

# Syrian clashes kill 33

EU slaps new sanctions

AFP, Beirut

At least 33 people were killed in violence across Syria yesterday, among them 23 soldiers who died in fierce clashes between regime forces and rebels in the central city of Rastan, a watchdog said.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said reports indicated that three troop carriers were destroyed in the clashes that began at dawn on the outskirts of the rebel-held city in Homs province, which UN observers had toured last month.

Meanwhile, EU foreign ministers meeting in Brussels yesterday slapped a 15th round of sanctions on Syria, due to the "appalling violence" there and discussed further support for Kofi Annan's peace plan.

The new European Union sanctions, to take effect on today, mean 129 people and 43 firms or utilities are now targeted by an assets freeze and travel ban for backing the regime's 14-month campaign of relentless repression.

Four rebel fighters, among them a lieutenant who had defected, were also killed in yesterday's clashes, and random regime gunfire reportedly left two civilians dead in the city of Homs itself.

Regime forces launched an offensive on

Rastan at the weekend but met with sharp resistance from rebels seeking the ouster of the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

The Observatory said a child was killed and dozens wounded in shelling of the city by Syrian troops on Sunday. The bombardment by regime forces resumed following yesterday's deadly clashes, it added.

"The regime forces in the course of two hours fired 300 rockets at Rastan before launching their assault," Sami Kurdi, the FSA spokesman for Homs province, told AFP from Rastan.

"The army tried to advance on the city at dawn but it met fierce resistance from FSA soldiers massed there," he added.

"The deserters like the residents of Rastan were on the alert, ready to do anything to prevent the regular troops from entering the town," because "people know what happens when the army enters a town that has revolted," Kurdi said.

Activists and NGOs have accused regime troops of repeatedly committing abuses in pro-rebel areas like Homs and Idlib.

The Observatory reported deadly violence elsewhere yesterday, with three civilians killed by regime forces' gunfire in southern Daraa province, including a child and a Palestinian refugee.



Anti-government protesters chant holding up a portrait of Che Guevara during a demonstration against a new draft law on transitional justice outside the ministry of justice in Sanaa, Yemen yesterday.

# Palestinian hunger strikers ink deal to end fast

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike have agreed a deal with Israel to end their fast in exchange for an easing of their conditions, Palestinian and Israeli officials said yesterday.

"All of the factions signed an agreement to end the strike," Qadura Fares, head of the Palestinian Prisoners Club told AFP after several hours of negotiations between prison officials and the senior detainees at Ashkelon jail.

A spokeswoman for the Israel Prisons Service confirmed an agreement had been reached, saying it applied to most, but not all of the prisoners, referring to those who had been refusing food "for 28 days."

# Nepal plane crash kills 15

AP, Katmandu

A plane crashed into a mountain in the Himalayas while trying to land at an airport in northern Nepal yesterday, killing 15 people and injuring six, some critically.

It was carrying two pilots and a flight attendant - all Nepalese - along with 16 Indians and two Danish citizens, both of whom survived.

TV footage showed the Danes being taken inside a hospital in the nearby city of Pokhara, the man being led on foot and the woman crying in pain as she was carried on a stretcher.

The plane was turning to land at Jomsom Airport when it crashed, said Laxmi Raj Sharma, chief government administrator in the area.

It broke into pieces but did not catch fire. Sharma said an initial investigation indicated the Dornier aircraft, which belonged to the local Agni Air company.

# Myung-bak visits Myanmar

AP, Yangon

Myanmar tightened security for a visit by President Lee Myung-bak yesterday, the first by a South Korean leader since an assassination attempt by North Korean commandos nearly 30 years ago.

Lee flew to the capital Naypyitaw to meet with Myanmar President Thein Sein as part of a two-day visit that is expected to strengthen ties between the Asian countries, a statement from Lee's office said.

The South Korean president is the latest dignitary to visit Myanmar as it transitions from a military dictatorship to a fledgling democracy and opens its massive investment potential to the eager international community. The statement said Lee planned to discuss how to increase economic ties and cooperation in energy, development of natural resources and other sectors.

Myanmar state television showed Lee's arrival in Naypyitaw and his welcome by an honor guard at the president's office. It said he met with Thein Sein, along with Myanmar's home minister and ministers of commerce, energy and national planning and other Cabinet members.

Truckloads of riot police were stationed at major intersections in Naypyitaw and around Yangon, where Lee was to visit today and meet opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Security was particularly tight at the Martyr's Mausoleum, a monument to Suu Kyi's



South Korean president shakes hands with Myanmar President Thein Sein before a meeting at Naypyidaw yesterday.

father where then-South Korean President Chun Doo-hwan was nearly killed in 1983.

The bomb blast killed 21 people, 17 of them South Korean, including four Cabinet ministers and the South Korean ambassador to what was then known as Burma. Chun was not hurt

because he arrived a few minutes late for a ceremony to pay tribute to Gen. Aung San, the country's slain independence hero.

Three North Korean agents were arrested for the attack. One blew himself up while being arrested, a second was hanged in prison and a third died inside Yangon's infamous Insein Prison in 2008.

After the bombing, Myanmar's then-dictator Ne Win severed diplomatic relations with North Korea, but those ties were restored in 2007. The United States and other nations have expressed concern about Myanmar's relationship with nuclear-armed North Korea.

Arms experts say Myanmar - which faces an arms embargo from many Western states - gets weaponry from the North in defiance of U.N. Security Council resolutions. Some believe there is nuclear cooperation between the two countries, which Myanmar denies.

South Korea is the fourth-largest foreign investor in Myanmar after China, Hong Kong and Thailand with a total investment of \$2.67 billion for the 2010-2011 fiscal year, according to the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development.

# VIOLENCE FEAR Security heightened in Mizoram

IANS, Aizawl

Security forces in Mizoram have stepped up vigil after an intelligence report indicated possible violence by the separatist outfit Hmar People's Convention-Democrats (HPC-D) in the northeastern state, police said here yesterday.

DIG of Police (northern range) Zoramawia told reporters, "Security forces led by superintendents of police have been conducting flag marches in various parts of the mountainous state, bordering Myanmar and Bangladesh."

Official sources said they had received inputs that HPC-D cadres could indulge in violence.

"We have asked all the police stations to remain vigilant over the prevailing situation, so that the tribal guerrillas do not create any violence or any kind of disturbances," Zoramawia said.

The HPC-D is a militant outfit operating mainly in Mizoram and neighbouring Manipur.

# Greece's moderate left says no govt possible

BBC ONLINE



Fotis Kouvelis

The moderate Democratic Left party in Greece yesterday said it will not join pro-bailout parties in a coalition without the more radical far left Syriza.

The Greek president has called the four main parties, including the centre-right New Democracy and the Socialist Pasok, to try to form an emergency government to avoid new elections. But Syriza said it would not attend because it could not back any coalition which supported austerity. A majority voted against last week.

"No unity government can emerge," Fotis Kouvelis, head of the Democratic Left party, told Greek television.

"A government without Syriza would not have the necessary popular and parliamentary backing," said Kouvelis.

EU finance ministers were scheduled to meet in Brussels to discuss the Greek crisis later yesterday.

The fear over holding new elections is that parties that oppose austerity measures that are a condition of Greece's bailout deal might do well again in new polls, said the BBC's Gavin Hewitt in Brussels.

And with no sign Europe's leaders are prepared to renegotiate the deal, Greece could end up leaving the eurozone.

For the first time, some central bankers have spoken openly about the consequences of a Greek exit from the single currency, our correspondent adds.

President Papoulias had invited four parties, including Syriza, to further talks.

Both New Democracy and Pasok have so far been unable to form a new coalition.

They both agreed to swingeing cuts in return for the last EU/IMF bailout, but suffered at last week's polls.

# NEWS IN brief

## Nato underplayed civilian deaths in Libya: HRW

REUTERS, Brussels

Nato air strikes killed 72 civilians in Libya last year, Human Rights Watch said yesterday, accusing the western alliance of failing to acknowledge the scope of collateral damage it caused during the campaign that helped oust Muammar Gaddafi.

In a report based on investigations at bombing sites during and after the conflict, the New York-based HRW said Nato strikes killed 20 women and 24 children. It called on the alliance to compensate civilian victims and investigate attacks that may

## Egypt vote won't push the generals aside

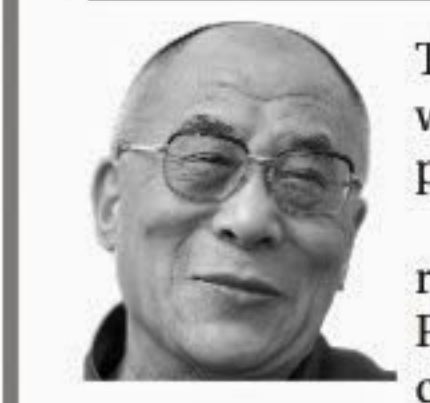
REUTERS, Cairo

Near the rock-strewn scene of a bloody anti-army protest, Islamist, liberal and other politicians sat with ruling generals this month to haggle over Egypt's future after its first presidential vote since Hosni Mubarak's fall.

At stake in the Defence Ministry meeting, held just hours after 11 people were killed in another flare-up marring Egypt's transition to democracy, was who would write a new constitution and what powers would Mubarak's successor have. No clarity has emerged.

## Dalai Lama gives £1.1m Templeton Prize money to charity

BBC ONLINE



The Dalai Lama said yesterday he will give away to charity £1.1m in prize money being awarded to him.

The Tibetan spiritual leader is receiving the annual Templeton Prize in London for exceptional contribution to "affirming life's spiritual dimension".

About £900,000 will go to Save the Children in India, with £125,000 set aside for The Minds and Life Institute. Money will also go towards a fund to educate Tibetan monks about science.

The 76-year-old, who leads a Tibetan government in exile in India, is being awarded the prize for encouraging "serious scientific investigative reviews of the power of compassion", and its potential to address world problems.



PHOTO: AFP

Painter Lisa Burton poses for pictures with a new waxwork figure of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II at Madame Tussauds in London, yesterday. The waxwork, replicating the official Jubilee photograph released earlier this year, will be placed centre stage in the Royal Area of the attraction.

## Police clear agitators from Madrid square

AFP, Madrid

Police cleared scores of "indignant" protesters from a Madrid square yesterday, arresting two, after a weekend of mass rallies marking one year since the birth of the popular movement.

Following a rally by tens of thousands that packed the Puerta del Sol square on Saturday, a small crowd of "indignados" returned overnight Sunday to Monday, defying an official ban on protests after 10:00 pm.

Riot police dispersed about 100 people from Sol early yesterday morning, making two arrests and checking the identity documents of 81, a police spokesman said, adding that the operation passed off "without incident".

## BAGHDAD TALKS UN nuke agency presses Iran

AFP, Vienna

The UN nuclear agency pressed Iran for greater cooperation yesterday in their first meeting since a "failed" visit in February, with world powers watching closely ahead of their Baghdad talks next week.

"We are here to continue our dialogue with Iran in a positive spirit," IAEA chief inspector Hermann Nackaerts said as he went into two days of talks with Iran's envoy, Ali Asghar Soltanieh.

"It is important now that we can engage on the substance of these issues and Iran let us have access to people, documents, information and sites," he told reporters outside Iran's embassy in Vienna.

## Pakistan to 'move on' over Nato supply lines

Says Pak foreign minister

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan said yesterday it was time to "move on" and repair relations with the United States and Nato, in a further sign it could reopen supply routes into Afghanistan closed for nearly six months.

Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar made the remarks one day before Pakistani leaders are to discuss ending the blockade on Nato supplies in time to attend a Nato summit in Chicago.

Islamabad shut its Afghan border crossings to Nato supplies after US air strikes killed 24 soldiers on November 26, provoking a major crisis in Pakistani-US relations still reeling from the raid that killed Osama bin Laden the previous May.

"It was important to make a point, Pakistan has made a point and we now need to move on and go into a positive zone and try to conduct our relations," Khar said.

Asked whether Pakistan would allow a resumption of Nato supplies, Information minister Qamar Zaman Kaira said a decision would be made in the coming days.

"There are a lot of sensitivities," he told reporters. "How we can share things with you which are under discussion? We will share it in the next three to four days."

Yesterday, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani briefed President Asif Ali Zardari, army chief of staff General Ashfaq Kayani and senior ministers after a recent visit to Britain.

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