



Tokyo, Seoul try to bury hatchet, hailing 'new future' for ties

Let down by Erdogan, Kurds cautiously back secular rival

Page 6

Page 7

23,000 flee violence in northeast India

Fleeing tribal families recount horror after Manipur carnage



IMPHAL, India: This picture taken on May 4, 2023, shows vehicles allegedly burned by the Meitei community tribals protesting to demand inclusion under the Scheduled Tribe category, in Imphal, the capital of India's Manipur state. —AFP

IMPHAL: Some 23,000 people have fled ethnic violence in northeast India that has reportedly killed at least 54, the army said Sunday, although there was no new "major violence" overnight. The unrest in Manipur state erupted after a protest march by a tribal group last week sparked clashes, with vehicles and houses set on fire and authorities firing tear gas.

The military has deployed thousands of troops to the state bordering Myanmar, issued "shoot-at-sight" orders in "extreme cases", imposed curfews and cut the internet. The army said on Sunday no major flare-ups were reported overnight and that a curfew was lifted between 7-10 am in Churachandpur district, one of the main flashpoint areas. "Past 24

hrs also witnessed Army significantly enhancing surveillance efforts through aerial surveillance, movement of UAV's & redeployment of Army Helicopters within Imphal Valley," it said, referring to unmanned aerial vehicles or drones.

"Total 23,000 civilians have been rescued till now & were moved to own operating bases/ military Garrisons," the statement said. Authorities have not given an official death toll but hospital morgues in the state capital Imphal and Churachandpur had reported a combined total of 54 dead, according to local media.

Tribal groups including the Kukis are unhappy about the prospect of the state's majority Meitei community being recognized under a "Scheduled Tribe" category. This designation would give them

a certain quota of government jobs and college admissions in a form of affirmative action aimed at addressing structural inequality and discrimination.

L Sanglun Simte, 29, a Kuki who has been camping outside the airport in state capital Imphal with 11 of his family members since Saturday, recounted the horror as violence broke out. "We fled for safety. Things are not okay. They are just attacking us Kukis," he told AFP.

Simte said his 49-year-old cousin, Siemcha Gangete, was killed by a mob on Thursday and his house was set on fire. "The attackers say we are outsiders and need to leave Imphal. When they attacked us, the local police didn't help." Simte, who has booked a flight for Agartala, the capital

of neighboring Tripura state, said he would return only if security improved.

"We don't feel safe right now," he said. Lalpu Suan-tak, 45, who works with a state-owned bank in Imphal and is also from the Kuki community, said he fled his house with 12 family members after some homes and a neighborhood church were set on fire. "My house hasn't been touched yet but there was fear when a mob burnt one house in our area," he told AFP. India's northeast has seen decades of unrest among ethnic and separatist groups seeking more autonomy or even secession from India, with at least 50,000 people killed in Manipur since the 1950s. These conflicts had waned over the years, with many groups striking deals with New Delhi for more powers. — AFP

Sudan maternity hospital fights to save lives under fire

KHARTOUM: When a maternity hospital in the Sudanese capital came under bombardment, Esraa Hesbalrasoul snatched her premature twins from an incubator and rushed out in a panic. In the chaos, only one of the infants survived.

Hesbalrasoul now tends to her baby in a small hospital in the capital's twin city of Omdurman that for weeks has struggled to weather the near-cessless fighting.

Numerous medical facilities have been shelled in the fighting that broke out on April 15 between rival generals and the forces they command. The battles have left only 16 percent of hospitals in Khartoum fully functional, according to the United Nations, putting countless lives at risk.

But the small Al-Nada hospital in Khartoum's twin city of Omdurman remains a lifesaver, keeping its doors open to offer vital health care despite the mounting odds. When strikes shook the ground on April 20 around the facility initially caring for the twins, "we were told we had to evacuate everyone right away", Hesbalrasoul told AFP.

"There were no ambulances available so we had to transport our babies as best we could," she said. "But one of them died because of the lack of oxygen." Her tragedy is hardly an isolated one.

The UN estimates that there are "219,000 pregnant women in Khartoum, including 24,000 women expected to give birth in the coming weeks". Al-Nada is one of the rare facilities they can turn to.

Its director, Mohammed Fattah Al-Rahman, in particular credits a generous donation from the Sudanese American Physicians Association (SAPA-USA), which has allowed it to keep running.



OUMDOURMAN, Sudan: This image grab taken from AFP TV video footage shot on May 4, 2023, shows infants at a maternity hospital in Oumduroman, the Sudanese capital's twin city. — AFP

With this money, "we have been able to deliver 500 births, naturally and through caesarian sections, and to admit 80 children", he told AFP, surrounded by premature babies in incubators. But the war is never far from the dimly-lit facility. Sounds of gunfire and blasts can often be heard echoing in the distance.

There is no air conditioning, only overhead fans that attempt to relieve the heat which often reaches up to 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) even before the blazing peak of summer. As the war rages, killing hundreds and injuring thousands so far, much of Sudan's meager medical resources have been diverted to tending the war-wounded with urgent care. "There have been no obstetrics or pediatric services since the beginning of the conflict," Rahman says.

That meant that Sudanese couple Fatima and her husband Jaber could find no facilities to treat their young son for meningitis, until they arrived at

Al-Nada, which offers pediatric care as well as maternity facilities.

Even before the war broke out, mothers and children faced grave dangers in Sudan, one of the world's poorest countries. Almost three out of every thousand women die in childbirth in Sudan, eight times higher than the figure in neighboring Egypt, according to the UN children's fund, UNICEF.

It says 56 out of every 1,000 Sudanese children die before reaching the age of five. Last year, the UN estimated that one in three Sudanese needed to walk more than an hour to get medical care. Today, the small team that keeps the Al-Nada hospital going fears conditions will soon force them to stop their essential work. "Our stocks of medicines are starting to dwindle," said Alaa Ahmed, a pharmacist at the hospital. "If it goes on like this, everything will collapse." — AFP

a government security adviser, was handed down by a Baghdad criminal court and can be appealed, the judiciary said. A well-respected academic and expert on jihadist groups, Hashemi was shot dead outside his Baghdad home in July 2020 by gunmen on motorcycles. A year later, state television aired the alleged confession of the mastermind of the assault who was then identified by his full name Ahmed Hamdawi Oueid Al-Kenani.

Then a police lieutenant aged 36, he said he shot Hashemi with a pistol. At the time a security source told AFP that the suspect was linked to the powerful pro-Iran Kataeb Hezbollah, which Hashemi had criticised in his writings and media commentary. On Sunday, Iraq's Supreme Judicial Council said in

a statement that "a death sentence has been issued against the criminal Ahmed Hamdawi Oueid for the murder of security expert Hisham Al-Hashemi".

Hashemi's murder sparked outrage across Iraq and was denounced by several Western countries as well as the United Nations. Hashemi had thrown his support behind popular protests that had broken out in Iraq a year before his death against the government, which was seen by many as inept, corrupt and too close to Iran. More than 600 people were killed and thousands wounded in the protests that had erupted in October 2019 and a crackdown on the demonstrations. In the aftermath of the protests, a spate of killings, attempted murders and abductions targeted dozens of activists in Iraq. — AFP

Iraq court sentences to death killer of academic Hashemi

BAGHDAD: An Iraqi court on Sunday sentenced to death a former policeman convicted of killing prominent academic Hisham Al-Hashemi, whose murder in 2020 sparked condemnation in Iraq and abroad.

The sentence against Ahmed Hamdawi Oueid for killing Hashemi, an expert on Sunni extremism and

UK anti-monarchy leader freed after coronation arrest

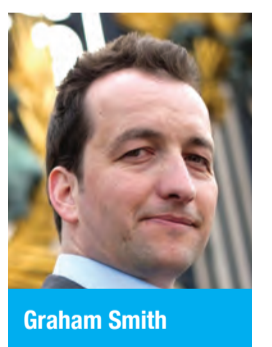
LONDON: The head of an anti-monarchy group who was arrested before a protest at King Charles III's coronation has been released from police custody, the group said. Republic, which wants an elected head of state, said late on Saturday that its chief executive Graham Smith was released, some 16 hours after he was first detained.

He was one of more than 50 people held using new powers rushed into law this week by the UK government to crack down on protests by direct action groups.

London's Metropolitan Police has been criticized for making the arrests, which included volunteers of a local women's safety team that the force supports. Last month, the Daily Mail newspaper claimed that protesters were planning to throw rape alarms to spook horses taking part in the parade, which included military bands. The newspaper also said climate change activists from the Just Stop Oil group were planning to disrupt the event.

Just Stop Oil members were among those picked up on Saturday. Republic's Smith, who last week told reporters he and other members had no plans to disrupt the procession. The protest went ahead, with opponents waving "Not My King" placards and booing. "Make no mistake. There is no longer a right to peaceful protest in the UK," Smith tweeted. "I have been told many times the monarch is there to defend our freedoms. Now our freedoms are under attack in his name."

Human rights groups likened the arrests to those in authoritarian states but police defended their tactics, claiming it was "proportionate... in line with relevant legislation" after public concern. London has been repeatedly targeted in recent years by direct action groups. Hard-line interior minister Suella Braverman promised police more powers to stop protesters using "guerrilla tactics". — AFP



Graham Smith