

International

Peruvians defy state of emergency, mobilize for major new protest

Almost 100 stretches of road remained blockaded in 10 of Peru's 25 regions

LIMA: Lima and other Peruvian regions were under a renewed state of emergency even as opponents of President Dina Boluarte began mobilizing toward the capital ahead of a major demonstration Monday, the latest in weeks of deadly unrest. At least 42 people have died, according to Peru's human rights ombudsman, in five weeks of clashes at burning roadblocks and other flashpoints to demand fresh elections and Boluarte's resignation.

She took over on December 7 as the South American country's first woman president following the impeachment and arrest of leftist Pedro Castillo for his failed bid to dissolve Congress and rule by decree. On Sunday some 3,000 protesters in Andahuaylas in southeastern Peru began boarding trucks and buses bound for the demonstration in Lima, RPP radio reported.

The government extended by 30 days a state of emergency from midnight Saturday for Lima, Cusco, Callao and Puno, authorizing the military to back up police actions to restore public order. The state of emergency also suspended constitutional rights such as freedom of movement and assembly, according to a decree published in the official gazette.

In protest epicenter Puno, the government declared a new night-time curfew for 10 days, from 8:00 pm to 4:00 am. Dozens of demonstrators had arrived in Lima's Miraflores district late Saturday as part of a mobilization for what they called a "takeover of the city."

Almost 100 stretches of road remained blockaded Sunday in 10 of Peru's 25 regions—a record, according to a senior land transport official. Castillo, a former rural school teacher and union leader, faced vehement opposition from Congress during his 18 months in office and is the subject of numerous criminal investigations into allegations of widespread graft. His ouster sparked immediate nationwide protests, mainly among the rural poor, that petered out over the holiday period but resumed on January 4.



LIMA: Protesters march demanding the resignation of Peru's President Dina Boluarte and the closure of Congress, in a residential area in Lima, on January 15, 2023. — AFP

'Terrible cruelties'

In the run-up to Monday's demonstrations, attitudes among both protesters and government officials appeared to harden. "We ask that Dina Boluarte resign as president and that Congress be shut down. We don't want any more deaths," Jasmin Reinoso, a 25-year-old nurse from Ayacucho, told AFP.

Prime Minister Alberto Otrola called for protesters to "radically change" their tactics and opt for dialogue. "There is a small group organized and paid for by drug

trafficking and illegal mining that wants to take power by force," Otrola said on local television.

Earlier in the day, some 500 Peruvians, including several dozen police officers, attended a mass in Lima's central cathedral for fallen protesters, as well as for a policeman burnt alive in the southern city of Juliaca. Many of the mourners wore white T-shirts to symbolize peace and bore photographs of the dead.

Lima Archbishop Carlos Castillo, who led the service in Spanish and the Quechua Indigenous language,

called for peace and an end to the "spiral of violence." "The blood that is spilled does not cry out for vengeance," he said.

"May the terrible cruelties that were done to some," including to "our burnt policeman brother, may these cruelties disappear from our horizon." On Friday, Boluarte expressed her "regret" for the deaths, but insisted: "I will not resign." An Ipsos poll published Sunday said Boluarte had a 71 percent disapproval rating.

More than 100 Peruvian, Argentine and Chilean intellectuals, meanwhile, urged Boluarte in an open letter Saturday to "stop the massacre of citizens who exercise their legitimate right" to protest. The unrest has been largely concentrated in the southern Andes, where Quechua and Aymara communities live.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has said that in order to end the crisis, these groups need to be better integrated into Peruvian society. Jose Muro, deputy minister of territorial governance, told TV Peru Sunday the government would create "spaces for dialogue" countrywide to discuss unanswered social demands.

Radical groups?

Meanwhile the airport in Cusco, gateway to the famed Machu Picchu site, reopened Saturday. It had been shuttered two days earlier—the second time it had been closed due to the protests. Train services to the historic Inca citadel also resumed Sunday.

Peru has been politically unstable for years, with 60-year-old Boluarte the country's sixth president in five years. Castillo has been remanded in custody for 18 months, charged with rebellion and other crimes. The authorities insist radical groups are behind the protests, including remnants of the Shining Path communist guerrilla group. As proof, they have presented the capture this week of a former member of that organization, Rocio Leandro, whom the police accuse of having financed some of the unrest. — AFP

London police officer admits serial rapes

LONDON: A British police officer in an armed unit protecting MPs and foreign diplomats has admitted 24 counts of rape and a string of other sex offences over nearly two decades. David Carrick, 48, appeared in court in London on Monday and pleaded guilty to four counts of rape, as well as false imprisonment and indecent assault against a 40-year-old woman in 2003.

Reporting restrictions were lifted on his admission at a previous hearing in December last year of 43 charges against 11 other women, including 20 counts of rape, over a 16-year period to September 2020.

Carrick's force, the Metropolitan Police, has apologised to his victims, after it emerged police were aware of several allegations of rape, domestic violence and harassment against him. But he faced no criminal sanctions or internal disciplinary proceedings. He was suspended from duty after he was arrested in October 2021. The Met has been under intense scrutiny about the conduct of its officers, particularly since the kidnap,

rape and murder of a young woman in south London in March 2021. Wayne Couzens, who also served with the Met's diplomatic protection squad, detained Sarah Everard by falsely claiming she had broken coronavirus lockdown rules.

She was then raped and strangled. Couzens admitted killing her and is serving a full-life sentence in prison. Police were criticised for a lack of proper vetting procedures of Couzens, and for failing to take action after he allegedly exposed himself in 2015.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan, whose office oversees policing in the British capital, said he was "sickened and appalled" by Carrick's offending. "Londoners will be rightly shocked that this man was able to work for the Met for so long and serious questions must be answered about how he was able to abuse his position as an officer in this horrendous manner," he added.

Investigators said Carrick met some of his victims through online dating apps or on social occasions and used his position as a police officer to gain their trust. He then subjected them to attacks, coercive control and degrading treatment.

"It is unbelievable to think these offences could have been committed by a serving police officer," said Detective Chief Inspector Iain Moor, from the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire Major Crime Unit. — AFP

Pakistan must act to end forced child marriage: UN

GENEVA: UN rights experts on Monday deplored a reported rise in abductions, forced marriages and conversions of girls from Pakistan's religious minorities, urging the government to swiftly halt such practices. "We are deeply troubled to hear that girls as young as 13 are being kidnapped from their families, trafficked to locations far from their homes, made to marry men sometimes twice their age, and coerced to convert to Islam," the experts said.

"We are very concerned that such marriages and conversions take place under threat of violence to these girls and women, or their families." The experts called on Pakistan's government "to take immediate steps to prevent and thoroughly investigate these acts".

The group of around a dozen independent United Nations rights experts includes the UN special rapporteurs on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, on contemporary forms of slavery, on violence

against women and on minority issues.

Such investigations, it said, should be carried out "objectively and in line with domestic legislation and international human rights commitments". The experts, who are appointed by the UN Human Rights Council but do not speak on behalf of the world body, pointed to reports indicating that Pakistan's court system enables offences against religious minority girls and young women "by accepting, without critical examination, fraudulent evidence".

"Family members say that victims' complaints are rarely taken seriously by the police, either refusing to register these reports or arguing that no crime has been committed by labelling these abductions as 'love marriages'," they said. The experts pointed out that abductors often "force their victims to sign documents which falsely attest to their being of legal age for marriage as well as marrying and converting of free will".

"These documents are cited by the police as evidence that no crime has occurred." The experts insisted it was vital that all victims, regardless of their religious background, be afforded access to justice and equal protection under the law. Pakistan's authorities, they said, "must adopt and enforce legislation prohibiting forced conversions, forced and child marriages, kidnapping, and trafficking". — AFP

Laser guides lightning bolt...

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an influence on lightning—and it is simplest to guide it," said Aurelien Houard, a physicist at the applied optics laboratory of the ENSTA Paris institute and the study's lead author. But for future applications "it would be even better if we could trigger lightning," Houard told AFP.

Lightning is a discharge of static electricity that has built up in storm clouds, or between clouds and the ground. The laser beam creates plasma, in which charged ions and electrons heat the air. The air becomes "partially conductive, and therefore a path preferred by the lightning," Houard said. When scientists previously tested this theory in New Mexico in 2004, their laser did not grab the lightning.

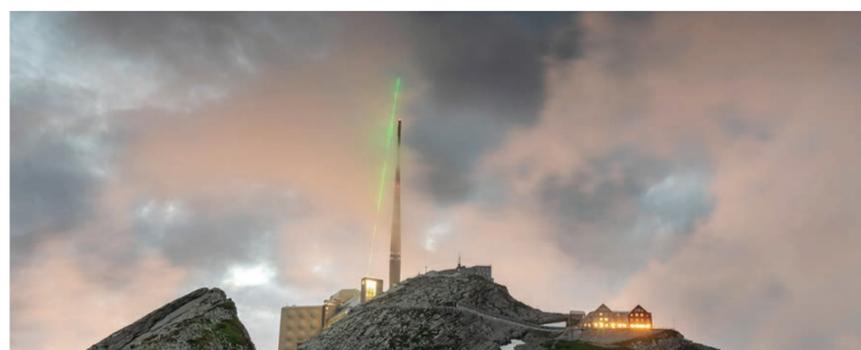
That laser failed because it did not emit enough pulses per second for lightning, which brews in milliseconds, Houard said. He added that it was also difficult to "predict where the lightning was going to fall". For the latest experiment, the scientists left little to chance. They lugged a car-sized laser — which can fire up to a thousand pulses of light a second — up the 2,500-metre peak of Santis mountain in northeastern Switzerland.

The peak is home to a communications tower

that is struck by lightning around 100 times year. After two years building the powerful laser, it took several weeks to move it in pieces via a cable car. Finally, a helicopter had to drop off the large containers that would house the telescope. The telescope focused the laser beam to maximum intensity at a spot around 150 m in the air — just above the top of the 124-m tower. The beam has a diameter of 20 cm at the beginning, but narrows to just a few centimeters at the top.

During a storm in the summer of 2021, the scientists were able to photograph their beam driving a lightning bolt for around 50 m. Three other strikes were also guided, interferometric measurements showed. Most lightning builds up from precursors inside clouds, but some can come up from the ground if the electric field is strong enough. "The current and power of a lightning bolt really becomes clear once the ground is connected with the cloud," Houard said.

The laser guides one of these precursors, making it "much faster than the others — and straighter," he said. "It will then be the first to connect with the cloud before it lights up." This means that, in theory, this technique could be used not just to drive lightning away, but to trigger it in the first place. That could allow scientists to better protect strategic installations, such as airports or rocket launchpads, by igniting strikes at the time of their choosing. In practice, that would require a high conductivity in the laser's plasma — which scientists do not think they have mastered yet. — AFP



This handout image shows a lightning rod in action on Santis Mountain in Switzerland. — AFP

Last activists leave village as coal pit expansion rolls on

LUETZERATH, Germany: The last two climate activists occupying a western German village to stop it making way for a coal mine extension left their underground hideout on Monday, marking the end of the police operation to evict them. Already abandoned by its original residents, Luetzerath has become a symbol of resistance against fossil fuels.

Around 300 activists occupied the village, staking out emptied buildings and building positions in the trees, to try to prevent the expansion of the adjacent Garzweiler open-cast coal mine. Police launched an operation on Wednesday to clear the protest camp, making quicker progress than expected. By Sunday, authorities had succeeded in removing all but the last two, holed up in a self-built tunnel under the settlement.

The end of the operation came despite a huge demonstration held on Saturday, attended by Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg. Police estimated that 15,000 people participated in the rally, but organizers put the turn out closer to 35,000. Protest planners accused authorities of "violence" after clashes between police and participants, which resulted in injuries on both sides.

Energy giant RWE has permission for the expansion of the mine under a compromise agreement signed with the government, led by Social Democrat Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Under the deal agreed in October, Luetzerath will be demolished, while five neighboring villages are spared. At the same time, RWE also agreed to stop producing electricity with coal in western Germany by 2030 — eight years earlier than previously planned.

With Russia's gas supply cut in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine, Germany has had recourse to coal, firing up mothballed power plants. The extension to the mine, one of Europe's largest, is deemed necessary to secure Germany's future energy supply. "It was necessary and of course it is a sin in terms of climate policy and of course we should work towards keeping this sin as short as possible and not constantly prolonging it," said Economy Minister Robert Habeck. But activists, who feel betrayed by Green politicians like Habeck, argue extracting the coal will



LUETZERATH: This combination of pictures shows (top) environmentalists sitting on wooden tripods on a road on Jan 11, 2023 and (bottom) a police car driving past cut trees on the same road. — AFP

mean Germany misses targets under the Paris climate agreements.

'Most beautiful place'

The end of Luetzerath comes after years of local resistance to the expansion plans left a different kind of mark on the area. In the nearby village of Keyenberg, recently spared from the bulldozer, local resident Thomas Schueller told AFP that "90 percent" of his neighbors had already moved out. "When the first street empties, then the others go, too," said the 51-year-old who has lived in the village since birth. "We never thought there was a chance to save this place," said Schueller, a house painter by profession. "I only wish it had happened 10 years earlier, then most people wouldn't have moved away."

Keyenberg native Wolfgang Wangerin, 42, said he felt a "pain in my heart, because I knew I would never be able to show this (place) to my children." "When I found out that this place had been saved, it was very emotional," said Wangerin. "For me, this is the most beautiful place on earth," said Alexandra Bruene, 45, whose current home near Holzweiler to the south of Luetzerath was finally excluded from expansion plans in 2014. Bringing new life back to the area would now take at least "five to 10 years", she said. — AFP