

Three dead, 118 arrested in India protests over Muslim

KOLKATA: (News Desk) India deployed troops on Saturday to quell deadly protests that have erupted in the state of West Bengal over legislation to change how Muslim-owned properties are managed.

Police fired tear gas at the thousands of demonstrators who gathered on Friday in the state's Murshidabad district. Three people, including a child, were killed, police said on Saturday.

"So far, 118 people have been arrested in connection with the violence," said Jawed Shamim, a senior police official in the state, adding that at least 15 police officers were injured. The state's high court ordered federal troops to deploy. The Waqf amendment bill that set off the protests was passed earlier this month after heated debate. According to the ruling Hindu nationalist government, it will boost transparency around land management by holding accountable powerful Waqf boards, which control properties gifted by Muslim charitable endowments.

But the opposition has called the bill a polarising "attack" on India's Muslim minority. They accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of trying to win favour with its right-wing Hindu base. After the bill's passage, Modi called it a "watershed moment". Opposition Congress Party chief Rahul Gandhi meanwhile said the bill was "aimed at Muslims today but sets a precedent to target other communities in the future". Modi's decade as premier has seen him cultivate an image as an aggressive champion of the country's majority Hindu faith. His government revoked the constitutional autonomy of India's Muslim-majority region Kashmir, and backed the construction of a temple on grounds where a mosque stood for centuries before it was torn down by Hindu zealots in 1992.

UK government to take control of British Steel under emergency law

LONDON: (News Desk) The British government said on Saturday it was taking control of Chinese-owned British Steel after rushing an emergency law through parliament to avert the shutdown of the country's last factory that can make steel from scratch. The struggling plant in northern England had faced imminent closure and Prime Minister Keir Starmer said his government "stepped in to save British Steel" with legislation to prevent its blast furnaces going out. At a rare weekend session, parliament approved the law without opposition to take over the running of the Scunthorpe site, which employs several thousand people and produces steel crucial for UK industries including construction and rail transport. The government saw its possible closure as a risk to Britain's long-term economic security, given the decline of the UK's once robust steel industry. Officials were poised to take over the site after the emergency bill passed into law on Saturday evening, according to UK media reports. Following its approval, Starmer said his administration was "turning the page on a decade of decline" and "acting to protect the jobs of thousands of workers." He insisted "all options are on the table to secure the future of the industry," after a government minister indicated nationalisation could be a likely next step. Earlier, as MPs debated in parliament, the prime minister made a dash to the region where he told steelworkers gathered in a nearby village hall that the measure was "in the national interest".

Most Hezbollah sites 'ceded to army' in south Lebanon

BEIRUT: (News Desk) Most military sites belonging to Hezbollah in southern Lebanon have been placed under Lebanese army control, a source close to the group said on Saturday.

A Nov 27 ceasefire which ended more than a year of conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, including two months of full-blown war, stipulated that only United Nations peacekeepers and Lebanon's army should be deployed in the country's south.

The deal required Hezbollah to dismantle its remaining infrastructure in the south and move its fighters north of the Litani River, which is about 30 kilometres from the Israeli border.

"Out of 265 Hezbollah military positions identified south of the Litani, the movement has ceded about 190 to the army," the source said.

Under the ceasefire, Israel was to complete its troop withdrawal from Lebanon by Feb 18 after missing a January deadline, but it has kept troops in five places it deems "strategic".

Israel has continued to strike what it says are Hezbollah infrastructure or members of the group in Lebanon.

The United States deputy special envoy for the Middle East, Morgan Ortagus, discussed disarming Hezbollah with senior Lebanese figures during her visit to the country a week ago, a Lebanese official said.

In an interview with Lebanese television channel LBCI, Ortagus said that "we continue to press on this government to fully fulfil the cessation of hostilities, and that includes disarming Hezbollah and all militias". She said it should happen "as soon as possible". The United States chairs a committee, which also includes France, tasked with overseeing the ceasefire. Following the Hamas raid in Israel on Oct 7, 2023, Hezbollah began firing into northern Israel in support of the Palestinians.



A view shows a site where medics said two Israeli missiles hit a building inside the Al-Ahli Arab Baptist Hospital, shortly after patients were evacuated following a call from someone who identified himself with Israeli security, in Gaza City, on April 13.

Ukraine says 32 killed by Russian ballistic missile strike on Sumy

Sumy (News Desk) Thirty-two people were killed and over 80 others wounded by two Russian ballistic missiles that slammed into the heart of the northern Ukrainian city of Sumy on Sunday morning, Ukrainian officials said. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky condemned the attack — one of the deadliest strikes on Ukraine this year — and

called for a tough international reaction against Moscow. "Only scoundrels can act like this. Taking the lives of ordinary people," Zelensky wrote on social media, alongside a chilling video which showed corpses on the ground, a destroyed bus and burnt-out cars in the middle of a city street. "And this is on a day when people go to church: Palm

Sunday, the feast of the Lord's Entry into Jerusalem," he said. Interior minister Ihor Klymenko said the victims were on the street, in vehicles, on public transport and in buildings when the strike hit. "Deliberate destruction of civilians on an important church feast day," he wrote. Andriy Yermak, Zelensky's chief of staff, said the mis-

siles contained cluster munitions. "The Russians are doing this to kill as many civilians as possible," he said. Reuters was seeking comment from Russian authorities. Andriy Kovalenko, a security official who runs Ukraine's Centre for Countering Disinformation, noted that the strike came after a visit to Moscow by US envoy Steve Witkoff.

US-funded Arabic network Alhurra ends broadcasts after Trump's aid cuts

Alkara (News Desk) Alhurra, the Arabic-language network created by the US government after the Iraq invasion, said on Saturday it would cease broadcasts and lay off most staff after US President Donald Trump's administration shut off funds.

The network went on air in 2004, when US officials were complaining about coverage of the Iraq war

from Qatar-backed Al Jazeera — which two decades later maintains a dominant role in Arabic-language media. "Media in the Middle East thrive on a diet of anti-Americanism," said Jeffrey Gedmin, president and CEO of Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN), the parent of Alhurra and other smaller US-funded Arabic-language outlets. Ged-

min added in a statement that it made "no sense to kill MBN" as a sensible alternative and to open the field to American adversaries and extremists. The Trump administration, in part of a sweeping cost-cutting drive led by billionaire Elon Musk, in March said it was ceasing all financial transfers for US government-supported media. The move quick-

ly froze Voice of America, although its employees have mounted legal challenges to restore the funding, which was approved by Congress. In a memo to staff, Gedmin said that Kari Lake, a firebrand Trump supporter put in charge of the agency supervising US-funded media, had refused to see him to discuss the "unlawfully" withdrawn funds.



Ukrainian law enforcement officers work at the site of a missile attack in Sumy, northeastern Ukraine, on April 13

Settlers storm Al-Aqsa Mosque compound: report

Gaza (News Desk) Hundreds of Israeli settlers have stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, Islam's third-holiest site, in occupied East Jerusalem under the protection of Israeli forces, Al Jazeera Arabic reports citing local sources.

Settlers are Israeli citizens who live illegally on private Palestinian land in the West Bank. Israel military says intercepts projectile

fired from Gaza

The Israeli military said it intercepted a projectile that was identified as crossing into Israeli territory from Gaza, AFP.

"Following the sirens that sounded at 15:58 (1258 GMT) in Reim, one projectile that was identified crossing into Israeli territory from Gaza was intercepted by the IAF (air force). No injuries were reported," the military said.

Explosion at UN building in Gaza caused by Israeli tank shells: report

The damage caused by the explosion at a UN building in Gaza's Deir el-Balah last month that killed a European staffer and wounded several others was reportedly consistent with two Israeli tank rounds, Al Jazeera reports citing a report by the Washington Post. The Israeli-made M339 high-explosive,

round was likely left by the fragments found at the scene, the Washington Post reported after speaking with multiple international experts. After the attack, the UN significantly downsized its presence in Gaza, as the Israeli military continues to blockade all aid and attack the enclave. The UN said Israel was behind the attack, but the Israeli army denied responsibility.

Accord reached 'in principle' over tackling pandemics

GENEVA: (News Desk) WHO members on Saturday reached agreement over how to tackle future pandemics after three years of discussions, the co-chair of the negotiating body said.

"We have an accord in principle" and the final version will have to be okayed by the various member states, Anne-Claire Amprou, who is also French ambassador for world health, said. Amprou said delegates would meet on Tuesday in Geneva to put the finishing touches to a landmark text on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response and give it their definitive seal of agreement.

The text will then require the final seal of approval from all World Health Organisation members at the World Health Assembly in Geneva at the end of May.

Over 100 feared dead in attacks by Sudan's paramilitaries

PORT SUDAN: (News Desk) More than 100 people, including 20 children, are feared dead in Sudan following paramilitary attacks on the besieged Darfur city of El-Fasher and two nearby famine-hit camps, the United Nations said on Saturday.

The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, at war with the regular army since April 2023, launched "coordinated ground and aerial assaults" on Friday on El-Fasher and the Zamzam and Abou Shouk displacement camps, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said.

In recent weeks, the paramilitaries have stepped up their attacks on El-Fasher — the only state capital in Darfur still outside their control — following the army's recapture of the national capital Khartoum last month. Early reports from a volunteer aid group put Friday's death toll at 57, with 32 civilians killed in El-Fasher and 25 in Zamzam. The army said on Saturday that 74 civilians were killed and 17 wounded in the El-Fasher attack. The Sudanese Organisation for the Protection of Civilians said the dead included nine humanitarian workers operating a hospital in Zamzam, run by an international non-governmental organisation.

Indian soldier, three fighters killed in occupied Kashmir

SRINAGAR: (News Desk) An Indian soldier was killed in a clash in occupied Kashmir's Sunderbani district, along the Line of Control, on Friday night.

A spokesperson for the Indian army said on X troops "challenged Kashmiri fighters" near a military base, sparking retaliatory gunfire in which one soldier died. Three Kashmiri fighters ected rebels and a soldier were killed in separate firefights near Indian-administered Kashmir's unofficial frontier with Pakistan, the Indian army said on Saturday.

The army said soldiers killed three fighters in a clash that began on Wednesday in a remote forest in Kishtwar, in the south of the India-occupied territory. Weapons and "war-like stores" were recovered from the site, the army claimed on X.

India has an estimated 500,000 soldiers permanently deployed in occupied Kashmir.

Four policemen were killed last month in a clash that also wounded several police officers.

Thousands of additional Indian troops, including special forces, were deployed across southern mountainous areas of the India-held state last year following a series of deadly attacks that killed more than 50 soldiers over three years.

Explosion at UN building in Gaza caused by Israeli tank shells: report

Gaza (News Desk) The damage caused by the explosion at a UN building in Gaza's Deir el-Balah last month that killed a European staffer and wounded several others was reportedly consistent with two Israeli tank rounds, Al Jazeera reports citing a report by the Washington Post.

The Israeli-made M339 high-explosive, multipurpose round was likely left by the fragments found at the scene, the Washington Post reported after speaking with multiple international experts.

After the attack, the UN significantly downsized its presence in Gaza, as the Israeli military continues to blockade all aid and attack the enclave.

The UN said Israel was behind the attack, but the Israeli army denied responsibility. Many wounded civilians die under Gaza rubble due to lack of equipment: Civil Defence

The Civil Defence in Gaza has released what it calls a message to the international community, Al Jazeera reports.

"Many wounded have been killed under the rubble of their homes, which the occupation destroyed over their heads without prior warning," it said in a statement on its Telegram channel.

"Our crews were unable to save their lives due to the occupation's insistence on preventing the entry of rescue equipment and heavy machinery into the Strip, amid your disturbing silence." Diocese of Jerusalem 'appalled' by Israeli attack on hospital The Baptist Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East has issued a statement saying the attack on al-Ahli Hospital destroyed the two-storey Genetic Laboratory, damaged the Pharmacy and Emergency Department buildings, and caused collateral damage to surrounding structures, including the St. Philip's church building, Al Jazeera reports. "The Diocese of Jerusalem is appalled," it said, adding that the hospital had been bombed "for the fifth time since the beginning of the war in 2023 — and this time was on the morning of Palm Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week." It added: "We call upon all governments and people of goodwill to intervene to stop all kinds of attacks on medical and humanitarian institutions." The Israeli military has used its routine justification for putting the last functioning hospital in northern Gaza out of service, Al Jazeera reports. Without providing any evidence, it said that it had worked with the Shin Bet internal security agency to bomb the al-Ahli Hospital "that was used by the Hamas terrorist organisation" to "plan and execute terrorist plots".

Israeli forces attack al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza City

Gaza (News Desk) Al Jazeera Arabic reports that Israeli forces have bombed the al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City as patients were being evacuated.

They say two airstrikes destroyed the hospital's emergency unit, the main entrance and the facility holding medical oxygen for intensive care patients. The attack came as doctors and nurses have been scrambling to get hundreds of patients out of the facility in the middle of the night. Gaza authorities condemn Israeli

attack on al-Ahli Hospital The Government Media Office in Gaza has slammed the bombing of the hospital in Gaza City, which is also known as the Baptist Hospital, calling it a "heinous" and "terrible" crime, Al Jazeera reports. In a statement, the office called the al-Ahli Hospital "one of the oldest and most important health institutions" in Gaza. "The Baptist Hospital, which includes many specialised departments, had hundreds of patients and wounded, medical staff and escorts at the moment

of targeting, and provides health services to more than a million Palestinians in the governorates of Gaza and northern Gaza," it said.

Israeli forces have already "deliberately destroyed 34 hospitals" in Gaza, the office said, adding that the continued attacks on medical facilities are a "flagrant violation of all international charters and the Geneva Conventions prohibiting the targeting of medical facilities". Hamas accuses Israel of 'new war crime' in Gaza after attack on al-Ahli

Hospital. The Palestinian group has described Israel's attack on the al-Ahli Hospital as a "new war crime" and said that the Israeli military had no regard for humanitarian laws and norms, Al Jazeera reports. It said it also holds the US responsible for the "brutal crime".

This is because Israel is working under the US's diplomatic cover, with Washington blocking all international mechanisms for accountability, it added. 3 patients reported dead after rushed evacua-

tion from al-Ahli Hospital Al Jazeera reports more from Razan al-Nahas, the emergency doctor in Gaza.

She said at least three people, including a 12-year-old boy with a head injury, have been reported dead following their forced evacuation from the Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza City.

"He was on oxygen, as were the two other patients, and the family basically walked with them to a nearby hospital, a very small facility with no capacity for the num-

ber of patients head their way. And they [the patients] arrived dead," said al-Nahas, who is in the city of Deir el-Balah. "There's so many patients on the streets. Some mat have made out to Al Shifa at this point. But I can't even imagine the scene of patients and their family members scattered in the streets, trying to find their way to a place for medical care. I'm certain that many of them will not make it." Al-Nahas said many of those at al-Ahli have severe injuries.