

Ambulance driver killed in Myanmar as army battles rebels

AFP, Yangon

A volunteer ambulance driver was killed in Myanmar's remote northeast as clashes between the army and ethnic insurgents escalated over the weekend, state media reported yesterday.

The area near the Chinese border has been riven by armed conflict for decades, but a fresh round of violence was sparked this week when a coalition of armed groups launched joint attacks against a military academy and police outposts, killing at least 15.

The army claims the attacks were retaliation for massive drug seizures in July, but insurgents say they were responding to military offensives.

An ambulance from a local philanthropy group working around the town of Lashio came under assault by insurgent sniper and artillery fire on Saturday, the state-owned Global New Light of Myanmar reported.

The attack killed 58-year-old driver Tun Myint, his wife Tin Tin Aye told AFP.

"The car was hit when they were trying to turn back from the mission

because of intense fighting," she said.

Video circulating online that could not be independently verified showed an overturned ambulance on the side of a road and workers frantically transferring a limp body to another vehicle.

The Taung National Liberation Army, one of the members of the Northern Alliance coalition of insurgent groups, said it was unclear who was responsible for the attack.

"As the fighting was intensifying, it is hard to say who to blame," the TNLA's Mai Aik Kyaw told AFP.

Myanmar security forces clearing mines near a bridge also found a weapons cache with dozens of explosive devices, detonators and grenades, according to state media.

The US Embassy in Yangon has issued a travel warning for areas near the recent fighting and on Friday urged "restraint" from all sides in the conflict.

The area around Lashio is crisscrossed by a patchwork of ethnic rebel groups fighting the military for more autonomy and control over land and resources.



Pedestrians squeeze passed a shop and a gaping drain on a footpath in Purana Paltan in the capital. The only warning of the drain is two bamboo poles sticking out of it, although such holes should be covered. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

DoE shuts down

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He said, "Analysing samples, we found proof that sludge produced by the mill polluted water at a dangerous level."

"This prompted the authorities to seal off the factory until it establishes a fully functional ETP [effluent treatment plant] and takes steps to remove sludge in an environment-friendly way."

Mohammed Shafiul Alam, chief engineer of Asian Paper Mill, said they would comply with the instructions of DoE.

He said, "The sludge produced by our factory spill over and get into a pond because of heavy rain. We are constructing a concrete reservoir to avoid this."

SC uphold

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Earlier on March 14, a HC bench stayed the investigation into the case.

The HC bench also issued a rule asking the government why the continuation of probing into the case should not be declared illegal and contradictory to the Digital Security Act-2018 in the constitution.

On March 3, Shahidul filed a writ petition challenging the legality of the case in which he was imprisoned for 107 days.

On August 5 last year, Shahidul, also founder of Drik Gallery and Pathshala South Asian Media Institute, was picked up from his Dhanmondi home during a widespread demonstration for safe roads.

Police lodged the case against the 63-year-old under Section 57 of the ICT Act and produced him before a Dhaka court the following day.

On November 15 last year, the HC granted bail to Shahidul and he was released from Dhaka jail on November 20.

Spain offers

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Saharan Africans -- making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean.

The Open Arms organisation said Madrid had taken the decision because of the "untenable" situation for the 105 migrants still aboard, including two children.

"Spanish ports are not the closest or the safest for Open Arms... but for now Spain is the only country willing to accept it," the organisation said.

Salvini, who leads the anti-immigrant League party, has taken a hardline against rescued migrants coming to Italy which he says bears an unfair burden as the first port of call.

France said yesterday it would take 40 of the migrants on board the Open Arms as long as they meet the criteria to be treated as refugees.

"France commits to meet its promise to take 40 of the people," the interior ministry said.

EU SPLITS

EU states disagree on how to handle the migrants crossing the Mediterranean and some like Italy are taking a tougher position, turning away rescue ships as they seek to dock to drop off rescued people.

Spain's foreign ministry yesterday called again on Italian authorities to allow the migrants entry, guaranteeing that other EU states would take them in once they reach land.

"The Italian government can be assured that when they disembark, the 107 migrants will be shared" among countries willing to take them -- France, Germany, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania and Spain, it said.

Italy's government on Saturday reluctantly agreed to let 27 migrant children from the Open Arms disembark but it required that the rest stay aboard.

Icelanders mourn death of glacier

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glaciers in West Antarctica, Earth's enormous masses of ice are melting fast. And though sea levels have risen and fallen throughout history, scientists say it's never happened at a rate this fast.

If glaciers continue to melt at the current rapid rate, it will pose a number of hazards for the planet, geologists say.

By 2100, up to 2 billion people -- or about a fifth of the world's population -- could be displaced from their homes and forced to move inland because of rising ocean levels, according to a 2017 study.

Bangladesh is particularly at risk. About 15 million people in the country could become climate refugees if sea levels rise 1 meter, or about 3 feet. And more than 10% of

the country would be underwater.

Some of the people who are displaced might not have anywhere to go. They're not protected by international laws, so industrialized countries aren't legally obligated to grant them asylum.

If sea levels continue to rise at a rapid rate, some remote island nations would be at risk of disappearing, including Tuvalu, the Maldives and the Marshall Islands.

Millions of people depend on glaciers for drinking water, particularly in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region and the Andes Mountains.

In dry climates near mountains, glaciers collect precipitation and freshwater and store it as ice during colder months. When summer comes along, the ice melts and runs off into rivers and streams, providing drinking

water.

A world without glaciers would threaten that water supply and potentially have devastating effects, Jason Briner, a geologist at the University of Buffalo, told CNN.

Melting glaciers also threaten the food supply.

Rising sea levels contribute to warmer global temperatures, changing what kinds of crops farmers can grow. Some climates will become too hot for what farmers are growing now. Other climates will see more flooding, more snow or more moisture in the air, also limiting what can be grown.

As a result, food will become scarcer, grocery prices will spike and crops will lose their nutritional value, as the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change noted in a report earlier this year.

13 killed in road accidents

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Only survivor of the incident nine-year-old Rifat, youngest son Jamshid, was shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital as his condition turned critical.

Family member of the victims took all the bodies after finishing official procedures, said Badrul Alam Talukder, officer-in-charge of Lalmai Police Station.

In Chattogram, an elderly man was killed and nine others were injured in a collision between a private car and a three-wheeler autorickshaw, locally known as Mahindra, on Chattogram-Cox's Bazar Highway in Lohagara upazila yesterday morning.

The dead is Abdul Mannan, 64, said Ahsan Habib, officer-in-charge of Dohazari Highway Police Station.

Locals and Highway police

personnel rescued the injured and sent them to Chattogram Medical College Hospital, the OC said, adding that police seized the two vehicles.

In Mymensingh, two people were killed and six others were injured in two road crashes on Mymensingh-Sherpur road in Phulpur upazila yesterday.

The victims are Rezia Khatun, 50, wife of Abdur Rashid from village Patigaon in Phulpur, and Sayeem, 15, son of Dudu Mia from Sherpur's Nalitabari upazila.

In Gopalganj, a man was killed and two others were injured in a road accident in Kashiani upazila on Dhaka-Khulna Highway around 11:30am yesterday.

Ahsan Habib, 18, was son of late Abu Taher Sorif from Borasur village under Kashiani Upazila.

Thousands flood streets

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freedoms guaranteed under the "one country, two systems" formula put in place after Hong Kong's return from British to Chinese rule in 1997.

Protesters held aloft placards with slogans including "Free Hong Kong!" and "Democracy now!" and umbrellas to shield them from the rain. The crowd in Victoria Park, where the rally started, was peaceful and included elderly people as well as the middle aged, young people and families, with some parents carrying toddlers.

Despite rally organisers not having permission to march, the park could not accommodate the crowd, which thronged the streets around the park. Many protesters headed towards the city's financial centre, chanting for the city's Beijing-backed leader, Carrie Lam, to step down.

It was impossible to put an exact figure on the number of protesters but Reuters journalists, reporting from around the territory, put the total at least 200,000.

"It's bloody hot and it's raining. It's a torture just to turn up, frankly. But we have to be here because we have no other choice," said a 24-year-old student named Jonathan who was at the rally that began in Victoria Park in the Causeway Bay district of Hong Kong island.

"We have to continue until the government finally shows us the respect that we deserve," he said. "WE ARE HONG KONGERS"

Aside from Lam's resignation, demonstrators are seeking complete withdrawal of the extradition bill, a halt to descriptions of the protests as "rioting", a waiver of charges against those arrested, an independent inquiry and resumption of political reform.

"When we were young, we didn't think about it. But my son tells me: After 2047, what will happen to me?" said a history teacher named Poon, referring to the year when the 50-year agreement enshrining Hong Kong's separate system will lapse.

224 killed on roads in 12 days of Eid rush

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of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, also said more crashes happened after Eid because of a lack of monitoring.

Chaos over the fare was worse this year in absence of any fixed fare, he said.

The number of crashes will fall once the Road Transport Act-2018 is implemented, he hoped.

Mozammel pointed out that 27.4 percent of the accidents involved buses, 26.33 percent motorcycles, 16.4 percent trucks, pickups, lorries and trailer trucks, and 7.82 percent cars and minibuses, 13.52 percent auto-rickshaws and other vehicles.

He said 52.21 percent of the accidents occurred after vehicles

hit pedestrians, 21 percent head-on collisions, 17 percent of drivers lost control and 9.85 percent accidents happened due to unknown reasons.

The organisation also gave 12 recommendations including providing training to drivers, introducing digital traffic control system, a separate cell to find out reasons behind accidents, implementing the ban on three-wheelers and slow vehicles on national highways, ban on motorbikes during Eid rush and checking vehicles before a trip.

Mozammel said the authorities used to deem their findings and recommendations as a "disturbance", but now the authorities have changed their outlook "a little".

"I will come again and again and again. We do not know how any of this is going to end. We will still fight," she said.

Police have come under criticism for using increasingly aggressive tactics to break up demonstrations and yesterday some people handed out balloons resembling eyeballs, a reference to the injury suffered by a female medic who was hospitalised after being hit by a pellet round in the eye.

On Saturday, however, a demonstration in support of the government attracted what organisers said was 476,000 people, although police put the number of attendees at 108,000.

The anti-government protests present one of the biggest challenges facing Chinese President Xi Jinping since he came to power in 2012. And with the ruling Communist Party preparing to mark the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic on October 1, the crisis in Hong Kong has come at a sensitive time.

India restricts movement

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Representatives in the Jammu and Kashmir government in Srinagar and the federal government in New Delhi did not immediately return calls asking about the latest clampdown or seeking an assessment of the number of injuries and clashes.

One of the official sources said that people pelted security forces with stones in around two dozen places across Srinagar. He said that the intensity of the stone pelting protests has increased over past few days.

CHILLY GRENADES

The heavy overnight clashes took place mostly in Rainawari, Nowhetta and Gojwara areas of the old city where Indian troops fired tear smoke, chilly grenades and pellets to disperse protesters, eyewitnesses and officials said.

Chilly grenades contain very spicy chili pepper, and produce a major eye and skin irritant, as well as a pungent smell, when they are unleashed.

The officials, who declined to be identified because they aren't supposed to talk to the media, said clashes also took place in other parts of the city including Soura, a hotbed of protests in the past two weeks.

A senior government official and hospital authorities at Srinagar's main hospital said that at least 17 people came there with pellet injuries. They said 12 were discharged while five with grievous injuries were admitted.

The hospital officials and a police officer told Reuters that a 65-year-old man, Mohammad Ayub of Braripora, was admitted to the hospital after he had major breathing difficulties when tear gas and chilly grenades were fired in old city area on Saturday afternoon. He died in the hospital on Saturday night and has already been buried, they said.

A magistrate speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity said yesterday at least 4,000 people were arrested after New Delhi stripped the restive region of its autonomy two weeks ago.

They were held under the Public Safety Act (PSA), a controversial law that allows authorities to imprison someone for up to two years without charge or trial.

"Most of them were flown out of Kashmir because prisons here have run out of capacity," the magistrate said, adding that he had used a satellite phone allocated to him to collate the figures from colleagues across the Himalayan territory amid a communications blackout imposed by authorities.

A police official who asked to remain anonymous told AFP "around 6,000 people were medically examined at a couple of places in Srinagar after they were detained".

"They are first sent to the central jail in Srinagar and later flown out of here in military aircrafts," he added.

BLOCKING THE WAY

Javed Ahmad, aged 35, and from the wealthy Rajbagh area of Srinagar, was prevented from going to the old city early yesterday morning by paramilitary police at a barricade near the city centre. "I had to visit my parents there. Troops had blocked the road with concertina wire. They asked me to go back as there was curfew in the area," he said.

Telephone landlines were restored in parts of the city on Saturday after a 12-day blackout, and remained open yesterday.

The internet and cell phones remain blocked in Kashmir.

For 30 years in the part of Kashmir that it controls, India has been fighting a revolt in which at least 50,000 people have been killed. Critics say the decision to revoke autonomy will cause further alienation and fuel the armed resistance.

The change will allow non-residents to buy property in Jammu and Kashmir, and end the practice of reserving state government jobs for local residents.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has said the measure is necessary to integrate Kashmir fully into India and speed up its development.

Owner held for floating

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Bakkar Siddiqui arrested Tasvir from the capital's Segunbagicha area around 4:00pm, said the watchdog's spokesperson Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya.

After his arrest, ACC kept Tasvir in the custody of Ramna Model Police Station.

"He will be produced to court today," said Pranab.

Earlier on March 31, SMHI Faruque, the land owner of FR Tower, and Tasvir were both arrested and placed on seven-day remand each.

The two, along with Liakat Ali Khan alias Mukul, 57, chairman of Rupayan Group -- the builder company of FR Tower, leaders of the building management committee, and some unidentified persons were charged for the death of people due to negligence.

Tasvir was a member of the building management committee.

The two were later released on bail.

The latest arrest comes after the ACC on June 25 filed two cases accusing 23 people for their involvement in illegally extending the building which caught fire on March 27.

According to the case statement, one of the accused SMHI Faruk on June 25, 1989 took lease of the over eight katha plot at Banani Commercial area from Dhaka Improvement Trust, which was renamed to Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (RAJUK).

On October 02, 1990 he applied to Rajuk for erecting a 15-storey building. The application was approved 28 days

later.

On January 25, 1996, Faruk applied to Rajuk again, but this time to revise the original plan and extend the building to 18-stories. Rajuk approved the plan illegally, reads the FIR.

Afterwards on April 27, 2003 Faruk signed a contract with managing director of Rupayan Housing Estate Ltd Liakat Khan Mukul, also an accused, for erecting the 18-storey building.

Later, both Faruk and Liakat signed another contract for extending the building to 23-stories and completed construction. According to the FIR, however, no clearance certificate was taken from the housing authority for the latest extension.

"Not even the design [for extension] was approved," it says.

On March 13, 2005, Liakat signed a contract with Tasvir to sell him office space on the three floors in level 19, 20 and 21.

The contract was valued at about Tk 5.65 crore. To meet the expenditure, Tasvir took out a Tk 3.6 crore mortgage from GPS Finance Company Ltd. Liakat and Tasvir, however, produced a "forged design of the building" and "misused their power" to get Rajuk's approval for the mortgage, the FIR said.

The fire at the 23-storey building killed 25 people and injured 73 others.

The former chairman of Rajuk, along with the housing authority's former and incumbent officials, was also made accused in the case.