

Bangladesh on boil: Unrest 'toll 32', state TV network set ablaze

'Near-Total' Internet Shutdown in Country, Says Netblocks; Hundreds Of Protesters Hurt; Vehicles, Police Posts Torched

Dhaka: Police and govt supporters clashed on Thursday with student activists trying to shut down transportation across Bangladesh as part of days-long protests over the allocation of govt jobs, and media reports said 19 people died in the violence. The new casualties Thursday would bring the overall toll to 25 dead since Monday when violence erupted at the Dhaka University in the capital. However, an AFP tally of casualty figures from hospitals said the toll was now 32.

Violence pitting protesters against pro-govt student groups and police soon spread to other cities. Six people had been reported killed on Tuesday, and hundreds more have been injured. Authorities did not confirm figures for the deaths.

The protesters are demanding an end to a quota system that reserves up to 30% of govt jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in war of independence in 1971. They argue the system is discriminatory and benefits supporters of PM Sheikh Hasina, and they want it replaced with a merit-based system. Hasina's party has accused opposition parties of stoking the violence.

The leading Dhaka-based newspaper Prothom Alo said that by late Thursday night, they received reports of 19 deaths in Dhaka and elsewhere in the day's raging violence. The country's leading English-language Daily Star also reported 19 deaths on Thursday.

Prothom Alo said at least six people died in Dhaka's Uttara area alone in the latest clashes pitting the protesters against security officials and ruling party activists. Thirteen others including a Dhaka-based journalist of an online portal died in other parts of the capital and elsewhere.

Protesters attacked the head office of state-run Bangladesh Television, breaking through a main gate and setting vehicles and the reception area



Anti-quota protesters clash with police & Awami League supporters in Dhaka

on fire, a news producer and a reporter told AP by phone. "I escaped by leaping over the wall but some of my colleagues got stuck inside. The attackers entered the building and set furniture on fire," the producer said by phone. He said the station continued broadcasting, though some Dhaka locals said they were receiving no signal from the broadcaster.

Meanwhile, the country was experiencing a near-total shutdown of internet services, Alp Toker, director of the London-based internet monitor NetBlocks, said on X.

The violence has continued despite a pending court decision on the legality of quota system. Hasina and law minister Anisul Huq urged protesters to await that decision, with Hasina saying she believes the protesters won't be disappointed by the court verdict.

Following the first deaths in this week's violence on Tuesday, the govt asked universities across the country to close in hopes of quelling the student unrest, and police raided the main opposition party's headquarters.

Protesters responded Wed-

nesday evening by saying they would enforce a "complete shutdown" of transportation across the country on Thursday. The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party said that it would join those efforts.

Clashes continued Thursday as protesters tried to enforce the shutdown. In Dhaka's Uttara neighbourhood, police chased hundreds of protesters after they blocked a road and chanted. In other locations, police fired tear gas and charged with batons to disperse protesters, who threw stones in response. Police said protesters vandalised police cars and set fire to a traffic police box. Scores of people, including police officers, were injured in the violence, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police said. Protesters also blocked some major highways across the country and local broadcasters reported violence in other cities including Chattogram and Khulna.

Traffic was thin on Dhaka's usually clogged streets. Many malls closed. Offices and banks opened, but transportation was limited. Police set up checkpoints at the entrances to Dhaka University. AP

were required in the probe.

2 terrorists killed in Kupwara encounter

SRINAGAR, July 18 (IANS)

TWO terrorists were killed on Thursday when the security forces foiled an infiltration bid on the Line of Control (LoC) in the Keran sector of Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district.

Officials said their bodies were yet to be retrieved.

The encounter broke out when the security forces challenged a group of infiltrating terrorists on the LoC in the sector. Officials said that troops of 6 Rashtriya Rifles and J&K Police had received intelligence inputs about the movement of terrorists along the LoC.

"The infiltrating terrorists were challenged by the security forces triggering an encounter during which two terrorists are likely to have been killed although their bodies are still to be retrieved. The operation against the terrorists is still going on in the area," officials said.



Security personnel stand guard after an early morning encounter with terrorists, in Doda district on Thursday. (PTI)

More details were awaited.

In another encounter between the terrorists and the security forces in the Doda district earlier in the day, two sol-

diers were injured.

The encounter was going on in the Kastigarh area of the district.

On July 14, three heavily

armed terrorists were killed along the Line of Control (LoC) in Kupwara district when the Army foiled an infiltration bid by the terrorists.

Declare centre-wise results of NEET-UG masking candidates' identity: SC to NTA

NEW DELHI, July 18 (PTI)

THE Supreme Court on Thursday directed the National Testing Agency (NTA) to declare by 12 noon of July 20 the centre and city-wise results of NEET-UG 2024 while masking the identities of aspirants.

As it strove to address the allegations of malpractices in the conduct of the examination, a bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud said any order for conducting it afresh has to be on concrete conclusion that the sanctity of the entire process was affected. The top court will resume hearing the arguments on July 22 on a batch of pleas seeking cancellation, re-test and a court-monitored probe into the allegations of large-scale malpractices in the prestigious test held on May 5.

During the day-long hearing, the bench asked the counsel for the aspirants to establish their claim



Chief Justice of India Justice DY Chandrachud with Justices J B Pardiwala (L) and Manoj Misra (R) during a hearing over the controversy-ridden medical entrance exam NEET-UG 2024, in New Delhi on Thursday. (PTI)

about extensive irregularities in holding the examination, including leak of question paper, warranting cancellation and a re-test.

The court said it prima facie appeared that the question paper leak was limited to Patna and Hazaribagh, and nothing of this

sort can be said to have happened in Godhra in Gujarat.

In Patna and Hazaribagh, the question papers allegedly got leaked, while in Godhra there were claims that a person involved in holding the test took money for filling up the OMR sheets of certain

candidates. Questioning the claims about leak of question paper on social media platform 'Telegram', the bench said, "You have to bear in mind that the idea of somebody doing this was not to make a national charade. People did it for money. So, it was not to bring disrepute to the exam and somebody was doing it to make money which is evident. Mass leakage requires contacts also at that level so that you connect to all such key contacts in different cities."

The bench, also comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, which commenced the crucial hearing on a batch of petitions related to the controversy-ridden medical entrance exam, said it has "social ramifications".

The top court adjourned the cases listed ahead of the NEET-UG pleas, saying "We will open the case today. Lakhs of young students are

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'Great power' India facing unjustified pressure over ties with Russia: Lavrov

■ By Yoshita Singh

UNITED NATIONS, July 18 (PTI)

INDIA is a great power that determines its national interests and chooses its partners, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said, describing as "completely unjustified" the "enormous pressure" on New Delhi due to its energy cooperation with Moscow.

During a press conference here on Wednesday, Lavrov also termed as "insulting" Ukraine's remarks on the recent meeting between President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Moscow.

"I think India is a great power that sets its own national interests, and chooses its own partners. And we know that India is being sub-



ject to enormous pressure, completely unjustified pressure in the international arena," Lavrov said.

Lavrov was responding to a question about Prime Minister Modi's recent visit to Moscow and the opposition faced by India for its energy cooperation with Russia. With Russia presiding over the UN Security Council for the month of July, Lavrov is in New York to chair meetings of the Council being

"I think India is a great power that sets its own national interests, determines its own national interests, and chooses its own partners."

held under Moscow's presidency.

Prime Minister Modi paid an official visit to Russia on July 8-9 at the invitation of Russian President Vladimir Putin for the 22nd India-Russia Annual Summit. India has not yet condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and has consistently pitched for a resolution of the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy.

Ukrainian President

Volodymyr Zelenskyy has also criticised Modi's visit to Moscow, saying in a post on X that "A Russian missile struck the largest children's hospital in Ukraine, targeting young cancer patients. Many were buried under the rubble."

Referring to Zelenskyy's comments about Modi's trip to Russia being "a stabbing in the back of all peace efforts", Lavrov said, "So that was very insulting and the Ukrainian ambassador was called in" and the Indian Ministry of External Affairs "talked to him about how he should be behaving."

"The ambassadors were really behaving as if they were hooligans," he said, referring to remarks made by some other Ukrainian envoys. "So I think India is doing everything right," he said.

Assam to repeal law that allowed underage Muslim marriages

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Guwahati: BJP-governed Assam, which has been cited in an independent nationwide survey as a case study in curbing child marriage, approved Thursday a Bill to repeal a 1935 law that permits underage marriages among the Muslim community if specific conditions are met.

With the cabinet endorsing the proposal mooted in Feb, the Bill to abrogate the Assam Muslim Marriages and Divorce Registration Act and Rules will be moved in the assembly's upcoming monsoon session.

"We have taken a significant step to ensure justice for our daughters and sisters by putting additional safeguards against child marriage," CM Himanta Biswa Sarma wrote on his X handle.

In February, cabinet minister Jayanta Malla Baruah said the move to repeal the "obsolete" British-era law was also meant to prepare the ground for the proposed Uniform Civil Code, following the example set by the BJP government in Uttarakhand.

The cabinet resolution



Himanta-led govt's resolution to end child marriage states that the intention is 'to bring parity in registration of marriage and divorce'

to end child marriage states that the intention is "to bring parity in registration of marriage and divorce". Assam began a crackdown on child marriage last year that led to scores of arrests across the state.

Under the 1935 Act, applications for marriage registration needed to be submitted jointly by the parties to the marriage, or by their legal guardians if the bridegroom or bride, or both, were minors.

CM Sarma said on more than one occasion that repealing the 1935 Act was a necessity as it contained provisions contravening the legal stipulation that a bride must be at least 18 and the groom 21 for a marriage to be deemed valid.

India is source of solutions in multiple areas: NITI Aayog VC

■ By Yoshita Singh

UNITED NATIONS, July 18 (PTI)

INDIA is proving to be a source of solutions in multiple areas, including public service delivery and digitalisation, NITI Aayog Vice Chairperson Suman Bery said.

Bery also said that by putting the SDGs at the heart of its G20 presidency, India has acknowledged that these are an almost sacred commitment by the global community to its less advantaged people.



“India is proving to be a source of solutions in multiple areas, be it public service delivery, be it digitalisation, even for multinational corporations, the so-called global capability centres,” Bery told PTI in an exclusive interview here.

“Both in their design and I would argue, based on the Indian experience on their implementation, I really see the SDGs as a commitment by governments to their own people. In the 21st century, this is a kind of commitment to a decent life.”

Responding to a question on Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision of a developed India by 2047, Bery underscored that the Indian leader has highlighted how much can be achieved with a single-minded focus in a period of 25 years.

He said that one thing that is clear is that this is ‘Amrit Kaal’ because this is when India will have the peak conditions for its working labour force. “And to do what we can to make the most of that opportunity through skilling, training, better job matching, rising productivity,” he said.

Bery was in New York to represent India at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) that took place at the UN headquarters from July 8 to July 17 under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council.