

Sanction bite cripples Syria

Conflict turning to civil war: UN

REUTERS, Beirut

Europe and the United States tightened economic sanctions on Syria, ramping up international pressure as the UN said more than 4,000 people had died in a crackdown on dissidents.

In continuing bloodshed, Syrian army defectors killed eight Air Force intelligence personnel in an attack on their base in the north of the country, according to an opposition group.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay called for international action to protect Syria's civilian population from "continual ruthless repression that, if not stopped now, can drive the country into a full-fledged civil war."

Thursday's incident suggested that armed deserters are turning increasingly from defending civilian protesters against violent repression by Assad's security forces to an offensive of ambushes and roadside bombs, raising the spectre of civil war.

The EU yesterday extended sanctions to three Syrian oil concerns, including the state-owned General Petroleum Corporation (GPC) and Syria Trading Oil (Sytrol), to crank up the financial pressure on the Assad government.

Syrian oil comprises under 1 percent of daily world output but accounts for a big chunk of Syrian government earnings.

The expanded EU sanctions list encompasses media companies and firms the EU says supply sensitive equipment to a research centre that supports Assad's suppression of dissent.

And the UN Human Rights Council yesterday urged tougher international action against Syria, condemning "gross violations" of human rights.



Climate activists protest the inactiveness of big countries and organisations, wearing T-shirts with their logos and flags, regarding climate change on Durban beach, South Africa yesterday. Durban is hosting the UN Climate Change conference this year.

PHOTO: AFP

Egypt awaits polls results

62pc turnout recorded

AFP, Cairo

Egypt awaited yesterday the delayed publication of results for the opening phase of its first post-revolution election, with the hardline Islamists set for comfortable win.

The date for results has been pushed back twice from their initially scheduled time of Wednesday.

A record 62pc vote marked the polls, said the election commission though a higher percentage was reported earlier.

Two demonstrations were also called yesterday--one against the army leaders overseeing the country's promised transition to democracy and another to support the regime -- but turnout was low by recent standards.

Millions of Egyptians embraced their new democratic freedoms this week in Cairo and Alexandria in the first election vote since the toppling of Hosni Mubarak in February.

Suu Kyi hopeful on reforms

Welcomes US move, eyes friendly ties with China

AGENCIES

Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday said she is hopeful that Myanmar can get on to "the road to democracy", after talks with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

She welcomed reforms that have enabled her party to stand in elections, but said more needed to be done and called for political prisoners to be freed.

The democracy leader held a morning of talks with the US top diplomat, the most senior US official to visit Myanmar in 50 years.

They promised to work together to promote democracy in Myanmar.

The democracy champion, speaking after talks with visiting US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during a landmark visit, also said it was good that China's foreign ministry had welcomed Myanmar's moves to engage with the West.

"I am very confident that if we work together... there will be no turning back from the road to democracy," said Suu Kyi after the talks.

But she added that the country was "not on that road yet". The government continues to hold hundreds of political prisoners and the country is still plagued by ethnic conflicts.

The US maintains tight sanctions on senior leaders in Myanmar, which was ruled by a brutal military junta from



Suu Kyi

1962 until last year.

The army handed power to a civilian government last year, but the military's primacy is entrenched in the country's constitution.

However, the government has implemented a series of reforms, and freed Suu Kyi from detention and allowed her to take up a role in public life.

The reforms led to speculation that decades of isolation could be about to end.

Hillary Clinton and Suu Kyi had a private dinner in Rangoon on Thursday - the first time the pair had met in person. The two women met again yesterday at Suu Kyi's Rangoon home, where she was held under house arrest for many years.

On Thursday, Hillary met President Thein Sein, a former general and top leader of the previous regime.

The pair discussed upgrading diplomatic ties, and the US said it would support some modest changes in Myanmar's relationship with the World Bank and the IMF.

But the US stopped short of easing sanctions on Myanmar, linking their removal to further progress on reform. Thein Sein hailed a "new chapter" in relations with the US.

After her talks with Suu Kyi, she met members of Myanmar's ethnic communities and leaders of the country's developing civil society groups. She will fly out of Myanmar later in the day.

UN slashes world growth forecast

AFP, United Nations

The United Nations on Thursday slashed its forecast for world growth to 2.6 percent in 2012 and warned the eurozone debt crisis could further undermine the global performance.

"The world economy is teetering on the brink of another major downturn," the UN said.

After rising 4.0 percent in 2010, the UN predicted 2.6 percent world growth in 2012 and 3.2 percent in 2013. UN economists had earlier said there would be 3.6 percent growth next year.

Developing countries, led by China, Brazil and India, are predicted to continue pulling the world economy forward with average growth of 5.4 percent in 2012 and 5.8 percent in 2013.

WikiLeaks unveils global surveillance industry

AFP, London

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange launched the website's new project Thursday, the publication of files it claims shows a global industry that gives dictators tools to spy on their citizens.

In parallel to Assange's announcement, Wikileaks' partner Owni.fr released evidence that a French firm helped Muammar Gaddafi's former Libyan regime spy on opposition figures living in exile in Britain.

It had already been revealed that the electronics firm, Amesys, had worked with the Libyan regime -- and French rights groups are attempting to take the group to court -- but Owni's files will prove embarrassing.

They appear to show that a manual provided to Libya to operate a "massive Internet surveillance" set-up known as the Eagle system included the email addresses and pseudonyms of opposition leaders.

The Wikileaks files reveal the activities of about 160 companies in 25 countries which



develop technologies to allow the tracking and monitoring of individuals by their mobile phones, email and Internet browsing histories.

"Today we release over 287 files documenting the reality of the international mass surveillance industry -- an industry which now sells equipment to dictators and democracies alike in order to intercept entire populations," Assange told reporters in London.

He said that in the last 10 years it had grown from a covert industry which primarily supplied government intelligence agencies such as the NSA in the United States and Britain's GCHQ, to a huge transnational business.

The documents on the website, <http://wikileaks.org/the-spyfiles.html>, include manuals for surveillance products sold to repressive Arab regimes.

It is the first time WikiLeak has released documents since October 24.

NEWS IN brief

US army hands main base to Iraq

REUTERS, Baghdad

The US military returned its biggest base in Iraq to the government yesterday.

The handover of Victory Base marks a major milestone in the US withdrawal from Iraq.

12,000 troops now remain in Iraq, down from a peak of about 170,000 at the height of the war. The remaining troops will also leave by next year leaving only 200 behind to protect the US embassy there.

US hits Iran with new sanctions

AFP, Washington

The US Senate on Thursday unanimously adopted harsh new economic sanctions on Iran, dismissing US officials' fears they risked fracturing global unity on blocking Tehran's suspected nuclear weapons program.

Lawmakers voted 100-0 to include the measure, which aims to cut off Iran's central bank from the global financial system, in a must-pass annual military spending bill poised for final approval.

Senators rebuffed an 11th-hour campaign from top aides to President Barack Obama who warned the legislation could shatter a growing but fragile global consensus on confronting the defiant Islamic republic over its nuclear drive.

Gillard to be paid more than Obama

AFP, Sydney

Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard is set to get a Aus\$90,000 (US\$92,000) pay rise, meaning she will earn more than US President Barack Obama, reports said yesterday.

Just days after announcing plans to cut public spending to bring the budget back into surplus, News Limited newspapers said Gillard's base salary will rise to Aus\$473,000. This would make her a higher earner than Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron.

18 killed in DRC vote violence

AFP, Kinshasa

Election-related violence in Democratic Republic of Congo has already killed 18 civilians, a rights group said yesterday, amid fears that fresh unrest could erupt over alleged fraud.

Monday's polls in the restive central African country were rocked by rioting at polling stations and deadly attacks in the flashpoint southeastern city of Lubumbashi, after a campaign marred by police crack-downs on opposition rallies and clashes between supporters of rival parties.

NATO ATTACK Pak senators close ranks

AGENCIES

The Pakistan Senate yesterday passed a unanimous resolution against the recent Nato's attack on a Pakistani check-post, reports the dawn.

The Senate opposition leader Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri tabled the resolution. The resolution stated that in case of foreign aggression, the nation would stand united for the country's defence.

The resolution moreover demanded that all resolutions that had been passed in the Senate relating to drone attacks and the war against terror should be implemented.

Meanwhile, Pak Army chief Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani upped the ante in the standoff with the United States by telling his troops on Thursday that aggressors would not be able to avoid a crushing retaliation in future.

Where he vowed to respond to any future 'aggression' by United States and Nato troops based in Afghanistan with 'full force' regardless of its consequences, he also permitted the troops to respond to any attack without waiting for directions.

"Be assured that we will not let the aggressor walk away easily," the army chief said in a message for the troops and added that he had "clearly directed that any act of aggression would be responded with full force, regardless of the cost and consequences".

And AFP said that the White House on Thursday dismissed the notion of offering an apology to Pakistan over the Nato air strikes that killed 24 soldiers, insisting an inquiry was still ongoing as to how the men died.

Pakistan's appetite for peace eroding

AFP, Islamabad

Deadly Nato strikes have sapped Pakistan's appetite for helping the United States carve out a settlement in Afghanistan, experts say, with army chiefs under pressure from their furious junior ranks.

The killing of 24 soldiers in attacks on two Pakistani posts close to the Afghan border on Saturday has prompted fury in the nuclear-armed Muslim nation, where there is little love for the alliance with Washington.

Pakistan's government says it will boycott an international conference on Afghanistan taking place in Germany on Monday, undermining attempts to stabilise the country after 2014 when foreign combat forces are due to leave.

The army, Pakistan's most powerful institution, summoned hand-picked journalists to denounce America and Nato's "deliberate act of aggression".

"Officers were very angry," said one person who attended. "They are also under pressure from the sol-



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani students protest in Lahore against the cross-border Nato air strike on Pakistani troops.

diers, mid-level officers and the families of the victims who tell them: 'Why do you stand with people who kill our soldiers?'

It is the second time in six months that army chief of staff General Ashfaq Kayani, considered a pragmatist and an ally in the United States, has faced the wrath of junior

officers incensed over a US attack.

Yet Washington accuses elements of Pakistan's military and intelligence services of collaboration with the Taliban and other Islamist militants.

Retired lieutenant general Talat Masood said that generals may now be considering how to distance themselves from Nato and the

United States.

"They might withdraw from facilitating the process (bringing militants to eventual peace talks in Afghanistan). I'm not so sure they will continue to cooperate in the same manner," said Masood.

Pakistan believes it has paid too high a price for signing up to the US-led "war on terror" in the dark days after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Homegrown Taliban are bombing cities and waging a bitter insurgency in the northwest. The government says 35,000 people have died in 10 years, including more than 3,000 soldiers killed in battles with Islamist militants.

In September, Pakistan closed ranks and called for peace and reconciliation with Taliban. And it worked too.

In the past six months, attacks have dropped.

"The more tensions you have in the relationships with Washington, the less attacks there are in Pakistan," said a Pakistani analyst.

Pak officials green signalled for attack

Reports Wall Street Journal

AFP, Washington

Pakistani officials gave the green light for the Nato strikes that killed 24 of their troops last month, unaware that the forces were in the area, the Wall Street Journal reported Friday.

US officials told the Journal that an Afghan-led force including US commandos was pursuing Taliban fighters near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border when they came under fire from what they thought was a militant encampment.

When they called in air strikes on the camp, team members contacted a joint command-and-control center manned by US, Afghan and Pakistani troops, and Pakistani representatives said there were no friendly forces in the area, clearing the way for the air assault, the officials told the Journal.

The officials nevertheless acknowledged errors on both sides.

The Pentagon has insisted there was no deliberate attack on Pakistani forces, but US officials have stopped short of apologizing over the incident.

Won't topple govt

Mamata tells Manmohan

PTI, Paschimbanga

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's attempt to win over ally Trinamool Congress on government's decision to allow foreign direct investment in retail was yesterday rebuffed by Paschimbanga Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who told him her party cannot back the move.

However, Mamata also made it clear that her party was not in favour of the United Progressive Alliance government being toppled even as Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee asked the allies and Opposition not to stand in the way of other States implementing the policy.

The jostling over FDI in retail continued to paralyse Parliament for the ninth successive days as both the Houses adjourned for a long weekend to reconvene only next



Mamata Banerjee



Manmohan Singh

Wednesday.

The Trinamool Congress chief told reporters at Dankuni in Hooghly district that the Prime Minister spoke to her on telephone and sought her party's support.

"I told him respectfully that we don't want the government to be toppled on this issue. This is a very sensitive issue. But at the same time, it is not possible for us to FDI entry into retail sector. I am sorry," she said.

"Since you are requesting me, we can discuss this in the party. But our party's stand is clear," Mamta said adding she urged the prime minister to reconsider the decision.

She also appeared unfazed by the remarks of Mukherjee that narrow political gains take precedence over implementation of policy framework even in a "calibrated and sensitive" manner.