

Syria opposition calls 'battle of liberation' if UN fails

AFP, Istanbul

Syrian opposition head Burhan Ghalion called yesterday for a "battle of liberation" against the regime until the United Nations takes action under Chapter Seven which allows military intervention.

"I call on the Syrian people to lead a battle of liberation and dignity, relying on its own forces, on the rebels deployed across the country and the Free Syrian Army brigades and friends," he told a news conference in Istanbul.

Ghalion, outgoing leader of the Syrian National Council (SNC), said such action would be taken "unless the international community assumes its responsibilities under Chapter Seven" of the UN charter.

A Chapter Seven resolution, which can be imposed by the UN Security Council, authorises foreign powers to take measures including military options.

Ghalion, in a meeting earlier with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet

Davutoglu, said the anti-regime uprising in Syria had reached a "turning point" after the killings on Friday and Saturday of more than 90 people in a central town.

"The SNC calls on the international community and in particular (UN-Arab League envoy) Kofi Annan to act immediately to halt the killings," an unnamed Turkish source quoted him as telling Davutoglu.

After an international outcry over what activists branded a massacre, the Syrian government yesterday denied its forces were responsible for the killing of at least 92 people, a third of them children, in the town of Houla.

Meanwhile, Syrian authorities blamed "terrorists" for the massacre,



Burhan Ghalion

among the worst carnage in the 14-month-old uprising against President Bashar al-Assad, reports Reuters.

"Women, children and old men were shot dead. This is not the hallmark of the heroic Syrian army," Foreign Ministry spokesman Jihad Makdesi told reporters in Damascus.

"We categorically deny the responsibility of government forces for the massacre," Makdesi said.

He added that UN envoy Kofi Annan will be in Syria today.

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton spoke of a "heinous act perpetrated by the Syrian regime against its own civilian population" in a statement yesterday. The head of the European parliament said it could amount to a war crime.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton demanded that those who carried out the killings be held to account.

France said it would call a meeting of the Friends of Syria, a group of Western and Arab countries keen to see Assad removed.



PHOTO: AFP

Demonstrators protest in front of the Syrian consulate in Istanbul yesterday against the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Manmohan arrives in Myanmar

Focuses on energy

PTI, Nay Pyi Taw

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday arrived at Nay Pyi Taw on a three-day visit during which the two countries are expected to take a series of initiatives to bolster bilateral relations in several key areas, including energy, trade and connectivity sector.

In a pre-departure statement, Singh said that his visit "will provide an opportunity to review the progress in implementation of decisions" taken during the "highly successful visit" of Myanmar President Thein Sein to India in October 2011.

"We will also consider new initiatives and define a roadmap for the further development of our cooperation in the years ahead," he said.

Singh will be the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Myanmar in quarter of a century since Rajiv Gandhi's trip to that country in December 1987.



India will be looking to enhancing its presence in the resource-rich energy sector of Myanmar, especially oil and gas, and to improve the road connectivity with its strategic eastern neighbour.

The two countries are expected to sign an agreement for starting a bus service between Imphal and Mandalay, the second largest city of Myanmar.

The premier, who will hold talks with Sein today at Nay Pyi Taw, said that during his visit to Myanmar, he hopes to focus on "stronger trade and investment links, development of border areas, improving connectivity between our two countries and building capacity and human resources".

Singh, who will also meet Nobel Laureate Suu Kyi in Yangon tomorrow, said India welcomes Myanmar's "transition to democratic governance and the steps taken by the government of Myanmar towards a more broad-based and inclusive reconciliation process".

Nato airstrike kills 8 people in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

A Nato air strike killed a family of eight, including six children, in their home in Afghanistan's eastern province of Paktia, Afghan officials said yesterday.

"Eight people, a man, his wife and six of their children, are dead. It was an air strike conducted by Nato. This man had no connection to the Taliban or any other terrorist group," local government spokesman Rohullah Samoon told AFP.

"A house was bombed by Nato. A man named Mohammad Sahfee, his wife and six of their innocent children were brutally killed," a senior security official said.

A spokesman for Nato's International Security Assistance Force, Lieutenant-Colonel Jimmie Cummings, said ISAF was investigating the claim.

No need for US boots in Yemen

Says US Defence Secy

AFP, Washington

The United States can deal with al-Qaeda's spreading presence in Yemen without US forces on the ground, relying instead on targeted operations, US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta said yesterday.

Panetta, in an interview with ABC television's "This Week," defended the use of drones as "the most precise weapon we have" in the campaign against al-Qaeda.

"Our whole effort there is aimed at going after those terrorists who threaten to attack our country," he said.

"We've been successful. We've gone after a number of key targets there. We'll continue to do that."

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian peninsula, which US intelligence considers a top threat to the US homeland, has expanded its presence in Yemen amid unrest and political turmoil there.



Leon Panetta

The Yemen-based al-Qaeda affiliate has twice tried to bring down US airliners, including the failed underwear bombing of a Detroit-bound jet on December 25, 2009.

Panetta was asked whether al-Qaeda could be stopped without US boots on the ground.

"The answer is yes, because very frankly, what we're targeting, the operations we're conducting, require the kind of capabilities that don't necessarily involve boots on the ground, but require the kind of capabilities that target those that we're after who are threats to the United States."

The United States has military advisers assisting Yemeni forces and has carried out regular drone strikes against al-Qaeda suspects there, mainly in the south and southeast.

Yemen's army launched a major offensive on May 12 to capture al-Qaeda-controlled areas in the southern province of Abyan.

Mali rebels agree on Sharia state

BBC ONLINE

Two rebel groups that seized northern Mali two months ago have agreed to merge and turn their territory into an Islamist state, both sides say.

The Tuareg MNLA, a secular rebel group, and the Islamist group Ansar Dine signed the deal in the town of Gao, spokespeople said.

Ansar Dine, which has ties to al-Qaeda, has already begun to impose Sharia law in some towns.

The groups took advantage of a coup in March to seize the territory.

Correspondents say the deal is yet another worrying development for Mali and may complicate efforts to stabilise the country.

Capt Amadou Sanogo seized power in March after claiming the then president, Amadou Toumani Touré, was not doing enough to quash the rebellion.

NEWS IN brief

Bahrain court sentences 8 in coup plot trial

AP, Manama

A Bahrain sentenced eight people to prison terms of up to 15 years yesterday after they were accused of plotting with suspected Iranian agents to topple the Gulf kingdom's ruling system, a defence lawyer said.

The convictions - which include three activists put on trial in absentia - reflect mounting claims by Gulf Arab states that Iran has links to the Shiite-led uprising against Bahrain's Sunni dynasty. Iranian leaders have denounced crackdowns against protesters in Bahrain, but deny any active aid to the

Vatican in chaos after butler arrested for leaks

AP, Vatican City

The Vatican's inquisition into the source of leaked documents has yielded its first target with the arrest of the pope's butler, but the investigation is continuing into a scandal that has embarrassed the Holy See by revealing evidence of internal power struggles, intrigue and corruption in the highest levels of the Catholic Church governance.

The detention of butler Paolo Gabriele, one of the few members of the papal household, capped one of the most convulsive weeks in recent Vatican history and threw the Holy See into chaos as it enters a critical phase in its efforts to show the world it's serious about complying with international norms on

Election committee to start Gaza work this week

AFP, Gaza City

Palestinian election officials will begin work on updating the electoral register in the Gaza Strip today in a key step to pave the way for elections, an official told AFP yesterday.

On May 20, senior Fatah and Hamas officials agreed that the Palestinian electoral commission would start work in Gaza on May 27 and that consultations to forum a new interim "government of independents" would start the same day.

But Jamil Khaldi, head of the Central Elections Commission (CEC) in Gaza, said work would only begin today after the arrival of CEC president Hanna Nasser.

Thousands protest against Morocco govt

AFP, Casablanca

Tens of thousands of Moroccans took to the streets of Casablanca yesterday in the largest opposition protest since an Islamist-led government took office, reflecting mounting tensions over unemployment and other social woes.

The protest was organised by trade unions which accuse Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane of failing to deliver on the pledges of social justice that brought his party to power in the wake of the Arab Spring.

"There are more than 50,000 people who are demonstrating to call on the government to start a genuine dialogue addressing our country's social ills," opposition Socialist MP Hassan Tariq said.



PHOTO: AFP

Members of the Nepalese Brahmin-Chhetri Society are restrained by police officials as they chant slogans during a rally outside the Constituent Assembly building, against federalism states in the new constitution in Kathmandu yesterday.

It's litchi time in Dinajpur

FROM PAGE 1
juicy tropical fruit.

According to the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), litchi is being produced on 3,000 commercial orchards in 2,000 hectares of land of the district this year.

The district horticulture department expects about four tonnes of this mouthwatering fruit from each hectare.

Favourable climate is just perfect for them and there is little need for fertiliser or any pest control methods unless any natural catastrophe appears or affects the orchards.

Botanically the fruit is known as Litchi Chinensis. Dinajpur mainly grows the Bombay, Madras, several varieties of China and Bedana litchis, each of which weighs around 15 to 20 grams and produces around six millilitre of juice, officials said.

Each full-grown tree can produce 5,000 to 10,000 pieces of litchi every year.

Dinajpur litchi are a key to the country's agricultural growth, largely benefiting the economy of the district's rural area.

It is a trade worth Tk 120 crore, with job opportunities for a large number of people of the district, said Moududul Haque, a horticulturist of Dinajpur, saying it undoubtedly contributed to the country's economy.

During a visit to a litchi market in Dinajpur town on Saturday morning, this correspondent saw growers from every corner of the district gathering their litchi by hired transport at the local market for sale.

Buyers from across the country were seen busy procuring them to meet the demands of their respective districts.

"We're selling every 100 pieces of Bombay and Madras litchi at Tk 230 to 320, depending on the size," said Altafuzzaman, a vendor at Dinajpur litchi market.

The production, however, fell this year by about 40

percent due to unfavourable weather, traders said.

"I leased an orchard of 26 trees at Tk 70,000, and I'm expecting a profit of Tk 1,00,000 this season. The profit was about Tk 1.5 lakh last year from the same orchard," said Masud Parvez of Hariharpur under Dinajpur sadar upazila.

The litchi season is also an income generator for the locals, including women and children.

Azizur, who was busy plucking the litchi, said he earned Tk 25 for plucking every 100 litchis while women were sorting each 100 pieces for Tk 10.

"It's a seasonal job to make money," said Razia Begum of Masimpur village of sadar upazila.

Above all, this luscious ruby-red, heart-shaped litchi is a symbol of love and romance and they invite many tourists every year to the region, said Anwarul Alam, deputy director of Dinajpur Agriculture Department.

Star Wars maker in 'evil empire' row with neighbours

AFP, Los Angeles

"Star Wars" director George Lucas has dismissed claims he is waging "class warfare" by selling some of his land for low-income housing, after rich neighbours nixed plans for new studio space.

In the latest twist in a long-running battle, the legendary filmmaker lamented that some locals near his Skywalker Ranch complex outside San Francisco had misrepresented him as running an "evil empire."

Lucas claims the planned new addition to his studio based in a secluded valley in Marin County would have provided good jobs for local people, and not had any significant extra environmental impact on the well-to-do area.

But he withdrew the planning application last month after it appeared that neighbours' complaints would delay the project indefinitely -- and decided instead to offer the land for development of affordable housing.

That triggered a new round of protest from some in the well-heeled community, including a



George Lucas

reported comment from Carolyn Lenert, head of the North San Rafael Coalition of Residents, that he was "inciting class warfare."

Lucasfilm, the studio behind the "Star Wars" and "Indiana Jones" movie franchises, rejected the charge.

"It's unfortunate if people think of affordable housing as a sort of class warfare, because affordable housing is for your firefighters, your police, your teachers," said Lucasfilm spokesman Miles Perkins.

"That's what's needed in Marin County, without a question," he told AFP.

The story began in 1978, when Lucas bought a 2,500-acre plot in Lucas Valley -- named after a 19th century rancher -- to build Skywalker Ranch, the year his first "Star Wars" film won a stunning six Academy Awards.

In the years that followed, he gradually expanded the company, but was careful to ensure the growing studio complex remained discreetly nestled behind trees, maintaining a low profile -- and keeping his valley neighbours happy.