

International

Myanmar police fire rubber bullets on protesters as UN envoy breaks ranks

20 protesters arrested, three journalists detained

YANGON: Myanmar police fired rubber bullets to disperse protesters in Yangon yesterday, after the country's ambassador to the United Nations broke ranks to make an emotional plea for action against the military junta. The country has been shaken by a wave of protests since a coup toppled civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1. Authorities have ramped up the use of force to suppress dissent, deploying tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets to disperse some protests. Live rounds have been used in isolated cases.

In Myanmar's biggest city Yangon yesterday, police used rubber bullets to disperse a demonstration at Myaynigone junction, the site of an hours-long standoff the day before. "What are the police doing? They are protecting a crazy dictator," the protesters chanted as they were chased away by the police. Hundreds of ethnic Mon protesters had gathered there to commemorate Mon National Day and protest the coup, joined by other minority groups. They scattered into residential streets and started building makeshift barricades out of barbed wire and tables to stop the police. Many wore hard hats and gas masks, wielding homemade shields for protection.

At least 20 protesters were arrested, a police official confirmed. Local reporters broadcast the chaotic scenes live on Facebook, including the moments when the shots rang out, which AFP reporters on the ground also witnessed. "We will try to find another way to protest-of course, we are afraid of their crackdown," said protester Moe Moe, 23, who used a pseudonym. "We want to fight until we win." At least three journalists were among those detained, including an Associated Press photographer, a video journalist from Myanmar Now, and a photographer from the Myanmar Pressphoto Agency.

At nearby Hledan junction several rounds of stun grenades were fired, according to AFP reporters, and a police source said more than 140 people had been arrested. Another protest near a shopping center in nearby Tamwe Township was broken up

by police. "I don't know where she is taken," said Aye Myint Kyi, a distraught mother of one shopper, adding that she reached her daughter briefly on the phone. "She answered she was being taken," she told AFP, crying. "The police don't answer anything too... she was unjustly arrested."

'This revolution must win'

Similar scenes of chaos played out across Myanmar as demonstrators entered their fourth week of daily protests against the junta. In the central city of Monywa a rally had barely started before police moved in on demonstrators, said a medic with a local emergency rescue team. Medic Htwe Aung Zin said his team had been "sent a man who was severely injured in his leg from the police crackdown," adding that they treated 10 others with minor injuries. He declined to say what kind of bullets caused the man's injury. Another medic—who did not give their name—told AFP that a woman had been sent to the intensive care unit after sustaining injuries during the crackdown. Local media Monywa Gazette also announced on its official Facebook that CEO Kyaw Kyaw Win was beaten by plainclothes police and arrested while he was broadcasting a live video.

The crackdowns came after Myanmar's ambassador to the United Nations broke ranks and made an emotional plea Friday to the international community. "We need... the strongest possible action from the international community to immediately end the military coup, to stop oppressing the innocent people, to return the state power to the people, and to restore the democracy," Kyaw Moe Tun told the UN General Assembly. Briefly speaking in Burmese, he pleaded with his "brothers and sisters" to keep fighting to end military rule. "This revolution must win," he said, flashing the three-finger salute that has become a symbol of resistance against the junta. His appeal broke with the current rulers of Myanmar and was met with applause in the chamber.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison of Australia, the former colonial power and PNG's biggest aid donor, lamented the loss of "a towering figure in the history of Papua New Guinea".

"He was a vital partner who staunchly defended Papua New Guinea's independence, but always appreciated Australia's unstinting commitment to his country," he said. Somare's passing represents the end of an era for the staggeringly diverse nation, which has more than 800 languages and a myriad of tribal groups and struggles with some of the highest levels of poverty in the Asia-Pacific region. "He's been a major figure, he's an iconic figure in Papua New Guinea politics," Sinclair Dinnen, a Pacific expert from the Australian National University in Canberra told AFP. "He has a status that nobody else has. He is seen as the father of independence. Some would attribute his influence to having held this very difficult country together over the post-independence period."

Father of the nation

Bright, educated and articulate, Somare was marked from the beginning of his political career as someone to watch, emerging as a leader of a new generation that would take power after the country won independence. Born to a policeman and his wife in Rabaul on April 9, 1936, Somare grew up in a village in East Sepik, where he is expected to be laid to rest in the coming days.

Facebook the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

The 53-year-old, a crocodile farmer and a writer known for his satirical style, was charged with spreading rumors and conducting "anti-state activities". Protesters have called his death a "custodial murder" after he was denied bail six times in 10 months. "Mushtaq Ahmed's death was not a normal death. We'll say it was a murder," said Manisha Chakraborty, a protester with a left wing group. Demonstrators were set to march to the office of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina carrying a coffin later yesterday.

Facing international questions on the case, authorities have ordered a probe into Ahmed's death, senior government official S.M. Tarikul Islam told AFP. "We formed a committee to probe whether there was negligence by jail officials or procedures in his treatment," Islam said. Thirteen ambassadors from countries including the United States, France, Britain, Canada and Germany have expressed "grave concern". "We call on the government of Bangladesh to conduct a swift, transparent and independent inquiry into the full circumstances of Mr Mushtaq Ahmed's death," the ambassadors said in a statement released late Friday.

They said their countries would be following up over "wider concerns about the provisions and implementation of the DSA, as well as questions

after himself," the tweet said. The post prompted an angry backlash in India, where people mistook the Twitter account with that of another Tom Holland—the 24-year-old British star of the "Spider-Man" series of Marvel movies—whose handle is @TomHolland1996. Soon the hashtag #BoycottSpiderMan started trending in the country of 1.3 billion people.

"This is India's internal matter. We will teach you a lesson of lifetime. #boycottspiderman," said one user in response to the historian's tweet. "You conspirator, conspiring against global leader (Modi). You just wait, Delhi police is coming for you," said another. The actor has been active on Twitter this week, teasing fans with possible titles for the newest film in the series. The #BoycottSpiderMan hashtag then gained further traction as Twitter users mocked others for



YANGON: Police charge on protesters as they crack down on demonstrations against the military coup in Yangon yesterday. —AFP

Mass arrests

The junta has justified its seizure of power by alleging widespread electoral fraud in the November elections, which Suu Kyi's party won in a landslide, and promised fresh polls in a year. Army chief General Min Aung Hlaing now holds unchecked power in Myanmar—effectively halting the country's 10-year experiment with democracy. Suu Kyi, who has not been publicly seen since she was detained, now faces two charges for having unregistered walkie-talkies in her residence and breaking coronavirus rules.

While the Nobel laureate is expected to have a hearing on Monday, her lawyer has still not been able to make contact with her. More than 770 people have been arrested, charged and sentenced since the coup, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners monitoring group, with some 680 still behind bars. At least five people have been killed since the putsch—four of them from injuries sustained at anti-coup demonstrations that saw security forces open fire on protesters. The military has said one police officer has died while attempting to quell a protest.—AFP

PNG 'father of the nation' Somare dies at 84

PORT MORESBY, Papua New Guinea: Papua New Guinea's first prime minister and "father of the nation" Sir Michael Somare died on Friday after what his family described as a brief battle with cancer. He was 84. Known across the country simply as "The Chief", Somare led Papua New Guinea at independence from Australia in 1975 and was prime minister for a total of 17 years, during three separate terms. "Our nation honors this Great Leader," Prime Minister James Marape said in a statement, calling for "a week of silence, peace and calm" to pay respect to "this one person whom our country owes much". "He is unmatched by anyone of us who comes after him."

Somare was only diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in early February and was admitted to hospital a week ago, his daughter Betha Somare said in a statement. For decades, Somare was the dominant political figure in the mountainous island nation and his death is expected to unleash an emotional outpouring. He only stepped back from politics in 2017, after 49 years as a member of parliament.

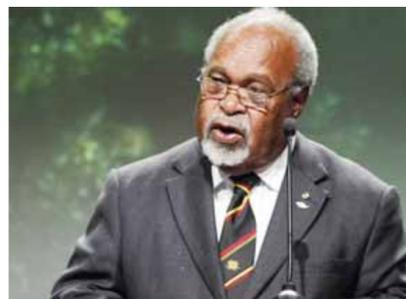
Anger brews over prison death of Bangladesh writer

DHAKA, Bangladesh: Hundreds of people in Bangladesh took part yesterday in a second day of demonstrations sparked by the death of a writer at a high security prison in a case that has drawn international concern. Protesters marched at the University of Dhaka chanting slogans condemning the government's treatment of Mushtaq Ahmed as well as other dissident writers, journalists and activists. Another protest was staged at the National Press Club.

Demonstrators demanded the scrapping of Bangladesh's hardline Digital Security Act (DSA) under which Ahmed was imprisoned. The law has been used to crack down on dissent since it was enacted in 2018. Security forces clashed with students in Dhaka on Friday night. Police said six people were arrested while activists said at least 30 were injured. Ahmed collapsed and died at Kashimpur High Security Prison late Thursday. He was first detained in May after criticizing on

Spider-Man star caught in Indian Twitter storm mix-up

NEW DELHI: "Spider-Man" star Tom Holland was grappling with an angry Twitter storm in India on Friday in a case of mistaken cyber identity. A historian with the Twitter handle @holland_tom tweeted a post mocking Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday after a huge cricket stadium was renamed after him. "I'm a huge admirer of the modesty Modi showed in naming the world's largest cricket stadium



OSLO: In this file photo Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Michael Somare addresses the Climate and Forest Conference in Oslo. —AFP

A talented student, he became a school teacher and later a state radio broadcaster before moving into politics. Mixing with like-minded activists in Port Moresby while studying at Administrative College, Somare helped found the nationalistic Papua New Guinea Union Party (PANGU) in 1967 before winning election to parliament in 1968. After several years as opposition leader, he became chief minister in 1972 after forming a coalition government with Julius Chan, and later prime minister in 1975.—AFP



DHAKA: Activists hold placards during a demonstration demanding the repeal of the Digital Security Act, in Dhaka yesterday following the death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed in jail. —AFP

about its compatibility with Bangladesh's obligations under international human rights laws and standards." Rights groups have also raised concerns about the case. The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) called for "a swift, transparent and independent investigation", while PEN America said authorities should drop charges against Kabir Kishore, a cartoonist who was detained along with Ahmed.—AFP

their misdirected vitriol.

Historian Holland later apologized, tweeting: "Oh dear—I seem single-handedly to have destroyed prospects for the next Spider-Man in India." "I should have remembered that with great power comes great responsibility," he said, echoing a famous Spider-Man quote. Tongue-in-cheek, he added: "Just for the record, & to save Marvel's profits in India, I freely acknowledge that Narendra Modi is a man of immense humility, and that his naming the world's largest cricket stadium after himself is in no way quite hilariously immodest." The stadium in Ahmedabad in Gujarat state was renamed on Wednesday from Motera to Narendra Modi. The 110,000-seat venue was the pet project of Modi who was the state's chief minister before becoming India's prime minister in 2014.—AFP

News in brief

Bangladesh vaccinates sex workers

DHAKA, Bangladesh: Bangladesh has begun administering coronavirus vaccines to sex workers from the country's largest brothel, a vast warren of shacks home to around 1,900 prostitutes. The South Asian nation has so far vaccinated nearly three million people aged 40 or above with the AstraZeneca jab, but has scrapped the age restriction for sex workers at the town of Daulatdia in the country's west. "At least 100 sex workers have already got the anti-COVID-19 jabs," Asif Mahmud, health chief in Daulatdia, told AFP.—AFP

Haiti prison breakout leaves 25 dead

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti: More than 200 prisoners were on the run in Haiti on Friday, a day after they escaped from jail in a violent breakout that left 25 people dead including the prison director, officials said. About 400 inmates fled on Thursday, with AFP photographs showing at least three dead bodies lying outside the prison and some captured prisoners under armed guard in the back of a truck. "Twenty-five people died including six prisoners and Divisional Inspector Paul Hector Joseph who was in charge of the prison," Secretary of Communication Frantz Exantus said of the mass escape from the jail in the suburbs of capital Port-au-Prince.—AFP

India, China discuss troop pullback

NEW DELHI: India and China's foreign ministers have discussed further de-escalating tensions at a disputed border after a pullback of troops in response to a deadly clash last year, New Delhi and Beijing said Friday. The nuclear-armed neighbors fought a border war in 1962 and last June their worst skirmish in decades left 20 Indian troops and four Chinese dead on the inhospitable frontier between Ladakh and Tibet, the Line of Actual Control. Both sides have sent thousands of extra troops and military hardware to the area since the clash. But India said the two countries had completed a "disengagement" of troops and tanks from one part of the disputed zone around the high-altitude Pangong Tso lake, following nine rounds of military talks.—AFP

Sri Lanka ends forced cremations

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka on Friday ended forced cremations of people who have died of coronavirus, after visiting Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan urged Colombo to respect the funeral rites of the island's minority Muslims. The government first banned burials in April over concerns—which experts said were baseless—by influential Buddhist monks that the practice could contaminate groundwater and spread the virus. The policy was decreed by members of the South Asian nation's Muslim community who constitute 10 percent of the 21 million population.—AFP

Auckland back in lockdown

WELLINGTON, New Zealand: Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern ordered New Zealand's largest city back into lockdown yesterday as COVID-19 cases continued to be detected in the community. The latest restrictions in Auckland will last at least seven days and come less than two weeks after a three-day shutdown in the city. Ardern said a new coronavirus case confirmed yesterday could not be directly connected to other positive tests over the last two weeks, although a school in South Auckland was a common link. From today morning the city's 1.7 million residents must stay at home except for essential shopping and work. Schools and non-essential shops will close, and entry in and out of the city will be restricted.—AFP