



Social media outrage; Pakistan official buys burqas for students

UAE lifts Lebanon travel ban; Beirut seeks support for ailing economy



LAHORE: A boy shows a placard supporting Kashmir as supporters and activists of Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan walk during a Kashmir Azadi ('Freedom for Kashmir') march in Lahore. —AFP

The transported: Kashmiri prisoners sent far away

Authorities moving hundreds of Kashmiri prisoners across India

SRINAGAR: One is a 19-year-old construction worker charged with aiding militants against Indian troops, the other is one of Kashmir's most prominent lawyers, accused of being "an incorrigible secessionist". Despite their different backgrounds, Uzair Maqbool Malik and Nazir Ahmad Ronga have something in common: they are among hundreds of people who have been detained without trial by Indian authorities following a crackdown in the disputed region of Kashmir and moved to jails far from home.

India's portion of the Kashmir Valley - a Muslim-majority territory also claimed by Pakistan - has been under lockdown since the region's statehood and autonomy were revoked on Aug. 5. Authorities have cut off mobile communications in the valley and detained nearly 4,000 people, many of whom have since been released, according to the government. At least 300 people have been arrested under the Public Safety Act (PSA), which allows for detentions of up to two years without trial, the government said. Most have been sent to jails across the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

Many are young men like Malik, a high-school dropout who works in construction. But there are others like Ronga, a former head of the bar association in Kashmir, and dozens of other lawyers, academics and leaders of political parties. Indian officials say the policy of transporting detainees, which started last year but has snowballed since August, is required to cut off militants from their networks.

The transportations are often conducted without warning, and families say they are allowed little contact with detainees once they find them. Proving innocence is difficult even for those with resources given the communications situation in Kashmir and the number of cases. Sanjay Dhar, the registrar general of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court, said two judges in Kashmir's main city of Srinagar were handling around 300 appeals against PSA detentions filed since Aug 5.

Accused of aiding militants

Malik, 19, grew up in Shopian, a town of around 16,000. As a child, he was friends with two boys who joined a militant group fighting Indian rule in Kashmir, a rebellion that has claimed tens of thousands of lives. That childhood association forms the basis of the case against him, according to court documents. In the documents, Malik is accused of assisting the two militants "in letter and spirit" and giving them "logistic support". They also say he participated in protests and an operation against security forces, between February 2018 and July 2019. "You not only yourself indulge in stone pelting but instigate others," one document said.

Malik's family denies the charges and say he has not seen the boys who joined the militants since they left. They said he participated in protests in 2016 and was hit in the eye by a metal pellet fired by security forces, partially blinding him. Malik dropped out of school and his family had to sell land to pay for surgery. "He hasn't done anything since," his mother, Haseena Malik, said. "He has made no mistake."

Dilbag Singh, chief of police for Jammu and Kashmir, said people detained under the PSA had been involved in subversive and terrorist activities, or disturbing public order. "All required procedural requirements under law are followed while executing detentions under PSA," he said. Singh said some individuals had been moved due to lack of space in Kashmir's jails. He said authorities were "checking the specific details" regarding the detentions of Malik and Ronga but had no additional information on their cases.

Faraway jail

For almost two weeks after he was arrested, Malik's family visited him twice a day, and officers repeatedly told them he would be released soon. But he was abruptly moved to the central jail in Srinagar, 50 kilometers away. When his family went to check on him, they were told he had been moved to a jail in Agra, in Uttar Pradesh, with 84 other

Kashmiris. The jail is one of at least six facilities in Uttar Pradesh where Kashmiris have been moved, officials said.

Reuters followed several families, including the Maliks, as they travelled to Agra last month to visit detained relatives. Around a dozen relatives and friends of four men held in Agra said they were not informed about the transfers, and that prohibitive travel costs and limited visiting hours meant they had little contact with those detained. On Sept 17, Malik's father, Mohammed, and his brother Danish managed to meet him after waiting for several hours. "He isn't scared," Danish said, adding that he was being treated well. "He was telling us not to worry, to take care of the family."

Legal wrangle

Even influential Kashmiris like Ronga, a 67-year-old criminal lawyer who once headed the Jammu and Kashmir High Court Bar Association, have been targeted in the crackdown. He was detained in Srinagar on Aug 9. Ronga was detained to help prevent "violence, strikes, economic adversity and social indiscipline" according to court documents laying out his detention order. He was briefly detained at a local police station, before being transferred to Srinagar's central jail. It took his son Umair Ronga, who is also a lawyer, a week to find him. In the court documents, dated Aug 17, Ronga is described by magistrates as "an incorrigible secessionist".

His son denies the charges. His father once represented Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, a prominent separatist, but has no political links with his organization, the Hurriyat Conference, he said. But he was involved in pursuing cases related to the region's status in India's Supreme Court, Umair Ronga said. "We were vocal in the Supreme Court of India, not on the roads," he said. "That is not a crime." On Sept 3, Umair returned to the Srinagar jail and found his father had been moved to a jail in Uttar Pradesh. "He has always advocated the rule of law and the supremacy of the judiciary," he said. "Now, the same system is being used against him." —Reuters

Bangladeshi shaved his wife's head after finding hair in food

DHAKA: A Bangladeshi who forcibly shaved his wife's head after finding a hair in his breakfast has been arrested, police said yesterday, as rights groups warned violence against women was rising in the conservative Muslim nation. Police raided a village in the northwestern district of Joypurhat and arrested Bablu Mondal, 35, after villagers told officers about the incident. "He found a human hair on the rice and milk breakfast his wife prepared for him," local police chief Shahrir Khan said. "He became angry seeing the hair and blamed the wife. He then took a blade and forcibly shaved the head of the wife," he said. Khan said Bablu was charged with "voluntarily causing grievous hurt", an offence that carries a maximum sentence of 14 years in jail, and also for "outraging the modesty" of his 23-year-old wife. Activists say the incident highlights growing repression of women in Bangladesh despite laws to protect them from abuse and sexual assault.

According to local rights group Ain o Salish Kendra, there were an average three rapes a day in the first six months of the year. The organization said of the 630 women raped between January and June, 37 were killed after the assault while seven others took their own life. There were also 105 instances of attempted rape. In April, massive protests broke out after a 19-year-old schoolgirl was burned to death on the orders of her headteacher after she reported him for sexually harassing her. —AFP

A paralyzed man walks again with exoskeleton

PARIS: A French man paralyzed in a night club accident can walk again thanks to a brain-controlled exoskeleton in what scientists say is a breakthrough providing hope to tetraplegics seeking to regain movement. The patient trained for months, harnessing his brain signals to control a computer-simulated avatar to perform basic movements before using the robot device to walk.

Doctors who conducted the trial cautioned that the device is years away from being publicly available but stressed that it had "the potential to improve patients' quality of life and autonomy". The man involved, identified only as Thibault, a 28-year-old from Lyon, said the technology had given him a new lease of life. Four years ago that life changed forever when he fell 12

meters from a balcony while on a night out, severing his spinal chord and leaving him paralyzed from the shoulders down.

"When you're in my position, when you can't do anything with your body... I wanted to do something with my brain," Thibault said on Thursday. Training on a video-game avatar system for months to acquire the skills needed to operate the exoskeleton, he said he had to "relearn" natural movements from scratch. "I can't go home tomorrow in my exoskeleton, but I've got to a point where I can walk. I walk when I want and I stop when I want."

Cervical spinal cord injury leaves around 20 percent of patients paralyzed in all four limbs and is the most severe injury of its kind. "The brain is still capable of generating commands that would normally move the arms and legs, there's just nothing to carry them out," said Alim-Louis Benabid, professor emeritus at Grenoble and lead author of the study published Friday in *The Lancet Neurology*.

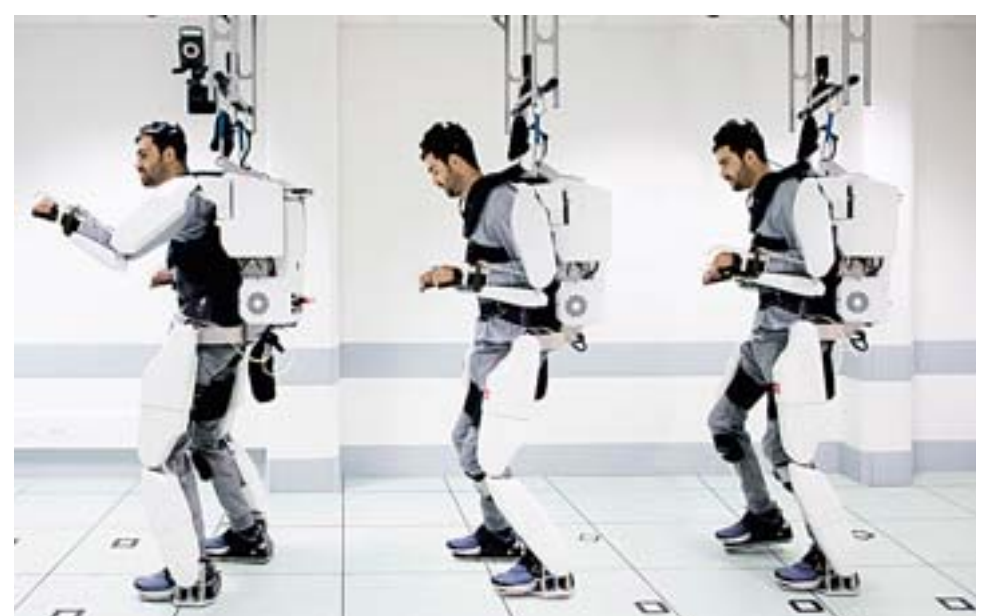
A team of experts from the Hospital of Grenoble Alpes, biomedical firm Cinatech and the CEA research centre started by implanting two recording devices either side of Thibault's head, between the brain and the skin. These read his sensorimotor

cortex - the area that controls motor function. Each decoder transmits the brain signals which are then translated by an algorithm into the movements the patient has thought about. It is this system that sends physical commands that the exoskeleton executes.

Thibault used the avatar and video game to think about performing basic physical tasks such as walking, and reaching out to touch objects. Using the avatar, video game and exoskeleton combined, he was able to cover the length of one and a half football pitches over the course of many sessions.

'Repaired not augmented man'

Several previous studies have used implants to stimulate muscles in patients' own bodies, but the Grenoble study is the first to use brain signals to control a robot exoskeleton. Experts involved in the research say it could potentially lead to brain-controlled wheelchairs for paralyzed patients. "This isn't about turning man into machine but about responding to a medical problem," said Benabid. "We're talking about 'repaired man', not 'augmented man'. In a comment piece on the study, Tom Shakespeare from the London School



GRENOBLE: This handout combination of photographs shows French tetraplegic 'Thibault' as he stands while wearing an exo-skeleton at The University of Grenoble in Grenoble. —AFP

of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine said the exoskeleton system was "a long way from usable clinical possibility". But Thibault

said the trial offered a "message of hope to people like me". "This is possible, even with our handicap." —AFP