

World News Roundup

India

Caste protests leave 4 dead

Kashmir shut by strike & security clampdown

SRINAGAR, India, April 2, (Agencies): A security clampdown and a strike sponsored by separatists fighting against Indian rule shut down most of Indian-administered Kashmir on Monday, a day after deadly protests and fierce fighting killed 16 combatants and four civilians.

Armed police and paramilitary soldiers in riot gear fanned out across the region and patrolled streets in anticipation of anti-India protests and clashes.

Authorities also imposed a curfew in some towns in southern Kashmir and in the old parts of the disputed region's main city of Srinagar, the urban center of protests and clashes against Indian rule.



Wani

Shops and businesses closed in other areas where no security restrictions were in place. Separatist leaders who challenge India's sovereignty over Kashmir called for a shutdown on Monday and Tuesday to protest the killings.

Authorities shut schools and colleges and canceled university exams in an attempt to stop protests by students.

Despite the suspension of classes, anti-India protests erupted at the University of Kashmir, where many students gathered in the main campus in Srinagar and shouted slogans such as "Go India, go back" and demanded an end of Indian rule over the region.

Officials also halted train services and cut cellphone internet access in the most restive towns, and reduced connection speeds in other parts of the Kashmir Valley, a common government practice aimed at calming tensions and preventing anti-India demonstrations from being organized.

Troops laid steel barricades and razor wire on roads and intersections to cut off neighborhoods as authorities anticipated widespread protests.

At least 13 rebels and three Indian army soldiers were killed in Sunday's fighting in three gunbattles in southern Kashmir, where a new generation of rebels have revived militancy and challenged New Delhi's rule with guns and effective use of social media.

As the fighting raged, large anti-India protests erupted in several parts of Indian-controlled Kashmir and at least four civilians were killed and dozens injured.

Residents said government troops fired live ammunition and shotgun pellets into the crowds of mostly young protesters, causing injuries. They also said one of the civilians who died in southern Shopian near a gunbattle on Sunday was being used as a human shield against rebels by the Indian army.

An army officer, who declined to be named in keeping with army regulations, rejected the accusation and said the civilian was killed in the crossfire with insurgents.

In the past, such allegations have rarely been probed, and some accused military officials have been rewarded.

According to hospital officials, many of the injured were hit by shotgun pellets in the eyes, causing widespread anger across Kashmir. In 2016, Srinagar's main hospital alone received hundreds of patients who had been injured in their eyes and blinded by shotgun pellets after some of the biggest protests against Indian rule in response to the killing of a charismatic young rebel leader, **Burhan Wani**.

On Sunday, doctors treated and operated on over 50 young men brought to the hospital, most of them hit in the eyes by pellets. A doctor said about 30 could lose their eyesight.

International rights groups have repeatedly condemned the Indian crackdown and called on it to stop using shotgun pellets against protesters armed only with stones. However, government troops have continued using the weapon.

Low-caste Dalits protest: At least four people died in street battles and widespread protests by Indian low-caste groups enraged by what they consider the undermining of a law protecting their safety, police said Monday.

Clashes with police, attacks on buses and government buildings, and blocked trains and roads were reported across five Indian states.

The four dead were in the central state of Madhya Pradesh, according to **Rishi Kumar Shukla**, director general of the state police. He insisted however that events had been brought "under control".

One of the dead was in Gwalior. "A curfew has been imposed in parts of the city and the protesters are still on the ground," Anshuman Yadav, police inspector general for Gwalior, told AFP.

There were media reports of more deaths in Morena district of Madhya Pradesh, but police could not immediately confirm fatalities.

Local media reports said that at least one more person had died in the western state of Rajasthan.

"I can't confirm the death but two or three people were possibly hit by bullets during the clashes," **Rahul Prakash**, superintendent of police in Alwar, around 100 miles from the Rajasthan capital Jaipur, told AFP.

Trouble was also reported in the capital New Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Bihar states.

The "Bharat Bandh" (India shutdown) was called by groups representing the Dalits, formerly known as untouchables, who make up 200 million of India's 1.25 billion population and are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy.

They are angry at a Supreme Court ruling that banned the automatic arrest of the accused in cases under a special law to protect marginalised groups who suffer widespread discrimination.

The 1989 Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act was intended to guard against the harassment of Dalits and other groups.



Kashmiri villagers attend the funeral of Zubar Ahmad, one of the killed rebels at Shopian, south of Srinagar, India, on April 1. Deadly protests against Indian rule erupted in several parts of Indian-controlled Kashmir on Sunday following the killings of at least eight rebels in fighting with government forces, officials said. At least two army soldiers were also killed in the fighting. (AP)



Pakistan's Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai (center), poses for a photograph with her family members at her native home during a visit to Mingora, the main town of Pakistan Swat Valley, on March 31. (AP)

Subcontinent

Airstrike kills 20 Taliban fighters:

An Afghan official says an airstrike on a Taliban training camp in northern Afghanistan killed at least 20 insurgents and wounded many more on Monday, while the Taliban said the airstrike hit a religious school during a graduation ceremony, killing dozens of civilians.

It was not immediately possible to reconcile the conflicting accounts.

Defense Ministry spokesman Mohammad Radmanish said "initial reports" indicate the airstrike in the Char Dara district of Kunduz province killed around 20 Taliban fighters, including a local commander, and wounded many more. "I can confirm that a Taliban training center was bombed and no civilians were present," he said.

The Taliban said in a statement that the airstrike hit a madrasa, or religious school, killing and wounding more than 100 clerics, religious students and other civilians.

In a separate incident in the southern Helmand province, at least 48 schoolgirls fell ill at a high school in what provincial authorities suspect is a case of mass poisoning.

Dr Nisar Ahmad Barak said the girls were admitted on Monday at his hospital in Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital, with headaches and vomiting, but that they are all now in stable condition and receiving treatment. He did not have any further details.

Ahmad Bilal Haqbeen, deputy director at Helmand's education department, said the girls attend the 11th grade at the city's Central Girls School. He said an investigation is underway. Both officials said the girls were deliberately poisoned.

Most of Helmand province is under the control of the Taliban, who oppose girls' education. (AP)

Malala ends Pakistan visit: Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai left

Pakistan on Monday, ending a surprise visit to the country, her first since being shot in 2012 by Taliban militants who tried to kill her for promoting girls' education.

A smiling Yousafzai was seen with her parents at Benazir Bhutto International Airport before they boarded a plane to return to London after the four-day visit.

Amid tight security, Yousafzai earlier in the day left her hotel in Islamabad, where she had stayed for four days, and in a convoy of vehicles headed to the airport. Touching scenes were witnessed when the now-20-year-old university student left the

Bangladesh

UN says refugees 'extremely vulnerable' to storms

Bangladesh begins relocating Rohingya

DHAKA, April 2, (AFP): Bangladesh has begun relocating 100,000 Rohingya refugees to safer ground before the monsoon season for fear of deadly landslides and floods in the congested camps, an official said Sunday.

The UN says about 150,000 refugees in Bangladesh's southeast — where nearly one million Rohingya in total live in shanties on hillsides — are extremely vulnerable to disease and disaster this rainy season.

Humanitarian groups have been racing to reinforce the basic shelters erected hastily by the Rohingya as they fled across the border after a fierce army crackdown on the community in western Myanmar.

Nearly 700,000 refugees have crossed the border since August into the Cox's Bazar region, clearing trees and packing whole hillsides with unstable shanties.

Bangladesh's refugee commissioner Mohammad Abul Kalam said 100,000 refugees living in "priority" areas most at risk from floods and landslides would

be relocated before June. "We have already shifted some 10,000 refugees from different locations to safer settlements," he told AFP.

Bangladesh had allocated roughly 3,500 acres (14 square kilometres) of forested land in Cox's Bazar to the newly-arrived Rohingya to build simple shelters.

But the forest is being felled at a rate of four football fields a day, Kalam said.

The refugees, who use the firewood for cooking, have already cleared 5,000 acres of forest, clearing trees and packing whole hillsides with unstable shanties, district administrator Mahidur Rahman told AFP.

The once lush hillsides have turned barren, exposing the topsoil and leaving them highly vulnerable to landslides during heavy rain, he said.

"Some 200,000 people are vulnerable to landslides," he said.

Monsoon rains wreak havoc every year in Cox's Bazar and the adjacent Chittagong Hill Tracts, a tropical forest zone home to wild elephants.

Last season heavy rain triggered landslides in the tract region, killing 170 people. Experts blamed deforestation for worsening the impact of the mud avalanches.

More than 100 people were killed in landslides in the region in 2012, and two years earlier heavy rain killed around 50.

In the past week UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has expressed fears the Rohingya were "extremely vulnerable" to the annual storms.

He told reporters he had stressed to Bangladesh that "higher ground is the best place for this kind of relocation".

Dhaka had earlier said about 100,000 refugees from the persecuted Muslim minority would be shifted to an island in the Bay of Bengal where the Bangladesh navy is building accommodation for the refugees.

But Abdul Mannan, the Chittagong regional commissioner, told AFP the Rohingya would not be relocated to the island before the end of the year.

hotel, thanking Pakistani officials for giving her an army helicopter over the weekend to fly to the Swat Valley, once virtually under the control of militants, and see her home in the northwest town of Mingora.

After visiting Mingora on Saturday, Yousafzai in a tweet said it was "the most beautiful place on earth" for her.

"So much joy seeing my family home, visiting friends and putting my feet on this soil again," said, as she posted a picture of her, showing her standing at her home's lawn with her father, mother and brothers. (AP)

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