

# All Extremists in Babri Mosque Demolition Acquitted



**Hindu fundamentalists are attacking the wall of the 16th Century Babri Masjid Mosque with iron rods in Ayodhya in December, 1992.**

LUCKNOW, India (AP) — **An Indian court on Wednesday acquitted all 32 people accused of crimes in a 1992 attack and demolition of a 16th century mosque that sparked Hindu-Muslim violence leaving some 2,000 people dead.**

Four senior leaders of the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP, were among the defendants in a trial that languished in India's sluggish legal system for almost 28 years. Seventeen of the 49 accused died of natural causes during the trial. The four BJP leaders were accused of making inflammatory speeches that incited tens of thousands of their followers who had camped out in the city of Ayodhya ahead of the attack on the mosque. Last year, India's Supreme Court ruled in favor of building a Hindu temple on the disputed site. Hindus believe their god Ram was born there and say the Muslim Emperor Babur built a mosque on top of a temple at the site.

The Supreme Court also ruled that the demolition of the Babri Masjid was illegal and ordered that the separate trial in the mosque demolition case be completed expeditiously. The four acquitted BJP leaders — L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Uma Bharti and Kalyan Singh — have said the mosque's demolition was a spontaneous eruption by angry Hindu activists. I.B. Singh, an attorney who represented Joshi, said investigators couldn't prove the authenticity of audio and video evidence submitted in the case, and the judge held that the case lacked legal evidence that the accused were part of any conspiracy. Acquitted defendant, Jai Bhagwan Goyal, said: "We had done nothing wrong. The whole of India is happy. Lord Ram's temple is coming up in Ayodhya city." The Muslim community will challenge the acquittals in an appeals court. "This is an erroneous judgment, as it is against

evidence and against law," said Jaffaryab Jilani, representing the All India Muslim Law Board. The verdict also was sharply criticized by Maulana Khalid Rashid, chairman of the Islamic Center of India, who said Muslims have always respected court decisions, but this was an injustice to the community. "When the Supreme Court said that the demolition of the mosque was an unlawful act, how can a lower court set free the accused?" he said. Rashid said Muslim organizations should evaluate whether it is prudent to challenge the decision. "Will Muslims get justice there?" he said. Muslim-majority Pakistan strongly condemned the court judgment and said the defendants who had "boasted of the criminal act publicly could not have been set free." Pakistan's foreign ministry said in a statement that Hindu nationalists' hatred of minorities, particularly Muslims, indicates that India is fast becoming a Hindu nation where minorities are second-class citizens. On Dec. 6, 1992, tens of thousands of Hindus gathered for a rally near the disputed site, and groups climbed the mosque and demolished it with axes and hammers. The accused included Lal Krishna Advani, 92, a co-founder of the BJP who served as deputy prime minister from 2002 to 2004 under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Others included another former government minister, Uma Bharti, as well as Kalyan Singh, who was the top elected BJP leader of Uttar Pradesh state when the mosque was demolished. In its ruling last November, the Supreme Court ordered the entire disputed area of 2.77 acres (1.1 hectares) to be allocated to Hindus for the construction of a temple, while 5 acres (2 hectares) at another location would be allocated to the construction of a mosque.

## Merkel Raps China, Plans Talks With Belarus Opposition



**German Chancellor Angela Merkel attends a session of the German lower house of parliament Bundestag, in Berlin, September 30, 2020.**

BERLIN (Dispatches) -- **German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Wednesday she would hold talks with Belarus's main opposition leader, days after French President Emmanuel Macron met with her and pledged to help mediate in her country's crisis.** Merkel, who holds the rotating presidency of the European Union, said Germany did not recognize President Alexander Lukashenko as the winner of the vote in Belarus. Macron spoke with Tikhonovskaya this week on a visit to Lithuania in

her most high-profile meeting so far since the Belarus election. "We will do our best as Europeans to help mediate and we will come back to OSCE mediation in order to progress," Macron said. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has offered to help broker a negotiated end to the crisis in Belarus. Merkel also accused China of "poor and cruel treatment" of minorities and underlined deep concerns over Beijing's security measures to return stability to Hong Kong.

In a speech at the Bundestag a day before an EU summit, Merkel vowed to bring up rights issues and Germany's purported worries over the situation in the former British colony in any future dialogue with Beijing. "Of course we have to bring up our different opinions in talks," said Merkel, whose country currently holds the rotating presidency of the European Union. "That's why we have flagged up our deep concern about the development in Hong Kong. The principle of one country, two systems stands but again and again it's being undermined. "We will bring that up, as well as the poor and cruel treatment in part of the rights of the minorities in China." She did not name the minorities bearing the brunt of poor treatment but the West has accused China over the mass internment of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang. According to Western claims, more than one million ethnic Uighurs and other minorities have been herded into internment camps to undergo political indoctrination. China insists the camps are training centers aimed at providing education to reduce the allure of takfiri radicalism. Beijing is also under fire from the West over a security law it imposed on Hong Kong in June to calm the situation after months of Western-backed violent riots.

## Belgium Finally Gets Prime Minister After 16 Months

BRUSSELS (AFP) -- **Flemish liberal leader Alexander De Croo will be Belgium's new prime minister at the head of a seven-party coalition government, it was announced Wednesday -- 16 months after an inconclusive election.** De Croo's French-speaking socialist rival Paul Magette confirmed that the parties had chosen the 44-year-old finance minister as premier. He is to be sworn in on Thursday by Belgium's king. By choosing a Flemish leader, the incoming government hopes to balance the fact that its parliamentary base will be drawn from mainly French-speaking parties, with the main Dutch-speaking groups in opposition. "We flipped a coin and it came down to Alexander and it's an excellent choice," Magette joked at the end of the press conference to present the outcome of the negotiations. Belgium has had no governing majority for 21 months since the collapse of former leader Charles Michel's government, and it has been 493 days since federal elections failed to resolve the crisis. Leaders from seven parties met until the early hours on Wednesday before coming to an agreement on a government programme

and cabinet line-up to be presented to King Philippe. De Croo will replace French-speaking liberal leader Sophie Wilmes who has served as acting premier during the coronavirus epidemic but never wielded a parliamentary majority. The new coalition will bring together two socialist parties -- one French-speaking, and one Flemish -- two liberal parties and two sets of greens. The CD&V, a party of Flemish Christian democrats will also join, but the larger Flemish nationalist N-VA, which was in government between 2014 and 2018 will leave power. Belgium's House of Representatives is expected to meet on Thursday to endorse the new government. The country has been governed by a minority coalition since December 2018, when the N-VA abruptly left Michel's government during a row about immigration. The legislative election of May 2019 saw gains by various green and fringe groupings, further fragmenting the political landscape and making it harder to build a majority around the traditional parties. Belgium has a long history of political instability and previously went without a government for 541 days in 2010 and 2011.-

## Japan Defense Ministry Requests Record Budget



**Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) destroyer Kurama (L), which is carrying Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, leads the JMSDF fleet during its fleet review at Sagami Bay, off Yokosuka, south of Tokyo October 18, 2015.**

TOKYO (AFP) -- **Japan's defense ministry on Wednesday unveiled a record \$52-billion budget request in a push to maintain military readiness under pressure from China and North Korea.** The military budget has been rising steadily for nearly a decade, with Japan saying it feels threatened by China's vast military resources and territorial disputes, as well as unpredictable North Korea. Pyongyang has repeatedly tested nuclear devices in recent years, and also missiles -- including some flown over Japan.

The Ministry of Defense is asking for 5.49 trillion yen (\$52 billion) for the fiscal year from April 2021, marking nine straight years of increases and a rise from the 5.3 trillion yen for the ongoing year to March. Among Japan's planned big purchases are two frigates and a submarine, with money also going to the development of a next-generation fighter. The budget does not include a request for an alternative to the U.S.-developed Aegis Ashore missile interception system, which is intended primarily to protect against possible North Korean attacks. The Japanese government has scrapped a controversial plan to build the system in two key locations on the main island of Honshu and is now con-

sidering putting the interception system at sea -- either by using ships or mega-floats, or by building structures similar to offshore oil rigs. Japanese defense officials said they cannot attach a price to the system until the government officially decides what to do with it. Under the planned budget, the defense ministry also said it aims to boost the nation's defensive capabilities in space and cybersecurity, although Japan's progress on those fronts has been slower than other top economies. Japan's Self-Defense Force plans to launch a new cyber unit with 540 personnel, while a planned space unit will have 70. It is the first military budget under Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who came to power this month by pledging to continue the policies of Shinzo Abe. Abe steadily sought to expand the role of Japan's military, which is highly circumscribed by the country's pacifist post-war constitution. But the rising defense spending comes with the world's third-largest economy chronically reliant on borrowed money to finance itself, contributing to public debt that stands at twice the size of its economy. The government budget is facing particular pressure this year to deal with the coronavirus pandemic.

## Vatican Launches Probe Into Numerous Dirty Dealings



**New cardinal Giovanni Angelo Becciu of Italy is seen during a consistory ceremony to install 14 new cardinals in Saint Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, June 28 2018.**

VATICAN CITY (AFP) -- **A financial watchdog drafted in by the Vatican to oversee its anti-corruption reforms began its latest inspection on Wednesday, as more reports of dirty dealings in a property investment scandal emerged.** The Council of Europe's anti-laundersing body Moneyval will assess "the effectiveness of the legislative and institutional measures" adopted during a recent crackdown on corruption, the Vatican said. The scheduled inspection comes less than a week after the public downfall of influential Italian cardinal Angelo Becciu, who was pushed out by Pope Francis following accusations of embezzlement and nepotism. It also falls on the day Australian Cardinal George Pell -- a rival of Becciu who was once tasked with cleaning up the Vatican's finances -- was expected back in Rome for the first time since being acquitted of sexual abuse charges.

Becciu has been linked to a luxury property investment deal in London, with at least some of the money used coming from Peter's Pence -- a collection intended to be spent on charitable works. The 72-year-old cardinal and at least six others could face trial on corruption charges, according to Vatican sources. Prosecution documents allege two Vatican insiders played a key role in the deal, which lost the Vatican millions of dollars, Repubblica newspaper reported. The pair are accused of pilfering from a Vatican account to pay an Italian middleman, Gianluigi Torzi, who is under investigation for extortion, embezzlement, fraud and money laundering, the paper said. The Vatican launched an investigation into the deal early last year reportedly after a suspicious activity report was lodged with the Financial Information Authority (AIF), the pope's financial crime watchdog.

## News in Brief

**TAIPEI (Reuters) -- The United States and Taiwan will work together on infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific region and Latin America, officials said on Wednesday, in an implicit pushback for China's own massive regional investment plans.** Washington is deeply suspicious of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative to build roads, railways and other facilities to link China to Europe, Asia and beyond, viewing it as a plan to entrap countries into China's orbit with debt diplomacy. China denies this. Taiwan's New Southbound Policy aims to boost economic ties with southeast and south Asia, to cut the island's reliance on China. Like most countries, the United States has no formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan, which China claims as its own. But the United States is Taiwan's most important international backer and main source of arms, to Beijing's anger.

**LONDON (Reuters) -- Britain considered a plan to send asylum seekers 4,000 miles away to holding centers on its remote overseas territories in the south Atlantic but the idea, described as "ludicrous" by opponents, was later dropped, the Financial Times reported. According to the paper, the Home Office (interior ministry) considered building migrant processing centers on the volcanic islands of Ascension and St Helena, having looked into how other countries deal with issues of illegal migration. However, Home Secretary Priti Patel dropped the plan after officials were consulted on the practicality of shipping the asylum seekers to the locations, the FT said. "This ludicrous idea is inhumane, completely impractical and wildly expensive," Nick Thomas-Symonds, the opposition Labour Party's home affairs spokesman, said on Twitter. In total, there were more than 32,000 asylum applications in the United Kingdom in the year ending June 2020.**

**NEW DELHI (AFP) -- Indian police were accused Wednesday of cremating the body of a 19-year-old woman against her family's will after she was allegedly gang-raped by four men in the country's latest horrific sexual assault. The teenager from India's marginalized Dalit community suffered serious injuries in a brutal sexual attack two weeks ago, according to her family and police, and died at a New Delhi hospital on Tuesday. On Tuesday night clashes between police and protesters appalled by the killing erupted outside the hospital, before a large group of officers escorted the hearse back to her native village in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. Her family told local media that the corpse was seized by police upon its arrival at the village in Hathras district, despite resistance from relatives and villagers, and was cremated in the middle of the night.**

**BUDAPEST (AFP) -- The Hungarian government said on Wednesday that its official Twitter account had been suspended "without any warning". "We have taken the necessary steps and are awaiting an official explanation from Twitter," government spokesman Zoltan Kovacs said on his own Twitter account. Kovacs portrayed the suspension as an act of censorship against nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban's government, saying: "The beautiful new world has finally arrived, in which tech giants are silencing those who hold different opinions." Any attempt to access the account now prompts the message: "User @abouthungary has been suspended." Hungary's other official social media channels seemed to be operating normally on Wednesday. This year Twitter has removed or labelled several of U.S. President Donald Trump's tweets, citing misinformation.**

**PARIS (Reuters) -- The sonic boom of a fighter jet breaking the sound barrier reverberated through the French capital Paris and nearby suburbs on Wednesday, the Paris police prefecture said on Twitter. The shockwave rattled windows, made birds fly up and was heard in every part of the city, leading to a surge in phone calls to police. It was not immediately clear why a fighter plane was flying over Paris. A defense ministry spokesman confirmed it was a sonic boom but did not immediately offer further comment. The police urged people not to call emergency services. Paris has been tense since a knife attack outside the former offices of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo on Friday.**

**HAMBURG (Reuters) -- Two more cases of African swine fever (ASF) have been confirmed in wild boars in the eastern German state of Brandenburg, with one found outside the area of the first discoveries, the federal agriculture ministry said on Wednesday. One new discovery was confirmed in the Maerkisch-Oderland district in Brandenburg outside of the area further south where the first cases were found, the ministry said. The sites are about 60 kilometers apart. The second case was inside the original area, it added. The Brandenburg state government said the case in Maerkisch-Oderland involved a wild boar shot by a hunter close to the Polish border. The site of the find will now be closed off with a 20 kilometer long electrified fence. The new discoveries bring total confirmed cases to 38 since the first on Sept. 10. All were in wild animals with no farm pigs affected, the federal ministry said.**