15 killed in Russia school shooting, 24 injured

11 children among dead; swastika-wearing attacker 'commits suicide'; Putin mourns

AGENCIES

A gunman with a swastika on his teeshirt killed 15 people, including 11 children, and wounded 24 at a school in Russia yesterday before committing suicide, investigators said.

The attack was the latest in a series of school shootings that have shaken Russia in recent years and came with the country on edge over efforts to mobilise tens of thousands of men to fight in Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin denounced the "inhuman terrorist attack" in the city of Izhevsk, the Kremlin said, adding that the shooter "apparently belongs to a neo-fascist group".

President Vladimir Putin "deeply mourns" the deaths, it added.

According to investigators, the attacker "was wearing a black top with Nazi symbols and a balaclava" when his body was discovered. He was later identified as a local man born in 1988, who graduated from this school.

Investigators have said two security guards and two teachers were among the victims. The shooter, described as "mentally ill", was later found dead, with officials saying he had "committed suicide" by shooting himself.

Authorities previously announced a death toll of nine people but did not specify if that included the suspected shooter, reports AFP.

Investigators said they were conducting a search in his home and looking into his "adherence to neo-fascist views and Nazi ideology".

The region's governor Alexander Brechalov confirmed there were "casualties and wounded among children", speaking in a video statement outside school No88 in Izhevsk.

Russia's health ministry said "14 ambulance teams" were working at the scene to help the injured, news agencies reported.

Brechalov declared a period of mourning in the region to last until Thursday. A city of around 630,000 people, Izhevsk is the regional capital of Russia's Udmurt Republic, located around 1,000 kilometres east of Moscow.

People bid farewell to reservists drafted during the partial mobilisation in the Siberian settlement of Bolsherechye in the Omsk region, Russia. The photo was taken on Sunday and released yesterday. The Kremlin admitted yesterday that errors had been made during the mobilisation of reservists for the military action in Ukraine and said no decision had been taken to close Russia's borders. PHOTO: REUTERS

GENERAL ELECTION

Italy takes step into unknown with far-right win

AFP, *Rome*

Italy took a sharp turn to the right yesterday after Giorgia Meloni's Eurosceptic populist party swept to victory in general elections, putting a one-time Mussolini admirer on course to become the first woman to lead the country.

Meloni's Brothers of Italy party, which has neo-fascist roots, won 26 percent in Sunday's election, according to partial results.

It leads a coalition set to win a majority in parliament and install the most right-wing government since World War II.

Her success represents a seismic change in Italy -- a founding member of the European Union-- and for the EU, just weeks after the far-right outperformed in elections in Sweden.

"Meloni takes Italy," read the Repubblica daily's headline, while editorialist Stefano Folli said Italy "awakes this morning very changed".

"It is the first time in decades that the country's political face has transformed so completely. We don't know yet whether its destiny in Europe has changed too, but that is the first of many questions" now facing Italians, he said.

Meloni, who campaigned on a motto of "God, country and family", is expected to become Italy's first woman prime minister, although the process of forming a new government could take weeks.

At a time of soaring inflation, a looming energy crisis and the war in Ukraine, the 45-year-old sought to reassure those worried about her lack of experience and radical past.

MAHSA AMINI'S DEATH

Iran protests flare

Over 1,200 arrested as crackdown escalates; Germany summons Iranian envoy as tensions with West grow

AFP, *Paris*

Iran has arrested more than 1,200 protesters, officials said Monday, in its lethal crackdown on 10 nights of unrest driven by outrage over the death of Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini in the custody of the notorious morality police.

At least 41 people have been killed as Iran has heavily deployed security forces against nationwide demonstrations sparked by the death of Amini, 22, following her arrest for allegedly breaching Iran's strict rules on hijab headscarves and modest clothing.

Tensions grew between the Islamic republic and Western nations as Germany summoned the Iranian ambassador, a day after the European Union protested the "widespread and disproportionate use of force" and Tehran called in the British and Norwegian envoys.

Protests flared again across Iran overnight as a Tehran crowd shouted "death to the dictator", calling for the end of the more than three-decade rule of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, 83, in footage shared by Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights.

"Woman, Life, Freedom!" the crowds have chanted as female protesters have defiantly burnt their hijabs in bonfires and blazing rubbish dumpsters -- a rallying cry that has been echoed at solidarity protests worldwide, including in London and Paris at the weekend.

Iranian riot police in black body armour have beaten protesters with truncheons in running street battles, and students have torn down large pictures of the supreme leader and his predecessor Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomenei, in recent video footage published by AFP.

In Iran's biggest protests in almost three years, security forces have used water canon but also fired birdshot and live rounds, according to rights groups, while protesters have hurled rocks, torched police cars and set public buildings ablaze.

The IHR rights group said Sunday at least 57 protesters have been killed.

The total number of officially reported arrests rose above 1,200, according to state media reports citing various

officials, including about 450 in northern Mazandaran province, over 700 reported Saturday in neighbouring Gilan and dozens in several other regions.

"Rioters have attacked government buildings and damaged public property," Mazandaran's chief prosecutor, Mohammad Karimi, was quoted as saying by official news agency IRNA, charging that they were steered by "foreign anti-revolutionary agents".

Tehran police have been deployed "24 hours a day", said the Iranian judiciary chief, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, thanking exhausted officers and the capital's police chief during a visit to their headquarters Sunday, in a video posted by Mizan Online.

Many police officers "did not sleep last night and the nights before ... and they must be thanked," said Ejei, who earlier stressed "the need for decisive action without leniency" against the protest instigators. Several security officers have also died, according to Iranian media.

Despite sweeping internet restrictions, including blocks on Instagram and WhatsApp, new videos shared widely on social media showed protests Sunday night in Tehran and cities including Yazd, Isfahan and Bushehr on the Persian Gulf.

Norway-based Kurdish rights group Hengaw said a protest was held in Amini's home town of Saqqez "despite a heavy military presence", and there were reports a 10-year-old girl being hospitalised after she was shot in the northern town of Bukan.

The Tasnim news agency published photos of about 20 "riot leaders", including several women, taken in the holy shrine city of Qom, and said the military and security forces were calling on citizens to "identify them and inform the authorities".

Other reports said that students at Tehran and Al-Zahra Universities and the Sharif Institute have gone on strike, refusing to attend lessons and urging their professors to join.

The European Union has slammed Iran, charging that "the widespread and disproportionate use of force against nonviolent protestors is unjustifiable and unacceptable", in a statement by its foreign policy chief Josep Borrell on Sunday.

India's Congress likely to get first non-Gandhi chief

REUTERS, *New Delhi*

India's main opposition Congress party is likely to elect a new party president from outside the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty for the first time in nearly 25 years, as it looks for a reset ahead of the next election to compete with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Formed 137 years ago during India's struggle for independence from Britain, Congress was thumped by Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the last two general elections. Many senior Congress leaders have quit to form their own party or to join the BJP, blaming the weak Congress leadership of Rahul Gandhi. Around 9,000 party delegates will vote for a new president. Gandhi family loyalist Ashok Gehlot, the chief minister of Rajasthan state, and Shashi Tharoor, a lawmaker from the southern state of Kerala and a former top UN official, could file nominations this week, party sources said. "The election authority of the party started the election process on Sept. 22 for which polling will happen on Oct. 17 if there is more than one candidate," said Pranav Jha, secretary at the Congress's Election Authority.

ECONOMIC WOES

Pakistan finance minister to resign

REUTERS, *Islamabad*

Pakistan's Finance Minister Miftah Ismail said late on Sunday he planned to formally resign from the role, a change that comes as the country grapples with an economic crisis exacerbated by destructive flooding. "I have verbally resigned as Finance Minister," Ismail said in a Tweet, adding that he had signalled his plans to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif during a meeting. "I will tender a formal resignation upon reaching Pakistan," he added. Ismail and Sharif are currently in London and due to return to Pakistan early next week.

EC plans legal cover to let 1pc voters vote

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because of ageing, accidents or certain types of work.

"If the fingerprints of a voter, in spite of being correctly identified in the monitor of the EVM's control unit, do not match with biometrics data and on account of that he cannot cast his vote, the Presiding Officer or the Assistant Presiding Officer, as the case may be, shall allow him to cast vote by opening the ballot unit by using his [election official's] fingerprints, but such number of voters to be so allowed shall not exceed one percent (1%) of the total number of voters in the said EVM," said the proposal.

Following a meeting of the election commissioners yesterday, EC Secretary Humayun Kabir Khandaker said, "The issue of bringing change to the RPO was on the agenda of today's meeting. But it was dropped, as the commissioners will discuss it further."

Contacted, Election Commissioner Ahsan Habib Khan said, "If the fingerprints of any voter don't match with [biometrics] data, the presiding officer or assistant presiding officer can open the digital ballot unit [of EVM] for that person. The commission wants to ensure there is no misuse of this power. It is discussing how this can be done. No final decision has been made yet."

Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan) Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar said the EC had previously said election officials are given the powers to override EVMs for 1 percent of the voters in a polling booth in case the machines failed to verify their biometrics data.

However, there were news reports that election officials overrode EVMs to allow up to 25 percent of the voters to cast votes in the last parliamentary election for such biometrics data-related problems, he pointed out.

"But who will ensure that the elections officials use their powers to override the EVM machines for not more than 1 percent voters?" he questioned.

The EC recently decided to use EVMs in up to 150 parliamentary seats in the next general election though major opposition political parties still have no confidence in the voting machine.

The commission on September 19 finalised a Tk 8,711-crore project for the purchase of two lakh EVMs and their maintenance. The proposal is now pending with the Planning Commission.

The EC currently has 1.5 lakh EVMs that can be used in 70-80 constituencies at one go in the next polls.

FARIDPUR-2 BY-POLLS

The EC secretary said they will carry out massive campaigns to dispel people's "misconceptions" about EVM.

He also announced the schedule for the by-election in Faridpur-2 constituency. The polling date is November 5.

The seat fell vacant following the death of Awami League leader and deputy leader in parliament Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury on September 11.

According to the election schedule, candidates can submit nomination papers till October 10. And the last date for withdrawing candidacy is October 19.

EVMs will be used in the by-election, and CCTV cameras will be installed at all polling booths, said Humayun.

Japan may give $600-700m in budget support

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the country manage the impacts of the pandemic.

"I came here in June 2020 amid the pandemic and I could see the great efforts of the people and the government of Bangladesh putting in to overcome the effects of Covid -- it was an impressive experience," Yuho Hayakawa, the outgoing Jica country representative, after the meeting.

Just as the economy was recovering from the pandemic slowdown the war in Ukraine started, leaving Bangladesh on shaky grounds once again.

Given the prolonged nature of wars, the government is seeking support from development partners to mitigate the effects.

The government is expecting $2.5-3 billion by June next year from multilateral lenders, according to an estimate made by the ERD, which manages foreign debt repayment activities, in June.

Budget support is being sought instead of other forms of assistance as it would be reflected in the country's balance of payment and shore up the delicate foreign currency reserves, which stood at $36.9 billion as of September 21.

It would also help the government extend cash assistance to the poor and the vulnerable to cushion them from the impacts of inflation triggered by the war.

"I will definitely contribute to the development of Bangladesh and deepening the relations between Bangladesh and Japan," said Ichiguchi Tomohide, the incoming Jica chief representative.

Tomohide previously worked in Jica's Bangladesh Desk in Tokyo and was involved with the metro rail, the Kanchpur, Meghna and Gumti bridges and the Matarbari coal-fired plant projects.

'I need my salary'

Anger as banks in crisis-hit Lebanon reopen

AFP, *Beirut*

Depositors scuffled and long lines formed at Lebanese banks yesterday as they partially reopened after a week-long closure following a slew of heists by customers desperate to access their money. But most banks remained shut, welcoming only a handful of depositors on appointment, and there was anger from those seeking to withdraw frozen funds desperately needed to weather a crushing economic crisis. At a closed Beirut branch of Fransabank, dozens of soldiers, internal security forces members and customers had queued for hours. "I don't care about anything, I need my salary," one ISF member yelled from behind the locked gates.