

# Indian Protesters Demand Lynching of Rapists



Students shout slogans as they display placards during a protest against the alleged rape and murder of a 27-year-old woman, in Kolkata, India, December 2, 2019.

NEW DELHI (Reuters) -- Protests over the alleged rape and murder of a 27-year-old veterinary doctor spread to cities across India on Monday as people demanded tough and swift punishments, including public lynchings, to stop crimes against women.

The woman was raped, asphyxiated and her dead body then set alight on Nov 27 on the outskirts of the southern city of Hyderabad, according to police. Four men aged between 20 and 28 years have been arrested in connection with the crime.

Protesters and lawmakers said they

wanted authorities to ensure that rape cases were speedily processed and those convicted punished instantly, similar to demands that were raised after the fatal gang rape of a young woman in New Delhi in 2012 that had caused outrage and international condemnation.

In the eastern city of Kolkata, where protests were planned throughout the day, college student Bandana Mondal said it was becoming difficult to sit back and watch silently.

"It is time to hit the road and seek faster punishment for the offenders. The process of law appears slow and there is hardly any deterrent," she said.

Indian police registered more than 32,500 cases of rape in 2017, according to government data. But tens of thousands of such cases remain stuck in courts, often hindering victims and their families as they navigate the slow and cumbersome legal system.

In 2017, for example, courts only disposed off about 18,300 cases related to rape and more than 127,800 such cases remained pending at the end of the year.

"It's very frustrating for the victim. You keep on going to court, and even after evidence is over, they take a long time to pass the judgment," women's rights lawyer Flavia Agnes told Reuters.

But in a sign of the volatile public mood, a lawmaker in India's upper house suggested that rapists should be strung up before a mob.

"I know it's a little harsh, but I think these kinds of people need to be brought in public and lynched," said Jaya Bachchan.

In Hyderabad, which has seen the largest of the protests, student activists linked to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party also asked for capital punishment.

"We demand the culprits be hung in public," said Sirisha, who only gave one name.

## China Bans U.S. Military Visits to Hong Kong



A combined formation of aircraft from Carrier Air Wing and Carrier Air Wing pass in formation above the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis in the Philippine Sea on June 18, 2016.

HONG KONG (Dispatches) — China said Monday it will suspend U.S. military ship and aircraft visits to Hong Kong and sanction several American groups in retaliation for the signing into law of legislation supporting riots in the semi-autonomous territory.

While the nature of the sanctions remained unclear, the move followed Chinese warnings that the U.S. would bear the costs if the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act was approved.

The steps are "in response to America's unreasonable behavior," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said in Beijing, adding that the legislation seriously interfered in China's internal affairs.

The law, signed last Wednesday by President Donald Trump, mandates sanctions on Chinese and Hong Kong officials and requires an annual review of the favorable trade status that Washington grants Hong Kong.

The legislation was backed by U.S. lawmakers who are sympathetic to the protesters and have criticized Hong Kong police for confronting rioters.

Police say their use of tear gas, rubber bullets and other force is a necessary response to escalating violence by the protesters, who have blocked major roads and thrown gasoline bombs back at officers in riot gear.

Hong Kong has been living with al-

most nonstop unrest for six months.

Hua said China would sanction organizations including the National Endowment for Democracy, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, Human Rights Watch, the International Republican Institute, Freedom House and others that she said had "performed badly" in the Hong Kong unrest.

"China urges the United States to correct its mistakes and stop any words and deeds that interfere in Hong Kong and China's internal affairs," she said, adding that China could take "further necessary actions" depending on how matters develop.

Hua accused the groups of instigating protesters to engage in "radical violent crimes and inciting separatist activities."

"These organizations deserve to be sanctioned and must pay a price," Hua said.

China has long accused foreign groups and governments of fomenting the demonstrations in Hong Kong, singling out the U.S., former colonial overlord Britain, and self-governing Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory to be annexed by force if necessary.

Among the groups to be subject to the unspecified sanctions, the National Endowment for Democracy receives funding directly from Congress, while others generally draw their running costs from a mixture of private and public grants.

## New Abuse Suits Could Cost U.S. Church Over \$4bn



Pope Francis holds the weekly general audience at the Vatican, May 8, 2019.

NEW YORK (AP) — At the end of another long day trying to sign up new clients accusing the Roman Catholic Church of sexual abuse, lawyer Adam Slater gazes out the window of his high-rise Manhattan office at one of the great symbols of the church, St. Patrick's Cathedral. "I wonder how much that's worth?" he muses.

Across the country, attorneys like Slater are scrambling to file a new wave of lawsuits alleging sexual abuse by clergy, thanks to rules enacted in 15 states that extend or suspend the statute of limitations to allow claims stretching back decades.

It's a financial reckoning playing out in such populous Catholic strongholds as New York, California and New Jersey, among the eight states that go the furthest with "lookback windows" that allow sex abuse claims no matter how old. Never before have so many states acted in near-unison to lift the restrictions that once shut people out if they didn't bring claims of childhood sex abuse by a certain age, often their early 20s.

That has lawyers fighting for clients with TV ads and billboards asking, "Were you abused by the church?"

And Catholic dioceses, while worrying about the difficulty of defending such old claims, are considering bankruptcy, victim compensation funds and even tapping valuable real estate to stay afloat.

"It's like a whole new beginning for me," said 71-year-old Nancy Holling-Lonnecker of San Diego, who plans to take advantage of an upcoming three-year window for such suits in California. Her claim dates back to the 1950s, when she says a priest repeatedly raped her in a confession booth beginning when she was 7 years old.

"The survivors coming forward now have been holding on to this horrific experience all of their lives," she said. "They bottled up those emotions all of these years because there was no place to take it."

AP interviews with more than a dozen lawyers and clergy abuse watchdog groups offered a wide range of estimates but many said they expected at least 5,000 new cases against the church in New York, New Jersey and California alone, resulting in potential payouts that could surpass the \$4 billion paid out since the clergy sex abuse first came to light in the 1980s.

## Critics Say Johnson Exploiting London Terror Attack



Britain has stepped up security after the London Bridge attack.

LONDON (AFP) -- Britain's Boris Johnson said he had ordered the security services to step up monitoring of convicted terrorists released early from prison, prompting accusations that he was exploiting the London Bridge attack for political gain less than two weeks before elections.

The prime minister revealed officials were scrutinizing around 74 people with terrorist convictions who had been released early from prison like Usman Khan, who left jail last December and went on to stab two people to death in Friday's rampage.

"They are being properly invigilated to make sure there is no threat," Johnson told the BBC. "We've taken a lot of action as you can imagine in the last 48 hours."

Under the review of released terrorist convicts, police in the West Midlands said they had arrested a 34-year-old man "on suspicion of preparation of terrorist acts".

British media said he was a former associate of the London Bridge attacker and had been jailed alongside Khan in 2012 over a plot to bomb the London Stock Exchange.

in a nearby hall hosting an ex-offenders' event that also left three people injured.

Police on Sunday formally named the two victims killed as Jack Merritt, 25, from Cambridgeshire in eastern England, and 23-year-old Saskia Jones of Warwickshire in the West Midlands.

Johnson blamed the previous Labour government for changing the law in 2008 to allow for the early release of prisoners and vowed to introduce minimum 14-year sentences if he regains power in the December 12 vote.

He penned an article setting out the new stance in The Mail on Sunday newspaper, under the headline: "Give me a majority and I'll keep you safe from terror".

Critics hit out at him for appearing to politicize Friday's attack -- including the family of victim Jack Merritt, who said he died "doing what he loved".

Meanwhile, hospital officials said one of the injured had returned home, while the two others remained hospitalized in a stable condition.

Members of the public have been hailed as heroes for preventing even greater loss of life by tackling Khan -- one armed with a five-foot (1.5-metre) narwhal tusk and another with a fire extinguisher.

## UN Chief: Choose Hope or Surrender on Climate Change

MADRID (AFP) -- Confronted with a climate crisis threatening civilization itself, humanity must choose between hope and surrender, UN chief Antonio Guterres told the opening plenary of a UN climate conference Monday.

"One is the path of surrender, where we have sleepwalked past the point of no return, jeopardizing the health and safety of everyone on this planet," Guterres said.

"Do we really want to be remembered as the generation that buried its head in the sand, that fiddled while the planet burned?"

In a separate forum moments earlier, U.S. Congressional leader Nancy Pelosi told the "COP25" conference that the world could still count on the United States despite President Donald Trump's decision to pull out of the Paris Agreement. Leading the 15-strong congressional delegation, Pelosi came to Madrid even as her colleagues in the House consider articles of impeachment against Trump.

Trump has dismissed global warming as a hoax, and dismantled many of the climate and environmental protection policies set in place by his predecessor Barack Obama.

Last month Trump gave formal notice of the U.S. withdrawal from the 196-nation Paris climate treaty, which calls

for capping global warming at well below two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), and 1.5C if possible.

In his impassioned appeal, Guterres cited new findings from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) confirming that the last five years have been the hottest ever recorded.

Concentration of planet-warming CO2 in the atmosphere has also reached levels not seen in three to five million years, the WMO will report this week.

"The last time there was a comparable concentration," Guterres said, "the temperature was two to three degrees Celsius warmer, and sea levels were 10 to 20 metres (32 to 66 feet) higher than today."

A major UN science report last year reset the Paris accord's threshold for a climate-safe world from 2C to 1.5C, concluding that the global economy must be "carbon neutral" by 2050 to stay under that threshold.

"What is still lacking is political will -- to put a price on carbon, to stop subsidies on fossil fuels, to stop building coal power plants," Guterres said.

"The best available science, through the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), tells us today that going beyond that (1.5C) would lead us to catastrophic disaster."



PARIS (Reuters) -- Hundreds of Parisians lined the streets of Paris on Monday to pay their respects to 13 French soldiers killed in Mali last week as hearses bearing their flag-draped coffins crossed the heart of the city. The soldiers died when their helicopters collided in the dark as they hunted militants. It was the biggest loss of French troops in a single day since an attack in Beirut 36 years ago when 58 soldiers died. The deaths in Mali highlight the human cost to France of leading a six-year campaign in West Africa. It has forced France to reassess its strategy, with no prospect in the immediate term of withdrawing its 4,500 troops from the region. Escorted by police motorcyclists and with soldiers from the military regiments saluting their fallen comrades along the Alexandre III bridge, the 13 hearses solemnly crossed toward the Hotel des Invalides, where President Emmanuel Macron will lead tributes at a funeral ceremony later in the day. The bodies of the fallen soldiers returned home on Sunday after a military homage at their base in Gao, central Mali. France, the former colonial power in the region, is the only Western country with a significant military presence waging operations in Mali and the wider Sahel region. Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK) faced criticism at home on Monday for heading to Paris after not attending a ceremony for the death of 30 Malian soldiers in Gao last month.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Russia is to set up a new online site for its national encyclopedia after President Vladimir Putin said Wikipedia was unreliable and should be replaced. The move will ensure people can find "reliable information that is constantly updated on the basis of scientifically verified sources of knowledge," a government resolution said. Putin last month proposed replacing the crowd-sourced online encyclopedia Wikipedia with an electronic version of the Great Russian Encyclopedia - the successor to the Soviet Union's main encyclopedia. "This, at any rate, would be reliable information offered in a modern form," Putin said then. In 2015, Russia briefly blocked the Russian-language version of Wikipedia for an article containing information on cannabis under legislation banning sites with drug-related material.

BAKU (Reuters) -- Azerbaijan's parliament on Monday formally asked President Ilham Aliyev to dissolve it and to schedule new parliamentary elections. The next election is not due until November 2020, but the president has the right to dissolve the parliament and call an early election. The call from parliament comes a month after a major government shake-up.

BERLIN (Reuters) -- NATO member states will affirm the bloc's collective defense guarantee at their summit this week in the United Kingdom, a German government official said on Monday. The commitment will be included in the summit's declaration, the official said, adding that a meeting of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and U.S. President Donald Trump was envisaged for Wednesday on the sidelines of the meeting.

TOKYO (Reuters) -- Japanese activists on Monday called for drastic steps by the government, companies and universities to stamp out sexual harassment of job-hunting students, a problem they said lurks in the shadows because victims fear speaking out. Although the labor ministry drafted guidelines in October to prevent power harassment in workplaces, it said only that such measures were "desirable" for students and other non-employees. Despite some diversification in recruitment, many Japanese firms tend to hire new graduates, who begin the job hunt while still at university. Many feel too vulnerable to denounce harassment, members of Safe Campus Youth Network (SAY), a volunteer group of professors and students at six Tokyo universities, told a news conference. "Today, harassment against job-hunting students, especially sexual harassment against female students, is a serious issue that could interfere with life choices on their career path," the group said in a statement demanding action. "These cases are almost never reported and employees can say anything they like because students are the weak ones," said Rhea Endo, a 19-year-old student at Tokyo's International Christian University.

YAKUTSK, Russia (AP) -- Russian scientists on Monday showed off a prehistoric puppy, believed to be 18,000 years old, found in permafrost in the country's Far East. Discovered last year in a lump of frozen mud near the city of Yakutsk, the puppy is unusually well-preserved, with its hair, teeth, whiskers and eyelashes still intact. "This puppy has all its limbs, pelage - fur, even whiskers. The nose is visible. There are teeth. We can determine due to some data that it is a male," Nikolai Androsov, director of the Northern World private museum where the remains are stored, said at the presentation at the Yakutsk's Mammoth Museum which specializes in ancient specimens. In recent years, Russia's Far East has provided many riches for scientists studying the remains of ancient animals. As the permafrost melts, affected by climate change, more and more parts of woolly mammoths, canines and other prehistoric animals are being discovered. Often it is mammoth tusk hunters who discover them.