#### 'Iran restarts uranium conversion'

AP, Vienna

Diplomats say Iran has started changing some nuclear material that could be used for weapons into another form but in amounts too small to reduce concerns about its atomic program.

They say it is changing small amounts of 20percent uranium into reactor fuel. That 20 percent material is only a technical step away from weapons-grade uranium.

## **US uses Pak route for Afghan pullout**

AP, Islamabad

The US has started using the land route through Pakistan to pull American military equipment out of Afghanistan as it draws down its troops in the country, US and Pakistani officials said yesterday.

The US moved 50 shipping containers into Pakistan over the weekend, said Marcus Spade, a spokesman for US forces in Afghanistan. The containers were the first convoys to cross into

## Suu Kyi's party to hold 1st congress

AFP, Yangon

Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) yesterday said it would hold its first ever national congress on March 8-10, reflecting the dramatic political changes sweeping Myanmar.

"It will be the NLD's first nationwide conference held in democratic conditions since the party was founded (in 1988)," NLD lawmaker and

#### 16 killed in Russian coal mine blast

AFP, Moscow

At least 16 miners were killed yesterday when a methane explosion tore through a coal mine in the remote Russian Far North within the Arctic Circle, in the latest disaster to hit the country's mining industry.

Two miners were still missing after the explosion at the Vorkutinskaya mine controlled by Russian steel-making giant Severstal in the Komi region town of Vorkuta, the emergencies ministry

## Liberia plane crash kills 10

AFP, Monrovia

A plane carrying a military delegation from Guinea crashed yesterday in Liberia, killing the army chief of staff and at least nine other people, said officials and a source close to the Guinean presidency.

"There were 10 people on board this flight and none of them survived," said Liberian Information Minister Lewis Brown after the crash in the town of Charlesville, about eight kilometres from Liberia's only international airport.

## No response to talks offer

Says Syria opposition head; Rebels seize largest dam

AFP, Cairo

The head of Syria's opposition coalition, Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib, said yesterday he had received "no clear response" from the regime of President Bashar al-Assad over his offer of dialogue.

Khatib said in late January he was prepared to hold direct talks with regime representatives who did not have "blood on their hands," and so long as the discussions addressed replacing Assad.

"The issue is now in the regime's camp. It has given no clear response yet that it accepts that (Assad) will leave. There has been no official

contact until now," Khatib told reporters in Cairo after talks with Arab League chief Nabil al-Arabi.

"I am sending a last message to the regime, so that it tries to understand the suffering of the Syrian people, because the revolution will continue and will never stop," he added.

"We call on the regime... to leave in order to avoid more bloodshed and destruction. We don't want war, but we have nothing against continuing until we die so that Syria can be free of this regime," he said.

The Assad regime had said it was open to talks but with no preconditions.

UN-Arab League peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi met Syrian opposition leader Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib Sunday in the Egyptian capital Cairo on Sunday and urged him to keep seeking dialogue with the Damascus government, the UN said.

Brahimi repeated his backing for Khatib's push for talks and "encouraged the Coalition to continue in this direction," said a UN statement.

Meanwhile, rebels yesterday seized control of the largest dam in Syria, a vital barrier along the Euphrates River in the northern province of Raqa, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

# Obama to propose nuke arms cuts

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama will use his State of the Union address today to call for dramatic cuts in nuclear arsenals around the world, The New York Times reported late Sunday.



Quoting unnamed administration officials, the newspaper said that in recent months Obama had secured agreement with the US military that its nuclear force can be cut by roughly a third.

In his speech Obama is unlikely to discuss specific numbers but White House officials are looking at a cut that would take the arsenal of deployed weapons to just above 1,000.

The Unites States has about 1,700 nuclear weapons, and the new strategic arms reduction treaty with Russia that passed the Senate at the end of 2009 calls for a limit of roughly 1,550 by 2018.

### PM worries

FROM PAGE 1

knows whether there is an evil design in anyone's mind, a cabinet minister told The Daily Star quoting the prime minister as saying.

She was talking to senior cabinet ministers after the weekly cabinet meeting at Bangladesh Secretariat.

Mentioning that the cabinet has approved proposals to amend the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act giving equal opportunity to the prosecution and defence for filing appeals against any inadequate sentence in war crimes cases, Hasina said the demonstrators should now think of limiting the protest within a certain time frame.

The prime minister also expressed worries over the sufferings of patients and their family members due to the protests at Shahbagh.

Two major hospitals Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University and BIRDEM Hospital -- are in the area and the patients have been facing difficulties to go there, she mentioned.

It would be good, she said, if the demonstrators consider the matter on humanitarian grounds.

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury said "The movement is an out come of the glorious spirit of the Liberation War. Our commitment is so strong that there is no need to make a strategy to try the war criminals.



Tunisians attend a demonstration in solidarity with Basma Khalfaoui Belaid following the assassination of her husband Chokri Belaid in front of the National Constituent Assembly in Tunis yesterday. Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali's gamble on forming a new government in defiance of his own Islamist party after the assassination of opposition head Chokri **Belaid left Tunisia** in political limbo.

## INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES' ACCOUNTABILITY

## Indian SC notice to govt

PTI, New Delhi

The Supreme Court yesterday issued notice to the Centre on a PIL seeking to make intelligence agencies Intelligence Bureau (IB), Research & Analysis Wing (RAW) and National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) accountable to Parliament.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Altamas Kabir sought response from the Centre and the three intelligence wings for bringing the that India is the only democracy in the world agencies under the oversight of Parliament whose intelligence agencies have no legitiand CAG.

The bench also asked Attorney General G EVahanvati to assist it in deciding the PIL filed by an NGO, Centre for Public Interest Litigation.

The NGO's petition has sought directions from the court for Parliamentary oversight

and financial auditing of RAW, IB and NTRO by CAG like in western countries. The NGO has submitted in its

plea that the agencies are being misused for political purposes and there is an urgent need to make these organisations accountable to Parliament. On February 1, senior advo-

cate Anil Divan and advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the NGO, submitted macy in the eyes of the law and are not accountable to the people or Parliament.

The bench had said it is a policy matter to be decided by the Centre but had agreed to hear the plea after the petitioner contended that earlier also the court had passed direction on policy matters.

## India Kumbh Mela stampede kills 36

AFP, Allahabad

A terrifying stampede at a railway station left at least 36 people dead after the main day of India's Kumbh Mela religious festival, which drew record crowds of 30 million, officials said yesterday. The chief organiser of India's massive Kumbh Mela

festival quit after the stampede incident as the emergency services came under fire for their handling of the tragedy. Survivors of the stampede blamed the tragedy on baton-charging police and the slow response of medics.

Dozens more were injured in the crush on Sunday evening at Allahabad, marking a tragic end to the most auspicious day of the 55-day Hindu festival in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, the world's largest gathering of

humanity. After the stampede, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh issued a statement saying he was "deeply shocked" while the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Akhilesh Yadav ordered an inquiry.

Local officials said the railings on a bridge at the station had given way under the pressure of the mass of people, while witnesses said that police had batoncharged the crowd, triggering panic.

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#### MALI INSURGENCY France bombs Islamist hideout

AFP, Gao

France bombed Islamist targets in northern Mali yesterday following a string of guerrilla attacks by the extremists a month after Paris launched an offensive to drive them from its former colony. In a pre-dawn attack,

witnesses said a French army helicopter destroyed a central police station in the northern city of Gao from where rebels from the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) had opened fire from the station on Malian troops Sunday, sparking an hours-long street battle.

An AFP reporter at the scene said the building was destroyed and body parts were lying in the debris.

One witness said an Islamist fighter inside the building had blown himself up.

Along with back-toback suicide bombings Friday and Saturday, also claimed by MUJAO, the latest fighting underlined the threat of a deepening insurgency one month after France began its offensive.



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