

World News Roundup

India

PM followers hit

'Meat & murder' polarise agenda

BISARA, India, Oct 5, (RTS): The murder by a Hindu mob of a Muslim man rumoured to have slaughtered a cow has thrown a spotlight on the headline, polarising agenda of some followers of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, undermining his promise of development for all.

On a tour of Silicon Valley last month where he was feted by US tech gurus and Indian emigres, Modi won a pledge from Microsoft to provide low-cost Internet for 500,000 villages to back his vision of a globally networked "Digital India".



Modi

One such village is Bisara, 50 km (30 miles) from the capital New Delhi, where a crowd of assailants broke into Mohammed Akhlaq's home last Monday night, beat him to death and dragged his body out into the street.

The local member of parliament, Mahesh Sharma, is also Modi's culture minister and has hit the headlines of late with statements that show a different side to their ruling Hindu nationalist party. In one recent speech, Sharma vowed to cleanse public life "polluted" by Western influences.

Visiting Bisara this week to pay his respects to Akhlaq's family, Sharma said the killing could have been an "accident".

Suffered

"How can the leader call my husband's murder an accident?" Akhlaq's widow Ikraman, who suffered facial injuries, told Reuters at the family home. "I don't think the minister knows the difference between an accident and murder."

Critics say Sharma's comment implicitly condoned Akhlaq's lynching and pandered to fringe Hindu militants who have recently become active in the district.

Eating beef is a taboo for many Hindus, who make up 80 percent of India's population of 1.25 billion people, but not for the country's 175 million Muslims.

Communal clashes had never erupted in Bisara, home to 400 landowning Hindu and 35 Muslim families, even when religious riots have broken out in the region. In 2013, 65 people died in sectarian strife around the northern town of Muzaffarnagar.

But an announcement by a Hindu priest over his temple loudspeakers that Akhlaq had butchered a cow and that his wife was cooking beef for dinner brought a sudden end to the village's tradition of tolerance, according to family members and villagers who heard the call.

Within minutes a mob stormed into Akhlaq's house, vandalised the kitchen in search of beef and beat the 56-year-old blacksmith to death with bricks and stones. His body was dragged out in front of his family.

Fighting

Akhlaq's youngest son, who suffered severe head injuries, is fighting for his life in a hospital intensive care unit after undergoing two brain operations.

His widow says he was killed for a crime he did not commit.

"Even now I can't believe that my Hindu neighbours killed my husband. My neighbours were like my extended family," said Ikraman, who will spend a month in mourning in a room near the bloodstained murder scene.

Local Muslims say Akhlaq's killing was a pre-meditated attack aimed at polarising the village on religious lines by militant Hindu groups loyal to Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which won power in the May 2014 general election.

Sharma and Modi are both members of an umbrella group, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), that is the BJP's ideological parent. The movement propagates an ideology of Hindutva, or Hinduism, which asserts that India is a Hindu nation.

Police have arrested seven Hindu youths over the murder and one paramilitary soldier accused of planning the attack. Investigators are also searching for Hindu activists who spread rumours and online posts stating that Akhlaq had stored 6 kg (13 lbs) of beef in his refrigerator.

The region holds village council elections next week and Bisara has, in the wake of the killing, become a magnet for campaigning politicians. One BJP lawmaker accused of instigating the Muzaffarnagar riots came to Bisara on Sunday and warned of a "befitting reply" if the suspects were prosecuted, according to news reports.

Many Indian states, including the country's largest Uttar Pradesh, where Bisara is situated, have banned cow slaughter for more than two decades.



A Kashmiri Muslim woman wails near the body of a suspected rebel, during his funeral at Barhama, 40 kms (25 miles) south of Srinagar, Indian-controlled Kashmir on Oct 5. (AP)

Bangladesh

Japan expresses outrage over killing of Japanese man

Murders underline rise of Islamist militants

DHAKA, Oct 5, (Agencies): The assassination of two foreigners in a week has highlighted the growing danger posed by Islamist militants in Bangladesh, with experts warning that a long-running political crisis has radicalised opponents of the government.

While experts are dubious about the Islamic State organisation's claim of responsibility for the latest killings, they say hardliners who have been shut out of the political mainstream are opting for increasingly desperate measures in a country known for its religious tolerance.

The latest killings follow the assassination of four atheist bloggers since the turn of the year, undermining the government's efforts to play down the threat posed by hardliners.

Even before Saturday's murder of Japanese national Hoshi Kunio in the northern town of Kaunia, Australia had cancelled a tour of the cricket-mad nation over security fears.

The killings of Kunio and Italian aid worker Cesare Tavella last Monday have also prompted buyers from foreign garment companies to shelve a meeting with local manufacturers due to have taken place in Dhaka in a worrying development for the \$25 billion industry.

"These killings are very ominous signs. There is a pattern that these are done by militants, which makes everyone concerned," Ali Riaz, an expert on militancy in Bangladesh based at Illinois State University, told AFP by phone.

"The future of Bangladesh is at stake because if these killings are continued it'll have a ripple effect on the country's political stability and its economy".

Only this year Bangladesh officially

joined the club of low to middle income economies, shedding its status as a least developed nation, after posting annual growth rates of around six percent over the last decade.

But while the economy may appear to be in rude health, Bangladesh has been plagued by unrest in the last three years, a period which has seen the largest Islamist party banned while the mainstream opposition boycotted the last elections in Jan 2014 over rigging fears.

The death sentences handed down to several leading Islamists for war crimes over their role in the 1971 conflict to secede from Pakistan have exacerbated tensions between the secular government and its opponents.

Detained

Scores of opposition activists including Islamists have gone missing since the start of the year when the latest round of anti-government protests erupted, with families fearing they have either been secretly detained or killed.

Veteran political analyst Ataur Rahman said the crackdown on radical Islamists had only served to fuel militancy.

"There is no doubt that a big section of the people are aggrieved. Some political groups, including Islamic parties are so cornered that they may have opted for desperate measures," Rahman told AFP.

The hitherto unheard of Ansarullah Bangla Team has claimed responsibility for three of the blogger killings while Islamic State has put out statements claiming both of last week's assassinations — the first time that the group has been linked to any such killings in Bangladesh.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said police have no evidence to confirm the jihadist group's involvement while her interior minister has repeatedly said there is no IS presence in the country.

But police have in fact trumpeted several arrests in recent months of alleged IS recruiters or would-be combatants said to have been planning to head to Iraq or Syria.

Abdur Rob, a professor of political science at Dhaka's private North South University, said he was dubious about IS's claim of involvement.

"The militants are here and their numbers are growing," he told AFP.

"But IS has yet to find a toe-hold. The foreigners' killings don't have any IS signatures", he said.

Riaz said he would "agree with those who doubt the presence of IS in the country" but said that the recent crackdowns had "created an environment which now appeals to the militants".

"The more you see the democratic space is shrinking, the more likelihood that militant groups will proliferate", he added.

Stalemate

A senior Bangladesh opposition leader said on Monday the killing of two foreign nationals was a sign that law and order was collapsing and the situation may get worse unless a stalemate between the two main political parties is resolved.

The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has staged violent protests since Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League won a second consecutive term in Jan 2014. The BNP boycotted the election, which was deemed by international

observers to be flawed.

At the same time, Islamist groups have been staging high-profile attacks in the impoverished South Asian nation. Earlier this year, four online critics of religious militancy were hacked to death. Over the past week, the Islamic State has claimed responsibility for shooting an Italian and a Japanese man and threatened more such attacks.

Japan's top government spokesman expressed outrage Monday over the killing of a Japanese citizen who became the second foreigner to be gunned down in Bangladesh in less than a week.

Kunio Hoshi was shot to death by unidentified assailants in northern Bangladesh on Saturday. Bangladesh's government rejected a statement by the Islamic State group claiming responsibility for the attack.

"Such a dastardly act should never be repeated. I feel outraged by such an act," Yoshihide Suga, Japan's chief Cabinet secretary, told reporters in Tokyo on Monday. He extended condolences to Hoshi's family, and said the Japanese government was seeking a full investigation into the case.

Bangladesh has been struggling in recent months with a rise in violence claimed by hard-line Islamic groups, banning several that have been blamed for killing four bloggers this year.

The Islamic State group issued a statement claiming responsibility for Saturday's attack, according to the SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors jihadi postings online. The report could not be independently confirmed. The Islamic State also claimed responsibility for the killing of an Italian aid worker last week in Bangladesh's capital.



Pakistani opposition leader Imran Khan addresses his supporters during a campaign meeting, ahead of the by-election for NA-122 (a constituency for the National Assembly of Pakistan) to be held on Oct 11, in Lahore on Oct 4. (AFP)



Gillani



Singh

Subcontinent

Taleban says hanged military officer:

The Pakistani Taleban has hanged a military intelligence officer in retaliation for recent executions of militants by Pakistan, the militant Islamist group said in videos released on Sunday.

Reuters could not independently authenticate the two videos and a Pakistani military spokesman was not immediately able to comment on them.

Pakistan reinstated the death penalty last December after Taleban gunmen massacred 134 school children. Since then the Taleban have staged several deadly attacks, but the videos of the hanging appear to be the first staged execution of a military officer since the restoration of the death penalty. In the first video, a man identifies himself as Bashir Ahmad Khan, originally from the 19th army air defence unit and later recruited by Pakistan's military intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence.

"We were trained to trace the Taleban's training camps," said the man identified as Khan. He was dressed in plain brown traditional Pakistani clothes and surrounded by armed men wearing masks and camouflage. One unmasked man in white robes kneels beside him.

Two men hold a black banner in the background that is embroidered with the kalma, a Muslim declaration of faith.

In the second video, Khan is shown wrapped in a Pakistani flag, his eyes bound with black cloth and a noose around his neck.

One of the masked men says: "The hanging of Bashir Ahmad is our response to the Pakistani government who are busy hanging our group members. This is just the beginning and all those who are in our custody or those who have any links with the Pakistan government will face the same treatment." (RTS)

4 Indian troops, 3 rebels killed:

Police say four Indian army soldiers and

three suspected rebels have been killed in separate gunbattles in the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir.

Inspector-General Syed Javid Mujtaba Gillani says the soldiers died Monday after militants ambushed troops during a search operation in Hafrauda forest near the highly militarized Line of

Control dividing Kashmir between India and Pakistan.

Gillani said the militants managed to escape the area after attacking the soldiers.

He said three militants were killed in two separate encounters with government troops in the area Sunday and Monday.



An Indian worker hangs freshly-dyed kalawa thread ahead of the Navratri festival at Lalgalpaganj village, some 45 kms from Allahabad, on Oct 5. (AFP)

Since 1989, rebels have fought against Indian rule. More than 68,000 people have died in the uprising and a subsequent Indian military crackdown. (AP)

Jouno killed in north India:

Gunmen have shot dead a television jour-

Sectarian leader gets 6 months for hate speech

RAWALPINDI, Pakistan, Oct 5, (AFP): A Pakistan anti-terrorism court Monday sentenced a former leader of a banned sectarian party to six months in jail for hate speech, part of a crackdown after last year's deadly Peshawar school attack.

Pakistan had previously tolerated many sectarian organisations, but has taken action this year as part of its grand National Action Plan to counter terrorism after a Taliban attack killed 153 people — mostly children — at the Peshawar school. Mufti Tanveer Alam Farooqi, a former leader in the anti-Shiite organisation Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ), was jailed for six months.

nalist in northern India, the latest in a string of killings in recent months of reporters in the country, police said Monday.

The reporter, Hemant Yadav, who worked for Hindi news channel TV 24, was returning home from a market in Uttar Pradesh state on Saturday night when he was shot by unknown assailants on a motorbike.

"It seems to be a case of revenge. The deceased was reportedly quite active socially and used to take up various causes of locals who approached him," sub-inspector Raj Kumar Singh, from the state's Dheena area where the attack happened, said.

"So, it is possible that he could have antagonised someone by his activism, which led to his murder," he told AFP.

Police said no arrests have yet been made over the 45-year-old's death.

The incident comes after a freelance reporter died after being doused with petrol and set on fire also in Uttar Pradesh in June.

The victim's family said Jagendra Singh was killed shortly after he published an article and posted allegations on Facebook accusing a state minister of involvement in illegal mining and land grabbing.

Amnesty International and journalists groups called for an investigation into that killing, saying it underscored the dangers Indian media face in doing their jobs.(AFP)