

# Military intervention urged

Annan urges unity on Syria as EU, Gulf Arabs mull diplomatic withdrawal

AFP, Damascus

Thousands of anti-regime protesters called on Friday for foreign military intervention to bring down a Syrian government whose brutal crackdown on dissent monitors say has cost more than 9,100 lives.

The protests after weekly Muslim prayers were called by activists on their Facebook page, Syrian Revolution 2011, to demand "immediate military intervention by the Arabs and Muslims, followed by the rest of the world."

"The people want military intervention, the Free Syrian Army to be armed, and the fall of the regime," several thousand demonstrators chanted in Aleppo in northern Syria, an activist at the scene told AFP in Beirut by telephone.

Meanwhile, Syria has vowed to cooperate with UN-Arab League peace envoy Kofi Annan while fighting "terrorism," its term for the country's anti-regime revolt, the foreign ministry said yesterday.

"The Syrian government is determined to protect its citizens by dis-



PHOTO: AFP

Syrian refugees hide their face as they arrive near the border between Syria and Turkey at Reyhanli in Antakya on Thursday.

arming the terrorists and continues to search for a peaceful solution to the crisis by cooperating with special envoy Kofi Annan," it said in a letter addressed to the United Nations, carried by state news agency SANA.

Kofi Annan yesterday told the Security Council it must end divisions as it bids to persuade Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to halt a bloody crackdown on protests, diplomats said.

"The stronger and more unified your message, the better chance we have of shifting the dynamics of the conflict," Annan was quoted as telling the 15-nation council.

On the diplomatic field, all six Arab Gulf states will close their embassies in Syria in protest at the year-long crackdown in the country, said Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) head Abdullatifal-Zayani early yesterday. Saudi Arabia, United Arab

Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and Kuwait took the step, he said, citing the regime's "massacring its people, choosing the military option and rejecting all initiatives aimed at finding a solution to the crisis."

And European Union foreign ministers will mull plans next week for the bloc's 27 governments to pull all their ambassadors out of Syria.

Thousands of others took part in protests in the flashpoint provinces of Homs and across Daraa as well as several districts of Damascus and the region, said Rami Abdel Rahman of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

On the day after the first anniversary of the outbreak of the revolt against President Bashar al-Assad, the Britain-based monitoring group said at least 15 people were killed in violence across Syria yesterday.

With the opposition divided, Western countries have been opposed to military intervention although Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Assad's fiercest critics in the Arab world, have come out in favour of arming the rebels.

## IRAN OIL IMPORT US hints at sanctions against India

DAWN ONLINE

Obama administration officials say they are worried India may run afoul of a new US law restricting payments for Iranian oil, forcing the White House to impose sanctions on one of its most important allies in Asia.

So far this year, India is failing to cut back its purchases of Iranian oil, which may force President Barack Obama to impose penalties as early as June 28, according to several US officials.

The US law, which targets oil payments made through Iran's central bank, applies in any country that doesn't make a "significant" reduction in its Iranian crude oil purchases during the first half of this year.

If India fails to sufficiently cut Iranian imports, Obama may be compelled to bar access to the US banking system for any Indian bank processing oil payments through Iran's central bank, the US officials said.

While New Delhi hasn't asked refiners to stop purchasing Iranian crude, the government has told processors to seek alternative supplies and gradually reduce their dependence on Tehran due to increasing pressure from the United States in recent weeks, three Indian officials with direct knowledge of the situation said.

India hasn't significantly cut imports this year because refiners' annual crude term deals with Iran typically run from April to March, they said.

The planned reductions will start only when new annual contracts begin next month, the Indian officials said.

India bought an average of 328,000 barrels a day of Iranian crude in the first six months of last year.

## Republican race shifts to Obama's home state

AFP, Chicago

Republican White House hopefuls were to set their sights on President Barack Obama's home state of Illinois, hoping to gain momentum and become the party's standard bearer in the general election.

Former senator Rick Santorum is aiming to win again as polls show him within striking range of frontrunner Mitt Romney, who has a big lead in all-important delegates but who has been dented by several failures to kill off his rivals.

Santorum, a devout Catholic and opponent of abortion and gay marriage, is seen as the most conservative Republican candidate vying to take on Democrat Obama on November 6, but his ability to win over independent voters is doubted.

## NEWS IN brief

### Manning helped al-Qaeda: US

AFP, Fort Meade

US soldier Bradley Manning aided al-Qaeda by leaking troves of classified information to the secret-spilling website Wikileaks, military prosecutors said Thursday.

Manning, who served as a low-ranking intelligence analyst in Iraq, has previously been charged with 22 counts, including aiding the enemy.

During a pre-trial hearing, the military identified that enemy as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, a lethal branch of the group based in Yemen.

Wearing his green Army uniform, the frail and bespectacled Oklahoma native was silent for nearly the entire hearing, sitting between his lawyers at a military courtroom at Fort Meade, near Baltimore, Maryland.

Many of the documents Manning is accused of leaking were classified.

### East Timor goes to poll today

AFP, Dili

East Timor will go to the polls on Saturday in a close presidential contest that pits the Nobel Prize-winning incumbent against about a dozen hopefuls, including the ex-lover of his would-be assassin.

The vote marks a decade since one of the world's youngest nations gained independence after Indonesia's 24-year occupation, which ended with a bloody vote for separation by Timorese in 1999 and cost up to 183,000 lives.

President Jose Ramos-Horta, who shared the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize with East Timorese Bishop Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo for his tireless efforts to free his

### C'wealth concerned on Maldives

AFP, Colombo

The Commonwealth has voiced "deep concern" over the failure of Maldivian parties to agree on a schedule for presidential elections this year and end a political crisis following allegations of a coup.

In a statement late Thursday, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), which deals with serious violations of the 54-nation bloc's political values, said fresh polls should be held at the "earliest possible" opportunity.

The CMAG expressed "disappointment and deep concern at the lack of progress achieved so far" at all-party talks aimed at reaching a political settlement that would pave the way for fresh polls.

The group appointed a special envoy to the Maldives after former president Mohamed Nasheed - the Muslim nation's first democratically elected leader -- resigned last month after weeks of anti-

## Allies to be consulted on 'tough' decisions

Indian PM tries to bridge coalition rift

PTI, New Delhi

Against the backdrop of stiff opposition by UPA constituent Trinamool Congress to FDI in retail and rail fare hike, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday said the government will consult allies and take them on board whenever "tough" decisions are taken.

In his reaction to the General Budget presented in Parliament, he acknowledged that coalition "compulsions" would pose difficulties but made it clear that the government was committed to ensuring faster, sustainable and equitable growth at the rate of 8-9 per cent.

When asked in an interview to Doordarshan whether allies like Mamata Banerjee were on board in the government's reforms process, Singh said, "I think these



on board."

The statement assumes significance as it comes against the backdrop of stiff opposition by major UPA constituent Trinamool Congress to reform measures like allowing FDI in retail and raising railway passenger fares.

In view of Trinamool opposition, the proposal to allow 51 per cent FDI in multi-brand retail has been put on hold.

are compulsions of managing the coalition.

"There will be difficulties. There have been difficulties but ultimately if the government is to govern, it must have a sustainable strategy of managing the economy. I sincerely hope when the time comes to take relevant decisions which are tough, we will consult all our allies and take them

## UNIVERSITY RANKINGS

### US leads world

BBC ONLINE

Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are top of a global league table of university reputation - in a top 100 dominated by US institutions.

Cambridge and Oxford make the top 10 - but other UK universities have slipped, while Asian institutions have risen.

The rankings are based on the perceptions of 17,000 academics.

This list is an attempt to quantify the elusive but important quality of "reputation" in higher education - with its findings based on the opinions of academics around the world.

The first such ranking by the Times Higher Education magazine, published last year, had the same top five as this year - with the two Boston-based institutions, Harvard and MIT, in first and second place.

Cambridge was once again the highest ranking UK university in third place, followed by Stanford and University of California, Berkeley.

Reflecting the rise of Asian countries as the new education superpowers, there is an increasing presence for countries such as China, Japan, Singapore and South Korea.

Switzerland is also seen as performing well, relative to its population, with three universities in the top 100.

Such rankings do not have an official status, but they have become an increasingly significant part of how universities market themselves to students, particularly as higher education has become more globalised.

## Nigeria, Boko Haram in indirect talks

AFP, Kano

Nigeria's government and Islamist group Boko Haram have been in indirect talks to end deadly violence blamed on the extremists, two sources familiar with the discussions said yesterday.

A diplomatic source said there have been contacts between Nigeria's government and Boko Haram through intermediaries.

The security official said Boko Haram has proposed a three-month truce if all of its detained members are released and if the government halts any further arrests. He said the government was looking at the proposal.

Government officials either declined comment on the information or could not be reached.

## ARMS SHIPMENT TO EGYPT Amnesty demands clarification from US

AFP, Cairo

Egypt denied yesterday a US arms shipment headed to the Suez Canal would be unloaded in the country, after rights group Amnesty International warned that Egyptian security forces could abuse the weapons.

The London-based human rights group had demanded on Thursday that the shipment not be offloaded in Egypt, where dozens of protesters have been killed in confrontations with soldiers and police in recent months.

But the US Navy said the shipment would not be offloaded in Egypt, without clarifying its final destination, the London-based organisation said in a subsequent statement.

The Egyptian embassy's defence attache in Washington also denied the shipment was meant for Egypt, saying it was destined for an "Asian country" through the Suez canal, the official MENA news agency reported on Friday.

The shipment "has nothing to do with Egypt," said the attache, Major General Mohammed Elkeshty.

Amnesty says the Dutch-flagged vessel, MV Schippersgracht, which left the US Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point (MOTSU), is "carrying a class of dangerous goods that covers cartridges for weapons, fuses and other ammunition" and is headed to Egypt's Port Said.

Port Said lies at the northern end of the Suez Canal, which leads to the Red Sea and several countries that receive weapons from the United States.



PHOTO: AFP

Japanese customers show off their newly purchased Apple's new iPads in Tokyo yesterday. Hundreds of gadget lovers queued up for the new iPads as a worldwide launch followed the global sunrise.

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## N Korea's plan for rocket launch sparks row

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday announced it would launch a rocket carrying a satellite next month, just 16 days after agreeing to suspend long-range missile tests in return for massive US food aid.

The United States, Japan and South Korea condemned the plan and said it would breach a United Nations ban imposed after previous launches.

Blast-off will be between April 12 and 16 to mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of founding leader Kim Il-Sung, the communist state's official news agency and state television said.

The US State Department called the proposed launch "highly provocative" and a threat to regional security.

It would also be inconsistent with the announced missile test moratorium,

spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said in a statement.

The surprise February 29 deal, under which Pyongyang also promised to freeze its uranium enrichment plant, had raised hopes of eased tensions under the new regime headed by Kim Jong-Un.

But one analyst said yesterday's announcement effectively killed off the agreement, under which the US was to give the hungry and impoverished nation 240,000 tonnes of food over a year.

The last long-range rocket launch on April 5, 2009, also purportedly to put a satellite into orbit, brought UN Security Council condemnation and tightened sanctions.

Pyongyang quit six-party nuclear disarmament talks in protest at the censure and conducted its second atomic weapons test the following month.

Request For Proposals

Assessing the impact of media interventions

Katalyst, a pro-poor market development project implemented under Ministry of Commerce by Swisscontact and GiZ International Services and funded by a donor consortium, requests proposals from interested firms for carrying out the following assignments.

**Assignment 1:Assessing the Benefits of Media Relations Activities of Selected SME Associations**

This assignment involves measuring the impact of media relation trainings provided to selected SME associations. The assessment will be a combination of identifying qualitative changes as well as capturing quantitative impacts.

**Assignment 2:Assessing The Benefit of 'Train The Trainer Program'**

The purpose of this assignment is to assess the impact of Train the Trainer (TOT) program on business journalism provided to journalists and understand how those journalists utilized their acquired knowledge by mentoring or training others in various media houses.

Organizations bidding for the assignments are to submit their respective proposals consisting of separate technical and financial bids by 5.00 pm of March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Terms of References (TOR) for the above assignments can be downloaded from the website [http://www.katalyst.com.bd/abtus\\_procurement.php](http://www.katalyst.com.bd/abtus_procurement.php)