

UN calls for talks to end Sudan crisis

US urges troops withdrawal, threatens aid

AFP, Juba

The UN human rights chief condemned yesterday attacks on Sudan's flashpoint district of Abyei, and urged both Khartoum and the southern Sudan People's Liberation Army to negotiate an end to the crisis.

The call came after the Khartoum government declared Abyei was a "northern town," dismissing international calls to pull its troops out of the border district also claimed by south Sudan, after days of fighting.

A southern minister in Khartoum's national unity government resigned, meanwhile, over what he called "war crimes" in Abyei, as the United Nations reported that more than 15,000 people fled the disputed area to find shelter in further south.

The UN human rights chief Navi Pillay said: "I urge all parties to explore a negotiated solution to the Abyei crisis and to avoid a descent into further conflict and chaos," she said in Geneva yesterday, adding that all rights violations must be investigated and perpetrators brought to justice.

Khartoum's defence minister, Abdulrahim

Mohammed Hussein, said however that "Abyei will remain a northern town until the population decides on their situation by themselves," as quoted in a report late Monday by Suna state news agency.

The United States urged Sudan on Monday to withdraw its forces from the flashpoint district and warned their presence would jeopardise lucrative US efforts to normalise ties with Khartoum.

North Sudan has put at risk possible debt relief worth billions of dollars by seizing the disputed town of Abyei, US envoy to Sudan Princeton Lyman has said.

It had also jeopardized negotiations due to be resolved before South Sudan's independence in July, he said.

He added that Washington would find it difficult to remove Sudan from its list of state sponsors of terrorism unless troops were withdrawn from Abyei.

Abyei, a fertile border region claimed by both north and south Sudan, was due to vote on its future in January alongside a referendum on independence for the south, which delivered a landslide for secession.



US President Barack Obama (L) and US First Lady Michelle Obama (R) meet Britain's Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge (2nd L) and his wife Catherine, the Duchess of Cambridge (2nd R) at Buckingham Palace yesterday during the president's state visit.

Queen greets Obama on state visit

BBC ONLINE

The Queen has greeted yesterday US President Barack Obama, and his wife Michelle, at the start of his first UK state visit.

They have laid a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey and will attend a state banquet at Buckingham Palace.

It came after David Cameron and Obama spoke of "essential" UK-US ties.

In a joint article in the Times, Obama and Cameron said of their countries' relationship: "Ours is not just a special relationship, it is an essential relationship - for us and for the world."

"When the United States and Britain stand together, our people and people around the world can become more secure and more prosperous," said the joint statement.

Japan's plant admits partial meltdowns

AFP, Tokyo

The operator of Japan's tsunami-hit Fukushima nuclear power plant yesterday said it believed fuel had partially melted inside three reactors, as long suspected by experts.

Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) said new readings on water gauges indicated that the fuel had dropped to the bottom of the containment vessels of units two and three, matching its earlier assessment of unit one.

In all three reactors, relatively low temperatures indicated that the fuel was now mostly covered by water that has been pumped into the vessels, meaning there was no immediate threat of an uncontrolled full meltdown.

Iceland volcanic eruption slows, ash plume drops

Thousands stranded at airports

AFP, Reykjavik

Activity at Iceland's erupting volcano has slowed significantly and its ash plume has dropped to a quarter of its peak of 20 kilometres, experts in Iceland said yesterday.

"There is less activity... A lot less of the ash is going into the atmosphere," Petur Matthiasson, a spokesman for Iceland's Civil Protection and Emergency Management Administration, told AFP.

The plume of ash from Grimsvotn, located in the southeast of Iceland at the heart of its largest glacier, Vatnajökull, had dropped from its peak of 20 kilometres in the hours after the eruption began to between three and five kilometres yesterday morning, according to official measurements.

"This is good news for aviation at least," Matthiasson said, pointing out while "there is still a lot of ash fall in the vicinity of the volcano in the south of Iceland," the lower column of ash meant "there is a lot less going into the atmosphere and going into the jetstream."

By yesterday, hundreds of flights, espe-

cially to and from Scotland, were cancelled as the ash blew over Britain, but experts said they did not expect to see the same level of air travel disruption as last year, when a cloud of ash from the nearby Eyjafjöll volcano grounded more than 100,000 flights and left eight million passengers stranded.

Olof Baldursdottir, a spokeswoman for the Icelandic Meteorological Office, said some of the decline in the height of the ash could probably be attributed to "strong winds that affect the plume."

Another explanation for the drop could be "that the ice is no longer melting into the crater," making the eruption less explosive, said Susan Stipp, a professor at the Nano Science Centre at the University of Copenhagen who has headed a study published last month on the dangers posed by the Eyjafjöll ash cloud.

That, she explained, would mean "we're going to have more typical ash which is larger particles," she said, hinting the ash could become heavier and thus fall out quicker.

India to offer Africa \$5b credit to nurture trade

AFP, Addis Ababa

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told African leaders yesterday that India will make loans to nurture economic growth on the continent where China is already a big step ahead.

The south Asian country will notably offer African nations \$5 billion in credit lines over three years, he told a trade summit here.

"Africa possesses all the prerequisites to become a major growth pole of the world in the 21st century. We will work with Africa to enable it to realise this potential," Singh said.

He said India will offer five billion dollars of credit lines to African nations over the next three years.

Millions of girls lost to selective abortion in India: study

AFP, Paris

Sex selection of foetuses in India has led to 7.1 million fewer girls than boys up to age six, a gender gap that has widened by more than a million in a decade, according to a study released yesterday.

In Indian families in which the first child has been a girl, more and more parents with access to prenatal ultrasound testing are aborting a second female in the hope that a subsequent pregnancy will yield a boy, said the study, published in The Lancet.

The increasingly lopsided ratio of girls to boys is larger in wealthy households than poorer ones, the researchers reported.

Between 1980 and 2010, they estimate, four to 12 million girls were aborted because of their sex.

"Selective abortion of female foetuses, usually after a firstborn girl, has increased in India over the past few decades, and has contributed to a widening imbalance in the child sex ratio," they conclude.

The female shortfall for the zero-to-six

age bracket was 6.0 million in 2001, and 4.2 million in 1991.

"Increases in selective abortion of girls are probably because of persistent son preference combined with decreases in fertility," the authors say.

The mean number of children per Indian woman fell from 3.8 in 1990 to 2.6 in 2008.

Selective abortion of female foetuses accounts for two to four percent of female pregnancies in India, roughly 300,000 to 600,000 per year out of 13.3 to 13.7 million carrying a girl in 2010, the study found.

From 2001 to 2011, the practice increased at a rate of 170 percent, slowing from 260 percent over the previous decade.

In the study, researchers led by Prabhat Jha of the Centre for Global Health at the University of Toronto, analysed census data from 2011 and earlier.

If the first child was a boy, however, there was no drop in the girl-boy ratio for the second child, showing that families -- especially those better off and more educated -- are far more likely to abort girls if the firstborn is also female.

NEWS IN brief

Palestinian PM had heart attack in US

REUTERS, Houston

Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad suffered a heart attack while visiting the United States, and a hospital spokeswoman said he was in good condition on Monday.

"Mr Fayyad's condition is good," said Adrienne Lallo, a spokeswoman for Seton Medical Center in

Russia cuts Khodorkovsky sentence by one year

AFP, Moscow

A Moscow court yesterday upheld ex-tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky's conviction and cut the Kremlin critic's jail term by one year until 2016, prompting a defence vow to appeal the case in Europe.

An appeals judge ruled that Khodorkovsky and his fellow prisoner and former business associate Platon Lebedev will have to serve "13 years each in a general security prison," an AFP correspondent reported from court.

Blast kills 10 Afghan workers

AFP, Kandahar

Ten people were killed and 30 others wounded yesterday when a truck carrying road workers struck a bomb in southern Afghanistan, officials said.

The incident happened in rural Panjwayi district in the province of Kandahar, which is the birthplace of the Taliban and one of the most violent parts of the country, frequently hit by major attacks.

"Ten dead, 30 injured have been sent to the hospital," said Abdul Qayoum Pukhla, provincial health director of Kandahar.

One survivor who did not want to be named said there were a total of 40 people on board the truck.

Japan anger at S Korean visit to Russia-held isle

AFP, Tokyo

Japan slammed a visit by South Korean lawmakers yesterday to a Russian-held island at the centre of a bitter dispute between Tokyo and Moscow.

Three members of a South Korean parliamentary committee, campaigning to reassert Seoul's claim in another territorial spat with Tokyo, toured one of the disputed southern Kuril islands, press reports said.

12 killed in Yemen fighting

AFP, Sanaa

Two days of clashes in Sanaa between backers of a powerful opposition chieftain and security forces left 12 dead by yesterday, after a defiant President Ali Abdullah Saleh warned of civil war in tribal Yemen.

In the second successive day of fighting, a source close to tribal chief Sheikh Sadiq al-Ahmar told AFP that "an armoured vehicle stationed near the interior ministry fired shells and killed five people" outside his home.

Macheguns and rocket-propelled grenades were used as fierce fighting between police and tribesmen loyal to Sheikh al-Ahmar gripped Al-Hasaba neighbourhood in north Sanaa where his home and the ministry are located, an AFP correspondent said.

Netanyahu rejects 1967 border in key speech

AFP, Washington

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the US Congress yesterday he would uproot settlements in a "generous" peace deal with Palestinians, but ruled out international demands to return to the 1967 borders or share Jerusalem.

In what had been hailed as a landmark speech, the Israeli leader broke no substantial new ground in his positions and rejected key calls from US President Barack Obama and the international community, who have been looking for ways to revive the comatose peace process with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu also ruled out any return to talks as long as the unity deal between Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas and the Islamist Hamas continues, while saying the real stumbling block to peace was the refusal of the Palestinians to recognize Israel as a Jewish state.

"We will be very generous on the size of a future Palestinian state," he said in a speech frequently punctuated by warm applause and several standing ovations from the US lawmakers.

But Netanyahu again ruled out any return to the borders that existed before the 1967 Middle East War or dividing the holy city of Jerusalem.

"Jerusalem must never again be divided. Jerusalem must remain the united capital of Israel," Netanyahu said.

China backs Lagarde for IMF chief: France

Claims of Strauss-Kahn's DNA denied by NY police

AFP, Paris

China would back France's Finance Minister Christine Lagarde to head the International Monetary Fund, chief French government spokesman Francois Baroin said yesterday.

"The Chinese are favourable to the candidacy of Christine Lagarde," Baroin, who is also France's budget minister, told Europe 1 radio, adding that it was too soon to know whether Lagarde would be a candidate.

China's backing would give a significant boost to Lagarde's possible candidacy, which has been opposed by some emerging nations in protest at the tradition of a European always heading the global emergency lender.

However, Japan yesterday repeated calls for an "open" and "transparent" selection process for the new leader of the International Monetary Fund, to which it is



Christine Lagarde

the second-largest donor.

Germany, Britain and other European powers have backed Lagarde to take over as managing director of the International Monetary Fund after her countryman Dominique Strauss-Kahn resigned following his arrest on sex assault charges.

Under a long-standing arrangement between Europe and the USA, a European has always held the top IMF job while an American leads its sister institution, the World Bank.

Meanwhile, reports claimed on Monday that investigators have found traces of semen from former IMF chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn on the clothes of a hotel maid which has been denied by New York police yesterday.

Earlier, The Wall Street Journal and France 2 television channel reported the DNA collected from the chambermaid's shirt matched with that of Strauss-Kahn.

Preacher resets apocalypse date

BBC ONLINE

The evangelical broadcaster who left followers crestfallen by his failed prediction that last Saturday would be Judgement Day says he miscalculated.

Harold Camping said it had "dawned" on him that God would spare humanity "hell on Earth for five months" and the apocalypse would happen on 21 October.

Camping said he felt "terrible" about his



Harold Camping

mistake.

But he said he could not give financial advice to those who spent their life savings in the belief the end was nigh.

Camping had predicted that on 21 May, true believers would be swept up to heaven while a giant earthquake would bring destruction for those left behind.

Some followers donated their life savings or simply gave away their worldly possessions as the day approached.

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