

# Syrians vow for more protests

## 72 killed in two days of protest; EU, US impose new sanctions

AFP, Damascus

Troops and snipers killed six civilians yesterday as Syrians prepared to bury scores of people killed in a "day of rage," while the United States and EU imposed sanctions on Damascus.

As the death toll from seven weeks of anti-regime protests rises, activists vowed to keep the pressure on the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, promising a new week of fresh pro-democracy protests.

At least 66 people were killed on Friday when tens of thousands of people demonstrated across Syria, activists said, while authorities said nine members of the security forces were killed by "terrorist groups."

Meanwhile, Washington blocked the assets of the president's brother, Maher, who commands Syria's feared Fourth Armoured Division, and of several other top officials and its intelligence services.

In Brussels, EU ambassadors launched preparations for an embargo on the sale of weapons and

equipment that might be used for internal repression and decided to put the brakes on trade deals with Syria.

In Geneva, the UN Human Rights Council endorsed a US call for an investigative mission on the bloodshed as it voted in favour of a resolution condemning the crackdown.

The Syrian Revolution 2011, a driving force of the protests in which demonstrators inspired by uprisings across the Arab world are seeking greater freedoms, said the blood of those killed has not been shed in vain.

"Your blood has paved the way for our freedom," the group said on its Facebook page, as it announced that funerals for Friday's "martyrs" will be held at 4:30 (1330 GMT) across Syria.

"Freedom is inexorably coming," pledged the militants, who also announced plans for countrywide protests from today at the start of what they called "the week of breaking the siege."

Demonstrations would take place today in the southern protest hub town of Daraa, which has been

besieged by security forces since last Monday along with the Damascus suburb of Douma.

Activists also called for rallies on Monday in Damascus, Tuesday in the northern towns of Banias and Jableh, Wednesday in Homs, Talbisseh and in Tall Kalakh on the border with Lebanon, and night vigils on Thursday.

Yesterday six more civilians were killed when the army began at dawn pounding Daraa, activists said.

Water and power have been cut in Daraa as the situation worsened after between 3,000 and 5,000 troops backed by tanks stormed the town on Monday.

"The town is a military zone and the situation is tragic, but our morale is high," Daraa activist Abdullah Abazid told AFP yesterday.

At least 582 have been killed by security forces firing live rounds and tear gas since protests erupted March 15, said the Committee of the Martyrs of the 15 March Revolution, which has been keeping a tally of the dead.



Houses lie in ruin amid vehicles and trees damaged by tornadoes on Friday in Pratt City, Alabama.

PHOTO: AFP

## NEWS IN brief

### Egypt's Islamists announce own political party

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, the country's best organised movement, yesterday announced the formation of a party to contest up to half of parliament's seats in a September election.

Mohammed Hussein, the group's secretary general, said at a news conference that the movement's consultative council decided at a meeting to adopt a decision to form the new Freedom and Justice Party.

"We have adopted the measures taken by the guidance council regarding the Freedom and Justice Party

### Al-Qaeda ordered suspect to carry out attack in Germany

AFP, Berlin

One of three alleged members of Al-Qaeda detained in Germany was ordered by a high-ranking member of the group last year to carry out an attack in the country, prosecutors said yesterday.

The 29-year-old suspect, identified as Abdelakim El-K, "was ordered by a high-ranking member of Al-Qaeda in 2010 to carry out an attack in Germany," the deputy federal prosecutor general, Rainer Griesbaum, said at a press conference.

### Ivory Coast police to start questioning Gbagbo next week

AFP, Abidjan

Ivory Coast police and gendarmes will next week begin interrogating deposed president Laurent Gbagbo and his wife Simone over alleged crimes by his regime, the justice minister told AFP yesterday.

Gbagbo and his wife have been placed under house arrest in separate towns in the north of the country after the strongman was arrested on April 11 by forces loyal to new President Alassane Ouattara.

"The police and the gendarmes will begin hearing Laurent Gbagbo and his wife next week from May 4. We have notified the (former) president Laurent

### 6.1-magnitude quake shakes Panama

AFP, Washington

A strong earthquake measuring 6.1 hit northern Panama early yesterday, the US government reported.

The epicentre of the quake, which occurred at 3:19 am local time, was located 179 kilometres south of the city of David, near the border with Costa Rica, according to the US Geological Survey.

There was no immediate report of casualties or damage.

## Taliban announce spring offensive in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan's Taliban insurgents yesterday announced the launch of their spring offensive as international troops gear up for a transition process to hand control of security to home-grown forces.

Referring to itself as "the leading council of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" -- as it did during its 1996-2001 rule -- the group said it "wants to declare the launching of the spring military operations christened as 'Badar' to be waged against the invading Americans and their foreign allies". Spring and summer are Afghanistan's traditional fighting season.

In a statement in English as well as local languages Pashto and Dari, the Taliban said its offensive against NATO-led troops and the Afghan government -- named for a historic victory by the Prophet Mohammed -- would begin on May 1.

It would "focus on attacks against US military centres, places of gatherings, airbases, ammunition and logistical military convoys of the foreign invaders in all parts of the country", the Islamist militants said.

They would also target members of the High Council For Peace, a government body that seeks to negotiate with the Taliban, the statement said, along with government, intelligence services and contractors working for NATO-led forces.

"Strict attention must be paid to the protection and safety of civilians during the spring operations by working out a meticulous military plan," said the statement.

## Act 'without fear or favour'

India PM tells police

AFP, New Delhi

India's prime minister Manmohan Singh, whose government has been roiled by a series of corruption scandals, yesterday urged the country's top police agency to "act without fear or favour".

Singh's comments came as his Congress-led coalition reels from a slew of scandals, with his personal reputation on the line amid charges that he has allowed graft to go unchecked during his seven years in office.

The prime minister noted that the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) was investigating several high-profile cases of corruption that have attracted wide public attention.

"The handling of these cases constitutes a litmus test for you," Singh said at the opening of a new CBI headquarters in New Delhi.

## Yemen president due to sign transition deal

Six killed in south Yemen strike

AGENCIES, Sanaa

Yemen's president was to sign an agreement yesterday to quit power in a month's time in exchange for immunity in a deal that, if implemented, would make him the third Arab ruler ousted by a wave of popular uprisings.

Ali Abdullah Saleh, who has ruled the impoverished Arabian Peninsula state for nearly 33 years, has in principle accepted the agreement negotiated by his oil-exporting neighbors in the six-state Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Yemen's main opposition coalition, which includes both Islamists and leftists, has also agreed to the deal, even as street protesters have rejected the agreement and demand Saleh step down immediately and face prosecution.

Meanwhile two servicemen and four civilians were killed and at least another 23 were wounded in south Yemen during a shutdown called by anti-government protesters yesterday, officials said.

Local officials said protesters opened fire on troops as they tried to dismantle roadblocks set up near Al-Mansura neighbourhood in Aden to demonstrate against the regime of President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

They said troops moved into the area from where they suspected the attack was launched and opened fire, killing at least three civilians and wounding at least another 15 more.

The casualties were taken to a hospital in Aden, the south's main port city, a medical source said.

## Saudi king tightens media restrictions

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah has imposed new media restrictions and threatened hefty fines and closure of news organisations allegedly undermining national security, press reports said yesterday.

Under a decree, the media will be prohibited from reporting anything that contradicts the strict Islamic sharia law or serves "foreign interests and undermines national security."

The decree requires publishers to stick "to objective and constructive criticism that serves the general interest," media reports said, adding that violators face fines of up to \$133,000.

In addition to a threat to close publishers who violate the decree, the authorities can also ban a writer for life from contributing to any media organisation.

## ALABAMA TORNADES

# 2nd deadliest disaster in United States history

### Death toll rises to 350

AFP, Tuscaloosa

The death toll from killer tornadoes in the southern United States rose to at least 350 early yesterday, making the storm the second-deadliest tornado-related tragedy in US history.

The worst tornado outbreak in the United States in March 1925 left 747 people dead. The third-deadliest tornado storm struck in 1932, killing 332 people.

"I've never seen devastation like this. It is heartbreaking," President Barack Obama said in Tuscaloosa Friday after meeting victims whose homes were demolished.

In Alabama alone, Wednesday's deadly storms claimed 254 lives, the state Emergency Management Agency reported.

In addition, 1,730 people in the state were either hospitalized or injured while eight others were listed as missing.

Entire blocks were obliterated in Tuscaloosa, a city of about 90,000 people,

where Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama touched down to see the destruction firsthand, meet with Alabama Governor Robert Bentley, and shake hands and hug distraught residents.

Obama pledged help for Tuscaloosa and dozens of other cities and towns across the US south struck by the worst US natural disaster since Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Obama spoke as the first estimates about the magnitude of property damage emerged, with catastrophe modeling firm EQECAT saying the tornadoes could result in between \$2 billion and \$5 billion in insurance costs.

The number of confirmed tornado related deaths increased Friday to 254 in Alabama, the worst-hit state; to 34 in Mississippi; and to eight in Arkansas, officials said.

Aside from those states, the twisters left 34 dead in Tennessee, 15 in Georgia, and five in Virginia, according to state officials.

## US FORCES IN IRAQ April deadliest month since 2009

AFP, Baghdad

The killing on Friday of an American soldier made April the deadliest month for US forces in Iraq since 2009, according to figures compiled by AFP.

The soldier "was killed April 29 while conducting operations in southern Iraq," a US military statement released yesterday said, without giving further details.

The death brought to 11 the number of US troops to have died in Iraq in April, according to an AFP tally based on data compiled by independent website www.icasualties.org.

That is the highest monthly toll since November 2009. Of the 11 to have died in April, six died in what were described as "non-hostile" incidents.

## US 'not withholding food aid from N Korea'

BBC ONLINE

US officials have denied an accusation from former President Jimmy Carter that the US is withholding food aid from North Korea.

A state department official said the North Korean government was responsible for the plight of its people.

Carter accused the US and South Korea last week, after a three-day trip to North Korea, of human rights violations against North Koreans by withholding food aid.

"One of the most important human rights is to have food to eat, and for South Korea and the US and others to deliberately withhold food aid to the North Korean people is really a human rights violation," he said.

"As you know well, the North Koreans were the ones who abruptly suspended the aid program in 2009, ordering our humanitarian personnel to leave the country and leave behind 20,000 metric tons of US food," the state department's director of policy planning, Jacob Sullivan, said.

"Everyone should remember who is responsible for the plight of the North Korean people, and that is the North Korean government itself," he said.

US food aid was suspended two years ago after the North said it was not wanted.

North Korea has warned of severe food shortages this year as a result of the harsh winter. The UN has announced plans to distribute emergency food aid.

The UN's World Food Programme said 3.5m people in the North who were suffering from malnutrition would be fed.

North Korea has been dependent on food aid since famine in the mid-1990s.

## TIMETABLE FOR POPE JOHN PAUL II'S BEATIFICATION TODAY

○ **Friday:** Pope John Paul II's coffin is exhumed from its resting place in a crypt under Saint Peter's basilica, signalling the start of the beatification proceedings as thousands of pilgrims crowd into central Rome.

○ **Saturday:** French nun Marie Simon-Pierre, whose unexplained healing was the miracle that qualified John Paul for beatification, is set to speak at a prayer vigil in the ancient Circus Maximus arena in front of more than 100,000 people.

► The vigil is set to start at 1800 GMT and will last around two hours.

○ **Sunday:** Pope Benedict XVI will declare his predecessor John Paul II "blessed" at a beatification mass in Saint Peter's Square that puts the former pontiff one step away from full sainthood in the Catholic Church.

⇒ **0330 GMT:** Vatican authorities will begin to allow access to the square for the ceremony. A total of around 500,000 people are expected.

⇒ **0700 GMT:** One of John Paul's favourite prayers in honour of the Virgin Mary is recited

and sung in different languages in Saint Peter's Square.

⇒ **0800 GMT:** The official ceremony, which the Vatican has said will be "very simple", begins in the square with 87 international delegations present.

► Shortly after the start of the mass, Benedict XVI will pronounce a special prayer in which he will declare John Paul as one of the "blessed".

► With these words, a giant image of the newly honoured John Paul II will be unfurled over the facade of Saint Peter's basilica.

⇒ **1030 GMT:** Benedict will pay his respects in front of John Paul's coffin inside the basilica. Pilgrims will then begin filing past the coffin and a relic -- a phial containing John Paul's blood -- for veneration.

○ **Monday:** A mass of thanksgiving in Saint Peter's Square will be led by Vatican Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone. John Paul's coffin will then be laid to rest inside the basilica near Michelangelo's famous Pieta.

AFP, Vatican City

## WILLIAM AND KATE'S WORLDWIDE WEDDING

BBC ONLINE

The marriage of Prince William and Kate Middleton was an event for the internet age.

Great traditions of state were celebrated by the modern institutions of the web like Facebook, Twitter, Google and YouTube.

**TWITTER**  
Talk of the wedding dominated Twitter, not just in the UK, but around the world.

The micro blogging site's top "trending topics" globally were all royal-themed.

**ROYAL CHANNEL**  
While blogs and social networking sites provided users with a way of sharing their thoughts on the royal wedding, the internet also allowed people to watch the ceremony.

It was the video sharing site's 23rd most-visited channel of the

day, but trailed behind America's Next Top Model and Top Gear.

Many TV broadcasters also live streamed the wedding to mobile devices, including smartphones and tablet PCs.

**FACEBOOK**  
The world's largest social networking site, Facebook was quick to extract wedding statistics from its more than 500 million users.

Some of the more choice nuggets of information include: **1684,399 status updates mentioned the royal wedding over a four hour period - roughly 47 per second.**

**1,274 users checked-in at Westminster Abbey using Facebook's "Places" feature.**  
**1 A Facebook page dedicated to "Princess Beatrice's Ridiculous Royal Wedding**

**Hat" gained over 4,000 fans.**

**WEB TRAFFIC**  
Measuring the scale of a global media event is notoriously difficult.

The number of TV viewers has been estimated at around two billion. In reality, that is little more than an educated guess.

Quantifying the popularity of a topic on particular sites, such as Facebook and Twitter is possible.

However, it is difficult to gauge the impact on the internet overall.

At the height of the wedding, global web traffic, as measured by Akamai, was 39% higher than normal.

Although there is no firm evidence that this was due to the wedding, the United Kingdom was listed as a hot spot, with the country account-

