



Palestinian Maysun al-Ghawi stands with her four-year-old son Adam next to Israeli riot policemen after being evicted from their home in occupied East Jerusalem's Arab district of Sheikh Jarrah yesterday. Israeli policemen wielding clubs kicked out two Palestinian families from their homes in the sensitive neighbourhood, defying international protests over Jewish settlement activity in the area.

Rafsanjani denies pact with opposition leaders

AFP, Tehran

Powerful Iranian cleric Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani on Saturday branded as a "lie" a claim made in court that he had entered a pact with ex-president Mohammad Khatami and opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi.

Leading Iranian reformist Mohammad Ali Abtahi told a revolutionary court in Tehran earlier in the day that the powerful trio had sworn to support each other following the re-election in June of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Abtahi, a close aide of Khatami, is one of 100 or so reformists and opposition supporters who went on trial Saturday accused of taking part in deadly riots after the June 12 election.

which the opposition claims was rigged.

The Fars news agency reported that Abtahi during his testimony said Mousavi, Khatami and Rafsanjani, a former president, had taken an "oath" not to abandon each other.

Mousavi probably did not know the country, but Khatami, with all due respect, knew all the issues. He was aware of the capability and power of the leader, but he joined Mousavi and this was a betrayal," Abtahi said, adding that Rafsanjani sought to avenge his 2005 presidential defeat to Ahmadinejad.

Iran's main political arbitration body, the Expediency Council, which is headed by powerful cleric Rafsanjani, denied Abtahi's allegations, in a statement carried by the state news agency IRNA.

Troops patrol Pak city after riots kill 8

AP, Lahore

Paramilitary troops patrolled the streets of an eastern Pakistani city yesterday after eight Christians died in riots led by Muslims, according to police.

Hundreds of Muslims burned and looted Christian homes in the city of Gorja in a rampage sparked by allegations that a Quran had been defaced. Shooting broke out, and six people were killed, including a child and four women. Two men wounded by

gunfire died in the hospital overnight.

Officials said the riots, which initially began Thursday but had abated before flaring again on Saturday, had been instigated by members of a banned extremist Muslim organisation.

Paramilitary troops were sent to Gorja to help police control the situation, Interior Minister Rehman Malik said Saturday, amid allegations the police had failed to respond quickly enough to prevent the violence from escalating.

New HIV strain leapt to humans from gorillas'

AFP, Paris

French virologists yesterday said they had found a new subtype of the AIDS virus that appears to have jumped the species barrier to humans from gorillas.

The new strain, found in a woman from Cameroon, West Africa, is part of the HIV-1 family of microbes that account for the vast majority of cases of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), they said.

Until now, all have been linked to the chimpanzee.

The new subtype has been called P, adding to three established HIV-1 subtypes - M, by far the most prevalent, and O and N, which are rare.

There is also an HIV-2, which is a minority viral family and is also suspected to have origins in non-human primates.

The virus was sequenced from a blood sample taken from an unnamed 62-year-old woman who moved to Paris from Cameroon, according to a letter published by the journal Nature Medicine.

7 women, children killed in Iraq market bombing

AFP, Ramadi

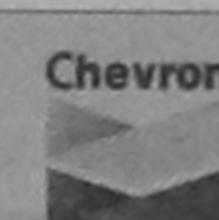
Four women and three children were killed in a car bomb attack on a market in the centre of the western Iraqi town of Haditha yesterday, military and medical officials.

The bomb exploded in a popular market at 10:30 am (0730 GMT), when local police are usually on patrol in the area, according to a police officer who declined to be identified.

"We received seven killed, four women and three children, and 17 wounded, including women and children," said Doctor Ahmad Hussein from Haditha hospital.

An Iraqi army captain in Haditha, who spoke on condition of anonymity, put the toll at seven dead and more than 20 injured.

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PHOTO AFP
Filipino Bishop Angel Lagdameo (L) offers prayers for the late Philippines president Corazon Aquino (C) during remembrance at the De La Salle school gym in the Manila suburb of Mandaluyong yesterday.

Palestinian families evicted from Jerusalem homes

Fatah still not ready to recognise Israel

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli riot police wielding clubs kicked out two Palestinian families from their homes in occupied east Jerusalem yesterday, defying international protests over Jewish settlement activity in the area.

Clashes erupted after police moved in at dawn around the homes in the upmarket Arab district of Sheikh Jarrah following an Israeli court decision ordering the eviction of the 53 Palestinians, including 19 minors.

"I was born in this house and so were my children," said Maher Hanoun, whose family was evicted along with the neighbouring Ghawi household. "Now we are on the streets. We have become refugees."

The Supreme Court ordered the evictions following an appeal by the Nahalat Shim'on International settler group, which claimed Jewish settlers have title deeds for the properties, despite UN and Palestinian denials.

Jerusalem authorities have also given permission for the construction of about 20 housing units in Sheikh Jarrah, in

defiance of global calls for a halt to all settlement activity in occupied east Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Sheikh Jarrah is one of the most sensitive neighbourhoods closest to the so-called Green Line, which separates east and west Jerusalem, with the fate of the city one of the thorniest issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As some settlers carried boxes containing the belongings of the expelled families a truck, others moved into the houses holding drills, shovels and ladders.

Police clashed with protesters and detained around 10 people as border guards and an ambulance were seen nearby.

"We are all afraid of being kicked out," said Amal Kassem, a Sheikh Jarrah resident for more than five decades.

She said Jewish settlers were holding "fake title deeds" to homes, which the Palestinians obtained in line with a deal struck between Jordan and the UN agency for refugees in 1956, when Jordan had jurisdiction over the area.

Senior Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat expressed his outrage.

"Israel is once again showing its utter failure to respect international law," he told reporters.

New settlers from abroad are accommodating themselves and their belongings in the Palestinian houses and 19 newly homeless children will have nowhere to sleep."

Meanwhile, Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah faction will reaffirm its refusal to recognise Israel as a Jewish state at a major congress next week, according to a document obtained by AFP on Saturday.

The congress document also reiterates the refusal of the Palestinian leadership to resume peace talks with Israel as long as it continues building Jewish settlements in Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank.

The Fatah congress that opens in the West Bank city of Ramallah on Tuesday will be the mainstream Palestinian faction's first such meeting in 20 years, with some 2,000 delegates expected to attend from around the world.

4 militants killed in Kashmir gunbattle

AFP, Srinagar

Four Muslim militants and an Indian soldier were killed in a gunbattle in Indian Kashmir close to the Pakistan-controlled section of the disputed region, the army said Sunday.

The fighting erupted late Saturday when a group of heavily armed militants were spotted and ordered to surrender. They instead opened fire, spokesman JS Brar told AFP.

Soldiers in the Bungus valley, about 100 kilometres (60 miles) north of summer capital Srinagar, were chasing down the surviving militants, Brar said.

The clash came a day after militants shot dead two police men minutes apart in the main city of Srinagar, ending a lull in violence.

The insurgency, which erupted in 1989, has left more than 47,000 people dead by official count.

EU keeps watchful eye on Georgia's rebel borders

AFP, Odzisi

Driving along the border of Georgia's rebel South Ossetia region on a hot summer day, two armoured jeeps flying European Union flags suddenly pulled over to the side of the road.

The sound of a helicopter echoed through the hills as a half-dozen EU monitors in blue berets emerged from the jeeps and began peering through binoculars.

Soon the helicopter came into view, its markings clear -- an MI-8 gunship, the red star of the Russian military painted on its side.

Flying low through a valley, the helicopter swept over the last South Ossetian village on

the border and into Georgian-controlled territory, a clear violation of the ceasefire that ended last year's Georgia-Russia war.

"It's definitely on the other side," the head of the EU patrol, an Irish police officer, said to his colleagues, before telephoning the EU mission's headquarters to report the incident.

A few minutes later, at a Georgian police checkpoint on the border, the monitors in blue berets emerged from the jeeps and began watching as the helicopter turned in an arc, heading back over South Ossetia.

In the year since last August's five-day war, the EU has become the key guarantor of peace in this region, its 225 civilian observers patrolling along the borders of both South Ossetia and Georgia's other rebel region, Abkhazia.



A forest fire ravages woods near the town of Tigray on La Palma Island in Spain on Saturday. Some 4,000 people were evacuated from their homes on one of Spain's Canary Islands as forest fires raged out of control.

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