

# Dozens killed as Syria regime pounds Homs

*Russia warns West against meddling*

AFP, Damascus

Syrian forces pressed a relentless assault on the protest city of Homs yesterday, with dozens of civilians reported killed, hours after President Bashar al-Assad said he was committed to ending the bloodshed.

The barrage of gunfire, mortars and shells was launched at daybreak and continued during the day. State television said a car bomb had ripped through the central city, killing and wounding civilians as well as security officers.

The blast hit the neighbourhood of Bayada, the television reported, blaming "armed terrorist gangs." If confirmed, the attack would be the first of its kind in Homs.

Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said at least 62 people were killed across the country, including 50 in Homs.

Meanwhile, Russia yesterday warned against outside interference in Syria, as Britain and France expressed strong doubt Damascus would live up to promises to end

its violent repression of dissidents.

UN rights chief Navi Pillay called for urgent action to protect Syrian civilians caught in 11 months of civil strife while the European Union made contingency plans in case it needed to evacuate its citizens from Syria.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin warned the West against behaving "like a bull in a china shop", saying Syrians themselves should be allowed to decide their own fate.

"Of course we condemn violence from whichever side it comes, but we must not behave like a bull in a china shop. We need to allow people to decide their own fate independently," Russian news agencies quoted him as saying.

Moscow sparked Western anger last week by joining Beijing in using its veto at the Security Council to block UN action against the Damascus regime following its latest military offensive on protestors in the city of Homs, fully committed" to resolving the crisis.



An anti-government protester throws back a teargas canister at police during clashes in the capital island Male, Maldives yesterday. Former president Mohamed Nasheed, *inset*, yesterday accused that he was forced out of office in a coup d'etat and vowed to come back to power.

PHOTO: AFP

## US drone kills 10 in Pakistan

REUTERS, Miranshah

A US drone aircraft killed 10 suspected militants in Pakistan's North Waziristan region near the Afghanistan border yesterday, security officials and residents said, the fifth such strike this year.

The unacknowledged Central Intelligence Agency drone programme, a key element in US counter-terrorism efforts, was apparently halted after a November Nato air attack from across the Afghan border killed 24 Pakistani soldiers, enraging Pakistan.

The United States resumed attacks with the missile-firing drones in northwest Pakistan on January 10.

In yesterday's attack, a drone fired two missiles at a house suspected of being a militant hideout in North Waziristan.

# Nasheed pushed too hard on reforms

TELEGRAPHINDIA ONLINE

The Maldives has eased "the Obama of the East" out of its helm and appointed a less controversial president, scattering words like "coup" and "mutiny" in the sub-continental air but masking the intense churn that prompted India to "guide" the transition.

Mohamed Nasheed, the first democratically elected President of the Maldives, announced his resignation over television on Tuesday. The 44-year-old Nasheed, hailed by the West as the hero of the Copenhagen climate talks and the "Obama of the East" for his oratory, handed charge to Vice-President Mohamed Waheed Hassan Manik.

The Nasheed camp suggested that he was ousted in a coup or a police mutiny 'an impression that gathered ground because policemen were seen clashing with soldiers ' but the new administration dismissed such suggestions.

Nasheed quit office after New

Delhi brokered a deal among the Maldivian political parties to save that country's nascent democracy.

At the root of the crisis was a clash between a hardline political Islam and a moderate version in the Sunni-majority country. Nasheed represented the moderate and modern side but the pace of the reforms he proposed was considered too fast ' a perception that was exploited by India's friend and former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom's religious right-wing party.

The religious right and the judiciary opposed Nasheed's efforts to relax some of the strict Islamic laws that govern the country in his bid to step up facilities for tourism, which generates 90 per cent of the country's gross domestic product.

Tossed into this cauldron were manoeuvres by other foreign powers, including China and Saudi Arabia, and resentment over permission for Israeli planes to land in the tourist paradise that has

invented ways to get around the strict religious code. However, there is little yet to suggest that China or Saudi Arabia had any hand in the current upheaval in the Maldives.

The flashpoint was related to Pakistan but not for the usual reasons. The hawks found fault with a monument Pakistan erected to showcase its pluralistic heritage in

## NEWS ANALYSIS

the Maldives on the occasion of the 17th Saarc summit in November.

All Saarc-member countries had built such monuments at Addu City. But protesters targeted Pakistan's edifice ' a pillar that depicted the cultural stages that Pakistan underwent from the Harappan and Buddhist past to its Islamic heritage before being proclaimed an Islamic Republic.

## Egypt accuses NGOs of meddling in politics

AFP, Cairo

Egyptian judges probing alleged illegal foreign funding of non-governmental organisations yesterday accused domestic and foreign groups, including American ones, of illegally meddling in politics.

The NGOs are operating "without license," and their work "constitutes pure political activity and has nothing to do with civil society work," Judge Sameh Abu Zeid said.

The judge said December raids on 17 offices of local and foreign NGOs as part of a probe into illegal funding.

Among them are 19 Americans, a fact that prompted a trio of leading US senators to warn Egypt that the risk of a "disastrous" rupture in ties had "rarely been greater."

## RACE TO WHITE HOUSE

# Santorum rattles Romney

AFP, Minneapolis

Christian conservative Rick Santorum's unexpected trio of state wins has reignited his White House bid and raised new question marks over Republican frontrunner Mitt Romney.

Santorum, written off only a few weeks ago, won caucuses in Minnesota and Colorado and a primary in Missouri on Tuesday -- a clean sweep that represented another stunning turn-around in this topsy-turvy Republican presidential race.

The established wisdom was that Santorum was surging in the Midwest and could take Minnesota and Missouri thanks to support from evangelical Christians, but no one expected him to win out west in the Rocky Mountains.

It was a bitter blow for



Rick Santorum

Romney, who romped home in Colorado during his 2008 bid, scooping more than 60 percent of the vote.

The latest contests could reposition the Republican battle to be the nominee to take on President Barack Obama ahead of "Super Tuesday" on March 6, when 10 states vote at once and almost a fifth of all delegates are decided.

A clutch of seven February contests, including the three



Mitt Romney

held on Tuesday, will not alter the fact that Romney goes into that day the frontrunner, with a larger nationwide organization and a heavier war chest than any of his rivals.

Santorum was the big winner in Missouri's primary, with 55 percent of the vote, more than double Romney's 25 percent. In Minnesota, Santorum led with 45 percent and Romney was a distant third at 17 percent.

The biggest shock of the

night was in Colorado, where Santorum scooped 40 percent of the vote, edging out Romney's 35 percent, according to official party results.

Santorum surprised many when he won the Iowa caucuses on January 3, the first stop in the protracted state-by-state primary process that will decide who takes on Obama, a Democrat, in the November 6 general election.

In theory, Tuesday's three states held rich pickings as the four remaining candidates try to secure enough delegates to pocket the total 1,144 needed to secure the Republican nomination.

With three big wins under his belt, Romney is still the man to beat. According to CNN, Romney currently has 106 pledged delegates, Gingrich 38, Santorum 22, and Paul 20.



## Europe should live within its means: Mahathir

BBC ONLINE

Now the emerging economies of Asia look like models of steady, consistent policy and sustained growth while Europe, America and Japan are mired in debt and are growing achingly slowly, if at all.

So what can the West learn from the East?

According to former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, the message is simple but devastating: Europe must face up to the new economic reality.

"Europe... has lost a lot of money and therefore you must be poor now relative to the past," he reasons in an interview with BBC World Service's Business Daily.

"And in Asia we live within our means. So when we are poor, we live as poor people. I think that is a lesson that Europe can learn from Asia."

Dr Mahathir is well qualified to pass judgement.

During his two decades in power, Dr Mahathir helped transform Malaysia from a sleepy former colony into an economic tiger.

His message is tough, he acknowledges, before adding with a laugh: "We used to get tough messages from you before, remember?"

"And now, what is the result? Sometimes you undermined our currency and we became very poor. Well, we learn from each other. We were Euro-centric before. I think it should be a little bit Asia-centric now."

## NEWS IN brief

### 'Last' First World War veteran dies

AFP, London

The world's last surviving First World War veteran, who served in Britain's Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF), has died aged 110, British media reported.

Florence Green, who joined the WRAF as a 17-year-old in 1918, was believed to be the last veteran of the 1914-1918 conflict.

She died in her sleep at a care home in King's Lynn, eastern England, on Saturday, according to media reports.

### Weiwei to build Olympic pavilion

AFP, London

Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei is reuniting with the Swiss architects with whom he created Beijing's spectacular Bird's Nest Stadium, to build a pavilion for this year's London Olympics.

Ai, along with the Swiss firm Herzog and de Meuron, will join forces again to design a pavilion for the Serpentine Gallery in London's Kensington Gardens park, the gallery said on Tuesday.

In a joint statement, Ai and the architects said the project would involve digging some five feet (1.5 metres) into the park's soil to collect rainwater, which would be incorporated into the design.

The resulting construction will be "the perfect place to sit, stand, lie down or just look and be amazed," they said.

### Russian cold snap kills 110

AFP, Moscow

Exceptionally cold weather in Russia has killed at least 110 people since the beginning of the year, the health ministry said yesterday.

"By this morning, 110 adults have died" from the cold, ministry spokesman Konstantin Proshin told the news agency, adding that official data did not include children under 18 years of age.

An abnormally cold front sweeping across Central and Eastern Europe over the past week has also led to numerous deaths in neighbouring Ukraine as well as in Poland and Romania.

In the southern Krasnodar region on the Black Sea, the authorities have closed schools amid severe weather conditions.

The regional power provider Kubanenergo said yesterday 28,000 people were without electricity in the Black Sea city Novorossiysk and several villages after high winds damaged power lines on Tuesday evening amid temperatures of minus 16 degrees Celsius.



Suzanne Mubarak

IANS, Cairo

The wife of ousted Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak has confessed in her memoirs about an attempt to commit suicide when she knew she would be arrested for corruption.

"May 13, 2011, was the 'darkest' day of my life. When Assem al-Gohary, assistant justice minister for illicit gains affairs, brought an order to arrest me, I took an overdose of sleeping pills and wanted to commit suicide as I could not imagine what for and how to live," Suzanne Mubarak was quoted as saying by EGYnews.

She said that she was miraculously saved. "And then, my husband got in touch with somebody who was in power in Egypt, I think somebody from world politicians and managed to keep me near him in hospital for the time of my detention," Suzanne said.

Suzanne Mubarak also revealed many surprising facts about the last days of her

husband's presidency.

"USA, Saudi Arabia, United Emirates, Bahrain and Kuwait offered husband and all family members political asylum at the beginning of February 2011. But when he resigned on February 11, these offers were immediately called off," the former first lady said.

She said it was her elder son, Alaa and not the younger Gamal who assisted his father in making the last fateful decisions.

"On February 1, during a telephone conversation with Barack Obama, my husband agreed to resign but said he did not want to make personal announcement. He also asked for written guarantees that nothing happen with him and his family. These guarantees were given by a special envoy from the US (sic)," Suzanne said.

The memoirs of the former Egyptian first lady, which speak not only about politics but about her personal experiences, love of jewellery and art, will soon be published by Scottish publisher Canongate Books.