

Tear gas, arrests in new anti-Macron demo in Paris

AFP, Paris

French police fired tear gas under a rain of projectiles and arrested dozens of people on Saturday as thousands of “yellow vest” anti-government protesters returned to the streets of Paris.

Demonstrators shouted slogans denouncing the police, President Emmanuel Macron and his pension reforms that have triggered the longest French transport strike in decades.

The night before Macron and his wife Brigitte had to be rushed briefly from a Paris theatre after protesters tried to burst in and disrupt the performance.

With sirens wailing, riot police drove across the French capital in dozens of vans Saturday to the route where thousands of protesters marched.

The police said 59 people had been arrested by the early afternoon.

There were further allegations of police violence after video footage shot by AFP-TV and others showed a young man, his face covered in blood, being arrested and beaten.

Young people wearing masks shouted “revolution” as tear gas drifted by the Bastille, the square where the French revolution erupted in 1789.

“The street is ours,” some protesters chanted. “Macron, we’re going to come for you, in your home.”

Saturday’s clashes came on the 45th day of a strike that has hit train and metro traffic and caused misery for millions of commuters in and around Paris in particular.

Trains are becoming more frequent however, and Paris’s metro drivers voted to suspend their action from today, their union UNSA announced Saturday.

The protests were also the latest of the weekly demonstrations held every Saturday by the yellow vest movement since November 2018, and which have been boosted by those opposed to the pension reforms.

“We’re suffocating with this government who wants to put us on our knees,” said Annie Moukam, a 58-year-old teacher among the protesters.

“It’s out of the question that he (Macron) touches our pensions. We have worked all our lives to be able to leave with a dignified retirement,” she added.

Macron’s reforms aim to forge a single pensions system from the country’s 42 separate regimes.

The various systems currently in place offer early retirement and other benefits to some public-sector workers as well as lawyers, physical therapists and even Paris Opera employees.

Critics say the reforms will effectively force millions of people to work longer for a smaller pension.

The transport unions have joined forces with the yellow vests, who accuse Macron of ruling on behalf of an urban elite while ignoring people in the provinces and the countryside, many of whom struggle to make ends meet.

The unions are looking for a second wind as their movement starts to flag, with the proportion of striking workers at national railway operator SNCF falling to less than five percent on Friday.

Snow shuts schools, delays flights in Iran capital

AFP, Tehran

Heavy snow covered the streets of Tehran yesterday, causing major flight delays and forcing the closure of schools, authorities in the Iranian capital said.

AFP correspondents said the snow started falling early in the morning and disrupted the flow of traffic on some of the city’s main highways.

“We knew that it would snow as of last night and that it naturally affects traffic,” head of Tehran’s traffic police Mohammadreza Mehmandar told state television.

“On some highways in the north (of Tehran) there was a bit of ice... and accidents were responded to quickly,” he added.

Schools in all the districts of Tehran city and some parts of the province were closed in both morning and the afternoon due to the heavy snowfall.

The snow dump caused long delays to flights to and from Tehran’s Mehrabad International Airport.

“Flights at Mehrabad will go ahead but with delays due to the lack of proper vision,” said Reza Jafarzadeh, spokesman for Iran’s aviation authority.

But flights were still going according to schedule at Imam Khomeini International Airport, also in Tehran, he added.

Snowfall is forecast to continue until today in Tehran and other northern provinces.



People react from tear gas fired by police to disperse the crowd gathered for the ‘universal siege on communists’ rally at Chater Garden in Hong Kong yesterday. Violence returned to Hong Kong’s streets with police firing tear gas to disperse crowds after a group of officers were beaten bloody by pro-democracy protesters.

PHOTO: AFP

India’s CAA unnecessary

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Jain, Parsi and Christians who have allegedly fled persecution from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan before December 2014.

Protests and violence have erupted across India since the enactment of the CAA and declarations by the Indian government that the National Register of Citizens (NRC) will be carried out nationwide.

The protesters say that the legislation is “unconstitutional and divisive” as it excludes Muslims.

The NRC has excluded more than 19.96 million people in Assam. To prove their citizenship, they can go to the court, but what happens if anyone fails to prove the citizenship is not clear.

Analysts have expressed fears that Indian Muslims who are unable to prove their citizenship claims will seek shelter in Bangladesh, reported The Gulf News on Saturday.

“[Still], it is an internal affair,” Hasina said, adding that India too has always maintained that the CAA and NRC are its internal matters.

“No, there is no reverse migration from India. But within India, people

are facing many problems,” Hasina also said.

Border Guard Bangladesh and police said, at least 329 people were arrested on charges of trespassing into Bangladesh from India in November and sent to jails in Jhenaidah and Jashore. The detainees claimed to be Bangladeshis, but could not provide any evidence to support their claims.

Following concerns that people were being pushed in to Bangladesh, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said Dhaka had sought information from Delhi on the Bangladeshi citizens living there illegally.

“If they [those who trespassed into Bangladesh] are not Bangladeshi citizens, we will send them back,” Momen said.

In December, he told reporters in Dhaka that India was always a tolerant country which believes in secularism.

There were speculations in the media that the India-Bangladesh relations were going through a rough patch as Foreign Minister Momen, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan and State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam postponed a visit to India.

They, however, said it had nothing

to do with the CAA and NRC.

PM Hasina told The Gulf News that the Bangladesh-India relationship was at its best and there was cooperation in a “wide spectrum of areas”.

She mentioned that about 1.2 million Rohingyas, who fled Myanmar, were living in camps in Cox’s Bazaar.

“The Rohingya crisis originated in Myanmar and the solution lies with them. But unfortunately, Myanmar is yet to take any meaningful step to address the core concerns of the Rohingya [on their] safe and dignified return.

“Two repatriation initiatives [so far have] failed as not a single Rohingya wants to go back voluntarily. It revealed that Myanmar did not succeed in creating an environment conducive for repatriation.”

Bangladesh cannot indefinitely shoulder the burden of providing for more than a million refugees, she said.

“If the problem persists, it may seriously affect the security and stability of the region. [This is why the] international community should remain [engaged] with the Rohingya issue until it reaches a sustainable solution.”

No harassment or arrest till hearing

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against Prothom Alo Editor and Publisher Matuir Rahman and nine others in the case. The court fixed February 24 for the next hearing in the case.

After the court proceedings, Aimrul Islam told reporters that the court was set to hear the petition yesterday afternoon but later fixed tomorrow [Monday] for the hearing due to time constraints.

Their petition is expected to be on the first part of the court’s cause list for today, he added.

Replying to a question as to why his clients sought bail directly from the High Court, the senior lawyer said, “The actions were taken at the lower court. We found those actions very

illogical. Without coming to the High Court, effective results would not have been attainable.

“Besides, the person was not at the spot and his father [Abar’s father] in writing requested the officer-in-charge that he would not file case in this regard. It was an accident. Even so the case has been filed. So, we think this is a mala fide prosecution,” he added

Abrar, a ninth-grader, was electrocuted during the anniversary programme of Prothom Alo’s youth magazine Kishor Alo on November 1 last year.

The charges brought against all the accused are under section 304(A) of Bangladesh Penal Code. The section deals with deaths caused by “rash or

negligent act”.

According to the section, a person may face up to five years in jail if charges are proven against him or her.

The victim’s father, Mojibur Rahman, filed the case with the Fourth Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate’s Court in Dhaka on November 6 last year.

In the complaint, Mojibur said his son was electrocuted and became unconscious around 4:30pm on November 1 last year while attending the programme of Kishor Alo.

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Md Aminul Haque took the case into cognisance and ordered the OC of Mohammadpur Police Station to submit an investigation report.

Ijtema ends seeking divine blessings

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and India, participated in this year’s congregation.

The first phase of the Biswa Ijtema this year was held from January 10 to 12.

Maulana Zubair Hassan, imam of the capital’s Kakrail mosque and leader of a faction of Tablighi Jamaat, conducted the Akheri Munajat of the first phase.

Followers of Maulana Saad Kandhalvi joined the second and last

phase of the Ijtema.

Law enforcers had beefed up security and restricted vehicular movement near the Ijtema ground since Saturday night ahead of the Akheri Munajat.

Police Commissioner of Gazipur Metropolitan Police Md Anwar Hossain said they had deployed 9000 police officials to ensure the security of the devotees.

Different government and charity organisations provided free treatment facilities for people at the Ijtema.

Rohingya man

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Mohammad Foysal Hasan Khan, commanding officer (CO) of BGB Battalion-2.

Around 3:00am, the team noticed that a boat carrying a group of people was crossing the Naf river into Bangladesh from Laldwip in Myanmar, the CO added.

The alleged smugglers, sensing the presence of law enforcement, started firing on the BGB men as they came closer to the shore, a BGB official said, adding that they retaliated with gunshots, triggering the gunfight that lasted around five minutes.

At one stage, three of the suspected drug smugglers jumped into the river and swam away toward the Myanmar border, CO Foysal said.

The BGB men later found a bullet-hit smuggler on the boat, he claimed. After providing him with primary treatment at the Teknaf upazila health complex, he was sent to Cox’s Bazar General Hospital, where doctors declared him dead, the BGB official added.

The team recovered around 2.2 lakh yaba pills, locally made firearms, and ammunition from the boat, he added.

Three border guards were also injured in the gunfight, the CO said.

Action prompt

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Mehedy Hasan, assistant commissioner, later told the correspondent that he had visited the spot and found evidence of encroachment and that he would soon submit a report to Barishal’s deputy commissioner soon.

DC SM Ajjar Rahman instructed the administration to conduct an immediate eviction drive. On Sunday afternoon, the district administration called our correspondent around 4:30pm.

“We are sending our people to the spot for eviction. We will appreciate if you send your men [photographer] there,” Hasan said over the phone.

This was a break from what is generally seen in a country where illegal grabbers often escape eviction drives.

Earlier on Saturday, the

correspondent found piling work of about 200 feet done in the river near Dhangobeshona Road in Barishal city.

The reporter also found workers constructing a wall using concrete blocks.

Locals said the river grabbing attempt started around two weeks ago by Raisul Kabir Swapon, a petrol pump owner in Rupatali bus stand area.

Swapon claimed his grandfather bought 60 decimals of land in 1954 and most of the land had been consumed by the river.

He said that he was protecting the remaining land from river erosion.

“It was not grabbing but rather an attempt to save our own property from river erosion.”

Swapon, however, was not around when the eviction drive was conducted, Hasan said.

PM to launch e-passports

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Border Control Management” -- is being implemented by German company Veridos GmbH in association with Bangladesh Army, under the Department of Immigration and Passports (DIP).

The biographical and biometric information of passport holders will remain safe in e-passport chip. The real information of the passport holders and facial recognition will be verified automatically within 30 seconds through digital signature, said the minister.

Bangladesh is the first country in South Asia to introduce the e-passport, said the home ministry.

fees for Bangladesh missions abroad.

E-passport application can be submitted online or manually after downloading the PDF form, and no one needs to attach any image or documents to it, said the home minister.

With the e-passport launch, 50 eGates will also be installed at 27 immigration check posts.

EGates are automated self-service barriers which use the data stored in the chip in biometric passports to verify identity.

Primarily, diplomatic and official passport holders, CIPs (Commercially Important Persons), tax card holders, and Bangladeshi pilot and crew

E-PASSPORT TENURE, DELIVERY TIME AND FEE				
PAGE NUMBER	TENURE	DELIVERY TIME		
		General (15 Day)	Urgent (07 Day)	Most Urgent (02 Day)
48 Page	05 Years	Tk 3,500	Tk 5,500	Tk 7,500
	10 Years	Tk 5,000	Tk 7,000	Tk 9,000
64 Page	05 Years	Tk 5,500	Tk 7,500	Tk 10,500
	10 Years	Tk 7,000	Tk 9,000	Tk 12,000
*15 Percent Vat applicable with the Fee				
*Most Urgent only applicable for Passport Re-issue				

There will be two types of e-passport with 48-page and 64-page, and their tenure will be five years and 10 years. It will need 15 days for delivering a general passport, while an urgent passport will be delivered in seven days.

In case of re-issue, applicants will get their passports within two days, said officials.

People living abroad will also get their e-passports within the same delivery period, but they will not be eligible for the most urgent facilities even for the re-issue service, they said, adding that the passport fees could be paid using debit and credit cards.

The government has fixed separate

members will be able to use the eGates, said officials.

In reply to a query, the home minister said digitalised identity cards were provided to Rohingyas and those were registered. It was not possible to get e-passports hiding information.

He said police verification was required to get an e-passport. But they were trying to complete it online to ease complications.

On July 19 in 2018, the DIP and German company Veridos GmbH signed an agreement for electronic passports. According to the project details, it is being implemented at a cost of Tk 4,569 crore.

Huthi rebels

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“The disgraceful actions of the Huthi militia without a doubt confirm its unwillingness to (achieve) peace, because it knows nothing but death and destruction and is a cheap Iranian tool in the region,” it quoted Hadi as saying.

The president also stressed the importance of increasing military vigilance “to foil hostile and destructive plans and maintain security and stability”.

The Huthis did not make any immediate claim of responsibility and the Saba report did not give a death toll.

The uptick in violence comes shortly after United Nations envoy Martin Griffiths welcomed a sharp reduction in air strikes and the movement of ground forces.

“We are surely, and I hope this is true and I hope it will remain so, witnessing one of the quietest periods of this conflict,” he said in a briefing to the UN Security Council on Thursday.

“Experience however tells us that military de-escalation cannot be sustained without political progress between the parties, and this has become the next challenge.”

A year after Yemen’s warring sides agreed to a UN-brokered truce for the key Red Sea port city of Hodeida and its surroundings, fighting in the province has subsided but the slow implementation of the deal

Ensure

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Mohammad Shamsuddin said Prothom Alo was an established and widely accepted newspaper. It would not have been possible for the accused to ignore a summons.

A summons would have been enough, he added.

On Saturday, Amnesty International South Asia said Bangladesh authorities must ensure that the trial against 10 people, including Matuir Rahman, follow due process.

“Authorities must therefore show restraint on any action that can amount to an attack on the freedom of expression in the country,” the international rights body said in a Facebook post.

has quashed hopes for an end to the conflict.

The landmark agreement signed in Sweden in December 2018 had been hailed as Yemen’s best chance so far to end the fighting that has pushed the country to the brink of famine.

Tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have been killed and millions displaced in the war that has ravaged the country, triggering what the UN describes as the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

Saudi Arabia and its allies intervened in the conflict to back the government against the Huthis in March 2015, shortly after the rebels seized control of Sanaa.

A senior UN official warned Thursday that certain key factors that threatened to trigger a famine in Yemen last year were once again looming large, including a plunge in the value of the national currency.

“With a rapidly depreciating rial and disrupted salary payments, we are again seeing some of the key conditions that brought Yemen to the brink of famine a year ago,” Ramesh Rajasingham, who coordinates humanitarian aid in Yemen, told the UN Security Council.

KSA deported

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they went to the Gulf country, he said. “Now, they are worried about their future,” he added.

Besides providing immediate support at the airport, Brac has also taken the initiative to provide the deportees with counselling, training and economic support so that they can change their fortunes here, Shariful said.

Urging the authorities concerned to stop sending workers under so-called “free visa”, he said recruiting agencies have to be responsible and the government as well as the mission has to verify the abuse allegations made by the deportees.

Referring to Prabashi Kalyan Desk’s data, the Brac official said about 64,638 Bangladeshi workers returned home last year and Saudi Arabia alone deported 25,789.