



Palestinian youths stand amidst teargas smoke during clashes with Israeli forces in a village south of Nablus in the occupied West Bank yesterday.

PHOTO:
AFP

China slams US for warship sailing in disputed waters

AFP, Beijing

Beijing yesterday accused the United States of a "provocative" act by sending a warship into disputed territorial waters in the South China Sea.

The USS McCampbell missile destroyer sailed near the Paracel Islands on Tuesday without authorisation, according to the People's Liberation Army.

The Paracel Islands are a chain of disputed islands and reefs in the South China Sea, claimed by China, Taiwan and Vietnam.

"Under the guise of 'freedom of navigation', the US has repeatedly flexed its muscles, been provocative and stirred up trouble in the South China Sea," PLA Southern Theatre Command spokesman Colonel Li Huamin said.

"This is a hegemonic act that violates international law, and ... threatens the peace and stability of the South China Sea."

PLA Navy forces tracked and identified the ship before warning it to leave, the statement said.

The US Navy 7th fleet confirmed the freedom of navigation operation. "Unlawful and sweeping maritime claims in the South China Sea pose an unprecedented threat to the freedom of the seas," said US Navy 7th fleet spokeswoman Commander Reann Mommensen in an emailed statement.

"By conducting this operation, the United States demonstrated that these waters are beyond what China can lawfully claim as its territorial sea, and that China's claimed straight baselines around the Paracel Islands are inconsistent with international law."

In recent years, Beijing has stepped up its territorial claims in the South China Sea by building numerous artificial islands and a heavy military presence, making it a flashpoint for geopolitical tensions.

Last tourists race home from virus-hit Italy

AFP, Florence

The only tourists outside Florence's majestic cathedral were a suitcase-laden couple rushing to leave Italy, where a nationwide virus shutdown is devastating an already fragile tourism industry.

"Everything's closed, we're going home," said German Alex Gross, 32, as his girlfriend nervously checked for updates on her phone. "That is, unless our flight gets cancelled."

Many holidaymakers had already made their escape when Italy started succumbing last month to COVID-19, which has killed 631 people there so far and infected over 10,000, mainly in the country's wealthy north.

It may be blue skies and sunshine from Sicily to the Alps, but the few remaining tourists now have two options: stay holed up in their hotels, relying on mini-bar snacks for dinner, or head home.

"We've had over 90 percent of bookings cancelled, even as far ahead as June," said Nicola, a hotel manager in Florence who did not want to give his last name.

"Though if we've not resolved the virus situation before then, empty rooms will be the least of our problems," he said.

From the Colosseum to the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the government has shuttered all museums and monuments, ordered restaurants and bars to close at 6pm, and told people to leave their homes only if strictly necessary until April 3.

Bangladesh-India friendship

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Bangladesh may not possess enough resources to present you but "we have endless love for you".

"We want to bid you farewell today with the love that we have, and please accept it," he appeals.

Bangabandhu, in his seven-minute speech, recalls with gratitude the all-out help, assistance and cooperation extended to the struggling people of Bangladesh for their liberation by the people, government and armed forces of India and says that the assistance "you have given to us has no parallel in history."

ICJ PREPARES REPORT ON ATROCITIES

The International Commission of Jurists on war crimes has prepared an extensive factual report on the atrocities committed by the Pakistan army in Bangladesh. Niall Macdermot,

secretary general of ICJ, today calls on Bangabandhu and informs him about the findings of the report. He also discusses the procedure for the trial of war criminals. Macdermot recalls the role played by the ICJ to save Bangabandhu from the clutches of Pakistan military junta by exerting international pressure on Pakistan.

Bangabandhu tells the secretary general that the Pakistan army destroyed everything, including the communication system and economy of the country. He urges that international public opinion should come forward to condemn the genocide in Bangladesh. He expresses the hope that the civilised people of the world will ensure that in the future no country suffers the kind of atrocities that the Pakistan army perpetrated on the people of Bangladesh.

RESIST ANTISOCIAL ELEMENTS

Bangabandhu fervently appeals to the people to rise as one and resist all antisocial elements, including smugglers and hoarders in the country. In a press statement issued today Bangabandhu calls upon the people to extend active cooperation to the border security forces, customs and other government agencies in their efforts to resist smuggling and hoarding throughout the country. The prime minister feels that people's committee should be formed in all border areas to mobilise public opinion against these culprits. He also expresses his concern over the sharp rise being registered in the prices of essential commodities as a result of smuggling and hoarding.

SOURCES: March 13, 1972 issues of Dainik Bangla, The Daily Ittefaq, Azad, Morning News, The Bangladesh Observer and Purbodesh.

Family files no-confidence

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maternal uncle of Rajib, filed the petition with the court of Metropolitan Magistrate Md Sarafuzzaman Ansary saying that the IO did not investigate the case properly.

Rajib lost his right hand after it got stuck between two speeding buses of the Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) and Sajan Paribahan while they were trying to overtake each other in the capital's Banglamotor area on April 3, 2018.

After two weeks in a coma, Rajib died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) on April 17.

The petitioner also alleged that the IO did not even interrogate the victim's paternal uncle Jakir Hossain, who submitted the FIR with Shahbagh Police Station on behalf of Rajib as he was under treatment.

The IO submitted the charge sheet against BRTC bus driver Wahid Ali Sardar, 35, and Sajan Paribahan's

Khorshed Alam, 50, on December 15 last year without informing the victim's family members and others involved with the incident.

That is why the case should be further investigated, Jahidul's petition said.

After recording the petitioner's statement, the court fixed April 1 for further hearing on the petition.

The IO submitted the charge sheet under section 304(b) of the Bangladesh Penal Code, which only gives a three-year jail term. But the offences the accused had committed should be under section 304, which gives imprisonment for life.

In his petition, Jahidul alleged that the IO brought charges against the accused under section 304(b) of Penal Code only to save them from the rigorous punishment.

Following a writ petition, the High Court on May 8, 2018, ordered the bus companies to pay Tk 1 crore to Rajib's family.

Biman braces for a bumpy ride

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be glad if it can pay the salaries, said the official.

Biman is now trying hard to cut costs, said another ministry official. Due to Saudi Arabia's ban on umra, Biman has lost several thousand potential passengers who were set to fly to Saudi Arabia.

Uncertainly looms over hajj as well. Hajj pilgrims are the main source of income for Biman. The company is scheduled to carry around 69,000 pilgrims to Saudi Arabia this year, Biman officials.

Prospective Bangladeshi hajjis so far showed lukewarm response to register for hajj, said Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh.

Biman Managing Director and CEO Mokabbir Hossain said the airliner has halved its international flights

as fewer people are flying due to the global coronavirus outbreak.

The national flag carrier suspended flights to several destinations.

"We have decided to reduce our weekly flights to 68 from 142 on 10 international routes amid the coronavirus outbreak," he said.

Apart from Biman, 12 other airlines operating from Dhaka have also cancelled 98 flights since January, sources at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport said.

Different airlines have started operating their flights with smaller aircraft instead of large wide-bodied ones.

As situation gets worse, many airlines reduced their number of regular flights too.

Around 28 airlines used to carry between 20,000 and 25,000

passengers to and from Dhaka airport each day. The number has significantly fallen in the last two months.

There are currently 119,711 confirmed cases and 4,351 deaths from coronavirus.

Global airlines industry may lose \$113 billion in sales if the coronavirus continues to spread, according to the International Air Transport Association. Just two weeks ago, the IATA had been expecting lost sales in the range of \$30 billion.

Airlines in Europe and Asia would bear the brunt of the pain, according to the IATA. Carriers in Asia Pacific could lose out on sales worth \$58 billion.

If the virus is contained soon, and economies around the world recover quickly, total industry losses could be limited to \$63 billion.

Left under open sky

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Jina Begum, who was diagnosed with tuberculosis a month ago, said she moved to the slum four months back with her day labourer husband and three children.

"My husband and I were outside when the fire broke out... We could not save anything. Everything was burnt to ashes -- my medical documents, Tk 8,500 and my children's books," said Jina, asking, "Where will we go now?"

Some affected people have taken shelter at the adjacent Islamia Government Primary School.

Lt Col Zillur Rahman, director (operations and maintenance) of Fire Service and Civil Defence headquarters, said they primarily identified three reasons -- short circuit

due to illegal power connections, gas leak and gas cylinder -- behind the fire.

He said the actual reason could be known after investigation.

A four-member body was formed to investigate the fire, and the committee was asked to submit its report within 10 days, said Zillur while talking to journalists on the spot.

ILLEGAL GAS, POWER CONNECTIONS Syndicates set up gas and power connection lines across the slum, said locals.

Galvanised iron pipes, plastic pipes and even rubber pipes were used for gas connections. Some were precariously hanging overhead inside the slum.

This correspondent found gas

burners were connected to those lines.

Some alleged that an unholy nexus of local influentials and some dishonest Titas Gas employees stole gas from the main transmission and distribution lines of the company.

Munirul Islam, deputy general manager of Titas Gas (zone 12), refuted the allegations and said people know who control those connections in exchange for money.

The tenants said they spent Tk 2,000 to Tk 3,000, including gas and electricity bills, for each room a month.

The shanties are owned by people who maintain close connections with local influentials. The owners have to pay a cut to the influentials, locals said.

Editors' Council

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defaming him in a story in which his name was not mentioned and no reference was made to him either directly or indirectly, said the statement.

The Parishad failed to understand why the lawmaker should take it upon himself to feel defamed when his name or any reference to him did not appear in any part of the report, it said.

What was done on social media by unknown users can in no way be attributed to Manabzamin, its Editor-in-Chief Matiur Rahman Chowdhury, or its reporter, it noted.

The Parishad considers the filing of the case as nothing more than an attempt to intimidate and harass the media and journalists in general. Such use of the Digital Security Act is part of the reason why Sampadak Parishad has been opposing the act from its inception, reads the statement.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International has urged the government to drop the case against Matiur Rahman Chowdhury and the 31 others.

"We call on the government to maintain restraint on further actions against the Manabzamin editor and 31 others and drop the case filed against them immediately," it said in a statement.

The case is a glaring example of how the law is being arbitrarily used against people by influential quarters and state agencies, including the police, the statement said.

"We are alarmed by the vague and overly-broad provisions within the Digital Security Act and the rigorous punishment that they entail for legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression," Amnesty said.

Bangladesh must decriminalise defamation and review the legislation so that it is in compliance with international human rights law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a state party, it said.

According to the statement, nearly 400 cases have been filed under the Digital Security Act with the cybercrime tribunal in the first 11 months since the legislation was passed in Bangladesh parliament in September 2018.

According to media reports, more than 200 cases have been dismissed for lacking sufficient evidence, it added.

In a statement yesterday, newly elected president and general secretary of Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) -- Quddus Afrad and Sajjad Alam Khan Topu -- also expressed concern over the filing of the case against the journalists.

Modi to join

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our part," Shringla said, adding that India will also provide a system in place so that the people injured in road accidents and face trauma can call a number and immediately have access to the ambulances, which would be available across the country.

He said India is also looking to inaugurate some of the projects implemented by Indian grants. Those include 15 kilometres of pavement in Rajshahi, a public library there, a renovated housing project for the city cleaners in Sylhet, and a girls' school in Khalishpur of Khulna.

Meanwhile, an official of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs said India will provide TATA Hexa cars to Bangladesh at the request of the Bangladesh military under a defence deal signed with Bangladesh in 2018.

It will be the first tranche of Indian equipment under the \$500 million line of credit extended by India.

The country is also working with Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries to control the spread of coronavirus.

Some 1,000 Indians remain quarantined at the moment.

Shringla said airports and borders will see more stringent efforts in place until the risks are cleared. "We are considering how we can combine our efforts, including the provision of technical assistance," he said.

Meanwhile, it has been decided that the two-day long special session

2 workers killed

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elsewhere by a tractor-trailer.

Quoting witnesses, the police official said when the tractor-trailer was being loaded with the mud, suddenly a portion of the piled mud fell on the four labourers around noon.

On information, officials of Joypurhat fire service went to the spot and rescued the injured and recovered bodies of the dead.

The injured were hospitalised.

Harvey Weinstein jailed

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as a serial predator who had manipulated women with promises of career advancement in Hollywood, coaxing them to hotel rooms or private apartments and then overpowering and violently attacking them.

Haley testified at the trial that Weinstein invited her to his home in 2006 after she had worked on one of his television productions, backed her into a bedroom, held her down on the bed and forced himself on her orally.

Mann told jurors that Weinstein raped her in a Manhattan hotel room in March 2013, about a month into what she described as an "extremely degrading" relationship with him that continued for several years after the attack. Mann called Weinstein a "Jekyll and Hyde" character, charming in public but prone to rage when they were alone.

Weinstein's lawyers argued during the trial that the six women who testified against him were reframing consensual encounters as assaults out of regret.

In Friday's filing, prosecutors listed more than a dozen accusations going back to 1978, when they said he sexually assaulted an employee of his Buffalo, New York-based music company in a hotel room.

Court documents unsealed on Monday included an email to Weinstein from his estranged brother, Bob Weinstein, telling him he belonged in hell.

"I deserve a lifetime achievement award," Bob Weinstein wrote in the November 2017 message, "for the sheer savagery and immorality and inhumanity, for the acts u have perpetrated."

Prosecutors portrayed Weinstein