

Lebanese rally against Iraq's crackdown on protesters

AFP, Beirut

Dozens of people in protest-swept Lebanon staged a candlelit vigil outside Iraq's embassy on Saturday to denounce the excessive use of force against demonstrators there.

They raised pictures of Iraqi protesters who have been killed since the unprecedented anti-government movement began on October 1.

Some raised the Lebanese flag, while one woman wrapped the Iraqi tricolour around her shoulders.

Iraq's grassroots protest movement has been the largest the country has seen in decades -- but also the deadliest.

More than 420 people have been killed and 15,000 others wounded since early October, according to an AFP tally compiled from medics and an Iraqi rights commission.

The toll spiked dramatically this week, when a crackdown by security forces left dozens dead in Baghdad, the Shia shrine city of Najaf and the southern hotspot of Nasiriyah -- the birthplace of Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi, who vowed to resign on Friday.

Lebanon has also seen an unprecedented anti-government protest movement since October 17.

Layal Siblani, the organiser behind the vigil, said the spiralling crackdown in Iraq this past week prompted the

idea.

"The uprising in Iraq and the uprising in Lebanon are one," she told AFP.

"A protester killed there is a protester killed here."

Like their counterparts in Iraq, Lebanese demonstrators are rallying against corruption, unemployment and appalling public services.

They are also pushing for an end to the kind of political system that prioritises power-sharing between sects over good governance.

Despite confrontations with security forces and supporters of established parties, protesters in Lebanon have largely been spared the violent crackdown seen in Iraq.

But rights groups and the United Nations last week criticised security forces for failing to protect protesters after they were attacked by backers of the Shia Hezbollah and Amal movements at several locations.

Amnesty International on Friday urged the Lebanese army "to end arbitrary arrests" and torture of peaceful protesters following a wave of detentions.

Hussein, at the vigil on Saturday, said Lebanese protesters had a duty towards those in Iraq.

"We have to stand in solidarity with our Iraqi counterparts who are being arrested and killed on a daily basis," he said.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina waves before leaving for Spain to attend the "Heads of State and Government Summit" of the 25th Annual Conference of Parties (COP25). The photo was taken at the capital's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Tens of thousands march against far-right in Italy

AFP, Florence

Tens of thousands rallied in Florence in Italy on Saturday against the far-right League party, the latest in a series of demonstrations called by the new, youth-driven "Sardine Movement".

The sardine has become a symbol of protest against the far-right firebrand leader Matteo Salvini, who served as interior minister and deputy prime minister in the previous coalition government with the Five Star Movement.

Students, young professionals and families with children joined the march, where the carrying of political banners was discouraged.

Demonstrators gathered in the city's Piazza della Repubblica sang the anti-fascist song "Bella Ciao" and shouted "Every sardine has the right to exist!"

Organisers claimed that 40,000 people had turned out to the Florence protest, which they said was substantially more than the 15,000 they claim attended their first rally, just two weeks earlier.

The new movement has staged around 10 demonstrations over the past 15 days in the north of the country.

Instead of the usual banners from political groups, protesters brandished placards in the shape of a sardine.

"No banners, we don't want symbols at such a beautiful gathering," one of the organisers, Danilo Magli, told the crowd.

"We are tired of hate, we are not fighting amongst ourselves," he added.

The Sardine Movement was founded on November 14 by four hitherto unknown young activists from the northern city of Bologna in protest against Salvini's politics.

It was a response to the growing strength in the north of the right-wing

coalition led by the League.

In late October, the League won a historic victory in regional polls in central Umbria, which had been led by the left for half a century.

"We think the ideas propagated by the League are unacceptable," Paolo Ranzani, a photographer with the Sardine Movement, said on Facebook.

"But sardines are strong and can become a huge wave, a tsunami," another supporter said on Facebook, where the group's page is titled "The Sardines' Archipelago".

On this day

FROM PAGE 1

guerrillas capture Fatikhkhari, Rajuan and Dakshin Anwara in Chittagong and fight to death to liberate Patiya.

Muktibahini kill five Pakistan militia men at Bijoypur area of Birisiri in Netrakona during an ambush and arrest 21 armed Razakars.

Hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis can return home to live in peace if the Pakistan army leaves Bangladesh, says Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi during a meeting of the Congress in New Delhi.

Pakistan military commander Mosleh Uddin, along with a group of Razakars, goes to a village named Kathali of Bhaluka upazila in Mymensingh to loot, vandalise and set fire to the houses. Meanwhile, Muktibahini, led by section commanders Gias Uddin and Abdul Wahed, attack and kill three militia men and seven Razakars.

Leaders of People's Party and Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh urge President Yahya Khan to attack India on the West Pakistan frontier to preserve the integrity of two parts of Pakistan.

919 diagnosed

FROM PAGE 1

Mycobacterial Disease Control Directorate and line director of TBL and ASP, presented the survey report.

Since 1989, a total of 7,374 HIV infected people have been detected in the country. Of which, 1,242 people have died of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) caused by the virus, the report said.

It showed that the number of the HIV/AIDS infected people is increasing alarmingly every year.

In 2000, the number of the affected people was only 31 which became 250 in 2009.

The figure ascended to 919 so far this year.

Among this year's affected, 74 percent are male, 25 percent are female, and the rest one percent includes transgenders.

The survey also said about 3.9 percent of the people who inject drugs are affected by the virus.

Health Minister Zahid Malik, the chief guest at the programme, said AIDS would be eradicated from the country by 2030.

The government has taken up extensive plans to expand HIV testing services in all the district level hospitals, he said.

The plans also include establishment of strong collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Year	Number of HIV infected
2010	343
2011	445
2012	338
2013	370
2014	433
2015	460
2016	578
2017	865
2018	869
2019	919 (so far)

SOURCE: NATIONAL AIDS/STD PROGRAMME

and the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment for tracking migrants, ensuring child transmission programme of pregnant mother under the government's health service, and raising awareness among mass people.

Asadul Islam, a secretary of the health ministry, and Mohammad Aminul Islam Mian, director of National AIDS/STD Control, also spoke at the seminar.

The World AIDS Day 2019, was observed with the theme "Communities make the difference". The day was observed in collaboration with the World Health Organization.

Relentless against child marriage

FROM PAGE 1

The ceremony started with recitation from the holy scriptures.

A documentary was screened on the life, education and activities of Faraaz.

PepsiCo India President, Ahmed El Sheikh said the world is grateful to stand up against ills in bad times. It brings hope against frustration," he said at the award ceremony.

The PepsiCo president said he was personally inspired by Faraaz to serve humanity.

"Selfless act of Faraaz inspires the future generations of not only Bangladesh, but across the world,"

said Ahmed El Sheikh.

Bishwo Shatitto Kendro Chairman Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed said Bangalees fought in the Liberation War for achieving freedom.

The courage of Faraaz has a higher meaning.

"Sacrifice of his life was for higher values like humanity and friendship," he said.

Farida Yesmin braved all odds to prevent child marriage, which creates various social, health and psychological problems in a society.

"She didn't do it only for her job. She went extra miles. She demonstrated her courage for values, for a social cause. We salute her."

Zaraif Ayaat Hossain, brother of Faraaz, said the courage of his brother to stand up for friends is a rare

example that will continue to shine.

He thanked his mother, saying she had been a role model for Faraaz.

Faraaz used to say, "Let's make a difference and amaze the world", said Zaraif, who moderated the event.

The award is given in recognition of the great sacrifice and courage shown by Faraaz, who refused to desert his friends and was brutally killed by terrorists during the July 1, 2016 terror attack at the Holy Artisan Bakery in Dhaka.

PepsiCo Global has been giving the award since 2016 to recognise acts of exceptional courage by individuals setting examples of empathy for fellow human beings.

PepsiCo set up a fund of \$200,000 to support an annual prize of \$10,000, which will be awarded for the next 20 years.

"I am extremely happy to be awarded. I think my work is nothing compared to the greatness that Faraaz had demonstrated by sacrificing his life for the sake of humanity and friendship," said Farida, now additional district magistrate of Mymensingh.

Farida, daughter of Fazlul Haque Chowdhury and Khaleda Begum from Jamalpur, did her post-graduation from Jahangirnagar University.

"I want to continue my work for the rights of women and children. It's not enough to prevent child marriage. We should create a society where women can flourish," said Farida, mother of a son.

She said she would dedicate the award to the welfare of women and children.

Owner gets off scot-free

FROM PAGE 1

in death.

Following their unprecedented demonstration for safer roads, different government bodies, police, and transport leaders made a series of lofty promises.

Lawmakers hastily passed the Road Transport Act-2018, the Prime Minister's Office issued a 17-point directive, and police observed "traffic weeks" multiple times to bring discipline on roads.

But the picture on Dhaka streets remains almost unchanged.

THE ACCIDENT

The judge started reading out the summary of the judgment around 3:00pm in presence of the four accused.

Referring to witnesses' testimonies

and confessional statements given by Masum, Zobair and Shahadat, he said three buses of Jabal-e-Noor Paribahan started for their destinations all at the same time.

At one stage, Masum went a little ahead, leading to an illegal race with Zobair.

Just before the buses reached the accident spot, Zobair started to pick passengers blocking Masum's way from right side. Failing to cross Zobair, Masum started driving recklessly through left side of the road to take more passengers, he said.

While Masum was driving recklessly, passengers of the bus and even his helper Enayet requested him to drive with caution. The bus hit the flyover wall twice and glasses of

windows got smashed.

"But he [Masum] did not pay heed to their request and rather drove at more speed, causing the accident," the judge said.

The court said the three were punished under the first part of section 304 of Penal Code - which deals with "culpable homicide not amounting to murder".

After the verdict, Dia's father Jahangir Alam Fakir expressed satisfaction and hoped it will help end recruitment of unskilled drivers.

DRIVERS APPOINTED WITH LIGHT LICENCE

Two BRTA officials, who gave testimonies as prosecution witnesses, said both Masum and Zobair were not eligible for driving heavy vehicles as

they had light licence.

"Even knowing this fact, owner Jahangir Alam did not bother about it," the court said.

"He [Jahangir] appointed Masum Billah to drive heavy vehicle with light licence although the driver was not competent."

However, the court acquitted Jahangir saying that it did not find his direct involvement in crimes.

Asked about the matter, Jahangir's lawyer Abdus Salam Sikder said his client was not present at the spot. Besides, it was the company, not his client, responsible for appointing drivers and helpers.

"Considering these, the court acquitted him and we are happy with the verdict," he told reporters.

Central bank may cap the interest rates

FROM PAGE 1

Kamal also set January 1 as the latest deadline for banks to bring down the lending rates to single digit and reducing defaulted loans by this year.

"Single digit interest rates will be implemented from January 1," he said after a meeting with chairmen and managing directors of private and state-owned banks at the National Economic Council auditorium at the planning ministry in Agargaon.

Kamal said in the beginning, the government would introduce single digit interest rates for industrial loans and working capital loans.

"The interest rate on the industrial loans and working capital loans would have to be in single digit to create jobs and attract investment."

The single digit interest rate will not be applicable for consumers and

housing loans and credit cards in January. "If needed we will include them later," the minister said.

Some loans already enjoy single-digit interest rate.

In the last two years, the government has provided various benefits to banks to bring down the interest rate below 10 percent, but only state-owned banks have implemented the decision.

Initially, banks had announced that the interest rate on lending and deposit would come down to single digits from July 1, 2018. But, none of the rates came down, and banks blamed it on the deposit rates being sticky upwards.

Later, they pledged to lower the interest rate on lending to single digit from August 9 in the same year. But it also has not been materialised.

At yesterday's meeting, private

banks placed a number of recommendations to implement the single digit interest rate. One of them is capping the deposit rates of project funds parked with banks.

Regarding defaulted loans, Kamal said high lending rates are the main factor behind the increasing non-performing loans. "There are no other countries where interest rates are so high."

The finance minister, after taking office in January this year, assured that the total default loans will not increase by even a penny.

But in reality, the defaulted loans have continued to increase since then.

Defaulted loans surged 24 percent to Tk 116,288 crore in September compared to that in December last year.

Kamal yesterday said the defaulted

loans would not increase from December. "Rather, the defaulted loans will come down."

He said laws would be amended to reduce the defaulted loans. The proposals aimed at the amendments would be placed at the cabinet and parliament.

The central bank has taken some steps, including giving long-term loan rescheduling facilities to reduce the defaulted loans. But a writ filed with the High Court delayed its implementation, Kamal said.

"Many borrowers stopped repaying loans in the hope of availing the loan rescheduling facilities, pushing up the defaulted loans. Now the verdict has been announced and the Bangladesh Bank will implement its plan and defaulted loans will come down."

Colourful opening raises 13th SA Games

FROM PAGE 1

had segments dedicated to the traditional culture of different regions of the host nation and those of the six other participating nations, with the performances supported by very local musical instruments and artists.

The marchpast was followed by speeches of dignitaries, including Nepal's president Bidhya Devi Bhandari, who officially opened the Games, during which nearly 3,000 athletes will vie for individual and collective supremacy over the next 10 days.

Jeevan Ram Shreshtha, the

chairman of South Asian Olympic Committee, took pride in the fact that Nepal is hosting these games after overcoming the devastation left by the 2015 Earthquake, that this edition will feature the highest number of disciplines (26) in the Games' history and that three cities will host it for the first time.

"We welcome you all to the birthplace of Lord Buddha and the home of the tallest peak in the world, Mount Everest," Ram Shreshtha said in his welcome speech, which he finished by stressing that "We are one, South Asia is one".

The Games' torch was relayed

through the venue by prominent Nepalese sportspersons and lit by Deepak Bishtha, a four-time SA Games gold medallist in Taekwondo. Paras Khadka, the recently-retired captain of the Nepal men's cricket team, hoisted the Games flag as the routine proceedings gave way to a night of celebration.

However, there was not much to celebrate for the Bangladesh contingent as the country's athletes suffered defeats in most of the disciplines earlier in the day.

The men's volleyball team, despite a spirited performance, lost to Pakistan in the semifinals, being left with an

opportunity to grab a bronze medal in the place-deciding match against Sri Lanka today.

There were defeats too for women shuttlers in the team event against the host country while both men and women lost against Nepal in their opening kho kho matches.

But there could be reason to cheer for the men in red and green today in the karate discipline, where Bangladesh are hoping to win a couple of gold medals, while there will be a lot of attention on the opening men's football match where Bangladesh will hope to ease past Bhutan.