



Rohingya wary as Myanmar's anti-junta resistance reaches out

UK's PM Johnson to 'restore our freedoms' after COVID lockdown

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MIAMI: Protesters gather in front of the Versailles restaurant to show support for the people in Cuba who have taken to the streets there to protest on July 11, 2021 in Miami, Florida. —AFP

Rare anti-govt protests erupt in Cuba

Only authorized gatherings in Cuba are Communist Party events

HAVANA: Thousands of Cubans took part in rare protests Sunday against the communist government, chanting, "Down with the dictatorship," as President Miguel Diaz-Canel called on his supporters to confront the demonstrators. The anti-government rallies started spontaneously in several cities as the country endures its worst economic crisis in 30 years, with chronic shortages of electricity and food.

Several hundred protesters marched through the capital Havana chanting, "We want liberty," with a heavy military and police presence deployed after demonstrators massed outside the Capitol building. Police used tear gas to disperse crowds, and at least ten people were arrested, while officers used plastic pipes to beat protesters, AFP journalists witnessed.

Diaz-Canel delivered a combative television address, saying: "The order to fight has been given into the street, revolutionaries!" "We call on all revolutionaries of the country, all communists, to go out in the streets where these provocations occur... and to face them in a decisive, firm and courageous way."

Protests around country

The only authorized gatherings in Cuba are normally

Communist Party events, but according to the data journalism site Inventario, a total of 40 demonstrations took place on Sunday. Social media showed scenes from anti-government protests around the country, but mobile internet-only introduced in Cuba since 2018 — was largely cut off on Sunday afternoon.

Several thousand protesters, mainly young people, took to the streets of San Antonio de los Baños, a town 30 kilometers (20 miles) southwest of Havana. One local, on condition of anonymity, told AFP that she participated in the demonstration as she was exasperated by "the situation with electricity and food."

Security forces arrived soon after the protests began, and the president later visited the town himself, surrounded by party activists as residents heckled him, according to videos posted online. "The energy situation seems to have produced some reaction," Diaz-Canel told reporters, blaming US sanctions imposed by Donald Trump and left unchanged by President Joe Biden.

He accused "a Cuban-American mafia" of whipping up the protests on social media. Candido Abrines, a retired pro-government protester, told AFP he was demonstrating so that "capitalism will never come back here again and (so)

that these mercenaries paid by the Empire (the US) will never again take our streets, first they have to kill us all."

Government supporters also held some counter-demonstrations in Havana. An Associated Press video journalist was assaulted by some of them, and an AP photojournalist was injured by the police, the news agency said.

The United States reacted swiftly to the day's events. "The US supports freedom of expression and assembly across Cuba, and would strongly condemn any violence or targeting of peaceful protesters who are exercising their universal rights," US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan wrote on Twitter.

In Miami, thousands of Cubans and Cuban-Americans took to the streets of the city's Little Havana district in support of the protests, on foot or waving Cuban flags out of car windows. "These young people today have finally said 'Enough is enough and we're going to do what our old folks couldn't do,'" Cuban-American Yanelis Sales told AFP. "Cubans, we are here with you from the United States."

COVID-19 crisis

Diaz-Canel has been president since 2018, succeeding Raul Castro, who served as leader after his brother Fidel

Castro. Public anger in Cuba has grown recently, driven by long food lines, worsening power shortages for several hours a day and a critical shortage of medicines since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, with Cuba under US sanctions.

The country is also experiencing its toughest phase yet of the coronavirus pandemic, and on Sunday reported a new daily record of infections and deaths. The country of 11.2 million people was left relatively unscathed in the first months of the COVID-19 outbreak but has seen a recent hike in infections.

"These are alarming numbers which are increasing daily," said Francisco Duran, head of epidemiology in the health ministry. Under hashtags such as #SOS Cuba, calls for assistance have multiplied on social media, with citizens and music stars alike urging the government to make it possible for much-needed foreign donations to enter the country.

An opposition group called Saturday for the creation of a "humanitarian corridor," an initiative the government rejected by saying Cuba was not a conflict zone. Ernesto Soberon, a foreign affairs official, denounced a "campaign" he said sought to "portray an image of total chaos in the country which does not correspond to the situation." —AFP

SA deploys troops as unrest spirals after Zuma jailing

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's army said yesterday it was deploying troops to two provinces, including its economic hub of Johannesburg, to help crush mob violence and looting as unrest sparked by the jailing of ex-president Jacob Zuma entered its fourth day.

"The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) has commenced with pre-deployment processes and procedures in line with a request for assistance," the military said in a statement. Personnel will "assist law enforcement agencies deployed in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal provinces respectively to quell the unrest that has gripped both Provinces in the last few days," it said.

The violence raged as the Constitutional Court was reviewing a landmark decision to jail Zuma for contempt of court. An announcement is expected later. The country's top court on June 29 slapped Zuma with a 15-month term for snubbing a probe into the corruption that stained his nine years in power.

Zuma began the sentence last Thursday but is seeking to have the ruling set aside. "What we are saying is that this court made fundamentally rescindable errors," Zuma's lawyer Dali Mpofu argued in an on-line hearing before nine of the court's 11 judges.

Zuma had been treated unfairly and his "right to mitigation was limited," he said. But one of the judges, Steven Majiedt, bluntly said Zuma had been convicted



DURBAN: A South African police officer holds his gun while arresting a suspected looter vandalising the Springfield Park Mall in Durban yesterday. —AFP

"because he disobeyed the order of this court."

Despite his reputation for graft and scandal, the 79-year-old former anti-apartheid fighter remains popular among many poor South Africans.

The epicentre of the unrest is Zuma's home region, the southeastern province of KwaZulu-Natal. Shortly before the military's announcement, troops were seen on the streets of its capital Pietermaritzburg and smoke billowed from the roof of a large shopping mall.

A retail shop in Durban was looted yesterday morning while in Eshowe, a town near Zuma's Nkandla home, police fired rubber bullets to disperse crowds after a supermarket was ransacked. In Johannesburg, in Gauteng province, an AFP photographer saw a corpse at one site. The cause of the death was not immediately known. Sections of a major highway were closed. —AFP

UN chief urges reparations for slavery, colonialism

GENEVA: The UN rights chief called yesterday for countries to dismantle systemic racism and to acknowledge and provide "reparatory justice" for past wrongs like slavery and colonialism.

Speaking before the UN Human Rights Council, Michelle Bachelet described how deeply-embedded racism against Africans and people of African descent continues to affect all aspects of their lives.

Presenting a report called for following the murder of George Floyd by a white US police officer last year, she said there was "an urgent need to confront the legacies of enslavement". In her report, which addressed systemic racism worldwide, Bachelet also called on countries to confront the legacies of "the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism and successive racially discriminatory policies and systems, and to seek reparatory justice."

190 killings

The report made a particular emphasis on systemic racism in policing.

Bachelet's office received information about at least 190 deaths of Africans and people of African descent at the hands of law enforcement officials — nearly all of them in the Americas and Europe.

She warned the council that the systemic racism and racial violence on display today was rooted in "the absence of formal acknowledgement of the responsibilities of states and others that engaged in or profited from"

such practices, "as well as those who continue to profit from this legacy".

Speaking on behalf of a group of African countries, Cameroon's representative in Geneva Come Awomou hailed the report, and presented a draft resolution demanding more protections for people of African descent from police violence.

The text, which is due to be discussed today, proposes the creation of an "independent expert mechanism" aimed at helping "advance racial justice and equality in the context of law enforcement in all parts of the world."

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights appeared to support that idea, urging the council to create "a specific, time-bound mechanism to advance racial justice". She stressed that only by facing the wrongs of the past could countries hope to "transform the structures, institutions and behaviours that lead to direct or indirect discrimination".

The idea of reparations for slavery and subsequent discrimination has long polarised the United States. And more recently, US schools have become embroiled in a row over so-called critical race theory.

The term defines a strand of thought that appeared in US law schools in the late 1970s and which looks at racism as a system enabled by laws and institutions rather than individual prejudices.

But its critics use it as a catch-all phrase to attack teachers' efforts to confront dark episodes in US history, including slavery and segregation, as well as to tackle racist stereotypes. —AFP



Michelle Bachelet

Sex tape furore sparks Cameroon's #MeToo moment

DOUALA: A leaked tape of a woman having sex in the office of a prominent journalist has sparked a wave of indignation in Cameroon, highlighting entrenched problems of sexual harassment and coercion. The

encounter, pictures and a video of which have been placed on social media, took place last month in the office of journalist Martin Camus Mimb, manager of Radio Sport Info, based in Cameroon's economic hub of Douala.

Mimb initially said that a woman who has been named Malicka and a friend of his, Wilfrid Eteki, who is also a traditional chief, had sex in his office while he was away. But after he vowed to file legal action, Mimb found himself accused of having taken part in the event.

He then expressed regret for an "unfortunate situation" and in a letter to Malicka begged her forgiveness

"for the damage to your dignity and honour." Attorneys for a 24-year-old woman whose first name is Malicka are pushing for judicial action against the two men.

They will file suit in the coming days, one of her lawyers, Guy Olivier Moteng, told AFP, but gave no details. Mimb and his lawyer did not respond to an AFP contact request. Malicka has been "very hurt by the fact that her image has been spread across the world — her image is completely ruined," said her attorney, Dominique Fousse. "Her family is getting psychological counselling for her."

The tape has triggered outrage among campaigners

who have battled for years against sexual violence and exploitation in Cameroon. "We live in an environment where assailants are never brought to book, either by society or by the judiciary," said Felix Mbetho, author of a book of first-person accounts of sexual assault.

The UN's Population Fund estimated in January 2016 that more than a third of women in Cameroon had suffered rape or a sexual attack at some point in their life. Minou Chrys-Tayl, a feminist who is urging women to come forward, said sexual harassment was "a curse that can be found at the head of our institutions, in small offices, in homes with domestic helpers." —AFP