

NEWS IN brief

West Bank tent protesters evicted

AFP, Zaim, Palestinian Territories

Israeli police backed by bulldozers early Sunday evicted Palestinian protesters from a hilltop camp they set up in a West Bank area slated for Jewish settlement, witnesses said.

About 200 Palestinian activists set up the camp, named Bab al-Shams (Gate of the Sun in Arabic), on Friday in the controversial E1 area between Israeli annexed east Jerusalem and the

Internet activist Swartz dies

BBC ONLINE

Aaron Swartz, a celebrated internet freedom activist and early developer of the website Reddit, has died at 26.

The activist and programmer took his life in his New York apartment, a relative and the state medical examiner said. His body was found on Friday.

Swartz began computer programming as a child, and at 14 co-authored an early version of the RSS specification.

Leading internet figures and friends paid tribute to Swartz via tweets or blogs.

Nato-Taliban clash kills civilians

AFP, Ghazni, Afghanistan

Seven Afghan civilians were killed yesterday after a Nato operation against insurgents in a central province which is a flashpoint for Taliban activity, officials said.

The US-led Nato force said it was investigating allegations of civilian casualties after a military operation in which four insurgents were killed in Wardak province.

Tibetan self-immolates in China

AFP, Beijing

A Tibetan has died after setting himself on fire to protest at China's rule of the Himalayan region in the first self-immolation this year, a rights group and overseas media said.

The man burned himself to death at about 1:00 pm (05:00 GMT) on Saturday, said London-based pressure group Free Tibet and US-based Radio Free Asia (RFA), in what is thought to be the first such act since December 9.

'Chavez not in coma'

AFP, Caracas

The brother of Hugo Chavez has denied that the ailing Venezuelan president is in coma, saying the Venezuelan leader is responding well to cancer treatment in Cuba and making progress on a daily basis.

Chavez, whose OPEC-member nation controls the world's largest proven oil reserves, has been out of the public eye since undergoing surgery in Havana on December 11. It is the fourth such operation in the 18 months since his condition was made public.

Pak Taliban say they won't attack army in key area

REUTERS, Peshawar

The Pakistani Taliban said on Saturday they would cease their occasional attacks on the Pakistani army in the Taliban stronghold of North Waziristan and concentrate attacks on Nato forces in Afghanistan instead - an announcement possibly designed to head off divisions in the insurgency.

The ceasefire does not apply to the rest of the country, where there are often fierce clashes

Syria calls UN envoy's mission 'useless'

Artillery pounds rebel zones near Damascus

AFP, Damascus

Official media in Syria renewed attacks on UN and Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi yesterday, calling him biased and saying his peace mission aimed at solving the country's crisis was "useless."

On Wednesday, Brahimi criticised as "one-sided" a proposal by President Bashar al-Assad to end the crisis, and two days later he met top US and Russian officials and urged "a speedy end to the bloodshed" in the strife-torn country.

"It is clear that Mr Brahimi is now out of the loop for the solution for Syria. He has taken sides, he is not a mediator," wrote the pro-regime daily Al-Watan on Sunday's front page.

"Brahimi is incapable of finding a solution to the Syrian crisis.

"He acknowledged in his last meeting with President Assad (on December 24) that Turkey and Qatar will not stop supporting terrorist groups and that he cannot prevent them from doing so," it wrote.

"Brahimi's mission is useless, just like

(his predecessor) Kofi Annan, who resigned when he realised that he had no role to play in a war waged against Syria by several Western capitals," said Al-Watan.

Syria's army sent shells smashing into rebel zones on the outskirts of Damascus Sunday while a Palestinian camp south of the capital was rocked by fresh fighting, a watchdog said.

"Regime troops shelled Daraya, Beit Sahm, Mleha and Moadamiyat al-Sham," said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, referring to rebel-held towns dotted around the edges of Damascus.

The monitoring group, which relies on a network of activists, doctors and lawyers inside Syria, also reported fierce clashes between insurgents and the army in Daraya, southwest of Damascus, and in the Barzeh district of northern Damascus.

Brahimi was appointed to replace Annan in September 2012, after the former UN secretary general resigned when his own peace plan failed to prevent further fighting.

6 held in new bus gang-rape case in India

AFP, Amritsar

Six men have been arrested over the rape of a passenger on a coach in India, police said yesterday, weeks after the gang-rape and murder of a student on a bus in New Delhi sparked nationwide protests.

The victim had boarded the service to her in-laws' home in the northern state of Punjab when she was abducted Friday and driven to a district bordering the Sikh holy city of Amritsar, local police officer Raj Jeet Singh said.

Five men joined the driver and conductor, who had taken her by motor-bike to an unknown address, and took turns to rape the victim before dropping her off near her in-laws' village on Saturday morning, he said. "Six men have been arrested on allegations of having raped a 29-year-old woman... after forcibly taking her to an unknown location on the night of January 11," the policeman told AFP, adding that a seventh suspect was being hunted.

"After raping the victim throughout the night, one of the accused dropped her near her in-laws' house the next morning where she narrated the whole incident to her two sisters-in-law."

He said the extent of her injuries had yet to be established. Police arrested the men late Saturday.



French jets pound Mali

Top Islamist reported killed

AFP, Bamako

French Mirage fighter jets yesterday pounded Mali for a third straight day and a top Islamist leader was reported killed as African troops headed to the west African country.

"There were (air strikes) last night, there are now and there will be today and tomorrow," Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said in televised remarks.

"Our intervention is ongoing and we will continue in order to make them (Islamist fighters) retreat and allow Malian and African forces to go forward and re-establish the territorial integrity of the country," Le Drian said.

The first troops promised by African nations were expected in Mali on Sunday to join the campaign.

Burkina Faso, Niger and Senegal on Saturday each pledged 500 troops for an African-led intervention force.

Also Sunday a security source said a lieutenant of Ansar Dine chief Iyad Ag Ghaly was killed in fighting to recapture the central town of Konna from the rebels.

"The Islamist fighters suffered a real setback with the death of Abdel 'Kojak' Krim," the source said.

On Saturday French troops arrived in the capital Bamako, flying in from bases in Ivory Coast and Chad, a Malian officer told AFP. He refused to give details of their numbers or their mission.

Colonel Paul Geze, the French mission's commander, told Mali's ORTM television he hoped their mission would succeed "as quickly as possible, in the best conditions possible".

IRAN ATTACK PLAN

Netanyahu denies wasting money

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday dismissed allegations by predecessor Ehud Olmert that he wasted billions of dollars preparing for a strike on Iran that did not take place.

Olmert, who once led the centrist Kadima party, told Israel's Channel 2 television on Friday that 11 billion shekels (about \$3 billion) were wasted on "illusionary security escapades that have not been implemented and will not be implemented".

Olmert, prime minister from 2006 to 2009, did not mention Iran by name but Israeli media said his meaning was clear in the attack on Netanyahu in the run-up to a January 22 parliamentary election.

Israel and the West suspect Iran's nuclear program is aimed at developing atomic weapons. Tehran says it is enriching uranium for peaceful purposes only.

"Last year they (Israel's leadership) frightened the whole world and in the end nothing was done," Olmert added, appearing to allude to warnings by Israel that it might strike Iran if Western sanctions failed to curb its nuclear activities.

Netanyahu, who leads the right-wing Likud party and is widely forecast to win the election, has set out a mid-2013 "red line" for tackling Iran's uranium enrichment project.



Thousands Russian opposition supporters rally yesterday on the Boulevard Ring in the center of Moscow against a Kremlin law that banned US adoptions of Russian orphans. The protest dubbed "the March Against Scoundrels" was aimed at naming and shaming the lawmakers who fast-tracked the anti-adoption bill through the lower house parliament, the State Duma.

PHOTO: AFP

Egypt court orders retrial for Mubarak

AFP, Cairo

An Egyptian court yesterday ordered a retrial for former president Hosni Mubarak after accepting an appeal against the life sentence handed him for his involvement in the deaths of protesters in 2011.

Mubarak, 84, his two sons Alaa and Gamal, his former interior minister Habib al-Adly and top security chiefs will now face a new trial, the Court of Cassation, the top appeals court, said after a very brief hearing.

The ruling was met with cries of "Long live justice!" by Mubarak supporters who held up the former strongman's picture and hugged each other in the courtroom, with dozens more outside shouting "We love you, president!"

Mubarak, his sons and Adly will remain



Hosni Mubarak's supporters celebrate after court accepted appeal for retrial.

in jail, however, as they still face separate cases.

Judge Ahmed Ali Abdelrahman told the court he had accepted the appeals by Mubarak, Adly and the prosecution, thereby cancelling all previous rulings by the Cairo criminal court.

A date has still to be set for the new trial, judicial sources said.

The decision comes less than two weeks before the

second anniversary of the popular uprising that unseated Mubarak and paved the way for the election of the country's first Islamist president, Mohamed Morsi.

On June 2, Mubarak and Adly were sentenced to life in prison for failing to prevent the deaths of over 800 protesters during the 18-day uprising that began on January 25, 2011.

Italian consul shot in Benghazi but unhurt

REUTERS, Benghazi

An Italian consul came under fire in his car in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi on Saturday but was unhurt, Italy said, four months after the US ambassador was killed in an attack on the US mission in the city.

A spokesman for the Italian Foreign Ministry confirmed the attack on Guido De Sanctis, Italy's Benghazi consul since 2011, and said he was unhurt.

A security source in Libya who declined to be named told Reuters: "They shot at his car, but the car was armored. He is fine, there are no injuries."

There was no immediate indication who might have been behind the attack.

Security for Westerners in Libya's second city was an acute concern even before the attack on the US consulate, in which four US staff were killed on the anniversary of the September 11 attacks.

American officials say militants with ties to al Qaeda affiliates were most likely involved in that attack.



A guard points at bullet impacts on the vehicle of Italy's consul.

SHIA PROTESTS

Pak PM visits Quetta for talks

BBC ONLINE

The prime minister of Pakistan has arrived in Quetta, where Shia Muslims demanding better security are refusing to bury loved ones killed by bombers.

Raja Pervez Ashraf arrived in the city after other officials failed to negotiate an end to the protest.

Thousands of Shia have been sitting in the open beside the shrouded bodies of victims of Thursday's attacks.

At least 92 people were killed by bombers.

The banned militant group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi said it had carried out the bombings.

BNP trashes

FROM PAGE 20 urged people to give the ruling Awami League another chance to run the country. She also sought cooperation in completing war crimes trials and urged the BNP not to try to protect war criminals.

Tariqul yesterday said the BNP was a freedom fighters' party. "Therefore, we are never against the trial of war criminals. But we repeatedly stressed the need for ensuring international standards in the trial process."

Criticising Hasina, Tariqul said she in her speech had not said anything about holding the next general

polls in a free and fair manner, for which the

whole nation was worried.

"That's why we are rejecting this speech. We want to say clearly on behalf of the BNP that no election was held in the country in a free and fair manner under the Awami League rule in the past. And it [holding fair polls] would not be possible in future as well."

The premier's description of the country's development during the last four years was false and baseless, Tariqul said.

"Prime minister in her speech mentioned six percent GDP growth which is nothing but fictitious and false," he added.

Roadside bomb kills 14 Pak troops

AFP, Miranshah

At least 14 Pakistani soldiers were killed and 25 others injured yesterday when a roadside bomb hit a military convoy in a lawless tribal area bordering Afghanistan, officials said.

The improvised explosive device struck the convoy in Dosali village in the troubled North Waziristan tribal district, a notorious stronghold of Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked militants, a senior military official said.

"At least 14 soldiers embraced martyrdom and 25 others were wounded in an IED (attack)," he said about the bombing which was confirmed by local security officials.

TENSION IN J&K

India-Pak flag meeting in Poonch today

Panchayat members resign

AGENCIES

Pakistan yesterday agreed to a flag meeting in Poonch at 1pm on Monday after the brutal killing of two Indian soldiers. India will reportedly strongly protest against jawan's beheading at flag meeting and demand the severed head, according to TV reports.

Indian and Pakistan troops on late Saturday night traded heavy gunfire along the Line of Control in Poonch sector after the movement of a group of suspected infiltrators was detected, in fresh escalation of tension, reports TNN.

The firing involving small arms and mortars continued intermittently overnight till 0200 hours today in Krishnagati (KG) sub-sector in Poonch district after Indian troops detected the movement of a group of "suspected persons" near LoC opposite KG forward belt. "Movement of 6 to 7 persons was detected close to LoC opposite Krishnagati sub-sector in Poonch sector around 2145 hours yesterday," Defence spokesman Col R K Palta said.

Meanwhile, Panchayat members in Jammu and Kashmir, around 20 panches and sarpanches of the Baramulla district yesterday tendered their resignations citing "threats to their lives", reports PTI.