

Syria fighting rages ahead of deadline

AFP, Damascus

Fighting raged in Syria yesterday a day after 77 people were killed and envoy Kofi Annan spoke of "alarming" casualties despite the regime accepting an April 10 deadline to withdraw forces from protest hubs.

Tens of thousands of Syrian protesters took to the streets yesterday under fire from regime forces, who pressed their campaign to pound rebel cities into submission, activists said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 29 people were killed yesterday, including 11 in the flashpoint central province of Homs and the same number in the Aleppo region of northern Syria.

Meanwhile, Turkey urged the United Nations and international community to reinforce efforts to aid Syrian refugees after a record 2,800 people poured across the border in less than two days, taking the number in Turkey to 23,835.

On Thursday, the UN Security Council, including Russia and China, joined Annan in stepping up pressure on Assad to implement a six-point peace plan even as doubts grew

over the Syrian leader's intentions.

Damascus has agreed to withdraw troops and heavy weapons from cities by next Tuesday. Annan said that if this is carried out he would call for a complete halt to hostilities by "0600 hours Damascus time on Thursday April 12."

"I urge the government and the opposition commanders to issue clear instructions so that the message reaches across the country down to the fighter and soldier at the local level," Annan told the UN General Assembly.

Western governments say they have strong doubts Assad will comply, and Annan said he had no confirmation of a Syrian claim that troops had begun a partial withdrawal from the protest cities of Idlib, Zabadani and Daraa.

"Clearly the violence is still continuing. Alarming levels of casualties and other abuses continue to be reported daily," he added.

The Local Coordination Committees group also reported overnight anti-regime demonstrations in Damascus's Mazzeh and Barzeh districts, in Aleppo and in Idlib, Raqqa and Hama provinces.



PHOTO: AFP

A man holds his daughter as he looks at chairs lined up along the main street in Sarajevo yesterday to mark the 20th anniversary of the bloodiest conflict in Europe since World War II. More than 11,000 red chairs, symbolising 11541 victims of the conflict, lined Sarajevo's main avenue yesterday as Bosnians marked the anniversary with songs and remembrance.

US to accept Iran civilian nuke program

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama has told Iran the United States would accept Tehran having a civilian nuclear program if the Islamic state can prove it is not seeking atomic weapons, the Washington Post said yesterday.

"President Obama has signaled Iran that the United States would accept an Iranian civilian nuclear program if Supreme leader Ali Khamenei can back up his recent public claim that his nation 'will never pursue nuclear weapons'," said the paper.

Obama sent such a message to Tehran via Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who delivered it to Iran's Supreme leader Ali Khamenei last week, the newspaper added.

The US on Thursday urged Iran to go ahead with talks with six world powers over its disputed nuclear program despite a venue dispute.

Suicide blast kills Afghan peace envoy

AFP, Asadabad

A suicide bomber assassinated an Afghan peace envoy and former mujahedeen commander yesterday, along with his son in an eastern region close to the Pakistan border, officials said.

Maulavi Mohammad Hashem Munib, the head of the High Peace Council in Kunar province, was the target, said provincial police chief Ewaz Mohammad Nazari.

"He was on his way home from Friday prayers when he was attacked by a suicide attacker," he told AFP.

One witness said that both Munib and the attacker had been torn to pieces, with body parts littering the scene.

Kunar, which borders Pakistan, is a stronghold of the Taliban-led insurgency against President Hamid Karzai's government and its Western allies.

South China Sea is property of world

Says India after China warning

IANS, New Delhi

The South China Sea is the property of the world and must be free for trade to prosper, India's External Affairs Minister SM Krishna said yesterday after China warned India against exploring oil in the area.

"India maintains that South China Sea is the property of the world... those trade ways must be free from any national interference. It has to be used for increasing trade related activities among nations which come within the range of the South China Sea," Krishna told reporters here.

He said this fact has been accepted by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and by China in their dialogue with ASEAN group of nations.

"India subscribes to the theory that these trade ways should be free for trade to prosper," he said.

China on Thursday asked New Delhi not to get involved in the "disputes". It said the sovereignty of the islands in the region was a major issue and India should not carry out oil exploration till the resolution of the vexed issue.

Krishna denied reports of a strained relationship between India and China.

"There is absolutely no strained relation between India and China. During the BRICS summit, Chinese President Hu Jintao was in Delhi and we had very cordial talks with him and I totally reject that theory," he added.

LeT founder case an internal issue: Pak PM

PTI, Islamabad

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has said the matter of LeT founder Hafiz Saeed is an "internal issue" and if there is any concrete proof against the outlawed Jamaat-ud-Dawah chief then it should be provided to Pakistan.

Gilani also cautioned that at a time when Pakistan's parliament is framing new rules of engagement for the US, such "negative messages would increase the trust deficit".

He made the remarks on Thursday while responding to points raised by lawmakers during a joint session of the National Assembly and Senate about the \$10 million bounty offered by the US for Saeed, the Lashkar-e-Taiba founder.

He said this was an internal issue of Pakistan and "if there is any concrete proof against Saeed then it should be provided to Pakistan, which has an independent judiciary".

The Prime Minister pointed out that cases against Saeed were dismissed in the past due to lack of evidence.

Gilani further said he had telephoned main opposition PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif and taken him into confidence on the government's position on the issue of the bounty.

Foreign minister Hina Rabbani Khar told the joint session of parliament that she too had discussed the issue of the bounty with Nides.

She said she had told the American delegation that Saeed was a Pakistani citizen and the US should have informed Pakistan before taking such a decision.

Earlier, Pakistan's foreign office spokesman Abdul Basit said it was "strange" that the US State Department had offered a bounty of millions of dollars for evidence and information against Saeed and his deputy, Abdul Rahman Makki.

The clarification about the bounty issued by the State Department spokesman made it clear that "even the US does not possess evidence against the two individuals," he said.

"We have clearly stated our position that there is no concrete evidence (against Saeed).

NEWS IN brief

Malawi president dies

BBC ONLINE

President Bingu wa Mutharika of Malawi has died, doctors and cabinet ministers have told the BBC, but this has not been officially announced.

One of the doctors who treated Mutharika, 78, said the president was "clinically dead" on Thursday after suffering a cardiac arrest.

Mutharika, a former World Bank economist, came to power in a 2004 election. Soon afterwards, he dramatically abandoned his United Democratic Front (UDF) party to form the DPP, after accusing leading UDF members of opposing his campaign against corruption.

Kony 2012 follow up released

AFP, Los Angeles

US pressure group that caused an Internet sensation with a documentary calling for the arrest of Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony posted a follow up Thursday and urged a day of action on April 20.

Invisible Children, a San-Diego based non-government group, said "KONY 2012: Beyond Famous," had been made in response to criticism it received after the original film went viral last month.

The LRA is the Kony-led Lord's Resistance Army, whose ruthless rebels were infamous for mutilating civilians and abducting children to use as soldiers and sex-slaves during their two-decade war in northern Uganda.

The rebels have been forced out of Uganda and since 2006 have been operating in neighboring countries.

The original 30-minute video, "Kony 2012," has been viewed by more than 100 million people world-

25 maids on death row in Saudi

AFP, Riyadh

Twenty-five Indonesian maids are on death row in Saudi Arabia and 22 others have been pardoned and sent home, local media reported yesterday, adding that Jakarta will send a delegation for talks on the issue.

"Twenty-two death row Indonesian inmates in the Kingdom have been exonerated and repatriated back to Indonesia, while 25 maids are still facing death sentences in Saudi Arabia for various offences," the English-language daily Arab News reported.

Indonesian anger over the treatment of its manual labourers in the oil-rich Gulf monarchy has grown since last year, after a spate of cases of abuse and killings.

Last June, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono denounced the beheading in Saudi Arabia of an Indonesian maid and accused Riyadh of breaking the "norms and manners" of international relations.

MODERNISATION OF SYLLABUS Marxism faces exile in Paschimbanga

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Almost a year after the ouster of CPI (M)-led Left Front from power in West Bengal, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, founders of Marxism, may be out of history syllabus in government schools in the state, now ruled by Mamata Banerjee government, following a recommendation by an education panel.

The state's school education syllabus committee tasked to "modernise" the syllabus and lessen the burden of "unnecessary" topics on students has recommended doing away with Marx and Engels and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia of 1917 in the textbooks.

The committee head Avik Majumdar is reported to have said that History syllabus in Paschimbanga gave importance to a particular ideology and that an attempt is being made to give it a balanced approach.

The committee's recommendation was condemned by communist parties as "wrong and controversial" and an attempt to rewrite history.

But Mamata-led ruling Trinamool Congress defended the move. Trinamool MP Dereck O'Brien rejected the charge that the state government was trying to doctor history.

"Marx, I believe, should be studied as a historical phenomenon but not at the expense of the Mahatma and not at the expense of Nelson Mandela," he said, adding "West Bengal is redressing balance, not doctoring history."

Activists of the Defence Council of Pakistan, an alliance of right-wing, religious and extremist groups, stand beside a US burning flag during an anti-US protest rally in Muzaffarabad yesterday. Hundreds of Pakistani Islamist activists poured onto the streets yesterday demanding holy war and torching US flags to condemn a USD10 million bounty slapped on the founder of the terror group.

PHOTO: AFP



Hackers hitting Macs with virus

AFP, San Francisco

The computer security industry buzzed Thursday with warnings that more than a half-million Macintosh computers may have been infected with a virus targeting Apple machines.

Flashback Trojan malware tailored to slip past "Mac" defenses is a variation on viruses typically aimed at personal computers (PCs) powered by Microsoft's Windows operating systems.

The infections, spotted "in the wild" by Finland-based computer security firm F-Secure and then quantified by Russian anti-virus program vendor Dr. Web, come as hackers increasingly take aim at Apple computers.

Dr. Web determined that more than 600,000 Mac computers may be infected.

TRAYVON MARTIN CASE UN rights chief calls for probe

AFP, Bridgetown

UN rights chief Navi Pillay on Thursday called for an "immediate investigation" into the circumstances surrounding the February death of an unarmed black US teen, shot by a neighborhood watchman.

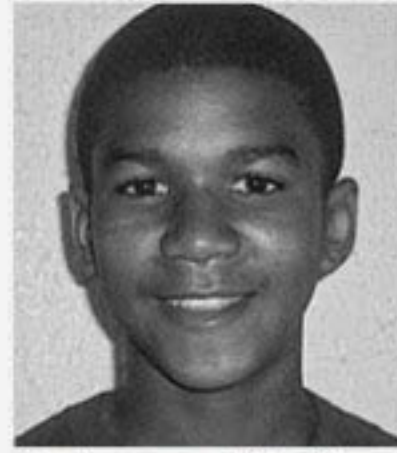
Pillay made the comments about the controversial Trayvon Martin case at a press conference in Barbados, as she wrapped up a three-day visit to the Caribbean island nation.

"As High Commissioner for Human Rights, I call for an immediate investigation," Pillay told reporters.

Neighborhood watch captain George Zimmerman, a white Hispanic, fatally shot 17-year-old Martin inside a gated community in the Florida town of Sanford on February 26.

Zimmerman has said he acted in self-defense after Martin punched him in the nose, knocked him down and slammed his head into the ground.

The case has unleashed a national uproar over race relations and the right to self-defense in the United States.



Trayvon Martin

Swordsman kills four in Hungary

AFP, Budapest

An attacker armed with a sword killed four relatives and wounded three others after a family dispute in Hungary yesterday before being arrested by a police anti-terrorist unit, state media reported.

Jutast Csened Horvath, 24, was detained near the scene of the killings in an area of moorland in the village of Kulcs, around 60 kilometers outside the capital Budapest.

The MTI state news agency quoted police sources as saying Horvath had killed his father, his grandparents and his older brother following a row.

Gaddafi son 'attacked' in Libya detention

AFP, The Hague

Saif al-Islam, son of slain Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, has been attacked in detention in Libya, a lawyer from the International Criminal Court said Thursday, accusing authorities of denying him basic rights.

ICC defence official Xavier-Jean Keita said local officials have failed to get Saif needed dental treatment, denied him visits with family and friends and kept him in isolation for 139 days except for contact with authorities and prosecutors.

"Mr Gaddafi has been physically attacked," Keita told AFP, without giving details on the attack or saying when it took place.

The ICC wants to bring Saif to The Hague to face charges of crimes against humanity for his role in battling the uprising against his father last year, but Libya's new government wants to try him at home.

The ICC issued an arrest warrant for Saif, 39, on June 27. He was arrested on November 19 in southern Libya and is being held in Zintan, 180 kilometers south of Tripoli.

The statements come a day after ICC judges issued a ruling demanding Libya immediately hand over Saif.

It was the second time judges asked Tripoli to hand him over, after last month rejecting an initial Libyan request for a postponement.

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