

UN chief urges Security Council to act on Syria

AFP, Abu Dhabi

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon yesterday appealed to the Security Council to act with "seriousness" on Syria, where he said the situation has become "unacceptable."

"The situation has reached an unacceptable point," Ban told reporters on the sidelines of an energy summit in Abu Dhabi.

"I sincerely hope that the Security Council will handle this in a sense of seriousness and gravity and in a coherent manner."

"I've been urging and appealing to President (Bashar) al-Assad to stop killing... and to listen to his own people," he said.

"Leaders should always be connected with the people. When a leader is disconnected from the reality and from the people, then this situation is inevitable," he added of 10 months of deadly protests against Assad's regime. Ban said he hoped the UN would act



coherently, acknowledging differences of opinion on how to address the situation in Syria where the world body estimates more than 5,000 people have been killed in the crackdown on dissent.

"It is important that the United Nations speaks and acts in a coherent manner," he said.

"I know there are some differences of opinions among member states of the Security Council, but the number of casualties has reached to such an un-

ceptable stage," Ban said. "We cannot let this situation continue like this."

In October, Russia and China vetoed a Western draft resolution that would have condemned Assad's regime. Russia, which is sticking by its ally, later circulated an alternative that would have pointed the finger at both sides.

Ban also commended the Arab League for sending monitors to Syria despite criticism of the mission that has failed to end the violence.

"I highly appreciate and commend the efforts by the league of Arab states, by dispatching monitors and engaging in discussions with President Assad," he said.

"I sincerely hope they will be able to carry on," he added.

The opposition has called for the Arab League to pull its observers out of Syria or at least seek UN tactical support, saying they have been ineffective in ending the violence and were repeatedly duped by the authorities.



Lebanese rescue search for survivors in the rubble of a collapsed building in Beirut's Ashrafiyeh neighbourhood yesterday. At least 13 people were killed and 20 others feared trapped in the rubble of a run-down apartment block that collapsed "like an earthquake" in Beirut, Lebanese officials and a witness said.

PHOTO: AFP

GOLDEN GLOBE

The Artist wins three awards

Winners of the key categories



Best picture - drama
"The Descendants"

Best director
Martin Scorsese
"Hugo"

Best actor - drama
George Clooney
"The Descendants"

Best actress - musical or comedy
Michelle Williams
"My Week With Marilyn"

Best foreign film
"A Separation"
Iran

Best picture - musical or comedy
"The Artist"

Best actress - drama
Meryl Streep
"Iron Lady"

Best supporting actor
Christopher Plummer
"Beginners"

Best supporting actress
Octavia Spencer
"The Help"

Best actor - musical or comedy
Jean Dujardin
"The Artist"

BBC ONLINE

Black and white silent film The Artist took home three prizes from the Golden Globe awards in Los Angeles, hosted by British comedian Ricky Gervais.

The Oscar-tipped movie was named best comedy and won additional prizes for lead actor Jean Dujardin and its score.

The Descendants was named best film drama and won a best actor prize for its star George Clooney.

Other lead actor awards went to Meryl Streep for The Iron Lady and Michelle Williams for My Week with Marilyn.

Streep, who plays Margaret Thatcher in The Iron Lady, thanked "everyone in England who let me come over there and trample over their history".

Williams, recognised for her portrayal of Marilyn Monroe, thanked the Globes for "putting in my hand the same award you put in Marilyn's hand more than 50 years ago".

Martin Scorsese was named best director for Hugo, a family film that marked his first 3D feature, while Steven Spielberg received the animated feature prize for The Adventures of Tintin.

Veteran actor Christopher Plummer won

the evening's first award for his supporting role in Beginners.

The female equivalent went to Octavia Spencer for her role as a domestic servant in The Help.

Pop star Madonna was recognised for Masterpiece, a song she wrote for her historical drama WE.

Iran's A Separation received the award for best foreign language film, while Woody Allen's Midnight in Paris won best screenplay.

It was a good night for British talent in the television categories, which saw ITV1 period drama Downton Abbey named best mini-series.

"How fabulous this is," said series creator Julian Fellowes. "The whole Downton Abbey adventure has been an extraordinary one, like spotting a promising child and waking up to find they won the Olympics."

Britain's Idris Elba collected a best actor prize for BBC One crime drama Luther, while Kate Winslet was recognised for HBO mini-series Mildred Pierce.

Amidst the celebration and back-slapping, though, a poignant note was struck by Peter Dinklage as he picked up a supporting actor prize for Game of Thrones.

Pak Taliban leader believed dead: Intel officials

REUTERS, Peshawar

The leader of the Pakistani Taliban, the militant movement that poses the gravest security threat to the country, is believed to have been killed by a US drone strike, four Pakistan intelligence officials told Reuters on Sunday.

The officials said they intercepted wireless radio chatter between Taliban fighters detailing how Hakimullah Mehsud was killed while travelling in a convoy to a meeting in the North Waziristan tribal region near the Afghan border.

A senior military official told Reuters there was no official confirmation that the Pakistani state's deadliest enemy had been killed. The Pakistani Taliban issued a denial. U.S. officials, speaking to Reuters on condition of anonymity, could not confirm his death.

If Hakimullah did die, it could ease pressure on security forces, who have struggled to weaken the group, which is close to al Qaeda and has been blamed for many of the suicide bombings across one of the world's most unstable countries.

But it may not ease violence in the long



Hakimullah Mehsud

term in Pakistan, which is seen as critical for US efforts to fight global militancy, most crucially in neighboring Afghanistan.

The death of Hakimullah's predecessor, Baitullah Mehsud, in a drone strike in 2009 raised false hopes that the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP, could be broken.

"Six to seven TTP members were talking to each other through wireless radio in the conversations we heard, talking about Hakimullah Mehsud being hit by a drone when he was heading to a meeting at a spot near Miranshah," said one of the intelligence officials.

"They referred to him by his codename." Officials refused to disclose Mehsud's codename.

"Based on our intercepts, Mehsud was heading to a meeting in Nawa Adda," said another intelligence official. Nawa Adda is a village in the Dattakhel area of North Waziristan.

The Pakistani Taliban said Hakimullah was still alive, but the denial was far less assertive than one issued in 2010 after media reports said he had been killed in a drone strike.

Huntsman quitting US presidential race

AFP, Myrtle Beach

Former ambassador to China and one-time Utah governor Jon Huntsman is dropping his US presidential bid and was set to endorse frontrunner Mitt Romney for the Republican nomination yesterday, his campaign said.

The timing of the news was a shock, coming hours after Huntsman picked up a major newspaper endorsement in South Carolina, which votes this Saturday in a crucial contest that could all but seal the deal for Romney.

Huntsman's campaign team relayed news of his exit to the US media on Sunday evening, but the candidate was expected to announce it formally at 11:00 am yesterday and endorse Romney.

"The governor and his family, at this point in the race, decided it was time for Republicans to rally around a candidate who could beat Barack Obama and turn around the economy," campaign manager Matt David told The New York Times. "That candi-



date is governor Mitt Romney."

A source close to the Huntsman campaign told ABC that Romney was "not currently" planning to attend the drop-out/endorsement event in Myrtle Beach, where the remaining candidates were set to duke it out yesterday evening in a televised debate, the first of two this week.

Huntsman's endorsement, while not a game-changer, is welcome good news for the favorite, who took a hit over the weekend when leading Christian evangelicals meeting in Texas chose to support rival Rick Santorum.

That move was symptomatic of lingering doubts among staunch conservatives over Romney, who has flip-flopped on core issues such as gay marriage and abortion in the past, and whose Mormon faith is a problem for some.

That hurdle to Romney's nomination has come into sharper relief as the Republican race has moved out of the northern states into the Bible Belt, where religion and politics often make for a volatile mix.

Car bomb kills 11 in Iraq

AP, Baghdad

A car bomb killed at least eleven people outside the northern city of Mosul yesterday, Iraq officials said, in the latest in a series of attacks to target the country's Shiites since the US withdrawal last month.

Violence has surged across Iraq since the last American troops left the country, with a string of bombings that has left at least 150 people dead since the beginning of the year. Most of the attacks appear to be aimed at Iraq's Shiite majority, suggesting Sunni insurgents are seeking to undermine the Shiite-dominated government.

Yesterday's blast struck a Shiite district outside of Mosul, a predominantly Sunni city some 225 miles northwest of Baghdad, a police official said.

Priyanka joins Rahul in UP poll campaign

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi



Priyanka Gandhi, daughter of India's ruling party President Sonia Gandhi, yesterday joined her brother Rahul in the campaign for Uttar Pradesh (UP) state legislative elections telling party workers to bury internal differences.

To keep a watch on groupism, flying squad teams would be constituted at village level which would be known by a secret code, according to party sources.

Priyanka began her three-day tour of Amethi and Rae Bareilly, the parliamentary constituencies of Rahul and Sonia respectively.

The sources said she told the workers to forget internal differences and work for success of the party in the polls in a state where Congress has been out of power since mid-1980s.

"Time is very short, party workers should reach the people in villages and inform the electorate about welfare schemes of Congress and UPA government and master support for party candidates," the sources quoted Priyanka as saying.

Italian cruise ship toll rises to 6

REUTERS, Giglio

Rescue workers searching the half-submerged hulk of an Italian cruise ship for missing passengers and crew recovered a sixth body yesterday, more than 48 hours after the vessel capsized off Italy's west coast.

The captain of the 114,500-tonne Costa Concordia, arrested on Saturday, was accused of manslaughter and abandoning his ship before all of the more than 4,200 people on board had been evacuated.

Francesco Schettino's employers, Costa Crociere, said he appeared to have made "serious errors of judgment" and had brought the ship too close to shore where it struck a rock that tore a large hole in the hull.

The disaster occurred as passengers were sitting down to dinner on Friday night, triggering scenes of panic with passengers jostling to get on lifeboats and some leaping into the icy sea.

Divers combing the vessel for 16 people unaccounted for said conditions had deteriorated since the weekend. "The sea is much rougher today, it's much more difficult to work," one said.

Three people, a South Korean honeymoon couple and a member of the ship's crew, were rescued on Sunday and police divers also recovered the bodies of two elderly men, still wearing emergency life jackets. The bodies of two French tourists and a Peruvian crew member were found on Saturday.

India, China begin talks on border issue

PTI, New Delhi

India and China yesterday began talks to put in place a mechanism for management of the border between the two nations, an issue that has been an irritant in bilateral relations.

National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon led the Indian team at the 15th round of the Special Representatives meeting with the Chinese delegation led by State Councillor Dai Bingguo here.

The meeting was to be held in November last year but had to be postponed after China protested Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama's participation in the Global Buddhist Congregation in the capital around the time of the talks.



Hamas police officers demonstrate their skills during a ceremony marking graduation from a military course in Gaza City yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

UK slams Israel settlement as "vandalism"

REUTERS, London

Britain condemned Israeli settlements yesterday as "deliberate vandalism" of efforts to establish a Palestinian state, bolstering Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas as negotiators attempt to revive moribund peace talks.

Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg's comments were some of Britain's strongest yet on the Middle East's most intractable conflict.

The exploratory discussions began on January 3 and followed a long break in negotiations after Abbas suspended talks 15 months ago over Israel's expansion of Jewish settlements in the occupied West bank, where Palestinians want to found a state.

NEWS IN brief

Philippines chief justice faces impeachment trial

AFP, Manila

A historic impeachment trial of the Philippines' top judge began yesterday in one of President Benigno Aquino's boldest yet most divisive moves to tackle pervasive corruption.

Members of the 23-person Senate gathered as judges to determine whether Supreme Court Chief Justice Renato Corona should be removed from his post and become the highest-profile scalp yet in Aquino's anti-graft crusade.

"Renato Corona by his misdeeds is unfit to remain chief justice," lead prosecutor Niel Tupas said in his opening address to the hearing, which could last months and seen Aquino accused of overstepping constitutional boundaries.

Murdoch criticises Obama on Twitter

AFP, Washington

Global media tycoon Rupert Murdoch used his Twitter account over the weekend to attack US President Barack Obama over his administration's opposition to parts of draft anti-online piracy legislation.

"So Obama is thrown in his lot with Silicon Valley paymasters who threaten all software creators with piracy, plain thievery," Murdoch wrote Saturday.

The president and founder of the News Corporation media empire was referring to a White House statement released Saturday in which the administration says what it will and will not support in terms of how to combat online piracy.

Nigerian unions call off strike after crackdown

AFP, Abuja

Nigerian unions ended a week-old nationwide strike yesterday after the president agreed to lower petrol prices, while security forces shot into the air and fired tear gas to disperse protesters.

A dispute over a sharp hike in fuel costs had crippled Africa's most populous nation and largest oil producer, compounding the government's problems as it has also faced a wave of bloody Islamist attacks.

Nigeria Labour Congress chief Abdulwahed Omar yesterday said, "Labour and its allies formally announce the suspension of the strike, mass rallies and protests across the country."

