

Delhi cuts mobiles as India protests rage nationwide

Thousands defy bans, historian Guha arrested

NEW DELHI: Indian authorities cut cellphone access in parts of Delhi yesterday and fresh violence erupted elsewhere, as thousands of protesters nationwide defied bans on assembly in growing anger at a new citizenship law seen as anti-Muslim.

Police and demonstrators clashed in Uttar Pradesh state as security forces bundled demonstrators including an internationally famous historian onto buses in Delhi and Bangalore, as 19 metro stations were shut in the capital and major roads blocked.

The new law eases citizenship rules for people fleeing persecution from three neighboring countries, but excludes Muslims, stoking accusations that Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants to reshape India as a Hindu nation and creating unease abroad. Seven months after Modi swept to a second term, India has seen a week of protests in which four people were shot dead, dozens injured and hundreds arrested, while authorities have banned gatherings in areas that together are home to hundreds of millions of people.

They included all of Uttar Pradesh and Bangalore, areas of the northeast and parts of Bihar, New Delhi, Hyderabad and Chennai. All of them have seen protests in recent days, and in the case of the capital, riots and police storming a university. Delhi police spokesman M S Randhawa told AFP that "people should seek permission to assemble at places" where the ban is not in place.

Indian police yesterday detained one of the

country's most respected historians and intellectuals, Ramachandra Guha, yesterday during a demonstration in the southern city of Bengaluru against a new citizenship law based on religion. Indian news channels showed footage of Guha being dragged by three policemen near barricades erected to hold back protesters challenging the law, which critics say is prejudicial to Muslims and undermines the country's secular constitution.

"I am protesting non-violently, but look they are stopping us," said Guha before being surrounded by police at the demonstration, one of four held in Bengaluru yesterday.

Demonstrators dragged

Fresh violence erupted in the Sambhal district of Uttar Pradesh as hundreds of protesters set fire to vehicles and threw stones at security forces who responded with tear gas, local police chief Yamuna Prasad told AFP. "We are trying to control the situation. People have been asked to return to their homes," Prasad said.

Police fired tear gas in state capital Lucknow while in Modi's home state of Gujarat police said they baton-charged demonstrators and arrested 50 people. As others ignored the assembly ban in Delhi and elsewhere, authorities ordered telecom firms to cut calls, text messages and data in parts of the city.

India is already the world leader in cutting the internet, activists say, and online access was also restricted in parts of the northeast and in Uttar

Khalilzad is leading, will eventually bring a "significant reduction in violence" that will let the United States "reduce its footprint." India is a sworn enemy of the Taliban, whose hardline 1996-2001 regime was allied with rival Pakistan and welcomed virulently anti-Indian Islamist extremists. India has been one of the top backers of Afghanistan's internationally recognized government, pouring in \$3 billion since the US-led invasion toppled the Taliban regime after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States.

"Of course we have concerns about the future of Afghanistan," Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said. "We believe that the reconciliation process in Afghanistan should be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned," he said. Esper declined to comment on a report that President Donald Trump, who believes the war is not worth the cost, could announce a pullout of around 4,000 troops, bringing the US contingent down to around 8,600.

Muted criticism on rights

India is one of only three countries to hold such "2+2" talks with the United States between foreign policy and defense chiefs, a sign of Washington's commitment to boost ties with a largely like-minded nation from which it was estranged during the Cold War. But the talks came as India faces growing criticism over a sharp turn into Hindu nationalism by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, bolstered by a convincing re-election win. —AFP



BENGALURU: A protester shouts to a policeman at the Town Hall during a demonstration held against India's new citizenship law in spite of a curfew in Bengaluru yesterday. Indians defied bans on assembly yesterday in cities nationwide as anger swells against a citizenship law seen as discriminatory against Muslims, following days of protests, clashes and riots that have left six dead. —AFP

Pradesh, home to a large Muslim minority.

Kawalpreet Kaur, Delhi President of the All India Students' Association, tweeted that police had filled 14 buses with detainees at the Red Fort landmark in Delhi. "But more and more people are pouring in, too many to be detained," she added. In Bangalore one of those dragged onto a police bus was globally renowned historian Ramachandra Guha just as he was giving an interview.

In the northeast, where the protests began last week—albeit for different reasons—around 20,000 people took to the streets in different locations. No violence was reported however after last week's deadly clashes. But the day's biggest demonstration so far took place in Malegaon in Maharashtra state—no assembly ban was in place—with as many as 60,000 people, police said. "It was all peaceful," spokesperson ASI Pathan said. —AFP

US promises to consider India in Afghan pullout

WASHINGTON: The United States promised Wednesday to take into account India's concerns as it looks to pull out of Afghanistan, in high-level talks that agreed on several ways to boost the democracies' emerging alliance. The talks in Washington came against the backdrop of major protests in India over a citizenship law that critics say targets Muslims, but Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was careful not to annoy his guests by speaking forcefully on the issue.

Pompeo and Defense Secretary Mark Esper, meeting for a day of talks with their Indian counterparts, said they spoke in depth on the renewed US talks with the Taliban aimed at ending America's longest war. "We understand the concerns that India has, too-rightful concerns that they have—about terrorism emanating from Pakistan," Pompeo told a joint news conference. "We assured them that we would take that into account," he said.

Pompeo voiced hope that talks with the Taliban, which veteran US negotiator Zalmay

Musharraf slams death sentence 'vendetta'

ISLAMABAD: Exiled former Pakistan military leader Pervez Musharraf dismissed the unprecedented treason conviction and death sentence handed to him earlier this week, saying the ruling was the result of a "personal vendetta". The special court's decision announced Tuesday marked the first time a former leader of the armed forces has been convicted of treason and sentenced to death in Pakistan, where the military wields enormous power and has ruled the country for roughly half its 72-year history.

"This case was taken up and proceeded due to a personal vendetta by some people against me," said Musharraf in a video statement released by his assistant late Wednesday night.

Musharraf—who is reportedly in Dubai and in poor health—appeared in a hospital bed in the video looking frail and was straining to speak. The former general however said he remained undecided on his next move or whether his legal team was planning to appeal the conviction.

The treason case — which began in 2013 and is one of several involving Musharraf-centered on his decision to suspend the constitution and impose emergency rule in 2007. The ruling has infuriated Pakistan's security establishment, with the military's spokesman swiftly condemning the verdict and saying the armed forces were in "pain and anguish" over the decision.

"An ex-Army Chief, Chairman Joint Chief of Staff Committee and President of Pakistan, who has served the country for over 40 years, fought wars for the defense of the country can surely never be a traitor," the military said Tuesday. Prime Minister Imran Khan—a former rival of Musharraf—has stayed largely quiet since the ruling.

Khan is broadly considered to be pro-military and several ministers in his administration had previously served in Musharraf's military government. Musharraf first took power after ousting prime minister Nawaz Sharif in a bloodless coup in 1999. A cigar-smoking, whisky-drinking moderate, the general became a vital American ally in the "war on terror" after the September 11 attacks and escaped at least three Al-Qaeda assassination attempts during his nine years in office.

His rule faced no serious challenges until he tried to sack the chief justice in March 2007, sparking nationwide protests and months of turmoil that led to the imposition of a state of emergency. —AFP