

Pressure mounts on Syria over monitors

Regime seeks int'l help; 50 killed in 2 days

AFP, Damascus

World powers piled pressure on Syria to allow observers to monitor spiralling deadly violence as activists condemned rights violations on yesterday's anniversary of International Human Rights Day.

Activists said nine civilians were killed yesterday by the security forces in the flashpoint regions of Homs, Daraa and Idlib, a day after 41 people died across the country, and as the opposition warned the regime was planning a "massacre" in Homs which has been ringed by troops for more than two months.

UN Human Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay has said that at least 4,000 people have been killed in a government crackdown on dissent in Syria since the anti-regime protest movement started in March.

Pillay is to brief the UN Security Council about Syria and the wider Middle East at a meeting on Monday -- her second address to the world body since August when the number of dead was estimated at more than 2,000.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has

refused to let investigators from two UN human rights inquiries enter Syria, and his regime is resisting Arab League calls to accept monitors despite being hit by crippling sanctions.

As the death toll mounted, Britain and the United States expressed fresh concerns, and Washington urged Syria to allow independent monitors into the country.

Damascus, which blames "armed terrorist gangs" for the violence, meanwhile appealed to the international community to help it find an "honourable exit" to the crisis and stem the flow of weapons into Syria.

"We are appealing to the outside world and our brothers in the Arab world to help Syria (prevent the) channelling (of) weapons" into the country, foreign ministry spokesman Jihad Makdisi said on Friday, speaking in English.

"If we all work together we can find an honourable exit to the crisis."

Meanwhile, activists called for a campaign of civil disobedience from today, the first day of the working week in Syria, with sit-ins at work, the closure of shops, universities and later a general strike.



PHOTO: AFP

Opposition activists take part in their authorized rally at the Bolotnaya Square in central Moscow yesterday to protest against the alleged mass fraud in the December 4 parliamentary polls. The poster depicts Russia's Prime Minister Vladimir Putin looking old and reads: "2050 - No!"

Libya to forgive Gaddafi fighters

AFP, Tripoli

Libya's new rulers are ready to forgive the forces of slain leader Muammar Gaddafi who battled rebels trying to topple his autocratic regime, National Transitional Council chief Mustafa Abdel Jalil said on Saturday.

"In Libya we are able to absorb all. Libya is for all," Abdel Jalil said in Tripoli as he launched a national reconciliation conference organised by the NTC.

"Despite what the army of the oppressor did to our cities and our villages, our brothers who fought against the rebels as the army of Gaddafi, we are ready to forgive them," he said.

The conference was attended by delegates from the major Libyan tribes, as well as from Qatar and Tunisia.

Libya's new interim Prime Minister Abdel Rahim al-Kib echoed Abdel Jalil.

Meanwhile Kib's government is under heavy pressure to disarm hundreds of former rebels who toppled Gaddafi's regime and who are now enforcing security on the streets.

Observers and human rights group have said that Libya's new rulers will have to come up with firm plans to win the trust of residents of towns such as Bani Walid and Sirte, former strongholds of Gaddafi.

The town, just 170 kilometres from the capital Tripoli, epitomises the problems the NTC must resolve, as several of its residents have often expressed desire for revenge after their homes were looted and pillaged by former rebels who ousted Gaddafi.

Occupiers evicted from Boston, 46 held

AFP, Boston

Police evicted protesters from a square in Boston's financial district early yesterday, arresting 46 people and bringing to an end one of the largest spinoffs of the Occupy Wall Street movement.

Police moved into Dewey Square at 4:55am, encountering little resistance as they cleared it of protesters camped out there as part of a nationwide grassroots movement against economic inequality and corporate greed.

A spokesman for the Boston Police Department, said 32 men and 14 women were arrested for trespassing, "and a few for resisting."

Authorities in New York and a string of other cities have cleared the tent camps, forcing the movement to reassess where it goes from here.

Taliban confirm peace talks with Islamabad

REUTERS, Peshawar

The deputy commander of the Pakistan Taliban, who have been waging a four-year war against the government in Islamabad, confirmed the two sides were in peace talks, a move that could further fray the US-Pakistan relationship.

"Our talks are going in the right direction," Maulvi Faqir Mohammad, the commander of the Pakistani Taliban in the Bajaur tribal agency and the No. 2 commander overall, told Reuters.

"If negotiations succeed and we are able to sign a peace agreement in Bajaur, then the government and the Taliban of other areas such as Swat, Mohmand, Orakzai and South Waziristan tribal region will sign an agreement. Bajaur will be a role model for other areas."

At the end of September, Pakistan's government pledged to "give peace a chance" and talk with its homegrown militants.

There was no immediate comment from the administration on whether talks were taking place.

The United States, the source of billions of dollars of aid vital for Pakistan's military and feeble economy, is unlikely to look kindly on peace talks with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which it has labelled a terrorist group.

Mohammad said the government has realised that there is no military solution to the conflict in Pakistan.

"We have no wish to fight against our own armed forces and destroy our own country," he said.

"There has been development in our peace talks, but the government would have to show more flexibility in its stance, and restore the trust of Taliban by releasing their prisoners and stop military operations against them."

Mohammad said Pakistan had released 145 members of the group as a gesture of goodwill, and the militants had pledged a cease-fire.

He added that Pakistan and Afghanistan should unite against what he called foreign occupations by non-Muslims.

NoW 'hacked' 800 people: Police

AFP, London

British police said yesterday the final number of victims of phone hacking by Rupert Murdoch's News of the World will be around 800 people, far fewer than originally thought.

The Scotland Yard officer leading the investigation into the scandal at the now-defunct tabloid said police had been in touch with everyone whose mobile phone voicemails were illegally accessed.

As late as a month ago Scotland Yard had said it identified 5,800 potential hacking victims, based largely on names found in the notes of Glenn Mulcaire, a private investigator jailed for phone-hacking in 2007.

The new, lower total was first reported by the Murdoch-owned Times newspaper.

NEWS IN brief

Yemen unity govt sworn in

AFP, Sanaa

Yemen's national unity government, led by the opposition, was sworn in yesterday to lead a three-month transition period until early elections are held and President Ali Abdullah Saleh formally steps down, an official statement said.

The new 34-member cabinet, headed by Prime Minister Mohammed Basindawa, will carry out its duties until February elections, after which Hadi will take over the presidency for an interim two-year period as stipulated by a Gulf-sponsored deal drafted to resolve Yemen's political crisis.

Meanwhile weekend clashes in southern Yemen left two government soldiers and 11 suspected members of al-Qaeda dead, military and local sources told AFP yesterday.

Plane hits slum in Manila, kills 13

AFP, Manila

A four-seater cargo plane crashed onto a crowded Philippine slum yesterday, sparking a fire that killed 13 people and left five missing and at least another 20 injured, officials said.

The crash and the resulting blaze killed both the pilot, co-pilot, and their lone passenger while the other fatalities are thought to be residents of the shanty town, said chief inspector Wilson Tana, a fire investigator. At least five other residents of the burnt shanties are missing.

Comic artist Robinson dies

BBC ONLINE

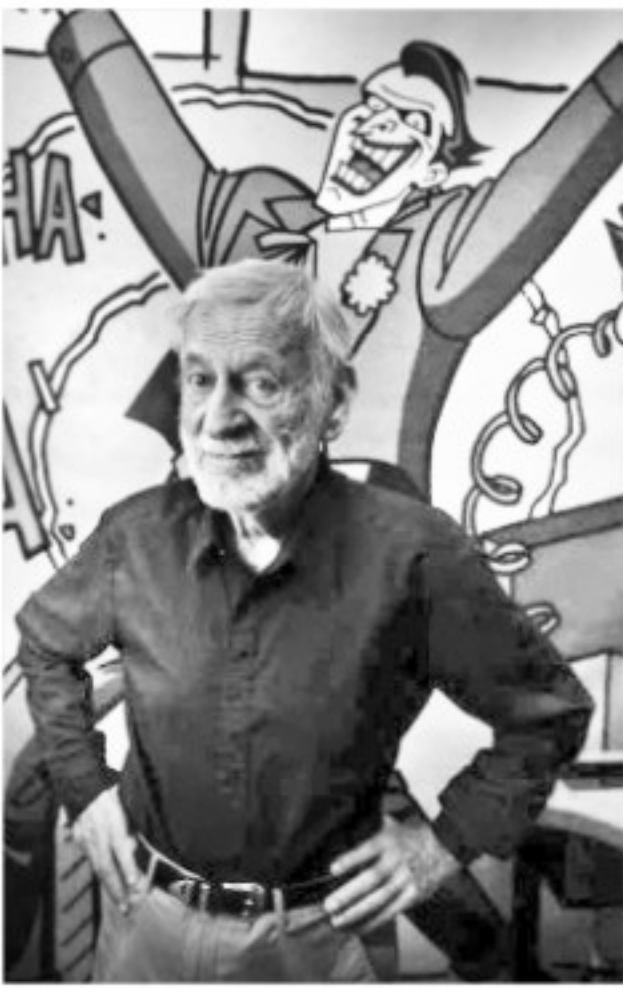
Comic book artist Jerry Robinson, who created characters including Batman's sidekick Robin, has died aged 89.

Mike Marts, editor of the Batman series at DC Comics, called the artist "a pioneer in storytelling".

Robinson, who was first hired to draw comic books in 1939, aged 17, is credited by many as crafting the Caped Crusader's arch-enemy The Joker.

In later life, he taught at New York's School of Visual Arts and was president of both the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists and the National Cartoonists Society.

Robinson is survived by his wife of 57 years, two children and two grandchildren.



Jerry Robinson

Israeli forces kill one in West Bank

AFP, Jerusalem

A Palestinian activist critically wounded by a tear gas canister fired by Israeli troops at a rally in the West Bank died yesterday of his wounds, his family and Palestinian medics said.

Mustafa Abdelrazek al-Tamimi, 28, was taking part in a Friday protest against the West Bank barrier in his village Nabi Saleh, some 10 kilometres northwest of Ramallah, when he was hit in the face by the tear gas canister, medics said.

Critically wounded, he was immediately flown by helicopter to an Israeli hospital near Tel Aviv, where he died yesterday morning.

Jonathan Pollak, a veteran Israeli activist who was at the demonstration, said Tamimi was shot at close range from a moving vehicle.



PHOTO: AFP

Animal rights activists of the Igualdad Animal pose holding dead animals during a protest at the Puerta del Sol square in the centre of Madrid yesterday.

Catalysts for Peace: Trio get Nobel Peace Prize



PHOTO: AFP

The 2011 Nobel Peace Prize laureates, Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (R), Liberian peace activist Leymah Gbowee (L) and Yemeni activist Tawakkol Karman (C) pose yesterday with their medals and certificates in Oslo.

AFP, Oslo

Liberia's president, a fellow Liberian and a Yemeni activist received the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo yesterday for showing how women facing war and oppression can shed the mantle of victimhood and lead the way to peace and democracy.

"You represent one of the most important motive forces for change in today's world: the struggle for human rights in general and the struggle of women for equality and peace in particular," Norwegian Nobel Committee president Thorbjørn Jagland said before handing out the prestigious award.

At the lavish ceremony in a colourfully flower-decked Oslo city hall, and with Norway's royal family and other dignitaries in attendance, Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, her compatriot and "peace warrior" Leymah Gbowee and Yemeni "Arab Spring" activist Tawakkol Karman received their gold medal and diploma.

"You give concrete meaning to the Chinese proverb which says that 'women hold up half of the sky'," Jagland told the laureates.

Gbowee, a 39-year-old social worker who led Liberia's women to defy feared warlords and bring

an end to her country's bloody 1989-2003 civil war, hailed the Nobel Committee for shining the spotlight on women's struggle for peace and human rights, insisting "this prize could not have come at a better time than this."

Sirleaf, Africa's first democratically elected woman president who last month won a second term, also hailed the Nobel Committee's focus on women's struggles after the world in recent decades has witnessed "unprecedented levels of cruelty directed against women" in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and her own Liberia.

An example of someone who found a powerful voice despite almost insurmountable odds is Karman, who at 32 is the youngest person to win the Peace Prize and the first Arab woman to receive a Nobel in any category.

The journalist and mother of three expressed confidence that the "Arab Spring" uprising would succeed.

At a separate ceremony in Stockholm, the winners of the Nobel Prizes for Medicine, Physics, Chemistry, Literature and Economics were to receive their prizes later yesterday.

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