

Israel kills Gazan despite truce

AFP, Gaza City

A Palestinian was shot dead by Israeli forces near the Gaza border yesterday, the first casualty since the two sides agreed a truce ending their week-long conflict, Palestinian medical sources said.

An Israeli army spokeswoman could not confirm the incident, saying only that "disturbances" had broken out on the Palestinian side of the Gaza border early yesterday, prompting Israeli soldiers to fire warning shots.

The Palestinian emergency services identified the dead man as Abdelhadi Qdeih Anwar, 21. They said he was killed in the southern Gaza Strip village of Khuzaa. Nineteen other Palestinians suffered gunshot wounds.



Thousands of Congolese flee the town of Sake, 26km west of Goma, following fresh fighting in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo town on Thursday. Aid agencies yesterday warned of a looming humanitarian crisis in Congo after another day of fighting sent thousands of people fleeing for safety.

PHOTO: AFP

Morsi defends 'power grab'

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's Islamist President Mohamed Morsi yesterday told supporters that Egypt was on the path to "freedom and democracy," a day after he assumed sweeping powers that critics said made him a dictator.

"Political stability, social stability and economic stability are what I want and that is what I am working for," he told an Islamist rally outside the presidential palace.

Secular opponents staged a rival rally in Cairo's Tahrir Square to denounce Morsi's power grab after he issued a decree on Thursday that gives his decisions immunity from judicial oversight.

Morsi attacked his opponents in the judiciary who annulled the Islamist-dominated parliament before his election in June and were considering voiding an Islamist-dominated constituent assembly next month.



His decree, granting himself unprecedented power, will expire when a new constitution is approved by the middle of February.

But his opponents say he has become a dictator with even more power than president Hosni Mubarak, who was toppled in a popular mass uprising in early 2011.

Morsi's supporters say the decree was necessary to bring an end to the turbulent transition period.

Mexico seeks to change its name

BBC ONLINE

Mexican President Felipe Calderon has sent a bill to congress to change the official name of the country.

The current name, the United States of Mexico, was adopted in 1824 and was intended to emulate its northern neighbour. The name United States of Mexico (Estados Unidos Mexicanos) was brought in after independence from Spain.

President Calderon wants to change it to just Mexico, as the country is known the world over.

Calderon, who leaves office on 1 December, said Mexico no longer needed to copy any foreign power.

"The name of our country no longer needs to emulate that of other nations," Calderon told a news conference.

It is used mostly on official documents, money and other government material.

Calderon first suggested the name change as a congressman in 2003, but the bill did not make it to a vote.

EU budget summit ends in failure

AFP, Brussels

Talks on the European Union's trillion-euro budget ended in deadlock yesterday as leaders of the bloc's 27 member states failed to overcome seemingly irreconcilable differences on how to reduce spending.

"There is no agreement," said one official at the Brussels summit.

Tensions between rich and poor states and Britain's demands for austerity in the budget for the seven years from 2014 to 2020 had set the summit on a rocky course from the start.

Britain was cast as the potential chief spoiler at the meeting, with Prime Minister David Cameron threatening to wield his veto unless spending is frozen in real terms, arguing that at a time of austerity at home the EU must also make cuts.

Britain, like many countries across Europe, is responding to economic crisis with major public spending cuts and Cameron argues that at a time of austerity at home the EU must also make deep cuts.

An EU diplomat said the main obstacle at the summit was Cameron's demand for reductions in the planned trillion-dollar budget, adding that "the most virulent" countries seeking cuts were Britain, Sweden and the Netherlands.

The sense of summit crisis was heightened by the failure on Wednesday at a eurozone finance ministers' meeting to unblock bailout funds needed to keep Greece from bankruptcy.

Israelis not satisfied with truce: Poll

PTI, Jerusalem

A poll shows about half of Israelis think their government should have continued its military offensive against Palestinian militants in Hamas-ruled Gaza.

The independent Maagar Mohot poll released yesterday shows 49 per cent of respondents feel Israel should have kept going after squads who fire rockets into Israel. Thirty-one percent supported the government's decision to stop.

Twenty-nine per cent thought Israel should have sent ground troops to invade Gaza.



NEPAL POLITICAL CRISIS President sets deadline, calls for unity govt

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's president yesterday set a November 29 deadline for the country's warring political parties to form a national unity government in an attempt to break the deadlock crippling the Himalayan nation.

Nepal has been run by a caretaker Maoist-led government since the collapse in May of an interim assembly that had failed in its main task of drawing up a new constitution following a 10-year civil war that ended in 2006.

"President Ram Baran Yadav appealed to the political parties to choose the prime minister and recommend ministers for a cabinet based on political consensus by November 29," said a statement from his office.

The current caretaker government called elections this week to elect a new parliament in April or May next year.

Nepal has been caught in a turbulent transition since 2006 when it emerged from its civil war between Maoist rebels and the state.



This photo shows a half-demolished apartment building standing in the middle of a newly-built road thanks to a Chinese couple that refused to move in Wenling, in eastern China's Zhejiang province. Luo Baogen, 67, and his 65-year-old wife have waged a four-year battle to receive more than the 41,300 USD compensation offered by the local government of Daxi, a Chinese newspaper said. The phenomenon is called a "nail house" in China, as such buildings stick out and are difficult to remove, like a stubborn nail.

PHOTO: AFP

IMPEACHMENT BID Sri Lanka top judge hearing begins

BBC ONLINE

Sri Lanka's parliament yesterday began an impeachment hearing against Chief Justice Shirani Bandaranayake.

Dr Bandaranayake, 54, faced an 11-member parliamentary committee which is investigating 14 charges of financial and official misconduct.

The Supreme Court chief justice denies the charges levelled against her.

Critics say this move is aimed at stifling the courts' independence after the Supreme Court blocked a recent government bill - officials deny this.

They say due process will be followed, but the state media has been running a campaign against her, saying the judge is unfit to hear cases, correspondents say.

Yesterday's hearing went ahead despite a non-binding court order to stay the process until legal challenges to the impeachment had been considered.



Missiles near Syria risk serious conflict: Russia

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday warned any deployment of Patriot missiles by Turkey on its border with Syria may create a temptation to use the weapons and spark a "very serious armed conflict" involving Nato.

"I understand that no one has any intention to see Nato get sucked into the Syrian crisis," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told reporters, reiterating concerns aired by the foreign ministry on Thursday.

But "the more arms are being accumulated, the greater the risk that they will be used," he added.

"Any accumulation of weapons creates a risk that any provocation may trigger a serious armed conflict. We would like to avoid it at all costs," Lavrov noted.

Lavrov spoke after Turkey turned to Nato to request the deployment of sur-

face-to-air Patriot missiles to protect its troubled border with Syria.

Nato chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen said earlier this week that Nato would consider the request for Patriots "without delay."

Meanwhile, two main Kurdish groups have agreed to join forces in a standoff with hundreds of Islamist rebels in north-eastern Syria, a Syrian Kurdish representative and an activist said yesterday.

The agreement sets the stage for an expanded conflict in the area between Islamist rebels opposed to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Syrian Kurdish forces.

And Iran's influential parliament speaker Ali Larijani met Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus yesterday at the start of a regional tour to find a solution to the conflict in his country's key ally.

NEWS IN brief

Nigeria to host D8 trade talks

AFP, Islamabad

Nigeria will host trade talks among the Developing Eight in February as part of efforts to increase business within member states and Africa, Nigeria's trade and investment minister said.

Aganga, who held talks with his Egyptian counterpart on the margins of the D8 summit in Islamabad, said there were also plans to boost trade within Africa. Nigeria and Egypt are the only two African members of the D8.

The D8 groups Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey, with an estimated total population of one billion.

India test-fires missile interceptor

IANS, Bhubaneswar

India yesterday test-fired a ballistic missile interceptor from a defence base in Odisha as part of its efforts to create a shield against incoming enemy missiles, defence officials said.

India is developing the interceptors which have been successfully tested several times in the past, to provide air-shield to important Indian cities against hostile attacks.

2 killed in 100-vehicle pile-up in US

BBC ONLINE

Two people died and dozens were injured on Thursday after a pile-up involving some 100 vehicles on a foggy motorway in the US state of Texas.

More than 50 people were taken to hospital and at least eight were critically hurt, local media report.

It happened at Interstate 10 near Beaumont, about 130km east of Houston, on Thanksgiving morning.

Congo suspends army chief

BBC ONLINE

The head of the army in the Democratic Republic of Congo has been suspended pending an investigation into claims that he sold weapons to rebel groups.

A UN report accused Gen Gabriel Amisi of running a network supplying arms to poachers and rebel groups including the notorious Mai Mai Raia Mutomboki. A government spokesman said other officers were also being investigated.

Delhi widens ban on plastic bags

AFP, New Delhi

The Delhi government yesterday imposed a blanket ban on the use of all plastic bags in an attempt to tackle the city's mounting rubbish problems, an official said.

Thin plastic bags -- measuring less than 40 microns thick -- were banned in India's capital in 2009, but the new rules will cover all plastic packaging for items such as magazines and greeting cards as well as garbage bags.

"From today, the government has banned all use, sale and manufacture of plastic bags in the city. No exceptions will be made," a senior official in the Delhi chief minister's office told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"Plastic is an environmental disaster. These bags clog the city's drains, they are non-biodegradable. It might take time, but we have to ensure that this ruling is enforced throughout Delhi," he added.

The last of the Ninjas

BBC ONLINE

Japan's era of shoguns and samurai is long over, but the country does have one, or maybe two, surviving ninjas.

Experts in the dark arts of espionage and silent assassination, ninjas passed skills from father to son - but today's say they will be the last.

Japan's ninjas were all about mystery. Hired by noble samurai warriors to spy, sabotage and kill, their dark outfits usually covered everything but their eyes, leaving them virtually invisible in shadow - until they struck.

Most of their missions were secret so there are very few official documents detailing their activities. Their tools and methods were passed down for generations by word of mouth.

This has allowed filmmakers, novelists and comic artists to use their wild imagination.

Hollywood movies such as Enter the Ninja and American Ninja portray them as superhumans who could run on water or disappear in the blink of an eye.

"That is impossible because no matter how much you train, ninjas were people," laughs Jinichi Kawakami, Japan's last ninja grandmaster, according to the Iga-ryu ninja museum.

Kawakami is the 21st head of the Ban family, one of 53 that made up the Koka ninja clan. He started learning ninjutsu (ninja techniques) when he was six, from his master, Masazo Ishida.

Kawakami inherited the clan's ancient scrolls when he was 18. But he has no one to pass the baton. Time has made the fearsome assassins useless in present world.

The ninjas will not be forgotten. But the once-feared secret assassins are now remembered chiefly through fictional characters in cartoons, movies and computer games, or as a tourist attractions.

