

Blasts rock security areas in Damascus

New UN envoy says change unavoidable

AFP, Damascus

Twin bombs exploded near a tightly guarded government compound in the heart of Damascus yesterday, state media said, as new international peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi said change was "unavoidable." Brahimi, who took over as international peace envoy on Saturday, told Al-Jazeera that "change is necessary, indispensable, unavoidable." Speaking to satellite news channel Al-Jazeera as he took over as UN-Arab League envoy from former UN chief Kofi Annan, Brahimi carefully refrained, however, from publicly calling as his predecessor had for President Bashar al-Assad to step down. Meanwhile, the main opposition Syrian National Council yesterday said they have agreed to expand to include more groups opposing President Bashar al-Assad and will reform to be more representative. At a meeting in Stockholm late Saturday, the SNC agreed to expand its membership and to hold a vote later this month to elect its

leadership, spokesman George Sabra said. Four people were wounded in the twin bombings which struck in the Abu Remmaneh district where several security service buildings and the office of Vice President Faruq al-Shara are located, state television said. The attack, which state media blamed on "terrorists" -- the government's standard term for rebels fighting to end Assad's rule -- came a day after a bombing killed 15 people in a southern suburb of Damascus. They were among at least 168 people killed on Saturday -- 110 civilians, 32 soldiers and 26 rebels, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Earlier, state media reported that a car bomb explosion near a mosque at Sbeneh in the southern outskirts of the capital on Saturday killed 15 people. Sbeneh is a poor neighbourhood where anti-government sentiment is strong. The violence in the capital came as the army renewed its bombardment of rebel-held areas in the provinces.

South Africa to drop miners' murder charges

AFP, Pretoria

South Africa's top public prosecutor yesterday said that controversial murder charges against 270 miners for the killing of fellow workers shot dead by police, will be provisionally dropped. "The murder charge against the current 270 suspects will be formally withdrawn provisionally in court on their next court appearance," acting national director of prosecutions Nomgcobo Jibo told a news conference. Thursday's decision to charge the miners over the August 16 killings during a wildcat strike at the Lonmin platinum mine, in what was the worst police violence since the end of apartheid, had triggered outrage. The workers are in custody since they were arrested

President Morsi 'didn't discuss boosting ties with Iran'

AFP, Cairo

Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi made no mention of resuming ties with Iran during a recent visit to Tehran, his spokesman Yassir Ali said yesterday, denying statements by Iranian officials. "The meeting between President Mohamed Morsi and his Iranian counterpart (Mahmoud) Ahmadinejad did not broach the subject of boosting the level of representation or of opening an embassy," said Ali, quoted by the state-owned daily Al-Ahram. Morsi's attendance of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit in Tehran was the first time an Egyptian head of state had set foot in Iran since the two countries broke off diplomatic ties in the wake of the 1979 Islamic revolution there. The two countries have since maintained interests



Iranian President Ahmadinejad greets Egyptian President Morsi

sections in their respective capitals. According to Ali, the two leaders agreed to hold "more dialogue to examine common affairs, including regional issues." On Thursday, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian told Iran's Arabic-language broadcaster Al-Alam that during their meeting, Morsi and Ahmadinejad discussed the Syrian conflict and their severed diplomatic ties. The Islamic republic had several times sought to normalise relations with Egypt since the overthrow of president Hosni Mubarak in 2011. Morsi hails from Egypt's powerful Muslim Brotherhood and says he is seeking broader relationships in the Middle East, including with Tehran. But he has so far reacted with caution to Iran's overtures.

Jewish settlers leave West Bank outpost

AFP, Migron

The residents of Migron, the largest and oldest Israeli settlement outpost in the West Bank, evacuated the site voluntarily yesterday ahead of a court-ordered deadline, police told AFP. The outpost in the occupied West Bank, built without Israeli state permission, is on private Palestinian land and in August 2011 Israel's Supreme Court ordered that it be cleared. The evacuation has been repeatedly delayed in the face of fierce settler opposition, but last week the court said the 50 families resident in the outpost had to be out by the end of Tuesday. A handful of mostly women and children were seen leaving their homes early yesterday, although none appeared to be taking luggage with them, an



US President Barack Obama speaks at a campaign event in Iowa yesterday. President Obama tried to bolster his re-election campaign with a fierce critique of the Republicans' convention saying they have offered nothing new. Inset, Mitt Romney greets supporters during a campaign rally in Ohio on Saturday.

Blair, Bush should face trial over Iraq war: Tutu

AFP, London

Archbishop Desmond Tutu yesterday called for British ex-leader Tony Blair and former US president George W Bush to face trial in The Hague for their role in the Iraq war. The South African peace icon, writing in The Observer newspaper, accused the pair of lying about weapons of mass destruction and said the invasion left the world more destabilised and divided "than any other conflict in history". Tutu argued that different standards appeared to apply for prosecuting African leaders than western counterparts, and added that the death toll during and after the Iraq conflict was sufficient for Blair and Bush to face trial. "On these grounds alone, in a consistent world, those responsible for this suffering and loss of life should be treading the same path as some of their African and Asian peers who have been made to answer for their actions in The Hague," Tutu wrote in the weekly Sunday newspaper. "But even greater costs have been exacted

Iraq war, had snubbed Blair last week, pulling out of a South African conference on leadership last week because the ex-premier was attending. The peace icon said he had boycotted the event in protest at Blair's "morally indefensible" support of the US-led 2003 Iraq invasion. He added: "Leadership and morality are indivisible. Good leaders are the custodians of morality. "The question is not whether Saddam Hussein was good or bad or how many of his people he massacred. The point is that Mr Bush and Mr Blair should not have allowed themselves to stoop to his immoral level. "If it is acceptable for leaders to take drastic action on the basis of a lie, without an acknowledgement or an apology when they are found out, what should we teach our children?" The Nobel Peace Prize winner also argued that the 2003 Iraq war to oust Saddam Hussein had created the backdrop for civil war in Syria,

NEWS IN brief

Sr N Korea official meets Iran leader

AFP, Seoul
North Korea's ceremonial head of state has vowed to strengthen ties with Iran and reaffirmed a shared hostility towards the United States during a meeting with Iran's leader, state media said yesterday. Kim Young-Nam, attending a summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Tehran, met with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Saturday to clarify Pyongyang's "firm stand" to boost ties with Iran, the North's KCNA said. Kim stressed the need for more bilateral exchanges among high-level delegations as well as to boost economic and diplomatic ties during the talks that took

Monks back anti-Rohingya plan

AP, Yangon
Hundreds of Buddhist monks in Myanmar yesterday staged a rally in support of the president and his proposal to send the members of a Muslim minority group to another country. The rally in Mandalay is the latest indication of deep sentiment against the Rohingya minority after June violence with ethnic Rakhine Buddhists that left 80 people dead and tens of thousands displaced. President Thein Sein suggested in July that Myanmar send all Rohingya to any country willing to take them, a proposal quickly opposed by the UN

Hamas declares cabinet reshuffle

AFP, Gaza City
The head of the Hamas government in Gaza, Ismail Haniya, announced a cabinet reshuffle yesterday, appointing seven new ministers including a new finance minister. Haniya said the reshuffle was "normal procedure after nearly six years of work by some ministers and in order to achieve specific goals for the current period." Violence after the 2006 poll left the West Bank and Gaza divided, with Fatah governing the West Bank

Pirate Bay co-founder arrested

AFP, Phnom Penh
A co-founder of top Swedish filesharing site The Pirate Bay, who is on an international wanted list, has been arrested in the Cambodian capital at Stockholm's request, police said Sunday. Gottfrid Svartholm Warg alias Anakata, who is a friend of WikiLeaks' Julian Assange, was handed a one-year prison sentence by a Swedish court in 2009 for promoting copyright infringement but failed to show up to serve his term at the start of this year. "His arrest was made at the request of the Swedish

INSIDER ATTACKS US suspends training of Afghan cops

AFP, Kabul

US special forces in Afghanistan have suspended training for about 1,000 Afghan police recruits to carry out checks on existing members, the military said yesterday, after a surge in insider attacks on Nato. There has been a sharp rise in so-called "green-on-blue" attacks recently, in which members of the Afghan security forces turn their weapons on their Western allies, sometimes their military trainers. There have been more than 30 such incidents this year, claiming the lives of 45 coalition troops -- about 14 percent of the overall death toll in the war for 2012. "Current partnered operations have and will continue, even as we temporarily suspend training of about 1,000 new ALP (Afghan Local Police) recruits while re-vetting current members," a spokesman for the US forces in Afghanistan, Colonel Thomas Collins, said. The ALP is a US-sponsored police force with around 30,000 members, recruited to fight Taliban insurgents in remote areas of the Afghan countryside. "While we have full trust and confidence in our Afghan partners, we believe this is a necessary step to validate our vetting process and ensure the quality indicative of Afghan Local Police," the spokesman said. The Washington Post said the re-vetting process would affect more than 27,000 Afghan troops.

World is not doing enough Israel PM urges tougher stance against Iran

AFP, Jerusalem

The world is failing to draw a "clear red line" for Iran over its nuclear programme, Israel's prime minister said yesterday after a new UN report found Tehran had doubled its capacity at a nuclear site. "I think that we should speak the truth -- the international community is not drawing a clear red line for Iran," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said at the start of his weekly cabinet meeting. "Iran doesn't see determination from the international community to stop its nuclear programme," he added. "Until Iran sees this clear red line and this determination, it won't stop advancing its nuclear programme. Iran must never be allowed to acquire nuclear arms." The comments are Netanyahu's first since the details of a new report from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

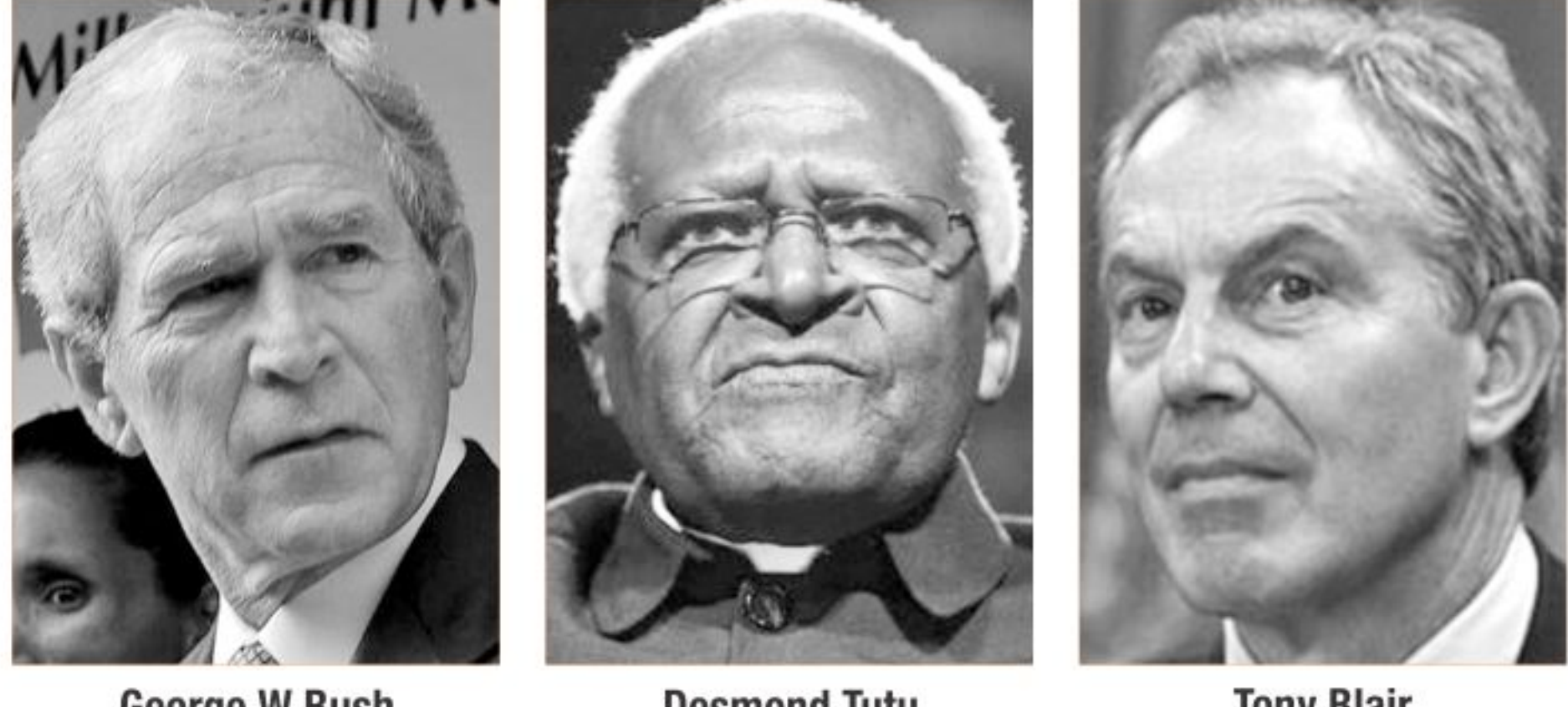


emerged on Thursday. The report said that Iran has doubled its uranium enrichment capacity at the underground Fordo facility, in spite of UN Security Council resolutions, sanctions and talk of Israeli military action. Earlier, a confidant of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Saturday that US President Barack Obama had yet to present a credible military threat that could deter Iran from seeking nuclear weapons. The latest criticism was voiced by Tzachi Hanegbi, an influential former legislator who quit the opposition Kadima party in July to join up with Likud and Netanyahu, with whom he has always maintained a close relationship. "I don't see that there is a credible threat for American action, the rhetoric of the US president is too vague, very amorphous... I don't see that (Obama's words) will be translated into more tangible intentions," Hanegbi said.

Ethiopia gives Meles state funeral

AFP, Addis Ababa

Tens of thousands of Ethiopians and many African leaders mourned late strongman Meles Zenawi yesterday at the first state funeral for a leader of the Horn of Africa nation in over 80 years. Followed by giant crowds, Meles's flag-draped coffin was carried on a carriage through the capital from the National Palace to the vast Meskel Square, his family dressed in black following behind, many in tears. The long-serving prime minister, who died last month aged 57, was hailed as an African hero and was a key Western ally in a region home to al-Qaeda-linked groups, but also criticised by rights groups for a crack-down on basic freedoms.



George W Bush, Desmond Tutu, Tony Blair



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