



Afghan voters defy attacks, delays to choose president

Mugabe burial underway in rural Zimbabwe home



KADUNA: Some of the 300 male students of 'different nationalities' are pictured in the Rigasa area of Kaduna in northern Nigeria after being rescued by police from an Islamic seminary where they were tortured and sodomized. — AFP

'Abused' captives freed from Islamic school

Over 300 students tortured and sexually abused

KADUNA: Police in the northern Nigerian city of Kaduna have rescued more than 300 male students being held at an Islamic school where many had been tortured and sexually abused, a police spokesman said yesterday. Officers raided a building in the Rigasa area of the city on Thursday where the victims including adults and minors were kept in "the most degrading and inhuman conditions in the name of teaching them the Koran and reforming them", Kaduna state police spokesman Yakubu Sabo told AFP.

"We found around 100 students including children as young as nine, in chains stuffed in a small room, all in the name of reforming them and making them responsible persons," Sabo said.

The school which has been operating for a decade, enrolled students brought by their families to learn the Koran and be rehabilitated from drug abuse and other illnesses, police said.

The proprietor of the school and six staff were arrested during the raid.

Victims at the facility were found padlocked to car hubcaps and had their hands and feet chained. Others bore scars down their backs.

"The victims were abused. Some of them said they were sodomized by their teachers," Sabo stated.

Police had been tipped off by complaints from local

residents who became suspicious of what was happening inside the school.

During the raid on the school, police said they found a "torture chamber" where students were chained, hung and beaten.

Local police chief Ali Janga said that despite its claims to be an educational institution, the conditions proved that the facility was "neither a rehab (centre) or an Islamic school".

Those held there "were used, dehumanised, you can see it yourself", Janga said. Private Islamic schools are common in mainly Muslim northern Nigeria, where government services are often lacking.

'Severe punishment'

One inmate quoted by Nigerian media described horrific conditions and treatment at the facility.

"I have spent three months here with chains on my legs," 42-year-old Bello Hamza said, adding that he was meant to be in South Africa studying for his Masters degree.

"This is supposed to be an Islamic centre, but trying to run away from here attracts severe punishment; they tie people and hang them to the ceiling for that."

Another victim Hassan Yusuf told AFP that he had been sent to the centre two years ago because he had

converted to Christianity.

"They keep you incommunicado, you can't talk to anybody," the married father said.

Television footage showed emaciated children being loaded into minivans and driven away for processing.

Police said the victims were of varying nationalities and that some had been brought from countries in the region including Burkina Faso, Mali and Ghana. The victims were taken to a camp on the outskirts of Kaduna where their identities were being documented to determine where they came from and to contact their families. Parents of some of the victims from within the city, contacted by police were "shocked and horrified" when they saw the condition of their children, as they had no idea what was happening inside the school.

Parents were allowed to visit their children every three months, but only in select areas of the premises. "They were not allowed into the house to see what was happening... the children are only brought to them outside to meet them," Sabo said. "All they thought was their children are being taught the Quran and good manners as they looked subdued," he added. One of the men allegedly running the facility insisted to local television channels that the centre was simply teaching Islamic studies and that those chained up "were the stubborn ones who attempt to run away". — AFP



KADUNA: A boy shows his marks of torture pictured in the Rigasa area of Kaduna in northern Nigeria where 300 male students of 'different nationalities' were rescued by police. — AFP

Trump launches a counter-attack

WASHINGTON: Facing the threat of impeachment, US President Donald Trump has launched a ferocious counter-attack with the help of Republican loyalists in Congress, media allies and a stream of angry tweets. Veering wildly between rage, defiance and self-pity, Trump is seeking to undo the political damage from asking Ukraine's leader to conduct an investigation into his potential 2020 Democratic rival Joe Biden, and a possible White House cover-up. "We're at war," the 73-year-old president declared.

For the coming fray, Trump has enlisted his allies in Congress and the media to try to shift the focus away from any wrongdoing by him and on to Biden and his son, Hunter, who served on the board of a Ukrainian gas company while his father was vice president. A list of White House talking points to Republican supporters in Congress for responding to the fallout from the Ukraine scandal launched by an anonymous whistleblower was accidentally emailed to Democratic lawmakers this week.

The document listed "myths" and "facts" that Republican lawmakers should address when publicly discussing the July 25 call between Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky that prompted the Democratic-led House of Representatives to launch an impeachment inquiry for abuse of power. "The real scandal here is that leaks about a second-hand account of the President's confidential telephone call with a foreign leader triggered a media frenzy of false accusations against the president," it said.

"The president didn't do anything wrong," said Mark Meadows, a Republican congressman from North Carolina, in a clip from an interview on Fox Business Network retweeted by Trump. Andy Biggs, a Republican congressman from Arizona, in another clip retweeted by Trump

from an interview with Fox Business, said the treatment of the president by Democrats is "outrageous." "Their real motive is to affect the election next year," Biggs said.

Trump sought to turn the Ukraine scandal to his electoral advantage on Friday, repeating unsubstantiated allegations against the Bidens in an ad for his 2020 reelection campaign. "Joe Biden promised Ukraine \$1 billion if they fired the prosecutor investigating his son's company," a narrator intones ominously as eerie music plays in the background. "But when President Trump asks Ukraine to investigate corruption the Democrats want to impeach him and their media lapdogs fall in line," the narrator says. "They lost the election. Now they want to steal this one."

'Presidential harassment'

The accusations against the Bidens have been pursued for months by Rudy Giuliani, Trump's personal lawyer, and the US president asked Zelensky to "look into" them with the former mayor of New York. The charge is that Joe Biden sought the removal of Ukraine's top prosecutor to shield his son from a corruption probe into the gas company where Hunter Biden held a lucrative position on the board.

But Hunter Biden has not been officially accused of any wrongdoing and by all accounts Joe Biden sought the dismissal of the prosecutor because the US, Western European countries and the IMF all believed he was not tough enough on corruption. The White House narrative on Trump and Biden has been echoed by Fox talk show hosts sympathetic to the president, but not by everybody on the news side.

"The spinning that's been done by the president's defenders over the last 24 hours since this very damaging whistleblower complaint came out—the spinning is not surprising, but it is astonishing and I think deeply misleading," Fox News anchor Chris Wallace said Friday. "To dismiss this as a political hack seems to me to be an effort by the president's defenders to try to make nothing out of something and there is something there," Wallace said. — AFP

Police tighten restrictions in Indian Kashmir

SRINAGAR: Authorities in Indian Kashmir tightened restrictions on people's movements yesterday to prevent possible protests following a speech by Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan. In an address to the United Nations General Assembly on Friday, Khan warned of a bloodbath once India lifts its restrictions in Kashmir, which have been in force since it revoked the region's decades-old autonomy in August and detained thousands of people.

Soon after the speech, hundreds of Kashmiris came out of their homes, shouting slogans in support of Khan late on Friday night and calling for the independence of Kashmir. Muslim-majority Kashmir has long been a flashpoint between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, which have fought two of their three wars over the divided territory. Both countries rule parts of Kashmir while claiming it in full.

Yesterday, police vans fitted with speakers made public announcements in some parts of Srinagar about movement restrictions, while additional troops were deployed to prevent protests, according to officials and two witnesses. The troops also blocked access to the main business centre of Srinagar with razor wire. "This was necessitated after protests across Srinagar city last night soon after Imran Khan's speech," said a police official, who declined to be identified.

Two Indian officials said six militants and one Indian soldier had been killed in two separate incidents in the state, two officials said. Three militants were killed in Ganderbal, about 12 miles north of Srinagar, according to one of the officials, who

declined to be named. Another three were killed in Batote, located on the highway connecting Jammu and Srinagar. Indian defense spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Devender Anand said.

'Inhuman curfew'

India's crackdown as it revoked Kashmir's special status was accompanied by severe restrictions on movement, as well as disconnection of telephone services. Though New Delhi has eased some of the movement curbs, no prominent detainees have been freed and mobile and internet connections remain suspended. While warning of the consequences of lifting what he described as an "inhuman curfew," Pakistani premier Khan demanded India do so and free all detainees.

In some areas in Kashmir—including the Soura region near Srinagar which has witnessed protests in the past against India's decision—people clashed with security forces by pelting stones on Friday night, forcing police to use tear gas to disperse them, said the Indian official. Khan addressed the United Nations a day after the senior US diplomat for South Asia called for a lowering of rhetoric between India and Pakistan, while saying that Washington hoped to see rapid action by India to lift restrictions it has imposed in Kashmir and the release of detainees there.

India kills 4 militants

Meanwhile, security forces killed four militants in Indian-administered Kashmir yesterday, police said, as the disputed Muslim-majority territory simmers under a lockdown imposed by New Delhi after it revoked its constitutional autonomy in August. Three militants were killed in the Batote market area of Jammu where, according to officials, they had taken a local civilian hostage inside his house. The hostage was rescued unharmed, a spokesman for the central reserve police force told journalists. — Agencies