

International

# Anti-trafficking campaigners abducted and raped in India

## Indian activists condemn attack on frontline workers

**CHENNAI, India:** Five Indian anti trafficking campaigners were gang-raped at gunpoint during an awareness program they were organizing in a village, police said on Friday. Unidentified men picked up nine activists during a street play performance in Kochang village in Jharkhand state and drove them into a dense forest, where the men were beaten up and the women raped, police officer Ashwini Kumar Sinha said.

"It is a very rare case, where people working on anti-trafficking have been targeted," Sinha said in a phone interview from Khunti district of Jharkhand. "We are not ruling out the possibility of the involvement of trafficking gangs and are investigating all aspects." The street play had been organized by charity Asha Kiran, which runs a shelter home for the rehabilitation of rescued girls in Khunti district of Jharkhand, which has been identified as a trafficking hotspot.

There are around 200 rescued girls in Asha Kiran's shelter. Most of were trafficked into domestic servitude to cities where a growing middle class is looking for cheap live-in labor. Jharkhand is among the top five states in India that reports increasing cases of human trafficking, with traffickers targeting poor villages, convincing vulnerable families to send their daughters away for employment, campaigners said. Indian activists fight-

ing to curb the trafficking of women and children condemned the shocking attack on "frontline workers". "We are still processing what has happened," said Rajiv Ranjan Sinha of the Jharkhand Anti-Trafficking Network - a coalition of 14 grassroots organizations working in the central Indian state. "This is the first time field workers have been targeted and it is both surprising and shocking. It is now going to become more difficult to work on this issue."

India has seen an increase in reports of human trafficking in recent years. Almost 20,000 women and children were victims of trafficking in 2016, a rise of 25 percent from the previous year, according to government data. Activists say the figures are under-reported, especially due to a lack of awareness in rural areas, emphasizing the importance of programs run by various charities to combat trafficking.

"The incident underlines the dangers on the ground and the fact that human trafficking is an organized and ruthless crime," said Rishi Kant of Shakti Vahini, an anti-trafficking charity that also works in Jharkhand. "Every day young girls are being rescued from domestic servitude in Indian cities. Many of them are from remote villages, which is why these awareness programs are so important and the incident is shocking." —Reuters



**JHARKHAND:** Schoolgirls holding placards participate in a protest rally against the rape of two teenage girls in Chatra and Pakur districts of eastern state of Jharkhand, India.—Reuters

“Field workers targeted for the first time”

## Ten days after Trump-Kim summit hard work yet to begin

**WASHINGTON:** The landmark summit between President Donald Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un ended with a pledge of "complete denuclearization," but ten days on no timetable for action has emerged. After flying back to Washington last week, giddy with success, the US leader tweeted "There is no longer a Nuclear Threat from North Korea"- a bold claim with Kim's arsenal still in place. But senior US officials admit there is much work to be done as negotiators thrash out the details of what they hope will be Pyongyang "complete, verifiable and irreversible" disarmament.

Many observers were disappointed that the short statement of intent signed by the two leaders was not more clear on the definition of denuclearization, fearing Kim plans to keep his hard-won deterrent. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo angrily insists that the term "complete" in the document "encompasses" the concept that the denuclearization will be "verifiable and irreversible." Trump has gone further, claiming on June 12 that the process will start very quickly, then on June 21 confusing the issue: "It will be a total denuclearization, which is already taking place."

Pompeo has been only marginally more cautious. On June 13, he said "We believe that Kim Jong Un understands the urgency ... that we must do this quickly" and added that he hopes for "major disarmament" with two-and-a-half years. So far, however, this confidence rests solely on trust in the assurances that Kim gave Trump at the summit, and his reported promise to China to "implement the summit's consensus step by step."

When Pompeo said of Kim's pledge, "I was there when he said it. He made a personal commitment. He has his reputation on the line," Thomas Wright, a senior fellow at Brookings, was scathing. "This is one of the most naive statements ever made by an American diplomat," Wright wrote on Twitter. "I hope he is trying to mislead us because it would be truly frightening if he believed it." Abraham Denmark of the Wilson Center warned a con-

gressional hearing: "Considering North Korea's repeated history of violating past agreements, there is little reason to trust them this time."

And, despite his professed faith in Kim's word, Pompeo knows he has work to do to establish a roadmap towards concrete steps and that he will have to speak to Kim again, probably in Pyongyang. Highlighting this apparent gap between Trump's rhetoric and facts on the ground, the administration Friday cited the "unusual and extraordinary threat" from North Korea's nuclear arsenal to extend decade-old sanctions on Kim's regime in a statement to Congress.

### War games

"There's a lot of work between here and there. My team is already doing it. I'll likely travel back before too terribly long," Pompeo said on Monday, without setting a travel date. Pompeo's spokeswoman Heather Nauert has said she

will not provide details of the negotiations, warning reporters the process "can be difficult when we're distracted by all of the questions going on." But she denied that the talks were at a dead halt, even if the detailed negotiations have yet to begin. "We have been in communication with the Government of North Korea," she said on Thursday.

"Secretary Pompeo will be meeting with them and talking with them at the earliest possible date to try to implement the outcomes of the US-DPRK summit." While Pompeo pushes on with follow up talks, Trump appears happy to celebrate the summit as a success, as if the joint statement itself marked a beginning to the end of Kim's nuclear program. He claims he has already received "good news" and on Thursday declared that the North has "already blown up one of their big test sites. In fact, it was actually four of their big test sites." —AFP



**SINGAPORE:** US President Donald Trump, right, walks out with North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un, left, after taking part in a signing ceremony at the end of their historic US-North Korea summit, at the Capella Hotel on Sentosa Island in Singapore.—AFP

## Pope to make Vatican changes in push for reform, transparency

**VATICAN CITY:** Pope Francis will be making several significant changes in the Vatican in the next few weeks and months to bring in fresh faces with new ideas and promote others as part of his push for reform. The pope disclosed his decisions in a rare sit-down interview with Reuters at his residence, during which he also spoke of migration, China, freedom of the press, sexual abuse and the role of women in the Church.

During the two-hour interview last Sunday night, Francis said he had decided that the Office of Papal Charities, otherwise known as the pope's almoner, will henceforth be headed by a cardinal, the highest position in the Church after the pope himself. The current head of that office will be promoted and his successors will have the same rank. This will institutionalize a higher profile for the department that oversees help for the poor.

"I think there are two long arms of the pope - that of being custodian of the faith, and there the work is done by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the prefect has to be a cardinal," Francis said. "And the other long arm of the pope is the almoner, and there must be a cardinal there. These are the two long arms of the pope - faith and charity." Polish Archbishop Konrad Krajewski currently heads the office, whose roots go back to the early 13th century. He will be raised to the rank of cardinal in a ceremony along with 13 other Churchmen on Thursday.

The almoner's office has not had a cardinal at its head in living memory. Under Francis' direction Krajewski has revitalised the office. He is often seen on the streets of Rome in simple, non-clerical clothes helping the homeless. He has set up shower stalls and medical facilities for the homeless, elderly and destitute near St. Peter's Square and taken groups to the circus and even on private tours of the Sistine Chapel.

### Break with tradition

In order to press his vision of a more merciful, less bureaucratic Church, Francis has broken with the custom



**GENEVA:** Pope Francis waves to Swiss President Alain Berset (front) at the end of his one-day visit to Geneva.—AFP

of automatically naming cardinals to head major dioceses around the world. Five major Italian cities who have always had cardinals are currently without them. Francis also said that before the end of the year he was considering making changes in the group of cardinal advisors from around the world known as the C-9. The group, which meets with him periodically in Rome, began its work five years ago.

He said he may take advantage of the upcoming anniversary "to renew it a bit", but that it would not be to "cut heads." Two of the members of the C-9, Australian Cardinal George Pell and Chilean Cardinal Francisco Javier Errzuriz Ossa, are under a cloud for allegations related to the Church's sexual abuse scandal. Both have denied any wrongdoing. Francis also told Reuters he was going to shake things up at APSA, a sort of general accounting office that manages the Vatican's real estate holdings in Rome and elsewhere in Italy, pays salaries of Vatican employees, and acts as a purchasing office and human resources department. He said that the current APSA head, Italian Cardinal Domenico Calcagno, had offered his resignation when he reached the age limit of 75 in February and that it would be accepted later this month. —Reuters

## Refugee children in Bangkok, Jakarta face trafficking risk

**BANGKOK:** A lack of legal protections is putting refugee children in Bangkok and Jakarta at heightened risk of trafficking and forced labor, campaigners said. More than 20,000 refugees live in the Thai and Indonesian capitals, many of them children, and neither country is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, which spells out legal obligations to protect refugees. That means they are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse and also makes them afraid to report violations for fear of arrest or deportation, said Save the Children's Ratirose Supaporn ahead of the release of a report in Bangkok yesterday.

"Refugees are vulnerable even before they set off from their home countries, as they are desperate, and often depend on an agent who may dupe them," she said. "Their insecurity is greater in the host country, where they are often afraid to go out, and are vulnerable to being duped or abused. They are usually too afraid to report any of it, particularly children who are especially at risk," she said.

The Save the Children report comes as the world's attention is focused on the detention of immigrant children who enter the United States illegally with their parents, which has been the subject of widespread criticism. It said most refugee children in Bangkok and Jakarta were out of school, and many suffered from illness and mental health issues.

Refugees in the two cities cannot legally work and are eventually repatriated to their country of origin, integrated locally or resettled in a third country, the Save the Children report said. But it warned that refugee resettlement levels are decreasing globally, which means families have to remain in Indonesia and Thailand for longer periods, increasing their vulnerability.

"They (refugees) run out of money, so children may be pushed into working from a young age, and that also raises the risk of trafficking and sexual exploitation," Ratirose said. A record 68 million people have been forced to leave their homes worldwide, according to figures the UN refugee agency released this week. —Reuters

## Community takes lead to rebuild Philippine city after siege

**MANILA:** When Tong Pacasum was allowed back into the area where his family home once stood in Marawi on the Philippine island of Mindanao, there was nothing left for him to salvage months after a bloody siege that levelled much of the city. But Pacasum considers himself lucky: his family is safe, and they have a title to their property, which will be key as residents and authorities begin rebuilding after the country's biggest and fiercest urban battle in years.

Others among the 200,000 Maranaos - as residents of Marawi are known - are not as fortunate. When pro-Islamic State rebels laid siege to the city in May 2017, everyone fled. Residents including Pacasum were allowed to inspect their homes and retrieve their belongings only recently. Groundbreaking - when demolitions of all affected structures will begin - is scheduled for July, after a private developer is selected.

The process will take several months, after which construction of roads and other public facilities will begin. The government will then give funds to residents will then be given funds to construct their homes. Rebuilding Marawi could cost more than \$1 billion and will be complete by the end of 2021, officials estimate. But the process could be delayed by questions on land ownership, said Pacasum, who helped evacuate people during the siege, and now liaises with the provincial government on rehabilitation.

"It's going to be a huge challenge, as a lot of residents don't have titles to their properties, even though they have been living there for generations," he said. "If we don't do it right, it will cause more pain and suffering, and we have already suffered so much," said Pacasum, who has participated in consultations with other residents and officials on the plans for rebuilding.

### Make or break

Muslims as well as indigenous people have been caught in the middle of a five-decade old insurgency in Mindanao, exacerbated by loggers and mining companies eager to tap its rich resources including gold, copper and nickel, experts say. President Rodrigo Duterte has called the island a "flashpoint for trouble" and atrocities by Islamist and communist rebels. Martial law imposed in May 2017 is in place until the end of the year.

Conflict over land was one of the major triggers of violence in Mindanao even before the siege, and could be a "make or break" issue in the rehabilitation of Marawi, according to a recent report by development organisation The Asia Foundation. Failure to address land issues could stoke further conflict and push more people into extremism, the report said.

A solution may lie in a more participatory effort led by the community, said Ica Fernandez, a spatial planner and co-author of the report, who is part of an initiative called Open Marawi, which had made recommendations based on community feedback. "A community-led effort is essential because of the history of Mindanao as an autonomous Muslim region," said Fernandez. "The people have the right to self-determination, the right to decide on their future. Especially in this case, when we have to also rely on memories and emotional associations to reimagine the city, we need everyone to be involved," she said. There is a complex system of ownership, tenure, and use of land in Marawi and in Mindanao, including practices that pre-date the Philippine nation-state.

A community-led rehabilitation is particularly relevant, as "many pre-colonial, traditional, and informal governance structures and practices around land, housing, and property" are practised alongside laws, according to The Asia Foundation. The government has established a Land Dispute Arbitration Committee to address concerns, and officials have said in the absence of a title, residents may present tax receipts and certificates from municipal officials.

"We will ensure all issues on land ownership are resolved," said Adoracion Navarro, an official at Marawi's regional development office. The rehabilitation will "take into account the demographic composition of a predominantly Muslim population, the Marano culture, and existing capacities of communities," he said. —Reuters