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MONDAY, AUGUST 10, 2015 + 30 BAHT



Several hundred motorcyclists and pillion riders sit on Vibhavadi Rangsit Road after police and soldiers stopped them on the way to what they said was a charity ride to Nakhon Nayok. PATTARAPONG CHATPATTARASIL

CITY

Police arrest over 400 young riders

POST REPORTERS

Police and soldiers yesterday intercepted more than 850 young motorcyclists and arrested 411 as the young people flocked to Vibhavadi Rangsit Road and a Saraburi petrol station for gatherings that alarmed motorists.

A member of the motorcyclist group in the Vibhavadi Rangsit area said they met early yesterday for a "charity trip", but the large size of the group worried motorists and police who were looking out for street racing, banned by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO).

About 30 police surrounded the riders who had filled in the express lanes near the Bang Khen intersection. They detained 227 men and 31 women. There were 59 teenagers, including some aged under 18 years old, including pillion riders.

Motorcycles modified for illegal racing will be seized under an order issued by NCPO chief and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, under Section 44 of the interim charter.

"We don't seek to cause disturbances," said Wuttichai Phekaeo, 22, whose group was travelling to Wang Takhrai waterfall in Nakhon Nayok.

Most riders in the group are from Nonthaburi and call themselves "Thurian Non Kan Yao", or "long stem Nonthaburi durian".

Mr Wuttichai said the trip to Nakhon Nayok was the group's second gathering after they travelled earlier this year to Bang Saen beach in Chon Buri to raise money to help the victims of the earthquake in Nepal on April 25. They raised 50,000 baht and sent it to Channel 3 TV which was overseeing the relief effort, Mr Wuttichai said.

But police detained members of the group saying some were riding in an unsafe manner and had modified their motorbikes for racing.

Wrongdoers aged over 18 will face charges in the Criminal Court, said assistant national police chief Pol Lt Gen Praveet Thawornsrir.

Those who violated traffic laws were accused of driving in express lanes which are usually reserved for cars, speeding beyond legal limits and not driving in the left lane.

In Saraburi, 153 out of a group of more than 500 motorcyclists were also arrested and fined as they were found to be violating traffic laws, said Pol Lt Col Samran Nothung, deputy chief of Muang Saraburi police station.

Nipha Malai, 22, another member of the durian group, said she and her friends had met at the petrol station in Muang district for the trip to Nakhon Nayok to raise money for Wat Phra Phutthabhat Namphu in Lop Buri, known for its work with Aids patients.

Governor faces challenging two years

The remaining two years in office for Bangkok governor Sukhumbhand Paribatra will be fraught with difficulties unless he opens up and tells his supporters what he has been doing.

MR Sukhumbhand has rarely been in the public eye since he was elected in 2013 and this is unlikely to change now he has fewer aides and officials to help him bridge the gap to the people of Bangkok.

In fact, one of MR Sukhumbhand's few public speeches back in March, when he said that city folk should go "live on a mountain" if they don't like the floods in

SPECIAL REPORT: Amid an outcry over his poor communication skills, MR Sukhumbhand battles to win credit with voters, write Supoj Wanchareon and Manop Thip-osod

the city, drew an angry response.

Even Abhisit Vejjajiva, leader of the Democrat Party when MR Sukhumbhand won the election, spoke out against the remark.

In an interview with the *Bangkok Post*, he urged MR Sukhumbhand to communicate more with people to let them know about what is going on at the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), which he runs.

Mr Abhisit said MR Sukhumbhand must "narrow the gap" between himself and Bangkokians.

MR Sukhumbhand has shied away from public speeches since a major court ruling in 2014 and earlier this year which dealt a blow to his administration.

Last year, the governor was suspended for about six months as he waited for a verdict by the Appeals Court on his alleged violation of an election law during his election campaign in 2013.

The case, which was filed by the Election Commission, regarded speeches given by his supporter, former Democrat MP Suhep Thagsuban, who was suspected of defaming MR Sukhumbhand's rival, Pheu Thai Party candidate Pol Gen Pongsapat Pongchareon, and influencing voters.

Even though the court dismissed the allegation, the six months away from work only added to the distance between the governor and the people of Bangkok.

The other case was filed against the BMA

and involved a scandal over the cost of fire engines.

MR Sukhumbhand was embroiled in the case because he was the governor at the time it went to court.

The National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) found the fire engines to be overpriced and the purchase, signed by late Bangkok governor Samak Sundaravej in 2004, benefited the Austrian supplier Steyr-Daimler-Puch Spezialfahrzeug AG.

The case eventually went to the Geneva-based Court of Conciliation and Arbitration which earlier this year found the company was at fault for damages resulting from the deal and ordered it to compensate City Hall 20.49 million euros (about 820 million baht).

However, questions remain if the



Bangkok governor Sukhumbhand Paribatra in a rare public appearance to announce a new reef. CHANAT KATANYU

damages can actually cover the costs of what the city has lost over the past nine years.

MR Sukhumbhand refused to discuss the issue when asked about it, claiming he was waiting for a Thai translation of the court ruling.

Due to his low public profile, people started to ask where their governor was and his image wasn't helped when internal politicking erupted among his backroom staff, reportedly causing some of his close aides to resign, said a source at City Hall.

Threedow Aphaiwongs left her position as MR Sukhumbhand's adviser and BMA spokeswoman at the end of July.

Before that, his secretary Sanya Chantharut and assistant to secretary Wiraporn Trakoolshewapanit also quit over personal reasons, said the source.

Some senior officials will also leave next month when they hit retirement age.

Among the 15 high-ranking retirees are city clerk Sanya Cheninmit and chiefs of Drainage and Sewerage Department and City Law Enforcement Department, all of whom have played key roles in helping the governor solve city floods and illegal street vending.

Mr Abhisit said that when the governor was unable to make an appearance, "I often saw the city clerk doing his job on TV instead" to solve flooding in the capital.

Mr Abhisit urged other city officials and MR Sukhumbhand's aides to use Mr Sanya as a role model in how to do their jobs.

The resignation and retirement of important City Hall personnel is seen as another stumbling block to MR Sukhumbhand's work over the next two years, the source said.

Mr Abhisit is still optimistic, however, saying the governor can take this as an opportunity to set up a new team and redesign working strategies.

Yet it remains unclear if MR Sukhumbhand has the ability to connect with the people of Bangkok, especially after the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) halted the elections of city and district councillors.

These councillors help bridge the gap between City Hall and the public.

Even with all these negatives against the governor, MR Sukhumbhand has strived to keep the promises he made to his voters.

He set up "district offices" inside Paradise Park shopping mall in Praveet district and Seakon Square department store in Phasi Charoen district to make it easier for people to register births and marriages.

Installing more than 26,000 security cameras and over 13,000 lights across the capital are other tasks he has completed.

"Getting the street vendors in order was also a good job," Mr Abhisit added.

Former transport minister Chadchart Sittipunt also echoed Mr Abhisit's comment, applauding MR Sukhumbhand for his efforts to control flooding by building a new giant sewer under Bang Sue canal and increasing the city's green areas.

Yet some critics remain unhappy with the work he has carried out over the last two years, and the condescending way he spoke to people during the floods in March.

"It showed a lack of EQ," said Srisuvan Janya, president of Stop Global Warming Association, referring to his inadequate "emotional quotient" when the governor told people to move to a mountain.

Mr Abhisit admitted he is worried how people view MR Sukhumbhand and the Democrat Party, which has backed the Bangkok governor for more than 10 years.

The Democrat Party has not decided who will run for governor in the next election in two years.

At present, Mr Abhisit just wants MR Sukhumbhand to improve his communication skills and try to get closer to the people of Bangkok.

"He [MR Sukhumbhand] needs to improve his image and I believe he's aware of that," Mr Abhisit said.

In a poor sign perhaps of his willingness to reach out to the public, MR Sukhumbhand refused to comment for this story, despite a number of requests.

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CAR UN worker kills four colleagues

BANGUI: A Rwandan UN peacekeeper in the Central African Republic (CAR) shot dead four colleagues on Saturday and wounded eight others at their base before being gunned down himself, military sources said.

It was the worst such incident to hit the UN peacekeeping mission in the country, known by its French acronym of Minusca, since it was deployed in September last year following inter-religious clashes that claimed thousands of lives.

A Rwandan soldier picked up his gun and killed his [four] colleagues before being felled. There were five dead and eight injured," said a source close to the Minusca mission.

The shooting happened at the Rwandan contingent's base in the capital Bangui and the reasons for the violence remain unknown, said a CAR military officer on condition of anonymity.

Rwandan military officials were unavailable for comment. In December 2013, Chadian and Burundian troops with an African-led peacekeeping force in Central Africa exchanged gunfire but no one was hurt.

The Minusca force comprises 10,800 troops drawn from Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda, Morocco, Senegal, Pakistan and Indonesia.

The unrest in CAR was spurred by a 2013 coup that ousted president Francois Bozize and then pushed the country into a conflict that took on a religious dimension, pitting sections of Christian and Muslim populations against one another.

Largely Christian "anti-balaka" — or anti-machete — militias were formed to avenge atrocities by the Seleka rebels behind the coup, resulting in waves of killing, rape and pillaging.

The Central African Republic is set to hold elections in October, but the polls have already been pushed back three times as the former French colony grapples with its worst crisis since independence in 1960.

Hundreds of thousands of people have fled deadly civil unrest in the landlocked nation since 2013, with the upcoming vote seen as a key test for the prospects of reconciliation. AFP



A lesbian couple laughs during the gay pride celebrations by the LGBT community in Entebbe, southwest of Uganda's capital Kampala, on Saturday. REUTERS

Ugandans mark Gay Pride despite stigma

Homosexuality still illegal in country

ENTEBBE: Several dozen Ugandans marked Gay Pride on Saturday, cheering that such a parade could go ahead in a country that only last year tried to impose long jail terms for gay sex.

At a secluded beach in Entebbe, on Lake Victoria just outside the capital Kampala, a group of about 70 people holding banners, including "I have a relationship with Jesus and I'm gay", marched a short distance as music blared out.

Gays and lesbians in Uganda often live secretive lives, fearful that coming out will attract stigma and hostility from family and friends, or the loss of a job or an apartment.

"We are here to send a message to the wider population that we do exist and we want rights like any other Ugandan," said Moses Kimbugwe, one of the marchers.

"We think this is a step moving forward." Although some of the revellers described the march — the culmination of a week of gay rights events in Uganda — as a triumph, they said their joy was tempered by the fact that society was still largely hostile to them and that attitudes were unlikely to change

quickly. "Why do I have to celebrate it in an isolated place? Who am I showing that am proud, because we are celebrating to our own selves," activist Sandra Ntebi said.

In 2014, Uganda attracted a storm of international condemnation after enacting one of the harshest anti-gay laws in Africa, where homosexuality is illegal in 37 countries.

A constitutional court later overturned the law because of legal technicalities. Despite threats by some lawmakers that the bill would be re-introduced in parliament, that has not happened and analysts say it would be unlikely to succeed in the face of strong pressure from Western donors.

Another marcher, who identified herself only by her first name, Mariam, because she was unwilling to be identified publicly as gay, said it was "exciting" to march alongside other gay people, but added she lived in fear of being found out. "I would never ever reveal my gay lifestyle to my parents or friends. They would denounce me."

The rally culminated a week of events that included a transgender awareness day and a "Mr and Miss Pride" beauty pageant, attended by about 200 people.

"For us, this is a celebration of who we are — celebrating our lives, also celebrating with our friends and allies," said one of the organisers, Richard Lusimbo. "There has

been some progress, the law was nullified and this also opened a new chapter in how we are doing advocacy."

However, homosexuality remains illegal in Uganda, punishable by a jail sentence. But politicians have proposed new legislation that would criminalise "promotion" of homosexuality — a key feature of the law that was overturned.

Those taking part in the rally said it was important to stand up for their rights. Ritaah, 32, a gay mother, said the past year had also been "scary" at times. "I almost thought of going for asylum with my child, but if we all run away, who is going to keep the movement going?" she said.

Homophobia is widespread in Uganda, where American-style evangelical Christianity is on the rise. Gay men and women face frequent harassment and threats of violence.

Critics said President Yoweri Museveni signed the law to win domestic support ahead of a presidential election in February or March 2016, which will be his 30th year in power. Activists fear that with Ugandans heading to the polls early next year, homophobia could be exploited for political gain.

"I've seen the gay issue being used as political capital, so anything could happen," Mr Lusimbo said. REUTERS

DRC mistrust deepens over Kabila's province bid

Territorial division plan seen as sly attempt by president to delay polls, hold on to power for third term

To take the political pulse of this sprawling mineral-rich country, head to the busiest stretch of Lumumba Boulevard, one of the capital's main roads. On weekdays, a large crowd gathers here to peer at the newspapers posted on a 2.5m-high wall and loudly trade opinions on the news of the day.

Recently, the shouting has been about President Joseph Kabila's plan to carve the Democratic Republic of Congo's 11 provinces into 26, which many in the DRC see as a ploy to delay the coming presidential election and allow Mr Kabila to "slide," as people here say, into a third term.

"We already know these are political manoeuvres," said Theo Balsomi, an unemployed college graduate, as he jostled with

others to get a look at the newspapers on a recent afternoon. "Knowing the reality of our country, we have lived through many regimes. We won't allow Mr Kabila to slide for even a second. The whole population would oppose that."

Mandated in 2006, the plan to split the provinces lay dormant until the president revived it in March. The new provinces have been named, but elections for governors and other leaders have yet to be held.

Before voting for a new president in 2016, the DRC must go through a series of elections on the local and provincial levels. Mayors, village chiefs and councils must be named, and deputies and governors need to be elected in the provinces. The longer this process takes, the more likely

the presidential race will be postponed.

Under the DRC's constitution, the president is limited to two terms. However, delays in the packed electoral calendar, which is already months behind schedule, are stoking fears that a postponed presidential election could allow Mr Kabila to stay in power for months or even years longer.

Mr Kabila, who rarely speaks publicly, has yet to say explicitly that he will step down in 2016. When asked about the sudden push to divide the country into 26 provinces, the communications minister, Lambert Mende, said the president "should not leave office, should not end his second term without giving what had been decided in 2006". This is not the first time this year that the president has been accused of trying to alter

the election schedule to stay in office.

In January, lawmakers began debating a bill pushed by the government that would require a census to be conducted before the 2016 presidential election. Experts said that process could take years, complicated by the lack of infrastructure in a country more than three times the size of Texas. The president would stay in power for the duration of the census.

Opponents to Mr Kabila's rule, led by rival politicians and youth activists, have called this a plan to push back the election and allow the president to hold on to power. In response, thousands of people took to the streets across the country. At least 36 people were killed by security forces before the government backed down and altered

the bill to allow the election to take place without a census.

"The people say, rain or snow, there will be a change in leadership in 2016," said Vital Kamukama, leader of the Union for the Congolese Nation, an opposition party. "Either he respects the constitution or he'll be pushed out by the people."

Instead of a census, the opposition has asked for a reassessment of the electoral rolls, which have not been updated since 2011, to add more than 5 million DRC youths who have since reached voting age. At the moment, those voters would not be eligible to vote in 2016. A number of youth movements have sprouted throughout the country, holding pro-democracy rallies and calling for electoral change. NYT



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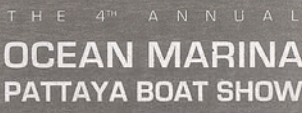
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