

International

4 dead as deadly violence erupts in Bangladesh over 'desecration'

Hindu temples vandalized

DHAKA: Bangladesh police shot dead four people as hundreds vandalized several Hindu temples across the Muslim-majority country, police said yesterday. Police opened fire on a mob of over 500 people late Wednesday following furor over footage of a Quran being placed on the knee of a figure of the Hindu god Hanuman during a religious festival.

In the main incident, the mob attacked a Hindu temple and clashed with police in the southern town of Hajiganj, leaving four dead and nearly two dozen injured, including 15 police officers, local police chief Milon Mahmud told AFP. A police inspector confirmed the four were shot dead. Police said the local magistrate had ordered a ban on gatherings in the area and seven people had been arrested.

Bangladesh's government ordered a probe into the violence, saying in a statement that anyone involved would be punished and asking people to maintain order: "The government has urged everyone to keep religious harmony, peace and security". Another Hindu temple was attacked in the eastern district of Comilla, where the alleged desecration of the Islamic holy book took place, police inspector Monir Ahmed told AFP. "The situation is peaceful now. Hundreds of policemen, elite Rapid Action Battalion and the border guards have been deployed," he said, adding at least 40 people had been arrested.

Police also clashed with hundreds of people in the northeastern town of Zakiganj after a crowd gathered in the town centre to protest. "Several people and a couple of police officers were injured. The mob attacked and vandalized police and local administrators' cars. We have deployed extra police," deputy police chief Lutfar Rahman said. Mass-circulated The Daily Star newspaper reported that idols of Hindu gods and temples were vandalized in two northern rural districts while authorities increased security in the southern city of Chittagong, which is home to a sizable Hindu population.

Hindus, who make up some 10 percent of Bangladesh's 169 million population, have faced sporadic violence in recent years, often sparked by rumors spread on social media. Mobs



COMILLA: A vandalized temple is seen in Comilla yesterday, after hundreds vandalized several Hindu temples across the Muslim-majority country. — AFP

vandalized at least five Hindu temples and attacked property in 2016 over a Facebook post mocking one of Islam's holiest sites. Over the past week, the community has been celebrating

their largest annual festival, the Durga Puja, which culminates with devotees immersing the idol of the goddess Durga in a river on Friday. — AFP

Taiwan building inferno kills 46, dozens injured

TAIPEI: An overnight fire tore through a building in the southern Taiwanese city of Kaohsiung yesterday, killing 46 people and injuring dozens of others in the island's deadliest blaze in decades. The fire broke out in the 13-storey, mixed-use building in the small hours of yesterday morning, according to officials, raging through multiple floors before firefighters finally got it under control.

Pictures published by Taiwan's official Central News Agency showed smoke billowing out of the building's windows as firefighters desperately tried to douse the flames using extendable hoses. Kaohsiung's fire department said it sent more than 70 trucks to tackle the blaze, which took four hours to put out.

As daylight broke the sheer scale of the fire became clear, with every floor of the building visibly blackened and most of its windows shattered. The fire department said the blaze "caused 41 injuries and 46 deaths", officials adding that most of the fatalities occurred on floors seven to 11, which housed residential apartments. The first five floors were for commercial use, but were unoccupied. Residents reported hearing a number of loud noises when the fire first broke out on the lower floors.

"I heard many loud bangs—'bang, bang, bang'—on the ground

floor and came down to investigate," an unidentified man who lived in the building told Formosa TV. "That's when I realized there was a fire and called the police," he added. An unnamed female survivor, describing the scene on her floor, said: "When I opened the door to get out, the hallway was full of black smoke." A constable at the Kaohsiung police department told AFP the building was 40 years old and mostly occupied by low-income residents. Survivors had estimated about 100 people lived in the apartment block, the constable added, giving only his surname Liu.

Officials had not yet ruled out arson, he added. Forensics teams were on site and further searches of the building were planned before sunset. The fire looks set to be Taiwan's deadliest in years. The last fire of a similar magnitude was in 1995, when 64 people perished inside a packed karaoke club. As an island frequently battered by earthquakes and typhoons, Taiwan has strict building codes and a generally good safety record.

But there is often a gap between what the rules state and how safety standards are applied, especially in older buildings. Some of the highest death tolls in recent earthquakes have come when older buildings have collapsed, with subsequent investigations occasionally showing their designs were not up to code. Earlier this year 49 people were killed when a train hit a truck that had slid onto the tracks, in the island's worst railway disaster in decades. Subsequent investigations revealed government agencies had ignored repeated warnings that such an accident was possible on that particular stretch of mountainside track.— AFP

Woman, 77, found beheaded in France

MARSEILLE: French authorities have found the decapitated body of a woman aged 77 at her home in a southern resort, police said yesterday. A police source, who asked not to be named, told AFP that the authorities were not at this point looking at terrorism as an explanation and the case has not been referred to national anti-terror prosecutors. The body of the woman was found in the Mediterranean resort of Agde in the Hérault region of southern France, the police source said.

Police had visited her home after the woman's son raised concern he had not heard from her despite usually making daily calls. He was also connected to her home via video link and said he had seen a shadow on the ground. According to another source, the victim's head was on a table next to the body. There was no sign of a break-in, the outside gate was closed and the front door of the house unlocked. There were no immediate further details and police did not at present favor one particular theory over what happened, police said — AFP