking its spread. Ebola causes severe fever and, in the worst cases, unstoppable bleeding. It is transmitted through close contact with bodily fluids, and people who live with or care for patients are most at risk.

Dozens killed as US counts cost of 'polar plunge'



Frustrated Texans queued for hours for safe drinking water, after an unprecedented and deadly "polar plunge" burst pipes and left millions in the US state shivering without power or clean water for days. The extreme winter weather system wreaked havoc across much of the southern and central United States this week, reportedly killing at least 40 people and igniting anger in Texas as authorities scrambled to turn the lights back on. President Joe Biden approved a major disaster declaration for Texas on Saturday. The action by the Biden administration makes federal funding available to affected individuals, including assistance for temporary housing and home repairs and low-cost loans.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



An Asian-American wearing a face mask and holding a sign takes part in a rally to raise awareness of anti-Asian violence during the Covid-19 pandemic, near Chinatown in Los Angeles, California, on Saturday. The rally was organized in part in response to last month's fatal assault of Vicha Ratanapakdee, an 84-year-old immigrant from Thailand, in San Francisco.

PHOTO: AFP

ALLEGED COAL SCAM

CBI summons wife of W Bengal CM's nephew for questioning

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) yesterday summoned the wife of West Bengal's ruling Trinamool Congress leader and lawmaker Abhishek Banerjee, who is the nephew of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, in a case relating to coal smuggling, officials of the probe agency said.

This is for the first time that the CBI has summoned Abhishek Banerjee's wife in the coal smuggling case in which the probe agency conducted multiple raids across West Bengal last week.

The CBI's move comes close on the heels of Abhishek Banerjee lodging a defamation case against Indian Home Minister and senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader Amit Shah.

A designated court in West Bengal issued summons to Shah on Friday last asking him to appear either personally or through a lawyer before it on February 22.

"At 2pm today, the CBI served a notice in the name of my wife. We have full faith in the law of the land. However, if they think they can use these

plots to intimidate us, they are mistaken. We are not the ones who would ever be cowed down," Abhishek Banerjee tweeted.

CBI officials said the searches were on in Purulia, Bankura, Pashchim Bardhaman and Kolkata districts. The searches included premises of Amiya Steel Pvt Ltd in Kolkata and Bankura and that of Joydeb Mandal, the alleged deputy of the suspected kingpin of the racket Anup Manjhi.

The CBI had registered an FIR in November last year against Manjhi, Eastern Coalfield Ltd General Managers Amit Kumar Dhar and Jayesh Chandra Rai (Kajora area) besides ECL Chief of Security Tanmay Das, Area Security Inspector, Kunustoria Dhananjay Rai and SSI and security in-charge Kajora area Debashish Mukherjee.

Manjhi is allegedly involved in illegal mining and theft of coal from leasehold mines of ECL in Kunustoria and Kajora areas, they said.

The CBI's summon to Abhishek's wife is set to heat up the political scenario in West Bengal where fresh assembly poll are likely to take place in April-May.

'Thought we were going to die'

United Airlines plane survives engine failure mid-air

AFP, Denver

A United Airlines plane suffered a fiery engine failure yesterday shortly after taking off from Denver for Hawaii, dropping massive debris on a residential area before a safe emergency landing, officials said.

A video shot from inside the aircraft -- which had 231 passengers and 10 crew onboard -- showed the right engine ablaze and wobbling on the wing of the Boeing 777-200, its cover entirely missing as the aircraft flew over a barren landscape.

There were no injuries on the plane or on the ground, authorities said. Most of the passengers have already headed to their destination by another plane. Few who refused to travel after the ordeal have been accommodated by the airlines.

"I can honestly say I thought we were going to die at one point -- because we started dropping altitude right after the explosion," passenger David Delucia told The Denver Post.

"I grabbed my wife's hand and said, 'We're done.'"

In a recording of the distress



A large piece of airplane debris in pictured in a neighborhood of Broomfield, Colorado. PHOTO: REUTERS

call obtained from the website LiveATC, which broadcasts air traffic communications, the pilot requested emergency permission to turn back to Denver.

"Three-twenty-eight, uh, heavy. We've experienced engine failure, need to turn. Mayday, mayday," he said, without obvious panic in his

voice.

"Mayday, aircraft, uh, just experienced engine failure," he said, after the tower asked him to repeat himself. "Need a turn immediately."

Meanwhile, residents in the Denver suburb of Broomfield found large pieces of the plane scattered around their community, including a giant circular piece of metal that landed in the yard of Kirby Klements.

"It was a little overwhelming," he told CNN.

"It landed square on top of my truck and fell off," he said, reporting that a separate large piece of debris had put a five-foot (1.5-meter) hole in a neighbor's roof.

United said it would "continue to work with federal agencies investigating this incident."

Heather Solar was running a practice at the park for her girls' soccer team when she said she heard an explosion, following by debris raining down.

"Honestly, what I thought it was at first... I thought we were being bombed," Solar told The Denver Post. "There was so much debris in the sky."



Catalan regional police Mossos d'Esquadra officers detain a protester following clashes after a demonstration against the imprisonment of Spanish rapper Pablo Hasel in Barcelona, Saturday. Protesters threw bottles at police, set fire to containers and smashed up shops in Barcelona on Saturday in a fifth night of clashes after a rapper was jailed for glorifying terrorism and insulting royalty in his songs. The nine-month sentence of Hasel, known for his virulently anti-establishment raps, has sparked a debate over freedom of expression in Spain as well as protests that have at times turned violent.

PHOTO: AFP