

## International

# Clashes erupt across Indonesia as thousands protest legal reforms

## Police fire tear gas to break up sex-ban law protests

**JAKARTA:** Riot police fired tear gas at stone-throwing protesters as fresh protests erupted across Indonesia yesterday, sparked by a raft of divisive legal reforms including banning pre-marital sex and weakening the anti-graft agency. At least two students have died and hundreds more were injured as unrest swept across the Southeast Asian archipelago, just weeks before President Joko Widodo kicks off a second term as head of the world's third-biggest democracy.

In the capital Jakarta, some 26,000 police and soldiers were deployed while large crowds - including placard-carrying students and factory workers - chanted for change near parliament, which was barricaded with barbed wire. Military vehicles rumbled along the streets as some students - with toothpaste smeared beneath their eyes to protect against tear gas - hurled projectiles. Many rallies, however, were peaceful.

The demonstrations have been fuelled by a proposed bill that includes dozens of legal changes - from criminalizing pre-marital sex and restricting contraceptive sales, to making it illegal to insult the president and toughening the Muslim-majority country's blasphemy law. The protests are among the biggest student rallies since mass street demonstrations in 1998 toppled the Suharto dictatorship.

More than a thousand demonstrators were on the streets in Bandung on Java island, where a female protester held a sign saying: "What is in our pants is none of the government's business." "I decided to join the demonstrations after I heard about the death of university students and that some were attacked by tear gas," said Banyu Biru, a Bandung student still dressed in his high-school uniform. "That's just absurd - is this how the police protect the people?" Passage of the controversial reforms has now been delayed.

### 'Pull them out'

Widodo has also said he would consider revising a separate bill that critics fear would dilute the powers of Indonesia's corruption-fighting agency, known as the KPK. "Why is this law being changed?" said Lukmanul Hakim Ahbr, a 24-year-old Indonesian who said he returned from his studies in neighboring Malaysia to join the protests.

"We students... reject any revision that will weaken the KPK," he added. Protesters have also demanded troops be pulled from Indonesia's restive Papua region, where fresh violence killed more than 30 people this month. They are also demanding a probe into the deaths of two university students on Sulawesi island last week, including one who was shot during the anti-government protests. The police said they are investigating, but denied responsibility.

At the rally in Bandung, high school teacher Iwan Hermawan was keeping a close eye out for his students. "If any students join this rally and engage in violence I'll immediately pull them out," he told AFP. Yesterday, scuffles broke out between authorities and some 2,000 university students on Lombok, an island next to Bali where hundreds also rallied. Ahead of today's inauguration of hundreds of members of parliament, Indonesia's chief security minister Wiranto - who goes by one name - warned that any bloodshed would not be tolerated.

"I'm reminding protesters not to engage in violence or disrupt the inauguration of new lawmakers," the minister told a press briefing. Officials have portrayed the protests as being hijacked by agitators aiming to disrupt government - and suggested they were similar to May's deadly post-election riots that paralyzed Jakarta. Updating Indonesia's criminal code, which dates back to the Dutch colonial era, has been debated for decades but there was a renewed push this year backed by conservative Islamic groups. — AFP



**JAKARTA:** Indonesian students set items on fire as police shoot tear gas during a protest outside the parliament building in Jakarta yesterday. — AFP

## Abdullah claims victory over Ghani in Afghan vote ahead of results

**KABUL:** Afghanistan chief executive Abdullah Abdullah claimed victory yesterday over incumbent Ashraf Ghani in the weekend's presidential election, far ahead of the release of any official results. The move is likely to stir political tensions across Afghanistan and brings to mind the election Abdullah and his top rival Ghani bitterly contested in 2014 that sparked a constitutional crisis and prompted US intervention.

"We have the most votes in this election," Abdullah said at a news conference, without providing evidence. "The results will be announced by the IEC (Independent Election Commission), but we have the most votes. The election is not going to go to a second round." Abdullah's announcement came after one of Ghani's running mates, Amrullah Saleh, on Sunday claimed to have garnered the lion's share of votes.

"According to our information, 60 to 70 percent of the people have voted for our team," Saleh told Voice of America's Dari- and Pashto-language services. The claims come even before the IEC has finished tallying turnout from Saturday's election, with hundreds of polling centers still unreported. Preliminary results are not due until October 19, and if the leading candidate doesn't secure more than 50 percent of the vote the top two will roll off in a second round.

Almost immediately, senior IEC official Habib Rahman Nang slammed Abdullah's announcement as premature. "No candidate has the right to declare himself the winner," Nang said. "According to the law, it is the IEC that decides who is the winner." Abdullah, who is seeking the presidency for the third time after losing in 2009 and 2014, said his team would "make the new government". Without giving details, Abdullah also mentioned reports of "some government officials" meddling in the election process.

His remarks follow the release on social media of several videos purporting to show election workers stuffing ballots in favor of Ghani. Shortly after Abdullah's comments,



**KABUL:** Afghan presidential candidate and current chief executive officer, Abdullah Abdullah (center), gestures as he leaves after addressing a press conference in Kabul yesterday. — AFP

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini called on candidates to respect the electoral timeline. "We expect that the candidates exercise restraint, await the official announcement of preliminary and final results by the (IEC) and submit any evidence-based complaints through the established institutional complaints mechanism," she said in a statement.

### Safeguards against fraud

The IEC's complaints division head, Zuhra Bayan Shinwari, said the panel had so far received 2,569 complaints. Previous Afghan polls have been marred by widespread allegations of systemic fraud, so the stakes are high for the IEC, which has promised a clean process this year with rigorous steps to curtail cheating. Commentators suggested the videos of apparent ballot stuffing could either have been made by rivals trying to discredit Ghani, or else produced as proof that the rigging had actually been carried out.

But even if true, the IEC insists it has ample safeguards against such blatant fraud through new technology and voter verification techniques, particularly biometric devices designed to ensure each person only voted once. "The management of election day was better than previous elections and security was better," said Ahmad Zubair Habibzada, a spokesman for the Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan, an election watchdog that dispatched about 5,200 observers across the country.

Despite a large pool of candidates, the election was seen as a two-horse race between Abdullah and Ghani. They both claimed victory in the 2014 poll - a vote so tainted by fraud and violence that it forced the administration of then-US president Barack Obama to push for a compromise that saw Abdullah awarded the subordinate role. Saturday's election was also marred by hundreds of small-scale Taliban attacks at polling stations, but the insurgents were unable to steal the headlines with any significant bloody assault. — AFP

## Pakistan summons Indian diplomat over cross-border shelling

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan's government yesterday summoned India's top diplomat in the country over accusations of deadly shelling by India in its portion of the disputed region of Kashmir, as tensions run high between the nuclear-armed rival nations. A 60-year-old woman and 13-year-old boy were killed and three wounded in shelling over the Line of Control (LOC), near the informal border with India, on Saturday and Sunday, Pakistan's foreign ministry said.

"The ceasefire violations by India are a threat to regional peace and security and may lead to a strategic miscalculation," said Pakistan's foreign ministry statement, adding that its spokesman had summoned Indian Deputy High Commissioner Gaurav Ahluwalia to condemn the incident. A spokesman for India's foreign ministry said it had no immediate comment on the matter. India and Pakistan both accuse each other of breaching a 2003 ceasefire agreement by shelling and firing over the LOC, killing dozens this year.

India has also accused Pakistan of providing support for militants on its territory, a claim Pakistan denies. The latest incident comes amid tension between the neighbors that escalated sharply following New Delhi's move to revoke the autonomy of its portion of Kashmir in August. Pakistan expelled India's ambassador and suspended bilateral trade soon after and launched an international diplomacy campaign in an attempt to draw global condemnation of India's treatment of Kashmiris. Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan made an impassioned address at the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Friday, saying there would be a bloodbath once India lifts a curfew and that any all-out conflict between the nations would reverberate far beyond their borders.

Both India and Pakistan control Kashmir in part while claiming it in full. India says its revocation of autonomy is an internal matter that will allow its portion of Kashmir to develop economically. — Reuters

## Japan posts radiation levels on South Korea embassy website

**TOKYO:** Japan's embassy in South Korea has begun posting the daily radiation levels of Fukushima and Seoul after new questions about the lingering effects of the 2011 nuclear disaster. The embassy website said the information reflects that "interest in radiation levels in Japan has recently been increasing, particularly in South Korea". The move comes amid worsening ties between Japan and South Korea over a long-running disagreement about Japanese use of forced labor in South Korea during World War II.

The two countries have taken retaliatory trade measures against each other, and South Korea has tightened radiation checks on Japanese food imports. The readings show levels in three Japanese cities are almost the same as in major cities outside of Japan, including Seoul, the embassy says. "The Japanese government hopes the South Korean people's understanding about Japan's radiation levels will deepen as we continue to provide accurate information based on scientific evidence and explain it fully with clarity," it says in Japanese and Korean on the site.

Questions have also been raised about the safety of the Olympics being held in Tokyo next year, with some South Korean lawmakers pushing for a boycott and travel ban over what they portray as radiation risks from Fukushima. A 9.0-magnitude earthquake in March 2011 triggered a massive tsunami that knocked out cool-

ing systems at the Fukushima Daiichi atomic power plant on the Pacific coast in the nation's northeast. The plant spewed radioactive materials into the air, soil and water in the worst nuclear accident since Chernobyl in 1986.

Fukushima City, some 70 kilometers away from the stricken nuclear power plant, will host baseball and softball games during the Olympics. And food from the Fukushima region is expected to be served to Olympic athletes as part of government efforts to tout the safety of produce from the area and its strict safety controls. The Japanese embassy in Seoul began posting the radiation levels last week, showing figures for two cities in Fukushima prefecture along with levels in Tokyo and Seoul.

The latest post shows the level in Fukushima City was 0.135 microsieverts per hour, a similar reading to 0.120 in Seoul. The level in Fukushima prefecture's Iwaki City, 30 kilometers away from the plant, was 0.060, while in Tokyo, more than 200 kilometers away, it was 0.036. Iwaki was chosen because it is the most populated city close to the Daiichi plant, according to the foreign ministry. The posts use data taken by radiation monitoring authorities in both countries as well as by local offices in Fukushima.

One microsievert is a thousandth of a millisievert, and the observed levels translate into a yearly dose of a maximum 1.182 millisieverts in Fukushima City and 1.051 millisieverts in Seoul. The worldwide average annual dose from natural background radiation is about 2.4 millisieverts, according to a UN report. For the general public, the International Commission on Radiological Protection recommends a yearly limit of 1 millisievert above exposure from natural background radiation. — AFP

## Gatecrashers? UN sees Venezuelan dueling delegations

**UNITED NATIONS:** Virtually all countries sent diplomats to the United Nations for the General Assembly, but Venezuela was a special case-it had two delegations, each dueling for recognition. Neither President Nicolas Maduro nor opposition leader Juan Guaido—who is recognized as interim president by more than 50 countries including the United States—came to New York for the world's biggest annual summit, but both had teams working the hallways.

Maduro's government, which is backed by Russia and China, retains the UN seat and Venezuela's official delegation was led by Vice President Delcy Rodriguez and Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza. But Guaido's forces were also at the United Nations, including his foreign affairs chief, Julio Borges. Guaido's representatives "go around the United Nations like ghosts," Arreaza told reporters. "Nobody invited them," he said. "We have a word for them in Venezuela that is very clear-gatecrashers. They are gatecrashers here."

Arreaza said that the opposition envoys managed to get into the UN headquarters by being accredited by other Latin American countries, which he called "the most absurd thing." Rodriguez said that Maduro was legally the president. Guaido argues that he is the de jure president as he heads the elected National Assembly, which has rejected the legitimacy of a presidential vote last year that gave Maduro a new term and was widely alleged to have irregularities.

UN chief Antonio Guterres, while saying the world body had dialogue with both sides, had ruled out meeting Guaido's team. Guaido's envoys were nonetheless able to keep a busy diplomatic schedule. They met with US President Donald Trump and representatives of more than 20 countries in Latin America. Guaido's team was seeking more pressure including targeted sanctions to oust Maduro, who presides over a crumbling economy that has caused millions of people to flee.

Borges, Guaido's top diplomat, said there was a strong contrast between the reception of the two delegations. "Nobody wanted to receive them," Borges said of Maduro's representatives at a press conference at the Venezuelan consulate in New York—which is a short walk from Venezuela's UN mission but administered by Guaido's team. "In halls full of ministers and presidents, Arreaza was a sorry sight, chasing them and seeing if he could take furtive photos," Borges said as a handful of pro-Maduro demonstrators chanted outside the consulate.

He said that Arreaza's meetings involved nations that are "toxic" or ministers whom the foreign minister "ambushed" for photos he could post on social media. On Twitter, Arreaza posted pictures or videos of himself meeting the presidents of Iran and Turkey, the prime minister of Pakistan, and the foreign ministers of China, Spain, The Netherlands, Uruguay, Belize, South Sudan and Nepal. Spain's foreign minister, Josep Borrell, met with both sides. Spain has taken a leading role on Venezuela, and Borrell soon takes over as the European Union's foreign policy chief. — AFP



**NEW YORK:** Vice President of Venezuela Delcy Rodriguez holds up a photo of Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido with a suspected member of the paramilitary group 'Los Rastrojos' as she addresses the United Nations General Assembly in New York. — AFP