

INDIA'S MANIPUR 175 killed in four months of ethnic violence

NDTV ONLINE

As many as 175 people have been killed, 1,118 injured, and 33 are still missing since ethnic violence broke out in Manipur on May 3, the state's police has said. Ninety-six unclaimed bodies are lying unclaimed in morgues, it said.

The state government released some key statistics on the impact of violence in the northeastern state, which has continued for over four months despite the state and union government's attempts to restore normalcy.

At least 5,172 cases of arson have been reported, which includes 4,786 houses and 386 religious places (254 churches and 132 temples). Around 5,668 weapons have been looted from the state armoury since the beginning of the violence. Of this, security forces have recovered 1,329. Another 15,050 ammunition and 400 bombs were recovered.

Security forces have destroyed at least 360 illegal bunkers in the state, the data said.

The barricades set up between Phougakchao Ikhai and Kangvai villages -- covering the about one-kilometre stretch along the Imphal-Churachandpur road -- were also removed on Thursday. The barricades served as a boundary of a "buffer zone" between the hills and the valley, manned by security forces, to ensure that people from the warring Meitei and Kuki communities do not cross over and engage in violence.

Meanwhile, the Manipur High Court has now admitted a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by the International Meiteis Forum (IMF) that seeks to "quash" the fact-finding report published by the Editors' Guild of India on the ethnic violence in the state. The PIL also requested for directions barring the use of the said report by any authority or agency looking into the conflict.

Meiteis account for about 53 percent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal valley, while tribals, including Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 percent and reside mostly in the hill districts.

A 'Tribal Solidarity March' organised on May 3 in the hill districts to protest against the majority Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status snowballed into full-blown ethnic conflict, leaving thousands displaced.



Migrants arrive on an Italian Coast Guard vessel after being rescued at sea, on the Sicilian island of Lampedusa, Italy yesterday. Good weather has seen a surge in arrivals across Italy in recent days, with more than 5,000 people landing across the country on Tuesday and almost 3000 the day after, according to updated interior ministry figures.

PHOTO: REUTERS

US stands with Iranians

Says Biden ahead of Mahsa Amini's death anniv; US, UK impose sanctions on Iranian officials, entities

AFP, Washington

President Joe Biden said yesterday that the United States would support Iranians a year after the death of Mahsa Amini sparked mass protests, and announced fresh sanctions against "egregious human rights abusers".

"Iranians alone will determine the fate of their country, but the United States remains committed to standing with them," Biden said in a statement issued by the White House.

The United States is sanctioning more than two dozen individuals and entities connected to Iran's "violent suppression" of protests in the wake of Mahsa Amini's death last year in the custody of Iran's morality police, the US Department of Treasury said yesterday.

The sanctions target 29 people and groups, including 18 key members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Iran's Law Enforcement Forces (LEF), as

well as the head of Iran's Prisons Organizations, the department said. They also target officials linked to Iran's internet blockade as well as several media outlets.

"The United States, alongside the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and our other international allies and



partners, will continue to take collective action against those who suppress Iranians' exercise of their human rights," US Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian Nelson said in a statement ahead of the one-year anniversary of Amini's death today.

Britain separately announced its sanctions targeting senior

Iranian decision makers enforcing Tehran's mandatory hijab law, including Iran's minister for culture and Islamic guidance, his deputy, the mayor of Tehran and an Iranian police spokesman.

Amini, an Iranian Kurd, died September 16, 2022 at the age of 22 after being arrested for allegedly flouting the Islamic Republic's mandatory dress code. Her death sparked months of anti-government protests that marked the biggest show of opposition to Iranian authorities in years.

Three state-controlled media groups in Iran, Press TV, Tasnim News and Fars News were also placed on the US blacklist.

The Treasury said they "work in tandem with Iranian security and intelligence services ... extending the regime's oppressive reach."

The sanctions come after the US and Iran reached a deal to release five detained US citizens in exchange for the unfreezing of \$6 billion of Iranian funds.

AI models struggle to identify nonsense

AFP, Paris

The AI models that power chatbots and other applications still have difficulty distinguishing between nonsense and natural language, according to a study released on Thursday.

The researchers at Columbia University said their work revealed limitations of AI models and suggested it was too early to let them loose in legal or medical settings.

They put nine AI models through their paces, firing hundreds of pairs of sentences at them and asking which were likely to be heard in everyday speech.

The research, published in Nature Machine Intelligence journal, then weighed the AI answers against the human answers and found dramatic differences.

CORRUPTION CHARGES

China defence minister under investigation

Say western media

REUTERS, Beijing



Suspicion over the unexplained weeks-long absence of Chinese Defence Minister Li Shangfu deepened yesterday, as leading western newspapers reported he was subject to a probe and a top US diplomat questioned whether he was under house arrest. Li, 65, has missed meetings with Vietnamese and Singaporean defence leaders in recent weeks, according to sources with direct knowledge of the engagements. He was last seen in Beijing on August 29 delivering a keynote address at a security forum with African nations. Citing US officials, the Washington Post reported Li was under investigation for corruption and will likely be removed from his post. The Wall Street Journal also reported Li was being removed from office. Rahm Emanuel, Washington's ambassador to Japan, wrote in a post on X: "1st: Defense Minister Li Shangfu hasn't been seen or heard from in 3 weeks... because he was placed on house arrest???" China's defence ministry did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

'No agreements' signed during Kim visit: Kremlin

AFP, Moscow

The Kremlin yesterday said no agreements have been signed during North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's ongoing visit to Russia. "No agreements were signed and there was no plan to sign any," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, amid concern in Washington that the two countries could be preparing an arms deal. Kim began his visit to Russia on Tuesday. At a meeting with President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday, the two leaders exchanged gifts of rifles -- a choice seen as symbolic given Western concern. Putin talked up the prospect of greater cooperation with North Korea and said there were "possibilities" for military ties despite international sanctions on Pyongyang. The Kremlin on Thursday said Putin had accepted an invitation from Kim to visit North Korea, without giving a date for the trip. Yesterday, Kim visited military and civil aviation plants in far eastern Komsomolsk-on-Amur, Moscow said in a statement. Kim saw the production of Russia's Sukhoi Su-35 and Su-57 fighter aircraft and watched a Su-35 demonstration flight. "We see the potential for cooperation both in the field of aircraft manufacturing and in other industries," said Russian Deputy PM Denis Manturov after accompanying Kim around the factories. "This is especially important for achieving the tasks facing our countries to achieve technological sovereignty," the trade and industry minister said.

US auto workers strike, posing threat to economy

AFP, Wayne

Workers at the "Big Three" US auto manufacturers went on strike yesterday in a first-ever coordinated action to demand pay raises, testing the resilience of the US economy and threatening President Joe Biden's 2024 re-election momentum.

A dramatic walkout -- observed outside a Detroit-area Ford plant with rowdy honking and cheers at the arrival of the United Auto Workers' leader -- followed a failed last-minute push by General Motors, Ford and Stellantis to produce an agreement before the deadline late Thursday.

This is a limited strike incorporating some 12,700 of the 150,000 workers represented by the UAW. However, the decision by the rival companies' employees to coordinate sent a powerful message in their battle for pay increases of 40 percent.

"Tonight, for the first time in our history, we will strike all three of the Big Three at once," UAW President Shawn Fain said in a webcast shortly before the strike took effect.

Fain said the union would strike at one plant at each company: a GM factory in Wentzville, Missouri; a Stellantis facility in Toledo, Ohio; and a Ford plant in Wayne, Michigan, but only the final assembly and paint operations.

The UAW said the strike could expand if demands are not met.

"They're starting it off right," said Rachel Judd, who joined the post-midnight rally in Wayne, Michigan in solidarity. Judd works at Ford's neighboring facility in Livonia.

"If negotiations don't keep moving forward, more plants will be added," she said.

Biden was to make public remarks on the strike at the White House, his press office said, without announcing a time.

Liquidity stress

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The excess liquidity in the sector was down 66.59 percent year-on-year in June, according to BB data.

Settlements of letters of credit (LCs) for importers and strong demand for credit amid slow deposit growth have strained liquidity at Islamic banks, the report said.

Besides, jumps in expenses due to high inflation have reduced households' capacity to save, leading to a slowdown in inflows of deposits, the main source of funding for banks.

Bangladesh's inflation rate rose to 9.7 percent in June 2023 from 7.6 percent a year earlier.

Inflation also shows no sign of cooling as it surged 23 basis points to a 12-year high of 9.92 percent in August, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

This means the banks' efforts aimed at recovering from the liquidity crisis by reversing the trend of deposits may not yield the expected outcome in the coming days since savers' capacity to park funds has continued to be under strain.

Besides, a near double-digit inflation rate has kept the weighted average deposit rate, which stands at less than 5 percent, in the negative territory, making parking funds in the entire banking sector unattractive for many savers.

The deposit growth in the Islamic banking segment plummeted to nearly 2 percent in June this year from 11 percent in the same month last year, BB data shows.

A number of loan scams at some Islamic banks recently also resulted in a sizeable outflow of customer deposits from the sector.

The investment (loan) growth for the Shariah-compliant lenders stood at about 15 percent in June last year but it fell to less than 10 percent in June this year.

In order to help Shariah-based banks overcome the fund crisis, the BB introduced two liquidity facilities for them in December 2022 and February 2023.

The programmes -- the Islamic Banks Liquidity Facility (IBLF) and the Mudarabah Liquidity Support (MLS) -- are meant to provide Islamic banks with alternative sources of funding and help them plug their short-term liquidity shortfalls.

"However, the central bank measures will not significantly alleviate liquidity stress for Islamic banks because they have small amounts of assets they can collateralise to use the facilities," said the Moody's report.

Bangladesh had the eighth-largest Islamic banking market globally in 2022, with a total asset of Tk 497,000 crore, ahead of Indonesia, Bahrain, Pakistan, Egypt, Jordan and Oman, according to Fitch Ratings.

India's opposition

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Leaders of at least two parties in the opposition alliance, who did not wish to be quoted, voiced disagreement with the move and maintained they were not consulted.

The News Broadcasters & Digital Association (NBDA) expressed concern over the opposition alliance's decision, saying it sets "a dangerous precedent. The boycott goes against the ethos of democracy".

The National Union of Journalists took strong exception to the opposition parties' boycott of some journalists and condemned the same, alleging that the opposition parties have politicised the media.

Ras Bihari, president of the National Union of Journalists linked to the International Federation of Journalists, said in a statement that this decision of the opposition parties is a "black chapter" of repression on the media in India's democratic history.

Elderly woman

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those involved and their exemplary punishment," he said.

Ahsan Ullah, officer-in-charge of Bhuhanapur Police Station, said they already started investigation and that the culprits will be brought to justice.



Palestinians react during a protest against Israeli settlements near Nablus in the Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Tigers win nail-biter

FROM PAGE 1

The first delivery of the 49th over. The left arm pacer was hit for a boundary by Patel but went on to dismiss the batter in the very next delivery when he mistimed another one of Mustafizur's cutters and was caught by a running fielder at long-off.

The finishing touches were provided by debutant Tanzid Hasan Sakib, who also initiated proceedings with two crucial breakthroughs to jolt India early in their chase. Sakib bowled three dots on the trot in the final over, ratcheting up the pressure on the tailenders who then needed 12 from three.

Shami managed to hit Sakib for a boundary the following delivery but the young pacer had the last laugh as Shami, forced to run a double to keep the match alive, was made run out in the penultimate delivery as

Bangladesh recorded their first ever victory in Colombo.

Before all the drama unfolded in the last few overs, off-spinner Mahedi Hasan impacted with the crucial wicket of Gill in the 44th over.

It was a promising display of cricket by the Tigers, who only had an 89-run win over Afghanistan in the group stage to show for before yesterday's dead rubber.

Skipper Shakib Al Hasan stepped up and led from the front as he stitched together a 101-run fifth-wicket stand with Towhid Hridoy to provide stability in the middle after a rocky beginning with the bat.

Shakib, who has not been able to play to his full potential throughout the Asia Cup -- played as a prelude to the ODI World Cup in India next month -- looked to have found his

rhythm with the willow. With six fours and three maximums, Shakib scored 80 off 85 deliveries before falling short of his 10th ODI hundred when he played a Shardul delivery onto his stumps in the 34th over.

With Shakib back in the hut, it seemed the Tigers' innings would fizzle out soon, especially after in-form Hridoy holed one out to square leg after a 54-run knock to leave Bangladesh at 193 for seven.

However, Nasum Ahmed came as a surprise package down the order, smashing his career-best 44 off 45, laced with six boundaries and one maximum. His knock was well complemented by unbeaten knocks of 29 and 14 from Mahedi Hasan and debutant Tanzim Hasan Sakib as Bangladesh reached a competitive total of 265 for eight.