

Vietnam vows tough measures to avert anti-China unrest

REUTERS, Hanoi

Vietnam yesterday vowed to thwart any new outbreak of violence after newly rioting devastated crucial manufacturing centres this week in an outpouring of rage over Chinese oil drilling in a disputed area of the South China Sea.

Vietnam's lead police investigator defended security forces widely blamed for failing to curb the unrest and said "illegal acts" would be not be tolerated, a day ahead of expected anti-China protests in its major cities.

Hoang Kong Tu told reporters the authorities would "strongly deploy measures in line with the law" and there would be no repeat of violence seen on Tuesday and Wednesday, when mobs went on the rampage in three provinces, targeting industrial parks crucial to Vietnam's economy and exports.

The violence was triggered by China's positioning of a \$1 billion oil rig in a part of the South China Sea claimed by Hanoi, a move described by the United States as provocative. It is the worst breakdown in ties between the two Communist neighbours since a short border war in 1979.

Crowds of thousands massed as rioters turned against Chinese workers and Chinese-owned businesses, smashing windows, gates and walls and

torching vehicles and factories. Taiwanese-owned firms were hit hard after being mistaken for being Chinese.

The trouble broke out on Tuesday in the south after nationalist rage boiled over during protests around the industrial parks near Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon.

Hundreds of Chinese and Taiwanese were forced to flee the country by plane or by bus into neighboring Cambodia.

Tu said two Chinese nationals were killed and 140 people wounded in the unrest.

A doctor at a hospital near one area of clashes said he had seen 21 dead bodies in central Ha Tinh province and an eyewitness to the fighting between Chinese and Vietnamese workers said she had seen at least 13 bodies. There were no reports of violence on Friday or Saturday.

Vietnam and China share close economic ties, worth \$50 billion of trade last year, but diplomatic relations are strained, with many Vietnamese harbouring deep resentment for what they see as a history of Chinese aggression.

China's Foreign Ministry on Saturday advised Chinese nationals to hold off from traveling to Vietnam and told its citizens in Vietnam to avoid leaving their premises.

China's public security chief urged Vietnam to take tough measures to

stem anti-China violence and punish rioters.

"We are strongly dissatisfied by the Vietnamese side failure to respond effectively to curb an escalation of the situation," state news agency Xinhua quoted Guo Shengkun as telling his Vietnamese counterpart during a phone conversation on Saturday.

Vietnamese authorities have also been criticised by affected businesses and workers for their response to the violence. Witnesses who spoke to Reuters said police arrived too late, or in insufficient numbers to prevent violence.

Tu insisted that was not the case.

"The police force has taken strong measures so that we have minimised the damage from what happened," he said. "We are always proactive, we are not passive, not slow."

Vietnam allowed rallies in its biggest cities a week ago in a rare move by police, which have reputation for thwarting demonstrations and arresting protesters, even though the country's constitution allows freedom of assembly. State media also reported the rallies extensively.

More protests were expected on Sunday and it was unclear whether the authorities would allow them.

Dang Quoc Khanh, assistant to Vietnam's Foreign Minister, said both countries had settled disputes diplomatically in the past and would seek to

Myanmar rally calls for charter change

AFP, Yangon

Thousands of people joined a rally in Myanmar's main city on Saturday to call for changes to a military-drafted constitution that bars opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi from becoming president.

The former political prisoner-turned-politician has been campaigning to amend the charter since she became a lawmaker two years ago.

The 2008 constitution blocks anyone whose spouse or children are overseas citizens from leading the country -- a clause widely believed to be targeted at the Nobel laureate, whose two sons are British.

It also ring-fences a quarter of the seats in parliament for unelected military personnel, leaving the army with a significant political role despite the end of outright junta rule.

Addressing a crowd at the rally in Yangon, Suu Kyi urged the military top brass as well as rank-and-file soldiers to support a petition campaign to amend the charter.

"I would like you all to consider whether getting more opportunities than ordinary citizens is really fair," Suu Kyi said.

China arrests 7 suspects linked to Xinjiang attack

AFP, Hong Kong

Chinese police have arrested seven people suspected of being linked to a deadly stabbing spree and explosion at a railway station in the restive Muslim-majority region of Xinjiang, state-run media said Saturday.

On April 30, the last day of a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to the region, attackers armed with knives and explosives carried out an attack at the southern railway station in Xinjiang's capital Urumqi, killing one person and wounding 79.

Two of the alleged assailants were also killed in the attack.

"Seven fleeing suspects were captured on May 14 by police in Xinjiang, and are being questioned in relation to the ongoing investigation," the Global Times daily reported in its Chinese edition Saturday.

There was no similar report in its English language edition, and no announcement by authorities confirming arrests.

Police had earlier identified one of the suspected attackers, Sedirdin Sawut, 39, originally from the south of Xinjiang.

Two of Sawut's brothers, together

with his wife and one of his cousins, were among those arrested, according to the report.

The seven suspects arrested by police this week were found "on a farm of the town of Changji, in the district of Jimsar, not far from Urumqi," the Global Times, which is close to the ruling Communist party, added.

Xinjiang, which borders Central Asia, is a vast semi-desert region rich in natural resources, where the mostly Muslim Turkic-speaking Uighurs are the main ethnic group.

It has been the site of a marked increase in violence over the past year, which Beijing has blamed on separatists and Muslim fundamentalists.

Rights groups say tensions are driven mainly by cultural oppression, intrusive security measures, and immigration by Han, China's ethnic majority, millions of whom have flocked to Xinjiang in recent decades.

The Uighurs claim they are harassed by the authorities, forgotten by the economic boom, and victims of severe political repression of their religion and culture.

One month on, Ukraine fails to rout rebels

AFP, Donetsk

Without even firing a shot, masked rebel gunmen overran a Ukrainian military headquarters in the main eastern city of Donetsk on Friday and swiftly declared they were in control.

After a couple of hours of what one local described as "negotiations", uniformed members of a National Guard special forces unit simply took off in a few trucks, leaving the building to the rebels.

Ukraine's military offensive against pro-Russian insurgents in the east, already a month old, has so far been a humiliating failure, with separatists now firmly in control of large swathes of the country's industrial heartland.

Despite its superior military firepower, the Ukrainian army is running into almost nightly confrontations

with well-armed insurgents barricaded in a dozen towns and cities.

It has lost at least a dozen men, seven of them this week in a single bloody ambush near the epicentre of the uprising in Slavyansk.

"The operation has proved to be ineffective because Ukrainian forces were not prepared," said military expert Mykola Sungurovsky.

Yaroslav Gonchar, deputy battalion commander of the Azov volunteer unit in the Ukrainian National Guard, pulled no punches in apportioning blame.

"At the local level, we faced betrayal by the police and the opposition of the local people, as well as the incompetence of those planning the operation," he said.

'NO REPEAT OF CRIMEA'

Ukraine's new leaders launched the

"anti-terrorist" operation on April 13 after gunmen sought to capitalise on Moscow's annexation of Crimea in March and began overrunning city halls, police stations and military barracks across the far east.

The army moved in with clear objectives -- to disarm the rebels, clear them from scores of occupied buildings and reestablish Kiev's authority over the region.

"We will not allow Russia to repeat the Crimea scenario in the east of Ukraine," interim President Oleksandr Turchinov has vowed.

But the human cost has been high, with the UN on Friday putting the number of dead in the southeast at 127 -- exceeding the toll from the bloodletting in Kiev earlier this year during pro-EU protests that saw the ouster of the corruption-stained Kremlin-backed

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No rule of law

FROM PAGE 1

Sweeping reforms were made in the electoral system while Huda was at the helm of the EC during the tenure of Fakhruddin Ahmed-led caretaker government.

The former CEC yesterday said the constitutional bodies have to be freed from politicisation, otherwise the country will go backwards.

"This situation is giving rise to characters like Nur Hossain," said Huda, referring to ward councillor Nur Hossain, the prime suspect for seven murders in Narayanganj.

The study conducted by a team of Centre for Policy Dialogue portrayed a bleak picture of the country's major political parties. Eminent political scientist Prof Rounaq Jahan led the team.

The study shows how lack of transparency in fund collection and expenditure, and absence of democratic practices within major political parties have constrained consolidation of democracy in the country.

It also made a set of recommendations for bringing about reforms in political parties.

Huda said political parties wouldn't make any move on their own to bring reforms within themselves.

"Pressure should be put on them constantly from outside [the parties] for bringing about reforms," said Huda, also a member of the Board of Trustees of Transparency International Bangladesh.

People know very well whom they should vote for. They can cast ballots freely if an election is held in a free, fair and acceptable manner, said Huda.

"Polls must be held for the sake of democracy. Nothing will happen without election. But it must be free, fair and acceptable to all," he added.

Several participants, including CPD Chairman Prof Rehman Sobhan and Water Resources Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud, said the EC had done a good job under his leadership.

The EC scaled new heights and set standards under Huda's leadership. The Huda-led commission gave rise to people's expectations that had earlier been dashed by a controversial EC headed by Justice MA Aziz.

The commission is mired in controversy again under the present CEC, Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmed. It held the controversial January 5 national election, and failed to conduct the upazila elections in a free and fair manner.

Asian women shy

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"In Singapore, the incidence rate is as high as 50 percent. In Bangladesh, where most women have more than five children, the rate is likely to be higher," he told a seminar on "Women Through The Ages" yesterday.

Seven Singaporean specialists presented lectures on different aspects of women's health, including osteoporosis, breast cancer, skin disease, irritable bowel syndrome, heart disease and depression, at the 16th Annual General Physician and Specialist Seminar, organised by the hospital at the Hotel Sheraton, Singapore.

Though a simple surgical procedure is available for treatment of urinary

incontinence, Dr Chong stressed the need for pelvic exercises to prevent such problems not only among married older women but also among young single women who regularly carry heavy loads.

Dr Bertha Woon, chairman of the organising committee of the seminar, said, "Women hold families together but they neglect themselves. Therefore, it is the doctors' duties to ask them questions and find out if they carry symptoms of a particular disease, so that it can be diagnosed earlier and treated effectively."

Doctors, health practitioners, hospital representatives and journalists from the South and Southeast Asian region were present at the

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Relief, but not much

FROM PAGE 1

Their names cropped up when Nazrul's father-in-law Shahidul Islam alleged that some officials of Rab-11 had killed Nazrul in exchange for Tk 6 crore from councillor Nur Hossain and his accomplices.

Tareque, who was the commanding officer of Rab-11, denies the allegation. During yesterday's court proceedings, he claimed the "Tk 6-crore story" is cooked up by the media.

He is son-in-law of Disaster Management and Relief Minister Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya.

None of the three has been made accused in the murder case filed by Nazrul's wife.

Although the arrest of the two brought some relief to the victims' families, a sense of insecurity prevails among the locals due to law enforcers' failure to capture any of the six accused in the case.

Meanwhile, 198 people, mostly neighbours and relatives of the victims, gave depositions at a public hearing arranged by a government probe committee for the third day.

More than 300 people showed up at the hearing, held at Siddhirganj Power Station in Narayanganj.

On April 27, Narayanganj panel mayor Nazrul Islam, his four aides and senior lawyer Chandan Sarker and his driver were kidnapped near Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah around the same.

Six bodies, including that of Nazrul and Chandan, were found floating in the Shitalakkhya river on April 30, and another was found the following day. The other victims are Swapan, Tajul Islam, Liton, Jahangir and Ibrahim.

Expressing satisfaction over the arrest of the two former Rab men, Nazrul's father-in-law, also known as Shahid Chairman, demanded immediate arrest of Nur, Rana and the other accused.

He also sought arrest of Syed Nurul Islam and Abdul Matin, the former superintendent of Narayanganj police and officer-in-charge of Siddhirganj Police Station, saying that they were very close to Nur Hossain and Nur could be arrested once they are arrested.

taken to the courtroom, locals hurled torrents of abuse.

The detainees were not in handcuffs then. After around 45 minutes of proceedings, police had to handcuff the two following lawyers' agitation.

No journalists were allowed to enter the courtroom during the proceedings. Reporters of The Daily Star, however, spoke to a number of lawyers who were present there.

Moving the remand petition, Additional Public Prosecutor KM Fazlur Rahman of Narayanganj said the statements of the victims' families and other evidence "primarily prove" involvement of Tareque and Arif in the crimes.

"They should be taken on remand for further information on others involved in the abductions and killings," Fazlur told the court.

During the proceedings, some senior lawyers, including the president and secretary of Narayanganj Bar Association, also placed submissions and prayed to the court for remand of the two.

One lawyer argued the duo should be placed on remand to know the whereabouts of Nur Hossain, the prime accused in the killing case.

"The officials should be taken on remand to get a clear picture of the abduction and murder," he told the court.

Another lawyer said the Rab officials worked on their own and stigmatised the Rab and army.

The Rab men did not ask for any lawyers as Tareque spoke for them at the court. He claimed the "killing in exchange for Tk 6 crore" is a story manufactured by the media.

"I also want the mystery to be revealed and I am ready to go on remand for the cause," Fazlur quoted Tareque as saying.

The ex-Rab man denied his involvement in the crime, while Arif Hossain said nothing.

Law enforcers struggled to tackle the public ire when the arrestees were being taken to police vans.

Meanwhile, lawyers filed a petition seeking arrest of the two Rab officials in the case filed by a relative of Chandan in connection with the killing. The court will hear it after the remand ends, said the additional public prosecutor.

Law enforcers' move to arrest the two under section 54, instead of in the killing case, drew flak from some lawyers. They alleged the government was not willing to bring the two to book.

Terming the five-day remand "lenient", they brought out a procession on the court premises soon after the delivery of the order.

Fazlur Rahman, however, said they will file a petition for the two to be shown arrested in the killing case if the investigator finds proof of their involvement.

PUBLIC HEARING

Several hundred people gathered at the Siddhirganj Power Station in Narayanganj early in the morning to give their depositions on the abductions and killings of the seven.

Beginning around 11:00am, the public hearing witnessed the highest gathering so far, apparently thanks to the shifting of the venue from Narayanganj Circuit House to Siddhirganj Power Station, adjacent to the place where most of the victims' families live.

The people, who gave depositions before the committee, spoke of Nur Hossain's criminal activities and his close relationship with the law enforcing agencies.

After his deposition, Shahidul Islam, a cloth trader of Bandar area, said he had seen Rab members forcefully taking some people to their vehicles around 1:30pm on April 27, when he along with his daughter was returning home through Dhaka-Narayanganj link road.

"I thought Rab men were searching people setting up check post," he said adding that later he learnt from the media about the abduction of seven.

Meanwhile, Mostafizur Rahman, a member of the probe committee, said they would interrogate the Rab men, if they find it necessary.

Only seven people gave depositions on May 12 and 57 on May 15, as people reportedly said they were afraid to give depositions at the Circuit House, some eight kilometres away from Siddhirganj, as Nur Hossain and his associates were not arrested yet.

The committee will hold another round of hearing for members of the civil society and the media at Narayanganj Circuit House at 3:00pm

Best school Rajuk

FROM PAGE 16

Cantonment Public School and College of Rangpur, Rangpur Zilla School and Thakurgaon Govt Boys' High School topped the chart in Dinajpur board.

Under the madrasa education board, Jhalakathi NS Kamil Madrasa; Tamirul Millat Kamil Madrasa of Tongi, Gazipur; and Sarsina Darussunnat Kamil Madrasa of Pirojpur were the ones to beat.

Under the technical education board, UCEP Mohsin Technical School of Khulna; UCEP Dhaka Technical School of Mirpur, Dhaka; and AK Khan UCEP Technical School of Chittagong topped the list of best schools.

24 more bodies recovered

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missing ones in the Meghna river," Saiful said.

Divers of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) recovered nine, out of 24 bodies, from inside the capsized launch yesterday while the rest were recovered from different points of the river, said ATM Mahbubul Karim, an upazila nirbahi (executive) officer of Gazaria.

Fifty-four bodies have already been handed over to the victims' relatives.

As BIWTA Chairman Md Shamsuddoha Khandaker declared the rescue operation closed around 9:00am, relatives of the missing people attacked the salvage vessel Pratty anchored on the riverbank.

One and a half hours later, rescuers resumed the salvage operation, receiv-

ing instructions from local lawmaker Mrinal Kanti Das and DC Saiful Hassan. Eight more bodies were retrieved between 1:00pm and 1:30pm.

"I saw so many bodies. But, where is my brother?" Mujibur cried out on the riverbank.

Relatives of the victims of Thursday's launch capsized, second in two weeks, demanded trial of Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan, blaming him for "negligence" in the rescue operation.

"Why should it be that divers rescued more bodies after the rescue operation had officially ended?" a relative said.

Had the rescue operation not resumed, many would have still been missing, he said, demanding that the operation be continued.