

# Yemen protesters reject US-backed Saleh exit plan

AFP, Sanaa

Yemen protesters yesterday demanded the immediate departure of President Ali Abdullah Saleh after his ruling party accepted a Gulf plan for him to quit in 30 days in a move promptly hailed by Washington.

The United States had urged a peaceful transition after Saleh's General People's Congress (GPC) party said late Saturday it accepted a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) plan under which he would quit after months of protests.

The top committee of the Peaceful Change Revolution issued a statement reiterating its rejection of the plan and demanding that Saleh be prosecuted, contrary to the GCC proposal which calls for immunity.

"The committee... utterly rejects any initiative that would not stipulate the departure of Saleh and his family (from power) and putting him and his staff on trial," it said.

The Gulf plan would see Saleh submit his resignation to parliament 30

days after tasking the opposition with forming a "national accord government" shared equally between the GPC and the opposition.

His resignation would also follow the enactment by the parliament of laws providing "immunity against legal and judicial prosecution of the president and those who worked with him during his rule," the text of the initiative says.

Saleh's deputy would then take over as interim president and call for a presidential election within 60 days.

The newly elected president would then form a committee to draft a new constitution which would be voted on in a referendum, paving the way for parliamentary elections.

The GCC, the European Union and the United States would sign the resulting agreement as witnesses.

Saleh's party said on Saturday it accepted the plan in its "entirety."

Yemen's parliamentary Common Forum opposition coalition also welcomed the Gulf plan, but insisted that

Saleh has to go before a national unity government is formed.

The protesters' statement yesterday slammed the Common Forum position, however, saying it "represents only itself."

The committee called on the Common Forum "to refrain from entering into dialogue with Saleh and his regime, and to merge fully with the revolution."

The White House on Saturday welcomed the plan for Yemen's long-time president to step down, urging all sides to "swiftly" implement a peaceful transfer of power.

"We applaud the announcements by the Yemeni government and the opposition that they have accepted the GCC-brokered agreement to resolve the political crisis in a peaceful and orderly manner," spokesman Jay Carney said in a statement.

More than 130 people have been killed in clashes with security forces and Saleh supporters since protests broke out late January.



Protestors wear masks as thousands protest against Japan's nuclear policy during a parade for Earth Day in Tokyo yesterday.

## Japan PM braced for vote blow

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's opposition Liberal Democratic Party is expected to win a lower house by-election yesterday in a blow to Prime Minister Naoto Kan who has been criticised for his handling of the nuclear crisis.

In the by-election in central Aichi prefecture candidates focused on disaster countermeasures after the March 11 earthquake and tsunami which triggered the world's worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl 25 years ago.

LDP candidate Hideki Niwa, 38, is expected to win the seat local media reported.

While Kan's ruling Democratic Party of Japan failed to field a candidate, Niwa and the conservative LDP fiercely criticised his handling of the Fukushima nuclear crisis as "irresponsible."

## NEWS IN brief

### Famed Indian guru Sai Baba dies at 85

AFP, Puttaparthi

Sathya Sai Baba, one of India's most famous gurus, died in hospital yesterday, triggering a global outpouring of grief and tributes from devotees across politics, sport and entertainment.

He was 85 and finally succumbed to multiple organ failure after being in a critical condition for more than three weeks, his doctors said.

He was credited by millions of people across the globe with having supernatural powers, including an ability to conjure objects out of thin air, remember past lives and cure terminal diseases.

### Pope urges 'diplomacy, dialogue', not arms in Libya

AFP, Vatican City

Pope Benedict XVI yesterday urged "diplomacy and dialogue" instead of arms in Libya and prayed that "human dignity may overcome the darkness of division" in the Middle East.

"In the current conflict in Libya, may diplomacy and dialogue take the place of arms and may those who suffer as a result of the conflict be given access to humanitarian aid," the pope said in his traditional Easter message.

"That the light of peace and of human dignity may overcome the darkness of division, hate and violence" in the Middle East, he added in the message known as

### Pakistani rape victim Mukhtaran Mai to file review petition

AFP, Meerwala

A Pakistani woman who was gang raped said yesterday she would challenge a Supreme Court decision to dismiss her appeal against the early release of five men convicted of abusing her.

Mukhtaran Mai, now 40, was gang raped in June 2002 on the orders of a village council as a punishment after her 12-year-old brother was wrongly accused of having illicit relations with a woman from a rival clan.

The court last week dismissed Mai's appeal against the acquittal of five men she accused of attacking her.

A local anti-terrorism court had sentenced six accused men to death, but Lahore High Court acquitted five of them in March 2005, and commuted the sentence for the main accused, Abdul Khaliq, to life

# Gaddafi accused of dirty tricks in besieged city

*Stalemate would draw in Al-Qaeda: McCain*

AFP, Misrata

Libyan rebels accused Muammar Gaddafi of playing dirty games in Misrata where salvos of Grad rockets exploded yesterday in apparent contradiction of his regime's vow to halt fire in the western city.

In a Misrata hospital, meanwhile, two captured pro-Gaddafi soldiers told AFP that loyalist forces were losing their grip in the battle for the western port, and that their morale was sinking.

Both said their officers had abandoned the troops and their supply lines were cut.

Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Kaim said early yesterday the army had suspended operations against rebels in Misrata, but not left the city, to enable local tribes to find a peaceful solution.

"The armed forces have not withdrawn from Misrata. They have simply suspended their operations," he told a news conference in Tripoli.

"The tribes are determined to solve the problem within 48 hours... We believe that this battle will be settled peacefully and not

militarily."

But Colonel Omar Bani, the military spokesman of the rebels' Transitional National Council, said Gaddafi was "playing a really dirty game" aimed at dividing his opponents.

"It is a trick, they didn't go," Bani said in the eastern rebel stronghold of Benghazi. "They have stayed a bit out of Tripoli Street but they are preparing themselves to attack again."

Later on yesterday bursts of automatic weapons fire could be heard and Grad rockets exploded in the city, the scene of deadly urban guerrilla fighting for weeks between rebels and Gaddafi loyalists.

Six people were killed and 34 wounded in yesterday's fighting, said a doctor.

US Senator John McCain yesterday urged Washington to increase its air strikes on Libya, warning a prolonged stalemate would likely draw Al-Qaeda into the conflict.

"The longer we delay, the more likely it is there's is a stalemate. And if you're worried about Al-Qaeda entering into this fight, nothing would bring Al-Qaeda in more rapidly and more dangerously than a stalemate," McCain told NBC's "Meet the Press."

## THAI-CAMBODIAN BORDER UNREST UN calls for truce amid third day of fighting

AFP, Prasat, Thailand

Cambodia and Thailand exchanged heavy weapons fire for the third straight day yesterday, officials said, after fierce fighting on their joint border left 10 soldiers dead.

Thousands of civilians have fled both sides of the disputed jungle frontier because of the fighting, which has shattered a tense two-month lull in hostilities.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called for a ceasefire and said the neighbours should launch "serious dialogue" to resolve the dispute, according to a spokesman.

Thai villagers sheltering in makeshift tents in Prasat district, Surin province, told how they raced from their homes in fear when clashes began in the neighbouring border district of Phanom Dong Rak on Friday.

"When a shell fell next to my house, I knew I had to run away," said Somjai Lengtamdee from Baan Khaotoh village.

Somdee Suebnisai, a local official for Phanom Dong Rak said there were 16 camps in the area providing refuge to more than 18,000 people and the number was expected to rise to 20,000 by yesterday evening.

On the Cambodian side, the National Committee for Disaster Management told AFP that 12,000 people had been evacuated.

Six Cambodian troops and four Thai soldiers were killed in the first two days of hostilities.

## Australian PM to raise N Korea issue in China

AFP, Seoul

Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard pledged yesterday to urge China to help tame North Korea and ease tension on the Korean Peninsula as part of efforts to ensure regional security.

Gillard, on a visit to Seoul as part of her whirlwind Asian tour, said Sydney was "concerned about continuing North Korean aggression" and vowed to "bring continued pressure on the North Korea regime for change."

"My message would be that it is not in China's interest to have instability on the Korean peninsula," she told reporters.

She will leave for China on Monday.

## Israeli killed at West Bank

AFP, Nablus

A Palestinian policeman fired on a group of Israelis in a Palestinian-controlled area of the West Bank yesterday, killing one and injuring four, the Israeli army said.

The shooting occurred early in the morning near Joseph's Tomb, a flashpoint shrine under Palestinian control and off-limits to Israelis except on army-organised, escorted trips.

In a statement, the Israeli military said Palestinian officials confirmed the shooter was a Palestinian policeman who opened fire "after identifying suspicious movements."

One of the suffered a gunshot wound to the stomach and was in serious condition, while the second was shot in the shoulder and was in moderate condition, hospital medics said.

# Syria rounds up opponents after 120 dead

AFP, Damascus

Security forces raided homes across Syria, arresting regime opponents, as funerals were held yesterday for protesters and mourners killed in a bloody crackdown which activists said cost 120 lives.

Students, meanwhile, called for a strike and two MPs resigned after more bloodshed on Saturday when Syrians swarmed the streets to bury scores of demonstrators killed in protests the previous day.

At least 120 people were killed in the two-day crackdown, the Committee of the Martyrs of the 15 March Revolution said yesterday.

It issued an updated list of names of 95 people it said were killed on Friday in massive protests which swept across Syria. The death toll for Saturday has risen to 25 people killed by gunfire, it said.

Most were killed in the southern protest hub region of Daraa and in and around Damascus, during funerals of people killed on Friday.

Human Rights Watch urged the United

Nations to probe the "carnage" from the massive "Good Friday" demonstrations and called for sanctions to be slapped on Syrian officials responsible for the killings.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said dozens of people were arrested in northern Syria on Friday, just a day after President Bashar al-Assad had lifted decades of emergency rule.

It gave the names of 18 men rounded up in the northern cities of Idlib, Raqqa and Aleppo, but said "dozens more were arrested in other Syrian towns."

Witnesses and activists said several people were also rounded up in and around Damascus, but could not give exact numbers.

Tens of thousands swarmed cities and towns across Syria on Friday to test the implementation of the reforms, but security forces fired live rounds and tear gas against them, activists said.

"After Friday's carnage, it is no longer enough to condemn the violence," Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch (HRW), said in a statement.

## Easter church blast wounds four in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

A roadside bomb explosion wounded four people, including two policemen, near a small church in the Iraqi capital on Easter Sunday, medical and security officials said.

The bomb went off near the entrance of the Sacred Heart church, which is surrounded by concrete blast walls, near Tahriat Square in central Baghdad.

Two passing civilians and two policemen were wounded, an interior ministry official and doctor at Ibn Nafis hospital said.

The church was empty at the time as Easter services were held earlier in the day, the building's security guards said.



PHOTO: AFP

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev (L), First Lady Svetlana Medvedeva and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin (R) attend Orthodox Easter celebrations at the Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow yesterday.

# Pakistanis rally against drone strikes

*Nato supply route blocked*

REUTERS, Peshawar

The main supply route for Nato troops in Afghanistan was temporarily closed yesterday after thousands of people blocked a key highway in Pakistan to protest against US drone strikes, officials said.

The Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul, however, said the two-day blockade would have no impact on the alliance's operations in Afghanistan.

"Coordination with Pakistani government officials has been conducted and we understand the government will maintain security," an ISAF spokesman said. "There is no impact on ISAF sustainment."

The routes through Pakistan bring in 40 percent of supplies for Nato forces in Afghanistan, according to the United States Transportation Command.

The call for blocking the supply line came from cricket-turn-politician Imran Khan

after US officials rejected Pakistan's demand for sharp cuts in drone strikes in its tribal regions where al Qaeda and Taliban militants are based.

Activists from Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaaf (PTI), Khan's party, and some Islamist parties staged a sit-in on the highway leading to Afghanistan through the Pashtun tribal region of Khyber.

The supply to Afghanistan through Khyber region had been suspended since the protest started on Saturday, a senior provincial government official, Siraj Ahmed, said.

The Chaman border crossing in the southwest has remained open to traffic, another official said.

The attacks by US pilotless aircraft are a source of concern for the Pakistani government, which says civilian casualties stoke public anger and bolster support for the Islamist militancy.

## Floods and landslides kill 10 in Brazil

BBC ONLINE

Landslides and floods triggered by torrential rain have killed at least 10 people in southern Brazil yesterday.

Among the dead were three children whose home was among several buried in the town of Novo Hamburgo in the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

A man was electrocuted by toppled power lines in Sapucaia do Sul and a farmer died when a building collapsed on him.

Floods and landslides in January killed about 800 people in a mountainous region near Rio de Janeiro.

Civil defence officials said that the latest flooding also caused deaths in Igrejinha, Fazenda Vila Nova and Sapucaia do Sul.