

Pro-democracy camp

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Opponents quickly called on Lam to accede to a five-point list of demands, including direct elections for the city's legislature and leadership and a probe into alleged police brutality against demonstrators.

"The government must squarely face public opinion," said Wu Chi-wai, the chairman of the Democratic Party, Hong Kong's largest anti-establishment party.

The Labour Party, another leading component of the pro-democracy bloc, attributed the election result to "the sweat, blood and tears" of protesters.

There has been no tear gas fired in Hong Kong for a week, rare respite for a city upturned by months of chaos and violence.

The lull follows some of the most intense clashes yet between police and protesters at the city centre PolyU campus.

Dozens of newly elected councillors marched yesterday evening on the campus urging police to allow the small number of hardcore protesters who remain holed-up inside to leave freely.

"The people of Hong Kong have spoken," Paul Zimmerman, a pro-democracy councillor re-elected in Sunday's poll, said in a speech outside PolyU.

"Now is time for the government to respond. Don't fail Hong Kong again."

Chatter on a popular web forum used to urge people to turn out for protests called for a march on Sunday to press the government to respond to the movement's demands.

'REVOLUTION'
Millions took to the streets earlier this year after Lam's government introduced a bill to allow extraditions to China's opaque judicial system.

It was eventually withdrawn, but the resulting public anger unleashed

broader demands and led to violent clashes between police and protesters.

District councils handle mundane community-level issues like garbage collection. But backlit by protests, Sunday's contest took a new political significance.

The outcome is "a sound repudiation of the (Hong Kong) administration and Beijing's policy toward Hong Kong," political analyst Willy Lam said.

But it does not mean Beijing will budge on the protesters' demands, he added.

Pro-democracy candidates grabbed 388 seats -- a stunning net gain of 263 -- according to local media, with the establishment holding on to only 59. Five went to independents.

Dominic Raab, the foreign minister of Britain, which handed the territory over to China in 1997, said: "There is now an opportunity to find a way through the crisis with political dialogue that reflects the legitimate aspirations of the people of Hong Kong and respects the one country two systems model."

RECORD TURNOUT

Chinese state media moved to downplay the poll debacle for pro-Beijing parties, suggesting mischief-making by western governments was at play in the poll run-up while violent protests chiselled away at the pro-government turnout.

"It is hard to imagine how many people's opinions the election result represents," ran a commentary in the China Daily.

"When people live under so heavy shadow of the rioters' terror that they dare not speak out against them."

A record 71 percent of the 4.13 million registered voters had cast ballots, according to Hong Kong's election watchdog.



A pro-democratic winning candidate at district council local elections argues with police officers (not pictured) as they walk towards the campus of the Polytechnic University (PolyU) in Hong Kong yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

2 killed in 'shootouts'

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Daily Star.

On information that some drug dealers gathered in Swadesh Property area of the capital's Khilkhet, a Rab patrol team rushed to the area around 1:15am. Sensing their presence, the criminals opened fire. The law enforcers then retaliated, he said.

After the "gun battle", Rab found Mintu bullet-hit. He was rushed to Kurmitola General Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

A Rab member was hurt during the "shootout", the Rab official said, adding that they recovered three firearms and some yaba tablets from the spot.

Mintu, of Barishal's Bakerganj upazila, used to live in the capital since 2010. He was involved in drug trading in Gulshan, Baridhara,

Bhatara, Khilkhet and nearby areas, Rab said.

In Sunamganj, a suspected robber was killed in a "shootout" with police in Bokarbhanga area of Chhatak upazila, reports UNB.

Laxminder Ali, 30, of Jiapur village, was accused in 12 robbery cases.

Mostafa Kamal, officer-in-charge of Chhatak Police Station, said police arrested Laxminder on Sunday night.

Police took him to Bokarbhanga area early Monday to recover firearms, but he tried to flee. A "gunfight" ensued when his associates opened fire, the OC said.

Later, police found the body of Laxminder and sent it to Sunamganj Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

"Five policemen were injured in the incident," the OC claimed.

Indian cops arrest

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in Delhi, the DCP said, adding that one kilogram of explosive material, a sword and a knife were recovered from their possessions. Four mobile phones containing valuable information about ISIS were also recovered.

The Delhi Police team apprehended the three from the spot before they could place the IED at the Raas mela, he said.

"They were carrying baton swords

and button actuated knives to carry out lone-wolf attacks as well," Kushwah said.

He added that a lot of "valuable information was extracted from interrogating the three and raids were conducted at two of their hideouts, where a lot of of IED materials were recovered." A case was filed with Goalpara Sadar police under the Explosives Act, Arms Act and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

It's an issue

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External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar time and again told Bangladesh not to worry about the NRC.

"We have faith in their assurances," said Quader, adding, "We are observing the matter."

"We will be worried when it will be a question of Bangladesh's interest. However, we are solving all problems through dialogue. So, there is nothing to be worried about," he said.

Asked about the trespassing of people from India, Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque said Dhaka was keeping an eye on the issue.

"We are watching ... It is under the government's observation," he told The Daily Star by phone yesterday.

The issue came to the fore after Border Guard Bangladesh detained 329 people and handed them over to police for trespassing into Bangladesh from India in the last three weeks.

The people, who entered the country through the borders in Jhenidah and Benapole of Jashore, were sent to district jails by courts, BGB and police said.

The detainees claimed to be Bangladeshis, but could not provide any evidence to support their claims. They said they fled from India, fearing harassment and detention by the police there.

The NRC in Assam of India has excluded more than 19.96 million people in the state. To prove their Indian citizenship, they can go to the court, but what happens if anyone fails to prove citizenship is not clear.

India and Bangladesh in formal meetings said the NRC is India's internal issue and would not affect Bangladesh, but Indian Home

Minister and ruling BJP President Amith Shah on various occasions said the NRC would be implemented all across India and the illegal migrants would be identified and deported.

CHLORINE ATTACK IN SYRIA Chem weapons body hits back at report doubts

AFP, The Hague

The head of the world's chemical weapons watchdog yesterday defended a report into an alleged chlorine attack in Syria, despite allegations of a cover-up by a whistleblower.

Wikileaks published an email from a member of the team that investigated the attack in the town of Douma in April 2018, which accused the body of altering the original findings of investigators to make evidence of a chemical attack seem more conclusive.

Russia and its allies have seized on the email and an earlier document which both question the conclusion by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in March 2019 that chlorine was used in Douma.

The row added to tensions at the OPCW's annual meeting in The Hague over a new team that will shortly name culprits for attacks in Syria for the first time.

"It is in the nature of any thorough inquiry for individuals in a team to express subjective views," OPCW Director General Fernando Arias told member countries.

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Gulshan café attack, we got information about the terror network, which led to our successful operations one after another," CITC Deputy Commissioner Saiful Islam told The Daily Star recently.

The Holey Artisan siege, the country's worst-ever terror attack, had left 20 hostages, including 17 foreigners, killed. Two police officials also got killed after they responded immediately.

Besides, five attackers and a restaurant staffer died during the "Operation Thunderbolt" that brought an end to the nerve-racking 12-hour hostage crisis at the posh eatery. Another café staff, who was arrested on suspicion, later died at a hospital allegedly due to torture.

After the café siege, law enforces carried out 28 high-risk anti-militancy operations in which 79 militants were killed and a huge stash of explosives was destroyed or seized. Besides, more than 250 militants have been arrested since then, officials said.

Saiful said almost all leaders and decision makers of the militant group had either been arrested or got killed in anti-militancy drives. It has been weakened to a great extent, he added.

After around two years of investigation, police pressed charges against eight of the 21 militants involved in the Holey Artisan siege. Thirteen of them were killed in different drives.

After around one and a half years of trial proceedings, a tribunal in Dhaka fixed November 27 to deliver the verdict of the case.

'PARADIGM SHIFT'

According to CITC chief Monirul, Holey Artisan attack was a "paradigm shift" in militancy in the context of Bangladesh.

Earlier, it was a worldwide notion

that those who are religiously educated or uneducated and from poverty-ridden families usually join militancy.

But because of internet and other modern technology and easy availability of radical propaganda online, well-educated people, especially youths from English-medium and posh institutions, started getting into militancy.

The breakaway group Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh, "Neo JMB" as law enforcers call it, recruited physicians, engineers, architects, technologists and other professionals. More quipped with technology, it communicated using encrypted apps.

Law enforcers started to have a clear picture of this new breed of radicals and their leadership after the Holey Artisan attack.

Of the five gunmen who stormed the Gulshan café, Nibras Islam and Rohan Imtiaz were students of Turkish Hope and Scholastica schools. Both of them also went to Monash University in Malaysia.

Another gunman, Meer Saameh Mubasheer, was due to take his A-level exams as a private candidate, when he went missing from Gulshan in February 2016.

"So our focus shifted as youths from any background may now join militancy," added the CITC chief.

'THREATS STILL THERE'

Though successful operations have contained militancy, threats, though not big, are still there. Islamist radicals are still active online to spread their ideology and make recruitments, said counterterrorism officials.

They said the Neo JMB now has no charismatic leaders, hardcore activists, financiers, planners, organisers or motivators. The group also does not have the supply of arms and ammunition.

"Still", CITC Deputy Commissioner

Saiful said, "The terrorist group can conduct small operations if they get the chance."

Members of a "Neo JMB" cell planted improvised explosive devices (IEDs) at two places and attacked policemen at three other spots in the capital this year. The CITC unit arrested some of the attackers in Narayanganj in September.

CITC unit chief Monirul yesterday said the number of terrorist incidents has come down by 90 percent last year from that in 2016. But radicalisation is on the rise.

He said they have planned a huge campaign from July 1 to June next year when they will organise six programmes in each of 32 districts for madrasa teachers and students, public representatives, officials in the administration, teachers and students of schools, colleges and universities, police and jail guards and civil society members and media people to create awareness.

"Cyberspace is the single largest platform for radicalisation. To fight it we now have a state-of-the-art digital forensic lab which has the capacity to conduct forensic tests of even a drone," Monirul said, adding they also have been getting other equipment and proper training.

Militancy analyst Shahab Enam Khan observed after the café attack law enforcers have built up three capacities.

Firstly, they have improved substantial understanding of detection. Secondly, law enforcement agencies are building interface with the community as tackling radicalisation has to be community-led. Thirdly, there is sharing of intelligence among agencies.

Shahab, an international relations professor at Jahangirnagar University, also said the current state of militancy in Bangladesh is manageable, but there is no reason to be complacent over this.

Customs detectives quiz 14 importers

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have gone up beyond an acceptable level. We call upon businesses so that they sell the bulb at bearable prices," said Shahidul.

However, traders, for the last several weeks, have been maintaining that there was a shortage of supply, compared to the demand, because of falling stocks of domestically grown bulbs and declining imports.

The CIID said 2.52 lakh tonnes of onions were imported during the July-October period of the current fiscal year.

The Customs Intelligence did not give onion import figures between July-October of the previous year.

It said importers brought in 11.37 lakh tonnes of onions in the July-June period of the fiscal 2018-19.

Import data showed that average monthly imports fell by 33 percent to 63,000 tonnes this fiscal year from 94,750 tonnes in the previous one.

Yesterday, prices of onions rose further at retails with one trader in Farmgate area demanding Tk 260 for one kilogram of locally-grown onions.

Market prices data by state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh and Department of Agricultural Marketing (DAM) also showed that prices of the bulbs increased yesterday.

The CIID, in a letter to an importer issued on November 19, said it has received allegations that the importer illegally hoarded onions to create an "artificial crisis in the market".

"And there is also allegation against you regarding money laundering," said the CIID letter.

CIID DG Shahidul replying to a question, said the CIID would take action if any specific allegation against anyone was proved to be true.

"After collecting their versions, we will be able to see if there was any violation of laws. We will also look into the stock they have at hand," he said.

Replying to another question on whether supply chain in the markets fall under CIID's jurisdiction, he said his office started working on the matter at the directive of the NBR chairman, as onions have become the talk of the town and various initiatives have been taken to stabilise the onion market.

"The extent of the onion crisis will reduce if we can identify those who have hoarded and did not sell after import," he said.

"We are trying to find out whether they really sold at higher prices and how many days they kept the bulbs in hand. We hope we will get a positive result," he said.

He added, "We will try to motivate them to release their stocks in the markets. All the departments are working together so that people get essential consumer goods easily and no artificial crises occur."

Replying to whether there was any scope to take action against anyone for hoarding under the customs law, Shahidul said it would be valuable for all at this moment if we could provide actual information to the ministry concerned regarding the amount of stock big importers have now.

He said no panic should be created among traders due to summoning and questioning importers at the CIID office.

Md Abdul Awal, proprietor of M/S Bishal Enterprise, an importer in Chapainawabganj, had told reporters earlier that they submitted statements of their imports between August and

November 18.

An onion wholesaler at Shyambazar, the main wholesale market of onions in Dhaka, said government actions such as imposing fines on traders and the authorities summoning them left onion traders worried.

"We are businessmen, not thieves. What we have done? We have tried to make a profit. We also incur losses and no customer comes and offers extra to recoup those losses. The way we are being fined and summoned hurts our sentiments," he said, seeking anonymity.

He added that the supply of onions at Shyambazar has been much lower than the demand in recent weeks.

Hitler's top hat

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Welle reported.

Rabbi Menachem Margolin, chairman of the European Jewish Association, had appealed to the auction house to cancel the sale, saying that it would "send a message that some things particularly when so metaphorically blood soaked, should not and must not be traded."

"The Nazis' crimes are being trivialized here," the German government's antisemitism commissioner Felix Klein told Funke newspaper group.

"They're acting as if they're trading in perfectly normal historical art objects," he also said, adding that "there is a danger that Nazi relics become cult objects."

Hermann Historica director Bernhard Pacher told Deutsche Welle that most customers "are museums, state collections and private collectors who really meticulously deal with the subject."

Greenhouse gas

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parts per million, up from 405.5 parts per million (ppm) in 2017.

That increase was just above the annual average increase over the past decade.

CO2 is responsible for roughly two-thirds of Earth's warming.

The second most prevalent greenhouse gas in the atmosphere is methane -- emitted in part from cattle and fermentation from rice paddies -- which is responsible for 17 percent of warming, according to WMO.

Nitrous oxide, the third major greenhouse which is gas caused largely by agricultural fertilisers, has caused about six percent of warming on Earth, the UN agency said.

Atmospheric concentration levels of both methane and nitrous oxide both hit record highs last year, the UN said.

"This continuing long-term trend means that future generations will be confronted with increasingly severe impacts of climate change, including rising temperatures, more extreme weather, water stress, sea level rise and disruption to marine and land ecosystems," WMO said.

'MORE HOPEFUL'

Emissions are the main factor that determine the amount of greenhouse gas levels but concentration rates are a measure of what remains after a series of complex interactions between atmosphere, biosphere, lithosphere, cryosphere and the oceans.

Roughly 25 percent of all emissions are currently absorbed by the oceans and biosphere -- a term that accounts for all ecosystems on Earth.

The lithosphere is the solid, outer part of the Earth while the cryosphere covers that part of the world covered by frozen water.

The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has said that in order to keep warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius, net CO2 emissions must be at net zero, meaning the amount being pumped into the atmosphere must equal the amount being removed, either through natural absorption or technological innovation.

While Taalas made clear that the world was not on track to meet UN targets, he did highlight some reasons for cautious optimism.

"The visibility of these issues is the highest (it has) ever been," he told reporters in Geneva, noting that the private sector was increasingly investing in green technology.

Even in the United States, where President Donald Trump's administration this month began the process of formally withdrawing from the Paris agreement, "plenty of positive things are happening," Taalas said.

While Washington may have renounced its Paris agreement commitments, "we have plenty of states and cities who are proceeding in the right direction," he added.

"Personally, I am more hopeful than I used to be 10 years ago but of course we have to speed up the process," Taalas said.

Iran planning attacks on Israel: Netanyahu

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday accused Iran of planning attacks against the Jewish state and said everything possible would be done to prevent them.

The premier, who was indicted on corruption charges on Thursday and is seen to be battling for his political life, made his remarks on a visit to an army base near the border with conflict-ravaged Syria.