

2008 BOMBINGS India court sentences 38 to death

AFP, Ahmedabad

An Indian court sentenced 38 people to death yesterday over a string of bomb blasts in 2008 that killed dozens in the city of Ahmedabad, in one of the country's biggest mass death sentences.

The court also convicted 49 people over the attacks, in which more than 200 were injured.

Coordinated attacks in Gujarat state's commercial hub in 2008 killed 56, launching shrapnel through markets, buses and other public places.

An Islamist group calling itself the Indian Mujahideen claimed responsibility, saying the blasts were revenge for 2002 religious riots in Gujarat that left some 1,000 people dead.



Demonstrators chant slogans during a protest against the proposed grant agreement from America under the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), in Kathmandu, Nepal yesterday. MCC, a US government aid agency, agreed in 2017 to provide \$500 million in grants to fund an electricity transmission line and road improvement project in Nepal. The funds do not need to be repaid, and Washington says they come with no strings. But opponents say that the agreement would undermine local laws and Nepal's sovereignty, as Nepal would not have sufficient oversight over the board directing projects. Major political parties, including those forming the ruling coalition, are divided over whether to accept the money.

PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lanka out of cash to buy oil: minister

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's state-run petroleum company has run out of cash to buy oil, and fuel shortages across the country could get worse, the energy minister said yesterday.

Udaya Gammanpila said the loss-making Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) continued to hemorrhage cash and was out of money to procure supplies from abroad. He said the CPC suffered losses of up to 42 percent on the sale of diesel at government-mandated prices.

Sri Lanka's worsening foreign-exchange shortage has seriously impacted the energy sector, which depends entirely on imports for its oil needs. The shortage of furnace oil has already led to the shutting down of thermal electricity generators, resulting in unannounced power cuts across the Indian Ocean island.

Sri Lanka's economy is also seeing a scarcity of food, with supermarkets forced to ration staple foods including rice. The shortages pushed food inflation to a record 25 percent last month.

The island was handed temporary relief with a \$500 million credit line from India last month to finance oil purchases sufficient for about six weeks. Sri Lanka has also sought more loans from Beijing to help repay its existing Chinese debt, which accounts for about 10 percent of the country's external borrowings.

ROHINGYA GENOCIDE CASE AGAINST MYANMAR

Junta to join ICJ hearings

REUTERS, Amsterdam/Bangkok

Myanmar's military junta is to take part in hearings at the top United Nations court in The Hague next week despite a complaint from political opponents that this could give it international recognition without legal standing.

The hearings complicate a jurisdictional dispute arising from Gambia's claim filed in 2019 at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), also known as the World Court, accusing Myanmar of genocide against its minority Muslim Rohingya population.

More than 730,000 Rohingya fled Myanmar after a military-led crackdown in 2017 and were forced into squalid camps across the border in Bangladesh. UN investigators concluded that the military campaign had been executed with "genocidal intent".

Before the fall of Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian National Unity Government (NUG) to a military coup a year ago, she disputed

the genocide allegations against the military brought by Gambia, a mainly Muslim African country backed in this case by the 57-nation Organisation for Islamic Cooperation.

Now, junta representatives are expected to attend virtual hearings at the ICJ - which handles disputes between states - dealing with a fight between the military and the NUG for recognition at the court. Hearings are set to begin on Monday.

The ICJ has yet to consider the merits of the genocide accusation. Suu Kyi in December 2019 called on the World Court to dismiss Gambia's claim, denying genocide and saying the ICJ should not have jurisdiction.

"The junta's presence at the hearings doesn't impart legitimacy or validate the representation of the military before the United Nations," said Shayna Bauchner, a researcher for New York-based Human Rights Watch. She said the more important focus should be on justice being served over atrocities against the Rohingya in Myanmar.

S'pore PM Lee's 'criminal MPs in Nehru's India' remarks draw ire

REUTERS, New Delhi

India has complained to Singapore about a remark its prime minister made on the number of Indian parliamentarians facing criminal charges, an Indian official said yesterday, in a rare instance of friction between the Asian allies.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong made the remark in Singapore's parliament on Wednesday during a debate about accusations of lying levelled at a member of Singapore's opposition.

Lee, referring to parliamentary standards, mentioned India, suggesting a decline there since its first prime minister after independence from Britain in 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru, was in charge.

"Nehru's India has become one where ... almost half the MPs in the Lok Sabha have criminal charges pending against them, including charges of rape and murder," Lee said, referring to India's lower house of parliament. He did add, however, that many of the charges were politically motivated.

Indian media reported that Singapore's ambassador had been summoned to the foreign ministry to explain.

"Most countries are founded and start off on the basis of high ideals and noble values. ... Things start off with passionate intensity. The leaders, who fought for and won independence, are often exceptional individuals of great courage, immense culture, and outstanding ability. They came through the crucible of fire and emerged as leaders of men and nations. They are the David Ben-Gurions, the Jawaharlal Nehrus, and we have our own too," he said.

But beyond that initial fervour, succeeding generations often find it hard to sustain this momentum and drive, Lee added. The texture of politics changes, respect for politicians declines. After a while, the electorate comes to think this is the norm. So, standards get debased, trust is eroded, and the country declines further, he said.

India's main opposition Congress party, led by Nehru's great-grandson, Rahul Gandhi, took the opportunity to extol its old leader and have a dig at its rivals. "Nehru's magnanimity continues to inspire world leaders even today," Congress said in a statement on Twitter. "Pity the ones here at home who fail to have the vision to understand the exceptional leader he was."



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