

Nato blasts Gaddafi hometown

NTC holds back after making advance

AFP, Sirte

Nato warplanes pounded Muammar Gaddafi's hometown of Sirte for the second straight day yesterday as new regime forces held back on the ground after a major push into the heart of the coastal city.

A day after entering Sirte in a surprise assault, National Transitional Council (NTC) fighters pulled back on the western side, while east of Sirte others awaited their marching orders, AFP correspondents said.

Deadly fighting also raged in the oasis of Ghadames near the Algerian border in the west, a local official said, while further north, and south of Sirte, NTC forces gathered outside Bani Walid for a fresh assault on the town.

On the political front, NTC chief Mustafa Abdel Jalil said an interim government would be announced next week and that Gaddafi's internationally "banned weapons" were now under its control.

"We were ordered to leave downtown Sirte because Nato has a mission to do there.

We left after 7:00pm last night (Saturday)," a fighter told AFP. Other fighters said the attack on Sirte will come today.

Nato aircraft launched at least a dozen air strikes around Sirte yesterday morning, an AFP correspondent said.

On Saturday fighters entered Sirte in what appeared to be a pincer movement from the south and the east.

"Our troops went seven kilometres inside through the eastern gate and there were sporadic to sometimes heavy clashes with Gaddafi's forces," said commander Mohammed al-Marimi of the Fakhriddin Sallabi Brigade.

Misrata Military Council spokesman Abdel Ibrahim said seven NTC fighters were killed and 145 wounded.

Nato forces struck at Gaddafi forces after reports emerged from Sirte of "executions, hostage-taking, and the calculated targeting of individuals, families, and communities within the city," a coalition statement said.

Syria hit by new sanctions, arms seizure

AFP, Damascus

New sanctions against Syria come into effect on Saturday as Turkey said it had intercepted an arms shipment at sea destined for the protest-wracked country after another day of deadly demonstrations.

The sanctions came as 13 civilians were killed by security forces, nearly all in the central Homs region, a rights group said.

Both the European Union and Switzerland have targeted Syria's oil sector in new sanctions that bite from Saturday, with the EU banning new investments there and also prohibiting the delivery of bank notes to Syria's central bank.

The EU has also added two individuals and six companies to a list of people and entities facing an assets freeze and travel ban.

Manmohan turns 79 amid crisis all around

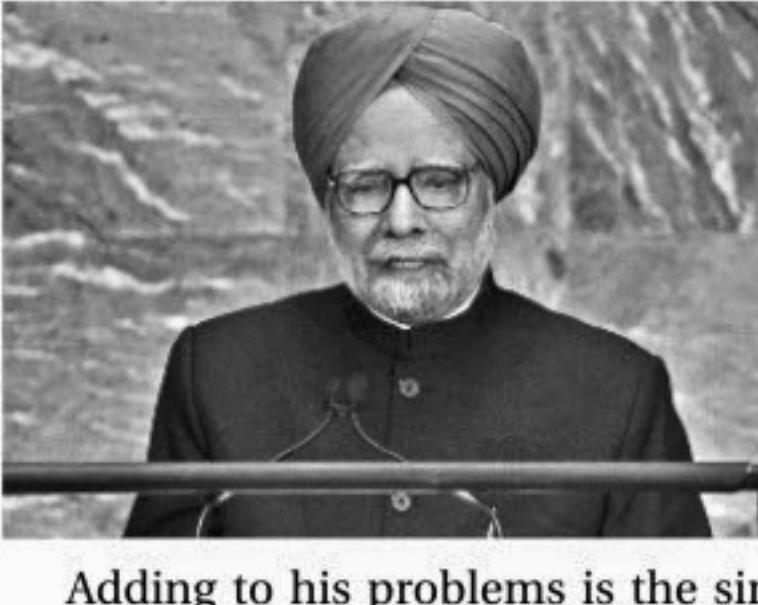
IANS, New Delhi

A series of corruption scandals, a perceived decline in his 'Dr Clean' image, an increasingly belligerent opposition, reports of infighting in his cabinet... Prime Minister Manmohan Singh celebrates his 79th birthday today in a none too happy setting.

There is even talk that he might be shifted to Rashtrapati Bhavan next year.

An eminent economist-turned politician who ushered in the economic reforms in the early 1990s, Manmohan Singh is now widely perceived - particularly by the influential middle class that was once his strongest backers - as the head of a corruption-hit and controversy-ridden government.

Manmohan Singh himself admitted the change in public perception recently. In his interaction with a group of editors June 29, he said: 'In the situation today, day in and day out, I think we are described as the most corrupt government.'



Manmohan Singh'.

'I think his tenure as the prime minister of United Progressive Alliance (UPA)-I was his peak time. The series of corruption scandals during UPA-II eroded Manmohan Singh's image too, though he brought the high standards of probity, honesty, integrity and hard work to the PM's post,' Mukherjee told IANS.

She felt that one cannot rule out the speculation that Manmohan Singh may be made president when Pratibha Patil demits office next July. 'That is the only post he may accept or aspire at the age of 80 next year.'

Political analyst N Bhaskar Rao feels that the problem with Manmohan Singh is that he is a poor communicator. The prime minister still has not lost his reputation as a good economist and an honest politician.'

History will remember Manmohan Singh more as the finance minister who brought economic reforms with a minimum suffering in the 1990s than as a two-term prime minister, opined Mukherjee.

Police arrest 80 Wall Street protesters

AFP, New York

At least 80 people protesting in New York against the US financial system and Wall Street practices were arrested Saturday in the first big crackdown since demonstrators began camping on city streets a week ago.

One person was charged with assaulting a police officer and one officer suffered a shoulder injury, the department spokesman said. Footage on the site showed police corralling a crowd with orange plastic mesh.

The Occupy Wall Street protest began on September 17. They say they are motivated by anger against the huge disparity between the very rich and the growing number of people struggling in the aftermath of the US financial crisis and recession.

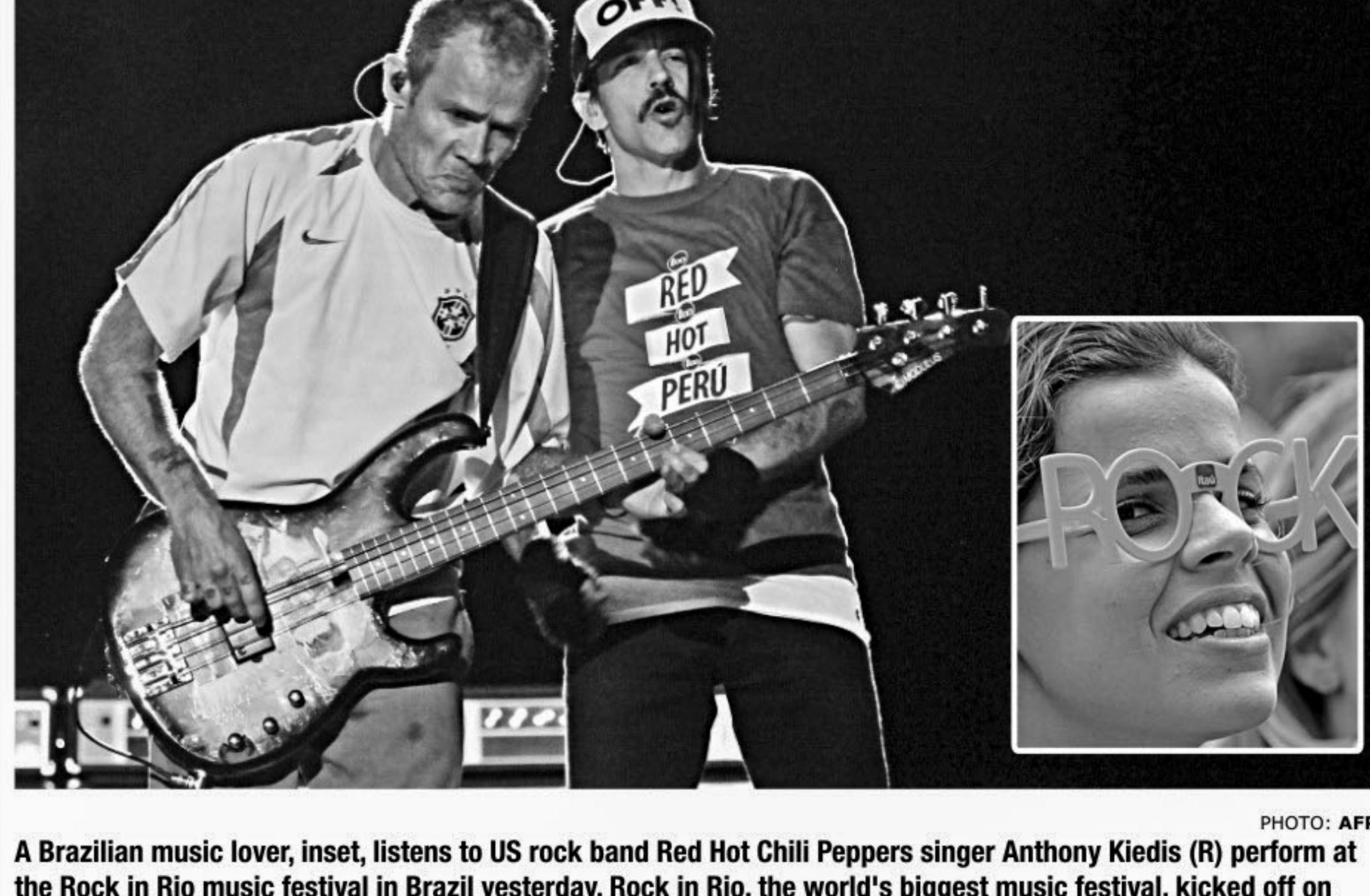


PHOTO: AFP

A Brazilian music lover, inset, listens to US rock band Red Hot Chili Peppers singer Anthony Kiedis (R) perform at the Rock in Rio music festival in Brazil yesterday. Rock in Rio, the world's biggest music festival, kicked off on Friday in the city of its birth.

AFRICA FAMINE World Bank increases aid

BBC Online

The World Bank yesterday announced it is increasing funding for the drought in the Horn of Africa to nearly \$2bn.

It says that the funds are needed to provide humanitarian assistance to millions of people.

The World Bank says countries across the region face one of the worst droughts in more than half a century.

The conditions, it says, are causing increasing malnutrition and food insecurity, and are displacing large numbers of people.

Over the coming years, the body will provide \$1.8bn (£1.2bn) in assistance - nearly four times the amount originally pledged in July.

Four blasts kill 17 in Iraq's Karbala

REUTERS, Karbala

Four successive blasts hit the Iraqi city of Karbala yesterday, killing at least 17 people and wounding dozens more outside a local government building in an attack officials blamed on al-Qaeda affiliates.

The first bomb ripped through a crowd of guards and civilians gathered in front of an office issuing ID cards and passports, and three other explosions went off shortly after as emergency services arrived to help the wounded, police said.

The blasts, three bombs in cars and explosives attached to a motorbike, tore the fronts off several homes and shops, leaving bodies among the rubble and twisted metal scattered across the street outside.

A Karbala police official said 17 people were killed. Health department officials said 45 wounded were treated in Karbala's main hospital and another 25 were sent to a hospital in the nearby city of Hilla.

Violence in Iraq has eased since the height of sectarian strife in 2006-2007, but insurgents tied to al-Qaeda and Shia militias still carry out daily attacks as US troops prepare to withdraw at the end of this year.

Karbala, a major Shia holy city 80 km southwest of Baghdad, has often been attacked in the past by Sunni Islamist insurgents targeting Shi'a pilgrims who flock to the city's religious sites.

NEWS IN brief

Sonia among the world's 50 most-influential people

PTI, London



UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi was among the world's "50 most influential people" along with German chancellor Angela Merkel, who was ranked No 1, according to a survey by UK-based magazine New Statesman.

Describing Gandhi as "Madam India", the survey included the Congress president in the list for the political power she wields as much as her capacity as the chairperson of the ruling United Progressive Alliance.

The list, however, features a number of controversial figures including the chief of the Pakistan Army Gen Ashfaq Kayani, the Republican Tea Party leader Michele Bachmann and al-Qaeda's "spiritual leader" Anwar al-Awlaki.

BBC News, Al Jazeera take online journalism honours

AFP, Boston

BBC News, Al Jazeera and The Los Angeles Times scooped up the top prizes as the Online News Association (ONA) handed out its annual awards on Saturday.

BBC News took the award for general excellence in online journalism by a large site while The Globe and Mail won the award for a medium site.

Al Jazeera was honored in the breaking news category for its coverage of the popular uprising in Egypt.

The Los Angeles Times won two awards: One for innovative investigative journalism and a second for online video journalism at a large site.

Barcelona to stage final bullfight

AFP, Barcelona

Top matadors will perform in Barcelona's Monumental arena for the last time yesterday before a ban against the centuries-old blood sport comes into effect in Spain's northeastern Catalonia region.

A relief to animal rights activists, the ban on bullfighting in Catalonia from 2012 is a bitter blow to bullfighting enthusiasts.

Catalan regional members of parliament voted July 2010 to ban bullfighting from January 1, 2012 after animal rights groups managed to garner 80,000 signatures for a petition demanding the debate.

But fans of the bullfight have not given up hope: They hope to find 500,000 backer to present their own petition to the national parliament and classify the combat as a cultural asset.

Thai rice scheme causes price uncertainty

AFP, Bangkok

A populist policy aimed at boosting the incomes of Thai farmers has raised fears of global rice price turbulence, and experts say the kingdom could just be hurting itself.

Thailand, the world's biggest rice exporter, has vowed to boost the minimum price farmers receive by buying unmilled rice directly at 15,000 baht (\$485) per tonne from October. The current price is about 10,000 baht.

The move, part of an array of promises that helped propel former premier Thaksin Shinawatra's allies to victory in a July election, has fuelled speculation that world prices could be set to surge.

While it is unclear what effect the policy might have on global consumers, prices have already risen and observers fear a spike could pile further pressure on poor importers.

Rice is the staple food for more than three billion people, about half the world's population, and Thailand produces about one third of global exports, with China, Bangladesh, Philippines, South Africa and Nigeria among its major customers.

The rice export price has jumped from \$500 per tonne in early July to around \$600 as Thai farmers withheld stocks to take advantage of the rice deal, according to analysis from Capital Economics.

The Thai Rice Exporters Association, concerned that the country could lose its position as the biggest global exporter, has warned that prices could hit \$800 per tonne.

Thousands of Eritreans flee forced conscription

AFP, Shire

For 12-year-old Eritrean refugee Ablel, the decision to flee his country was relatively simple.

"I didn't want to be a soldier," he says with a shy smile, revealing a mouthful of crooked teeth.

Getting out, however, was a harder challenge. He is one of thousands of youngsters risking death to sneak across Eritrea's heavily militarized border every month into neighbouring Sudan and Ethiopia.

Most, like Ablel, are running from open-ended military conscription imposed by the autocratic, isolated and impoverished government of the Red Sea state.

He escaped Eritrea on foot in June, leaving without telling his family -- a common practice in a country where family members are reportedly often jailed after a relative leaves, accused of involvement in helping their escape.

Ablel said he left because authorities closed his school to use the land for military training, with a new school not due to open for two years.

"I couldn't wait," he said.

This month marks the tenth anniversary of mass arrests of hundreds of politicians, journalists and suspected spies by Asmara. Experts say the country's human rights record has deteriorated in the past decade.

The United Nations refugee agency said nearly 3,000 Eritreans flood into Sudan and Ethiopia every month from Eritrea, a country of some five million people and about the size of England.

"(They're escaping) gross human rights violations, including forced conscription into the army," UN spokesperson Kisut Gebre Egziabher told AFP.

National service is compulsory for all citizens -- male and female -- at the age of 16.

Conscripts earn about \$3 per month for the first 18 months and the service can last for decades. Many end up working as indentured labourers building roads or in the country's newly opened foreign-run mines.

Eritrea is one of the least developed countries in Africa, with a per capita GDP of \$369 and one of the worst human rights records in the world, according to the UN.

Ensure peace

FROM PAGE 1
Institution of Diploma Engineers in the capital.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Saturday presented the peace model at the 66th UN General Assembly at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

At the meeting organised by BNP's front organisation Jatiyatabadi Sweekhasebok Dal, Dhaka unit (north), Fakhrul said, "I was smiling to myself while watching the news. I am telling the prime minister to look after her home first."

About 40 percent people are under the poverty line and democracy did not get any institutional shape. Even a lawyer has recently been killed after his arrest and attacks on political opponents are common phenomena, noted the opposition leader.

"Under the circumstances, the prime minister was offering peace proposals to other countries of the world."

Fakhrul said 33 percent of youths cast their votes in the last election. The government gave them hope through vision 2021 and promised to ensure job for at least one member of each family but failed to keep it.

Criticising the government for "torturing Jamaat leader ATM Azharul Islam in custody", he said it cannot be a practice of democracy.

In April, a group of women defied the ban by turning up at a voter registration office in the Red Sea city of Jeddah, in a rare public demonstration against the male-only electoral system.

And on June 17, a group of defiant Saudi women got behind the steering wheels of their cars in response to calls for nationwide action against the driving ban.

Women's rights activists have long fought to gain the right to vote in the kingdom that applies a strict version of Sunni Islam and bans women from driving or travelling without the consent of a male guardian.

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More than 60 intellectuals and activists called in May for a boycott of the ballot because

Saudi women to get

FROM PAGE 20

The changes will take effect from next year, the king said.

King Abdullah announced the move in a speech at the opening of the new term of the Shura Council.

"Because we refuse to marginalise women in society in all roles that comply with sharia, we have decided, after deliberation with our senior ulama [clerics] and others... to involve women in the Shura Council as members, starting from next term," he said.

"Women will be able to run as candidates in the municipal election and will even have a right to vote."

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Rowdy way to fulfil demands

FROM PAGE 20

students went on the rampage and vandalised several vehicles stuck in the jam.

At one stage, police resorted to charging truncheons to disperse them.

Agitating students alleged that some activists of Jagannath University BCL beat them up during the demonstration near the High Court.

According to the Jagannath University Act, the government will discontinue funding the university after 2012 and the university would have to run on its own income.