

Nine killed in Oman Shia mosque gun attack

REUTERS, Dubai

Nine people were killed, including three attackers, in an assault on a Shia Muslim mosque in Oman late on Monday, authorities said, in a rare breach of security in one of the most stable countries in the Middle East.

Four Pakistani nationals and a policeman were among those killed in the gun attack, according to Pakistani and Omani officials. Authorities said 28 people of various nationalities were wounded, including security personnel.

Pakistan's foreign ministry said the attack took place in the Ali bin Abi Talib mosque. A local source said it was also known as Imam Ali mosque.

Describing the incident in the Wadi al-Kabir district of Oman's capital Muscat as a "terrorist" attack, the Pakistani ministry said 30 injured people were in hospital.

J&K FIGHTING Five Indian security personnel killed

AFP, Srinagar

Five security personnel were killed in a firefight with gunmen in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, the army and police said yesterday, with security sources saying militants had made a "tactical shift" in attacks.

A security official, who asked not to be named, said militants had shifted operations from the mainly Muslim Kashmir valley to the Hindu-dominated southern Jammu area, where "counterinsurgency measures are not as strong".

Kashmir's top political official Manoj Sinha said forces would "avenge" their deaths. The Indian army's 16 Corps said security forces had launched an operation in the Doda forest on Monday evening, some 135 kilometres southeast of the territory's capital Srinagar, in the Jammu area.

A "heavy firefight ensued," the army said, saying four men were killed, including a captain.

Indian army chief Upendra Dwivedi sent his "deepest condolences" to the families of the men.

A police officer, speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP a police officer also died of his wounds, adding two other soldiers had been hospitalised.



An injured man lies on a cart while arriving at Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday, amid the ongoing Israeli bombardments across the enclave.

PHOTO: AFP

Access to Gaza getting increasingly difficult

Warn 13 leading NGOs, denounce Israel's ongoing attacks on aid operations

AFP, Paris

Access to Gaza has become increasingly difficult for humanitarian groups, 13 leading NGOs warned on Monday, accusing Israel's military of blocking much-needed aid from reaching the Palestinian territory.

Denouncing "Israel's systematic obstruction of aid and its ongoing attacks on aid operations", the humanitarian organisations said that Israel had facilitated only 53 -- less than half -- of the 115 relief missions they had planned.

The aid groups slammed what it called Israel's "siege tactics" in its

The so-called "humanitarian zone" had become "an active combat zone", say aid groups

struggle against Hamas.

It said the so-called "humanitarian zone" where most of the strip's population of 2.4 million people now reside had become "an active combat zone" and "extremely unsafe".

The charities also criticised the bombing of UN schools used as shelters by displaced Palestinians. At least six schools have been hit over the past nine days.

"These recent events are exacerbating the humanitarian catastrophe at a time when NGOs



continue to come up against the obstacles imposed by the continuation of Israeli military operations on the ground," a press release summarising the 13 NGOs' views warned.

Oxfam, Doctors Without Borders, Save the Children and the Norwegian Refugee Council were among the charities to contribute to the document.

Since Israel began its ground offensive in Rafah in May, humanitarian workers have faced major difficulties in delivering aid to the Gaza Strip's south.

Israel's capture at the beginning of May of the Rafah crossing, which has since been destroyed, brought aid deliveries to a "complete halt", the NGOs added.

Tonnes of "absolutely necessary aid" were left blocked at the

crossing points in the south "due to the deterioration in security conditions", the statement said.

More than 1,500 trucks of humanitarian aid containing medicines, first-aid kits and basic necessities were stuck in the Egyptian city of Al-Arish as a result.

Meanwhile, in the north of the Gaza Strip -- which has been isolated from the south by the Israeli army -- aid delivery is "very limited". Oxfam said it took it five weeks to transport just 1,600 food parcels from Jordan to Gaza -- a journey it said "should take no more than six hours".

At Kerem Shalom, designated since May as a priority crossing point for humanitarian aid, the situation had "deteriorated significantly since Israel's offensive in May", the aid groups said.

More than 10m displaced by Sudan war Says IOM

REUTERS, Cairo

More than 10 million Sudanese, or 20 percent of the population, have been driven from their homes since the war there began, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said yesterday, as the world's largest displacement crisis continues to worsen.

The number is the latest dire figure out of the east African country, devastated by a conflict that began in April 2023. The war has left half the population of about 50 million facing a hunger crisis and in need of humanitarian aid, the most of any country.

More than 2.2 million people have fled to other countries since the war began, while almost 7.8 million sought refuge inside the country, the IOM said. An additional 2.8 million people were already displaced by previous conflicts in the country.

Fighting between the army and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces that broke out in the capital Khartoum last year quickly expanded across Darfur, with RSF taking control of most centres. UN experts say hunger has replaced violence as the largest driver of migration from Darfur, where they face difficulty delivering aid.

Musk pledges \$45m a month to electing Trump

AFP, Washington

Tech billionaire Elon Musk said he plans to commit roughly \$45 million each month to a new fund backing Donald Trump for US president, the Wall Street Journal reported Monday.

Musk's donations will go to a political group dubbed America PAC, which will focus on promoting voter registration, early voting and mail-in ballots among residents in swing states ahead of the November general election, the Journal reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

Musk is one of several major backers of the new fund, with others reportedly including Palantir co-founder Joe Lonsdale, former US ambassador to Canada Kelly Craft and cryptocurrency investors Tyler and Cameron Winklevoss.

The Tesla founder formally endorsed Trump's candidacy for US president on Saturday after the former president survived a shooting at a political rally in Butler, Pennsylvania.

"I fully endorse President Trump and hope for his rapid recovery," Musk wrote on the social media platform X, which he acquired in 2022.

Musk, the wealthiest man in the world with an estimated net worth of \$250 billion, has grown increasingly friendly with Trump over the course of the 2024 US election.

In March, the two met in person during a donor breakfast hosted at the Florida residence of billionaire Nelson Peltz.

Metsola wins 2nd term as EU Parliament chief Warns against polarisation

REUTERS, Strasbourg

Roberta Metsola, a Maltese lawmaker from the centre-right European People's Party, easily won a second term yesterday as president of the European Parliament and she appealed for a more inclusive politics to help combat polarisation.

Metsola, who in 2022 became the first woman in 20 years to head the European Union assembly, has emerged as a strong supporter of Ukraine in its war with Russia and its bid to join the EU. President Volodymyr Zelensky sent his congratulations.

Some 562 EU lawmakers out of the 623 who took part in yesterday's vote backed her reappointment to the mainly ceremonial role for a further two and a half years, the largest margin of victory ever for a president of the European Parliament.

"Polarisation in our societies has led to more confrontational politics, even political violence," Metsola, 45, told the assembly. "We need to move beyond this zero-sum thinking that has excluded people, that turns people away," she said.

Metsola urged the European Parliament to remain a strong supporter of Ukraine, the rule of law, and women's rights, while preparing to add new countries to the EU.

In his message of congratulations, Zelensky wrote on X: "I greatly appreciate President Metsola's personal involvement in supporting Ukraine, as well as her unwavering commitment to protecting people and upholding our European way of life."



5 rights bodies slam attacks on quota protesters

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Amnesty International South Asia, in a statement posted on its verified Facebook page, called on the government to immediately guarantee the safety of all peaceful protesters and proper medical treatment of the injured.

"Bangladesh must uphold its obligations under international law and its own constitution to fully respect the people's rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, and protect peaceful protestors from further harm."

Transparency International Bangladesh, in its statement, expressed outrage over the attacks on the student protesters by the ruling party's student wing and external attackers, urging that these attackers be identified and held accountable.

In the statement, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman termed the attacks on students "disgusting and barbaric".

Reliable media sources have reported that even female students faced indiscriminate attacks and public harassment while a student in Rangpur has died during clashes, said the statement issued in the afternoon.

"We are appalled, outraged, and disappointed by the attacks. We demand the attackers be identified and brought to book, regardless of their political positions and identities."

He added that the government should not ignore the logical demands of the students by passing the burden onto the courts. "Rather, it should take steps for a logical, modern, peaceful, and constitutional solution."

The International Human Rights Commission's Bangladesh chapter, Manobadhikar Sangskriti Foundation, and Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik have also expressed concerns over the attacks.

They urged that effective steps be taken to solve the crisis and said the human rights situation in the country will deteriorate to the extreme, creating obstacles for common people, if the crisis continues.

The statements said the attacks on protesting students, especially the females, are gross violations of the constitution and human rights, adding that the state failed in protecting the students.

114 CITIZENS CONDEMN

At least 114 eminent citizens in

a statement yesterday strongly condemned the attacks on quota protesters over the last two days.

They demanded justice for the students and exemplary punishment to those responsible for the attacks.

The statement said, "We've observed with deep concern that yesterday [Monday] and today [yesterday], the quota reform activists and students of different universities were indiscriminately attacked. Media reports state that Chhatra League leaders and activists of different units attacked the protesting students with pistols, rods, sticks and sharp weapons.

"Even female students were not spared ... We're outraged and saddened by this barbaric attack. We strongly condemn the painful news of the deaths of at least four people in the attacks on the protesters."

"Attacking the demonstrators, killing several and injuring hundreds of them are serious criminal offences under the country's customary law. The injured students were attacked again while they were at the emergency of Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment,

which is equivalent to crimes against humanity," it added.

They also demanded that the ministers and Awami League leaders concerned be brought to book for ordering these attacks.

Condemning the failure of the police and university administrations to prevent the attacks, they extended their support to the logical demands of the quota reform movement.

Ali Imam Majumder, former cabinet secretary; Debapriya Bhattacharya, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue; Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh; Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik; Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association; Prof Anu Muhammad of Jahangirnagar University; Prof Swapan Adnan; CR Abrar, executive director of Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit; Prof Asif Nazrul and Prof Shahnaz Huda of DU; Shahidul Alam, renowned photographer; and Maha Mirza, development researcher, were among the signatories.

World's rarest whale washes up on New Zealand beach

AFP, Christchurch

The body of a spade-toothed whale -- a species so rare it has never been seen alive -- appears to have washed up on a New Zealand beach, scientists said.

The remains of the obscure, five metre long, beaked creature were found near a river mouth in southern Otago province on July 4, government researchers said.

It was identified by experts from New Zealand's Department of Conservation and the national museum, Te Papa, as a male spade-toothed whale. A DNA investigation has been launched to confirm its classification.

"Spade-toothed whales are one of the most poorly known large mammalian species of modern times," said the conservation department's coastal Otago operations manager, Gabe Davies.

POST-POLLS FRANCE PM Attal to take caretaker role

AFP, Paris

President Emmanuel Macron was set to accept the resignation of the French government yesterday, but ask Prime Minister Gabriel Attal to head up a caretaker administration for now, cabinet sources told AFP.

French politics have been in gridlock since an inconclusive snap election earlier this month, with parties in the National Assembly scrambling to put together a governing coalition and no successor to Attal in sight.

Macron made the announcement yesterday at the first cabinet meeting since his allies got roundly beaten in the snap parliamentary election he called to "clarify" the political landscape.

Macron told the ministers that he would accept Attal's resignation "at the end of the day", but ask him to stay on "for some weeks", probably until after the Paris Olympics, which open on July 26, meeting participants said.

This gives political parties more time to build a governing coalition after the July 7 election runoff left the lower house without an overall majority.

A broad alliance called the New Popular Front (NFP) which includes Socialists, Communists, Greens and the hard-left France Unbowed (LFI) won the most seats, with 193 in the 577-strong lower chamber.

Macron's allies came second with 164 seats and the far-right National Rally (RN) third with 143. The divided NFP alliance has been scrambling to come up with a consensus candidate for prime minister.

But internal conflicts -- notably between the LFI and the more moderate Socialists -- have thwarted all efforts to find a personality able to survive a confidence vote in parliament.