



Ukraine puts Dnipro toll at 21 after wave of Russian strikes

Biden declares disaster as California takes another storm-pounding

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RAMMUN: Palestinians attend the funeral procession of Ahmad Kahla in the village of Rammun in the occupied West Bank, on Sunday. —AFP

Palestinian government condemns 'execution' at West Bank checkpoint

Large protest against Netanyahu's 'government of shame'

RAMMUN/TEL AVIV: Palestinian foreign ministry on Sunday condemned as an "execution" the killing of a Palestinian man by Zionist entity forces at a checkpoint in the occupied West Bank. The ministry slammed the "heinous execution" of Ahmad Kahla, 45, who was shot dead by troops near the village of Silwad north of Ramallah. The Zionist entity's military did not immediately respond to requests by AFP to comment on the incident.

The man's son, Qusai Kahla, told AFP he was in the car with his father when they were stopped at the checkpoint. "Soldiers came and they sprayed pepper spray on my face and pulled me out of the car," the 18-year-old said at the family home in Rammun village. "I don't know what happened after that," he said. "I found out from my uncle that my dad was killed."

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported soldiers shot Kahla at "point blank" range after forcing him out of his vehicle. He died from a gunshot wound to the neck, the Palestinian health ministry said.

Kahla's death brings up to 13 the number of Palestinians killed in the territory so far this month, the majority shot by Zionist entity forces, according to an AFP tally. The Palestinian foreign ministry said the Zionist entity's leadership has made it "easy for soldiers to kill any Palestinian without them posing any danger to the occupation soldiers".

The Zionist entity's most right-wing government in history was sworn in last month, including ministers known for their anti-Palestinian remarks who have taken over key powers in the West Bank. The rising toll this month follows the deadliest year in the West Bank

since United Nations records began in 2005.

'Government of shame'

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of people protested in central Tel Aviv Saturday against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new hard-right government of the Zionist entity. Protesters braved the rain for the rally, brandishing signs with slogans decrying a "government of shame" and urging: "bring down the dictator". AFP correspondents said.

Media reported 80,000 people joined the rally, citing police sources. Police gave no official estimate after reporting 20,000 protesters earlier in the evening. The demonstration is the biggest since Netanyahu's new government took power in late December. "The situation is worrying and scary," said 22-year-old protester Aya Tal, who works in the high-tech industry. "They want to take away our rights... We must unite."

Other rallies were held in Jerusalem, outside the prime minister's and the president's residences, and in the northern city of Haifa, local media reported. Already the Zionist entity's longest-serving premier, Netanyahu returned to power at the head of a coalition with extreme-right and ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties, some of whose officials now head key ministries. Protesters called for Netanyahu, who is fighting corruption charges in court, to resign. "Bibi (Netanyahu) doesn't want a democracy, we don't need fascists in the Knesset," read one sign at the Tel Aviv protest.

'Save democracy'

The crowd filled the streets surrounding Tel

Aviv's Habima Square and chanted "democracy, democracy", according to an AFP correspondent. Opposition parties had called on the public to join the demonstration—organized by an anti-corruption group—to "save democracy" and in protest at a planned judicial overhaul.

Justice Minister Yariv Levin announced on January 4 a controversial plan to hand more powers to lawmakers in appointing judges and overriding Supreme Court decisions. In the Zionist entity, which does not have a constitution, the Supreme Court currently has the authority to repeal laws it considers discriminatory. The new government has also announced intentions to pursue a policy of settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank. The rally included messages against the Zionist entity's occupation of the Palestinian territories. "There's no democracy with the occupation," read one sign.

Netanyahu is the Zionist entity's first sitting prime minister indicted while in office. He denies the charges against him of bribery, fraud and breach of trust. The leader of right-wing party Likud was ousted from office in 2021 after a record 12-year run by a motley coalition of parties, elected on the heels of anti-corruption protests that called for Netanyahu's resignation. His return to power ended an unprecedented period of political gridlock that forced five elections in less than four years and deepened social divisions. The leader of center-left opposition party Labor, Merav Michaeli, was among several politicians at the Tel Aviv rally, as was former foreign minister Tzipi Livni. — AFP



KABUL: A woman looks at a picture of former Afghan lawmaker Mursal Nabizada on her mobile phone, who was shot dead by gunmen last night at her house in Kabul on January 15, 2023. — AFP

Gunmen shoot dead 'fearless' Afghan woman ex-lawmaker

KABUL: Gunmen shot dead an Afghan former lawmaker and one of her bodyguards in the capital Kabul in a night-time attack at her home, police said on Sunday. Mursal Nabizada had been a member of parliament in the US-backed government that was overthrown by the Taliban in August 2021.

"Nabizada, along with one of her bodyguards, was shot dead at her house," Kabul police spokesman Khalid Zadrani said. "The security forces have started a serious investigation into the incident," he said, adding that a brother of the former lawmaker was also wounded in the attack, which took place during the night between Saturday and Sunday.

Nabizada was a "fearless champion for Afghanistan", former lawmaker Mariam Solaimankhil said on Twitter. "A true trailblazer - strong, outspoken woman who stood for what she believed in, even in the face of danger," she wrote. "Despite being offered the chance to leave Afghanistan, she chose to stay and fight for her people," she added.

Nabizada, 32, hailed from the eastern province of Nangarhar, and had been elected as a member of parliament from Kabul in 2018. "I am sad and angry and want the world to know!" tweeted Hannah Neumann, a member of the European parliament, in response to the killing. "She was killed in darkness, but the Taliban build their system of gender apartheid in full daylight."

Women had worked in prominent positions across Afghan society in the two decades since the US-led invasion of Afghanistan, with many becoming judges, journalists and politicians. Many women in such professions have fled the country, however, since the Taliban returned to power.

Taliban authorities have rapidly squeezed women out of almost all areas of public life, banning them from secondary and higher education, public sector work and even from visiting public parks and baths. They have also ordered women to cover their bodies in public, ideally in an all-encompassing burqa. — AFP

China-Myanmar border towns eye revival after COVID

RUILI: At a checkpoint on China's southern frontier with Myanmar, shuttered stores advertising the region's famed jade jewelry appear abandoned, driven out of business by a pandemic-induced closure of the border. The city of Ruili is slowly creaking back to life as China ditches its zero-tolerance COVID strategy after years of strict lockdowns and other grueling restrictions.

An absence of cross-border travel has haunted the trade-dependent city since April 2020, when the flow of goods and people from Myanmar was cut off. On Sunday a Myanmar official told AFP the border had finally been partially reopened, with some trucks making the crossing — spurring hope for a revival of the local economy.

Two men on the Chinese side were leaning against the barrier dividing the countries when AFP visited on Friday, gazing through the gates at the Myanmar town of Muse. "We are from Myanmar," said one. "We haven't been home in three years and really miss it."

Ruili was one of China's hardest hit cities during the three-year campaign to keep the virus at bay. It became a key battleground in the fight to keep imported COVID cases out of China, with residents living through nearly a dozen lockdowns and prevented from travelling for most of the period.

"We were locked down so many times each year, not just once or twice — as if we were sleeping for months and months at home," Duan, a jade seller in the city's Delong jewelry market, told AFP. Unable to operate normally, many businesses closed down, Duan said, pointing to the shuttered stalls surrounding his stand.



RUILI: This photo shows a border checkpoint between China and Myanmar in the county-level city of Ruili in Dehong prefecture, in China's southwestern Yunnan Province. —AFP

The city of around a quarter of a million people saw its population decline by 40,000 between 2020 and 2021, the most recent census figures show. Huang, another jewelry seller, told AFP she became trapped outside Ruili by a travel ban in 2020 after attending her mother-in-law's funeral in distant Shanxi province. When the restrictions were lifted last month, she rushed back to seize her first chance in years of celebrating the upcoming Lunar New Year with her parents.

'Very bad experience'

U Min Thein, vice-chairman of the Muse Rice Commodity Exchange, told AFP on Sunday that China was not yet allowing people across the border. But people in Ruili told AFP that Chinese

authorities had given the green light to reopening checkpoints and Myanmar had not yet agreed to resume travel.

In Muse, residents were worried about soaring COVID cases in China. "Over a hundred people were killed in the COVID-19 pandemic during 2021 in Muse, and so the people in the town have had a very bad experience," a water pipe seller told AFP. He criticized what he said was inadequate testing on the Myanmar side. "If they tested properly and carefully, we would not have to be afraid."

He and others acknowledged the importance of reopening to boost people's livelihoods. "I hope the economy will recover and be like it was before," said Soe Soe Aye, who used to work in a garment factory in China. — AFP