

Anger, grief and hatred mount in Mideast

AFP, Cairo

The Middle East boiled with anger as protestors trying to topple more of the region's rulers staged fresh mass demonstrations after Friday prayers and buried the victims of crackdowns by embattled regimes.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, a sense of anger, grief and hatred pervaded at the end of a week which has seen unprecedented challenges to some of the world's longest-serving rulers, including Libya's Moamer Kadhafi.

According to a leading human rights watchdog, Libyan security forces killed at least 24 people during assaults by the security services on anti-government protesters in two Libyan cities on Thursday.

The worst violence hit the eastern city of Al-Baida where hospital staff put a call out for additional medical supplies to treat 70 injured protestors, half in critical condition, said Human Rights Watch.

One injured protester sitting near the hospital's intensive care unit told Human Rights Watch that security forces had used live ammunition to deter protesters, fatally shooting 16 of them and wounding dozens others.

Funerals were being held across the region following a series of bloody crackdowns ordered by various governments.

In Bahrain, thousands of mourners' chanted slogans called for the fall of the al-Khalifa dynasty at the funerals for four people who were killed when police stormed Pearl Square, the epicentre of pro-democracy protests that have

shaken the Gulf island state, in the early hours of Thursday.

Police were not visible at the funerals but a helicopter hovered over Sitra, while army tanks and troops kept tight control on the streets of Manama ahead of Friday prayers.

There were similar scenes in Yemen after three people were killed in the southern port city of Aden during clashes between police and anti-regime demonstrators.

Anti-regime protesters in the volatile Yemen city of Taez were blasted with a hand grenade yesterday leaving two dead and dozens hurt, as violent clashes also erupted in Sanaa, witnesses said.

The grenade attack came as hundreds of protesters took to central Taez after the weekly Muslim prayers to demand President Ali Abdullah Saleh's ouster, in protests that have been raging in the city for the past week.

Two people were killed and 27 wounded, a medical official in the southern city told AFP.

Earlier, police had opened fire on thousands of demonstrators who marched Thursday in Aden's Al-Mansura neighbourhood demanding the ouster of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who has been in office for 32 years.

The demonstrators, chanting "Ali, out!" damaged shops, set fire to tyres and placed obstacles in the streets to block traffic, an AFP correspondent said.

Like Mubarak in Egypt, Bahrain and Yemen have been key allies in US efforts to combat Al-Qaeda, and Washington has faced widespread accusations that it has too often turned a blind eye to abuses.



PHOTO: AFP

An American woman waves an Egyptian flag from a balcony overlooking Cairo's landmark Tahrir Square where hundreds of thousands of Egyptians gathered yesterday to celebrate at the epicentre of a nationwide revolt which forced president Hosni Mubarak to step down and hand over power to a military junta a week ago.

NEWS IN brief

Eight hurt in Jordan clash

AFP, Amman

Government supporters clashed with young protesters in Amman yesterday, leaving eight people injured, in the first such violence since protests began in Jordan, witnesses and medical sources said.

"A quarrel broke out between pro-government rally and another demonstration staged in the same location," said police spokesman Mohamed Khatib, referring to the rally of young people demanding political change.

Demonstrators told AFP that they were dispersing when government supporters started to chase

Germany opens new Nazi investigation

AP, Berlin

A German prosecutor tells The Associated Press he has opened a murder investigation against a key witness in the trial of John Demjanjuk.

The probe is based on evidence Alex Nagorny may have been involved in mass killings at the Nazis' Treblinka concentration camp in occupied Poland.

Prosecutor Hans-Joachim Lutz told the AP yesterday witnesses say 94-year-old Nagorny took part in the mass shootings of Jewish prisoners in 1941-1942. He is trying to determine if there is enough evidence

Nato soldier shot dead at Afghan base

AFP, Kabul

A German soldier was killed and eight others wounded yesterday when a man in Afghan army uniform opened fire at an outpost in northern Afghanistan, a lawmaker said.

The shooting at a base in the Puli Khumri district of Baghlan province occurred as troops carried out maintenance on a vehicle, the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said.

A man in Afghan uniform shot at the troops and they fired back, critically injuring the gunman.

A lawmaker in Berlin confirmed that the soldier killed was German, adding that eight others had been injured, four of them seriously, and said that

Lebanon sentences 'Israeli spy' to death

AFP, Beirut

A Lebanese military court sentenced a man to death on charges of spying for Israel's Mossad and providing the agency with information on the militant group Hezbollah, a judicial official said yesterday.

"A military court has sentenced Amin Ibrahim al-Baba to death ... for contacting Israeli intelligence and providing information that aided Israeli attacks on Lebanon," the official told AFP.

The charge sheet said Baba, 44, had opened an Internet cafe in southern Lebanon through which he sent information to Israel, including information that facilitated the 2006 assassination of brothers Mahmud and Nidal Mazjoub of the Sunni Islamic

Japan PM faces party revolt

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's centre-left Premier Naoto Kan, in power less than a year, faced a mutiny from a group of ruling party lawmakers on Thursday that threatens his reform agenda and imperils his leadership.

Sixteen lower house members loyal to Kan's internal party rival, scandal-tainted powerbroker Ichiro Ozawa, asked to leave the party's group in parliament and said they may not support the government in crucial votes.

If the rebels fail to vote with Kan's Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) it could spell doom for the government, which already lacks the two-thirds lower house majority needed to push through bills

Egypt "Victory March" tests military rulers

REUTERS, Cairo

Egyptians held a nationwide "Victory March" yesterday to celebrate the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak's 30-year rule one week ago, to protect the revolution and to remind new military rulers of the power of the street.

Hundreds of thousands joined the rallies, which are also a memorial to the 365 people who died in the 18-day uprising, with many Egyptians expressing their intention to guard their newly-won prospect of democracy.

With the Higher Military Council facing demands to free political prisoners and to lift emergency rules after dissolving parliament and suspending the constitution, all eyes were on the military's careful management of rallies around Egypt.

Sheikh Yusef al-Qaradawi, a Qatar-based preacher who backed the revolt and called it "a day from God," led prayers in Tahrir Square. He was greeted with loud cheers.

The atmosphere was relaxed and jubilant as the military blocked off the square to traffic ahead of Friday prayers. Soldiers and organisers conducted searches of people

streaming in while an army band played "Egypt the Great."

The crowd sang along, waving Egyptian flags given out by soldiers, and chanting: "The army and the people are united." There were tanks and armoured vehicles at the 12 entrances to the sprawling square.

Life in Egypt is still far from normal almost a week after the popular revolt focused on Cairo's Tahrir (Liberation) Square, with tanks on the streets, banks closed, workers on strike and schools shut.

Security officials said Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq will announce ministers making up the new emergency government next week and hoped the reshuffle would help to appease protesters and workers on strike.

Other groups held a simultaneous demonstration to "apologise" to Mubarak for the way he was ousted and recognise his achievements in his three decades in power.

Organisers said the Mubarak sympathisers are wearing black, with the victory marchers in white, and organizers said they hoped that the rallies would be peaceful.

Gbagbo to take control of I Coast banks amid panic

AFP, Abidjan

Ivory Coast strongman Laurent Gbagbo said Thursday he would take control of two French bank affiliates that closed due to the post-election crisis as residents began a run on banks over fears of more closures.

After at least five international banks suspended activities this week, Gbagbo "has issued decrees so that the state of Ivory Coast can take total and complete control of the capital of certain banks", spokesman Ahoua Don Mello said in reading a statement on public television RTL.

He noted in particular the affiliates of French banks BNP Paribas and Societe Generale.

Earlier Thursday dozens of people anxiously lined up outside bank branches in the Plateau business district of Abidjan waiting to withdraw funds.

Iran devotees demand 'death' of opposition

AFP, Tehran

Thousands of worshippers and regime-backers gathered for yesterday prayers demanding the execution of opposition chiefs whom officials say have rebelled against Iran's Islamic establishment.

"Death to Mousavi! Death to Karroubi! Mousavi, Karroubi should be hanged!" chanted the devotees at the weekly prayers.

The worshippers were expected later to stream out of Tehran University and join other regime-backers in denouncing opposition leaders Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, former pillars of the Islamic regime, media reports said.

Leading the prayers, hardline cleric and head of powerful Guardians Council, Ahmad Janati, demanded total isolation of Mousavi and Karroubi as worshippers chanted "American servants, shame on you!", referring to Mousavi and Karroubi.

Janati said the judiciary must "cut access (of Mousavi and Karroubi) with the people completely, the doors of their homes must be shut... so that they can't receive and give messages, their phones... Internet must be cut and they be imprisoned in their homes."

The two leaders are already under de facto house arrest and on Wednesday, the chief of judiciary Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani warned them sternly.

"The treason committed by the movement of sedition leaders is not hidden from anyone," Larijani was quoted as saying by state news agency IRNA Thursday.

"This group which has rebelled against the religious government should know that while maintaining Islamic compassion we will not tolerate the establishment being compromised."



PHOTO: AFP

A woman collects her ballot papers at a voting station in Wiaworanja yesterday. Ugandans voted in polls widely expected to return veteran leader Yoweri Museveni to power, with a fragmented opposition crying foul even before the ballot.

Syrians hold protest against police

AFP, Cairo

Hundreds of Syrians staged a protest against security forces after traffic police beat up a young man in the capital's Old City, an opposition website reported yesterday.

The Dubai-based all4Syria.info said Imad Nasab, son of a shop owner in the cobbled commercial strip of Hariqa, was assaulted by traffic police officers, sparking a spontaneous rally on Thursday in solidarity with the victim.

"The Syrian people will not be humiliated," chanted the crowd.

"Police, thieves" and "We will sacrifice our soul and blood for you (President) Bashar (al-Assad)" were some of the slogans used by the demonstrators.

G20 meeting urged to act on food price inflation

BBC ONLINE

The G20 is being urged to tackle the issue of price inflation affecting basic goods ahead of a two-day meeting which kicks off later.

Finance ministers and central bankers from 20 of the world's biggest developed and developing nations will gather in Paris.

Ahead of the meeting, the International Monetary Fund warned food price rises have increased economic imbalances.

Earlier this week, the World Bank said food prices were at "dangerous levels".

Forty-four million people have been pushed into poverty since last June, it said.

John Lipsky, first deputy managing director of the IMF, told the BBC that the G20 needed to work to remedy the instability: "There is great concern over the obvious high volatility of basic commodity prices especially food."

French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who is currently the head of the G20, has argued that commodity speculators should be reined in in order to reduce food price spikes and volatility.

Meanwhile, more than 100 European and international organisations led by the World Development Movement (WDM) have signed a statement warning the G20 of what they see as the dangers of unchecked speculation.

AFTER EGYPT Arab voices matter

TIME ONLINE

If one lesson is to be learned from the remarkable events unfolding in Egypt, it is that Arab public opinion matters. For too long Arab voices have not been listened to, nor have Arab sensibilities or aspirations been respected. The Egyptian people have not only risen up, demanding to be heard, they have challenged other Arabs and the west to pay attention to what they are saying.

Mubarak, in bid of desperation, played every card at his disposal: the caring father, the patriot, the xenophobe, the reformer and more. Mubarak was talking, but he simply wasn't listening. Maybe, he was reaching out beyond the square to those he thought might also be listening.

It was the immovable object squaring off against the irresistible force. In the end, the force won. The protesters rejected Mubarak's promises and his appeals as "too little, too late."

Now the president is gone. The throngs have won this round and they are empowered to seek more change. It is not the end, just the beginning of a process, the outcome of which is still uncertain. With the military in charge, it will now be up to them to listen.

In some ways, after February 11th, much has changed. In other ways, the struggle remains the same. A movement that has won a round now becomes a potentially formida-

ble force. But a regime that fears losing control is also a force which must be reckoned with. In the weeks and months ahead we will see this drama play out in the streets and in negotiations.

The problem of not listening to Arab voices is not only a problem for those presidents who have fallen or those who are still at risk; it is a problem for the West, as well. For too long, the US, Great Britain, and others have ignored the concerns and sensibilities of Arab people. Arabs have been treated as if they were pawns to be moved about on the board.

The practice of ignoring Arab concerns isn't new. Until this day, all too often the west has acted across the Middle East as if Arabs were objects without sensibilities or concerns. The west invaded Iraq without understanding the impact it might have on Arab opinion. They have continued to ignore Palestinian suffering and aspirations.

Now all this must of necessity change. When the Egyptian people organised themselves demanding to be heard they introduced a new and potentially transformative factor into the political equation of the region. It will no longer be possible to act as if policies can be imposed and blindly accepted.

Arabs have been inspired by Egypt and empowered to believe that their voices must be heard and respected. It will make life more complicated for Western and some Arab policy makers.

British PM, deputy clash over referendum

AFP, London

British Prime Minister David Cameron and his deputy Nick Clegg fired the first shots yesterday ahead of a May 5 referendum on electoral reform that threatens to undermine the ruling coalition.

They gave speeches setting out opposing positions in a campaign that has so far failed to fire the public imagination despite the far-reaching effect it could have on the way Britons pick their lawmakers.

Clegg's centrist Liberal Democrats demanded the referendum as a key condition for joining a coalition with the centre-right Conservatives after the Tories failed to win a clear election victory in May 2010.

Cameron warned yesterday that abandoning the current first-past-the-post sys-

tem -- also used in the United States, India and Canada -- could lead to hung parliaments and "second choice" governments.

"I think any system that keeps dead governments living on life support is a massive backward step for accountability and trust in our politics," Cameron told an audience in London.

But Cameron and Clegg both insisted that the result on May 5 would not affect the coalition, which is already under pressure over its massive cuts to public services in order to curb Britain's record deficit.

Under the first-past-the-post system favoured by the Conservatives, the constituency candidate who wins the most number of votes wins outright. It tends to favour a two-party system.