

# Myanmar tells UN body it will never seek atom bombs

REUTERS, Vienna

Myanmar told the UN nuclear watchdog yesterday that allegations it was trying to develop atomic bombs were unfounded and that its nuclear activities had solely peaceful ends.

A Norwegian-based exile group said in June that Myanmar had a secret program dedicated to acquiring nuclear weapons capability, following up on similar allegations by defectors from the reclusive, military-ruled country.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said at the time it was looking into the report. Myanmar is a member of both the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Vienna-based UN agency, now holding its annual 151-nation assembly.

"There have been unfounded allegations reported by international media...that Myanmar is attempting to develop a nuclear weapon program," the head of the country's delegation, U Tin Win, said in a speech to the IAEA General Conference.

"We would like to reiterate that the applications of nuclear science and technology in Myanmar are only for peaceful developmental purposes and Myanmar will never engage in activities related to the production and proliferation of nuclear weapons," the Myanmar chief delegate said.

## EXILES ACCUSE JUNTA

In June, an exiled anti-government group said it had carried out an investigation indicating that Myanmar's military junta is pursuing a clandestine nuclear weapons program.

The five-year inquiry by the Norway-based Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) concluded

that Myanmar, formerly Burma, was a long way from producing a nuclear weapon but had gone to great lengths to acquire the technology and expertise to do so.

If true, it would be the first Southeast Asian country with nuclear arms aspirations and alter the strategic landscape of a fast-growing region whose big countries -- from Indonesia to the Philippines and Thailand -- are closely allied with Washington.

The DVB report cited a US nuclear scientist assessing evidence provided by Sai Thein Win, a Burmese defense engineer.

He said he had defected after working in factories built to develop weapons of mass destruction.

Last year, Washington offered Myanmar a fresh start toward improving long-strained relations. But US officials have been disappointed by the junta's refusal to budge on key sticking points involving democratic reforms, as well as growing disquiet over its nuclear stance.

Last October, Myanmar's foreign minister told his Japanese counterpart that his country was seeking Russian nuclear expertise, but only for civilian atomic energy for its people.

The isolated, impoverished country has been under Western sanctions for two decades and analysts say a nuclearized Myanmar could trigger an arms race in the region.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said at a security forum in Thailand last year she was concerned about the possible transfer of nuclear technology to Myanmar from North Korea, which has left the NPT and tested two nuclear devices.



Indian forestry officials and villagers remove the carcass of an elephant, one of seven killed by a goods train over a railroad track, at Moraghat Tea Garden near Binnaguri in Jalpaiguri district of India's West Bengal yesterday. The elephants were hit on Wednesday when they were trying to help two baby elephants that were trapped on the tracks, a forestry official said in a report.

# Israeli raid on aid flotilla broke law : UN probe

BBC ONLINE

Israel's military broke international laws during a raid on a Gaza-bound aid flotilla, a UN Human Rights Council investigation says.

Its report said the action by commandos, which left nine dead, was "disproportionate" and "betrayed an unacceptable level of brutality".

It said there was clear evidence to support prosecutions against Israel for "wilful killing".

Israel rejected the report as "biased" and "one-sided".

It insists its soldiers acted in self-defence during the 31 May raid.

Nine Turkish pro-Palestinian activists were killed and many others injured after Israeli commandos boarded the six-ship convoy as it tried to breach an Israeli naval blockade of Gaza.

The convoy's passengers were detained and later deported by Israel.

There was widespread international criticism of Israel's actions, which severely strained relations with its long-time Muslim ally, Turkey.

In a 56-page report, the UN panel of three international lawyers said: "There is clear evidence to support prosecutions of the following crimes within the terms of article 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention: wilful killing;

torture or inhuman treatment; wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health".

The conduct of the Israeli military and other personnel towards the flotilla passengers was not only disproportionate to the occasion but demonstrated levels of totally unnecessary and incredible violence."

The Convention is an international treaty governing the protection of civilians in times of war.

The UN fact-finding mission also said the Israeli blockade of the Palestinian territory was "unlawful" because of a humanitarian crisis there.

The panel had interviewed more than 100 witnesses in Britain, Jordan, Switzerland, Turkey, but not in Israel.

Before the report was released, Israel dismissed the Human Rights Council as being biased, politicised and extremist.

After the findings were published, it said the report was "as biased and as one-sided as the body that has produced it".

There is also a separate UN inquiry - ordered by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon - into the raid. Israel has said it will co-operate with the investigation.

# Colombian army kills top militant leader

AFP, Bogota

Colombia's army said yesterday it has killed a top leader with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the country's oldest and fiercest rebel insurgency.

The army said it has killed Jorge Briceño Suarez, who is also known as Victor Julio Suarez Rojas and the alias Mono Jojoy, the head of FARC's military operations.

The US State Department, which had been offering a reward of up to five million dollars for information leading to the arrest or conviction of the rebel leader, described him as playing key role directing the group's drug-trafficking operations, including the production and distribution of hundreds of tonnes (kilos) of cocaine around the world.

# Mass protests in France against retirement at 62

AFP, Paris

French unions staged mass protests and strikes yesterday, hoping to bring more than two million onto the streets to defy President Nicolas Sarkozy's plan to hike the retirement age to 62.

Between one and three million French workers rallied two weeks ago to fight the reforms and now unions are hoping for an even bigger day of demonstrations to keep the right to retire at the age of 60.

Sarkozy, already under attack from the European Union for deporting Roma and from the media over a lingering financial scandal, is facing fierce opposition to his pension reform plans, but says he will press on regardless.

The issue is central to both his reform programme and his personal political survival strategy, with less than two years to go before he seeks re-election.

More than two thirds of French -- 68 percent -- support the day of action, according to an opinion poll published by the communist daily L'Humanité, while only 15 percent are against it.

However, the pension reform bill has already been passed by France's lower house of parliament and will be debated from October 5 by the upper house, the Senate, where it is expected to

pass comfortably.

Several schools announced in advance that they would be closed, and reports suggested up to half of teachers would be on strike.

French men and women can under current rules retire at 60, but they only get a full pension if they have paid social security contributions for a given period, which for most people now in work is 40.5 years.

Under the new law, the number of years of payroll social security payments needed to get a full pension is due to increase in stages to 41.5 years, and the minimum retirement age is to go up to 62.

The age at which retirees can get a full state pension even if they have not paid the required number of years is currently 65. The new law calls for this to increase gradually to 67 by 2018.

Unions and opposition politicians say the plan puts an unfair burden on workers, particularly women, part-timers and the former unemployed who might struggle to hit the 41.5 year requirement.

The government argues the reform could save 70 billion euros (90 billion dollars) by 2030 at a time when France's public deficit -- at around eight percent of GDP -- is well above the eurozone target of three percent.

# Typhoon Fanapi kills 54 in China

AFP, Beijing

Typhoon Fanapi, one of the strongest storms to hit China in years, has left 54 people dead and 42 missing in flooding and landslides in the south of the country, state media said yesterday.

Xinhua news agency said 79,000 people had been evacuated due to Fanapi, which hit China on Monday a day after raking Taiwan with heavy rains, killing two people and leaving more than 100 injured on the island.

All of China's deaths occurred in the southern province of Guangdong, which has been battered by its worst rains in a century, it said.

Of those missing, 25 people disappeared in a rain-triggered mudslide, state media reports had said.

Fanapi made landfall in Fujian province in the south-east but no casualties have been reported there.

# Arctic must remain 'zone of peace' Says Putin

AFP, Moscow

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin called yesterday for "a zone of peace" in the Arctic as Russia and its Polar neighbours scramble to stake their claims to the region's energy-rich seabed.

"We think it is imperative to keep the Arctic as a zone of peace and cooperation," Putin told international participants at the first Arctic Forum in Moscow, which stressed the eye-watering potential for offshore development.

"We all know that it is hard to live alone in the Arctic," Putin said, calling for foreign capital to exploit the Russian Arctic.

"We have heard futuristic predictions threatening a 'battle for the Arctic'," he added. But "the majority of scary scenarios about the Arctic do not have any real basis."

Opening the two-day conference a day earlier, Iceland's President Ólafur Grímsson had called for an end to "Cold War" tensions over the Arctic, saying the time for such a struggle had passed.

Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States are locked in a race over how to divide Arctic resources and shipping routes as scientists predict that global warming could leave it ice-free by 2030.

Over one quarter of the earth's untapped energy riches are believed to be buried in the sea floor under the North Pole.

But in a nod to environmental concerns raised by many forum participants, Putin pledged Russia would protect the region's fragile ecology.

"Not one industrial project in the Russian Arctic will be undertaken without consideration for the strictest ecological demands. This is a key position of the Russian Federation," Putin vowed.

# Obama urges support for Middle East talks

BBC ONLINE

US President Barack Obama has urged fellow world leaders to support Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations currently under way.

He was speaking at the 65th UN General Assembly at the organisation's New York headquarters.

The week-long diplomatic marathon comes on the heels of a development summit which ended with a US pledge to revamp its foreign aid policy.

Leaders will also hold dozens of extra meetings on the sidelines.

Peace-keeping in Somalia, the possible break-up of Sudan, the conflict in Yemen, climate change and UN reform are all set to feature in these fringe meetings, which our diplomatic correspondent Jonathan Marcus says constitute the most important business of the event.

While the Millennium Development Goals summit - which was also held in New York - had a clear focus, this meeting is more of a free-style event, says our diplomatic correspondent.

## 'FREE-STYLE EVENT'

At the UN General Assembly, leaders take to the stage to make speeches on a subject of their choice.

Mr Obama's speech reads more like a plea to keep negotiations going than a blueprint to the future. Ever since he took office he has expressed his commitment to making peace in the Middle East.

But he has also had a crash course in the realities of Middle Eastern diplomacy.

He refers to the direct talks that are going on between the Palestinians and Israelis. So far they are all the Obama administration has to show for a year-and-a-half of hard work.

There's a real chance though that they may fail soon over the question of Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is adamant that if Israel doesn't prolong the partial freeze on building in the occupied territories, he will leave the talks.

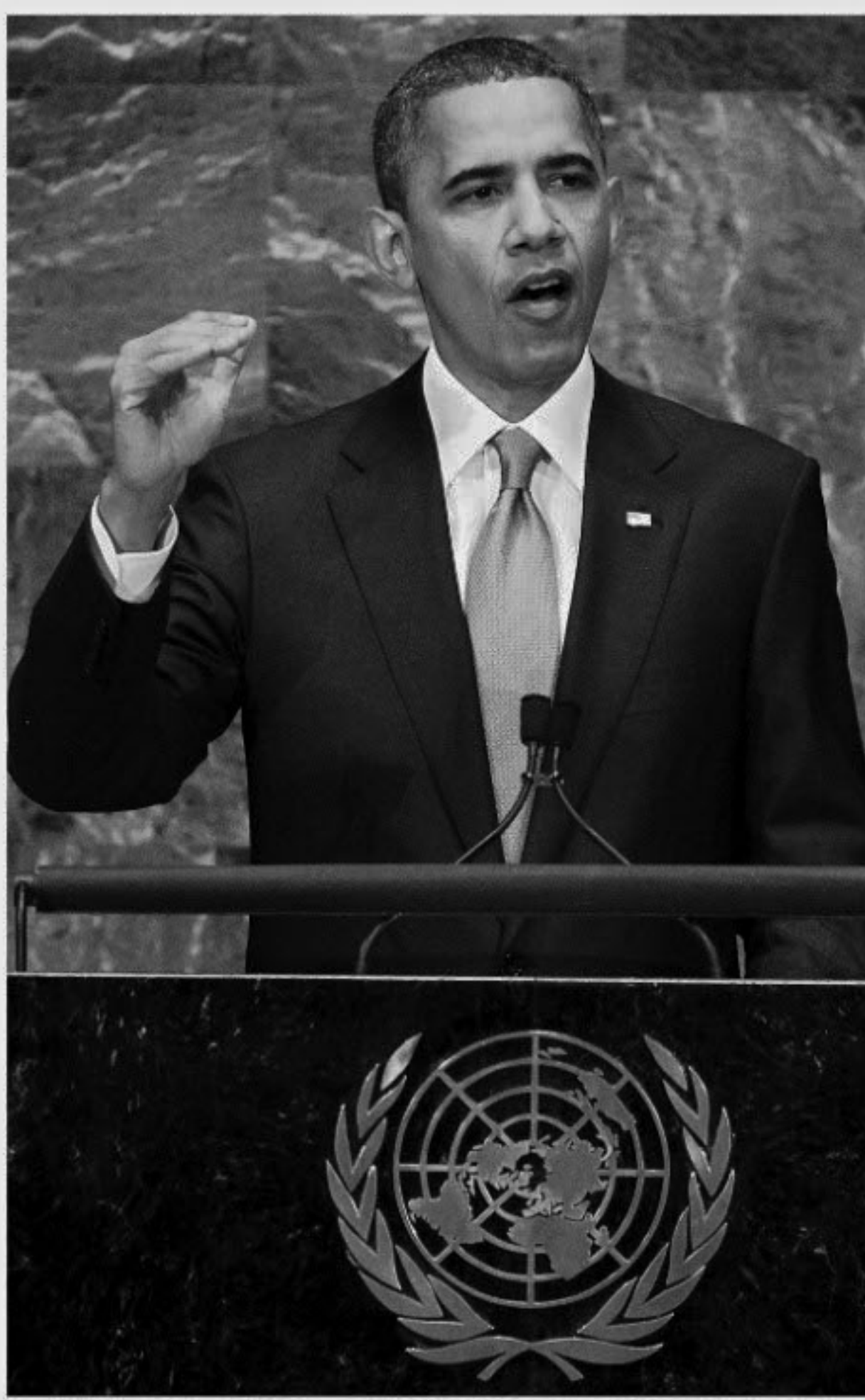
The freeze is due to end on the 26th of this month. This week, US diplomats have been trying to get Israelis and Palestinians to find a way through that deadline. So far it doesn't look as if they have succeeded.

Speaking shortly after UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon launched the diplomatic marathon, the US president urged the audience to support Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations which started on 2 September.

"We have travelled a winding road over the last 12 months, with few peaks and many valleys," Mr Obama said.

"But this month, I am pleased that we have pursued direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians in Washington, Sharm el-Sheikh and Jerusalem."

"Peace must be made by Israelis and Palestinians, but each of us has a responsibility to do our part as well."



President of the United States of America, Barack Obama addresses the 65th session of the General Assembly at the United Nations yesterday in New York City.

"Those who long to see an independent Palestine rise must stop trying to tear down Israel."

Mr Obama accepted that many remained pessimistic about the peace process, with cynics saying the two sides were too distrustful of each other, and too divided internally, to forge lasting peace.

"Rejectionists on both sides will try to disrupt the process, with bitter words and with bombs," he said. "Some say that the gaps between the parties are too big; the potential for talks to break down is too great; and that after decades of failure, peace is simply not possible."

"If an agreement is not reached, Palestinians will never know the pride and dignity that comes with their own state. Israelis will never know the certainty and security that comes with sovereign and stable neighbours who are committed to co-existence."

"The hard realities of demography will take hold. More blood will be shed. This Holy Land will remain a symbol of our differences, instead of our common humanity."

# North Korea reshuffles officials

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

North Korea has announced a reshuffle of three senior officials just days before a crucial ruling communist party meeting that is expected to outline a change in the country's leadership.

State media yesterday reported the promotion of three diplomats ahead of the Workers' Party of Korea meeting described as "historic".

All three of the newly promoted diplomats have been involved in international negotiations on the disarmament of North Korea's nuclear programme.

The announcement came as North Korea prepared for its biggest political meeting in decades. The meeting next week is expected to pave the way for a power transfer from Kim Jong-il, the North Korean leader, to his son, Kim Jong-un.

The Korea Central News Agency (KCNA) said Kang Sok-ju, the North Korean first vice-minister of foreign affairs, was made a vice-premier of the cabinet.

Kang, known to be overseeing Pyongyang's nuclear negotiations and diplomatic policies on the US, accompanied the North Korean leader during his visit to China last month.

Kim Kye-gwan, the country's chief negotiator in the six-nation nuclear disarmament talks, was picked to fill Kang's slot at the foreign ministry, while Ri Yong-ho, Kim's deputy in the talks, was named a vice-foreign minister.

The ruling party conference "for electing its supreme leadership body will take place in Pyongyang on September 28", the KCNA said on Tuesday.

A similar congress held in 1980 confirmed Kim, the North Korean leader, as successor to his father Kim Il-sung, who died in 1994.

# Mogadishu street battles kill 20

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

At least 20 people have been killed and 70 others injured in a series of street battles in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, sources say.

Shells fired by African Union (AU) peacekeepers hit Bakara market, in central Mogadishu, during yesterday's fighting, Al Jazeera has learned.

"Heavy artillery shelling is ongoing and has left 70 people wounded", Al Jazeera's Jama Nur reported from Mogadishu.

The violence started early yesterday morning when AU troops clashed with anti-government fighters in the south of Mogadishu.

The street battles in Mogadishu are the latest in a string of deadly incidents to hit the Horn of Africa nation.

A suicide bomber blew himself up on Monday at the gates of the presidential palace in Mogadishu, an attack blamed by the Somali police on al-Shabab, Somalia's main anti-government group.

Al-Shabab has been fighting the fragile transitional government for three years and now controls much of Mogadishu and huge tracts of southern and central Somalia.

DEVASTATING EFFECT Somalia has been plagued by anarchy since regional commanders toppled Mohamed Siad Barre from power in 1991. Pirates are active in its coastal waters and have driven up shipping costs in the Gulf of Aden.

Anti-government fighters have used suicide bombers to devastating effect over the past two years, killing five government ministers and dozens of AU keeping troops. Al-Shabab was also behind attacks in Uganda in July that killed at least 79 people.

The AU forces in Mogadishu have focused their manpower on shielding the president and guarding the sea port and airport from attacks.

# WANTED BUILDING SPACE IN GAZIPUR/ASHULIA/SAVAR/UTTARA

A multinational company planning to set up a training academy wants to take on rental building space of 20000 to 30000 square feet in Gazipur/Ashulia/Savar area. Preferably in a new or up-coming building, the space should be available for occupation from January 2011 and it should have adequate electricity supply and good road connection. Interested owners/parties of the buildings should send offer by October 07, 2010 to The Daily Star, Box No A-76, 19 Karwan Bazar, Dhaka-1215. Dhaka call in 0172-7209662 (Faruk).