



KOLKATA, India (Reuters) -- Protesters angered by a new law on land use they say discriminates against Muslims set fire to police vehicles in Kolkata, capital of India's West Bengal State, after a weekend of violence claimed three lives, authorities said. Protesters in the Bhangar area of Kolkata clashed with police after officers stopped a protest rally. A major highway was blocked by protesters during the disturbances. The protesters were angry about a new law passed by the Indian parliament this month, which makes sweeping changes in the management of vast tracts of land set aside solely for Muslim use, potentially stoking tensions between the government and minority Muslims. Muslim groups and political parties say the law, like many of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's policies, aims to alienate and discriminate against Muslims. Modi and officials in his party deny the allegations, and have said the law is a "pro-Muslim reform".

LONDON (Reuters) -- Britain sent Ukraine 752 million pounds (\$990 million) to buy air defenses and artillery, part of a broader \$50 billion international loan program backed by frozen Russian assets, Britain's government said. The Group of Seven advanced economies agreed an outline lending package in October 2024 - before the election of Donald Trump as president changed the United States' approach to the conflict - and finance minister Rachel Reeves and her Ukrainian counterpart Serhiy Marchenko finalized details of Britain's contribution in March. Pressured by the United States' increased reluctance to provide security in Europe, Britain's government announced in February that it would raise defense spending from about 2.3% of national income to 2.5% by 2027 and 3% some time after 2029. Monday's payment to Ukraine is the second of three installments totaling 2.26 billion pounds. The first was on March 6 and the final part will be paid next year.

SYDNEY/JAKARTA (Reuters) -- Indonesia dismissed on Tuesday a report in defense publication *Janes* that Russia has requested basing military aircraft in Papua, its easternmost province, after the issue caused concern in Australia. "The report is incorrect," said Frega Wenas, the spokesperson of Indonesia's defense ministry. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation said Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles said to his Indonesian counterpart Sjafie Sjamsuddin who said there would be no Russian air force planes based in Indonesia. "He (Sjamsuddin) has said to me in the clearest possible terms, reports of the prospect of Russian aircraft operating from Indonesia are simply not true," Marles said. Papua is about 1,200 km (750 miles) north of the Australian city of Darwin, where a U.S. Marines Corp rotational force is based for six months of the year, and Australian air bases are being upgraded to host visiting U.S. bombers.

BEIJING/MANILA (Reuters) -- China and the Philippines accused each other on Tuesday of dangerous maneuvers in a hotly disputed shoal in the South China Sea, in the latest confrontation over the waterway. A Chinese coast guard vessel sped up and maneuvered on Monday to block the navigation route of a Philippine vessel around 36 nautical miles off the Scarborough shoal, the Philippine Coast Guard said. China's coast guard said the Philippine vessel "dangerously approached" its ship and crossed its route, alleging it attempted to stage a false collision. Xinhua reported on Tuesday. Tensions between China and the Philippines over the South China Sea have escalated in the last two years, including in the Scarborough Shoal, a prime fishing patch claimed by both as their territory.

NAIROBI (Reuters) -- Four smugglers caught trying to transport thousands of live ants out of Kenya for sale on exotic pet markets in Europe and Asia will be sentenced for trafficking wildlife in a case being hailed as a milestone by the Kenya Wildlife Service. The KWS said authorities had intercepted live queen ants, including from the sought-after Messor Cephalotes species also known as the Giant African Harvester Ant, concealed in modified test tubes and syringes. While some people may see ants as a picnic-ruining nuisance, aficionados enjoy keeping them in formicariums, transparent cases where they can watch their building complex colonies. A court document seen by Reuters stated that the authorities had intercepted about 5,000 queens packed in 2,244 containers, with a street value of about 1 million Kenyan shillings (\$7,800). Two Belgians, one Vietnamese and one Kenyan pleaded guilty on Monday to charges of illegal possession and trafficking of live wildlife and appeared again on Tuesday at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport Court.

SANTO DOMINGO (Reuters) -- The death toll at last week's nightclub roof collapse in the capital of the Dominican Republic rose to 231, the Minister of Interior and Police said, as families of victims began filing lawsuits against the nightclub's owners. Relatives of Virgilio Rafael Cruz, one of the victims who died on April 8, have begun a legal action against the establishment's owners, the family's lawyer told local media. Other families have also indicated they will file lawsuits. Local media and ticketing sites indicate the club could accommodate between 700 and 1,000 people, though there is no official confirmation on how many were present at the time of the disaster.

Trump Freezes \$2 Billion After Harvard Rejects Demands



Students protesting against the war in Gaza are seen at an encampment at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass. On April 25, 2025.

BOSTON (AP) -- The federal government says it's freezing more than \$2.2 billion in grants and \$60 million in contracts to Harvard University, after the institution said it would defy the Trump administration's demands to limit activism on campus.

The hold on Harvard's funding marks the seventh time President Donald Trump's administration has taken the step at one of the nation's most elite colleges, in an attempt to force compliance with Trump's political agenda. Six of the seven schools are in the Ivy League.

It sets the stage for a showdown between the federal government and America's oldest and wealthiest university. With an endowment of more than \$50 billion, Harvard is perhaps the best positioned university to push back on the administration's pressure campaign.

In a letter to Harvard Friday, Trump's administration had called for broad government and leadership reforms at the university, as well as changes to its admissions policies. It also demanded the university audit views of diversity on campus, and stop recognizing some student clubs.

The federal government said almost \$9 billion in grants and contracts in total were at risk if Harvard did not comply.

On Monday, Harvard President Alan Garber said the university would not bend to the government's demands. "The University will not surrender its independence or relinquish its constitutional rights," Garber said in a letter to the Harvard community. "No government — regardless of which party is in power — should dictate what pri-

vate universities can teach, whom they can admit and hire, and which areas of study and inquiry they can pursue."

Hours later, the government froze billions in Harvard's federal funding.

The first university targeted by the Trump administration was Columbia, which acquiesced to the government's demands under the threat of billions of dollars in cuts. The administration also has paused federal funding for the University of Pennsylvania, Brown, Princeton, Cornell and Northwestern.

Trump's administration has normalized the extraordinary step of withholding federal money to pressure major academic institutions to comply with the president's political agenda and to influence campus policy. The administration has argued universities allowed antisemitism to go unchecked at campus protests last year against Israel's war in Gaza.

Garber said many of the government's demands don't relate to antisemitism, but instead are an attempt to regulate the "intellectual conditions" at Harvard.

Withholding federal funding from Harvard, one of the nation's top research universities in science and medicine, "risks not only the health and well-being of millions of individuals but also the economic security and vitality of our nation." It also violates the university's First Amendment rights and exceeds the government's authority under Title VI, which prohibits discrimination against students based on their race, color or national origin, Garber said.

Cars Set on Fire Near Several Prisons in France



Journalists gather in front of the Toulon-La Farlede prison ahead of a visit of the French Minister of Justice in La Farlede, near Toulon, southern France on April 15, 2025.

PARIS (AFP) -- French justice minister Gérald Darmanin confirmed on Tuesday that attacks had been carried out overnight on several French prisons, and added he would travel to the southern city of Toulon, whose prison was among those attacked.

"Attempts have been made to intimidate staff in several prisons, ranging from burning vehicles to firing automatic weapons," Darmanin said on social media platform X.

"I am going to Toulon to support the officers concerned. The French Republic is facing up to the problem of drug trafficking and is taking measures that will massively disrupt the criminal networks," he added.

In recent months Darmanin and Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau have vowed to intensify the fight against narcotics and drug-related crime.

"All this appeared to have been coordinated and is clearly linked to the anti-drug gang strategy" introduced by Darmanin, a source close to the matter told AFP.

According to prison staff union FO Justice, "vehicles were torched, prison gates set on fire, and even targeted with heavy guns".

Three vehicles, including two belonging to prison staff, were set on fire in the car park of the Villepinte prison north of Paris, a police source said. A fuel canister was found on site, and CCTV footage showed two individuals torching cars.

Cars parked outside three other prisons, one near Paris and two in southern France, were also set on fire, another police source said.

In a prison in Toulon, on France's southern coast, 15 bullet impacts were found on the front gate following an attack with a "Kalashnikov-type" assault weapon, FO Justice said.

In a prison in nearby Aix, two vehicles were set on fire and the gate of the local ERIS prison surveillance unit was damaged, the union added.

Overnight Sunday to Monday, fires had already been set in the parking lots of a prison staff training centre and a prison near Paris, several sources said.

"These criminal acts are a full-on attack on our institution, on the republic and the staff who serve the republic every day," FO Justice said, calling for a "strong, clear response by the government".

China Says 'Tearing Down Walls' to Expand Alliances



BEIJING (Reuters) -- China is "tearing down walls" and expanding its circle of trading partners, "shaking hands" instead of "shaking fists", its foreign ministry said on Tuesday, as Beijing works on diversifying ties amid an escalating trade war with the U.S.

President Donald Trump has added an eye-watering 145% of tariffs on Chinese goods this year as part of broader reciprocal duties on all U.S. trading partners. That prompted ridicule and criticism from Beijing, which retaliated by jacking up levies on U.S. goods by 125%.

"In the face of external uncertainties, China will insist on shaking hands rather than shaking fists, tearing down walls instead of building barriers, connecting instead of decoupling,"

Lin Jian, a foreign ministry spokesperson, told a press briefing on Tuesday.

The World Trade Organization has warned the high-stakes Sino-U.S. trade row could cut the shipment of goods between two economies by as much as 80% and severely hurt global growth.

Beijing has called U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs strategy "a joke", irritating U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent.

"These are not a joke. I mean these are big numbers," Bessent said in a Bloomberg Television interview. "I think no one thinks they're sustainable, wants them to remain here, but it's far from a joke."

Any U.S. China negotiations would have to come from "the top," involving Trump and Chi-

nese President Xi Jinping, Bessent also said.

Xi on Monday kicked off a three-nation tour of Southeast Asia. In Vietnam, which is facing potential U.S. tariffs of 46%, Xi called for the two countries to oppose "unilateral bullying" and to strengthen cooperation in production and supply chains.

Chinese and Vietnamese officials also signed dozens of cooperation deals during Xi's visit, including on production and supply chains as well as railway cooperation.

After a two-day stop in Hanoi, Xi will continue his Southeast Asian trip by visiting Malaysia and Cambodia, which could be slapped by additional U.S. tariffs of 24% and 49%, respectively.

A commentary published on Tuesday by China's state-run People's Daily underlined the need for unity amid the trade turbulence.

"In the face of crisis, no one can keep only to oneself," the commentary said, referencing Dorothy's adventure in the American children's story *The Wizard of Oz*. "Only unity and cooperation can meet the challenge."

The commentary presented China as a benevolent advocate for free trade, spotlighting China's decision to implement zero tariffs for some of its least developed partners.

Spy Chief: Russia, Belarus Ready to Act Over European 'Escalation'



Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service chief Sergei Naryshkin in Moscow in 2023.

MOSCOW (NBC News) -- Russia and Belarus are ready to act preemptively over increased military escalation from European countries over Ukraine, the head of Russia's foreign spy service chief said Tuesday, according to state media.

"We feel and see that European countries, especially France, Great Britain and Germany, are increasing the level of escalation around the Ukrainian conflict. Therefore, we need to act preemptively. We are ready for this," Sergei Naryshkin

was quoted as saying by both the TASS and RIA news agencies.

In the event of an attack on Russia or Belarus, Russia would retaliate against NATO as a whole, but that Poland and the Baltic states would suffer first, he added.

Those countries should understand that "in the event of aggression" from NATO "damage will certainly be inflicted on the entire NATO bloc, but to a greater extent the first to suffer will be the bearers of such ideas in the political circles of Poland and the Baltic countries," Naryshkin

said.

His comments came hours after Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said it "not easy" to agree with the U.S. on key parts of a possible peace deal with Ukraine. "We are well aware of what a mutually beneficial deal looks like, which we have never rejected, and what a deal looks like that could lead us into another trap," he told Russia's *Kommersant* newspaper.

His comments appeared to pour cold water on the optimism expressed by Steve Witkoff, the U.S. special envoy leading talks with the Kremlin, after he met with President Vladimir Putin in the Russian city of St. Petersburg on Friday to discuss a ceasefire in the war that entered its fourth year in February.

Speaking to Fox News on Sunday, Witkoff said a peace deal was "emerging" and that he thought "we might be on the verge of something that would be very, very important for the world at large."

President Donald Trump, meanwhile, said Monday that "millions" of people had died in the war in Ukraine which he blamed on his predecessor Joe Biden, as well as Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky and Putin.

Rape Systematically Used as Weapon of War in Sudan

GENEVA (Reuters) -- Rape is being used systematically as a weapon of war in Sudan, a UN agency warned on Tuesday, as the conflict marks its second year.

"We have seen a 288% increase in demand for life saving support for rape and sexual violence survivors. We are beginning to see the systematic use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war," Anna Mutavati, the regional director of UN Women, told reporters in Geneva via video link from Port Sudan.

"Women's bodies have turned into a battleground," she said, without saying which side in Sudan's war was responsible.

The war between Sudan's army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces erupted in April 2023,

shattering hopes for a transition to civilian rule.

The conflict has since displaced millions and devastated regions like Darfur, where the RSF is fighting to maintain its stronghold amid army advances in Khartoum.

"This is just the tip of the iceberg, not everyone is coming forward because there is shame and victim blaming that is attached to every woman that has been raped and gang raped," she said.

A UN fact-finding mission last year described levels of sexual abuse, including child rape, as "staggering". The majority of known cases were perpetrated by the RSF and its allies, the mission said, noting it was more difficult to report in army-controlled terri-

tories.

A representative of another UN agency said on Tuesday he had met women in Khartoum who told him they had been sexually assaulted in front of their injured husbands and screaming children.

"It is the first time in my life I have seen women who have been abused to that extent," said Mohamed Refaati, head of the International Organization for Migration's mission in Sudan.

Britain is co-hosting a London conference on Tuesday, aiming to improve coordination of the international response to the crisis. Sudan's foreign minister has criticized the presence of the UAE and Kenya at the talks and said Sudan should have been invited.