

International

Five killed, dozens hurt as anti-UN protests spread in east DR Congo

Protesters smash windows and loot valuables, helicopters airlift UN staff

GOMA: At least five people have been killed and dozens injured during anti-UN protests in eastern DR Congo, a government spokesman said Tuesday as the unrest spread. On Monday, hundreds of people blocked roads and chanted hostile slogans before storming the UN peacekeeping mission's headquarters and a supply base in Goma, the main city in North Kivu province.

Protesters smashed windows and looted valuables, while helicopters airlifted UN staff from the premises and security forces fired teargas in a bid to push them back. In a post on Twitter, government spokesman Patrick Muyaya said "at least five people (were) dead, about 50 wounded" in the unrest.

The security forces had fired "warning shots" at protesters to stop attacks on UN personnel, he said. The unrest continued on Tuesday, with the fatal shooting of a man near the supplies base, an AFP correspondent saw.

The security forces were pushing back crowds outside the depot as protesters waved placards bearing slogans such as "bye bye MONUSCO". Anti-UN protesters also took to the streets in the North Kivu towns of Beni and Butembo, according to witnesses.

Soldiers were deployed on the road leading to the MONUSCO base in Beni, which lies about 350 kilometres (215 miles) north of Goma, while protesters burned tyres. Security forces also dispersed protesters who

had gathered in front of a MONUSCO base in Butembo, another provincial hub, local sources said.

Anger

The UN mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, known as MONUSCO, is one of the world's biggest peacekeeping operations. But it has regularly come under criticism in the troubled east, where many accuse it of failing to do enough to stem decades-long bloodshed.

More than 120 armed groups roam the volatile region, where civilian massacres are common and conflict has displaced millions of people. The killings have continued despite the presence of thousands of UN peacekeepers, sparking bouts of anger among local people.

In late 2019, nine anti-UN protesters were killed as Beni and Butembo were terrorised by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which the Islamic State group describes as its central African affiliate. In a statement on Monday,

Khassim Diagne, the deputy special representative of the UN secretary general to MONUSCO, said the peacekeepers were there to protect civilians. "The incidents in Goma are not only unacceptable but totally counterproductive," he said.

M23

The latest protests come after the president of the senate, Modeste Bahati, told supporters in Goma on July



GOMA: A wounded man is rushed away on a motorcycle after protesters stormed and looted a warehouse belonging to the peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) at the UN facilities in Goma. —AFP

15 that MONUSCO should "pack its bags." They coincide with the resurgence of the M23 — a militia that lay mostly dormant for years before resuming fighting last November.

The rebels have since made significant advances in eastern Congo, including capturing the North Kivu town of Bunagana on the Ugandan border. The UN first deployed an observer mission to eastern Congo in 1999.

In 2010, it became the peacekeeping mission MONUSCO—the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo—with a mandate to conduct offensive operations.

It has a current strength of about 16,300 uniformed personnel, according to the UN. The peacekeepers have suffered 230 fatalities during the course of their mission. —AFP



World's biggest peacekeeping operations

Japan executes man over 2008 stabbing rampage

TOKYO: Japan on Tuesday executed a man convicted of killing seven people in a truck ramming and stabbing rampage in Tokyo's popular Akihabara electronics district in 2008, the justice ministry said. Justice Minister Yoshihisa Furukawa said Tomohiro Kato had undertaken "meticulous preparation" for the attack and displayed a "strong intent to kill".

Furukawa said he "approved the execution after extremely thorough scrutiny," noting that Kato's death sentence had been upheld by the court system. Kato went on the rampage on June 8, 2008, telling police: "I came to Akihabara to kill people. It didn't matter who I'd kill."

He was arrested on the spot shortly after the attacks, in which he rammed a rented two-tonne truck into a crowd of pedestrians before getting out and randomly stabbing people. "This is a very painful case that led to extremely grave consequences and shocked society," Furukawa said Tuesday.

Police said Kato documented his deadly journey to Akihabara on Internet bulletin boards, typing messages on a

mobile phone from behind the wheel of the truck and complaining of his unstable job and his loneliness.

Prosecutors said his self-confidence plummeted after a woman he chatted with online abruptly stopped emailing him when he sent her a photograph of himself. His anger against the general public grew when his comments on an Internet bulletin board, including his plans to go on a killing spree, were met with no reaction at all, prosecutors said.

While awaiting trial, Kato wrote to a 56-year-old taxi driver whom he injured in the stabbing spree, expressing his remorse. The victims "were enjoying their lives, and they had dreams, bright futures, warm families, lovers, friends and colleagues," Kato wrote according to a copy published in the Shukan Asahi weekly. And in court, he offered remorse for the attack. "Please let me use this occasion to apologise," he said about the bloody rampage that also left 10 people injured.

Support for death penalty

After the 2008 rampage, Japan banned possession of double-edged



TOKYO, Japan: File photo shows rescue workers gathering at the site where a man went on a stabbing spree in Tokyo's Akihabara electronic shops street. Japan executed a man convicted of killing seven people in a stabbing rampage in Tokyo. —AFP

knives with blades longer than 5.5 centimetres (about two inches), punishable by up to three years in prison or a 500,000 yen fine. The attack was Japan's worst mass killing in seven years and Kato was sentenced to death in 2011, a decision that was upheld by Japan's top court in 2015.

Kato's execution is the first in Japan this year and comes after three prisoners were hanged in December 2021.

Those executions ended a two-year hiatus and were the first under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's administration.

Japan is one of the few developed countries to retain the death penalty, and public support for capital punishment remains high despite international criticism. Executions are carried out by hanging, generally long after sentencing. More than 100 people are currently on death row in Japan. —AFP

Shortages leave bankrupt S Lanka's hospitals empty

COLOMBO: Entire wards are dark and nearly empty in Sri Lanka's largest hospital, its few remaining patients leaving untreated and still in pain, and doctors prevented from even arriving for their shifts. An unprecedented economic crisis has dealt a body blow to a free and universal healthcare system that just months earlier was the envy of the country's South Asian neighbours.

Suffering from diabetes and high blood pressure that inflamed her joints, Theresa Mary travelled to the capital Colombo for treatment at the National Hospital of Sri Lanka. Unable to find a ride for the last leg of her journey, she had to limp the last five kilometres (three miles) on foot.

She was discharged four days later, still finding it difficult to stand on her feet, because the dispensary had run out of subsidised painkillers. "Doctors asked me to buy medicines from a private pharmacy, but I don't have money," Mary, 70, told AFP.

"My knees are still swollen. I don't have a home in Colombo. I don't know how long I have to walk." The National Hospital normally caters to people all over the island nation in need of specialist treatment, but it now runs on reduced staff and many of its 3,400 beds are lying unused.

Supplies of surgery equipment and life-saving drugs have been almost exhausted, while chronic petrol shortages have left both patients and doctors unable to travel for treatment. "Patients scheduled for surgeries are not reporting," Dr Vasan Ratnasingham, a member of a gov-



COLOMBO, Sri Lanka: A woman purchases medicine at a private pharmacy in Colombo. Entire wards are dark and nearly empty in Sri Lanka's largest hospital, its few remaining patients leaving untreated and still in pain, and doctors prevented from even arriving for their shifts. —AFP

ernment medical officers' association, told AFP.

"Some medical staff work double shifts because others cannot report for duty. They have cars but no fuel." Sri Lanka imports 85 percent of its medicines and medical equipment, along with raw materials to manufacture the remaining share of its needs.

But the country is now bankrupt and a lack of foreign currency has left it unable to source enough petrol to keep the economy moving—and enough pharmaceuticals to treat

its sick. "Normal painkillers, antibiotics and paediatric medicines are in extremely short supply. Other medicines have become up to four times expensive in the last three months," pharmacy owner K. Mathiyalagan told AFP.

Mathiyalagan said his colleagues had to reject three out of every 10 prescriptions because they lacked the means to fill them. "A lot of basic medicines are completely out of stock," he added. "Doctors prescribe without knowing what is available in the pharmacies." —AFP

Taiwan practises repelling Chinese sea invasion

TAIPEI, Taiwan: Taiwan simulated intercepting Chinese attacks from the sea in annual war games on Tuesday, with President Tsai Ing-wen hailing the military's "determination" as she watched from onboard a destroyer.

Democratic Taiwan lives under constant threat of

being invaded by China, which views the self-ruled island as part of its territory to be seized by force if necessary. On the second day of the island's largest annual war drills, Tsai, dressed in military fatigues, boarded the Keel Lung class destroyer to supervise a live-fire exercise off Taiwan's eastern coast.

Fighter jets and warships set off various types of missiles aimed at intercepting "a group of enemy ships", the military said. Anti-submarine rockets and depth bombs were also discharged and a Dutch-built Sword Dragon class submarine practised an emergency ascent, it added.

"The precise and solid exercise carried out by everyone just then demonstrates the capabilities and

determination of the Republic of China's military to protect our home and defend our country," Tsai said in a message broadcast to the ship, using Taiwan's formal name.

Beijing's sabre-rattling has increased considerably since Tsai took office in 2016, as she rejects its stance that the island is part of China. When asked to comment on Tuesday's drills, China's foreign ministry warned that "the road to independence is a dead end".

"Taiwan's delusional attempt to confront militarily the mainland is like a mantis trying to obstruct a chariot. It will eventually fail," said spokesman Zhao Lijian. This year's five-day "Han Kuang" (Han Glory) war games have incorporated lessons from Russia's inva-

sion of Ukraine, which has heightened fears of a Chinese assault on the island.

CIA chief Bill Burns said last week Beijing appeared determined to use force in Taiwan, with Russia's experience in Ukraine affecting its calculations on when and how-not whether-to invade. The Taiwan Strait, the narrow waterway separating the island from mainland China, is often a flashpoint between the two sides, with Beijing maintaining it is not international waters.

Last week China slammed Washington as "a destroyer of peace" in the strait, following the latest in a series of passages by US warships through the waterway. —AFP

News in brief

Morocco intercepts migrants

RABAT: Morocco's navy intercepted more than 350 illegal migrants, including four children, in waters off its coast, a military official said on Tuesday. The 359 people rescued between Saturday and Monday had been "aboard makeshift boats, kayaks or swimming" in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, the unnamed official said, quoted by MAP news agency. Mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, the migrants, who also included 10 women, received first aid aboard navy vessels before being transported to the nearest Moroccan ports, according to the same source. On Monday, the Moroccan authorities said the bodies of eight migrants were recovered off the southern shores of the North African kingdom. Morocco is a key transit point on routes taken by migrants seeking better lives in Europe. The Caminando Fronteras charity says almost 1,000 migrants died or were reported missing at sea in the first half of the year as they tried to reach Spain.

Evacuations as forest fires spread

FRANKFURT, Germany: Local officials in Germany were planning more evacuations on Tuesday as forest fires tore through the east of the country in the wake of punishing heatwave. Authorities in the eastern region of Saxony triggered a "disaster alert" in the Bad Schandau area, as wildfires spread through the Saxon Switzerland National Park. Scientists say climate change is making heatwaves around the world more frequent and more intense, which increases the risk of fires. The alarm was due to the "continuing terrible forest fire situation" in the park, which is close to the border with the Czech Republic, officials said. The fire broke out on the Czech side of the border in the twin Bohemian Switzerland National Park. Czech authorities evacuated dozens of people from the area on Monday.

PNG election poll count extended

PORT MORESBY, Papua New Guinea: Vote counting in Papua New Guinea's general elections was extended by a fortnight on Tuesday, as violence and destruction disrupted the already month-long poll. The country's governor general announced the extension, with the return of writs moving from July 29 to August 12, as he called for an end to attacks in an election marred by the "hijacking" of ballot boxes and at least a dozen deaths. "I am appealing to everyone from the candidates, their supporters, scrutineers and elections officials to refrain from violence and allow the process to complete in an orderly and peaceful manner," Governor General Bob Dadae said in a statement. "Don't wait till you are in Parliament to show leadership. Hindering and abetting violence and mayhem is not a sign of leadership, and those involved in such should not consider themselves leaders at all." —AFP