

International

India's court jails 11 men for life over 'beef' murder

Muslim meat trader killed by 'cow vigilantes'

NEW DELHI: An Indian court has sentenced 11 men to life in prison for killing a Muslim meat trader they suspected of transporting beef, in the first convictions over so-called "cow vigilantism".

The men, including a worker from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party, were found guilty of killing Alimuddin Ansari in the eastern state of Jharkhand in June 2017. It was one of a series of attacks related to cows, which are considered sacred by Hindus. The men were charged with murder and rioting, among other offences, under India's penal code and a court in Jharkhand's Ramgarh district delivered its verdict on Wednesday.

"The fast-track court handed them the life sentence yesterday," Rajesh Kumar, a senior police officer in Ramgarh told AFP by phone yesterday. "It is the first case in which a court has convicted and punished (perpetrators) for cow vigilantism."

The police officer said a dozen men were arrested over the murder but the court deferred its decision on the twelfth accused who is said to be a minor. India has witnessed a wave of rising tensions over the killing and smuggling of cows in the Hindu-majority country, where their

slaughter is a punishable offence in many states, including Jharkhand.

A number of people, particularly Muslims and low-caste Dalits, have been targeted for allegedly killing cows or consuming beef. Similar cases of cow vigilante violence are at the trial stage, according to Indian media reports.

Human Rights Watch urged law enforcers to take prompt action with credible investigations and prosecutions in the pending cases to rein in "those responsible for hate crimes".

"The authorities still have a long way to go before they can convince religious minorities and socially marginalized communities that justice can be assured," it said in a statement late Wednesday. Modi's critics say vigilantes have been emboldened by the election in 2014 of his right-wing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, which promised to completely outlaw cow slaughter across India.

The premier has condemned such vigilantism, saying murders in the name of protecting cows were unacceptable, but it has failed to deter some attackers.

In August, villagers in eastern India beat two Muslim cattle truckers to death on the pretext of protecting cows. — AFP



AMRITSAR: Members of the All India Anti-Terrorism front shout slogans as they pay tribute to Indian socialist revolutionary Bhaga Bhagat Singh at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar yesterday on the eve of the India Martyr's Day. — AFP

Meditation and law: The Suu Kyi loyalist tipped for presidency

YANGON: Win Myint, the long-serving member of Myanmar's ruling party who is expected to become the country's next president within days, is described by colleagues as a skilled political operator with a crucial quality - loyalty to de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi. The job is vacant after another Suu Kyi loyalist, Htin Kyaw, resigned due to ill-health on Wednesday. Suu Kyi - who remains a national heroine in Myanmar despite growing international criticism over the Rohingya crisis in the northwest - is barred by the military-drafted constitution from assuming the top job because her sons have British citizenship.

Still, she wields absolute authority in the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) after vowing on the eve of her 2015 election victory to run the country from "above the president" - an arrangement that means the change is unlikely to distort the balance of power in a country where the army remains powerful. State media confirmed yesterday the 66-year-old Win Myint was poised to take over when the country's parliament elects a new president, in a vote that must be held within seven days, after he resigned as lower house speaker on Wednesday.

"U Win Myint, 66, is considered to be one of the candidates for the presidency, which was va-

cated by U Htin Kyaw for health reasons," said the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar daily.

Suu Kyi is known for keeping her cards close to her chest and operating with a very narrow group of trusted advisors. Win Myint, who has been an NLD member from its humble beginnings almost three decades ago, is among the few to whom she has given serious responsibility since taking office almost two years ago. "If I have to describe him in one word, I would say: 'a good person, and loyal to Aung San Suu Kyi,'" said Ye Htut, an upper house NLD lawmaker.

Ye Htut said that when he was invited to Win Myint's daughter's wedding last year, he specifically asked guests not to bring any gifts to the ceremony. "It's obvious he's an honest man who's not seeking anything for his own benefit."

Win Myint comes from Myanmar's southern agricultural heartland in the Ayeyarwady delta region. He worked as a senior lawyer in the 1980s and took part in the 1988 pro-democracy uprising, later serving three years in an internment camp. "He usually takes walks in early mornings and does meditation to improve his health and practice mindfulness," said Cho Cho Win, a lower house NLD lawmaker.

Critics stifled

Win Myint's critics, including some Yangon-based diplomats, say that while he is loyal and honest, the quality of debate during his tenure as speaker deteriorated as he silenced dissenting voices - including those from the NLD. Nyo Nyo Thin, a former Yangon region lawmaker, has criticised Win Myint's performance as the speaker, saying parliament, where the NLD enjoys a comfortable majority, was not robust enough in performing its check-and-balance role. — Reuters

Afghan strongman makes way for hand-picked successor, ending crisis

MAZAR-I-SHARIF, Afghanistan: Afghanistan's "King of the North" handed the reins to his hand-picked successor yesterday, ending a three-month political crisis that many had feared would turn violent.

Atta Mohammad Noor, who sees himself as a potential presidential contender, agreed to step down from the governorship of Balkh province after his Jamiat-e-Islami party struck a deal with President Ashraf Ghani's US-backed government. Ghani sacked Noor on December 18 but the strongman refused to leave the position he had held since 2004, triggering a standoff that threw up a challenge to the president's authority.

Noor will be replaced by one of his chosen successors, Mohammad Ishaq Rahguzar, who also belongs to the Jamiat party and is a member of the Balkh parliament.

"I say goodbye today but I will still be here and always with my people," Noor said at a ceremony in the provincial capital Mazar-i-Sharif as he introduced his successor.

"Big political games are ahead, including the elections, and we will be major players."

The decision to oust Noor backfired badly on Ghani, who was criticised for his poor timing and clumsy handling of the issue. Instead of weakening a rival ahead of the presidential election in 2019,

Ghani thrust the more charismatic Noor onto the national stage where he capitalised on his newfound fame. The political crisis came at a bad time for the president, with his government facing a deteriorating security situation as the Taliban and the Islamic State group continue to carry out deadly attacks across the country.

Rahguzar served as the first governor of Balkh in the post-Taliban era before he was replaced by Noor.

"They are very close," an Afghan analyst told AFP on the condition of anonymity. The two men were part of the US-funded mujahideen who fought to expel the Soviets from Afghanistan in the 1980s. "He's acceptable to Atta-not Ghani's first choice, but face-saving," a Western diplomat told AFP. In his address for Nawrooz, the traditional Persian new year holiday, on Wednesday, Noor welcomed the deal with Ghani. — AFP