

Cuba sees rare protest over freedom of expression

AFP, Havana

About 200 Cuban artists demonstrated outside the country's culture ministry on Friday in a rare protest over freedom of expression that received support from leading Cuban cinema figures.

The demonstration followed the expulsion by authorities on Thursday night of protesting members of an artists' collective from their premises in the historic center of Havana.

Authorities said the eviction of the 14 members of the San Isidro Movement was necessary due to Covid-19 protocols since one had returned from Mexico via the United States and not properly quarantined.

They had been protesting for 10 days, with six of them on hunger strike, and their movement had gained significant attention.

Demonstrators outside the culture ministry on Friday demanded "dialogue" and representatives were waiting to meet with vice minister Fernando Rojas after having gathered there for much of the day.

The demonstration was rare in Cuba, where permission for such protests is not often given.

Security personnel and uniformed police watched over the protest from a distance but without intervening.

"On the one hand, we do not have much confidence, but on the other we feel that it is an obligation," said activist Michel Matos.

"They are public officials of this country and this has become a political situation."

The San Isidro Movement had been demanding the release of another member of the group, rapper Denis Solis, arrested on November 9 and sentenced to eight months in prison for contempt.

After the raid on their premises, the 14 members of the group were given Covid-19 tests and returned to their homes, with the collective's headquarters closed by the authorities, activists said on social media.

Two of them refused to go home and were arrested again: Luis Manuel Otero Alcantara, 32, a plastics artist, and Anamely Ramos, 35.

Some activists said on social media that Ramos had been released.

The list of demands from Friday's protesters included information on the whereabouts of Otero and Ramos, the release of Solis and an end to the "harassment" of artists.

"It is time for dialogue and I believe that you young people must be listened to," well-known actor and director Jorge Perugorria, 55, told the protesters.

He was accompanied by prominent filmmaker Fernando Perez, 76.

Amnesty International in a statement called for the release of Otero and Ramos, calling them "prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely because of their consciously held beliefs".

Soviet-Bangladesh

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equipment and spare parts.
POLITICAL TRIALS INTERNAL MATTER OF BANGLADESH: HEATH British Prime Minister Edward Heath has told the House of Commons that the political trials in Bangladesh are the internal matters of that country. He was replying to a question by a Conservative member of the Parliament John Wilkinson who said that political trials in Bangladesh might hinder the process of reconciliation among the nations in the India subcontinent.
POPOV CALLS ON BANGABANDHU Soviet Ambassador in Bangladesh Valentin F Popov calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Secretariat today. They discuss various bilateral issues.
SOURCES: November 30, 1972 issues of *Dainik Bangla*, *The Daily Ittefaq* and *The Bangladesh Observer*

AL picks

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Barishal division -- ABM Golam Kabir (Betagi), A Berek Molla (Kuakata), M Giauddin Bepari (Ujirpur) and M Lokman Hossain Dakua (Bakerganj).
Mymensingh division -- SM Iqbal Hossain Suman (Gafargaon) and M Abdul Hannan Talukder (Madan).
Sylhet division -- Biswajit Roy (Dirai), Abul Imam M Kamran Chowdhury (Borolekha) and M Masuduzzaman Masuq (Shayestaganj).
Chattogram division -- Badiul Alam (Sitakunda).

4 killed

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others in the bus were injured. Thirteen of them got admitted to Gopalganj General Hospital," said AFM Nasim, officer-in-charge of Tungipara Police Station.
Bus passenger Sohag Khan, 30, said the driver was talking to two people sitting next to his seat while driving really fast.
OC Nasim said the bus driver fled the scene after the crash.



This handout photograph taken yesterday and released by the Indian Press Information Bureau (PIB), shows India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (R) visiting the Zydus Biotech Park, a vaccine manufacturing facility, to review the coronavirus vaccine development in Ahmedabad, India.

PHOTO: AFP

Amphan still taking its toll

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Chairman of Pratapnagar UP Sheikh Zakir Hossain told The Daily Star, "Out of 18 villages in the union, 17 are completely submerged. There are regular tidal surges in the whole union now.

"There has been an acute shortage of drinking water. The sanitation system has collapsed.

"We repaired six out of nine points of the embankment which were washed away by Cyclone Amphan."

The Pratapnagar UP chairman blamed Water Development Board officials, saying, despite the allocation of resources, the embankment was repeatedly breached due to untimely work.

On May 20, embankments in coastal areas of Assasuni's Pratapnagar, Sriula, Anulia, Khajra and Shyamnagar's Gabura, Padmapukur, Munshiganj and Kashimari unions were breached.

According to sources at the Satkhira Water Development Board office, 34km of embankment at 70 points

under Shyamnagar, Kaliganj and Debhata upazilas of Satkhira WDB-1 were partially damaged.

Additionally, a 1km stretch of embankment had collapsed at 13 points, 66km of embankment in Satkhira WDB-2, and 105 points in Satkhira Sadar, Assasuni and some parts of Shyamnagar had been damaged.

Around 20 out of 21 villages in Sriula union have been inundated since Cyclone Amphan hit.

Chairman of Sriula UP Abu Hena Shakil told The Daily Star that Mariala, Hazrakhal, Kalimakhali, Nasimabad, and Thanaghata villages -- with around 28,000 affected people -- remain under water for hours every day since Cyclone Amphan struck.

"People of the area have been suffering due to a lack of food and pure drinking water," he said. Sources of "sweet water", primarily freshwater ponds, have become unusable.

Sohag Khan, project implementation officer of Assasuni

upazila, said 546 tonnes of rice and Tk 2,120,000 in cash have been distributed among the affected people in the upazila, as of November 26.

In Assasuni upazila, 23,450 houses have been destroyed -- 1,050 of them completely, said Sohag.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mir Alif Reza told The Daily Star, "We are trying to repair the dam to protect the villages from the water but it was not possible to save the dam in Hazrakhal."

The dam had been completed at a cost of around Tk 3 crore, the UNO said.

"We are providing rice through the local union councils for the affected people. We have already distributed 100 tonnes of rice in Pratapnagar union," he added.

Executive engineer of Satkhira Water Development Board Division-2, Sudhanshu Sarkar, said the problem was caused by the rupture of the embankments due to the high tide.

"Although the ring dams were

constructed on an emergency basis, they broke again two months ago," he said, referring to the temporary earthen dykes set up in Kola and Harishkhali areas of Pratapnagar union following the cyclone. They are yet to be repaired following the breaches.

"I will start working soon with a plan to protect these villages," Sudhanshu said recently.

On the other hand, five villages in Koyra upazila of Khulna are similarly inundated, affecting around 5,000 people.

SM Shafiqul Islam, chairman of Koyra upazila, told The Daily Star that at least six villages -- including Gobra, Ghatakhali, Uttor Bedkhashi, Katmorchar, and Kashihaatkhol -- are still inundated following Cyclone Amphan.

"We urge the Water Development Board to take the necessary action to rebuild the embankment to protect these areas and villages," said the upazila chairman.

PM to lay foundation stone today

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The project has signed deals with the contractors on April 5 and they have formally commenced work on August 10, they said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was supposed to lay the foundation stone of the project in March but it deferred due to Covid-19 pandemic, they added.

BENEFITS OF THE NEW BRIDGE

Most of the delays of scheduled trains between Dhaka and northwestern and southwestern regions mainly occur due to restrictions on load and speed on the Bangabandhu bridge.

With the highest permitted speed of 20kmph, it takes about half an hour for a train to travel from the station on the east side of the bridge to the one on the west, officials said.

Railways Minister on several occasions said the problems could not be solved until the rail bridge and the dual-gauge double lines between Joydebpur and Ishwardi were constructed.

There is a single line from Joydebpur to Ishwardi. The railway operates 42 trains on this 174km stretch that connects Dhaka with the

western region via the Bangabandhu bridge.

Officials said a maximum of 22 trains could travel smoothly on this route a day.

Considering all these factors, Bangladesh Railways has taken the project of constructing the rail bridge and a dual-gauge double line from Joydebpur to Ishwardi, they added.

Once built, the running time of the trains operate through the bridge would be reduced, and the operation cost of railway will reduce and income of railway will increase, they said.

Rape victims suffer

FROM PAGE 1
Alliance to End Domestic Violence, Bangladesh, while speaking at a seminar on why rape case trial completions exceed the 180-day limit set by the High Court.

The seminar was held at The Daily Star centre yesterday and organised by WE CAN Alliance to End Domestic Violence, Bangladesh.

For nearly all rape survivors, the December 2016 High Court ruling that rape cases must be concluded within a maximum of 180 days is still a pipe dream.

"If the concerned court fails to do so, a report must be provided to the Supreme Court explaining why this happened," she added.

"A further HC ruling from 2019 notes that the perpetrators of rape cases are desperate and reckless, and they threaten the family of the victim from pursuing justice. The ruling observes that in certain cases village social courts are arranged to settle the matter and prevent the victim from seeking legal reparations. To this end, the court observed the need for a witness protection law," said Haque.

Even highly publicised cases like that of the Noakhali Subarnachar gang rape have not seen any conviction

in nearly two years, noted Advocate Golam Akbar, additional public prosecutor at the Noakhali Judge Court.

"There have been as many as 15 hearings to hear the testimonies of 24 witnesses. Each time the case has to be heard, the judge clears the day to give it adequate time but the caseload of the court decides the hearing dates," said Akbar.

Md Golam Kibria, senior district judicial magistrate and teacher at Judicial Administration Training Institute, noted that it is not possible to expedite the process without more courts and more judges.

"Each tribunal has between 1,500-2,000 such cases at any given time. A judge can only hear about a hundred cases a month. Make it such that a judge has only 500 cases or less," he said.

While it was not possible to get the exact number of rape cases pending before the tribunals of the 54 Women and Children tribunals across the country, a project called Justice Audit Bangladesh made some projections in 2018.

The GIZ-run project collected data of pending cases from 2015-2018, and made individual projections for each

tribunal for years 2019 to 2022.

According to their projections, 42 percent of the cases in 2020 were pending cases, with similar numbers projected for 2021 and 2022.

The project surmised that Kushtia's Women and Children tribunal had the most number of pending cases this year, at nearly 70 percent.

The problem however is not just in the caseload of the courts, but also in the investigation process and the lawyers, said speakers.

Former director of National Human Rights Commission Dr Mizanur Rahman questioned, "Do the investigating officers stick to the investigation timeframe?"

"The medical report gets delayed because the one-stop crisis centre is only available in certain areas," said Farhana Afroze, additional attorney general of the Supreme Court. According to the Judiciary Portal of Bangladesh, there are 6 OCCs to service 65 districts.

Speakers also said that if the case extends for over 180 days, judges may be more inclined to provide bail to the accused.

"The accused often escapes. The investigating officer then has to find the accused on top of continuing the

prosecution of the case," said Afroze.

"Many of the victims come from lower socio-economic backgrounds with temporary addresses. It becomes very difficult to track them down to continue a case," she added.

Afroze however said that the lengthy wait-times are a deterrent for survivors to seek justice to begin with. "They think that it will be years before the case is cleared by the Appellate Division so why bother filing a case."

As speakers spoke about lawyers and witnesses not showing up on court dates, they pointed out that the 2019 HC ruling also stated that if important witnesses such as magistrates, police, doctors and other experts do not appear before courts to provide their testimonies, departmental action may be taken against them, and if need be, their salaries can be stalled.

"Witnesses of all types need to be remunerated for their time. This is especially for retired police officers who show up for cases by spending out of their own pocket," said Golam Kibria.

"Going through the legal process re-traumatises the survivor," said Mahfuza Mala, programme coordinator of gender justice and social inclusion at Oxfam Bangladesh.

Menczer said this week.

Menczer accused critics of the procurement plans of representing the interests of pharmaceutical multinationals and "the Brussels lobby scene".

The European Medicines Agency (EMA), charged with overseeing vaccine approval in the European Union, has yet to assess the Russian drug, which Moscow said this week showed 95 percent effectiveness in latest trials.

Pump worker

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Emon, 22, set him on fire out of anger, police said.

On the same day, Farid Mia filed a case with Shyampur Police Station in connection with the incident.

Police that day arrested Emon and two other employees -- Fahad Ahmed Pavel, 28, and Shahidul Islam, 18 -- of the filing station in the capital's Jurain.

Mofizul Islam, officer-in-charge of Shyampur Police Station, said four workers, including the victim and arrestees, were on the night shift at the filling station on Tuesday. As Emon was asleep, Riad went to call him to get to work.

Unable to wake Emon up, Riad sprinkled octane on his face. Angered by this, Emon took a container of octane, poured the fuel on Riad and set him on fire, leaving him critically injured, the police officer said quoting the arrestees.

Melting mountain

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"The ice melt, sad as it is, provides an unprecedented archaeological opportunity for new knowledge."

The finds come in a range of conditions, with the oldest arrows, from 4000BC, in poor condition. However, the arrows from the Late Neolithic period (2400-1750BC) have been better preserved in comparison to those from the following 2,000 years, according to the study.

Using ground-penetrating radar (GPR) technology, researchers concluded that the ice movement might be the reason behind the deterioration of the oldest arrows.

WHO wants

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Shoigu said that over 2,500 soldiers had already been vaccinated, adding that by the end of the year the number is expected to reach 80,000.

The Sputnik V vaccine -- dubbed after the Soviet-era satellite -- was registered in August and is currently undergoing its third and final stage of trials involving more than 40,000 volunteers.

Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) said in a statement: "Hetero, one of India's leading generic pharmaceutical companies, have agreed to produce in India over 100 million doses per year of the Sputnik V."

It also said that production was expected to start in early 2021.

Meanwhile, WHO's top emergency expert said on Friday it would be "highly speculative" for the global health body to say the coronavirus did not emerge in China, where it was first identified in a food market in December last year.

China is pushing a narrative via state media that the virus existed abroad before it was discovered in the central city of Wuhan, citing the presence of coronavirus on imported frozen food packaging and scientific papers claiming it had been circulating in Europe last year.

"I think it's highly speculative for us to say that the disease did not emerge in China," Mike Ryan said at a virtual briefing in Geneva after being asked if Covid-19 could have first emerged outside China.

"It is clear from a public health perspective that you start your investigations where the human cases first emerged," he added, saying that evidence might then lead to other places.

He repeated that the WHO intended to send researchers to the Wuhan food market to probe the virus origins further, reports Reuters.

The WHO has been accused by the Trump administration of being "China-centric", allegations it has repeatedly denied.

SHOPS REOPEN IN FRANCE
Coronavirus deaths topped 400,000 yesterday in Europe, the world's second worst-hit region, as parts of the continent began to reopen shops for the holiday season.

But across the Atlantic fearful US shoppers turned to online outlets for a massive Black Friday sale, while densely populated Los Angeles county announced a ban on gatherings of people from different households under a new "safer-at-home order" to battle the surging pandemic.

Persistent high case numbers in many western countries loom over governments' hopes to ease their virus rules for Christmas and New Year.

The holidays would be a longed-for respite before bracing for what the world hopes is one last wave of restrictions until a clutch of promising new vaccines kick in.

Britain accounted for almost two-thirds of Europe's fatalities at 57,551, followed by Italy with 53,677, France at 51,914 and Spain with 44,668.

Stores began lifting their shutters in France yesterday, while Poland's shopping centres will also reopen.

Belgium will allow shops to reopen from December 1, but keep the current semi-lockdown in place possibly until mid-January. The move mirrors similar easing in Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

Ireland has also announced a staggered easing of restrictions to allow some businesses to reopen and for families to gather ahead of Christmas.

The pandemic has killed at least 1,444,426 people worldwide since last December, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP yesterday.