

HK SECURITY TRIAL
Pro-democracy tycoon Jimmy Lai testifies
Tells court he championed 'freedom'

AFP, Hong Kong

Jailed Hong Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai insisted his newspaper had championed democracy and "freedom" as he took the witness stand yesterday for the first time in his trial for collusion with foreign forces.

Lai's case is one of the most prominent prosecuted under the national security law imposed by Beijing in 2020, with Western countries and rights groups demanding his release.

The 76-year-old founder of tabloid Apple Daily is accused of colluding with foreign forces, a charge that could carry a sentence of up to life in prison.

The case centres around articles in the newspaper that supported huge, sometimes violent pro-democracy protests in 2019 and criticised Beijing's leadership.

Yesterday, Lai insisted that "the core values of Apple Daily are actually the core values of the people of Hong Kong... (including) rule of law, freedom, pursuit of democracy, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly".

He said he had entered the media business because "to participate in delivering freedom is a very good idea for me... The more you are in the know, the more you are free".



People inspect a damaged site in the aftermath of an Israeli strike that hit an army post in the town of Sarafand, southern Lebanon yesterday. US envoy Amos Hochstein said he will travel to Israel to secure a ceasefire.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Israeli strikes kill 19 Palestinians in Gaza
Say medics; hospital in north makes distress call

REUTERS, Cairo

Israeli forces killed at least 19 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip yesterday, including a rescue worker, health officials said, as tanks deepened their incursion in the area and blew up homes, according to residents.

Medics said at least 12 people were killed in an Israeli strike on a house in the area of Jabalia, in northern Gaza, earlier yesterday. They said at least 10 people remained missing as rescue operations continued. Another man was killed in tank shelling nearby, they said.

In the Sabra suburb of Gaza City, the Palestinian civil emergency said an Israeli air strike targeted one of their teams during a rescue operation, killing one staff and wounding three others.

The death raised the number of civil emergency service members killed since Oct 7, 2023, to 87, it said. Israel's offensive in Gaza killed at least 43,985 people, according to the Gaza health ministry.

Adding to the challenges facing the healthcare system in north Gaza areas, the civil emergency service said their vehicles were hardly operational because of shortages of fuel and equipment, citing Israel's continued refusal to allow them to bring the needed supplies.

Hussam Abu Safiya, director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, one of three medical facilities barely operational in the enclave, said the hospital came under Israeli fire on Tuesday. "Unfortunately, food and water are not allowed to enter, and not even a single ambulance is permitted access to the north," he added.

ARMY OUTPOST
Suicide attack kills 12 Pak soldiers
PM announces new offensive against insurgents

REUTERS, Islamabad

A suicide attack by Islamist militants on an outpost killed 12 soldiers in northwest Pakistan, the country's military said yesterday.

Militants rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into the perimeter wall of the outpost in northern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, and damaged the adjoining infrastructure during the attack on Tuesday, the military's media wing said in a statement.

"Sanitization operation is being conducted in the area and the perpetrators of this heinous act will be brought to justice," the statement said, adding that six militants had been killed.

The military did not provide details on who was behind the attack, but Hafiz Gul Bahadur, an Islamist militant group claimed responsibility.

Yesterday, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced a new military offensive against separatist insurgents in southwestern Balochistan province, which borders Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and is home to key Chinese Belt and Road projects, after a spate of attacks in the area.

DEPORTATION THREAT
Los Angeles passes ordinance to protect immigrants

REUTERS, Los Angeles

The Los Angeles City Council on Tuesday unanimously passed a "sanctuary city" ordinance to protect immigrants living in the city, a policy that would prohibit the use of city resources and personnel to carry out federal immigration enforcement.

The move by the Southern California city, the second most populated city in the US after New York City, follows President-elect Donald Trump's vow to carry out mass deportations of immigrants.



The ordinance codifies the protection of migrants in municipal law. Council member Paul Krekorian said the measure addresses "the need to ensure that our immigrant community here in Los Angeles understands that we understand their fear."

Pro-immigrant protesters spoke on the steps of Los Angeles City Hall before the vote, holding up signs saying "Los Angeles Sanctuary City Now!" They chanted in Spanish "What do we want? Sanctuary. When do we want it? Now."

The city is home to 1.3 million migrants, council members said, without specifying how many entered the country legally.

"We are extremely concerned, given that this is a city where about a third of the population is immigrants," Shiu-Ming Cheer said at the rally.

She is deputy director of immigrant and racial justice at the California Immigration Policy Center.

We are only facilitators, not rulers: Yunus

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put together, they have already recognised this government.

TDS: However, Indian media seems to distort our evolving situation. Reports include allegations of attacks on minorities. Have you expressed concern about this?

Muhammad Yunus: We've consistently said that these claims are mere propaganda. When Modi mentioned attacks on minorities during our conversation, I told him outright that these allegations are baseless. I even invited Indian journalists to visit Bangladesh to see for themselves. Our country is open, journalists can go wherever they want without restrictions.

Although some journalists did come after that, the narrative didn't change, which is disappointing.

TDS: Some Indian media have gone as far as to use terms like genocide against the Hindus.

Muhammad Yunus: They even had Trump make similar statements. This deeply saddened us. We've repeatedly emphasised that Bangladesh and India share a deep friendship. Such tactics won't sustain in the long term. Our shared history and geographic realities mean there's no scope for distance between us.

Some temporary friction may arise, but it won't define our bond. The sooner we move past these narratives, the better.

From the beginning, I've advocated revitalising SAARC. Everyone was enthusiastic about SAARC initially, but now it's practically a dead organisation. When I asked, they said it was because of Pakistan. So, I suggested that we could leave that aside for the time being and proceed. We were all there at the UN General Assembly, a photo-op would have been a matter of half an hour at most.

India says it's focusing on BIMSTEC. My response is, "Fine, pursue BIMSTEC, but SAARC is still here." We have expressed interest in joining ASEAN as well. These aren't conflicting endeavours. Every country has the right to build alliances. SAARC, with its established secretariat in Nepal, is just sitting idle. This is disheartening.

The youth are being deprived. SAARC had the potential to be like the European Union, facilitating free movement, trade, and education across member states. While this wasn't achievable immediately, it would have been possible step by step. Instead, it has regressed.

TDS: Considering US-China tensions and competition in the Indo-Pacific, Bangladesh may find itself caught in the middle. What's your perspective?

Muhammad Yunus: I don't see this as a tug-of-war. We have the opportunity to act as influencers. If

misunderstandings arise between our two neighbours, we can mediate. We're friends with both and can work to defuse tensions. We may be a small nation, but we have a big role to play.

We're not seeking conflict; we want peace. And because of our size, neither side would feel threatened by us. They might even laugh at our attempts, but we'll continue advocating for peace.

TDS: The worsening US-China relations are troubling.

Muhammad Yunus: No country benefits from deteriorating relations with another. Many years ago, I wrote an article in The Daily Star titled "Growing Up with Two Giants".

TDS: It was for The Daily Star's 15th anniversary issue.

Muhammad Yunus: Yes. We're not denying their significance. This is an opportunity for us, and it remains so.

We now have a significant opportunity to move past everything from the past. Let us not make the same mistakes again. We need to rebuild based on truth and learnings from past errors.

If we make mistakes during this process, point them out to us. That's why we value independent journalism. Your feedback helps us notice what we might otherwise miss.

We still have the chance to make the most of it. Why would we want to create enemies? We don't wish harm upon anyone.

TDS: Is our relationship with China the same as before?

Muhammad Yunus: They are very enthusiastic about working with us. During my visit to the United Nations, the Chinese head of state didn't attend. According to protocol, I cannot hold formal meetings with anyone other than a head of state. However, the China's foreign minister was present, and he wanted to meet. We didn't have an official meeting, but we sat down informally.

For two evenings, we discussed various issues with his entire team. He outlined, point by point, the extent of China's relationship with us. He gave a lengthy statement, and I reciprocated with one of my own.

He had detailed records of my personal connections with Chinese universities that have centres named after me, places where Grameen microcredit operates, when I visited China, and whom I met.

China's largest bank, the China Construction Bank, once sought my

advice on microcredit. Today, they operate microcredit programmes there. They even introduced new banking laws for the poor because of my influence. Establishing a new banking law is no small feat. It couldn't be done in our country, except for the Grameen Bank law. But in China, the law applies to all banks.

TDS: Could the distance between China and India impact us?

Muhammad Yunus: We are friends with everyone. We want to maintain close friendship with both India and China. We are excluding no one.

TDS: Murder cases have been filed against journalists without concrete evidence. Recently, the accreditation cards of 150 journalists were revoked. This has had a negative impact on press freedom.

Muhammad Yunus: This is what happens when things are done hastily. We have stopped such actions.

A committee has been formed to review the cases filed against journalists. The committee will examine whether these cases have any basis. The government will take appropriate steps based on its recommendations.

TDS: Has a timeline been set for this process?

Muhammad Yunus: No, not yet. TDS: What about the accreditation cards?

Muhammad Yunus: I've been informed that these cards are for entry into the Secretariat, not for practising journalism. The revocation affects only access to the Secretariat. Journalists can continue their work otherwise. Legally, the government has the authority to regulate Secretariat access.

TDS: Do you have a message for journalists?

Muhammad Yunus: We now have a significant opportunity to move past everything from the past. Let us not make the same mistakes again. We need to rebuild based on truth and learnings from past errors. If we make mistakes during this process, point them out to us. That's why we value independent journalism. Your feedback helps us notice what we might otherwise miss.

TDS: We are optimistic, too. We see new opportunities and potential and want to advance along this path.

Muhammad Yunus: This is the aspiration of the entire country. We are talking about reforms to establish a proper framework to make it sustainable. Otherwise, we might return to the old ways after a single election. We must ensure that we break free from this cycle.

TDS: Thank you so much for your time.

Muhammad Yunus: Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak.

AFP, Bangkok

Landmines and unexploded munitions claimed more victims in Myanmar than in any other country last year, a monitor said yesterday, warning the true toll could be double or triple its estimate of 1,000 people killed or wounded.

Decades of sporadic conflict between the military and ethnic rebel groups have left the Southeast Asian country littered with deadly landmines and munitions.

But the military's ouster of Aung San Suu Kyi's government in 2021 has turbocharged conflict in the country and birthed dozens of newer "People's

Defence Forces" (PDFs) now battling to topple the military.

Anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war killed or wounded 1,003 people in Myanmar in 2023, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) said yesterday.

There were 933 landmine casualties in Syria, 651 in Afghanistan and 580 in Ukraine, the ICBL said in its latest Landmine Monitor report.

With conflict and other restrictions in Myanmar making ground surveys impossible, the true casualty figure was likely far higher than reported, said Yeshua Moser-Puanguwan of the ICBL.

"How many more? Double? Triple?"

Quite possibly... There's no medical surveillance system in the country that can provide official data in any manner or form," he told a press conference in Bangkok.

"No armed group in Myanmar, not the military, not any of the ethnic armed groups, not the PDFs have provided us with any data on the number of casualties they have."

"And we know from anecdotal evidence that it's massive."

Myanmar is not a signatory to the United Nations convention that prohibits the use, stockpiling or development of anti-personnel mines.

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গবেষণা আগ্রহব্যক্তকরণ প্রস্তাব (EOI) আহ্বান সংক্রান্ত বিজ্ঞপ্তি
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(২) শিশুর প্রতি সহিংসতাঃ কারণ ও প্রতিকার
(৩) সমষ্টিগত সহিংসতাঃ কারণ ও প্রতিকার (আন্তর্জাতিক ও জাতীয় ঐতিহাসিক অবস্থা বিশ্লেষণপূর্বক রাজনৈতিক ও সামাজিক সমষ্টিগত সহিংসতার কারণ ও প্রতিকার নির্ণয় করতে হবে)
(৪) সিলেট জেলার বিশ্বনাথ উপজেলার রামপাশা ইউনিয়নের আমতৈল (আমতৈল, মাথারগাঁও, ধলিপাড়া ও জমসদপুর) গ্রামে তুলনামূলকভাবে প্রতিবন্ধী বাক্তি ও শিশুর সংখ্যা বেশি হওয়ার কারণ ও প্রদেয় সরকারি সেবাসমূহ চিহ্নিতকরণ
(৫) প্রজন্মের মধ্যে রাজনৈতিক ও সামাজিক মূল্যবোধ (রাজনৈতিক মতাদর্শে প্রজন্মগত বিভাজনঃ প্রজন্মভেদে সামাজিক ও রাজনৈতিক মতামতের পার্থক্য নির্ণয় করতে হবে)
১২ প্রধান শর্তসমূহ : (১) প্রতিটি গবেষণা কাজের প্রাক্কলিত ব্যয় ৭,৬০,০০০ (সাত লক্ষ ষাট হাজার) টাকা (ভাট ও আয়করসহ)।
(২) গবেষক/গবেষণা প্রতিষ্ঠান উল্লিখিত যে কোনো একটি শিরোনাম নির্বাচন করে বাংলাদেশ ১৫০০ শব্দের একটি গবেষণা সারসংক্ষেপ সহজলিখিত অনুরোধ আবেদনপত্রের সাথে দাখিল করবেন।
(৩) একই বাক্তি বা প্রতিষ্ঠানের একাধিক বিষয়ে গবেষণা প্রস্তাব বাতিল বলে গণ্য হবে।
(৪) গবেষণায় বাংলাদেশ জাতীয় সমাজকল্যাণ পরিষদ-এর নীতিমালা অনুসরণ করতে হবে। নীতিমালা পরিষদের ওয়েবসাইট www.bnswc.gov.bd এ পাওয়া যাবে।
(৫) গবেষক/গবেষণা প্রতিষ্ঠানের প্রধান গবেষকের যোগ্যতা, অভিজ্ঞতা, সহায়ক গবেষক বা জনবলের যোগ্যতা/তথ্য, গবেষণার সামগ্রী, শিরোনাম সংশ্লিষ্ট প্রকাশনা ইত্যাদির তথ্য আবেদনপত্রের সাথে দাখিল করতে হবে।
(৬) মূলকপিসহ ০৩ (তিন) সেট গবেষণা আগ্রহব্যক্তকরণ প্রস্তাব (EOI) দাখিল করতে হবে।
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ফোনঃ ২২২২২৮১২৫
ইমেইলঃ bnswcbd@gmail.com