



Palestinian supporters of the secular Fatah movement wave their national and Fatah (yellow) flags during a rally marking the movement's 45th founding anniversary in the West Bank town of Beit Jala near Bethlehem on Saturday. Fatah, led by Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas, vowed to step up its struggle against the Israeli occupation with demonstrations and diplomacy.

Terror threat shuts US, UK embassies in Yemen

BBC ONLINE, AFP, Sanaa

The United States and Britain have shut their embassy in Yemen's capital Sanaa, citing "ongoing threats" by an al-Qaeda offshoot linked to an alleged failed US plane bomb plot.

In a statement on its website, the embassy urged US citizens in Yemen to be vigilant and aware of security.

It comes a day after top US soldier Gen David Petraeus visited Yemen to pledge US support for its fight with al-Qaeda.

Gen Petraeus said on Friday the US would more than double counter-terror aid to Yemen this year.

"The US Embassy in Sanaa is closed today, January 3, 2010, in response to ongoing threats by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula to attack American interests in Yemen," said a statement on the embassy website on Sunday.

Britain also closed its embassy in Yemen on Sunday, following a similar move by the United States, because of threats from a local branch of al-Qaeda, a government official told AFP.

"The embassy is closed today (Sunday)

for security reasons, and out of fear of possible al-Qaeda reactions," the official said on condition of anonymity. But he stressed there were "no direct al-Qaeda threats" against the mission.

"Tighten the noose"

Analysts say the US has been providing intelligence and other help to Yemeni forces, which carried out raids on 17 and 24 December that reportedly killed more than 60 militants.

On Saturday, Gen Petraeus, head of US Middle East and Central Asian operations, visited Yemeni President Ali Abdallah Saleh to discuss the militant threat.

Yemeni officials said they had sent more troops to fight al-Qaeda militants in the provinces of Abyan, Baida and Shabwa.

"These measures are part of operations to hunt down elements of al-Qaeda... and tighten the noose around extremists," a Yemeni official told AFP news agency.

Gen Petraeus announced on Friday in a news briefing in the Iraqi capital Baghdad that US counter-terrorism aid to

Yemen would more than double in the coming year.

The US provided \$67m (£41m) in training and support to Yemen last year and only Pakistan receives more counter-terrorism funding, with about \$112m, according to AP news agency.

On Saturday, President Barack Obama accused Yemen-based al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula of orchestrating a failed Christmas Day attack on a US plane.

The group said in an Internet statement last week it had trained Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who spent time in Yemen last year, to carry out the attempted bombing of the airliner over Detroit.

In his weekly address, Mr Obama said he had made it "a priority to strengthen our partnership with the Yemeni government, training and equipping their security forces, sharing intelligence and working with them to strike al-Qaeda terrorists".

He said training camps had already "been struck, leaders eliminated, plots disrupted".

West agrees to wait over nuclear proposal: Iran

Washington considers new sanctions

AFP, Tehran/Washington

Iran said yesterday the West had agreed to wait two months on a proposal to exchange enriched uranium and that a month has now passed, reiterating that if there is no deal it will produce its own fuel for a nuclear reactor.

"Based on the talks Iran had with the relevant parties, it was decided to provide the Tehran reactor with the necessary fuel (from outside), and if not then we will produce it," foreign ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast was quoted by news agencies as saying.

"Then the (negotiating) parties asked the Islamic republic to give them two months to reach an understanding and we accepted that," he added.

"Now one month of that waiting period is over and one month is left. So if it does not materialise (the provision of fuel) then Iran will take the necessary decision," Mehmanparast said.

He spoke a day after Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki gave the West a one-month "ultimatum" to accept a uranium swap.

"The international community has just one month left to decide" whether or not it will accept Iran's conditions, otherwise "Tehran will enrich uranium to a higher level," he was quoted by the state television as saying.

"This is an ultimatum," Mottaki added.

Iran, which rejected a December 31 deadline to accept a UN-brokered deal, said on Tuesday it is ready to swap abroad its low-enriched uranium for nuclear fuel, insisting

however that the exchange should happen in stages.

Tehran has rejected a proposal by UN nuclear watchdog the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to ship out most of its stockpile of low-enriched uranium for further processing by Russia and France into fuel for the research reactor.

Last month Mottaki said Iran was open to exchanging uranium on Turkish soil. The IAEA has ruled out a swap taking place in Iran itself.

World powers have been pushing for Iran to accept the UN-brokered deal and are also mulling fresh UN sanctions after Tehran dismissed the year-end deadline.

The United States, Israel, and other world powers suspect Tehran is making an atomic bomb under the guise of a civilian nuclear programme. Iran denies the charge.

And the administration of US President Barack Obama believes domestic unrest and signs of unexpected trouble in Iran's nuclear programme make the country's leaders particularly vulnerable to strong and immediate new sanctions, The New York Times reported late Saturday.

Citing unnamed officials, the newspaper said the long-discussed sanctions proposal comes as the administration has completed a fresh review of Iran's nuclear program.

Obama's strategists believe Iran's top political and military leaders were distracted in recent months by turmoil in the streets and political fighting, and that their drive to produce nuclear fuel appears to have faltered, the report said.

Rio hotel turns horror as landslides kill 63

AFP, Angra Dos Reis

Rescuers pulled more bodies from an avalanche of thick mud and rock that buried a luxury Brazilian hotel filled with New Year's revellers, as the death toll from heavy rains in the south of the country rose to 63.

Twenty-eight people were killed in the tragedy at the hotel on Ilha Grande -- a resort island southwest of Rio -- and another six people injured.

State officials said another landslide in the nearby city of Angra dos Reis, south of Rio, left at least 13 people dead, part of a series of mudslides brought on by incessant rains that have killed at least 63 people across the state of Rio de Janeiro since Wednesday and left dozens missing.

Authorities said the Hotel Sankay was full to capacity with about 40 guests, including children, ringing in the New Year at the idyllic seaside getaway on Bananal beach.

The complex is nestled at the bottom of a jungle-covered hillside, which gave way before dawn Friday on New Year's Day, transforming the tourist paradise into a hell.



Picture taken on Saturday shows the area where a landslide buried a hotel on January 1, in Praia do Bananal, Ilha Grande, Angra dos Reis, southwest of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Brazilian rescue workers dug for survivors Saturday after a mudslide buried a luxury hotel filled with New Year's revellers on an island near Rio, killing at least 63 and leaving many others missing.

Troops drawdown from Iraq on track

Says US commander AP, Forward Operating Base Cobra

The nearly two-month delay in holding Iraq's nationwide elections will not keep American combat troops from leaving the country as scheduled by the end of August, the top US commander in Iraq told The Associated Press in an interview Saturday.

"The plan that I put together originally gave me plenty of flexibility, and part of that flexibility was that the election would be delayed, so I built flexibility into our plan," Gen Ray Odierno said at a military base in Iraq's Diyala Province. "I feel comfortable that we're on track."

Iraq was originally scheduled to hold key elections in January that will determine who will lead the country as American forces go home, but political wrangling over how to apportion votes in a law needed to carry out the balloting delayed the vote until March 7.

Under a US plan, all combat troops are slated to leave Iraq by the end of August. The remaining 50,000 US forces will be doing non-combat operations such as training.



Dozens of supporters of the Iranian opposition demonstrate on Saturday in Paris. Iranian opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi said on Friday that he was ready to sacrifice his life in his campaign for reform after the disputed June re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

'Google phone' debut expected this week

AFP, Washington

Google is expected to ring in the new year by unveiling its own smartphone on Tuesday, the Nexus One, in a bid to expand its powerful Web brand in the booming mobile arena.

The Internet search and advertising giant has already gained a foothold in the market with its Android mobile operating system, featured in a number of phones starting with T-Mobile's G1 in October 2008 and more recently with the Droid from Motorola.

But the Nexus One, designed by Taiwanese handset maker HTC, represents a significant departure in that Google is expected to sell the Google-branded phone directly to consumers who will not be tied to any one telecom carrier.

Water talks start today

FROM PAGE 1

"If it is not possible to reach a long-term agreement we may go for an interim agreement," said Sheikh Wahid-Uz-Zaman, secretary of the water resources ministry who will lead the Bangladesh delegation.

Indian Water Resources Secretary Umesh Narayan Panjar will lead an eight-member team at the talks.

Besides the Teesta water sharing, the talks will include water sharing of six other common rivers -- the Dharla, Monu, Muhuri, Dudhkumar, Khowai and Gomti. The issue of riverbanks protection is also expected to be on the agenda.

Dredging of the Isamoti river will also come up for discussion, says an official from the water resources ministry.

Experts said Bangladesh side would propose basin-wise management of the Teesta river. "Basically we will discuss the quantum of water sharing. I

hope, we will reach a consensus," said the secretary.

Both Bangladesh and India need water. So both the parties have to justify how much they are seeking and why, the secretary added.

Drastic fall in the water flow of Teesta during the lean season, especially in February and March, seriously hampers irrigation in Bangladesh, official sources said.

Dhaka, at the meeting, also wants to put up the issue of riverbank protection of the bordering Mahananda, Punarbhaba, Korotoa, Feni, Isamoti, Kalindi, Raymangal, Hariabhanga, Ashalong, Atrai, Muhuri, Surma and Kushiara rivers.

Every year Bangladesh loses its land due to the river erosion inside Bangladesh territory. Bangladesh and India are supposed to demark the border in the middle flow of the bordering rivers,

according to the Radcliffe mapping.

The Bangladesh team also include Monowar Hossain, professor of Water Resources Department, Habibur Rahman, director general of Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), Parimal Chandra Saha, joint secretary of the Ministry of Water Resources, Moahmmad Imran, director general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mir Sajjad Hossain, member of the Joint Rivers Commission (JRC), Giasuddin Ahmed Chowdhury, executive director of Centre for Environment and Geographic Information Services, Dhaka, Aminul Haque, chief engineer of Rangpur BWDB, Sahidur Rahman, chief engineer of BWDB, Ahan Ullah, director of JRC, Rakib Uddin, deputy secretary of the Ministry of Water Resources, Mofazzal Hossain, executive engineer of JRC.



This handout photo released on Sunday by the Mawson's Huts Foundation shows the rusty cast iron joints of a monoplane aircraft buried in the Antarctic ice on the shores of Commonwealth Bay, in the Australian Antarctic Territory.

Remains of early 1900s plane found in Antarctica

AP, Adelaide

Remains of the first airplane ever taken to Antarctica, in 1912, have been found by Australian researchers, the team announced.

The Mawson's Huts Foundation had been searching for the plane for three summers before stumbling upon metal pieces of it on New Year's Day.

"The biggest news of the day is that we've found the air tractor, or at least parts of it!" team member Tony Stewart wrote on the team's blog from Cape Denison in Antarctica's Commonwealth Bay.

Australian polar explorer and geologist Douglas Mawson led two expeditions to Antarctica in the early 1900s, on the first one bringing along a single-propeller Vickers plane. The wings of the plane, built in 1911, had been damaged in a crash before the expedition, but Mawson hoped to use it as a kind of motorized sled.

Stewart said the 1911-14 Australian Antarctic Expedition used the plane to tow gear onto the ice in preparation for their sledging journeys.

SSC exams start Feb 1

FROM PAGE 16

tolerance will be shown to those taking unfair means.

Nahid also said the prime minister will launch a website today with soft copies of the textbooks at primary and secondary levels.

SSC exams are the first public examinations students take after completing 10 years of formal education. Some 10,58,674 students -- 5,56,839 boys and 5,01,835 girls -- sat for last year's SSC and equivalent exams in February and 7,50,538 of them passed.

The government has taken necessary steps to hold exams in a free, fair and congenial atmosphere, the education minister told journalists after a preparatory meeting on the exams with the officials concerned.

"We want to hold the exams in a hundred percent fair and peaceful environment with zero tolerance for chaos," he said.

Nahid said stern actions will be taken against anybody

resorting to unfair means in the exams.

"Come to the exam halls with full preparation; don't even think of adopting unfair means," he said referring to the examinees.

Education ministry sources said about 12,02,864 students will sit for this year's exams in 1,992 exam centres under ten education boards including the Technical Education Board and Madrasa Board.

Of the examinees, 2,72,183 are under Dhaka Board, 1,02,323 under Comilla Board, 68,339 under Chittagong Board, 41,169 under Sylhet Board, 1,34,687 under Rajshahi Board, 1,18,225 under Dinajpur Board, 1,24,116 under Jessore Board, 55,575 under Barisal Board, 74,720 under Technical Board and 2,11,527 under Madrasa Board.

This is the first time the exams in two subjects -- Bangla and Religion -- will be held under the new creative question method.

Nahid said the government

decided to hold the SSC exams in February instead of March to bring forward the academic year.

He directed the officials to maintain law and order in the examination centres and strictly prevent entry of unauthorised persons into the centres.

The minister also urged the investigators and vigilance teams to carry out their duties properly.

He hoped that the parliament members, upazila chairmen and other public representatives would help ensure a peaceful atmosphere in the exams centres in their localities.

Examinees will not be allowed to carry mobile phones or bags with them inside the exam centres, he added.

Education Secretary Syed Ataur Rahman and the chairmen of all education boards, among others, were present at the meeting.

No more unplanned housing in Dhaka

FROM PAGE 1

The PM unveiled government plan for setting up four satellite cities surrounding the capital to divert pressures on the city.

She said her government is determined to protect the country's environment "at any cost".

"Not a single unplanned work will be allowed in the capital from now on as without proper plan and its implementation it will not be possible to build a comfortable and modern Dhaka," she said.

She said her government attaches highest importance to water and rail communications to ensure smooth and cheap transport for the people.

She said the government is going to cleanse the riverbeds of the Buriganga, the Turag, the Sitalakkhya and the Balu of all the piled-up wastes before going for massive dredging of these rivers around the capital.

Hasina further said the government will talk to neighboring India regarding the dredging works in the rivers in the bordering areas.

She once again voiced concern over the indiscriminate grabbing of the rivers and canals in and around the city.

She was critical of setting up box culverts by filling up canals of the city in the name of development works.

"At present, none can imagine that there was a canal in the city's Panthapath area, which was filled up through constructing box culverts for creating roads," the PM told the function.

She was also critical of the past BNP-Jamaat government for cancelling some 99 development projects initiated by the past Awami League government.

Hasina mentioned that the then Awami League government had started dredging in the river Gorai for saving the coastal belts from salinity

intrusion, but, after coming to power, the BNP-Jamaat alliance government halted the project, which resulted in huge loss to agriculture and the flora and fauna of the coastal areas.

She deplored that it came to government notice that many mills and factories have set up effluent-treatment plant but are not using the mechanism for waste disposal to save money.

"When government goes for inspection, the factories start their ETPs, but after inspectors' departures they shut these down," she said.

Hasina said to compel the industries to use ETPs the government is going to set up a centralised ETP and then the mills and factories will have to set up small ETP linked with the central plant.

She told the function that following hectic efforts by Bangladesh and other most vulnerable countries at the recently concluded Cop15

summit in Copenhagen, the developed countries, mainly responsible for the climate change, agreed to form a primary adaptation fund of \$ 30 billion.

Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) and Bangladesh Environment Network

(BEN) have jointly arranged the conference at DU Senate Bhaban in collaboration with various public and educational institutions, including the University of Dhaka.

Presided over by Chairman of Bapa Prof Mozaffer Ahmad, the function

was also addressed by State Minister for Forests and Environment Hasan Mahmud, Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University Dr AAMS Arefin Siddique, Vice-President of Bapa Dr Nazrul Islam, UGC Chairman Prof Nazrul Islam and General Secretary of BEN MAMatin.