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I no longer have a visa to travel to the United States. I don't care. I don't need a visa ... because I'm not only a Colombian citizen but a European citizen, and I truly consider myself a free person in the world. Revoking it for denouncing genocide [in Gaza] shows the US no longer respects international law.

GUSTAVO PETRO
Colombia president
after US revoked his visa



A damaged building and vehicles in a residential neighbourhood on the outskirts of Kyiv after it was hit by a Russian drone and missile strike yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Gaza flotilla sails again amid threats

REUTERS, Rome

An international aid flotilla that paused for several days in Greek waters for repairs has set sail again for Gaza, where activists aim to challenge Israel's naval blockade and deliver aid to the Palestinian territory.

Organisers yesterday said that Greek vessels had now joined their enterprise, meaning that the flotilla, which counts some 47 civilian boats, was "complete".

"Brothers and sisters in Gaza, we sail with hope in our hearts. Your resilience is our compass, your struggle is our struggle. Together, we will break the silence of the siege," the Global Sumud Flotilla wrote on social media.

Around 40 Italians are aboard the flotilla alongside activists from dozens of other countries, including Swedish climate campaigner Greta Thunberg. They hope to bring humanitarian aid to Gaza in the coming week.

Italy's Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani yesterday repeated a proposal made last week for the flotilla to take the aid to Cyprus for eventual distribution in Gaza by the Roman Catholic Church. The flotilla rejected the suggestion.

"We have always said ... that it is dangerous to approach Israeli waters. We don't know what might happen. Forcing the blockade is dangerous," Tajani told reporters.

The flotilla was struck on Wednesday in international waters off Crete by drones armed with stun grenades and irritants, which caused damage but no injuries.

Israel did not comment on the incident. It has previously said it will use any means to prevent the boats from reaching Gaza.

Return of UN sanctions 'unjustifiable': Iran

Vows 'firm and appropriate' response to 'illegal' measures

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday condemned as "unjustifiable" the reinstatement of United Nations sanctions over its nuclear programme, after the collapse of talks with Western powers and Israeli and US strikes on its nuclear sites.

The measures, which bar dealings linked to the Islamic republic's nuclear and ballistic missile activities, took effect overnight after Western powers triggered the so-called "snapback" mechanism under the 2015 nuclear accord.

"The reactivation of annulled resolutions is legally baseless and unjustifiable... all countries must refrain from recognising this illegal situation," the Iranian foreign ministry said in a statement.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran will firmly defend its national rights and interests, and any action aimed at undermining the rights and interests of its people will face a firm and appropriate response," it added.

The return of the sanctions ends months of tense diplomacy aimed at reviving nuclear talks derailed since June, when Israeli and US forces bombed Iranian nuclear facilities.

Despite the reimposition, Western leaders stressed channels for dialogue remained open.

Kaja Kallas, the European Union's top diplomat, on Sunday said the reimposition of sanctions



Western leaders say channel for dialogue remains open

Rubio calls on Iran to engage in direct talks with US

Russia says sanctions invalid; Israel hails move

"must not be the end of diplomacy", adding that "a sustainable solution to the Iranian nuclear issue can only be achieved through negotiations".

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio urged Iran to "accept direct talks, held in good faith".

He also called on UN member states to "immediately" implement sanctions to "pressure Iran's leaders to do what is right for their nation, and best for the safety of the world".

The British, French and German foreign ministers said in a joint statement they would continue to seek "a new diplomatic solution to ensure Iran never gets a nuclear weapon".

They also called on Tehran "to

refrain from any escalatory action".

Iran had allowed UN inspectors to return to its nuclear sites, but President Masoud Pezeshkian said the United States had offered only a short reprieve in return for handing over its whole stockpile of enriched uranium, a proposal he described as unacceptable.

An 11th-hour effort by Iran allies Russia and China to postpone the sanctions until April failed to win enough votes in the Security Council on Friday, leading to the measures taking effect at 3:30am in Tehran (0000 GMT) on Sunday.

Russia has long contended that it would not enforce the sanctions, considering them invalid.

The sanctions "finally exposed the West's policy of sabotaging the pursuit of constructive solutions in the UN Security Council, as well as its desire to extract unilateral concessions from Tehran through blackmail and pressure," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

Iran has long contended that it is not seeking nuclear weapons. Newspapers in the Islamic republic gave contrasting reactions to the reimposition of the sanctions. The ultraconservative newspaper Kayhan, which opposes any dialogue with the United States, suggested the sanctions would likely have been imposed even if Iran had engaged in negotiations.

The reformist daily Ham Mihan wrote: "The big question is whether Russia and China will maintain their position".

China former minister gets death for graft

AFP, Beijing

China's former agricultural minister was sentenced to death yesterday on corruption charges, with a two-year reprieve, a court statement said.

Tang Renjian accepted cash and property bribes totalling more than 268 million yuan (\$38 million) between 2007 and 2024, the People's Court of Changchun in northeast Jilin province said in a statement.

The court ruled that the bribes "caused particularly severe losses to the interests of the state and the people, and therefore warranted the death penalty", adding that Tang had confessed to his crimes and expressed remorse.

Tang's sentencing is the latest in President Xi Jinping's sweeping anti-graft campaign that has brought down several high-level figures.

Supporters of Xi's anti-corruption drive say the campaign promotes clean governance, but critics argue it provides the president with the power to purge political rivals.

Tang previously served as governor of the northwestern province of Gansu, as well as the vice chairman of southern autonomous region Guangxi.

Deep roots of rage as Ladakh seeks self-rule

AFP, Leh

India's remote high-altitude desert region of Ladakh has been in turmoil since four people were killed in violent protests demanding greater political autonomy for the Himalayan territory.

Growing resentment with New Delhi's direct rule over the territory, and fears of losing livelihoods boiled over on Wednesday as crowds took to the streets in the main city Leh, torching a police vehicle and the offices of ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Initially police said five people had died but later revised the toll to four.

The sparsely populated region, home to some 300,000 people, borders both China and Pakistan and is a strategic enclave for India. Around half of Ladakh's residents are Muslim and about 40 percent are Buddhist.

Why are people protesting?

Modi's government split Ladakh off from Indian-administered Kashmir in 2019, imposing direct rule on both after cancelling the region's partial autonomy.

Since then, resentment has been growing in Ladakh, with concerns about losing traditional livelihoods, land rights, and cultural identity. Residents say the end of semi-autonomy stripped them of protections over land, jobs, and resources.

Who is leading the demonstrations?

The Apex Body Leh, led by veteran leader Chering Dorjay, has become the main voice of the protesters.

"We have been used like slaves," Dorjay, 77, said, vowing to continue the struggle in the days to come.

Wednesday's demonstrations were also organised in solidarity with prominent activist Sonam Wangchuk, who had been on hunger strike for two weeks. New Delhi blamed the unrest on "provocative speeches" by Wangchuk who was detained by police on Friday.

What are the core demands?

The protesters are demanding protection of land rights and to stop outsiders from buying property in Ladakh. They also want constitutional autonomy under the "Sixth Schedule" of India's constitution, which would allow a local legislature to make laws on land use and jobs.

Why is land a sensitive issue?

The government has announced large-scale solar projects and industrial plans in Ladakh that require thousands of acres of land.

Locals fear this will endanger grazing grounds critical for pashmina goat herding, already under pressure from climate change and military buffer zones established with China.

"The danger to this centuries-old



livelihood undermining lives of thousands of pashmina goat herders is another issue now," Dorjay said.

How do Ladakhis view relationship with India?

Unlike in Kashmir where opposition to Indian rule runs deep, Ladakhis have historically aligned with India, backing its troops in past conflicts with Pakistan and China.

But many now say they feel betrayed.

"For 70 years we have helped protect India's borders," Haji told AFP. "Now we want ourselves to be protected."

Beaten, shot and burned

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For over an hour and a half, harrowing images rolled across a large screen, leaving the courtroom in stunned silence. Parents of July uprising victim Golan Nafiz, present in the courtroom, broke down in tears while all eyes were glued to the screen with a heavy pall of grief.

The documentary, prepared by the International Truth and Justice Project based on forensic analysis of 400 video clips, captured one chilling scene after another from the Jatrabari massacre.

Policemen were seen firing point-blank at two young men crouching for safety behind a pillar beneath the Mayor Hanif Flyover. One collapsed instantly. The other, clutching his chest, tried to stumble forward when a policeman struck him with his rifle.

Elsewhere, two youths were cornered in an alley and beaten with rifle butts and sticks before targeted shots struck them down. Their lifeless bodies were soon left sprawled on the ground.

At least 19 were killed, including 18-year-old Yasir Sarker, Hubayed Ahmed, Md Liton, and Miraz Hossain. Many more were wounded.

The footage also traced how the quota reform movement transformed into a nationwide uprising after the killing of Abu Sayed, a Begum Rokeya University student, on July 16. It captured Sheikh Hasina branding protesters as descendants of "razakars", a remark that ignited fresh fury on the streets.

Other atrocities flashed across the

screen: the burning of five dead and one still alive protesters in a police van in Ashulia, the Chankharpool killing of six demonstrators, the murder of Golan Nafiz at Farmgate, and the shooting of Amir Hossain as he clung desperately to a ledge in Rampura. One clip even showed sound grenades being fired from helicopters hovering above.

Later, the tribunal began recording the statement of Investigation Officer Additional SP Md Alamgir, the final prosecution witness in the case. So far, 53 witnesses have testified.

The tribunal also accepted as corroborative evidence a statement from the late intellectual and political activist Badruddin Umar, who had passed away before he could testify.

In the case against Hasina, the investigating officer, Md Alamgir, in his deposition, mentioned evidence he seized during the investigation, including the bullets taken out from the bodies of wounded protesters, and video footage of the police firing. The court recorded his deposition. The remaining part of his deposition will resume today.

Meanwhile, ICT-1 disposed of a case against former minister and JSD president Hasanul Haq Inu after prosecutors said formal charges had already been pressed against him before ICT 2 in a similar case.

In court, Inu's lawyer, senior advocate ZI Khan Panna, sought permission to consult his client, which was granted.

Speaking to journalists afterwards,

he expressed deep frustration. Referring to Inu's audio conversation with Hasina, ZI Khan yesterday said Inu had asked the former premier to arrest protesters but also directed that they be released the next day, cautioning against opening fire under any circumstances and instead creating fear by using sound grenades.

"This does not mean he was insisting on killings. Such acts are carried out by those in power," ZI Khan told journalists after leaving the courtroom.

Replying to a question, he said that if his client is proven to have been involved in any killing, he should face punishment. "But it has to be proved," he stressed, adding that he himself has always opposed both killings and the death penalty.

"That is why I never came to this tribunal during the Awami League's tenure. Whether an individual is hanged rightfully or wrongly - I am not in favour of it. The civilised world rejects the death penalty..."

Responding to another query, the senior advocate said, "There are lapses everywhere in this country. I cannot even be sure if I'll reach home safely from here."

He further alleged that no cases were filed against those who created mobs and attacked the participants of a roundtable he organised at the Dhaka Reporters Unity last month. "Instead, the victims were sued. How can I respect this law and this administration?"



World's highest bridge opens in China

AFP, Beijing

The world's highest bridge opened to traffic in China yesterday, state media said, capping an engineering feat three years in the making.

The Huajiang Grand Canyon Bridge towers 625 metres above a river and vast gorge in the country's rugged southern province of Guizhou, also home to the 565-metre Beipanjiang Bridge that is now the world's second highest.

Live drone footage broadcast by state media showed vehicles traversing the immense structure, its support towers partially engulfed in clouds.

State news agency Xinhua said Wednesday that nearly half of the world's 100 highest bridges are located in Guizhou.

The Huajiang Grand Canyon Bridge took more than three years to complete, Xinhua reported. Its 1,420-metre main span makes it the "world's largest-span bridge built in a mountainous area", it added.



STAMPEDE AT INDIA RALLY Case filed against actor Vijay's party

REUTERS, Chennai

Police in India registered a criminal case against leaders of Tamil actor Vijay's political party after a stampede at his rally killed 39 people, a senior police official said yesterday.

The dead included children and more than 50 people were injured in Saturday's stampede in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, where Vijay was campaigning for his Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam party ahead of state elections early next year.

Tamil Nadu police filed the case, the first step toward potential charges, "against TVK party senior leaders Bussy Anand, Nirmal Kumar and V.P. Mathiyalagan, and the investigation is under way," senior police official V. Selvaraj told Reuters. "TVK originally sought permission for a gathering of 10,000 people, but the actual crowd was more than double," he said.

Vijay, one of Tamil cinema's most bankable actors for three decades, has drawn massive crowds since launching his party last year.