



Troops deployed across fire-hit Australia after horror weekend

## Ex-leftist prime minister wins Croatia presidential election



NEW DELHI: Supporters, students, media representatives and police force stand outside the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) gate in New Delhi yesterday. —AFP

# Masked goons strike terror in Delhi university

## Attacks on JNU students and teachers spark protests across India

**NEW DELHI:** Protests were held across India yesterday after masked assailants wielding batons and iron rods went on a rampage at a top Delhi university, leaving more than two dozen injured. Controversy over Sunday's violence at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) comes as a new challenge to the government as it confronts major nationwide protests against a new citizenship bill that critics say is anti-Muslim. Meanwhile, New Delhi police are investigating how masked men burst into a leading university and attacked student protesters with sticks and rods, an officer said yesterday.

"Social media and CCTV footage will be part of the investigation," said police official Devendra Arya, adding the violence at the university had prompted police to start a case. Students and some faculty of the Jawaharlal Nehru University have blamed the incident that injured at least 30 people on a students' union tied to Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party that has increasingly picked on the institution.

Students put out pictures of mobs entering university residential halls, their faces covered with cloth, carrying sticks and even sledgehammers. Some shouted slogans, threatening death for traitors.

Students said police had failed to act, leaving them at the mercy of the mob.

Delhi police said they had launched an investigation.

Some students blamed the university attack on right-wing activists, but they also accused police of doing nothing to stop the violence. At least 28 students and teachers were injured, while doctors and nurses from a nearby hospital who went to treat them were also attacked, their union said.

Scores of riot police yesterday patrolled the university—the alma mater of several key ministers in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cabinet-picking their way past shattered glass and broken doors and furniture. They made no immediate arrests, but blamed the violence on "rival student groups". As condemnation of the attacks spread, more than 1,000 people held a vigil in Mumbai. Other demonstrations were held in Bangalore, Kolkata and other major cities.

### Student groups blamed

Nobel economy prize winner Abhijeet Banerjee, a former JNU student, said the attacks had "echoes of the years when Germany was moving towards Nazi rule". Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party denied claims by the opposition Congress that it

was responsible, and in turn blamed left-leaning student groups which dominate the university's politics. The government has promised an investigation, while home minister Amit Shah—a close Modi aide—told university administrators and police to maintain order at the campus, which has been tense since protests in November over fee increases.

The unrest comes as nationwide protests continue against a citizenship law passed in December that bars Muslims from a measure granting nationality to minorities from three neighboring Islamic-majority countries. Hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets across the country, and more than 25 people have been killed. Critics say the legislation goes against India's secular constitution, but Modi says the new law is intended to help "persecuted" minorities. The street protests have further divided a country that gave Modi a landslide return to power in May last year.

Modi's opponents blame his policies for the country's sluggish economy and social unease.

Meanwhile, India's leading trade unions yesterday called for a general strike on January 8 to protest against the govern-

ment's "anti-people" policies. More than 60 student unions have supported the one-day strike. More than 30 people injured were admitted to the All-India Institute of Medical Science in the capital, a hospital official said, most of them with lacerations, cuts and bruises.

The protests have persisted, with more demonstrations planned across India yesterday, prompted by the university attack.

The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the students' wing of the BJP, denied accusations that it was behind the attack, which it blamed instead on rival leftist unions. Authorities faced criticism for failing to rein in the violence on a campus viewed a center of resistance to Modi's policies, including the abolition last year of special status for Muslim-majority Kashmir.

### As police watched ...

Amit Thorat, who teaches economics at JNU, said he called the police a little after 7 pm on Sunday but they didn't come until an hour later. Nearly a dozen students Reuters spoke to said police watched as the mob rampaged inside the campus.

"I...hang my head in shame after witnessing video clips of goons merrily entering JNU campus, creating mayhem and

grievously injuring innocent students, damaging public property and then exiting the campus," Rahul Mehra, a lawyer for the Delhi police, said on Twitter.

Even medical teams trying to help the injured were attacked, said Harjit Bhatti, former president of the resident doctors' association at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences.

"Our team of doctors, nurses & medical volunteers who reached JNU to give first aid to injured students & teachers, was attacked by hundreds of goons," he said in a tweet. "Mob manhandled doctors, nurses & threatened them. Our ambulance's glass & windows broken, this is totally inhuman & insane."

Critics say the Modi administration is trying to crush dissent as it advances a Hindu-first agenda that undermines India's foundations as a secular democracy. The citizenship law lays out a path for Indian nationality for minorities from six religious groups in neighboring countries but excludes Muslims.

The government says the law is meant to tackle the grievances of minorities, such as Christians, Hindus and Sikhs, who face persecution in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. —Agencies

## Both Guaido and rival claim to be Venezuela's parliament speaker

**CARACAS:** Opposition leader Juan Guaido and a rival lawmaker, Luis Parra, both claimed to be Venezuela's parliament speaker on Sunday following two separate votes and accusations of a "parliamentary coup." Guaido was re-elected speaker by opposition lawmakers in a session held at a newspaper office after police blocked him from entering the National Assembly legislature.

In his absence, corruption-tainted Parra proclaimed himself speaker after claiming to have been elected with 81 votes in the 167-member chamber. Guaido, who a year ago declared himself acting president in a challenge to socialist leader Nicolas Maduro, received the votes of around 100 lawmakers, including several forced last year into exile or to take shelter in foreign diplomatic missions due to a regime crackdown. Guaido vowed to "enforce" the constitution in his dual role as parliament speaker and "acting president." But in a televised address, President Maduro gave his backing to Parra as the new speaker, adding that "Guaido was kicked out of the National Assembly by the votes of his own opposition." Venezuela's opposition denounced Parra's move as a "parliamentary coup."

Guaido and around a dozen lawmakers had been prevented from entering the assembly by police claiming to be carrying out a security operation, but deputies from Maduro's party and opposition ones that have rejected Guaido were allowed in. Guaido, 36, attempted to climb over the railing around the National Assembly premises to gain entry, only to be pushed back by police with riot shields.

Images of Parra declaring himself head of the chamber by megaphone were shown on state television channel

VTV. After spending four hours outside parliament, Guaido and allied lawmakers went to the offices of El Nacional newspaper where they held their own session.

### US backs Guaido

"This is unprecedented!" Guaido told a member of the security forces with whom he had a heated exchange. "What operation? Who ordered it?" "Those who help to prevent the legitimate installation of the Venezuelan parliament are converting themselves into accomplices of the dictatorship," he wrote on Twitter. Guaido has led the National Assembly for the last year and used that role to declare himself acting president on January 23, 2019 after parliament had branded Maduro a "usurper."

The US congratulated Guaido on being re-elected as speaker and said it condemned "the failed efforts of the former Maduro regime to negate the will of the democratically elected National Assembly."

"The United States and 57 other countries continue to regard (Guaido) as the legitimate leader of the National Assembly and thus the legitimate interim president of Venezuela," US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said. But ahead of Parra's self-proclamation, opposition deputy Jose Brito spoke to journalists, addressing Guaido: "You could have been the future—now you are and will be the past."

Both Parra and Brito fell out with Guaido last year after being accused of corruption related to the over-pricing of food imported for the Maduro regime.

Parra told reporters 140 lawmakers were present in the session and that his candidacy was approved with 81 votes. But regime deputy, Pedro Carreno, told AFP that the vote took place with 150 deputies present and that Parra received the simple majority of 84 needed to win. The National Assembly has 167 seats, 112 of which are in opposition hands. On Twitter, the National Assembly described Parra's claims as "a violation of the constitution." Brazil's Foreign Minister Ernesto Araujo said his country "does not recognize" Parra's claims, while Colombia described Parra's election as "fraudulent, without transparency or guarantees" and said it wouldn't recognize it.



CARACAS: Venezuelan opposition leader and self-proclaimed acting president Juan Guaido is helped to climb a railing in an attempt to reach the National Assembly building in Caracas, on Sunday. —AFP

### Maduro expects

Guaido sprang to prominence a year ago when he declared himself acting president—a move quickly supported by more than 50 countries. The National Assembly has been effectively sidelined since 2017, when the Supreme Court, made up of Maduro loyalists, declared it in contempt. The court has since annulled its every decision. Maduro has said he expects to "regain the National Assembly" in elections later this year. Guaido's challenge to Maduro started brightly in 2019 as he showed ingenuity and skill in rallying sup-

porters to protest and defying Maduro's authority in a number of ways—including flouting a travel ban.

But his momentum petered out over the second half of 2019. Despite intense pressure from the United States, which has imposed sanctions on regime figures, Maduro has retained power thanks to support from the armed forces. Even an economic crisis that has led to shortages of food and medicines, and an inflation rate the IMF said would hit a stunning 200,000 percent for 2019, hasn't dislodged Maduro. —AFP