

NEWS IN brief

Israeli, Egyptian leaders to discuss peacemaking

AP, Jerusalem

Israel's prime minister says he will discuss Mideast peacemaking with Egypt's leader, as well as the common threat posed by Iranian-backed militant groups.

Benjamin Netanyahu says Gaza-based Hamas militants and Lebanese Hezbollah guerrillas want to "disturb the quiet" but "we will not let them."

Both groups have warred with Israel. Egypt is worried by their Islamic militancy and Iranian ties.

Netanyahu said in a statement that he and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak would also discuss stalemated Israeli-Palestinian peace talks



PHOTO: AFP
Indian commuters journey past a burning government bus which had been set alight by students of Osmania University in Hyderabad yesterday, during a protest demanding separate state of Telangana in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.

Allies see plot in Pak governor's killing

AFP, Islamabad

Allies of Pakistan's assassinated liberal politician Salman Taseer yesterday alluded to his killing as part of a wider plot, slamming security failures that saw his bodyguard charged with murder.

Pakistan's most high-profile political assassination in three years has bitterly divided the country, horrifying moderates but winning praise from religious scholars and lawyers who festooned the presumed killer in garlands.

A member of an elite commando responsible for protecting Taseer confessed to killing him in broad daylight outside an Islamabad cafe to silence his efforts

to reform laws that make defaming the Prophet Mohammed punishable by death.

But Taseer's political allies suggest Malik Mumtaz Hussain Qadri, pictured grinning after allegedly pumping nearly 30 bullets into Taseer's body, acted as part of a wider conspiracy and accused police of a cover-up.

"The martyrdom of Mr Salman Taseer is a conspiracy against Pakistan and Pakistani institutions," said Imtiaz Safdar Warraich, a junior cabinet minister in the main ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP), to which Taseer belonged.

"The people behind this assassination should be exposed immediately... There was a serious security lapse," he said.

22 killed in India bus crash

AFP, Dehradun

At least 22 people including six children were killed when their bus plunged into a gorge in the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand, a police officer told AFP yesterday.

Nineteen others were injured in the late Wednesday accident, which occurred when the bus was returning with holiday makers from the popular hill town resort of Mussoorie.

The bus was carrying 42 passengers when it skidded off a mountain road and crashed some 15 kilometres (nine miles) from the state capital Dehradun.

Youths riot in Algeria over high prices

AP, Algiers

Rioting youths have set buildings ablaze and hurled stones at police in Algeria amid anger at recent price rises and chronic unemployment.

Security officers filled the tense working class Algiers neighbourhood of Bab el-Oued yesterday after riots Wednesday night.

The violence came after hikes in prices for milk, sugar and flour in recent days, and amid simmering frustration that Algeria's gas and oil resources

Israel won't be Turkey's 'punching bag': Lieberman

AFP, Jerusalem

Turkey is to blame for the crisis in relations between Israel and Ankara, and the Jewish state will not become a Turkish "punching bag," Israel's foreign minister said yesterday.

In a commentary published in the English-language Jerusalem Post, Avigdor Lieberman accused Ankara of anti-Israel incitement, and warned the situation in Turkey reminded him of Iran just before the Islamic revolution.

US to send 1,400 troops to Afghanistan

REUTERS, Washington

The US plans to send 1,400 additional Marines to Afghanistan to boost its combat forces ahead of the spring fighting season, the Wall Street Journal reported on yesterday.

The United States already has about 100,000 troops in the country, and Obama is under pressure to show results so he can begin a promised withdrawal this year.

Gbagbo ordered Ivory Coast violence Claims Ouattara

REUTERS, Paris

Ivory Coast's presidential claimant Alassane Ouattara said yesterday he had proof his rival, Laurent Gbagbo, had instigated post-election violence and ordered foreign agents to carry out killings.

"Laurent Gbagbo has blood on his hands. He has ordered assassinations of citizens by foreign agents," Ouattara told Europe 1 radio. "Of course, we have proof of this."

"I have already written to the Secretary General of the United Nations to ask that the International Criminal Court send a team of investigators to Ivory Coast, and I am told that this will be done in coming days."

Iran detains US woman

AP, Tehran

Iranian authorities have detained a 55-year-old US woman on spying charges, a state-owned newspaper reported yesterday.

The daily IRAN said the woman had spying equipment hidden on her body when customs authorities detained her in the border town of Nordouz, 370 miles (600 kilometers) northwest of the capital Tehran.

CRISIS IN KOREA US envoy seeks Chinese help

AP, Beijing

A top US envoy sought China's help yesterday in easing the threat of war on the Korean peninsula, hoping to gain insights about a senior Chinese official's recent meeting with North Korea's absolute leader, Kim Jong Il.

Stephen Bosworth met with Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Zhijun and other officials. He was to travel to Japan later yesterday.

"Ambassador Bosworth and Chinese counterparts had useful consultations on how to coordinate moving forward in dealing with North Korea," a US Embassy statement said.

Palestinians look for early vote on UN resolution

AFP, United Nations

A Palestinian resolution condemning Israel's settlement building could be voted on at the UN Security Council as early as next week, the Palestinian representative to the UN said Wednesday.

However Palestinians are not yet sure whether the United States will veto the resolution as part of its traditional support of Israel, the representative Riyad Mansour told AFP.

Mansour said he started meetings with Security Council ambassadors on Wednesday on the draft resolution drawn up with the backing of Arab states. Mansour and other Arab envoys met with Bosnian ambassador Ivan Barbalic, who is president of the Security Council for January.

"Now we are having talks about the drafting language," he said.

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