

LANGUAGE PROTEST

Indian man burns himself to death

AFP, New Delhi

An octogenarian man burned himself to death in southern India in protest at what he called New Delhi's attempts to impose nationwide usage of Hindi, a language mostly spoken in the north, police said yesterday.

Language is an emotive issue in India where hundreds of languages and dialects are spoken, but English serves as the main official medium while state governments use regional languages.

MV Thangavel, 85, a farmer in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, doused himself in petrol and kerosene and set himself alight, police said.

He was holding a Tamil-language placard reading: "Modi government stop imposing Hindi. Why do we need to choose Hindi over our literature-rich Tamil... it will affect future of our youth."



Damaged cars are seen on the beach of Casamicciola yesterday following heavy rains that caused a landslide on the island of Ischia, southern Italy. Italian rescuers were searching for a dozen missing people on the southern island of Ischia after a landslide killed at least one person.

PHOTO: AFP

CHINA'S INDIAN OCEAN FORUM

19 nations, except India, attend meet

NDTV ONLINE

China held a meeting this week with 19 countries from the Indian Ocean region in which India was conspicuously absent.

The China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), an organisation connected with the Chinese Foreign Ministry held a meeting of the China-Indian Ocean Region Forum on Development Cooperation on November 21, in which 19 countries took part, according to a press release issued by the organisation.

The meeting was held in a hybrid manner under the theme of "Shared Development: Theory and Practice from the Perspective of the Blue Economy" in Kunming, Yunnan Province, it said.

Representatives of 19 countries, including Indonesia, Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Afghanistan, Iran, Oman, South Africa, Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, Djibouti, Australia and representatives of 3 international organisations were present, it said.

India was reportedly not invited, according to informed sources. Last year, China held a meeting with some South Asian countries on Covid vaccine cooperation without the participation of India.

Anger over China's Covid curbs mounts

Hundreds protest in Shanghai, Beijing and other cities

REUTERS, Shanghai/Beijing

Crowds of demonstrators in Shanghai shouted and held up blank sheets of papers early yesterday evening, as protests flared in China against heavy Covid-19 curbs following a deadly fire in the country's far west sparked widespread anger.

The wave of civil disobedience, which has included protests in cities including Beijing and Urumqi, where the fire occurred, is unprecedented in mainland China since Xi Jinping assumed power a decade ago.

In Shanghai, China's most populous city, residents had gathered on Saturday night at Wulumuqi Road - which is named after Urumqi - for a candlelight vigil that turned into a protest in the early hours of yesterday.

As a large group of police looked on, the crowd held up blank sheets of paper as a protest symbol against censorship. Later on, they shouted, "lift lockdown for Urumqi, lift lockdown for Xinjiang, lift lockdown for all of China!", according to a video circulated on social media.

Later, a large group chanted "Down with the Chinese Communist Party, down with Xi Jinping", according to witnesses and videos, in a rare public protest against the country's leadership.

Reuters could not independently verify the footage.

Later yesterday, police kept a heavy presence on Wulumuqi Road and cordoned off surrounding streets, making an arrest that triggered protests from onlookers, according to unverified videos seen by Reuters.

By evening, hundreds of people had gathered again near one of the cordons, some holding blank sheets of paper.

At Beijing's prestigious Tsinghua University, dozens of people held a peaceful protest against Covid restrictions during which they sang the national anthem, according to images and videos posted on social media.

One student who saw the Tsinghua protest described to Reuters feeling taken aback by the protest at one China's most elite universities, and Xi's alma mater.

"People there were very passionate, the sight of it was impressive," the student said, declining to be named given the sensitivity of the matter.



Police officers confront a man during a protest as they block Wulumuqi street in Shanghai, China, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

China has stuck with Xi's signature zero-Covid policy even as much of the world has lifted most restrictions. While low by global standards, China's cases have hit record highs for days, with nearly 40,000 new infections on Saturday.

China defends the policy as life-saving and necessary to prevent overwhelming the healthcare system. Officials have vowed to continue with it despite the growing public pushback and its mounting economic toll.

China's economy suffered a broad slowdown in October as factory output grew more slowly than expected and retail sales fell for the first time in five months, underscoring faltering demand at home and abroad.

Adding to a raft of weak data in recent days, China reported yesterday that industrial firms saw overall profits fall further in the January-October period, with 22 of China's 41 major industrial sectors showing a decline.

The world's second-largest economy is also facing other headwinds including a global recession risks and a property downturn.

Widespread public protest is extremely rare in China, where room for dissent has been all but eliminated under Xi, forcing citizens mostly to vent on social media, where they play cat-and-mouse with censors.

N Korea plans 'world's most powerful' nuke force

Says Kim Jong Un

CNN ONLINE

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is planning to build "the world's most powerful" nuclear force, state news agency KCNA reported yesterday.

The "ultimate goal" behind North Korea's nuclear program was to possess an "absolute force, unprecedented in the century," Kim said Saturday as part of an order promoting dozens of military officials, the agency reported.

The order comes after what North Korea said was a "test firing of a new kind" of intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) on November 18.

The missile was a Hwasong-17, according to KCNA, a huge rocket that is theoretically capable of delivering a nuclear warhead to US mainland.

Kim commended the officials who developed the new missile in his comments.

He called the missile "the world's strongest strategic weapon" and said it represented "a wonderful leap forward in the development of the technology of mounting nuclear warheads on ballistic missiles."

In a letter sent to Kim recently, scientists from North Korea's Academy of Defense Science said the test firing marked a "great historic victory" for the country.

SERVING UNVEILED WOMAN

Iran bank manager fired: report

AFP, Tehran

An Iranian bank manager who served an unveiled woman has been fired, local media reported yesterday, as demonstrations triggered by the mandatory head covering rule shake the Islamic republic.

Women in the country of more than 80 million people are required to cover their heads, necks and hair, a law enforced by the country's morality police.

The September 16 death in morality police custody of Mahsa Amini, 22, for allegedly breaching the dress code rules, sparked nationwide demonstrations which authorities call "riots".

Mehr news agency reported that the bank manager in Qom province, near the capital Tehran, "had provided bank services on Thursday to an unveiled woman".

As a result he was "removed from his position by order of the governor," Mehr quoted deputy governor Ahmad Hajizadeh as saying.

Mehr said video of the unveiled woman "elicited a lot of reaction on social media".

In Iran most banks are state-controlled and Hajizadeh said it is the responsibility of managers in such institutions to implement the hijab law.

Dozens of people, mainly protesters but also members of the security forces, have been killed during the demonstrations, which Iran says are encouraged by its Western "enemies".

The hijab became mandatory four years after the 1979 revolution that overthrew the US-backed monarchy and established the Islamic Republic. Later, with changing clothing norms, it became commonplace to see women in tight jeans and loose, colourful headscarves.

Indonesia quake death toll rises to 321

AFP, Cianjur

The death toll from an earthquake that hit Indonesia's island of Java this week has risen to 321 as rescuers found more bodies yesterday, the national disaster mitigation agency said. The shallow 5.6-magnitude earthquake hit the West Java town of Cianjur on Monday, where most of the victims were killed as buildings collapsed or landslides were triggered. Disaster mitigation agency chief Suharyanto, who like many Indonesians uses only one name, told a news briefing yesterday that rescuers found three more bodies. Eight were found on Saturday. "With the discovery of these three (bodies), as of today, the death toll becomes 321 people," said Suharyanto. Eleven people remain missing. Rescuers will resume their search today, focusing on areas where the missing are believed to have been buried, said rescue agency head Jumartil.

Canada launches new Indo-Pacific strategy

REUTERS, Ottawa



Canada launched a new Indo-Pacific strategy yesterday, vowing more resources to deal with a "disruptive" China while working with the world's second-biggest economy on climate change and trade issues. In a 26-

page document, Canada said it would boost its military presence in the region and tighten investment rules to protect intellectual property and prevent Chinese state-owned enterprises from snapping up critical mineral supplies. The long-awaited plan is a blueprint to deepen ties with a fast-growing region of 40 countries accounting for almost \$37.4 trillion in economic activity. But the focus is on China, at a time when bilateral ties are frosty. "China is an increasingly disruptive global power," said the strategy. "China is looking to shape the international order into a more permissive environment for interests and values that increasingly depart from ours," it said.

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