

Assad troops fight back Syrian rebels

REUTERS, Amman

Street battles raged at the gates of the Syrian capital yesterday as President Bashar al-Assad's troops sought to consolidate their grip on suburbs that rebel fighters had taken only a few miles from the centre of government power.

Activists and residents said Syrian troops now had control of Hamouriyeh, one of several districts where they have used armored vehicles and artillery to beat back rebels who came as close as 8 km to Damascus.

An activist said the Free Syrian Army - a force of military defectors with links to Syria's divided political opposition - mounted scattered attacks on government troops who advanced through the district of Saqba, held by rebels just days ago.

"Street fighting has been raging since dawn," he said, adding tanks were moving through a central avenue of the neighborhood. "The sound of gunfire is everywhere."

The rebels said at least 15 people

had been killed as they pulled back in Saqba and Kfar Batna. Activists have claimed a death toll of several dozen in three days of fighting in the districts, which have seen repeated protests against Assad's rule and crackdowns by troops on the 10-month-old uprising.

The escalating bloodshed prompted the Arab League to suspend the work of its monitors on Saturday. Arab foreign ministers, who have urged Assad to step down and make way for a government of national unity, are due to discuss the crisis on February 5.

Syria's state news agency said six soldiers were killed in a single attack near Deraa in the south and that "terrorists" blew up a gas pipeline, often targeted during the uprising against Assad.

Residents of Deraa - where anti-Assad unrest first flared - said firefighters between army defectors and government troops killed at least 20 people, most of them government forces.

In Homs, the central Syrian city that has seen both heavy attacks by Assad's

forces and sectarian reprisal killings, residents said government troops backed with armour fought rebels near its marketplace.

Syria restricts access to the country for journalists and the numbers could not be immediately verified.

Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby is to seek support today for the Arab peace plan from the UN Security Council, which France's foreign minister said, through a spokesman, must act against "crimes against humanity committed by the regime."

Elaraby, who wants to overcome Russian and Chinese objections to the plan, will be joined by Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani, whose country heads the League's committee charged with overseeing the Syrian crisis.

Yesterday, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov said Moscow first wanted to hear directly from the observers whom the Arab League sent - a move likely to delay any vote.



PHOTO: AFP
Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh pays homage at Rajghat, the memorial of India's founding father Mahatma Gandhi, on Martyrs' Day in New Delhi yesterday, the 64th anniversary of Gandhi's assassination.

Romney surges to double-digit lead in Florida

AFP, Fort Myers

Mitt Romney stormed yesterday towards a likely victory in Florida that would all but lock up the Republican presidential nomination, but rival Newt Gingrich promised a bitter fight all the way to the August convention.

Polls Sunday showed

Romney pulling clear in the Sunshine State after his campaign team went on the offensive, unleashing blistering ads that painted Gingrich as unethical and not fit for office.

Romney, a former Massachusetts governor and millionaire venture capitalist considered the party establishment's favourite, was leading Gingrich by 15 points in Florida, 42 percent to 27 percent, according to an NBC/Marist poll.

A new Miami Herald poll showed Gingrich behind by 11 points.

Hoping to finish off his rival, Romney renewed his assault before a crowd of several hundred supporters in an affluent Naples shopping centre.



"The reason that speaker Gingrich has been having a hard time in Florida is that people of Florida have watched the debates, have listened to the speaker, have listened to the other candidates and have said, 'You know what, Mitt Romney's the guy we're going to support,'" he said.

Despite the polls, Gingrich said he expected a close race in Florida, which will be a key battleground in the November election, pitting President Barack Obama, a Democrat, against the eventual Republican nominee.

After attending church services in the community of Fort Myers north of Tampa, a fiery Gingrich insisted "the election will be substantially closer than the two polls" suggest.

With time running out for Gingrich to claw back lost ground in Florida, he turned to the national fight.

"Romney has got a very big challenge in trying to get a majority at the convention," he said, predicting a "wild and woolly" campaign ahead.

Iran claims to have laser-guided shells

AP, Tehran

Iran's state TV is reporting the country has produced laser-guided artillery shells, capable of hitting moving targets with high accuracy.

The yesterday's report quoting Defence Minister Gen. Ahmad Vahidi also says that the shell was an "intelligent" munition with the capability to identify its own targets.

The report was accompanied by footage showing an artillery piece firing a shell, followed by an explosion in the desert.

The report does not give details on specifications of the shell. It could not be independently verified.

Iran occasionally announces the production and testing of military equipment.

Raul Castro defends Cuba's one-party system

BBC ONLINE

Cuban President Raul Castro has defended the one-party system in a speech at the conference of the ruling Communist Party.

Castro said allowing other political parties would threaten Cuba's independence and the socialist system established by the 1959 revolution.

But he said it was necessary to promote more democracy and open debate within the Communist Party.

He also reaffirmed plans to limit political terms to 10 years.

Castro, 80, has launched widespread economic reform since taking over from his brother Fidel in 2008.

But in his address, he ruled out any change to the one-party system, criticising "those who hoped the conference would mark the start of the dismantling of the social and political conquests of the revolution".

"Giving up the principle of one party would simply amount to allowing the party



or parties of imperialism on national soil," he said.

Castro added that those who thought Cuba should return to multi party democracy ignored "the history of permanent aggression, economic blockade, interference and media siege" that Cuba had faced from the US.

However, he warned that corruption and a failure to eradicate "the errors of the past" represented the most serious threat to the future of the socialist system.

And he said the Communist Party should promote greater democracy and open debate within its own ranks and in the mass media.

President Castro also repeated his plan to limit leaders to two five-year terms, saying the measure would be implemented gradually without waiting for a reform to the constitution.

The proposal - first announced last year - represents a major change in Cuba where senior positions are dominated by veterans of the 1959 revolution, known as the "historic generation".

INDIA'S STATE POLLS Brisk voting in Punjab, Uttarakhand

THE HINDU ONLINE

Brisk polling was yesterday witnessed in the elections to the Assemblies of Punjab and Uttarakhand that were by and large peaceful.

According to the Election Commission, the turnout in Punjab could cross 77 per cent, while poll percentage in Uttarakhand was expected to be around 70 per cent. The turnout in the State till 5:00 pm was 65 per cent, the poll panel said.

The key elections in Punjab and Uttarakhand, which were being ruled by National Democratic Alliance governments, will decide the fate of 1,866 candidates of the Congress in Punjab and BC Khanduri of the Bharatiya Janata Party in Uttarakhand.

NEWS IN brief

Israeli settler seeks to beat Netanyahu in primary

AP, Jerusalem

A hard-line Jewish settler who wants to pay Palestinians to leave the West Bank and Gaza is running against Israel's prime minister in today's party primary election.

Moshe Feiglin has little chance of defeating Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but he could deliver an embarrassing blow to the country's leader in his fourth try for leadership of the Likud, none of which have had a realistic shot at success.

Experts say Feiglin could get a third of the vote in the closed party primary, reflecting the view of hard-liners that Netanyahu, despite his uncompromising worldwide, is not hawkish enough.

Ex-Pakistani envoy to US wins court victory

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan's former ambassador to the US said yesterday that a travel ban imposed on him during the investigation of a controversial memo sent to Washington has been lifted.

The decision suggests that a scandal that at one point looked as though it could lead to the downfall of Pakistan's government may be losing steam.

Husain Haqqani said in a statement that the court commission investigating what the Pakistani media calls "memogate" removed the ban. The commission could not immediately be reached for comment.

Three Canadians jailed for life for "honour killings"

REUTERS, Ontario

Three members of an Afghan Canadian family were found guilty of the "honour killing" of three siblings and a fourth relative on Sunday after a high-profile trial that has fascinated Canadians.

A jury in Kingston, Ontario, found the three -- husband and wife Mohammad Shafia and Tooba Mohammad Yahya, and their eldest son Hamed Mohammad Shafia -- guilty of four counts of first-degree murder.

Their victims were three of Hamed's sisters and the woman introduced to outsiders as a cousin, who turned out to be Mohammad Shafia's first wife in a polygamous marriage.



PHOTO: AFP
A man throws a tire onto a fire as unions block the entrance road to the harbour of Zeebrugge, as part of a nationwide general strike yesterday. Belgium shuddered to a halt just hours before an EU summit, with transport and other public services going off in protest at EU-ordered austerity measures.

Four killed in Pak suicide attack

AFP, Peshawar

A suicide bomber killed an Islamist militant commander in northwest Pakistan who had escaped two previous assassination attempts, and three other people yesterday, police said.

The attack damaged a house that commander Haji Akhunzada was building in Pakha Ghulam on the outskirts of Peshawar, Pakistan's main northwestern city that borders Taliban and Al-Qaeda strongholds near the Afghan border.

He was considered a significant force within Ansar ul-Islam, a home-grown group based in the lawless tribal district of Khyber, and had moved to Peshawar after escaping two other failed attacks in the past.

Afghans to press Pak govt for access to Taliban

REUTERS, Kabul

Afghanistan will press Pakistan for access to Taliban leaders during a one-day visit to Kabul by Pakistan's foreign minister, with Afghan officials hoping to ease cross-border strains and lay the ground for peace negotiations with the insurgents.

Hina Rabbani Khar will visit Kabul tomorrow to discuss reconciliation and nascent plans for peace talks ahead of a meeting between representatives of the Afghan government and the Taliban in Saudi Arabia in coming weeks.

Khar's trip will mark the first high-level meetings between officials from the countries in months.

Pakistan is seen as critical to US efforts to stabilize Afghanistan before foreign combat troops leave in 2014.

"We hope it will mark a new phase in the relationship between both countries," Afghan Foreign Ministry spokesman Janan Mozasai said yesterday.

Senior Afghan security sources told Reuters that Afghan officials would use Khar's visit to press for access to Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, a co-founder of the Taliban captured in Pakistan in 2010, as well as other members of a Taliban council known as the Quetta Shura, after the Pakistani city of Quetta where the leaders are said to be based.

Afghan officials want direct access to senior Taliban members and advisers because they are the main decision makers for the insurgency and will be crucial to winning support for the fledgling peace process.



Hina Rabbani Khar

UN panel aims for 'a future worth choosing'

BBC ONLINE

Growing inequality, environmental decline and "teetering" economies mean the world must change the way it does business, a UN report concludes.

Health and education must improve, it says. Subsidies on fossil fuels should end, and governments must look beyond the standard economic indicator of GDP.

The High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability was established in 2010 by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

Its report will feed into discussions leading to the Rio+20 summit in June.

It is being launched in Addis Ababa by its two co-chairs, Finnish President Tarja Halonen and her South African counterpart Jacob Zuma.

"With the possibility of the world slipping further into recession, policymakers are hungry for ideas that can help them to navigate these difficult times," said Mr Zuma.

"Our report makes clear that sustainable development is more important than ever

given the multiple crises now enveloping the world."

Halonen emphasised the theme of equality that runs through the report, in terms of gender and redressing the burgeoning gap between people on high and low incomes.

"Eradication of poverty and improving equity must remain priorities for the world community," she said.

The panel's 22 members include heads of government and ministers past and present, including Barbadian Prime Minister Freundel Stuart, Australian Foreign Minister and former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, and India's Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh.

They also include Gro Harlem Brundtland, the former Norwegian Prime Minister who led the Brundtland Commission in 1987.

It was that report that coined the most familiar definition of sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

North South University

The first private university in Bangladesh

RE- TENDER NOTICE

North South University is inviting sealed offer from the bona fide / reputed organization / distributors/business partners/agents for supplying the items for Pharmacy Laboratory as mentioned below :

SL. No.	Description of items	Quantity
Lot- 01 4 Sub lots	Instruments	04 items
Lot- 02 3 Sub lots	Chemical	03 items

Interested bidders may collect schedules of tender from the Finance & Accounts Department of the NSU from 10:00a.m. to 4:00p.m. Sunday through Thursday on all working days till February 08, 2012 by paying non refundable taka 500.00 (Five Hundred) only in cash for each schedule.

The bidders must submit earnest money @ 2.5% of quoted price in the form of pay order issued from any scheduled bank drawn in favor of North South University along with their offer. The sealed offer must be submitted on or before February 09, 2012 at 01.00p.m. at the office of the undersigned. Bidders can bid for all or any of the Lot. The offers will be opened at 01:15p.m. on the same day. Representatives of the participating bidders may remain present at the time of opening the bids. NSU authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders without showing any reason

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