

OMAN UNREST

Protesters block road to port

Death toll tops 6

REUTERS, Sohar

Omani protesters demanding political reforms blocked roads to a main export port and refinery yesterday and a doctor said the death toll from clashes with police in the Gulf Arab sultanate had risen to six.

Hundreds of protesters blocked the entrance to the industrial area of the northern coastal town of Sohar, which includes a port, refinery and aluminum factory. They pushed back four army vehicles that had been observing the scene.

"We want to see the benefit of our oil wealth distributed evenly to the population," one protester yelled over a loud-hailer near the port. "We want to see a scale-down of expatriates in Oman so more jobs can be created for Omanis."

The unrest in Sohar, Oman's main industrial center, was a rare outbreak of discontent in the normally sleepy sultan-

ate ruled by Sultan Qaboos bin Said for four decades, and follows a wave of pro-democracy protests across the Arab world.

Oman's government, trying to calm tensions, promised on Sunday to create more jobs and give benefits to job seekers.

A main supermarket in Sohar was burning yesterday after being looted, witnesses said. Protesters stormed the town's police station on Sunday to try to free detainees before burning it. They had also set two state offices alight.

As well as those demonstrating outside the industrial area, hundreds more were at the main Globe Roundabout, angry after police opened fire on Sunday at stone-throwing protesters demanding political reforms, jobs and better pay.

Graffiti scrawled on a statue said: "The people are hungry." Another message read: "No to oppression of the people."

Nearby, sidewalks were smashed and

office windows broken. Troops deployed around the town but were not intervening to disperse protesters.

"There are no jobs, there's no freedom of opinion. The people are tired and people want money. People want to end corruption," said Ali al-Mazroui, 30, who is unemployed.

Marine traffic and exports of refined oil products from Sohar's port, which ships 160,000 barrels per day (bpd) of a range of products, were continuing although the flow of trucks into the port was blocked, a port spokeswoman said.

"It is true the protesters are making a very non-violent protest," the spokeswoman told Reuters. "Marine traffic in and out is not affected at the moment."

A doctor at Sohar's main hospital said the death toll had risen to six. Witnesses had earlier put it at two, some saying police had fired live ammunition, while others said they had used rubber bullets.



Bangladeshi workers gather at a makeshift camp on the shores of Benghazi port as they wait for a boat to flee Libya yesterday. Pressure mounted on Libyan leader Moamer Gaddafi after his opponents overran towns and world leaders called for him to end his iron-fisted rule.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

US weapons killing Arab protesters: Iran

AFP, Tehran

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said yesterday that it was weapons manufactured and delivered to "dictators" by the United States that were killing protesters in uprisings around the Arab world.

The hardliner said that the United States and its allies must be blamed for imposing dictatorships on regional countries now in the grip of deadly revolts.

These "dictators who are killing their own people are incapable of manufacturing even simple things and they are killing their people with weapons they bought from America and its allies," the Fars news

Israel PM meets Blair as Quartet pushes peace

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu held talks yesterday with Quartet envoy Tony Blair, as international peace negotiators sought to coax Israel and the Palestinians back into some form of peace dialogue.

Israeli officials confirmed the two had met but refused to give details of what was discussed, as media reports suggested the premier was shying away from sending his chief negotiator to meet Quartet representatives in Brussels.

The peacemaking diplomats, who last met in Munich on February 5, are due to meet again in Paris at an unspecified date in March, ahead of which their envoys were to hold separate talks with Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in Brussels.

At least 16 dead at Brazil carnival

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

At least 16 people were killed at a carnival in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais when one of the floats was hit by a broken high-voltage electric cable, local media reported.

The reports said the broken cable fell atop the float and produced a charge that resulted in multiple deaths and injuries.

"It was a catastrophe," Jose Balducci, a local health official, was quoted by newspapers as saying. "Many people were affected, and we don't know for

Somali pirates release Japanese ship

AFP, Brussels

Somali pirates have released a Japanese ship that was hijacked four months ago with a crew of 20 Filipinos, the European Union's anti-piracy mission said yesterday.

Captured on October 10 while transporting steel products off the coast of Kenya, the Izumi was released from pirate control on February 25, the EU Navfor mission said in a statement.

The ship is "believed to be making for a safe port," the statement said, but the EU mission had no infor-

Iraq PM apologises to journalist for demo abuse

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's prime minister apologised to a reporter yesterday after the journalist alleged assault at the hands of security forces during massive demonstrations in Baghdad last week.

Nuri al-Maliki pledged to compensate the television news reporter for damage to his equipment, and promised to personally lead an inquiry into the physical abuse, following widespread allegations of brutality towards media by security forces during protests in the capital on Friday.

"We will compensate you for your camera and for the poor treatment that you received," Maliki said at a news conference. "We are sorry for what happened and if you can identify to us who carried it out, we will punish the guilty, provided that you had not

Islami Bank spends 8pc

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statement on its website, the bank had a net profit of Tk 352.8 crore in the nine months to September 2010.

The home ministry has asked the bank authorities to submit a report before April 7 on where the bank spent its profit, Tuku said at the 9th meeting on ways to combat militancy at his office.

Home Secretary Abdus Sobhan Sikdar, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Hassan Mahmood Khandker and Rapid Action Battalion Director General Mukhlesur Rahman also attended the meeting.

The home ministry has intelligence report that the bank is spending certain amount of its profit to spread militancy, a meeting source told The Daily Star.

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) in November last year assigned its General Manager SM Moniruzzaman to identify any suspicious transaction by Islami Bank Bangladesh and its foundation.

Prior to that on November 8, the BB imposed a ban on giving funds to the foundation for its alleged lack of transparency in the transaction, and for violation of Islamic

Sharia.

A BB official said the general manager is tasked with overseeing the overall activities of the bank and monitoring its fund transfer to the foundation.

Islami Bank's Public Relations Officer Mohammad Abdul Mannan, however, denied the bank's involvement in financing militants.

"If we fund militants then why the authority concerned does not halt our banking?" he told The Daily Star.

Tuku said the ministry asked the intelligence agencies to prepare a report on how the bank spends its "Jakat" (donation to the poor) before the next meeting on April 7.

He added that he has information that the bank spent its Jakat fund in 16 phases though it is permitted to spend it in eight phases.

The state minister instructed the IGP to use community police to uproot militancy from the society and to stop recruiting members for militant groups from academic institutions.

NHRC chief wants strong govt warning

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with a strong warning against custodial deaths.

If the circular is issued, it will help bring down the rate of custodial deaths and improve human rights condition in the country, he said.

Mizanur was speaking at a press conference at the Dhaka Reporters' Unity on publication of "Human rights report on Minority community in Bangladesh, 2010" jointly conducted by

Bangladesh Institute of Human Rights (BIHR), Dhaka and Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD), the Netherlands.

Mentioning the limitations of the commission, he blamed the bureaucracy for lack of sufficient manpower in his organisation.

"Now we have a total of eight staff while the government approved the appointment of 28. Bureaucrats are doing it to hinder the com-

mission's activities," he said.

He termed the Vested Property Return Act a means of discrimination against minority communities and recommended forming a commission headed by noted economist Prof Abul Barakat to return the properties to their real owners.

He criticised some human rights NGOs for not having a clear conception of

human rights.

"They do not know what constitutes a violation of human rights or crime," he said. Presenting the findings of the study, GHRD observer Rabintra Ghosh said at least 2,153 incidents of violation of human rights against minority communities happened last year.

Human rights situation improved last year com-

pared to previous years although assault, rape and violence against the Hindu, Ahmadiyyas, Christians, Dalits and indigenous communities continued, he said.

The observer placed some recommendations to protect human rights of minority communities.

They include -- impartial investigation into the incidents and justice to the vic-

tims, implementation of the CHT peace accord 1997, steps to stop fatwa and village arbitration and review of Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000.

Rana Das Gupta, general secretary of Bangladesh Hindu-Bouddha-Christian Oikya Parishad, and officials of the GHRD and the BIHR were present at the press conference.

Anti-graft body

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"The amendments will turn ACC into a worthless institution. Once the amendments are passed, it is the government who would decide what the commission would do.

Then what will be the use of keeping an anti-graft body?" said Shujan Secretary Badiul Alam Majumder, the keynote speaker.

Badiul Alam cited The Daily Star report headlined "Only people's graft to be under watch," published on Sunday, as the moot point for the discussion since, he said, there was no official information about the proposed amendments.

It is necessary to turn the ACC into a constitutional institution so that no government can pull a stunt on people in the name of a "stronger" and "more effective" anti-graft body, he added.

Iftekaruzzaman, the executive director of Transparency International,

Bangladesh, said the motive behind the amendments is to establish administrative and political control over the ACC.

Referring to the movement that turned the Bureau of Anti-Corruption into the ACC in 2004, TIB Trustee Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said "If the authority to conduct probe is seized from the ACC, it would assume a status worse than the anti-corruption bureau."

Speakers demanded the government seek public opinion before adopting the amendments and compel its agencies to give the commission necessary information.

TIB Chairman M Hafizuddin Khan, columnist Syed Abul Maksud, and former ACC member Prof Moniruzzaman Miah were present at the roundtable conducted by former inspector general of police ASM Shahjahan.

Bahrain prince seeks dialogue amid protests

AFP, Manama

Bahrain's Crown Prince Salman said yesterday efforts were underway to launch talks with the opposition, which is demanding major political reforms amid a wave of anti-government protests.

"The steps we have taken in the last few days have calmed the situation and helped restore life in Bahrain to normal in preparation for dialogue," Prince Salman said in a statement carried by state news agency BNA.

However, "some continue to seek to block reform," he said, adding, "such disruption only harms the interests of the people of Bahrain."

Opposition leader Hassan Mashaima, who returned home to Bahrain on Saturday from self-imposed exile in Britain, is set to lead yesterday evening prayers in Karbabad, a village west of the capital Manama.

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