

Bahrain forces attack protest camp, 6 killed

AP, Manama

Soldiers and riot police used tear gas and armoured vehicles yesterday to drive out hundreds of anti-government protesters occupying a landmark square in Bahrain's capital, a day after emergency rule was imposed in the violence-wracked Gulf kingdom.

At least six people were killed, according to witnesses and officials.

The full-scale assault launched at daybreak swept into Pearl Square, which has been the centre of uprising since it began more than a month ago. Stinging clouds of tear gas filled streets and black smoke rose from the square from the protesters' tents set ablaze.

Witnesses said at least two protesters were killed when the square was stormed. Officials at Ibn Nafees Hospital said a third protester later died from gunshot wounds in his back. The witnesses spoke on condition of anonymity because of fears of reprisals from authorities.

Meanwhile, Bahrain state TV also

reported that two policemen died when they were hit by a vehicle after anti-government protesters were driven out. The Interior Ministry also at least one other policeman was killed, but did not give the cause.

But state TV broadcast video showing military vehicles in the square flying Bahrain's red-and-white flag as security officials moved through the wreckage of the encampment, set up at the base of a towering monument to the country's history as a pearl diving centre. The video showed the ground littered with debris, including satellite dishes and charred tent poles.

Helicopters crisscrossed over the square, which was cleared by security forces late last month but was later retaken by protesters after a deadly confrontation with army units.

Protesters fled for cover into side streets and security forces blocked main roads into Manama. Mobile phones were apparently jammed in central Manama during the height of the attack and Internet service was at a crawl.



Black smoke billows in Pearl Square in Bahraini capital Manama yesterday, after Bahraini forces killed at least three protesters and wounded dozens more as they assaulted a peaceful protest camp in the capital's Pearl Square.

State security service dismantled in Egypt

PTI, Cairo

Egypt yesterday disbanded its much-feared and hated state security service, shutting down its headquarters and offices throughout the country, conceding one of the main demands of the protesters, who led the recent uprising.

Announcing this the country's new interior minister Mansour al-Isawy said an official decree had been issued. He also declared that old methods of torture and spying had been made illegal and that the security police would no longer monitor activities in universities and tap telephones.

Pakistan frees CIA contractor accused of murder

AFP, Islamabad

A Pakistan court yesterday freed CIA contractor Raymond Davis, who was accused of murdering two men in Lahore, after blood money was paid in accordance with sharia law, officials said.

"The family members of the slain men appeared in the court and independently verified they had pardoned him (Davis)," provincial law minister Rana Sanaullah told private Geo television.

"He has been released from jail. Now it is up to him. He can go wherever he wants," he added.

The January shooting sparked a diplomatic row with the United States.

Fearful Libyans flee as Gaddafi forces advance to east

Four killed in attack on rebel western city

AFP, Sallum

Residents of rebel-held eastern Libya streamed into neighbouring Egypt yesterday fearful of an assault by forces loyal to Muammar Gaddafi driving eastwards to put down a month-long revolt.

Forces loyal to Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi attacked yesterday the rebel-held western city of Misrata, killing at least four people and wounding 10, a rebel spokesman said.

"The city is under attack from all sides but the rebels are still in control and succeeded in capturing two tanks coming in from the south," the spokesman reached by telephone said.

"Four martyrs have fallen, two of them civilians whose houses were hit by wild shelling," the spokesman added, saying he was speaking from the hospital.

"The rebels have repulsed the offensive and the intensity of fire has slackened rela-

tively.

Meanwhile, several Arab nations are prepared to take part in a military operation in Libya to stop the advance of leader Muammar Gaddafi's forces, French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe wrote on his blog yesterday.

"Only the threat of force can stop Gaddafi. It is by bombarding, with the few dozen planes and helicopters he really has, his opponents' positions that the Libyan dictator has turned the balance.

"We can/should neutralise his airborne means by targeted strikes.

"That's what France and Britain have been proposing for two weeks. On two conditions: getting a mandate from the United Nations Security Council, the only source in international law for using force; acting not only with the support but also with the concrete participation of Arab nations.

"This second condition is in the process of being satisfied: several Arab countries have assured us that they would take part."

Two killed in Israeli airstrike near Gaza City

AFP, Gaza City

A second body was yesterday found at the site of an Israeli airstrike near Gaza City which targeted a Hamas training ground near Gaza City, medical officials said.

Emergency services spokesman Adham Abu Selmiya said rescuers had found the body of a second person killed at the site, a training ground east of the city, raising the toll to two dead, and two injured in the air attack.

The attack targeted the Abu Jaarad training camp in the Zeitun district which was used by the Hamas security forces, witnesses said.

The Israeli army confirmed the air raid, saying it had targeted "an active centre of terrorism" on southern Israel.

WikiLeaks' cables spurred Arab uprisings : Assange

REUTERS, Cambridge

Publishing US diplomatic cables helped shape uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, WikiLeaks co-founder Julian Assange said on Tuesday.

The computer expert, who infuriated the US government by publishing thousands of the secret cables, said the leaks may have persuaded some authoritarian regimes that they could not rely on US support if military force was used on protesters.

They also made it difficult for the West to continue its support of the long-standing regimes, Assange told hundreds of students at the Cambridge University union.

"The Tunisian cables showed clearly that if it came down to it, the US, if it came down to a fight between the military on the one hand, and (President Zine al-Abidine) Ben Ali's political regime on the other, the US would probably support the military," he said.

"That is something that must have also caused neighboring countries to Tunisia some thought. That is that if they militarily

intervened, they may not be on the same side as the United States," Assange said.

The wave of unrest began in Tunisia last December, forcing the president to flee the country a month later.

Protests then sprang up elsewhere in the region, encouraging WikiLeaks to pump out information on principal players in Egypt, Libya and Bahrain "as fast as we could," Assange said.

The cables were published, not just so that the people in those countries would know what was going on, "because many of them already knew what was going on in great and grotesque detail, but rather so that it would not be possible for the West to stand up and support the (authoritarian leaders)," he said.

In Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak stepped down in February after 18 days of protests.

Assange, who is fighting extradition from Britain to Sweden over alleged sex crimes, said cables released on Egypt's former intelligence chief and vice president Omar Suleiman prevented the United States from supporting him as a potential successor.

NEWS IN brief

China aims new missile at Taiwan: Intelligence chief

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan's top intelligence chief said yesterday that China is targeting the island with a new type of ballistic missile.

"The Chinese communists have deployed the Dongfeng 16, which is a new powerful missile aimed at Taiwan," Tsai said while replying to queries raised by Lin Yu-fang, a legislator from the ruling Kuomintang party.

"Its range is longer, and it increases the threat to Taiwan," Tsai said while replying to queries raised by Lin Yu-fang, a legislator from the ruling Kuomintang party.

Abbas says he won't run for re-election

AP, Ramallah, West Bank

The Palestinian president says he won't run for re-election. This is the first time Mahmoud Abbas has said explicitly he won't seek another term.

In a speech yesterday to political allies, Abbas also said he is willing to travel to the Gaza Strip to promote reconciliation between the feuding Palestinian territories and form a united government.

Abbas' plan includes new elections within six months. But he says he wouldn't run for president again.

Sarkozy says nuclear power essential for independence

AFP, Paris

President Nicolas Sarkozy insisted yesterday that despite growing international concern over its safety nuclear energy remained essential for the country's energy independence and the environment.

Amid concerns around the world in the face of quake-hit Japan's nuclear crisis, Sarkozy said that France, proportionally the world's biggest user of nuclear power, would stick with it.

"France has made the choice of nuclear energy, which is an essential element of its energy independence and the fight against greenhouse gases," said Sarkozy.

120 wounded in Yemen clashes

REUTERS, Sanaa

At least 120 were wounded as police and government loyalists tried to break up a rally in western Yemen demanding an end to President Ali Abdullah Saleh's 32-year rule, a doctor said yesterday.

"They attacked the protesters and wounded around 120 people," a doctor treating protesters in the Red Sea city of Hudaida said. "They were using tear gas, rubber bullets, live fire and daggers."

EU energy ministers to hold nuke meeting

AFP, Brussels

European Union energy ministers will hold an extraordinary meeting next week to assess the impact of quake-hit Japan's nuclear crisis on the vital industry, the EU's president said yesterday.

Herman Van Rompuy said the ministers will hold talks in Brussels on Monday to "discuss the consequences for the energy sector and markets, and the response we can give."

European heads of state and government will then debate the consequences of the Japanese catastrophe at a long-scheduled summit on March 24-25, he said.

"One aspect is nuclear safety," Van Rompuy said. Amid concerns around the world, French President Sarkozy said yesterday that France, proportionally the world's biggest user of nuclear power, would stick with it.

"France has made the choice of nuclear energy, which is an essential element of its energy independence and the fight against greenhouse gases," Sarkozy told a cabinet meeting, according to a statement released by his office.

At an urgent meeting with industry officials on Tuesday, EU states agreed to conduct voluntary tests on Europe's nuclear plants in the second half of the year to assess their ability to withstand the shock of earthquakes and floods.

Japan's growing nuclear emergency has prompted European nations to check safety at their plants while Germany decided to temporarily shut down seven reactors.

A European diplomat said the energy ministers would also discuss the impact of the upheaval sweeping across North Africa on gas and oil supplies.

Japan disaster in numbers

AFP, Tokyo

The following is a list of facts and figures about the devastating 9.0-magnitude earthquake and tsunami that battered Japan's north-east coast on March 11, sparking a nuclear emergency.

DEATH TOLL: The death toll rose to 3,676 yesterday, the National Police Agency said. A total of 7,558 people are reported missing and 1,990 are injured, according to the latest update.

NUMBER OF EVACUEES: 556,132 people have been evacuated following the catastrophe, the fire and disaster management agency said. Many others are still stranded and cut off from aid.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE WITHOUT WATER OR ELECTRICITY: 1.6 million build-

ings are out of running water and 621,439 households without electricity, the health ministry said.

NUMBER OF BUILDINGS DAMAGED: 80,422 buildings have been damaged, including 4,798 destroyed, the fire and disaster management agency said.

IMPACT ON ECONOMY: Tokyo shares closed up 5.68 percent yesterday on bargain-hunting following a huge two-day selloff.

Japanese shares had plunged 10.55 percent on Tuesday on a wave of panic-selling after Prime Minister Naoto Kan warned that radiation leaked from the quake-hit plant had reached levels that posed a threat to health.

It was the biggest one-day fall since the Lehman crisis in 2008 at the beginning of the global financial downturn, compounding Monday's 6.18 percent tumble.

The Bank of Japan has so far pumped 28 trillion yen (\$346 billion) into money markets.

With rolling power cuts planned, many major companies from carmakers to tech firms have suspended production.

Singapore bank DBS estimated the quake and tsunami would cost Japan's economy \$100 billion, equivalent to about two percent of its gross domestic product.

112 countries and regions, along with 23 international organisations, have offered aid, the foreign ministry said. It did not reveal the amount in money terms.



Japan's Self Defence Force soldiers search for missing people in a snow covered field in Miyako in Iwate prefecture yesterday. Japan's Emperor Akihito delivered a rare address to a jittery nation in dread of nuclear catastrophe as millions struggled in desperate conditions after quake and tsunami disasters.

Radiation panic spreads to Asian nations

Govts vow to crack down on hoax messages

AFP, Hong Kong

Asian nations yesterday vowed to crack down on hoax messages warning about radiation spreading beyond Japan, which have helped stoke growing unease over the unfolding nuclear crisis.

Shoppers in the region scrambled to hoard supplies of favourite Japanese food products, fearing contamination of future stocks, after radiation was unleashed from a stricken nuclear plant in quake-hit Japan.

The hoax text messages and emails, warning people to shelter from dangerous radioactive material, were reported to have spread as far afield as India.

Thought to have originated in the Philippines and purporting to be a BBC newsflash, the messages urge people to stay inside and swab their thyroid glands with iodine solution to guard against radiation sickness.

Japan's atomic emergency has sparked panic buying of iodine pills, even though experts warned they are of limited use. Iodine solution, commonly used as an anti-septic, is completely ineffective.

In Hong Kong, nervous parents queued for powdered milk formula across the city, anxious to stockpile the popular product as fears grew that future shipments could contain radioactive traces.

Fires and explosions at the Fukushima plant have unleashed dangerous amounts of radiation at the plant, and higher than normal levels in Tokyo, but authorities say there is no threat to human health in the capital.

But despite widespread expert assurances that there is currently no risk outside Japan, the radiation threat was also troubling restaurateurs around the region.

"We're very worried," said William Mark, president of the Federation of Hong Kong Restaurant Owners, who feared an impact on Japanese outlets in a territory which is already skittish after a series of health emergencies in recent years.

South Korean authorities urged calm after bogus alerts swept the country's social media networks and vowed to track down and punish those responsible under social unrest laws allowing a maximum one-year prison sentence.