

## International

# Philippine protesters vow to 'never forget' Marcos era abuses

## 'A nation that doesn't remember its history is doomed to repeat it as they say'

**MANILA, Philippines:** Philippine protesters vowed Wednesday to "never forget" the human rights abuses under former dictator Ferdinand Marcos as they held rallies to mark 50 years since his imposition of martial law. Amnesty International estimates thousands of people were killed and tens of thousands tortured and imprisoned after Marcos imposed martial law on September 21, 1972, unleashing security forces on rivals, critics and dissidents.

Marcos's son is now the president of the Philippines, and campaigners have urged him to recognise his family's role in the violence. "The Marcoses need to at least acknowledge their role in those dark days," said Carlos Conde, a researcher for Human Rights Watch, as activists and victims marked the 50th anniversary.



### Christian groups held peaceful demonstrations

"Without truth-telling, without the space for Filipinos to understand and accept what happened during martial law, we can never find closure, we can never move forward." Hundreds of protesters, including human rights activists and Christian groups, held peaceful demonstrations across the capital Manila, carrying placards with slogans such as "never again" and images of martial law victims.

"A nation that doesn't remember its history is doomed to repeat it as they say," said John Magtibay, a 22-year-old film student protesting at the University of

the Philippines. "We are beginning to see that now."

Half a century after martial law began, 11,103 people have been officially recognised as victims of torture, killings, enforced disappearances and other abuses. They have been compensated with some of the wealth-estimated to be in the billions of dollars-stolen by Marcos and his wife Imelda.

But human rights groups say there has never been a true reckoning of the abuses—or those responsible held to account. Marcos was toppled from power by a bloodless "people power" revolt in 1986 and the family was chased into exile.

After the patriarch's death in 1989, they returned to the Philippines and began a remarkable political comeback that culminated with Ferdinand Marcos Jr's victory in the May 9 presidential election. "The fact that we allowed the Marcoses to re-enter Malacanang is really messed up," said Patricia Pobre, a 24-year-old protester, referring to the presidential palace.

### 'One of the darkest periods'

His landslide win was helped by a massive online misinformation campaign that whitewashed abuses and corruption during the dictatorship. Martial law victims and activists have described the Marcos regime as "one of the darkest periods" in the country's history.

They accuse Marcos Jr and his supporters of distorting the facts about martial law and falsely portraying it as a "golden age" for the Philippines. "There are young Filipinos who are interested in learning what really happened in spite of many others who were really blinded," said former political prisoner Bonnie Ilagan, who spent two years in jail where he was repeatedly tortured.

"The fight continues. We must never forget." Ilagan and others accused Marcos's allies in Congress of slashing budgets and weakening the government agencies responsible for preserving the nation's past. In the run-



**QUEZON CITY, Philippines:** Protesters wearing masks depicting President Ferdinand Maros Jr, and former president Rodrigo Duterte, carry a placard during a rally to commemorate 50 years anniversary of the imposition of martial law at the university grounds in Quezon City, suburban Manila. — AFP

up to Wednesday's anniversary, documentary screenings and exhibitions have been held to educate the public about the horrors of martial law.

But a left-wing political party said they were forced to scrap a film screening in suburban Manila on Tuesday after five members of the local police intelligence unit showed up and "harassed" them and "shot video".

Marcos Jr, who has repeatedly praised his father's rule, last week defended martial law as "necessary" to protect the country against communist and Muslim insurgencies. "We do recognise the problems that hap-

pened, the abuses that occurred like in any war," Marcos Jr said.

But he said critics were "wrong" to call his father a "dictator". "There's no reason to revise history," he said, while suggesting school textbooks need to be rewritten "only if they're wrong". Cristina Palabay of the Karapatan human rights alliance accused Marcos Jr and his administration of peddling "one lie after another".

"There needs to be institutionalised acknowledgment and great reckoning on the crimes committed by Marcos and his ilk," she said. — AFP



**TOKYO:** Police stand guard at the entrance to the prime minister's official residence in Tokyo on September 21, 2022. A man set himself on fire near the Japanese prime minister's office after expressing opposition to a state funeral for assassinated ex-premier Shinzo Abe, local media said. — AFP

## Man sets himself on fire near Japan PM's office

**TOKYO, Japan:** A man set himself on fire near the Japanese prime minister's office on Wednesday after expressing opposition to a state funeral for assassinated ex-premier Shinzo Abe, local media reported. Police declined to confirm the incident, but the government said an individual with burns had been found near government property.

"We are aware that a man with burns was found by a police officer at 7:00 am (2200 GMT) this morning at an intersection below the cabinet office," top government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno said. "But details are currently being examined by police," he added, declining to answer further questions on the incident. Local media said the man was taken to hospital and was conscious. TV Asahi said he told police he was opposed to the planned ceremony for Abe.

According to the television station, a police officer who tried to extinguish the fire was injured in the process. Jiji news agency said handwritten notes found near the man said he was "staunchly opposed" to the state funeral. The man was believed to be in his 70s and told police he had doused himself in oil, the agency added.

By mid-morning, the only sign of the incident was a scorched patch of grass and bush, with police and media nearby. Abe, Japan's longest-serving prime minister, was shot dead on July 8 while campaigning, and a publicly funded state funeral honouring him will be held on September 27.

State funerals are rare in Japan, and the decision has been controversial. Recent polls show more than half of the public is opposed to the idea. Abe was Japan's best-known politician and remained a prominent public figure after resigning for health reasons in

2020. He was campaigning for ruling-party candidates in upper-house elections in the Nara region when he was shot by a man who allegedly believed the former leader had ties to the Unification Church.

### World leaders expected

The assassination prompted shock and international condemnation, but sitting Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's authorisation of a state funeral has proved contentious. Abe was far from universally popular, and many opposed his hawkish nationalist views or were angered by persistent allegations of cronyism.

The ceremony for Abe is expected to cost at least 1.7 billion yen (\$12 million.) Kishida, who is currently in New York to address the UN General Assembly, has defended the plan, insisting Abe's record-breaking tenure and international standing mean he merits the ceremony.

The prime minister's approval ratings have taken a hit over the decision, as well as a controversy over ties between politicians and the Unification Church. The church, whose members are sometimes colloquially called the "Moonies" after Korean founder Sun Myung Moon, has been accused of pressuring believers to make sometimes ruinous donations — accusations it denies.

Tetsuya Yamagami, the man accused of shooting Abe, reportedly resented the church over his mother's membership and hefty donations that left his family bankrupt. While Abe was not a member of the church, he addressed affiliated groups, and his death caused renewed scrutiny of the sect and its political connections.

An investigation by Kishida's ruling Liberal Democratic Party found that around half its lawmakers had ties to the sect. He has pledged that the party will cut all links to the church, which has denied any wrongdoing.

Abe's state funeral will be held at Tokyo's Budokan, a large venue for concerts and sporting events. World leaders, including US Vice President Kamala Harris and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, are among those expected to attend. — AFP

and one died of his injuries, he said. A low-level conflict has simmered in Thailand's southernmost provinces since 2004, killing more than 7,000 people, as rebels in the Muslim-majority region battle for greater autonomy from the state.

Early on Wednesday morning, police were investigating the scene of the bomb blast. Local media reported that the force of the explosion had pushed the police car into a power pole. The southern region—heavily policed by Thai security forces—is culturally distinct from Buddhist-majority Thailand, which colonised the area bordering Malaysia over a century ago.

Last month, more than a dozen arson attacks and explosions targeted convenience stores at petrol stations in the provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat—with seven people suffering minor injuries.—AFP

## Japan PM willing to meet North Korea's leader

**UNITED NATIONS, United States:** Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Tuesday renewed his offer to meet North Korea's reclusive leader Kim Jong Un, as tensions simmer over Pyongyang's nuclear program.

Addressing the United Nations General Assembly, Kishida said that Japan still stood by diplomacy set out two decades ago by former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi on his historic visit to Pyongyang.

## US, Canadian warships sail through Taiwan

**TAIPEI, Taiwan:** A US destroyer and a Canadian frigate sailed through the Taiwan Strait on Tuesday in the latest joint operation aimed at reinforcing the route's status as an international waterway. Beijing views as its own both democratic Taiwan and the narrow body of water separating the island from mainland China—one of the world's busiest shipping channels.

The United States has long used "freedom of navigation" passages through the Taiwan Strait to push back against Chinese claims and Western allies have increasingly joined these operations. The USS Higgins, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, in cooperation with the Royal Canadian Navy's Halifax-class frigate HMCS Vancouver "conducted a routine Taiwan Strait transit September 20 (local time)... in accordance with international law", the US Navy's Seventh Fleet said.

"The ship transited through a corridor in the Strait that is beyond the territorial sea of any coastal State." Canada said the HMCS Vancouver was en route to join an ongoing mission to enforce UN sanctions against North Korea when it transited with the USS Higgins.

"Today's routine Taiwan Strait transit demonstrates our commitment to a free, open and inclusive Indo-

Pacific." Canadian Defense Minister Anita Anand said in a statement, using another term for the Asia-Pacific region.

A spokesman for China's Eastern Theatre Command described the latest transit as "public hype". "The troops are always on high alert, resolutely counteract all threats and provocations, and resolutely defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity," Colonel Shi Yi said, according to Chinese state broadcaster CCTV.

British, Canadian, French and Australian warships have made passages through the Taiwan Strait in recent years, sparking protests from Beijing. They also frequently ply the South China Sea, another vital shipping area that Beijing insists comes under its domain despite a 2016 Hague ruling that dismissed its claims as well as rival ones from multiple neighbours.

The last time US and Canadian warships sailed through the Taiwan Strait was 11 months ago when the destroyer USS Dewey and frigate HMCS Winnipeg made the trip. The latest joint passage came a day after President Joe Biden again declared that US troops would come to Taiwan's aid in the event of a Chinese invasion.

This was the fourth time Biden made such comments, despite Washington's longstanding official policy of "strategic ambiguity"—designed both to ward off a Chinese invasion and discourage Taiwan from provoking Beijing by formally declaring independence. Each time after Biden's comments, the White House said there was no change in US policy on Taiwan. — AFP

## Roadside bomb kills policeman in Thai south

**BANGKOK, Thailand:** A roadside bomb blast killed one police officer and wounded three others in Thailand's troubled deep south, authorities said Wednesday. The attack happened on Tuesday night on the side of a road near an abandoned shop in Mai Kaen district, Pattani province, police captain Wasuwat Kongtuk said.

All four officers were taken to hospital for treatment



**AT SEA, UNDEFINED:** In this handout photo courtesy of the US Navy taken on September 20, 2022 the Royal Canadian Navy Halifax-class frigate HMCS Vancouver (FFH 331) transits the Taiwan Strait with guided-missile destroyer USS Higgins (DDG 76) while conducting a routine transit. — AFP