

May Day marches turn violent as activists reject globalisation

AFP, Paris

Police and demonstrators fought street battles in cities around the world Tuesday as many May Day marches turned into violent protests against globalisation, capitalism and political corruption.

In Australia and Germany, dozens of police officers were injured and many more left-wing demonstrators arrested in clashes with riot squads.

In London, where the police had warned of a repeat of last year's violent disorder, demonstrators found themselves in a stand-off with large numbers of police who appeared to have the situation under control, despite some stone-throwing and scuffles.

Each country's protests were spiced with local economic and political grievances, but the common recipe was the demonstrators' anger at unemployment and the destabilising side-effects of global capitalism.

In Australia's main cities, an alliance of anarchists, Trotskyists, green groups, students and school-children brought traffic to a standstill in a series of blockades aimed at big business.

In Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, some protests turned violent and at least 60 police were injured and dozens of protesters arrested.

The demonstrations were organised by the same groups responsible for a series of anti-globalisation protests that started at a World Trade Organisation conference in Seattle in 1999.

In Berlin, some 500 protesters constructed a street barrier overnight and set it ablaze. When police, armed with water cannons, attempted to clear it, they were pelted with stones and bottles.

Some 9,000 officers from around the country had been ordered to the capital to prevent the street violence that has marred Germany's Labour Day for more than a decade.

In Frankfurt 100 protesters were arrested after 800 clashed with police.

In South Korea, 20,000 brushed aside a police barricade to defy a ban on taking their protests against the economic policies of President Kim Dae-Jung toward Seoul's main government district.

Demonstrators and pedestrians applauded as the police ranks gave way. There was no immediate violence, but 600 riot police formed a second barricade 50 metres further down the road.

In London, 6,000 police were deployed, promising "zero tolerance" of the kind of protest which last year saw damage costing than half a million pounds (715,000 dollars, 800,000 euros) inflicted on banks and symbolic targets such as McDonald's restaurants.

The demonstrations began peacefully as thousands of protesters flooded into the city centre, blocking roads, chanting slogans and occasionally throwing bottles,

but apart from scuffles with police there were no serious incidents.

"Overthrow capitalism and replace it with something nice," read a banner.

In Paris, at least 12,000 people took part in three separate and peaceful demonstrations organised by trade unions.

In Japan, about 1.36 million workers attended rallies across the country as trade unionists warned that new Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's plans to kickstart the stagnant economy could lead to unemployment and bankruptcies.

"It will force the Japanese people to make a sacrifice in the name of reform, bringing only unhappiness to the masses while benefiting a handful of the privileged," said Yoji Kobayashi, president of the National Confederation of Trade Unions.

Arroyo refuses to rule out martial law 'if provoked'

Senator, ex-envoy to US detained

AFP, Manila

Philippines President Gloria Arroyo warned foes yesterday that further provocation could goad her into adopting more emergency powers, including martial rule, after a failed mob attack on her official residence.

She declared a "state of rebellion" in Manila on Monday after government forces repulsed an attack on Malacanang palace by thousands of followers of her jailed predecessor Joseph Estrada. The declaration allowed police to detain rioters and their backers without a court order.

Asked about criticism that the declaration was a step away from martial rule, Arroyo told a news conference: "I have no intention of declaring martial law. I hope they will not provoke me, those in the opposition into doing that."

She said she has a "conciliatory" manner of governing. "But if they break the law, as president I have no choice but to enforce the law and to defend the republic. And I will use the weapon in the constitution that is needed, suited, to a particular kind of provocation."

The constitution authorises the president, who is also commander-in-chief of the armed forces, to suspend the writ of habeas corpus, or place the country or parts of it under martial law for up to 60 days in case of invasion or rebellion.

"You've seen how I reacted to the provocation on Tuesday," Arroyo warned.

A day after the worst riots in 15 years, Manila's 10.5 million residents awoke Wednesday to find military checkpoints and armoured vehicles in

major streets.

Earlier Wednesday, Arroyo said all public assemblies by pro-Estrada forces would be banned immediately, and all their rallies would be dispersed promptly by the police.

She said the May 14 legislative and local administrative elections "can proceed" despite the latest crisis.

Under the Philippine system, the poll schedule is determined by the independent Commission on Elections.

Police detained opposition Senator Juan Ponce Enrile and former Filipino ambassador to the United States Ernesto Maceda and launched a manhunt for several other alleged masterminds of the march on Malacanang palace.

Military spokesman Brigadier General Edilberto Adan said the armed forces did not plan to reduce the number of military units deployed in Manila for the time being, even though he believed the Estrada forces no longer had the capability to mount another attempt to march on the palace.

He said the troops would remain in their positions to prevent possible "acts of sabotage", while stressing that they would only be working in support of the police.

Estrada was toppled by a popular revolt in January and arrested last week on a charge of economic plunder, punishable by death, for allegedly amassing 80 million dollars in illicit wealth through kickbacks and embezzlement.

Chandrika urges Tamils to persuade Tigers to talks

Curfew imposed on Lankan town after riot

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga has urged minority Tamils in the embattled minority peninsula of Jaffna to help bring Tamil Tiger rebels to the negotiating table.

Kumaratunga in a video conference with residents in Jaffna, 400 km north of here, said the Norwegian-backed peace process had been held up due to new demands put forward by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas.

"We believe the people of Jaffna would be able to persuade the LTTE to abandon their violent ways and

agree to a solution that upholds democracy," the president was quoted as saying in the state-run Daily News Wednesday.

In her address on Tuesday, Kumaratunga said her government was committed to a peaceful solution to the long-running conflict which has claimed more than 60,000 lives in the past two decades.

"But talks have been delayed during the past five months due to the LTTE's insistence on new demands and conditions," Kumaratunga said.

Norway's special envoy, Erik Solheim, arrived here Monday for talks with Kumaratunga and other

leaders here in a bid to revive the peace process buffeted by the heavy fighting in Jaffna last week.

More than 410 combatants on both sides were killed in four days of fierce fighting that ended Saturday in the southern sector of the Jaffna Peninsula.

Meanwhile, police clamped a curfew on a town in central Sri Lanka Wednesday after overnight clashes between rival ethnic groups led to rioting, officials said.

Armed police patrolled the streets of Mawanela, 90 km north-east of Colombo, after more than a dozen shops were gutted in the rioting.

Musharraf appoints deputy army chief of staff

First move towards presidency?

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani military ruler General Pervez Musharraf has appointed Karachi Corps Commander Lieutenant General Muzaffar Hussain Usmani as deputy chief of army staff, an official statement said Wednesday.

"He will assume his new appointment on May 17," the statement said adding that Lieutenant General Tariq Waseem Ghazi will replace Usmani.

The appointment of Usmani to the newly created post has led to speculation that Musharraf was likely to assume the country's presidency, local media reported.

"It's a preparatory step for General Musharraf to become president and politically more active," General Hameed Gul, former chief of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) told Dawn.

To become president Musharraf

would need somebody to manage army affairs for him, Hamed Gul said.

"Usmani is a fine and a good Muslim," he said.

Usmani played a key role in Musharraf's October 12, 1999 coup to oust then prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

Former army chief retired General Aslam Beg told the newspaper he believes Musharraf will retain the army command and decision-making powers while Usmani will share the workload at the General Headquarters.

However Beg said Musharraf may only decide about becoming head of state after a new parliament has been elected. Musharraf has promised to abide by a Supreme Court ruling to hold elections by October 12, 2002.

The post of president is largely ceremonial in Pakistan.

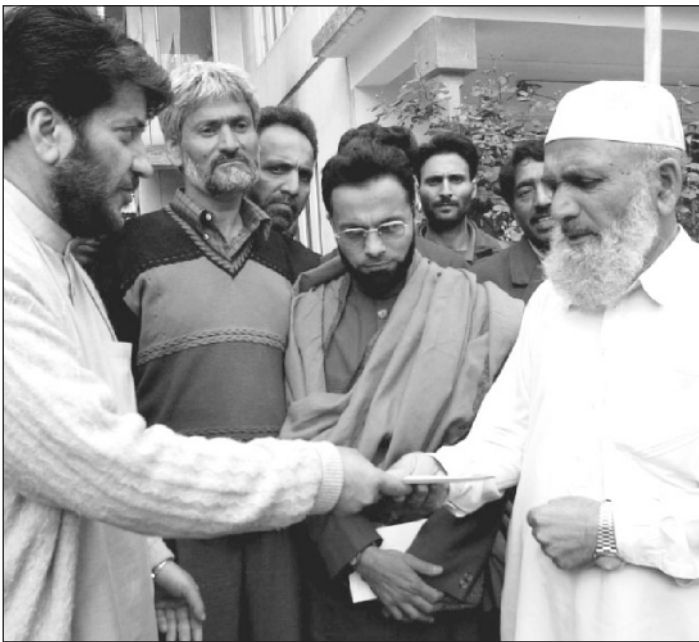


PHOTO: AFP

Kashmiri separatist leader Shabir Shah (L) hands over a letter to his envoy Mohammad Abdullah Tari (R) as second envoy Saleem Geelani (2nd from R) looks on, prior to their departure from Srinagar for talks in New Delhi yesterday. The envoys will deliver a letter from Shah to India's new pointman on Kashmir K.C. Pant, who has invited prominent separatist groups for peace talks.

Truce hopes fade further with new Israeli incursion

AFP, Jerusalem

A new incursion Wednesday by Israeli troops into Palestinian-controlled territory in the Gaza Strip further undermined hopes of an early breakthrough to end the violent Palestinian Intifada, or uprising, now in its eighth month.

As Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres continued efforts in Washington to involve the United States in a new peace-making

initiative, the overnight raid which killed one man, and wounded a dozen others sharpened tensions and raised fears of more Palestinian retaliation.

The incursion, which the Israeli army said was in response to an attack on a routine patrol Tuesday, came after a particularly bloody two-day period in which eight people -- including two Palestinian children and an Israeli settler -- lost their lives.

Palestinian officials said the

Israelis used tanks and bulldozers to penetrate around 100 metres (yards) into Palestinian territory at Rafah on the frontier between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, destroying 17 houses and a number of sheds and chicken-houses, and damaging a mosque.

A 17-year-old, Mahmud Akel, was killed after being shot in the chest, and 12 other people were injured, they said.

15 killed as India braces for third year of drought

AFP, Bhubaneswar

Fifteen people have died in the eastern state of Orissa as fierce temperatures and drought ravage India for a third year running, relief workers said Wednesday.

"The state is headed for one of its worst summers in history. Death from sunstroke and drought could mount unless the government acts immediately," warned environmentalist Banka Behari Das.

The deaths had occurred in the past week as the mercury soared to 46 degrees Celsius (115 degrees Fahrenheit) in Orissa towns such as Jharsuguda and Titagarh, he said.

Drought is also gripping other parts of India including the northern desert state of Rajasthan and

earthquake-hit Gujarat in the west.

Some 23 districts in Gujarat, where an earthquake on January 26 claimed an estimated 25,000 lives, were now reeling from a terrible drought, the Times of India newspaper reported.

A government relief official was quoted as saying that "the tribal belt in the state extending from the north to the east has never been so bad."

Relief agencies said 32 million people in Rajasthan state were affected by drought.

A state revenue official confirmed two deaths in Orissa.

"A 70-year-old man in Orissa's Khurda district died Tuesday due to heat stroke as did an engineering student in another part of the state," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

From top) Stella Demetriou, Miss Cyprus 2001; Juliana Borges, Miss Brazil 2001; Telma Santos, Miss Portugal 2001 and Ilanit Levi, Miss Israel 2001, pose during rehearsals for the Miss Universe 2001 competition at the Westin Rio Mar Beach Hotel and Resort in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico on Tuesday. Seventy-seven delegates will compete for the title of Miss Universe 2001 on May 11 at the Ruben Rodriguez Coliseum in Bayamon, Puerto Rico.