

Fresh clashes in Congo after day of deadly protest

AFP, Brazzaville

Demonstrators and security forces clashed for a second day in Congo's capital yesterday in unrest triggered by the president's bid to extend his three-decade term in office, an AFP correspondent said.

After a day in which four people were killed and 10 hurt in clashes, dozens of youths took to the streets in western Brazzaville in an apparent bid to throw up barricades as security forces fired rounds of tear gas grenades to disperse them.

Opposition supporters also reported clashes in southern parts of the capital.

For the second day running, mobile Internet, text messaging services and French radio RFI's signal were cut throughout the city.

Clashes had erupted on Tuesday after government banned an opposition rally due to take place later that day in protest against Sunday's referendum which could allow President Denis Sassou Nguesso to prolong his stay in office.

The vote proposes changing the constitution to increase the maximum age of presidential candidates, currently 70, and to scrap a rule that limits the number of seven-year terms to two.

Speaking to state TV late on Tuesday, Interior Minister Raymond Mboulou said the unrest -- which he described as an "organised and coordinated insurrection" -- had left three people dead in Brazzaville and another in Pointe-Noire, the country's economic capital and its second city.

"Symbols of the republic, such as the headquarters of the police (or) the gendarmerie, were targeted," he said.

Pascal Tsaty Mabiala, a leader of the main opposition PanAfrican Union for Social Democracy, called Tuesday for "a peaceful popular insurrection" to prevent the referendum from taking place.

Traffickers gearing up for the Bay voyages

Fear rights bodies, say human trafficking gangs in Bangladesh, Myanmar out to take advantage of the sailing season that began this month

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

International rights bodies fear human traffickers are preparing for fresh operations in the Bay of Bengal as the "sailing season" started off this month. The warning reminds Southeast Asia of the migrant crisis it faced five months ago.

Chris Lewa, head of the Bangkok-based The Arakan Project, said she heard of small groups embarking vessels from Chittagong of Bangladesh and South Maungdaw of Myanmar and that "two boats have apparently sailed with a low number of people over the last couple of weeks."

The fact that Thailand as a transit country closed its door to migrants has definitely had an impact on the scale of departures, she told ucnews.com, a news portal in Bangkok.

Amnesty International (AI) in a report yesterday said, "With the monsoon over and a new 'sailing season' already underway, thousands more could be taking to boats."

Considering the international attention on trafficking, it is likely that traffickers will change their patterns and use new routes to escape scrutiny, said the rights watchdog.

The UN refugee agency and Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network in recent months expressed fear that there would be maritime departures in October unless the factors causing human trafficking are addressed.

Southeast Asia witnessed a serious migrant crisis in May after Thailand discovered some mass graves, believed to be of the Rohingyas of Myanmar and poor Bangladeshis. The Thai government then launched a widespread crackdown on human traffickers.

The action forced traffickers to abandon boats in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea, leaving some 5,000 victims in the seas. Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia initially denied accepting them, but later agreed to do so following widespread criticism from UN agencies and rights bodies, according to media reports.

The UN refugee agency said around 94,000 refugees and migrants departed from Bangladesh and/or Myanmar between January 2014 and June 2015. Over 1,100 of them died of starvation, dehydration, disease and abuse by the crews on ships.

At least 36 bodies were exhumed from the mass graves in Thailand while another 130 from graves in Malaysia.

Human traffickers usually lure Bangladeshis and Rohingyas, a persecuted minority in Myanmar, into taking the risky sea voyage with the promise of landing jobs in Malaysia.

Once they arrive in Thailand, they are held hostage for ransoms and are forced to call their families at home for payments. Those who manage to pay the traffickers are pushed into Malaysia or forced to servitude in the jungle camps or sold in the Thai fishing or plantation firms.

Human trafficking has been going on for around a decade, but it has escalated in recent years, particularly this year, drawing global attention.

Regional countries, UN agencies and the international community at a meeting in Thailand on May 29 made some recommendations to check human trafficking and address its root causes.

The UNHCR in its August report, however, said implementation of most of the proposals, including establishment of a joint taskforce, is yet to begin.

The AI in its report called on Myanmar to stop violence against Rohingyas by state or non-state forces.

It recommended cooperation among Southeast Asian countries in combating human trafficking and develop coordinated search and rescue operations in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea with safe and predictable disembarkation procedures.

Ex-UN assembly chief indicted in the US

AFP, New York

Former UN General Assembly president John Ashe was indicted Tuesday by US authorities on charges of accepting more than a million dollars in bribes from Chinese real estate developers.

Ashe, from Antigua and Barbuda, president of the assembly from September 2013 to September 2014, is accused of accepting money to promote the construction of a UN conference center in Macau.

The 61-year-old is charged with accepting more than \$1.3 million from 2011 to 2014 from a group of five people, according to the indictment filed by Preet Bharara, the US attorney for the southern district of New York.

Ashe is accused of hiding more than \$1.2 million in his income tax return.

Four other people were also charged on Tuesday, including the main suspect in the corruption ring, Ng Lap Seng, a wealthy Chinese real estate developer.

Monk seeks

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forging a government document to say recruitment of children into Jain monastic orders was legal.

Acharya Kirti Yashurishwarji Maharaj, who is 60, had told the court that he cannot walk more than 10-12 km a day because of a spinal injury and old age, the Times of India newspaper reported.

He had also promised the court that his absence would not hinder proceedings.

However the court not only rejected the request, it also issued a fresh warrant against him.

The practice of inducting children as monks or "bal diksha" is common among Jains, especially those in India's western state of Gujarat, where children as young as eight are inducted as monks.

Maharaj was taken to court by Ahmedabad-based activist Jasmin Shah, who accused him of forgery and misleading the Jain the community.

Her lawyer Nitin Gandhi told BBC Hindi that his client had been able to prove that Maharaj had forged an official gazette notification from the government of India, to say that "bal diksha" was legal.

Earlier this month the Gujarat High Court urged the state government to do more to curb the practice.

India is home to around four million Jains, many of whom live in Gujarat and neighbouring Rajasthan.

IS not alone in looting Syria cultural heritage

AFP, New York

The Islamic State group may dominate headlines about the destruction of heritage sites in Syria, but it is far from the only culprit, new US research warned yesterday.

The Syrian regime, Kurdish and other opposition forces are also major players in the destruction, according to the study led by a specialist in Middle East archaeology at Dartmouth University.

The findings, published in the journal Near Eastern Archaeology, are based on analysis of satellite imagery from nearly 1,300 out of Syria's estimated 8,000 archaeological sites.

Media attention "has led to a widespread misunderstanding that ISIS is the main culprit when it comes to looting," said Jesse Casana, associate professor at Dartmouth, using another acronym for the IS group.

"Using satellite imagery, our research is able to demonstrate that looting is actually very common across all parts of Syria."

The research found that more than 26 percent of sites were looted in regions held by Kurdish or other opposition groups.

Around 21.4 percent of sites were looted in IS-controlled areas and 16.5 percent in Syrian regime areas.

But while minor looting was most common in Kurdish and opposition-held areas, IS dominated when it came to heavy destruction, the study found.

The study classified 42.7 percent of looting in IS-held areas as heavy, 22.9 percent in Syrian regime areas, 14.3 percent in opposition force-held areas, and 9.4 percent Kurdish areas.

"To the best of our knowledge, the sites that were within ISIS-held areas now have a much higher incidence of moderate or severe looting than sites we have sampled in other places, and a much lower incidence of looting overall," Casana told AFP.

"ISIS is terrible, awful," he said. "On the other hand, looting on an equally large scale is taking place at a large number of sites all across Syria."

Episodes of severe looting have been perpetrated under the direct watch or perhaps by the Syrian regime military and not been widely reported, Casana told AFP.

IS has carried out a sustained campaign of destruction of heritage sites in Syria and Iraq, most notoriously dismantling the ancient ruins of Palmyra since capturing the area in May.

Two Chinese diplomats

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Officers retrieved a semi-automatic .45 Colt pistol and three bullet shells from the scene, he added.

Police said the attack occurred at 1:30pm (0530 GMT) at Lighthouse, a popular restaurant that serves Filipino food in Cebu, the trading capital of the central Philippines and the nation's second biggest city.

Staff at the upmarket restaurant told AFP a group of nine people had gathered in a private room to celebrate the birthday of the consul general, Song Ronghua.

Restaurant cashier Remedios Rivalde, 27, said she was at work at the cash register outside of the function room when she heard gunshots.

"I dived under the counter and covered my ears. Then there were other shots that followed," Rivalde said by phone.

She said the reservation had been made shortly before lunch for the consul general's birthday, and the group had ordered a banquet that included popular local delicacies such as tuna head, shrimps and roasted pork.

"They ordered a lot of food, but no liquor," she said.

Song was shot in the neck, but his injuries were not believed to be life threatening and he was in a stable condition in hospital, regional police chief Tom Banas told AFP.

Police identified his dead staff members as Sun Shan, the deputy consul general, and Hui Li, a finance officer.

Banas said the husband and wife were arrested without any resistance.

But he said they had not immediately co-operated with police, and so the details of the shootings and the motives were not known.

Lighthouse manager Stephen John Paterno said staff did not see the shooting because only the guests were in the private room at the time.

But he said waiters who served them beforehand had heard the guests shouting at each other.

Song was born in October, 1962, according to a biography published on news website Sina News.

He has been a career diplomat, joining the foreign ministry in 1987, then serving in New Zealand, Japan and Hong Kong before his current posting, according to the biography.

Philippine foreign ministry spokesman Charles Jose also said he had no comment, as authorities were still determining what happened.

Cops hunt

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said they were trying to hunt down the suspects.

Monirul Islam, joint commissioner of Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star recently that they did not have any CCTV camera coverage of the killing spot.

However, they had collected footages recorded by 155 CCTV cameras in the Gulshan area.

Tavella, a technical director of a Netherlands-based development organisation, was shot dead in the capital's Gulshan on September 28.

The victim was found with bullet wounds around 6:15pm not far from the house of the governor of Bangladesh Bank on Road-90 in Gulshan-2.

2 'outlaws'

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lage, Mohammad Raihan, 40, of Moisha village and Farid Miah, 34, of Gupto Gaguljan village were admitted to Tangail Medical College Hospital under police custody.

Other criminals managed to escape the scene leaving a foreign-made 7.65mm pistol, a single-shooter gun, one magazine, two bullets and several bullet shells on the spot.

Of the deceased, Akber was a member of Baghil Union Parishad (UP), said Rafiqul Islam, chairman of the parishad, adding, he was absent from all meetings in the last three years.

Akber's elder brother Iqbal Hossain was killed by a faction of the outlawed party two years ago. Since then Akber was leading the group, said Tofazzal Hossain Tofa, chairman of Hugra UP where the gunfight took place.

HC clears

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TK 10.88 crore loan from Agrani Bank, Returning Officer Mohammad Alimuzzaman told The Daily Star earlier.

The EC also cancelled nomination paper of his wife Nasrin Siddique, who is a director of the organisation, on the same ground.

The seat fell vacant after Kader Siddique's brother Awami League leader Latif Siddique resigned from parliament on September 1 over his remarks on hajj made in the US last year.

Latif Siddique was also expelled from the AL and the cabinet for his remarks.

The KSJL in a release lambasted the attorney general saying the EC had the right to appeal against the HC decision. "But the attorney general should not have any role in this end," Iqbal Siddique, joint secretary of KSJL, said in the statement.

Pvt schools too to keep

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The education secretary said the school authorities would prepare their own catchment areas and conduct a survey to determine the number of school-going children in their respective areas.

"There might be some 'overlapping' in the surveys and if that happened, the upazila education officers would settle the issues after scrutiny, he said.

The district education officers will also be involved in the process, he added.

Sources at the ministry said primary schools prepare their catchment areas during the end of every year.

A ministry official, wishing not to be named, said they have set tentative dates for all these processes. The schools are scheduled to complete the surveys by November 7 while the upazila education officers are to settle the disputes and submit the surveys by November 10, he said.

"A meeting will be held in the first week of November to finalise the admission policy," he added.

In yesterday's meeting, the official said, the heads of the schools agreed to introduce the quota system for local students.

Some principals proposed to increase the session fees for students, said meeting sources.

Currently, there is a 5 percent quota for freedom fighters' children and their children, 2 percent for the disabled children, 2 percent quota for the education ministry officials living in Dhaka and 1 percent for children living in Lillah (free accommodation and food) boarding.

Admission to class-I in these schools is made through lottery while students take a written test to get admitted into classes II to VIII, according to the existing system.

There are around 650 private schools in Dhaka.

Unfit vehicles

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According to the Motor Vehicles Ordinance 1983, a driver can drive up to eight hours a day, with a break in the middle.

A transport owner said a driver in Bangladesh usually makes round trips. For example, if he drives a bus to Dinajpur in the morning, the same driver drives back to Dhaka at night, the transport owner told The Daily Star.

Most drivers get tired, sleepy or drive hurriedly to complete their trips, which sometimes cause crashes.

In addition, drivers can drive as fast as they want since speed limits are not enforced, Prof Hoque said.

He said road crashes could be reduced by a big margin just by not allowing unfit vehicles to ply the roads, enforcing the speed limit, fixing driving hours, and resolving road-related problems in a planned way.

Some steps are being taken in an indiscriminate manner, which according to him cannot produce the desired results. "We are still in rudimentary stage in terms of road safety."

The Road Transport and Bridges Ministry is making efforts but that are not sustainable as most of the steps are reactive rather than proactive.

There is hardly any monitoring of vehicles, drivers, roads, or enforcement of laws and punishment of offenders, experts say.

A Safety Audit Manual has been finalised in 2005 to regularly monitor roads and solve their problems before crashes happen. The Roads and Highways Department is still sitting on it, sources claimed.

Today is National Road Safety Day.

Biometric

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Uddin Ahmed handed over the registration document to Joy after completion of the registration.

The adviser said Bangladesh was the second country to introduce biometric registration of SIM (subscriber identification module) cards.

He thanked the employees of Teletalk and post and telecommunication ministry for introducing the system successfully.

State Minister for Post and Telecommunication Tarana Halim said the SIM registration system was launched under a pilot project.

The main project will get underway on December 16, she added.

Joy later had a meeting with the officials of Teletalk and the NID wing of the Election Commission.

Cops wait

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detailed instructions and intricacies. We will take steps following them," he added.

The High Court on Tuesday asked the police authorities to explain in two weeks why they should not be ordered to take legal actions against Fareez Rahman, the underage driver of the SUV.

The ruling came as law enforcers did not take any action in this regard.

The policemen at the scene had said Fareez, nephew of former Awami League lawmaker HBM Iqbal, was racing with another car on a water-logged Gulshan street and had been drinking.

Giving its ruling on a Public Interest Litigation, the HC further asked why departmental proceedings should not be brought against the officer-in-charge of Gulshan Police Station for not carrying out his duty in this regard.

The October 12 incident created quite a stir on the social media, but police neither arrested Fareez, 16, nor filed any case against him.

Minutes after the accident, pictures of cops taking Fareez to Gulshan Police Station hit the social media. Police later let him go.

One of Fareez's friends gave this newspaper selfies he had taken on his mobile phone while driving. A bottle of Chivas Regal whiskey was seen in a number of those pictures.

RMG can create

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China is currently the largest garment supplier worldwide, grabbing nearly 40 percent of the \$450 billion market. Since 2009, Bangladesh is the second largest apparel exporter after China, capturing a little over five percent of the global apparel market.

"To accelerate GDP growth, Bangladesh needs higher volumes of exports to larger and richer markets, beyond its relatively smaller domestic market," said Johannes Zutt, country director of WB in Bangladesh.

"Bangladeshi firms have succeeded in garments, and they can also succeed in other industries with demonstrative competitiveness such as jute-based industries, footwear, information and communication technology, shipbuilding, pharmaceuticals, and light industry such as bicycles."

The study on 'Diagnostic Trade Integration Study' also said international and regional trade, especially with South Asian and East Asian neighbours, is critical for Bangladesh to create more and better jobs for the 2 million youths entering the labour force every year.

The study provides a roadmap to strengthen Bangladesh's trade competitiveness and develop a policy regime that takes full advantage of international markets, said the study, which was jointly launched by the WB and the commerce ministry at Westin Dhaka yesterday.

The study identified a number of reform initiatives in high priority areas to enhance the country's trade capacity and competitiveness. The report also calls for establishing an inter-ministerial committee to help Bangladeshi exporters succeed in a globally competitive environment.

To accelerating export growth, Bangladesh needs to focus on diversifying regional and global markets, building a wider export base, improving worker and consumer welfare, and strengthening institutional capacity while sustaining sound economic fundamentals, said the study.

It also found that foreign direct investment (FDI) can play a much larger role in many sectors, especially those with technology upgradation needs, such as pharmaceuticals, bicy-

cles, and shipbuilding.

Bangladesh will need to expand its linkages with neighboring countries, such as China and India as well as other Asian countries like Japan and South Korea, to access underexploited markets and attract greater FDI, the study found.

To attract higher FDI, Bangladesh needs to address critical bottlenecks such as the availability of serviced land, uninterrupted power supply, congestion at Chittagong Port, the Dhaka-Chittagong road and rail corridor, customs clearance at land and sea borders, and ease of access to finance, said the study.

"A trade policy regime that is more neutral between exports and production for the domestic market would support the development of new export sectors and small and medium firms," said Sanjay Kathuria, lead economist of the WB.

Kathuria, who is a specialist on trade and competitiveness of global practice with the WB, is also a co-author of the report.

The country needs to prepare its youth with solid foundational education and vocational skills needed to be productive in export-oriented industries, according to the report.

Bangladesh needs to act urgently to tap into regional and global trade as well as FDI, to boost its economy and reduce poverty, Kathuria added, while he was presenting the keynote paper at the function.

Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed said Bangladesh has targeted two important achievements -- making the country digital and a middle income country by the end of 2021.

"If we can implement the seventh five-year plan, Bangladesh will not only be a middle-income country, but also an amazing country at the end of 2021," the minister added.

"I do not mind the huge trade gap with India and China, as Bangladesh imports a lot of raw materials and food items from both the countries."

Bangladesh currently has a trade gap with India at more than \$6 billion and with China at \$8 billion a year. Bangladesh export goods worth \$550 million to India and nearly \$800 million to China in a year.