

Cuba marks event with call for US embargo end

AFP, Santiago De Cuba

Cuba marked the anniversary of Fidel Castro's first armed uprising 62 years ago Sunday with calls for an end to the US embargo and the return of the US naval base at Guantanamo.

The ceremony -- attended by Cuban president Raul Castro and some 10,000 of the country's ruling elite and their guests but not by the frail 88-year-old Fidel -- was the first since the restoration of relations with the United States.

"Now begins a long and complex road toward the normalization of bilateral relations, which includes, among other things, the end of the blockade and the return of the Guantanamo naval base," said Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, the number two of Cuba's communist party. Machado's brief speech contrasted with the hours long anti-American orations Fidel was known for, particularly on the July 26, 1953 anniversary of the assault he led on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago.

Although a military failure that landed Castro in prison, the uprising is considered the start of a revolutionary movement that ultimately ousted the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in 1959.

Fidel stepped down as the country's president in 2006 in poor health, and has watched with some skepticism as his brother and successor Raul has gradually opened the Soviet-style economy to private enterprise and outside investments.

HC may today

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included in today's cause list.

Khurshid said another HC bench led by Justice Md Nizamul Huq was scheduled to rehear a similar appeal by former BNP state minister Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin and his son Mir Helal Uddin against their conviction and sentence in a graft case.

In February 2008, a special court sentenced Maya to 13 years' jail for illegally amassing wealth worth Tk 6.29 crore and concealing assets worth Tk 5.9 crore. The court also fined the AL leader Tk 5 crore. In October 2010, the HC cleared him of the charges.

But on June 14 this year, the Supreme Court scrapped the HC judgment and directed it to hold further hearing, and dispose of Maya's appeal challenging the lower court verdict.

Separate special courts convicted Nazmul, Sigma, Tuku, Aman, Sabera and Munshi and sentenced them to imprisonments on different terms during the military-backed caretaker government rule.

The HC following their appeals scrapped their convictions and acquitted them of the charges.

Later, the ACC filed appeals with the SC challenging the HC verdicts

Bill drafted

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RAM Obaidul Moktadir Chowdhury, MP, said since the bill is a private one, lobbying from other MPs and pressure from civil and indigenous communities would be needed to ensure passing of the bill this session.

Indigenous leaders Sanjeeb Drong and Rabindranath Soren also spoke at the programme.

HSC results

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Nurul Islam Nahid told reporters that he would ceremonially hand over copies of the results to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) at 10:00am on that day.

Later, he will officially announce the results at a press conference at his ministry in the secretariat. However, the time of the conference has not been fixed yet.

The examinees will get their results, soon after the official announcement, from the website: <http://www.educationboardresults.gov.bd>, respective centres and boards and on cell phones through SMS.

Over 10.73 lakh students under the 10 education boards sat for this year's HSC and its equivalent exams that began on April 1. The theoretical tests ended on June 10.

An official of the education ministry said they had sent a proposal to the PMO, seeking the PM's permission to publish the results either on August 8 or 9 to meet the 60-day publication deadline. The PMO approved August 9 as the date.

The ministry has been publishing the results of the public examinations 60 days within the end of the tests for the last five consecutive years.

Iran launches charm offensive in the Gulf

REUTERS, Dubai

Iran's foreign minister yesterday began a charm offensive in the Gulf to defend a nuclear deal seen by some Arab states as heralding greater Iranian support for armed groups and governments opposed to the hereditary monarchies.

Most Gulf Arab states are worried that Iran's July 14 accord with world powers will hasten detente between Tehran and Washington, emboldening Tehran to increase backing for Middle Eastern allies at odds with Gulf Arab countries.

The minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, began a one-day, three-country tour by visiting Kuwait. He was due to go on to Qatar and then Iraq.

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir-

Ex-MP Shakhawat

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are Shakhawat, now involved in Jatiya Party politics, Billal Hossain Biswa of Nehalpur, Akram Hossain of Bhalukghar Mollapara, Ajihar Morol of Chingra, Ibrahim Hossain of Nehalpur, Sheikh Md Mujibur Rahman and Kazi Ohidul Islam of Shekhpura, Aziz Sardar of Mominpur, Aziz Sardar of Boga, Lutfar Morol of Porchakra, Abdul Khaleq Morol of Altapol and Moshiar Rahman of Chingra.

Of them Shakhawat, Billal, Akram and Ajihar are behind bars, while the rest are on the run, according to the prosecution.

On June 15, the investigation agency of the tribunal said they had found "evidence" against the 12 of their "involvement" in crimes against humanity.

According to the agency, Shakhawat was a central committee member of Islami Chhatra Sangha, the then student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, and a commander of Pakistani army's auxiliary Razakar force at Chingra Bazar camp.

Law enforcers arrested Shakhawat at his Uttar Khan's house in the capital on November 29 last year. The other three were arrested on May 12 this year.

On June 18, the agency handed over the probe reports, statements of the witnesses and other documents to the prosecution, who pressed the charges yesterday.

TAHER AND NANI CASE

A prosecution witness yesterday testified that Razakars including Obaidul Haque Taher and Ataur Rahman Nani and Pakistani army detained and tortured him along with several others during the war.

Abdul Hannan Chowdhury of Purba Dattakhila village of Netrakona's Barhatta upazila said though he was released later, one

Abdollahian, accompanying Zarif, said the goal of this visit was "strengthening ties and developing cooperation is all the fields" with Iran's neighbors.

"The fight against extremism and violence as well as strengthening regional ties are a fundamental necessity to achieve sustainable development and security in the region," Amir-Abdollahian told Iran's state news broadcaster.

Most Sunni Muslim-ruled Gulf Arab states have long accused Tehran of interference in Arab affairs, alleging financial or armed support for political movements in countries including Bahrain, Yemen and Lebanon.

Shi'ite power Iran denies interference but says the nuclear deal will not change its policies in the region.

Fazlur Rahman was tortured to death.

Hannan, also 12th prosecution witness in the case against Taher and Nani, said his father Sahabuddin Chowdhury and elder brother Abdul Khaleque Chowdhury were killed by Razakars in 1971.

He however did not name any Razakars, who killed his father and brother.

Hanna said Peace Committee and Razakar force were formed in Netrakona after the Pakistani army had entered the town in late April 1971. Taher and Nani shook hand with them, headded.

The Pakistani army and a group of Razakars including Taher and Nani attacked Boushi Bazar probably on August 17 and detained him, Fazlul Rahman, son of local Awami League leader, Abdul Hai and several others, said Hannan.

Razakars and the army tortured them. Though they released him and Abdul Hai later, they took Fazlur Rahman to Netrakona town and killed him through torture, said Hannan.

He further said his father was their union council chairman, who used to provide information to the freedom fighters and probably on November 4 Razakars detained his brother and took him to a local Razakar camp.

Hearing the incident, his father went to the camp and was detained and tortured by Razakars before he was shot dead near Trimohini Bridge that night, Hannan added.

Defence counsel Abdus Sobhan Tarafder completed his cross-examination before the three-member tribunal led by Justice M Enayetur Rahim adjourned the proceeding until today.

Taher and Nani face six charges. They however pleaded not guilty before the tribunal.

Selection in garb

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while Jakir was assistant secretary of the BCL central executive committee.

Soon after their victory, the new president and the general secretary along with their outgoing counterparts met Hasina, also the prime minister, at the Gono Bhaban. From there, the four along with some other BCL leaders visited Liaquat at his Segunbagicha residence.

Almost every councillor of the BCL who came from different units already knew who was going to be their leaders, after Hasina inaugurated the BCL council on Saturday and said the new BCL leadership would come through ballots.

BCL leaders loyal to Liaquat immediately finalised the panel following the AL chief's announcement. Apart from the outgoing president and general secretary, several former leaders faithful to Liaquat made no delay to convey the message to the top leaders of each of the 111 units over which they have control, according to BCL insiders.

They asked the councillors to vote for Sohag-Jakir panel.

Sensing sure defeat, no other former BCL leaders gave any panel.

"We did not give any panel or support anyone as we knew who was going to be the new leaders," said a former BCL leader.

"The election was simply eyewash," a senior BCL leader told The Daily Star preferring anonymity.

BCL insiders said around 40 unit committees were announced by outgoing president Sohag and general secretary Nazmul to influence the voting.

Not only that. Non-councillors were also seen voting. The Daily Star correspondent found Xahid Hasan, a fourth-year student of Mass Communication and Journalism at Dhaka University, collecting ballot paper posing as the councillor from Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science & Technology University.

This newspaper yesterday talked to 10 councillors from Jhenidah, Chuadanga, Madaripur, Sylhet, Chittagong and Rajshahi.

Syed Farid Ahmed, organising secretary of Chuadanga district, said,

Italy fireworks factory blast toll rises to 9

AFP, Rome

The death toll from an explosion at a fireworks factory in southern Italy has risen to nine after one of those hurt succumbed to his injuries Sunday, a hospital source said.

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Seven people were killed on the spot and several others were injured on Friday in the explosion in the southern port city of Bari, local media reported citing the emergency services.

Another person who was seriously injured in the blast died on Saturday.

La Repubblica newspaper reported that a van exploded first, triggering a series of blasts within the factory that lasted around an hour.

The Bari prosecutor's office has opened an involuntary homicide enquiry into the explosion.

2 shot dead

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could not yet be known, the OC added.

Talking to this correspondent over the phone, members of Ashutosh family confirmed the incident. They, however, did not give any details.

The duo went to stay at one Moloy Chakma's house on Saturday. Around 12:30am, a gang stormed the house and shot Ashutosh and Arannyo at close range, leaving them dead on the spot, locals said.

Ashutosh, a resident of Ananda Bihar in Rangamati, was an ex-operative of the PCJSS armed wing. After the signing of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord in 1997, he along with others surrendered their weapons to the then government, they said.

"We are investigating the incident," the OC said, adding that no case was filed in this connection yet.

Buns used

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after they had been frozen using nitric oxide.

The sugar, fat and oxygen within the buns meant they could burn, hence could drive the rocket's engine.

The project was masterminded by Jon London, who previously worked behind the scenes on TV shows including Sky's 'Brainiac: Science Abuse'.

It was put together with the launch button from a model rocket box used to house the water pump for the coolant system, with pieces from two other rocket engines thrown into the mix too.

London, who has built rockets using salami and fish and chips as fuels in the past, described using Fitzbillies' Chelsea buns as 'the only way to make this even more Cambridge-y'.

The stunt was put together to mark Cambridge Science Centre's COSMIC exhibition.

The fortnight long event focused on exploring the solar system, the wider universe and the technology behind space exploration.

Floating veg

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way include aubergine or eggplant, coriander, okra or ladies finger, green chilli, tomato, spinach, bottle gourd, mint, mustard and lal shak.

Vegetable cultivation on a 100-square-foot floating garden costs just Tk 360 to 400, and only regular care and physical labour are needed for getting expected results, he said.

Nurjahan Begum, 48, of the same village, said the money they were earning was also being used for their children's education.

As the vegetables are grown without the use of any pesticides, they are quite popular among local consumers. Farmers said people were buying those for higher prices.

Mirza Miah, a local at Char Balapara village in Aditmari upazila, said they prefer the vegetables grown on floating gardens as they are free from insecticides.

Many say the farming process that involves using local resources, especially rapidly growing water hyacinths, is as an environmentally sustainable way to use wetland areas for cultivation.

The floating bed cultivation, a long forgotten tradition in some rural areas of Bangladesh, could receive renewed interest as a potential solution for farmers whose lands have been waterlogged, and the landless ones, they added.

Small plane crashes into Tokyo suburb; 3 killed

AFP, Tokyo

Three people were killed yesterday when a small plane crashed into a Tokyo suburb shortly after takeoff, police said, leaving nearby homes and cars ablaze and the charred remains of the fuselage lying in a burnt-out residence.

The single-engine propeller aircraft with a 36-year-old pilot and four passengers on board crashed at around 11:00 am (0200 GMT) shortly after leaving Chofu airport on the outskirts of the Japanese capital, public broadcaster NHK reported.

"Two people from the airplane are confirmed dead and a person believed to be a local resident has also died," a spokesman for Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department told AFP.

"Three other people from the airplane and two others on the ground were injured. Their condition is unknown."

Local media reports said earlier that two men, including the pilot, and a woman on the ground were killed in the fiery crash.

An AFP photographer at the scene saw rescuers rushing to an ambulance

carrying two victims on covered stretchers with the remains of the charred fuselage of the Piper PA-46 nearby.

At least three houses and two cars were on fire in the residential district of Chofu just some 500 metres from the airport.

The crash also damaged the roofs of other houses nearby while the plane's fuselage was left upside down in the charred remains of a home.

"At first I thought a large truck had crashed into a neighbouring house as I heard the ground shake and then I then saw this ferocious smoke," female witness told AFP.

Television footage showed firefighters battling the blaze. The plane came down in an area near a school, sports stadium and shopping plaza.

"I thought it was flying quite low and then I heard a bang," a local resident who witnessed the crash told NHK.

The plane was bound for Izuoshima island in the Pacific some 100 kilometres (60 miles) south of central Tokyo for a one-day training flight, local media said.

Landslides usher Mayor

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forward his plans to modernise the waste management system, establish good governance, restore the reputation of the corporation's health department, develop its education department, and ensure sustainable use of technology in all development interventions.

"I will show zero tolerance against any sort of irregularity and corruption for ensuring all public services," said the mayor.

Replying to the queries of reporters, Nasir claimed that waterlogging was not lasting long now despite heavy rains for the initiatives he took after taking oath in May.

"Waterlogging is a long-standing problem and I inherited it," he said.

Nasir, whose key electoral pledge was to end the problem forever, said, "On a priority basis, I will take annual plans for the areas experiencing waterlogging so that it is mitigated in targeted areas. This way, the whole city will be freed from waterlogging gradually."

STILL WATERLOGGED

As heavy showers continued for the third day yesterday, houses and markets in many low-lying parts of the city remained flooded.

Md Humayun, a phone and fax shop owner of Shulak Bahar, said his shop was inundated by rainwater at least thrice in the last three days.

"How will we run our business? All mobile phones and stuff in the shop were damaged by water," he said.

Till the afternoon, no vehicle plied in Muradpur, Bahaddarhat, Sholashahar and Mehediabag as the roads were under knee- to waist-deep water.

Waiting at Tiger Pass Intersection around 12:00 noon, Mamunul Haque, an employee of a C&F firm, said, "I have been here for one hour but I saw no bus."

Badurtala and Bayezid areas experienced the same.

'RESULTS IN TWO YEARS'

Talking to The Daily Star about waterlogging, the new mayor hoped that people would see visible progress of his initiatives in two years.

"I will construct sluice gates at the mouths of the canals, through which tidal water enters the city," Nasir said.

"I will take advice from resource persons and take necessary steps in keeping with the city drainage master plan to solve the problem."

The mayor would also take action against the grabbers of the canals.

LANDSLIDES

In the last three days since Friday, the Met Office recorded 214, 251, and 235 millimetres of rainfall respectively.

The heavy rains already triggered landslides at two places in the city yesterday.

Though no casualty was reported, the damage that occurred does not bode well, particularly for the low-income people living in hill slopes.

An estimated 30,000 people are at serious risk of rain-induced landslides.

Forid Ahmed, meteorologist at Patenga Met Office, said, "Heavy rains could continue for two to three more days. The possibility of rain-induced landslides in hills is also high."

Around 7:00am yesterday, a chunk of earth from the adjacent Manila Hill collapsed onto Chittagong District Shilpakala Academy.

Breaking the wall and the windows of a classroom of the academy's main building, mud spread in an office and two classrooms, said district cultural officer Moslem Uddin Shikdar.

The hill collapsed along a length of 30 feet, said the official.

Three hours before that, at 4:00am, a portion of Prabartak Hill fell on the wall surrounding Prabartak Palli with a bang, said Pulak Chowdhury, a resident of the neighbourhood.

Pulak said the area became risky due to cutting of the hill and building unplanned structures.

Sources said the hill management committee this year declared the two hills as vulnerable to landslides.

Though several hundred people were killed in landslides in the past and eviction drives were conducted this year, thousands of people are still living in the risky hills.

Landslides have already taken six lives -- three kids in Amin colony Tankir hill in Bayezid and three in Lalkhanbazar Pora colony in Khulshi on July 19, increasing the landslide toll to 191 since 2007.

Since the monsoon started, the district administration evicted residents of 400 houses in the risky hills of Lalkhanbazar, Roufabad, Amin Colony, AK Khan and Motijharna.

But most of the evicted people returned.

At a rented house in Amin Colony, the very place where three kids of a family died in the July 19 landslide Ayesha Begum, 36, was cooking rice with two neighbours on Saturday amid torrential rains.

Ayesha narrowly escaped death with her husband on that fateful night. Both were stuck under a chunk of mud that fell on the house. But the horror did not deter her from living there.

"We have no other place to move to. The authority has taken no steps for our shelter and food. Where should we go during rain?" asked Ayesha.

Some 3,600 families live in Tankir Pahar and Textile Pahar, both owned by Amin Jute Mill. Most of these families are at risk of landslides, locals said.

Mohammed Babul, who worked in the jute mills for 42 years, said almost all the residents, both mill workers and outsiders, had been living at the place for more than 30 years.

Similarly, hundreds of families were living in shanties in Shantinagar, Roufabad hills, Bayezid, Lalkhanbazar, Motijhorna, Akbershah, Pahartal Biswocolony, ignoring the risks.

Additional Deputy Commissioner and Hill Management Committee Member Secretary Mohammad Elius Hossain said, "We have conducted drives in several risky areas but over 30,000 families are living in the vulnerable hills in the city."

"We cannot bulldoze the houses as it is a problem of over 50 years, and there are many cases centring land ownership," said the ADC, adding that they asked people in the areas to leave during downpours so as to prevent casualties.

Acknowledging the reality, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Meshbah Uddin also expressed his worry, saying landslides might occur any time.

"None wants to leave their houses. And those who have rented out houses are encouraging them to stay," he said.

The official said rehabilitating this huge population was an enormous task. All stakeholders including the landowners, the city corporation, and other government agencies must sit down together. "We would arrange a meeting soon," he said.

Mayor Nasir held the same view.

"As a mayor I sympathise with the poor people living in the hill slopes," he said.

They can be rehabilitated for a short time after eviction, said Nasir.

However, he thinks, only rehabilitation of the people at risk would not solve the problem.

Rehabilitating thousands of people needs big money, he said.

"Only the district administration has the ability to address the big issue without permission of the related ministries," said Nasir.

Coordinated efforts by all stake-