

## Tensions flare at several US univs over Gaza protests

In-person classes cancelled, demonstrators arrested

AFP, New York

Tensions flared between pro-Palestinian student protesters and school administrators at several US universities Monday, as in-person classes were cancelled and demonstrators arrested.

The protests, which began last week at Columbia University with a large group of demonstrators establishing a so-called "Gaza Solidarity Encampment" on school grounds, have spread to other campuses, including Yale, MIT and others.

Some Jewish students at Columbia have reported intimidation and anti-Semitism amid the days-long protest, which is calling for the prestigious New York institution to divest from companies with ties to Israel.

Classes were moved online Monday, with university president Nemat Shafik calling for a "reset" in an open letter to the school community.

"Over the past days, there have been too many examples of intimidating and harassing behavior on our campus," she said. "Anti-Semitic language, like any other language that is used to hurt and frighten people, is unacceptable and appropriate action will be taken."

"To deescalate the rancor and give us all a chance to consider next steps, I am announcing that all classes will be held virtually on Monday," she added. Last week, over 100 protesters were arrested after university authorities called the police onto the private campus.



Displaced Palestinians, who fled their homes due to Israeli strikes, shelter in a UNRWA-affiliated school in Deir Al-Balah, in the central Gaza Strip yesterday. Israeli strikes intensified across Gaza in some of the heaviest shelling in weeks, residents said.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Troops back in border trade hub

Says Myanmar junta

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar junta troops have moved back into a vital border town they were ousted from by an alliance of ethnic rebels and anti-junta fighters this month, military sources told AFP yesterday.

The Karen National Union (KNU) and "People's Defence Force" fighters ousted around 200 military soldiers from their positions in the lucrative trade hub of Myawaddy around April 10, in a major blow to the junta.

The troops withdrew to a bridge that connects Myawaddy to Thailand's Mae Sot town following the clashes, which sent thousands fleeing Myanmar.

Yesterday, "some of our troops arrived at the 275 military command," junta spokesperson Zaw Min Tun told AFP, referring to the previously vacated military base in Myawaddy.

## Hezbollah launches deepest strike into Israel

REUTERS, Dubai

Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah group said yesterday it had launched a drone attack against Israeli military bases north of the city of Acre, in its deepest strike into Israeli territory since the Gaza offensive began.

The Israeli military said it had no knowledge of any of its facilities being hit by Hezbollah, but had said earlier yesterday that it intercepted two "aerial targets" off Israel's coast.

Hezbollah said it acted in retaliation for an earlier Israeli attack killing one of its fighters.

The group published what appeared to be a satellite photo, with the location of the strike symbolised by a flash with a red circle around it that sat halfway between Acre and Nahariyya to the north. Israeli airstrikes killed two Hezbollah fighters in southern Lebanon, the military said earlier yesterday. Hezbollah later confirmed the death of one of its fighters, Hussein Azkoul, but provided no further details.

A separate Israeli strike overnight Monday to yesterday killed a fighter in Hezbollah's elite unit, Radwan Forces, the military said, though Hezbollah has not confirmed his death.

Since October, Israeli strikes have killed about 270 Hezbollah fighters as well as about 50 civilians.

## 'Neutrality' issues found at UNRWA, review finds

Israel yet to provide evidence for incendiary allegations that UN agency's staff were members of terrorist organizations

AFP, United Nations

An independent review group on the UN agency for Palestinians found some "neutrality-related issues," its much-anticipated report said Monday, but noted Israel had yet to provide evidence for incendiary allegations that staff were members of terrorist organizations.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) remains "irreplaceable and indispensable to Palestinians' human and economic development" added the 54-page report, which was led by French diplomat Catherine Colonna.

**The review also found that the majority of neutrality breaches related to the social media posts.**

The review group was created following allegations made by Israel in January that some UNRWA staff may have participated in the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks. In the weeks that followed, numerous donor states suspended or paused some \$450 million in funding.

Many have since resumed funding, including Sweden, Canada, Japan, the EU and France -- while others, including the United States and Britain -- have not.

Congress passed a bill signed into law by President Joe Biden



last month that blocks US funding until March 2025.

The freezes to the main aid agency in Gaza come as months of Israeli military operations have turned the territory into a "humanitarian hellcape," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said recently, with its 2.3 million people in desperate need of food, water, shelter and medicine.

Colonna's team was tasked with assessing whether UNRWA was "doing everything within its power to ensure neutrality," while Guterres activated a second investigation to probe Israel's allegations.

Despite a framework for ensuring it upheld the humanitarian principle of neutrality, the review found that "neutrality-related issues persist," including staff sharing biased political posts on social media and the use of a small number

of textbooks with "problematic content" in some UNRWA schools.

But it added "Israel has yet to provide supporting evidence" for its claim that UNRWA employs more than 400 "terrorists."

Israel responded by saying that "the Colonna report ignores the severity of the problem, and offers cosmetic solutions that do not deal with the enormous scope of Hamas' infiltration of UNRWA."

UNRWA itself welcomed the findings and Guterres said he accepted its recommendations.

The review found that the majority of neutrality breaches related to social media posts, often following incidents of violence affecting colleagues or relatives.

"One preventive action could be to ensure that personnel are given space to discuss these traumatic incidents," said the report, which was co-authored with three Nordic rights groups.

## Maldives vows China-backed building boom, Indians OUT

AFP, Male

The Maldives will press on with Chinese-backed construction and evict Indian troops from the strategically placed atoll nation, President Mohamed Muizzu's office said yesterday, two days after his party's stunning parliamentary victory.

He thanked voters for the landslide victory by his People's National Congress, which promised a boom in building apartments, bridges and new airports with Chinese funding.

Muizzu, 45, won September presidential polls after vowing to evict 89 Indian troops deployed in the country.

The Indian contingent -- operating three aircraft patrolling the archipelago's vast maritime boundary -- is due to leave by May 10.

Muizzu consolidated his hold on power by winning more than two-thirds of the seats in Sunday's vote for the 93-member assembly.

"We will bid farewell to the enduring anguish of housing insecurity, a pressing and longstanding concern burdening the Maldivian populace," his office said, quoting his promise at a victory rally in Male on Monday.

He did not mention China or India by name, but said he will work towards ensuring that the Maldives' sovereignty is not compromised.

## 'My speech created panic in INDIA bloc'

Modi tells election rally

NDTV ONLINE

Amid a debate on Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks that "Congress wants to snatch women's Mangalsutra," the Prime Minister reiterated yesterday that he had put the truth before the country that Congress is hatching a deep conspiracy to snatch your property and distribute it to its special people. Addressing a public meeting in Rajasthan yesterday, Modi said that his speech had created panic in the entire Congress and INDIA bloc. "When I came to Rajasthan the day before yesterday, I had presented some truths before the country in my 90-second speech. This has created panic in the entire Congress and INDI alliance... After all, why is Congress so afraid of the truth?" the Prime Minister said.

## After 28 years, court

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and a judicial committee was formed in September that year.

Police took almost 14 years to complete the probe. They filed the first final report on May 21, 2010.

The report did not say anything conclusive about the suspects and their whereabouts, according to media reports.

As her family rejected the report, the court sent it to the Criminal Investigation Department for further probe and the CID submitted a similar final report on September 26, 2012.

Kalpna's family refused to accept the report again and the case was handed over to the then superintendent of police of Rangamati for reinvestigation.

With the SPs transferred from the district, the case's investigation officer also changed. It finally came to the hands of SP Sayed Tariqul Hassan. He took over the case as its 39th investigation officer.

He filed the latest final report on September 7, 2016. In November that year, Kalindi filed the "no-confidence" petition with court, rejecting the report.

Over the last few years, several hearings were held on the petition. Finally, the court came up with the order yesterday.

Contacted, Supreme Court lawyer and rights activist Jyotirmoy Barua told The Daily Star that the submission of the final report by police and the court accepting the report were miscarriages of justice.

"I think the people's faith in the judicial system will wane because of such incidents. The family of Kalpana Chakma should move to the High Court challenging the Rangamati court's decision."

## Trans woman dies allegedly by suicide

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Utsho was buried in her Bakshiganj home yesterday after an autopsy.

Following her death, many social media posts claimed she died by suicide due to the ongoing backlash against transgenders. She was reportedly bullied for her gender both virtually and upfront.

However, Helal Uddin, Utsho's paternal uncle, told The Daily Star that her family was unaware of any such issues.

"We heard Utsho jumped from the hostel roof. We don't know the details yet. Police are investigating."

Speaking to The Daily Star, Sabbir Hossain, officer-in-charge of Mirpur Model Police Station, said that an "unnatural death" case was filed in this regard yesterday.

"We aren't certain whether she died due to the bullying. She left a suicide note on Facebook, which did not indicate anything as such. We are investigating."

A resident of the same hostel, Jobaida Mashruba told The Daily Star that Utsho lived in a four-bed room with two other students.

"She was a private person and didn't mingle much. We heard from her roommates that she returned

to the hostel five days ago after Eid holidays. She, however, seemed more reserved than before after return.

"Students in the hostel assume that she died by suicide due to depression, social ostracisation, and the recent hostility towards transgender individuals."

Trans people have been facing intense scrutiny since January after controversies over a third-gender story in a class seven textbook, say activists.

Shimul Khan, an activist for gender inclusion, said Utsho gained attention after participating in the beauty pageant. However, she faced extensive bullying afterwards.

"I heard she was disturbed by the portrayal of third-gender people in the class-VII textbook, which sparked a debate. However, her last post [on Facebook, before her death] didn't indicate any such concerns."

During the contest, Utsho had expressed her desire to represent the trans community on a global stage.

She spoke out about the challenges she endured as a child. "I was born with hormonal issues, and even though my parents treated me as a boy, my feminine features took over, which led to relentless

bullying."

Utsho also highlighted the lack of access to proper education and job opportunities for transgender individuals, emphasising the absence of appropriate platforms for their representation.

## Indian court

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private retailers.

The policy was subsequently withdrawn. Kejriwal, who rose to power as an anti-corruption crusader and is a critic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has denied wrongdoing.

His arrest on March 21 sparked protests in Delhi and in the northern state of Punjab governed by his decade-old Aam Aadmi Party, and also drew the attention of the United States and Germany.

His detention has united the 27-party opposition alliance called INDIA, which includes AAP and the Congress party.

However, opinion polls suggest that Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party has a strong lead in elections that are under way and is likely to win a historic third term.

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