



A large group of Han Chinese walk up a street carrying sticks and shovels in Urumqi in China's far west Xinjiang province yesterday while ethnic Uighur Muslim women are beaten up by Chinese riot police as they stage peaceful protest.

Security, high tensions across Xinjiang

AFP, Urumqi

Residents in major cities across China's vast Xinjiang region reported a spike in security Tuesday and businesses closed over fears deadly unrest that erupted in the capital could spread.

The worst reported ethnic violence in China for decades saw thousands of Muslim Uighurs, who have long harboured resentment under Chinese rule, take to the streets of Xinjiang's capital on Sunday in riots that led to 156 deaths.

Members of China's ethnic Han majority who were targeted in Sunday's riots then took to the streets of Urumqi on Tuesday armed with makeshift weapons vowing revenge against the Uighurs.

In the first hint that the violence could spread, police said they dispersed "more than 200 rioters" on Monday in Kashgar, another city in Xinjiang about 1,050 kilometres (650 miles) southwest of Urumqi.

In Kashgar, where two Uighurs killed 17 policeman in an attack using a truck and machetes last August, residents reported an increase in security, particularly near the Id Kah mosque where Monday's protest took place.

"Some shops are closed today, there are lots of policemen, very little passers-by, we have no clients and there are no buses in the streets," said a shop employee near the mosque, who refused to give his name.

A shop owner in Yining, a city 500 kilometres (310 miles) west of Urumqi in Xinjiang that was the scene of deadly ethnic riots in 1997, said there was virtually no activity amid a heavily increased security presence.

"From yesterday (Monday), most shops and entertainment venues have closed down and in populated areas there are not even any vegetable sellers," the man, who would only give his surname as Chen, told AFP by phone.

"Outside, there are many armed police, way more than before. TV and Internet have both been cut, there's nothing to do here, so I'm preparing to go home to the suburbs, although I don't know if I'll be able to get out."

Another resident in Yining said people were not allowed to enter the city.



Hair/makeup artist Karen Faye arrives to pay last respects to Michael Jackson at the Forest Lawn Memorial Park on Monday in Los Angeles, California.

Iranian opposition calls for end to crackdown

Release of detainees demanded

AP, Tehran

Iran's top three reformist leaders called for an end to the heavy crackdown launched by the ruling clerics following the disputed June 12 presidential election and demanded the release of all those detained in the post-election turmoil, an opposition Web site reported yesterday.

Defeated presidential candidates Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mahdi Karroubi as well as Iran's popular former president Mohammad Khatami met late Monday to discuss the harsh crackdown against street protests over election results the opposition says were fraudulent.

The crackdown unleashed by the Guards, police and pro-government Basij militia killed 20 protesters and injured hundreds more. Since then, there have been no major street protests for more than a week. Mousavi on Monday vowed to continue his campaign against a government he said lacks legitimacy - but hinted he was dropping the strategy of protests and moving to political action, including forming a party.

The pro-reform camp says Mousavi was the real winner in the election and accuses Iran's ruling system of faking results that showed a victory for incumbent hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Karroubi came last in the official results. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final say on all state matters, has publicly sided with Ahmadinejad.

More than 1,000 people were arrested during the post-election crackdown, according to police, who say most of them have been released. Still, dozens of protesters, pro-reform politicians and journalists are still being held, and arrests have continued.

"The useless wave of arrests must end immediately and all those detained without committing the least crimes must be released. Also, security and military forces must return to their bases," Mousavi, Karroubi and Khatami said in a statement after their meeting.

They deplored "savage and shocking attacks" by pro-government Basij militia against protesters.

Uighur leader wants Western probes into Xinjiang unrest

AFP, Washington

Exiled Uighur leader Rebiya Kadeer Monday called on the international community to probe the deadly violence that rocked China's Xinjiang region over the weekend, accusing Beijing of fudging the truth and playing down the death toll.

"We hope that the United Nations, the United States and the European Union will send teams to investigate what really took place in Xinjiang," Kadeer told reporters, after Chinese state media said at least 156 people were killed and 1,080 injured in the clashes.

"We hope the White House will issue a stronger statement urging the Chinese government to show restraint and also to tell the truth of the nature of the events and what happened, and to tell the Chinese government to redress Uighur grievances."

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said the United States was "deeply concerned" about the reported deaths in Xinjiang's capital Urumqi on Sunday and called for both sides in the remote northwestern province to "exercise restraint."

China has blamed what it termed riots squarely on the Turkic-speaking Uighurs.

On Tuesday, Chinese authorities announced the mass arrest of more than 1,400 people in connection with the protests, while at least 200 people staged fresh demos in Urumqi before foreign reporters.

Beijing has also accused Kadeer of fomenting the unrest from her exile in the United States.

"These accusations are completely false," she said.

"I did not organise the protests or call on people to demonstrate."

"My only contact with any Uighur (is) inside East Turkestan," she said, using the Uighur name for Xinjiang, citing a call "in recent days" to her brother in Urumqi in which she told him of announcements her daughters had seen on the Internet about plans to demonstrate Sunday.

Asia says farewell to 'King of Pop'

AFP, Tokyo

Devoted fans of Michael Jackson across Asia said farewell to the "King of Pop" on Tuesday, singing his greatest hits, watching videos and gathering for a late-night viewing of the memorial in Los Angeles.

From Japan to Australia, Jackson enthusiasts prepared to stay up into the small hours to see the star-studded final tribute to the pop icon broadcast live from the Staples Center from 1700 GMT Tuesday.

In Tokyo, hundreds of fans flocked to Tower Records in the fashionable Shibuya shopping district for a series of free viewings of Jackson's videos, including clips from the groundbreaking "Thriller," "Billie Jean" and

"Bad".

"I still cannot believe he really died," said Eri Kato, 24. "His spirit will live on in his music."

The Tokyo store's general manager Tatsuro Yagawa said three video sessions had been organised over two days, for a total of 500 fans, because people had crowded around a small television screen in the store showing Jackson videos.

"I saw tears in some people's eyes as they were watching him. We wanted to mourn his passing with those fans with a better screen and a better sound system," Yagawa said.

The store also displayed a poster for people to write messages on, planning to later take it to Jackson's grave in the United States.

US touts progress with Russia on Iran

Putin, Obama seek entente

AFP, Moscow/ Novo Ogarevo

Iran was the main topic in talks between US President Barack Obama and Russia's Dmitry Medvedev, White House officials said, who added that Moscow now seemed more receptive to US arguments.

Obama and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Tuesday sought to smooth out differences over a lavish breakfast feast marked by expressions of mutual admiration.

After a pre-summit media spat, the pair sought to project a polite atmosphere as they met for the first time over a spread of Russian pancakes and black caviar on the terrace of Putin's country residence.

The US president said last week the Russian premier had "one foot" stuck in the past of the Cold War, prompting Putin to quip that he was standing firmly on both feet.

But speaking in front of the press as they nestled in gold-leaf, baroque chairs on the second floor of Putin's forest home on the outskirts of Moscow, the two leaders went out of their way to exchange pleasantries.

"Iran, in the one-on-one meeting, was the majority of the conversation," Mike McPaul, a top adviser to Obama on Russian affairs, told journalists after the Kremlin talks between the US and Russian presidents on Monday.

"There's a reason for that, because that is something that affects our real national security interests," he said.

Another top official travelling with

Obama on his visit to Moscow, Deputy National Security Advisor Denis McDonough, said the Russian president made plain to his guest that Moscow's concern about Iran was rising.

"I think the president has been struck by the candour with which President Medvedev has underscored his concern about the growing threat from Iran," McDonough said.

Russia is building a nuclear reactor in Iran for the Iranian atomic programme, which Tehran insists is strictly for energy production but the United States fears could be used to manufacture an atomic bomb.

Iran -- whose president has called for Israel to be wiped from the map -- also possesses missiles capable of reaching targets throughout the Middle East that could be fitted with nuclear warheads if Tehran possessed them.

Iranian officials consistently deny any intention to acquire nuclear weapons but insist their country has a sovereign right, like any other, to pursue peaceful nuclear energy development.

The United States and Russia have for years differed sharply on how to approach the Iran security issue, which is also directly linked to their disagreement on US missile defence plans in Europe.

When the previous US administration of president George W. Bush introduced the programme, Washington said it was to protect against missile attacks by "rogue states" such as Iran.

But the US officials indicated they saw

signs of movement on both topics during Obama's closed-door discussions with Medvedev on Monday.

"I think one of the important and one of the most significant things that developed today was a Russian acknowledgment that we need to study the growing ballistic missile threat," another top Obama aide, Gary Samore, said.

"That joint assessment is going to be focused on Iran and North Korea as the two countries which pose the most direct threat to the US and its allies and to Russia as well," he said.

During a joint news conference with Obama after their meeting, Medvedev did not mention Iran once.

But the Russian leader stated: "There are negative trends in the world and they are due to the emergence of new nuclear players."

"It is our common, joint responsibility and we should do our utmost to prevent any negative trends there.... Our negotiations with President Obama have demonstrated that we share the same attitude towards this problem."

Washington has for years argued that it needs to fortify missile defences in Europe precisely to defend allies from such a threat.

Moscow however has previously rejected that argument, saying it has seen no evidence Iran is working to develop nuclear weapons and that Iran currently has no missile capable of reaching the European allies the US system would protect.

'Absolutely no green light for Israel to strike Iran'

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama yesterday strongly denied that the United States had given Israel a green light to strike Iran's nuclear facilities, in an interview on CNN television.

Asked by the cable television broadcaster whether Washington had given Israel the go-ahead to attack Iran's nuclear facilities, Obama answered: "Absolutely not."

In the interview, which was broadcast from Russia, where he is on an official visit, he added: "We can't dictate to other countries what their security interests are."

"What is also true is, it is the policy of the United States to try to resolve the issue of Iran's nuclear capabilities," Obama said.



US President Barack Obama and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin (R) converse while having traditional Russian tea and snacks on a terrace at Putin's residence outside Moscow in Novo-Ogarevo yesterday. Obama praised Vladimir Putin's "extraordinary work" as Russia's president and now prime minister, but admitted their two nations still do not agree on everything.

700-year-old skull washes up on beach

AFP, Sydney

Baffled Australian police launched an appeal for information on Tuesday after a 700-year-old skull washed up on a beach.

Police believe the skull must belong to a private collector or museum, but are mystified as to how it arrived on the Sydney beach in September.

"Detectives are now looking for the owner of the skull, who they believe may be a private collector or from a museum or research facility," they said.

Tests showed the skull belonged to a non-Aboriginal child aged between four and six who lived about seven centuries ago.

Police said any claim for the skull would require records or some other proof of ownership.

US hints at talks on S Korean missiles

UN condemns missile launch

AP, Seoul

The United States is open to talks on the possibility of South Korea developing ballistic missiles capable of striking all of North Korea, a South Korean Defence Ministry official said yesterday.

A senior general at the US command in Seoul told deputies to South Korean lawmakers last week that the allies can discuss the revision of a 2001 accord barring the South from developing missiles with a range of more than 300km, the ministry official said.

He spoke on condition of anonymity, citing department policy, and refused to identify the US general. The US military command in Seoul said it could not immediately confirm the remarks.

South Korean politicians and experts have called for the improvement of their country's missile capability, citing North Korea's increasing missile and nuclear threats.

North Korea carried out its second nuclear test in May. On Saturday it test-fired a barrage of ballistic missiles into waters off its east coast, its biggest

display of missile firepower in three years.

The North deploys hundreds of missiles that have all of South Korea and Japan within their striking range. In April, the North test-launched a long-range rocket believed capable of reaching Alaska.

North Korea's Saturday missile tests drew more international censure when the UN Security Council issued a condemnation after a closed meeting Monday in New York.

Uganda UN Ambassador Ruhakana Rugunda, who holds the council's rotating presidency, said members "condemned and expressed grave concerns" at the missile launches, which violate UN resolutions and "pose a threat to regional and international security." The Security Council passed Resolution 1874 last month to punish North Korea after its May 25 nuclear test. The country, already banned from conducting ballistic missile tests under previous resolutions, is also forbidden from selling arms and weapons-related material.

ME peace process cannot handle more failure, warns Egypt

AFP, Cairo

The Middle East peace process cannot handle another failure, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak warned on Tuesday, telling his Israeli counterpart his country would have to make "difficult decisions."

"There is an increased need now for a political will from the Israeli side, a political will which has the courage to take difficult decisions," Mubarak told journalists after talks with Shimon Peres in Cairo.

"The peace process cannot handle another failure," the veteran Egyptian president said, calling on hawkish Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to "believe that peace and only peace can open a new page in the history of the Middle East."

"We have clear bases for a just and comprehensive peace," he said, referring to the 2003 internationally-drafted roadmap and a 2002 Arab peace plan offering normalisation in exchange for Israel returning occupied Arab land.

The roadmap, adopted by world powers in 2003, requires a complete freeze of all settlement activity on occupied Palestinian land, including natural growth, and the dismantling of all settlements built after March 2001.

The White House has repeatedly demanded that Israel halt all settlement activity in the occupied West Bank in order to relaunch peace talks with the Palestinians, who have refused to meet Netanyahu without a complete freeze.



Members of environmental group Greenpeace hold banners reading "G8" and "Climate leadership now!" next to a giant fake blown-up iceberg on the river Seine near the Eiffel Tower yesterday in Paris, on the eve of the G8 summit aimed at finding common ground on how to tackle the global economic crisis and climate change.