

Drone war on farmers' march to New Delhi unfolds live on TV

Protesters demand government ensure minimum crop prices

Protesting Indian farmers attempting to reach the capital New Delhi clashed with security forces for a second day on Wednesday, with drones being used to drop tear gas shells, television images showed.

Hundreds of farmers, travelling on trucks and trolleys loaded with food, bedding and other supplies, began marching towards Delhi on Tuesday morning after talks between their unions and the government failed to yield a commitment regarding minimum prices for a range of crops.

The protesters were stopped by security forces at the Shambhu border that divides Punjab and Haryana — the northern states to which most of the protesters belong — almost 200 km from their destination.

"We want the prime minister to come forward and speak to the farmers," Sarwan Singh Pandher, general secretary of the Punjab Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee, told Indian news agency ANI.

The government, meanwhile, appealed to farmers to come forward and have a discussion on the matter.

"Efforts will continue to speak to farmers' unions in a constructive and positive manner," Agriculture Minister Arjun



UNREST: Farmers, who are marching towards New Delhi to press for the better crop prices promised to them in 2021, run for cover amid tear gas fired by police to disperse them at Shambhu, a border crossing between Punjab and Haryana states, India. Picture: REUTERS/ STRINGER

Munda told reporters on Wednesday.

A similar year-long protest in 2021 by farmers, a powerful voting bloc, had pushed the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government to repeal some farm laws and promise to find ways to ensure support prices

for all farm produce. Farmers say the government has been slow on fulfilling the latter promise.

The latest protests come with the country months away from a national election where Modi will seek a third term. ANI images showed tight se-

curity arrangements in other areas bordering the national capital as well, with rows of barricades and cement blocks topped with wire meshing, and empty containers lying ready for use as physical barriers.

Other images showed security forces in anti-riot gear

standing ready to be deployed.

Haryana has also suspended mobile internet services, bulk messaging, and dongle services in several parts of the state until Thursday night, fearing these may be misused to spread "inflammatory material" and "false rumours." — Reuters

Iran cries foul as main gas pipe line hit by two explosions

Two explosions along Iran's main south-north gas pipeline network on Wednesday were caused by sabotage, the Iranian oil minister told state TV, without naming any suspects.

Authorities also denied reports that the incident caused gas cuts to industries and offices in some provinces, state media reported.

"This terrorist act of sabotage occurred at 1am on Wednesday morning in the network of national gas transmission pipe

lines in two regions of the country," Minister Javad Owji said. Only villages near the damaged pipe line were experiencing gas outages, which will be fixed later today, Owji said.

Owji pointed to a similar incident which took place in 2011.

He said this was also an act of sabotage that caused temporary gas outages in four different regions in the country.

While such attacks are rare in Iran, Arab separatist militants

in Iran claimed in 2017 that they had blown up two oil pipe lines in co-ordinated attacks in the country's western Khuzestan province.

In December, Iran executed five people it accused of being saboteurs with links to Israel's Mossad intelligence service in a decades-long shadow war that has seen Tehran accuse Israel of attacks on its nuclear and missile efforts, charges the latter has never confirmed or denied. — Reuters

Myanmar gets ready for military callup as insurgency grows

Myanmar's ruling military plans to call up young people for mandatory service from April, as well as require retired security personnel to serve.

This is according to local media reports citing a junta spokesperson, as the army struggles to crush insurgency.

The Southeast Asian country has been in turmoil since the military seized power from an elected government in a 2021 coup and the junta's plans to call up more fighters points to a military under growing pressure.

Last Saturday, Myanmar's junta declared a law governing mandatory military service would be enforced for men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27 for up to two years. On Tuesday, it said this would begin in April.

"We are working to implement the conscription after the new year holiday in April," junta spokesperson Zaw Min Tun told BBC Burmese, referring to Myanmar's most important

holiday, known as Thingyan. He said medical checks would be conducted and each intake would number about 5,000.

Zaw Min Tun did not answer a phone call seeking comment, but state media MRTV also cited him as saying retired members of the security forces who had left within the past five years would also have to return to the army.

He did not specify how many would be called up nor the timing but said it would only include those "who were necessary."

A law mandating conscription was introduced in 2010 but had not been enforced. Those who fail to comply with the

draft face up to five years in prison, the legislation says.

The junta has not disclosed details about the military's strength, but analysts and a diplomat in Southeast Asia have said that it faces challenges in recruiting soldiers and has resorted to deploying non-combat personnel to the frontline.

Since October, the Tatmadaw, as the military is known, has suffered personnel losses while battling a co-ordinated offensive by an alliance of three ethnic-minority insurgent groups, allied with pro-democracy fighters.

Plans to call up more ordinary citizens are providing additional impetus for some to consider fleeing the conflict-torn country, media reports and social media posts show.

"It is really bad for our generation," said a 27-year-old company worker in Yangon who was trying to leave and declined to be named due to concerns about being targeted by authorities. — Reuters

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RESISTANCE: Soldiers stand next to military vehicles as people gather to protest against the military coup in Yangon, Myanmar. Picture: REUTERS/ STRINGER

Italian watchdog fines Amazon and BAT over misleading advertising

Italy's competition watchdog, AGCM, has fined British American Tobacco (BAT) and Amazon a combined €7m (R142.92m) over misleading advertising for heated tobacco products.

BAT was fined €6m (R122.46m) and Amazon €1m (R20.41m) for failing to provide sufficient information to consumers about the nicotine content and corresponding health risks from using the Glo Hyper X2 and Glo Hyper Air products, AGCM said.

Street and online advertising presented the products as "simple electronic devices" and "design objects", the regulator said.

"This is seriously misleading conduct that leads consumers to purchase a product that poses health risks and is prohibited for minors," it said.

Amazon strongly disagrees with the regulator's decision and plans to appeal against the

fine, a company spokesperson said.

"The description of our products includes references to age restrictions and health-related risks," the spokesperson said.

"We have worked closely with the AGCM throughout this case."

"We've made this information even clearer for customers to address the authority's concerns."

BAT's Italian business issued a statement saying it would appeal against the AGCM ruling.

"We have always provided adequate information that our products are only intended for adult smokers and that we adopt the highest standards of conduct to prevent underage use of any nicotine product," it said.

"We have co-operated with the Italian authorities and promptly adopted all required changes to our marketing practices."

BAT's Glo device, which is sold on Amazon's online platform, does not itself contain nicotine but is used with tobacco sticks that do include nicotine.

The Italian antitrust regulator launched its investigation in April 2023, accusing the two companies of not clearly stating that the heaters were for adults only and noting that they were marketed as "nicotine-free."

At the time, reporters found an Amazon offer for Glo Hyper X2 presenting the product as "the cigarette alternative, a smokeless and odour-free experience, nicotine-free."

An accompanying image had a "no under-18s" symbol.

The same product is now sold with the following warning: "Not for sale to minors."

"This product, when used with related tobacco or nicotine sticks, cartridges or refills is not risk-free and provides nicotine." — Reuters



30th

CELEBRATION OF A DEMOCRATIC STATE

34 YEARS OF NELSON MANDELA'S RELEASE FROM PRISON

Theme: The Triumphant Walk into a Dream of Rainbow Nation

VENUE FOR ACCREDITATION

VENUE: MAKHENKESI STOFILE PUBLIC LIBRARY, DIKENI

DATES: 14-15th FEBRUARY 2024

TIME: 08h00 - 16h00

VENUE FOR ACCREDITATION

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DATES: 16th FEBRUARY 2024

TIME: 07h00 - 10h00

NELSON MANDELA ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

DATE: 15th FEBRUARY 2024

TIME: 15h00 - 18h00

VENUE: RAYMOND MHLABA MUNICIPALITY CHAMBERS, DIKENI

NELSON MANDELA RELEASE RALLY

DATE: 16th FEBRUARY 2024

TIME: 11h00

VENUE: NTSELAMANZI SPORTS GROUND, DIKENI



Featuring *Nathi Mankayi*

