

Thousands rejoice as Saleh leaves Yemen for S Arabia

Opposition vows to prevent strongman's return

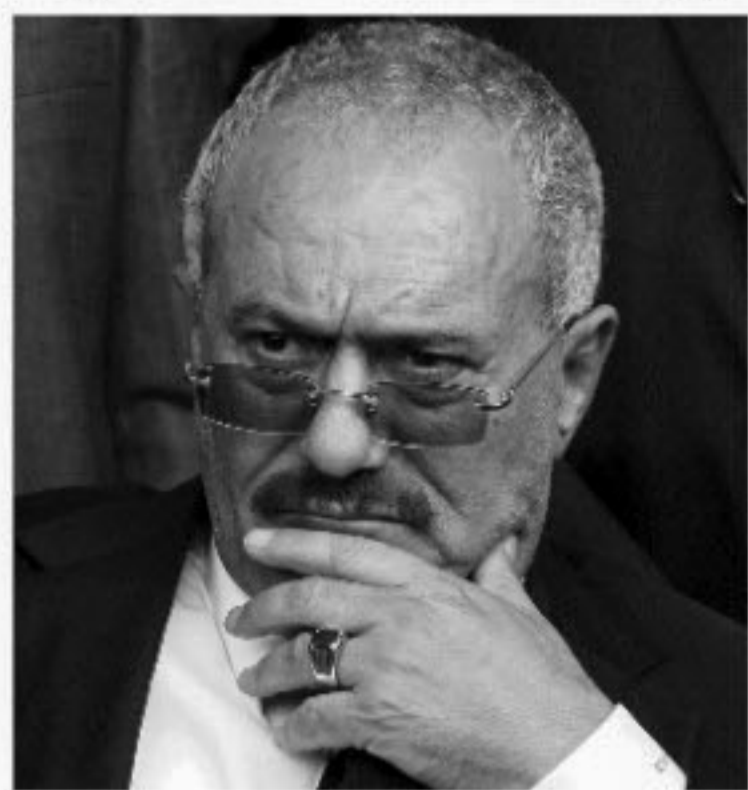
AFP, Sanaa

Tens of thousands of people took Sanaa's streets yesterday, hailing what they said was the end of Yemen's regime after President Ali Abdullah Saleh, wounded in a blast, left for treatment in Saudi Arabia.

"Today, Yemen is newborn," sang people who massed in Sanaa's University Square -- dubbed "Change Square" -- the epicentre of anti-regime protests that have raged against Saleh's rule since January.

"This is it, the regime has fallen," they chanted before their numbers swelled from dozens of youths to tens of thousands of all ages, said an AFP correspondent at the scene.

In Yemen's second-largest city Taiz, a flashpoint of anti-regime demonstrations south of Sanaa, hundreds also celebrated, shouting:



"Freedom freedom, Ali has fled."

Meanwhile, Yemen's opposition vowed yesterday to work to prevent the return of Saleh.

"We will work with all our strength to prevent his return," parliamentary opposition spokesman Mohammed Qahtan told AFP. "We see this as the beginning of the end of this tyranni-

cal and corrupt regime."

The veteran leader's eldest son Ahmed, commander of the elite Republican Guard, has remained in Yemen. The opposition says Ahmed was already preparing to take over from his father before a popular uprising broke out in late January.

Hadi held talks yesterday with the US ambassador to Sanaa, Gerald Michael Feisterstein, state news agency Saba reported.

Qahtan said the opposition was also to meet with US and European Union envoys in Sanaa yesterday.

Doubts were raised about whether or not Saleh would return with his family, many of whom also flew out to Saudi Arabia.

State television, meanwhile, kept broadcasting songs in praise of Saleh.

Saleh, wounded by an explosion as he prayed at a mosque inside his

presidential compound on Friday, was transferred to Saudi Arabia late on Saturday, but had not stood down, a Saudi official said.

"President Saleh has arrived in Riyadh for treatment, but he will return to Yemen," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

A source close to the presidency told AFP that Hadi, the vice president, and Ahmed held a top-level meeting with several military officials late on Saturday, without disclosing what was discussed.

Heavy fighting broke out between gunmen who have declared themselves the "Eagles" for protecting the revolution in Taiz and Republican Guard troops near the presidential palace in Yemen's second-largest city, witnesses and fighters said.

Four soldiers and a gunman were killed, the sources said.

N Sudan rejects UN call for Abyei pullout

New clashes reported

AFP, Khartoum

Sudan's Foreign Minister Ali Ahmad Karti has rejected a request by the UN Security Council to withdraw its troops from Abyei, the first response to those demands by a senior government official.

"Sudan does not need to be asked to pull its army out of Abyei because this is a Sudanese territory," Karti said in comments published late on Saturday by SUNA state news agency, echoing statements by President Omar al-Bashir.

"The army's entering the area to handle the security situation there was necessitated by the continued security breaches committed by the other party," he added, referring to the southern Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

Speaking in Khartoum after meeting his Egyptian counterpart Nabil al-Arabi, Karti repeated his ministry's insistence the army would remain in the bitterly contested area until a comprehensive agreement is reached. Meanwhile, clashes have broken out in a

flashpoint region of Sudan controlled by the northern government, exacerbating tensions as the southern portion of the vast country prepares to secede following a referendum.

Two southern party officials and the United Nations reported fighting at the weekend in the Nuba region of South Kordofan, an area in northern territory that the Khartoum authorities have threatened to clear of southern-allied armed groups.

Tensions have been mounting between north and south Sudan ahead of the scheduled July 9 division of the country.

Khartoum's troops overran Abyei, a poor but fertile region on the frontier with southern Sudan, on May 21 and razed much of the main town, prompting at least 60,000 people to flee the region, according to UN estimates.

Bashir had already rejected calls by the United States and European Union to withdraw its forces from Abyei. Russia, China and three African nations joined the western powers in backing Friday's Security Council statement.

NEWS IN brief

Ban Ki-moon reelection campaign gathers pace

AFP, United Nations

Ban Ki-moon's campaign for a second term as United Nations leader gathers pace today when he is to formally announce that he wants to stay on as secretary general, diplomats said.

With no declared rival for the post and none of the five permanent members of the Security Council opposing Ban, the 66-year-old former South Korean foreign minis-

Seven killed in south Tunisia tribal clashes

AFP, Tunis

Seven people have been killed and more than 100 injured in fierce tribal clashes in the southern Tunisian mining town of Metlaoui, authorities said yesterday.

The violence led local authorities to deploy additional security forces and to extend a curfew imposed Saturday on Metlaoui, where clashes between rival tribal factions began late Friday after an altercation between two youths.

The curfew will now run from 1500 GMT to 0500 GMT instead of from 1900 to 0400 GMT, interior minis-

Polarised Peru votes for president

AFP, Lima

Peruvians headed to the polls yesterday in a presidential election run-off between a leftist ex-army colonel and the daughter of jailed former strongman Alberto Fujimori.

Opinion polls have given former military man Ollanta Humala, 48, a slight lead over Keiko Fujimori, a 36-year-old right-wing lawmaker whose father is serving a lengthy jail sentence for human rights abuses and corruption.

The last two opinion polls, from Datum and Ipsos-Apoyo, showed a lead of between 1.6 and 3.8 percent.

China urges 'democracy in international relations'

AFP, Singapore

Chinese Defence Minister Liang Guanglie called yesterday for "democracy in international relations" and warned against security alliances directed at particular countries.

He told a high-level forum in Singapore that "only by advocating democracy in international relations and respecting each other's core interests and major concerns" could the Asia-Pacific region "truly find its lasting peace, harmony and stability".

20 killed as Israel opens fire on Golan

AFP, Majdal Shams

Israeli troops opened fire yesterday as protesters from Syria stormed a ceasefire line in the occupied Golan Heights, with Damascus saying twenty demonstrators were killed.

Hundreds of protesters rushed towards the ceasefire line, attempting to cut through a line of barbed wire and head into the Golan Heights in a repeat of demonstrations last month that saw thousands mass along Israel's north.

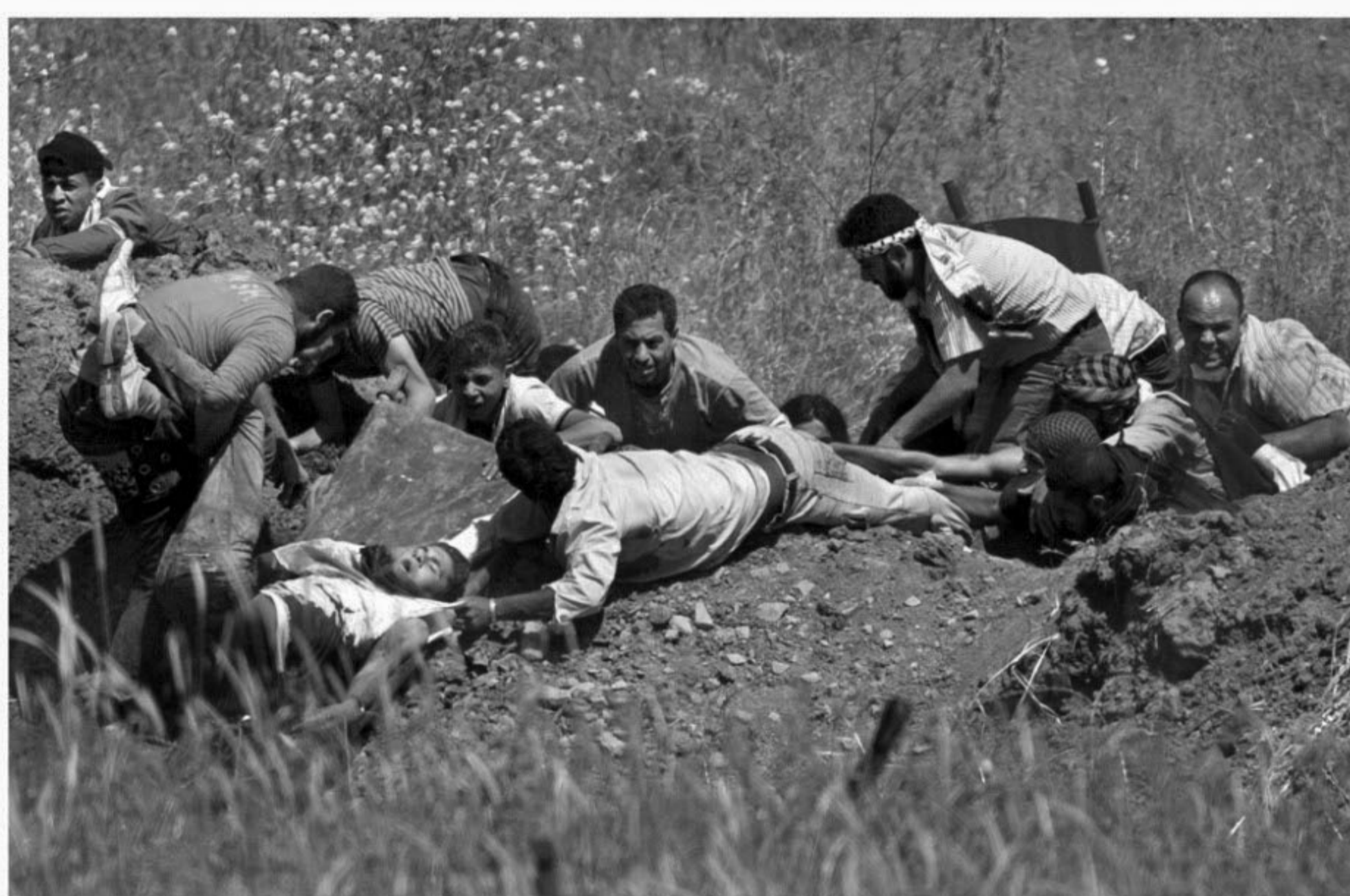
Similar protests were held in the West Bank, where hundreds demonstrated at Qalandia checkpoint near Ramallah, and in Gaza, where several hundred gathered in the north of the coastal enclave.

In Majdal Shams, on the occupied Golan, Israeli troops opened fire as demonstrators sought to push through the mined ceasefire line, which has been reinforced with two lines of curled barbed wire blocking access to a fence.

"Despite numerous warnings, both verbal and later warning shots in the air, dozens of Syrians continue to approach the border and IDF (Israel Defence Forces) forces were left with no choice but to open fire towards the feet of protesters in efforts to deter further actions," an army spokesman told AFP.

An AFP photographer saw at least 20 people with injuries, some soaked in blood as they were evacuated from the scene, while the Israeli military said it was aware of 12 casualties.

Yesterday's protests, timed to coincide with the 44th anniversary of the Six-Day War when Israel captured the Golan from Syria as well as the West Bank and Gaza Strip, were planned as a repeat of massive demonstrations last month.



Demonstrators prepare to evacuate a wounded fellow protestor who was hit by Israeli forces fire while trying to cut through a line of barbed wire and head into the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights, as seen from the Druze village of Majdal Shams yesterday.

Nato blasts shake Tripoli as Hague meets rebels

AFP, Benghazi

Nato pounded Tripoli yesterday hours after Britain's top diplomat met rebel chiefs in Libya and Russia voiced concerns the alliance's military operation is sliding towards a land campaign.

Warplanes launched intensive air raids on the Libyan capital and its eastern suburbs, where several explosions were heard, as Nato kept up its pressure on strongman Muammar Gaddafi.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague on Saturday met leaders of rebels who have been fighting to oust Gaddafi after Nato deployed attack helicopters for the first time.

Hague admitted yesterday that the Nato operation was "intensifying" and that there was no deadline, but denied any "mission creep" for the aerial bombing campaign launched nearly three months ago.

"We're not going to set a deadline. You're asking about Christmas and who knows, it could be days or weeks or months, (but) it is worth doing," Hague told BBC television.

Hague defended the use of attack helicopters and ruled out putting forces on the ground in Libya, saying Nato would stick to

the terms of a UN Security Council resolution passed in March to protect civilians.

Three waves of explosions have rocked Tripoli since the British foreign secretary departed the rebel stronghold on Saturday.

Four blasts shook Tripoli at around 2:30am local time yesterday after two powerful but distant explosions were felt in the centre of the capital at around 6:30pm on Saturday, followed by several others within a few minutes.

Witnesses reported four more at midday yesterday in Tajura, a suburb often targeted by Nato since an international coalition began military operations against Libya on March 31 to stop Gaddafi forces attacking civilians.

Britain and France said Saturday they deployed attack helicopters against Gaddafi's forces for the first time as part of the Nato campaign to protect civilians in line with UN Resolution 1973.

Moscow, which is calling for a negotiated solution to the conflict, expressed alarm as the Nato campaign entered a new phase.

"We consider that what is going on is either consciously or unconsciously sliding towards a land operation," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

PARIS PEACE MEET Israel studying offer

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel is studying a French proposal to hold a peace conference in Paris by the end of July, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said yesterday.

French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe, visiting Israel and the West Bank this week, officially announced France was willing to expand a scheduled meeting of international donors into a broader peace conference.

But Netanyahu said his government had not yet decided whether they would be willing to attend any such meeting.

"We very much appreciate our French friends and I will respond to them after we have considered matters. We will study the proposal and discuss it with our American friends as well," said Netanyahu.

Militants bring down chopper in Afghanistan

Three foreign troops killed

AFP, Kabul

Three foreign troops were killed in Afghanistan yesterday, including two who died when their helicopter crashed in the east, the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said.

ISAF added that the cause of the crash was being investigated but there were no signs of enemy fire in the area at the time.

The Taliban, the key militant group behind the near 10-year long insurgency, claimed credit for bringing down the helicopter, although the group is known regularly to exaggerate its claims.

Its spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said it came down in Khost province, which borders Pakistan. Afghan media, citing eyewitnesses, also said the helicopter crashed in Khost.

In line with policy, ISAF did not give further details of the incident or reveal which country the dead troops came from.

Meanwhile in southern Afghanistan, another soldier was killed "following an insurgent attack", ISAF said.

The deaths in the south and east, which feature some of the worst battlegrounds in the Afghan war, came as US Defense Secretary Robert Gates visited Afghanistan to say farewell to troops before leaving his job this month.

There are around 130,000 US-led international troops in Afghanistan fighting a Taliban-led insurgency which has lasted for nearly 10 years since a 2001 invasion brought down their Islamist regime in Kabul.

Strauss-Kahn to plead not guilty today

REUTERS, New York

Former IMF chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn will plead not guilty today to charges he tried to rape a New York hotel maid, an accusation that has wrecked his chance of becoming France's next president.

Strauss-Kahn, 62, is facing up to 25 years in prison if convicted on charges of a criminal sexual act, attempted rape, sex abuse, unlawful imprisonment and forcible touching.

His lawyer, Benjamin Brafman, told Reuters that Strauss-Kahn will plead not guilty to the charges in New York Supreme Court before Judge Michael Obus today.



People attend a demonstration to ask for freedom in Syria on Saturday in front of the CNN building in Hollywood, California.

38 killed in Syrian protest town

AFP, Nicosia

Thirty-eight people, including six members of the Syrian security forces, were killed in 24 hours during clashes in the northwest town of Jisrash Shughur, a Syrian rights activist said yesterday.

"Thirty-eight people were killed in shootings in the region of Jisrash Shughur, 10 yesterday and 28 today," Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, told AFP.

He had earlier given a toll of 25 -- 19 civilians and six security agents -- but said that number could rise as military and security forces continued operations in the north-west Idlib province.

On Saturday, an activist in Jisrash Shughur said "security forces opened fire to scatter more than 1,000 demonstrators protesting after the funeral of a civilian killed on Friday" in protests at the nearby village of Has.

Syria's official SANA news agency reported at the time that "a member of the

army was killed and a policeman injured in clashes" in Jisrash Shughur.

"Armed groups attacked a police station and military barracks in the area" and one assailant was killed, SANA said.

Rights groups say more than 1,100 civilians have been killed and at least 10,000 arrested in Syria since protests erupted in mid-March.

Damascus insists that the unrest is the work of "armed terrorist gangs" backed by Islamists and foreign agitators.

Meanwhile, residents of the Syrian city of Hama said they were observing a general strike yesterday in memory of the dozens of people killed by security forces in a crackdown on pro-democracy protests.

"We started a three-day strike on Saturday for the fallen martyrs," one resident said by telephone from Hama, about 210 kilometres north of Damascus.

On Saturday, more than 100,000 mourners turned out in Hama for funerals of 48 protesters killed the day before in the city, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

E coli death toll rises to 22

AFP, Stockholm

The death toll from the killer E coli outbreak has risen to 22, all but one of them in Germany, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) said yesterday.

The Stockholm-based centre said 1,605 cases of enterohaemorrhagic E coli infection had been recorded and 658 others have the associated condition haemolytic uraemic syndrome.

The vast majority of cases are in Germany, the source of the outbreak, which has 1,536 people infected and 627 with HUS.

The previous death toll stood at 19, 18 of them in Germany, with a suspected 20th case reported there on Saturday. The other victim died in Sweden.